MAGDA AL-NOWAIHI (1958-2002) IN MEMORY

EDITORS
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MAGDA AL-NOWAIHI
IN MEMORY

Writing in memory of a dear friend and colleague is an emotional and intellectual journey into both the past and the future. How does one do justice to a life fully lived yet cut short in the most abrupt of ways? How does one signify an intellectual promise to open up unthought-of connections in the future? How does one portray Magda's warmth, intellectual generosity and twinkling brilliance? It is in this spirit of rendering Magda's memory, as an academic whose full intellectual promise was cut too short, as a member of the MIT-EJMES editorial board whose absence is sorely missed, and as a personal friend whose intelligence and zest for life touched us all in different ways that this issue was created. It brought together different pieces of Magda's universe; individuals who shared the larger segments of Magda's life journey and helped mould some of its contours, colleagues she befriended and shared with various aspects of her world and some who never knew her but carry an award in her name. In a very small and minute way we tried to capture the memory of her smiles, her brilliance and the infinite humanness that so characterized Magda.

This edition of MIT-EJMES is divided into three sections; the first features personal testimonies about Magda by Samia Mehrez and Joseph Massad, both close friends and colleagues of Magda, and by Fernand Cohen, Magda's husband. The following section was the last MESA panel organized by Magda herself and includes her paper as well as the other papers presented in that panel, as they were given that day. By publishing this panel we wanted to reflect the promise of Magda and the tremendous work that remains. The third section includes articles by two ex-students and close friends of Magda, Samah Selim and Marlé Hammond, and an article from the first recipient of the Magda al Nowaihi award for best MA thesis established at the American University of Cairo. We hope that in some small measure this collection reflects a part of Magda's legacy in the short time she was with us.

Maha Yahya

PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

REMEMBERING MAGDA AL-NOWAIHI

Joseph Massad[*]

This issue is dedicated to the memory of a great scholarly mind, that of the late Magda al-Nowaihi. I knew Magda for the last six years of her life during which we had the most intense of friendships. Having just returned from Jordan in August of 1995 after being away for much of the year doing my dissertation research, fellow graduate students were abuzz with the new professor of Arabic literature on campus who had started to teach while I was away. But I was unable to find her. She was away already undergoing chemotherapy. It was during an Egyptian Film Festival at Columbia in February 1996 that I finally spotted her. Her bold shiny head, her big talkative eyes that declared her brilliance, and a big smile drawn on her face are what I saw as I approached her. I introduced myself and added that Sinead O'Connor should move over as Magda al-Nowaihi had already eclipsed her. She laughed hard; we became instant friends.

Magda's amazing memory and sharp mind went hand in hand with an incredible erudition that was always manifest no matter what aspect of modern or classical Arabic literature she was asked about. She had the kind of memory that could reproduce verse upon verse of the poetry of whatever poet came up in conversation (not to mention every song sung in Arabic since 1920). A perfectionist, Magda, would note without any irony that her memory was no longer the same after chemotherapy!

Magda's scholarly future was ahead of her. The projects and the publications she was planning were formidable in scope. Her great wealth of knowledge, theoretical sophistication, and sharp mind were a definite recipe for stardom. All she needed was time, which proved to be the most precious of commodities in Magda's short life. I never believed that she would succumb to the disease, even though she always said she would. She hoped that she would live to the age of fifty. That was not to be, as she died six years shy of her goal. Until very close to the end, her voice remained strong, affirmative, and alert. It was hard to believe that such a resonant voice came out of an increasingly disappearing body, eroded as it was by the approaching death.

Magda's towering presence was felt especially when she lectured. She would deliver a formal lecture for an hour without once looking at her notes

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and without a tinge of a stutter in her voice, moving from one poet to the next, quote after quote, navigating through her arguments, point by point with seamless eloquence. She was working on elegies in classical Arabic poetry conscious of the irony of her choice. While the writings she published before she left us are merely an introduction to Magda's limitless range of interests and work, they provide a glimpse of the great mind of this first-rate scholar.

This issue of MIT-EJMES, which I co edited with Maha Yahya and Samia Mehrez includes articles by friends, colleagues, and students of Magda al-Nowaihi, and engages many of the topics she loved and wrote about. I can see her smiling, egging us on to continue the work.

MAGDA'S STORY

SAMIA MEHREZ[*]

ONCE UPON A TIME…

She used to sit across the table from me in the English Department seminar room. I didn't know her then. But she fascinated me with her wide, sharp eyes, her focused attention, and her incisive comments. Her father, Mohammad al-Nowaihi, was my teacher, a magnificent man. I envied her her father. I envied her her composure, confidence and defiance.

It took us a while before we became friends, before we could put aside our competitiveness and unite around the impossible, or at least what seemed to be impossible at that time. We were both in love and our stories were difficult. We were born under the same sign and our hearts took us to two men who were also friends and born under the same sign.

That was in the seventies.

Together, the four of us formed a pact. We shared the same dream of departure, of growth and of the impossible. Hers was the more vulnerable of the two stories. We nursed and protected it together, the four of us. And when she left for Harvard and he to Brown, when they were finally together against all odds, we knew that nothing was impossible. This knowledge, indeed, this certainty, so early on in her life, is what shaped Magda's entire life. From then on, Magda's story was to become a series of impossibilities that she rendered possible.

As I look back upon her life now I can see that every stage was a lesson, a test of limits, of boundaries, of risks that have forever left me in awe and admiration. She mothered two beautiful children, worked on her thesis, taught at Harvard, commuted endlessly between Providence and Boston and emerged so prematurely mature: a big heart, a warm friend, a patient listener, an independent soul, a brilliant scholar, a tolerant colleague, and a dangerous enemy. She had become all this as I was still busy being the good student and the good academic. I have spent the remaining years of our friendship trying to catch up with her only to discover that it may very well be impossible.

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AND SHE LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER…

From the US at first, and then later on from Cairo, I followed her stories of growth and success. A series of appointments to some of the most distinguished centers of learning: University of Pennsylvania, Princeton University and finally Columbia University where she was Associate Professor of Arabic Literature in the Department of Middle Eastern and Asian Languages and Civilizations. The children grew and so did her yearning for Egypt. And she would come to Cairo alone, or with her small and lovely family, to be immersed in the warmth of lifetime friendships while making new, equally strong bonds with many cultural and literary figures whose work occupied her mind and shaped her research when she was away. She moved back and forth with enviable ease between her initial grounding in the classical Arabic tradition and the modern Arabic literary field. And she explored and charted new territories in her professional journey: gender studies, postcolonial studies, translation studies. The very last project she had decided to undertake during her late days of illness was in perfect keeping with how her private life and professional work were one, in perfect harmony, each enabling the other, at every stage of her forever challenging existence. Two or three months before she left us, on June 4, 2002, Magda had signed a contract for a book project on the poet Ibn al-Rumi. When she wrote to tell me about it, I knew that she had quietly decided to transcend the physical pain and to initiate a different path of peace with herself and with the world.

Over the years, as we moved from being girlfriends to being colleagues, I tried to emulate Magda's unique art of patience and defiance, the challenging balance she struck between tolerance and the assertion of difference. And I watched her mother a new generation. Magda would send her students to see me at AUC. They would sit in my office and sing her praises for hours on end: her meticulous rigor and her joyful comradeship, her steadfast engagement and her uncompromising criticism. As a mentor, Magda protected her students like a fierce lioness but she also pushed them to the limit, enabling them to become what only her discerning eye had imagined from the start. She left behind her a beautiful constellation of stars that are today some of the leading young scholars in the field.

THE PRINCESS AND THE DRAGON…

Perhaps the fairytale was all too perfect. Magda was diagnosed with cancer in 1995 just as she was launching her brilliant career at Columbia and savoring the gratifying taste of her maturing family. She stood tall among us as we bent over in fear for her life. The world flocked to her side when she underwent her arduous bone marrow transplant in Los Angeles. Her friends literally arrived from the four corners of the earth to be with her. I called her then, from Cairo, with a trembling voice to ask about her. Her voice came back steady and strong. "I am well," she said. "I just worry about them," referring to the anxiety of the friends who surrounded her. To our immeasurable joy, Magda transformed this moment of potential death into a new life and emerged from this ordeal triumphant and radiant. But the dragon was ruthless and the princess was destined for more battles. It lurked at every corner and

she waged war after war after war until finally she defeated it: she walked away from it, walked beyond it, with grace, with certainty and with courage.

The last time I saw Magda was in May 2002, almost one month before she left us. She sat in bed looking very frail but her wide, sharp eyes held my disbelieving gaze. I sat speechless as she fondled the many gifts I had brought her from friends in Cairo. She tried things on and commented on the beauty of the colors and the originality of the forms. She asked for the latest Cairo gossip and listened with bemused interest to my stories of intrigue despite the pain that was eating away at her now tiny body. Two or three days later, I went to see her in hospital. She lay very peacefully in bed with her eyes closed, sleeping, I thought. Fernand and I sat around her talking about the history of her case, plans for the future, and his intentions to seek yet another opinion. Suddenly, she opened her eyes and said, "Bravo, Nando!" She had been attentively following our conversation all along! I went up to her and kissed her hand and forehead for, what I feared, is the last time. She held me for a moment and said, "I will see you again soon." I was dumbfounded and felt completely dwarfed by my own limited imaginings of the possible. There she was again, going for the impossible. And I believed her. One month later I was devastated. But I also knew that she had put an end to war: she had walked away from it, walked beyond it, with grace, with certainty and with courage.

FOR ALL OUR SAKES…

In December, 1998 I found myself at the heart of a major crisis surrounding my teaching of Muhammad Choukri's autobiographical text, *Al Khubz al-Hafi* (For Bread Alone), in one of my literature classes at the American University in Cairo. Magda happened to be in town as the crisis was beginning to unfold. She was genuinely concerned for me and, before she left Cairo, made me promise that I would keep her informed of how the situation developed. As the crisis escalated and spilled over into the Egyptian press it became apparent to me that I will be incapable of weathering the storm alone. I turned to her and to our dear friend and colleague at the University of California Berkeley, Muhammad Siddiq for help. Together, Magda and Muhammad took the initiative to draft and post a letter on the internet against censorship and in defense of academic freedom, calling on colleagues to support me during this crisis and to defend the Arab literary imaginary.

Magda was just beginning a study leave. She was busy writing and trying to make the most of the year before coming up for tenure at Columbia despite the relentless cancer attacks. It was a decisive moment in her career. Rather than focus on her research, she put herself in the eye of my storm and shielded me valiantly to safety. Magda gave me her study leave, with grace, with certainty and with courage. For six months, the span of the *Khubz al-Hafi* crisis, we were on email daily. We shared memorable moments of fear, of anxiety, of anger but also of laughter and of mischief. We were able suddenly to live the many dimensions of our long distance relationship in a uniquely intense and intimate way: as girlfriends, as colleagues, as women, as mothers, and as terrible children who were perhaps playing with fire. Magda managed the *Khubz al-Hafi* crisis: she responded to queries, replied to email messages,

contacted various scholarly organizations and spoke to many members of the press community. Her letter of support for me during the crisis was deemed by the AUC administration itself "extremely thoughtful," "the most eloquent by far," of the many, many letters of support that were copied to me.* Despite the fact that the *Khubz al-Hafi* crisis was draining for both of us, it was also a most rewarding experience of friendship and of solidarity. But the greatest lesson that I learned from Magda during the crisis was that she did what she did not just for my sake but, as she so eloquently put it in her letter of support, "for AUC's sake, for Egypt's sake, and for all our sakes."

AND BEYOND…

It was for "all our sakes," as Magda had put it, that we went to MESA 2000 with a panel on *Censorship and the Literary Imaginary* with the participation of Richard Jacquemond (University of Aix-Marseille, France), Magda and myself, chaired by Shahab Ahmed (Society of Fellows, Harvard University). None of us on the panel spoke about the *Khubz al-Hafi* crisis. We had all lived it together very intimately throughout. It had become just one instance of the many other battles that needed to be fought. And Magda was ready for them all, having fought yet another of her own battles against chemotherapy just before the scheduled panel.

That day, Magda walked out of a full auditorium and said, "This is a book." She sat us down to coffee and commitments: list of contributors, areas to be covered, joint editorial work. When she volunteered to co-edit the volume despite her already very frail health I could not but grab the partnership. The fusion that was generated between us during the *Khubz al-Hafi* episode was meant to continue. And so we began…. But the work remains unfinished. This time Magda's health had to take precedence. But I know, deep in my heart, that she would not have wished it to be so. And so we will go beyond. And we will resume work on the project, not just for her sake, but for all our sakes.

Last July, after Magda left us, Fernand and I decided to launch a fundraising campaign to establish a yearly, AUC, Humanities award in Magda al-Nowaihi's name for the best M.A. thesis in Women/Gender Studies. A symbolic moment to remember her for her sake, she who has given so much of her short but remarkable life for all our sakes.

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*The text of Magda's letter is printed below:

Friday, January 22, 1999.

Dear President Gerhart,

I am writing to express my deep concern over the events unfolding around Prof. Samia Mehrez's teaching of Muhammad Choukri's *Al-Khubz al-Hafi* at AUC. I write as a professor of Arabic Literature, a former AUCian, and, on a more personal level, as the daughter of a long-time Professor and Chair of the Arabic Studies Department at AUC. I strongly urge the AUC to fully support

and protect Prof. Mehrez for the following reasons:

1. Professor Mehrez is without any doubt a first-rate scholar and teacher of modern Arabic Literature, highly respected and admired worldwide. When our students here at Columbia University contemplate doing a semester or year abroad at AUC, or are about to join the CASA program, one of the first pieces of advice I give them is to be sure and get in touch with Prof. Mehrez and to try and take a course with her. The reports from the returning students are always glowing.

2. Choukri's novelistic autobiography is neither an obscure nor a pornographic text, but rather a well-established classic of contemporary Arabic literature, translated into many languages, taught by many universities in classes on Arabic and world literature, and researched and analyzed by various critics of Arabic literature, including myself. It is true that the text includes unsavory details, and this brings me to my next point.

3. It is in the nature of serious literature, Arabic literature being no exception, to deal with sensitive and controversial subjects. Indeed, that is the source of its power. We all know that the Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfuz regularly populates his fiction with characters who question the existence of God and the value of religion. And a vast majority of serious Arabic literature deals with human sexuality with brutal honesty. To mention just a couple of examples from works by writers whose stature no one can doubt: Yusuf Idris routinely describes, in quite graphic details, incidents such as that of a child sleeping under his mother's bed and listening to the sounds ensuing from her sexual activities with her customers (liana al-qiyamata la taqum), or a mother and three daughters all knowingly having sexual relations with the mother's husband and their step-father because of the unavailability of another man (Bayt min lahm). Yahya al-Taher Abdallah begins his masterpiece *Al-Tawq wa-al-Iswira* by describing the incestuous desire of a sister for her brother, and her sniffing of his underpants and the sweaty armpits of his undershirts before washing them. He later describes how that incestuous desire gets played out in a sado-masochistic relationship between brother and sister. I can fill pages and pages with more examples of the explicit sexual details of many works of Arabic literature, but the point I want to make is this: these writers are not including these horrifying sexual details in their works to corrupt their readers or tempt them to do likewise, quite the contrary. They believe, and they ARE right, that literature does not affect positive change in society, does not contribute to the making of moral human beings, by restricting itself to the portrayal of decent, law-abiding citizens doing good deeds. Rather, the role of a writer can be compared to that of a physician. Just as a physician, to heal the human body, needs to expose it and examine it in all its nudity and deal with its guts, blood, urine, etc, a writer must fully expose human society in all its ugliness and oppressiveness in order to move his/her readers enough for them to join the struggle to create a better world. Just as we cannot afford to deny students of medicine the right, in fact the duty, to dissect the human body, we cannot afford to allow students in the humanities to avert their eyes from dissecting human nature and human society in all its aspects and manifestations. The phrase "la-haya'a fi l-din" (there is no shame in religious matters) is routinely applied to the sciences by educators explaining to parents

why their daughters, for example, need to touch male genitalia, and must likewise be applied to the study of the humanities.

4. My final point has to do with the AUC as an institution. I have always been extremely proud of my AUC education, and have been brought up on memories of my father's pride in belonging to that institution. I hope I will be able to continue to do so. Above all, what makes AUC occupy an important and special placed in Egypt has been its commitment to academic freedom and the principles of a liberal-arts education, which allows it to train young men and women not just to parrot information but to develop the capacity to analyze, to question, to examine critically- in short, to be thinking human beings. AUC, over the past few months and starting with the incident involving the teaching of Rodinson's book, has begun to renege on this commitment, and that is terrifying. Instead of adopting an apologetic tone and retracting, which will not, I assure you, appease its enemies, and may very well cause it to lose its friends, AUC must emphasize its strengths, of which there are many. It has graduated, both through the college and CASA, a large number of academicians and professionals who have, for one thing, served to improve the view of Egyptians, Arabs, and Muslims in the West. Its students are not, as some critics seem to think, a bunch of kids being brain-washed by Americans evidenced by the recent demonstrations of the students against America's bombing of Iraq. Young men and women come from universities all over Egypt (Tanta, Asyut, etc.) to use the AUC library and bookstore, which they consider havens for seekers of knowledge. Many AUC students volunteer in hospitals, orphanages, schools, etc., and they are fully committed to working with Egypt's poor and oppressed. The ironic part is that it is through their exposure to works like Choukri's that they gain knowledge and understanding of those less privileged then they, and this must be made clear to the public. I urge you to support Prof. Mehrez and the values on which AUC stands- for her sake, for AUC's sake, for Egypt's sake, and for all our sakes.

Thank you.

Prof. Magda Al-Nowaihi
Columbia University

CELEBRATING MAGDA'S LIFE

FERNAND COHEN[*]

I would like to thank you all for being here, for this extraordinary event celebrating Magda's life. Magda, I'm sure, would look kindly and approvingly on so eloquent an expression of tender appreciation in her memory. I would like to thank you, Samia, for your gigantic efforts for planting the seed of that award and for seeing it to completion in record time. I suspect Magda would gently reproach you for going over board in your praise of her efforts, though she would also wink and smile to ambiguate the situation to your benefit and to express her gratitude and ours to her classmate and very dear friend. Many thanks to all of you dear friends of Magda for your generous contribution towards the establishment of that award, and finally to you the recipients of that award present and future that will carry the banner of academic excellence in the subject of gender studies, a subject that Magda dedicated a good part of her academic life to. Amira and Eman, as the first awardees, many eyes will be on you following your endeavors and scholarly successes. Magda would have been proud of your work as we all are.

It means a lot to me, to have this award established at the American University in Cairo, our Alma Mater, Magda and I, a place we hold so dearly to our heart, a place where we both got a first rate education, a place where we first met and fell deeply in love some twenty seven years ago. She was barely eighteen, I, twenty one. I was the luckiest man to have found her, and luckily for me she did not know better at the time. What lingers in my own memory not too far from this beautiful hall, next to the fountain area where we used to meet between classes is the graceful ease of her elegant ways: a unique blend of unassuming intelligence, forceful personality, exquisite charm, and radiant inner and outer beauty. I knew then as I know now that I wanted to be part of her journey and that my life would be much richer glazed by her presence.

Magda was blessed with so many endearing qualities. Chief amongst them is her amazing ability of being an excellent listener, of tuning in and seeing it from the 'other's' point of view. Her former student Lital Levy, now at Berkeley pursuing her doctoral degree, wrote:

> Magda defied categories. She was an advisor and a mentor, but
> also a friend and a confidante. No matter what was going on in
> her own life, you could talk to her about anything, however

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private or personal or petty, and she would give it all her most serious and usually also humorous consideration. And for whatever point she wanted to make, she always had a story. I remember I once wrote her after breaking up with a boyfriend about my fears of never meeting the right person. She wrote me back with a story about a friend of hers who had met the love of her life at age forty while walking her dog. Magda said that she was sure I wouldn't have to wait until I was forty, but in the meantime, she said, "I hope you don't think that turning thirty makes you an old hag.

I should emphasize that although Magda related that story to Lital, she revealed neither the name of that lucky woman nor that of her dog.

For Magda the understanding of the 'other' was far more relevant to negotiating our differences than the futility of being right or wrong. The 'self' was never defined or manifested at the expense of obliterating the 'other'. And although she possessed strong opinions on many issues, she was one of the least judgmental and most tolerant persons I have ever seen. Her former Ph. D. student Marlé Hammond, currently a fellow at St. John's College, Oxford University, wrote:

Magda always struck me as someone who was both passionate about her beliefs as well as deeply open-minded--open-minded because she always made room for contradictions and complexities, owning up to her personal biases, and hence allowing other people theirs, as long as they, too, owned up to them.

She was totally at peace with herself and with who she was and never professed any jealousy or ill will towards another human being. Many of her decisions in life were driven by passion and love towards others. Her former student Mara Naaman, a Columbia student who is here this year at AUC at the CASA program wrote:

I remember specifically at Chicago what she had said that changed everything for me. She was standing in line for coffee and donuts and I approached her and inquired about Columbia and asked her in confidence how it was she knew that academia was right for her and which path to take for graduate study and she said, leveling with me, "academia is a lonely profession, but I have always loved to argue, ever since I was a child. Besides I was in love and my husband was also studying in the States so that decided things."

For me, her unapologetic frankness and willingness to admit, nakedly that she - a feminist academic – knew loneliness and love, and made decisions for love, solely for another person, reordered my sense of what was possible. Her unabashed humanness startled me and forced me to rethink my own notions of what it meant to possess authority, academic and otherwise. She made me believe – in everything she did – that humanness, that openness… had power and could be a starting place for a

form of committed politics or, more plainly, a way of being…
real and unaffected in the world.

I hope Mara's use of the past tense in "besides I was in love with my husband…" rather than 'have been,' was just a misquote!

If there is one characteristic of Magda that stands in everybody's mind above anything else, it is her 'smile,' that hypnotic smile of hers that was so much her, so much a reflection of how positive she has always been, how much she embraced life and radiated happiness all around her. Even when her frail body was failing her, her spirit never succumbed and until her last breath she never lost that smile. She strongly believed that our own state of mind and personal aura have a powerful effect on those around us, so it makes a lot of sense to radiate happiness and promote the well-being of others in addition to our own. She found joy in the simple things in life, from getting a free gift with her Estée Lauder purchase, to the very scholarly and intellectual exercise of dissecting a poem or a text, to unraveling layers upon layers of human quirks and behavior. In the words of her dear friend Eve Troutt, a MacArthur Award recipient and Professor of History at University of Georgia in Athens:

> But there is one image of Magda in her magnificence that must be told. Over dinner one night she was relating to me, my husband Tim and Khaled Fahmy, what growing up in Ma`adi was like. Tim also lived in Egypt, and began to tease Magda, talking about his 'rougher' experience in Zaqaziq. Magda corrected his pronunciation and he teased her, doing an impression of what he thought she was like as an undergraduate of AUC. There she sat, legs curled up in the chair, the formidable hair tossed back, laughing her heart out. What a joy, making Magda laugh.

Madga was also fierce and fiery about never succumbing to or being content with our weaknesses and learning disabilities. She had an amazing ability and great faith in all of us. I personally can say with no shame or doubt that I became a better man (in spite of my gender handicap), a better human being, because of and as a result of living with Magda. She was always a great believer in our abilities and used her invariably constructive stance to drive her point through. She demanded that of herself more than of any other. Her fighting spirit is indeed that lighthouse whose shinning rays are guiding pointers to all of us. In the words of Marlé Hammond:

> Magda was an outstanding instructor, perhaps because she maintained a nearly perfect balance between enthusiastic support and combative criticism. She used positive reinforcement to build up our confidence and express faith in our abilities, while she used negative reinforcement to jolt us out of intellectual complacency. Magda's criticism was invariably constructive. She did not want us to content ourselves with what comes easily; rather she wanted us to struggle to improve ourselves on all fronts.

This same sentiment has been also echoed by our dear friend Professor Abdelziz Ezzelarab in the dedication part of his book *European Control and Egypt's Traditional Elites – A Case Study in Elite Economic Nationalism*, dedicated to the passing of his dear friend Magda. And no I am not his agent trying to advertise his book. Abdelaziz wrote:

> To my dear friend Magda al-Nowaihi (1958-2002) who was always around in time of need. She listened with care during recurrent periods of stress and self-doubts, but resolutely and uncompromisingly demanded perseverance. In her own way, Magda provided through her firmness and fighting spirit a reasoned and considerate care which understood the pressures but allowed no room for giving in to weakness. Without Magda's understanding, strength and wisdom, I would have lacked the insight during many periods of confusion and near desperation.

Our beloved Magda will always be with us. We will always carry images of her or do things differently because of her, always remembering how lucky and blessed we were to have been part of her journey and to have been influenced by her. Our elegy to you our dearest Magda is to try hard to find our smile again, and every time we do we will be reminded of your genuine joy of laughter and your cheerful embrace of life. I personally thank you dearly for being part of my journey, for Nadeem and Nadia, for so many wonderful memories and friends that I have inherited from you through the years, for making me a better man and a human being, however difficult a chore that has been on you. As we celebrate your life my dear Magda, many of us have taken on new challenges because of you or are invoking you in our daily life.

In the words of Joseph Massad, your dear friend and Columbia colleague:

> Magda is alive and well in my memory. I rehearse her likes and dislikes, her opinions, her views, and her actions to myself and others every day. I do this with people who knew her and people who wish they did. I invoke her when I am alone day-dreaming, and when I am writing my book and think of what she would say about this or that paragraph.

Eve Troutt is taking trapeze lessons and back to dancing. She wrote:

> Since Magda left us, I've taken up dancing again. I've also taken up trapeze classes, and although it frightens me to be flying around the ceiling at the age of forty one, there's an anti-gravitational joy that I wish Magda could have felt. She needed freedom from the distress her body caused her - now, finally for her but much too soon for us, she's taken wing. So my elegy is this - before I get too old, if I get too old, I will dance my elegy for you, my darling Magda. I will miss you for the rest of my life.

Your very dear friend Heba el Kholy's book *Defiance and Compliance: Negotiating Gender in Low Income Cairo*, is out and is dedicated to her son Seif, but also to the memory of her soul mate, you Magda.

Abdelaziz promised now that his tenure case is behind him to start 'worrying' about other things, and yes worrying unfortunately instead of just enjoying, but hey it is a step forward.

Dina Amin, your dear friend, is teaching very popular courses at Drexel University on women and post colonial literature of the Middle East, subject matters so dear to you Magda and in such dire need to be taught and heard in the current anti-Arab atmosphere so pervasive in the US. To this day, Dina constantly expresses her gratitude for your helping hand with her Ph.D. dissertation and I quote:

> I would like to express special gratitude to Magda al-Nowaihi without whom, this work would not have been possible. Her intelligent remarks and tough expectations improved my work; her kindness as a dear friend made the hard and lonely task of writing the dissertation infinitely more enduring.

Marlé has definitely jolted herself from her self-declared 'mental complacency,' and has successfully defended her thesis. She has carried the baton, continuing in your struggle to raise academic and ethical standards from across the Atlantic.

Mara is forging ahead with her Ph.D. work, spending a year in the city victorious in the CASA program. She is a believer in herself more than ever, in Mara's own words:

> Magda was a believer: a believer in people, a believer in literature and critical debate, a believer in connection and the possibility for connections (both theoretical and personal) to change lives and to move people to think and act. She made me believe in myself, she demanded it and required it of all of her students. She forced me to think about the world in terms of possibility and never once seemed to doubt what could be, with enough drive and commitment.

I am slowly but surely finding my smile again and my beautiful memories with you and the beautiful imageries of you are slowly replacing the harsh ones of your sickness days. I often catch myself smiling when I remember the funny things you used to do and the good times we had together. This is not to say that I don't cry; I still do, though less often and less painfully now. My tears are often accompanied by tender emotions and shy smiles of these days. Finally, Nadeem and Nadia although they terribly miss you, as we all do, are starting to whistle their joyful hum. They are excelling at their respective school/university, always questioning authority and set rules and regulations. Nadia has been voted by her classmates as well her teachers to serve on the student/faculty policy committee to revamp the archaic rules in her school handbook. She also published an article in the school's paper challenging the school policy vis-à-vis nose piercing. Nadeem wrote very interesting term papers in his social science courses challenging the high school curriculum and the zero tolerance policies. They are indeed 'awlad el waz 'awam'.

They (Nadia and Nadeem) incidentally are extremely happy and proud of their mom, they would have loved to be here but because of their final and

midterm exams they could not. They have asked me, however, to read something on their behalves.

Nadeem wanted to share with you a write up that he kept from Magda about an outing he, at the age of 15, had, leaving the suburbs and venturing into the city in the company of his mom.

KNIGHTS IN TARNISHED ARMOR

Last weekend, with my daughter at a sleepover and my husband out of town, I decided to come out of the 'burbs' and enjoy a night out on the town with the other man in my life- my 15 year old son. After a delicious Italian meal in South Philly, we decided to see a movie at the SamEric. After circling several blocks around the cinema for about twenty minutes, with my son complaining about the graffiti, the noise level, and the general griminess of the city, hoping to God he would never have to live out of the suburbs, I finally spotted a legal parking spot not one block away from the cinema, and parked neatly, jumping out of the car with great euphoria. As we were about to cross the street, an African American man, shabbily dressed and looking borderline homeless, started running after us, gesturing widely and yelling at us. My son stopped and was about to turn back to talk to the man, but I firmly pulled him along, telling him to ignore the guy, whom I gave the generic dismissal of "no thanks."

The film (X-Files) was quite exciting, and we spent the next two hours plus virtually on the edge of our seats. Coming out of the cinema, I started to fiddle around in my bag in search of my keys. Imagine my horror when , upon reaching the car, I saw that not only had I locked the keys in it, but that I had left the engine running for over two hours on a rather hot evening, with God knows how little gas in the tank. "But Mom," my son said, "that's what the guy whom you told me to ignore was trying to tell us." With images of the car breaking out into flames, I quickly dialed the police on my cellular phone, and the response was that if the car was not in flames, the police would not come out to unlock it. Not an unreasonable policy, I guess, but the tone in which it was delivered - not terribly friendly; not terribly helpful; barely civil!

My story had a happy ending. We walked to the corner Wawa, where the cashier was friendly and helpful, called a locksmith who said he would come as soon as he could, probably within a half-hour, and waited for him outside, with as assortment of people passing by, most of whom did not look like the people you would typically encounter in our middle-class suburb, but all of whom were harmless or

pleasantly friendly. The locksmith arrived quickly, reassured me with his funny, gentle stories about other people locking themselves out of different places, and opened the car in less than five minutes- and in the nick of time, too, with the gas gadget very close to empty.

Driving home, my son declared Philly not so bad after all. As I went to sleep, I realized that while I would feel silly and embarrassed over my debacle of locking the key in for maybe a week or two, what I would remain deeply ashamed of is the fact that I did not, at the time, recognize and appropriately appreciate the true knight in shining armor: the "borderline homeless" man who ran after me to warn me - and all because he was not dressed for the role.

What stuck in Nadeem's mind more than anything else aside from the discovery and love of the city in the company of his favorite person was how much ashamed Magda felt for ignoring and prejudging another human being and how quick she was to admit it.

Nadia wanted to share with you two poems, one she wrote to her mom after Magda passed away and one Magda wrote to her a few weeks before her passing.

NADIA'S POEM TO HER MOM

How I wish

Things I never got the chance to say
Keep me crying till the early morning hours

Thinking of these mornings I would wake up next to your warm body
Your body that sheltered me and kept me unaware of the world's suffering

The suffering you went through
The suffering I go through now

Even the most silent streets
Don't compare to the everlasting stillness
That fills that spot in my heart
Where you used to be.

MAGDA'S POEM TO NADIA

For I do know this moment is close to come
I see your sadness and your tears around my bed,

But what I need is to see your joyful hum.

Days come and go with them they take our loved ones
But what they never take is our sweet times
It allows us to continue, my daughters and my sons
And our thoughts and creations still shine.

Although the ship of time takes me away
I do not land at the shore of decay.

Nadia has asked me to read these poems in the reverse chronological order to emphasize the fact that she is on her way to replace the voice of her dropping tears by the joyful humming sound so much requested by her mom.

I would like to conclude my speech by reading excerpts from one of Magda's favorite poems by Ibn Khafaja, the mountain poem, a poem analyzed and translated by her in her book on the literary analysis of the poetry of the Andalusian poet.

How long will I be in this place
  While friends move, how often
See the backs of such as never return?

Till what time must I contemplate
  Stars that rise and set
Forever and ever and on?

Such was the sermon I heard
  One might learn less of matters
In the encompass of a lifetime

In tears he stirred, grief excited
  Such a consolation was mine
He was the best friend to travel with

As the track veered away, me with it
  I answered him: Peace
One of us has to stay and one move on.

Until we meet again our dearest and beloved Magda, you will always be in our hearts and our thoughts.

I thank you all for being here to celebrate Magda and I pass my sincere congratulations to the award winners of the Magda Al-Nowaihi Graduate Student Award in Gender Studies. The torch is now passed on to you.

MAGDA AL-NOWAIHI: BIOGRAPHY, BIBLIOGRAPHY

Magda was born January 4th 1958 in Cairo.

1978	BA, with "Highest Honors," in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the American University in Cairo.
1988	Ph.D., "with Distinction," in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Harvard.
1980	Teaching Fellow and then Instructor at Harvard. Lecturer at Princeton University.
1994	Assistant and later Associate Professor of Arabic Literature at MEALAC, Columbia University.

Magda died on June 4th 2002 in Philadelphia.

She was the daughter of Ferial al-Nowaihi and Muhammad al-Nowaihi, Professor and Chair of the Department of Arabic Studies at the American University in Cairo, and a leading public intellectual of his time. She is survived by her husband, Fernand Cohen, Professor of Engineering at Drexel University, and their two children, Nadeem and Nadia.

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CENSORSHIP IN THE ARAB LITERARY IMAGINATION

Panel Description

MESA 2000

This panel seeks to explore the pressing issue of censorship in the Arab World from multiple perspectives, focusing particularly on the modern period in Egypt. The panel examines the historical, political, textual, and locational dimensions of this phenomenon. It will be argued, through several examples, that Arab elites have neither been able to assimilate the fundamental principles and mores of modernity nor have they been able to shun them effectively, resulting in a state of cultural indeterminacy that has proved particularly amenable to manipulation for political advantage. In order to determine the limits of the sayable in contemporary Egyptian literature we will seek to understand the seemingly contradictory developments within the literary field: on the one hand the frequent reoccurrence of censorship cases and on the other, the ever increasing margin of freedom of expression in the country. The ever shifting nature of the mutually constraining relationship between the intellectual and the political over the past three decades will be traced through a reading of two contemporary Egyptian novels: one from the sixties, the other from the nineties. Finally, it will be argued that the silencing of Arab voices is not a phenomenon unique to the Arab World. The institutional structures of the Western academy and the politics of translation and reception equally constitute guises of censorship that stifle the Arab creative endeavor. Our ultimate aim is to contribute a more comprehensive understanding of the multiple forces behind censorship of the imagination.

Magda al-Nowaihi
Samia Mehrez

UNHEARD IN ENGLISH

Magda M. Al-Nowaihi

ABSTRACT

Censorship takes many guises, but can generally be seen as a process that places obstacles between writers and their public audiences. Moreover, the inability to be heard by the intended audience in its turn has a deep impact on how a writer composes his/her texts. This paper will examine the barriers that prevent Arab literary voices from being heard in English, and what that tells us about the dynamics of cultural exchange between first and third world countries in this era of globalization. The inaccessibility of Arab voices to English-speaking audiences will be traced in three locations: a-the existing institutional structures of the western academy that determine the knowledge produced by the scholars it employs, b-the physical (un)availability of texts resulting from the politics of translation and reception, and c-the reduced texts that readers encounter because of the lack of contexts to which they relate the work, and because of the expectations that are brought into the reading of "foreign" texts. Consequently, Arabic texts offered to western audiences have a dramatically different relationship to structures of power. No longer shocking readers out of their apathy and prejudices because they deal with the disenfranchised and voiceless in their own societies, they now simply confirm what we always knew about "these people." Their value as a site of opposition and contestation is transformed into complicity and conciliation with mechanisms of oppression in the adopting culture. This does not only affect the ability of scholars and students of Arabic in the west to truly understand the Arab world, but also, more and more frequently in this era of globalization, it influences the compositions of the authors themselves in their attempts to appeal to a global market. The pressures that ensue from the role that literature plays as an exchange

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commodity between the first and third world, and the desire of Arab writers to be heard in English, thus have detrimental results that transcend languages and borders.

UNHEARD IN ENGLISH

Most Arab writers are acutely aware of the many guises and shapes that censorship takes. If censorship is a process that places obstacles in the path of writers attempting to create oppositional works of literature, and also blocks the path between these works, when they are written, and their public audiences, then we can see that such diverse conditions as the unavailability of funds to support writers, inability to find publishing houses that will take on the works, lack of access to the media which could publicize these works widely, deliberate exclusion from such prestige-allocating processes as prizes and awards, keeping these works outside of school and college curricula, and so on, all constitute means of censoring a writer's ability to create, and to have access to an audience that would be affected by these creations. You will notice that all the examples I gave are not exclusive to totalitarian regimes, but are equally alive and healthy in the liberal democracies of this world.

If we look specifically at the case of Arabic literature here in the west, and more specifically in America, then it seems almost self-evident that certain Arab voices get relatively wide audiences and an attention that allows them to thrive, though thrive in a very particular way that I will get into later, while many other, potentially more significant voices remain unheard, and unheard of. This paper will attempt to analyze some of the conditions that allow for this situation to persist, through focusing on three locations: **a**-the existing institutional structures of the American academy that determine the knowledge produced by the scholars it employs, **b**-the physical (un)availability of texts resulting from the politics of translation and reception, and **c**-the reduced texts that readers encounter because of the lack of contexts to which they relate the work, and because of the expectations that are brought into the reading of "foreign" texts. I will argue that the result is the consumption of even works that may have been oppositional in the Arab world, in such a manner that makes them downright collaborative in the American context. Finally, one must ask whether the pressures that ensue from the role that literature plays as an exchange commodity between the first and third world in this increasingly globalized market economy, and the desire of Arab writers to be heard in English, do not have detrimental results that transcend languages and borders.

Arabic literature is primarily taught in this country in departments of Middle or Near Eastern Studies. Almost everyone in the humanities today is aware of how institutional structures of limited funding and resources, the distinctions between tenured, non tenured, and adjunct faculty, the politics of publication and advancement, etc. affect the production of the knowledge that our students and readers are exposed to. In the case of Area Studies departments the problems are more acute. It is not simply that the resources are less, the support from the administration weaker, and the prestige at the bottom of the academic food chain, all of which is true. It is also that, when it

comes to Area Studies, it becomes near impossible for the American academy to be an arena of opposition and contestation. Edward Said traced the history of Area Studies departments in *Orientalism* over twenty years ago, and exposed the ways in which the knowledge they produce has served the interests of some at the expense of others, and has functioned to consolidate a world order, "new" or "old" does not seem to make much difference, of a privileged few, and a disenfranchised majority.

Today the situation has not improved much. In the absence of adequate funding from the universities themselves, Middle Eastern Studies departments and programs are still forced to go, hat in hand, to the State Department and/or wealthy oil sheiks, two entities whose interests often coalesce to determine, for example, which translation of the Quran is assigned, which variety of the Arabic language is taught, and so on. In these cases funding does not come with strings unattached. This funding may also be responsible for the strong anti-theoretical, primarily philological bent of most Middle Eastern Studies departments. Theory is after all very dangerous to State Department and to oil sheik interests, precisely because it introduces issues such as the relations between knowledge and power, or discourse and the material world, the problematics of representation, the politics of location and reception, and so on. The result is a situation where European departments produce the theory, we provide the raw material; they set the parameters of discourse, we function as the native informants; they decide the subject, we offer, or become, the object.

In addition, the umbrella term "Middle East" does not serve as a rallying call for an empowering unity that transcends national and linguistic boundaries. It has not functioned as a basis for enabling agendas of resistance. The very appellation is a creation of colonialism, and people who live in these countries understand themselves to be "Middle Easterners" only in relation to the West, and use the term primarily within the context of discussions of geopolitical considerations and configurations of world powers. Their own self-designated parameters of identity would not include this category.

Departments of Middle Eastern Studies are usually composed of scholars working on different 'regions' within the area, each within one language, and these scholars are more often than not interested in and capable of talking to colleagues in other departments, such as English literature, than with one another. That is how you move from the local to the universal, from the ghetto to the center. That is how you become a "cosmopolitan intellectual"! The self-violence and colonial barriers which divide the different peoples in the physical "Middle East" are reenacted within the space of the American academy, and these departments amount to a number of individual scholars who have been forcibly lumped together as a matter of convenience for powers that need to look at the countries they focus on as one region. The ghettoization of these departments within the American academy parallels the disenfranchisement of the cultures they represent in the power games on the world arena, and their lack of inner cohesion and solidarity is reminiscent of the sad divisions between the different nation states of the Middle East.

Like many "third-world" peoples, we in the Middle East, and in Middle Eastern Studies, have mostly lost the ability to hear one another in any language other than English (occasionally French), and in reference to any terms outside those set by western discourses. It is rare indeed that we encounter one another and experience each other's cultural productions without the mediation of the West. For example, I know no Hebrew, Turkish, or Armenian, but my English and French are reasonable, and the only reason I learnt some Persian, to be quite honest, is because it was required by my department at that formidable American university, Harvard, where I did my graduate studies. In that I am quite representative of the field, I think.

But the fact that I am forced to rely on English translations to experience, say, a Turkish novel troubles me, not because I hold on to the belief that only cultural insiders who read the material in the original language can understand it or are authorized to represent it. Rather, my anxiety stems from my knowledge, through my first-hand experience in dealing with translations from Arabic, that the works that make it into English, and the English forms they take, offer more insights into the politics of reception in the host culture than the cultural dynamics of the originating one. At best, what makes it into English replicates an elitist and hegemonic canon in the original culture, more often it creates an alternative canon that privileges works easily consumed by western audiences because they reinforce preexisting stereotypes and misconceptions. Recently I was asked to review a translation that came out this year from Syracuse University Press. The book is entitled *Three tales of Love and Death,* written by Qut el Qulub, "the richest woman in Egypt in her time", and translated from the French by Nayra Atiya.[i] Here are a few typical examples from the book: a village beauty's "eyes shone more brightly and her breasts filled out, her small nipples pushing against the cloth of her dress. She walked erect, her body swaying like a sapling . . ." (p.7) Another woman is described thus: "How beautiful Nazira was ! Draped from head to toe in voluminous black veils, how straight and supple her body was! How graceful her movements!" (p. 39) When lovers meet, they melt in each other's arms, sighing "in wonder. To what land of enchantment had they suddenly been transported?" (p.20) And when disaster befalls them, they lose their appetites and waste away, and their plight is described in expressions like: " Farewell to joyous celebration! Farewell to sweet love songs! Farewell to the life she and Ahmad had longed for since childhood!" (p.19) The short songs that intersperse the text are of the following quality:

Oh, beloved ! In your embrace,
Oh, beloved! In your embrace
I will learn the delights of heaven … (p.17)

These tales, that perhaps would be more suitable as a Harlequin Romance than as part of a translation series from a distinguished university press, are made "authentic", in the words of the cover jacket, by "bringing to light manners, customs, folklore …" and including descriptions of Egyptian "streets, bazaars, holy sites, homes, verdant fields, arid deserts…" (Front cover jacket). The descriptions are clearly those of a rich aristocratic lady curiously observing the "natives" as they go about their lives. While Qut El Qulub probably did feel sympathetic to her characters, one almost constantly feels that one is participating in a voyeuristic activity, fixing our gaze on the

folklore of peasant and urban lower-class life as these women apply henna, dance, sing, celebrate weddings, participate in the *Zar*, and so on, but only rarely coming close to their inner lives or hearing their voices. This is a classic case of the erasure of "subaltern voices" and their replacement with external, exoticized descriptions. These tales are no more than a collection of dated, quaint stories that tell us more about how Egyptian elites imagined the lives of native peasants and the urban lower classes during the first half of the twentieth century than about these lives themselves. In spite of the innocent intentions of the author, such works, when they are not seriously contextualized, can be quite dangerous. Why then, one must ask, was this book given precious space by this respected academic press, the third book to be translated and published by the press for Qut el-Qulub, when we have nothing in English translation, as far as I know, by Ghalib Halasa, only one short story by Radwa Ashur, only one novel by Bahaa Taher? Is it perhaps the luring promise of the jacket that readers will get "a glimpse of the 'veiled' culture. . ." of the harem, and a "sensual picture of Egyptian city and country life where passions end in tragedy or resignation"? And in this case, these three books by Qut el Qulub, is not a fluke or an exception. In fact, a number of younger scholars have begun to focus on this phenomenon, trying to understand, for example, why a figure like Nawal al-Saadawi, by no means an important literary writer in the Arab world, is the most widely translated and taught Arab writer in the English language, whereas more important women writers are barely known here. They also are looking at the subtle and not so subtle changes that happen to these texts on their migration route: titles change, covers change, arrangement of material changes, and so on. For example, whereas the Arabic equivalent of al-Saadawi's *The Hidden Face of Eve* starts with a strong condemnation of imperialism, the American version starts with a gruesomely detailed description of a clitoridectomy. Not an innocent change, and not one without implications.[ii]

The issue is not that the West should not know that the Arab world is less than perfect. The real problem is that in the process of translation and reception, texts that are oppositional within their cultures, because they address the concerns of those disenfranchised in their own societies, become collaborative with systems of oppression in the adopting culture, validating and legitimizing already held beliefs that "those Arabs" mistreat their women, have racist inclinations, violent natures, etc. and are therefore still very much in need of the civilizing power of Western culture. Let me give you an example: when the amazing film *al-Tawq wa al-iswira* (The Choker and the Bracelet) directed by Khayri Bishara, based on the even more amazing novel by Yahya al-Tahir Abdallah, was shown in New York a few years ago, the audience came out muttering things like: "that's how Egyptians treat their women, what an uncivilized culture," etc. etc. Gone was the productive sympathy, anger, and soul-searching that an Arab viewer might feel, as well as the clear understanding of when and where these events where supposed to have taken place. They were replaced instead by the dangerous ahistorical and diffuse contempt of an American viewer buoyed by the sense of his/her own superiority. Change locations and you dramatically change the relationship between these texts and structures of power: from confrontational to collaborative, oppositional to complicitous. No longer shocking their readers

out of their apathy and prejudices, they now simply confirm what we always knew about "these people."

Thus in addition to the issue of which texts are physically available in English, there is the question of how those texts are received. A properly nuanced understanding of a text requires situating it within a field of relations and connections, literary and extra-literary. The problem is not just that American readers are encountering a reduced text because of their lack of awareness of its various contexts, but that the contexts they will almost inevitably relate the text to are their own prior "experiences" of the Arabs through the media, cartoons, *New York Times* editorials, etc. When an American student registers for a course in Arabic literature, his or her ultimate goal is to figure out the essence of this category, and to comprehend how each text "reflects" Arab reality. This is true not just of the students who unabashedly list as reason to take the course: preparation for a career at the CIA or State Department or IMF, or professions that will cater to the project of globalized capital, but also of the sweet undergraduates who really want to learn about other cultures and make this a better and more humane world. Even when one reminds them of the ways in which literature works, when one talks about paradox, irony, parody, fantasy, etc., and consistently makes comparisons with experiences familiar to them, they are still so desperate, at the end of the day, to make the jump from knowing this Arab text to knowing "the Arab". The mimetic model of simple reflection is almost unbeatable when encountering foreign texts, and even for the sophisticated student, the "authenticity" and "fidelity" of the representation to a "culturally typical" original experience becomes the litmus test for the text.

I am sure that part of the answer is not simply to give the students more, and more accurate, information, but to make them aware of their own positionality vis- a- vis the material they are reading, of how the material reaches them, how they consume it, and how their consumption of it is a power-allocating activity. The ultimate goal might be to gently lead them to shift vantage points, at least momentarily, and to stop using their own culture and their own self-interest as the primary point of reference. If that is not possible, then they should be made aware, if they are going to pronounce judgments, of the hidden motives and limitations of these judgments. If they are unwilling to entertain a critique of the Kantian notion of the universality of the aesthetic, let them at least consider how Eurocentrism masks itself as universal precisely by claiming that imitation of western models is a solution for one and all.

But while relativizing can be a powerful antidote to the belief in one culture's superiority, it runs the risk of depoliticizing intellectual activity, and promoting an attitude of "laissez faire" which is not the road to commitment. The balance one needs, perhaps, is to both condemn what one sees as morally reprehensible (clitoridectomy if I stick to my earlier example) while simultaneously condemning the manipulative and self-interested condemnation of that same behavior. This is a difficult and sometimes messy position (talk about taking the moral high-ground) but one that allows for being simultaneously honest and taking account of the politics of location.

The question that remains to be asked is whether these conditions that I have been discussing only affect the ability of scholars, students, and readers of Arab literature in the west to truly understand the Arab world, or whether they have wider ramifications that influence the production of literature within the Arab world? We know that Arab writers are more and more interested in appealing to a wider western audience, in having their works taught in world literature courses in western academies, in being invited here on book tours and lecture series, in gaining international recognition, competing for international awards, perhaps even getting nominated for a Nobel, like Mahfuz. As the market, for culture as well as for material goods, becomes more globalized, it seems reasonable to assume that this desire can only intensify. Does this desire have no influence whatsoever over these writers' choices of subject matter, the ways they treat this subject matter, arrangement of material, and so on? These writers are quite perceptive, and are aware of what works get chosen to be translated and published, what voices are heard in America. In their own, perhaps not illegitimate desire to be heard in English, will they not, maybe even unconsciously, turn complicitous before even crossing the borders?

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[i] Out El Kouloub *Three Tales of Love and Death* translated by, Nayra Atiya (Syracuse University Press, 2000)

[ii] Amal Amireh, "Framing Nawal el Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational Context," Forthcoming in *Signs* (Winter 2000). Other scholars who are working on this issue of the politics of translation and reception are Hosam Aboul-Ela, Nancy Coffin, Jenine Dallal, Lisa Suhair Majaj, and Therese Saliba.

THE BIG ONE: THE INTELLECTUAL AND THE POLITICAL IN MODERN EGYPTIAN LITERATURE

By Samia Mehrez*

This article seeks to trace the development of the relationship between the intellectual and the political fields in Egypt since the post 1960's through their representation in Egyptian literary texts from the sixties to the present focusing specifically on two examples: *Al-Zayni Barakat* by Gamal al-Ghitani[iii] and *The Assassination of the Big Man* by Ibrahim Issa.[iv] Whereas *Al-Zayni* is written very early on al-Ghitani's appearance within the literary field, *The Big Man* is written after some fifteen years in Ibrahim Issa's career as a journalist and creative writer. Hence, not only do the texts reflect different historical junctures between the intellectual and the political in Egypt, but they equally bespeak the respective experiences of the two writers as actors within the literary field, as well as their understanding of their relationship with the political one.

While *Al-Zayni* is today considered one of the landmarks of the sixties, *The Big Man* is more of an underground text that continues to be circulated and read within the Egyptian literary milieu. Despite the difference in sub-genre, one that this article will situate within a political context (*Al-Zayni* being a historical allegory that deals with the present by casting it in the past, while *The Big Man* is a satirical political thriller that immerses the reader in the details of the current, local and global) between them, these two texts map out some thirty years of the relationship that binds the intellectual field to the political power structure in the country. At the heart of this relationship, as depicted in the texts, is the contest over knowledge and truth: both sought by the intellectual and masked and/or mystified by the political apparatus. Both texts present the reader with substantially different understandings and hence representations of a "Big One": a political power against which the figure of the intellectual in the text is juxtaposed. The very nature, manifestations, and workings of this Big One will be analyzed, moving from the all powerful, all oppressive, self-contained police state of the sixties, to a weakened, transparent, and more globally dependent one in the nineties.

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It is perhaps important to say that my reading of *Al-Zayni Barakat* in this article constitutes a revisitation of a text that lay at the heart of my graduate work in the early eighties: a moment that represented the auspicious beginnings of Gamal al-Ghitani's career. It marked his ascent from the underworld of the literary field to the position of a major actor in the generation of the sixties that today dominates the key literary and cultural positions and institutions of the nineties. The early eighties equally represented al-Ghitani's growing affiliations with the field of power: it is during the early eighties that al-Ghitani becomes an established journalist in the daily *Al-Akhbar*, responsible for its weekly literary pages that have paved the way to his much coveted position as editor in chief of *Akhbar al-Adab*, the most widely distributed literary review in the Arab World today. This turning point in al-Ghitani's position within the literary field coincided with my own entry into it. My understanding and reading of the text then was shaped by these important elements.

Today, however, my revisitation of *Al-Zayni* is informed by Richard Jacquemond's reading of the same work in the late nineties in his Ph.D. dissertation *Le champ litteraire egyptien depuis 1967*,[v] a reading that coincided with al-Ghitani's consolidation of his position within the field of power to the detriment of his position within the literary one. Even though both readings understand *Al-Zayni* as a kind of "education sentimentale" of the author, Jacquemond's reading, unlike my much earlier one, introduces a prophetic dimension to the text that was simply absent twenty years ago when al-Ghitani's career and relationship to both the literary and political fields was still in the making. Jacquemond explains the "miracle" of *Al-Zayni Barakat*, the "chef d'oeuvres" written by a mere beginner at age twenty five, by reading it *à la* Bourdieu in his study of Flaubert's career, *Les règles de l'art* i.e. as a "lucid instance of the 'objectification of the self' that not only explains the past trajectory of its author but further announces, with exactitude, the turn it will take in the future."[vi] This prophetic element constitutes a crucial moment in my rereading of the representation of the political field within the novel as well as the various roles of the actors in the text, specifically that of the young protagonist Said al-Juhayni.

Published in Damascus in 1974, Gamal al-Ghitani's *Al-Zayni Barakat* parodies the Egyptian police state of the sixties through the representation of Mamluk Egypt in the sixteenth century, a strategy that is both legitimate and effective in bypassing censorship or direct confrontation with the political field of the sixties. It is set on the eve of the Ottoman invasion of Egypt and draws upon Ibn Iyas's sixteenth-century chronicle of that same moment in history, *Bada'i' al-Zuhur fi Waqa'i' al-Duhur*, not only for the archaisms of the language and the docu-fictional forms it uses, but also for its central and enigmatic character, the absent/present in the novel, al-Zayni Barakat himself, the *muhtasib* (supervisor of trade and prices) of Cairo who in both the medieval chronicle and al-Ghitani's modern novel remains a controversial character. As many critics have already pointed out, and as Al-Ghitani himself confirmed, there exists an analogy between the medieval police state that we read about in *Al-Zayni* and the modern Egyptian one. The factors that contributed to the Ottoman invasion in 1517 A.D. and the Egyptian defeat in 1967 were not dissimilar. We know that the historian Ibn Iyas was very critical

of the Sultan and his corrupt administration and held them responsible for the defeat. In both cases (the medieval and the modern Egyptian states) we have administrations that failed to live up to their images. And in both cases we have regimes that tried to mask the reality of defeat from the people for as long as possible.

Even though the novel traces the emergence of al-Zayni, his rise to power, and his success at remaining in power after the fall of the Mamluks and the advent of the Ottomans, it does so without him ever appearing in the text. Al-Zayni consolidates his power through an alliance with Zakariya ibn Radi, the supreme *shihab* (chief of the police and spy force). Said al-Juhayni is the young student of al-Azhar who is initially infatuated by al-Zayni and is ultimately manipulated and destroyed by the alliance between the controversial *muhtasib* and the supreme *shihab*. In painting Said al-Juhayni as the young upcoming intellectual in the text, al-Ghitani infuses him with key autobiographical elements that bring him unmistakably close to the author himself. Like al-Ghitani, Said is a *Sa'idi* (Upper Egyptian) from the village of Juhayna (al-Ghitani's own village). He is of modest background but is a potential social climber who is intent on transcending his marginal position through both the cultural (namely al-Azhar and his close relationship with Sheikh Abu l-Sa'ud whose daughter he is secretly in love with) and possibly through a naive belief in the political (an initial support for and belief in the *muhtasib*, al-Zayni Barakat Ibn Musa).

This portrait of the young man in the novel is a mirror of that of the young author in his twenties as an "apprentice intellectual." Due to the family's limited financial means, al-Ghitani was forced to abandon dreams of a university degree and worked as an apprentice carpet designer in order to support his siblings. However, he was able to transcend this marginal position through creative writing. The publication of his first collection of short stories *Awraq Shabb 'Asha Mundhu Alf 'Am* (1969) earned him immediate recognition within the cultural field and a permanent, even though modest, position in the daily *Al-Akhbar*. Further, Said's relationship with al-Zayni is not unlike al-Ghitani's own initial naive relationship with the late Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser: a relationship of infatuation and support that is later transformed into disillusionment and compromise. As it turns out, in both cases, that of the young character, Said, and that of the young author, al-Ghitani, it is the political field that will determine their respective relationship to and position within the cultural one.

In the beginning Said divides the world between the good (al-Zayni) and the bad (Zakariyya, the Supreme *shihab*). As the text progresses, and with the reoccurrence of controversies surrounding al-Zayni, this clear-cut understanding of the world, collapses. When Said's suspicion of al-Zayni's manipulative intentions are confirmed, when he finally knows "the truth" and dares to utter it in the text, confronting al-Zayni at a public appearance in a mosque and calling him a liar, he is arrested by al-Zayni's guards and is surrendered to Zakariyya who imprisons, tortures and co-opts him. Zakariyya's agenda is unambiguously stated towards the end of the text: "the step by which a man crosses our threshold should be a clear line of

demarcation separating two eras. That moment should divide a man's life into two parts in such a way that the man comes out of here, bearing the same name, but, in reality, a different person." (*Al-Zayni*, p. 182) Indeed, when two years later Said is finally released, he becomes that different person: a collaborator, employed by Zakariyya to spy on his own spiritual mentor, Sheikh Abu al-Sa'ud, a radical outspoken critic of al-Zayni:

> We know, Said that you wish to see your mentor. This is your right, of course. And need I remind you 'He who taught me one letter makes me his slave'? You said his name several times in your sleep... (...) ...Go to him. Don't be afraid. On the contrary, we want you to resume your relationship with him exactly as it was before. We want you to enjoy his confidence. Don't alienate him. Go to him, prostrate yourself at his feet. Cry. Shed real tears. He will ask you, 'Where have you been since your return?' Tell him, 'They forbade me, but I don't care about that anymore. I have disobeyed them and come to you.' Curse us, Curse our grandfathers! Pray to God to ruin us! Say whatever you want, Said. You must revive his confidence in you (...). We know you can do it. Otherwise, we wouldn't have come to you. We are asking for your help, Said. You are close to us; you are one of us. You are ours.' 'You are one of us. You are ours.' (*Al-Zayni*, p. 232-33)

Indeed, Said's anguished monologues and reflections at the end of the text mark the beginning of a new era: "Oh, there is no turning back." (*Al-Zayni*, p. 234) "Aaah, they have made me rot, they have destroyed my forts." (*Al-Zayni*, p. 235)

Like Said, al-Ghitani was detained in October 1966 by the same regime he had supported, during a purge against the "pro-Chinese" communists. He was released from the Citadel prison in March 1967 upon the intervention of Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. *Al-Zayni Barakat* represents the fictionalized narrative of that experience and announces, through Said's final lines in the novel, the beginning of a new era for the young author himself. Again, like Said, al-Ghitani acquires a new understanding of the political field that will redefine his relationship to it. This is perhaps the decisive moment in his career that will gradually change his position within the literary field from that of the apprentice intellectual (who divides the world into the good and the bad) to becoming, as Jacquemond succinctly puts it, the "intellocrat" whose position within the literary field is contaminated by his relationship with the political one.[vii]

Al Ghitani's representation of the field of power in his novel *Al-Zayni Barakat* is further manifestation of his own "apprentice" position in relation to that field. All the narrative strategies and techniques he uses reinforce this idea. *Al-Zayni*, the main figure who represents the field of power, remains invisible, inaccessible, and illusive, throughout. The text is constructed out of the constant juxtaposition of public and secret docu-fictional forms (memoirs, spy reports, public announcements, royal decrees, etc) that generate two levels of reality in the text: a reality for popular consumption and another that

circulates among those in power. Some of the docu-fictional spy reports are at times labeled "Top Secret" and made unavailable even to the reader who predominantly occupies a far more informed and privileged position than that of the other characters in the text. In all of this Said, the young student of al-Azhar remains the naive outsider, with no real grip on the inner dynamics of power, nor his relationship to it, until of course he dares to tell "the truth" and is arrested. The political field is depicted as opaque, all knowing, all-powerful, both efficient and effective, a force that will crush when it fails to manipulate. [viii]

In the late sixties, al-Ghitani was promoted to the position of military correspondent of *Al-Akhbar*. But he was soon punished for signing the manifesto of 1973, spearheaded by the noted Egyptian intellectual figure, Tawfik al-Hakim, and signed by more than 100 Egyptian intellectuals in solidarity with the student movement of 1972 that demanded of the late president Anwar Sadat a military confrontation with Israel.[ix] Al-Ghitani was first dismissed for eight months from *Al-Akhbar* and then brought back, "put away" in its offices and forbidden to write on its pages. There he will remain until the mid-eighties when, with a change in the administration of *Al-Akhbar*, he will be given the responsibility of its literary pages. From then on the journey to becoming the intellocrat begins.

In contrast, Ibrahim Issa's trajectory stands in diametrical opposition to that of al-Ghitani. Born in 1965, he graduated in Mass Communication in 1985 and was appointed journalist in the weekly *Roz al-Yusuf* where he rose to become managing editor until 1995. Unlike al-Ghitani, Issa began as a professional and not as an apprentice quickly gaining ground inside the political kitchen. In *Roz al-Yusuf* he established himself as an articulate, satirist and excelled in his attack on the Islamicists. In 1995 he was only thirty when chosen to be editor in chief of Cairo's popular, privately owned weekly *Al-Dustur* that boasted its non-partisanship to opposition parties and some sixty prominent contributing journalists and intellectuals representing the Egyptian right, left, and center. Despite the apparent expansion of the boundaries of freedom of the press in the Mubarak era, *Al-Dustur* was closed down by the state in 1998 for its attack on Coptic businessmen in Egypt.

When compared to al-Ghitani, Issa's career represents another miracle, but in the opposite direction: at age thirty he is already at the heart of the field of power with direct access and information to its workings and a singular position to understand, demystify, denude, and satirize it. He accedes to the literary field through the back door (journalism) and will continue to have problems legitimating his position within it. Even though his first novel, published in 1989, was very favorably reviewed by al-Ghitani himself, Issa will continue to be regarded by many, within the literary field, as an intruder, a journalist who uses his profession to write "quick" novels: a professional political satirist yes, but an "apprentice" within the literary field nonetheless, despite the seven novels and three collections of short stories that he has published, predominantly at his own expense. Ibrahim Issa's novels are considered by many of the literati as a paler version of the popular works of Ihsan Abdel Quddus (1919-1990): daring in content but conventional in form,

technique, and language, certainly not to be compared with the avant-garde narrative forms of the sixties or the experimentation of the seventies.

With the closing of *Al-Dustur* in 1998, under the eyes and complicit silence of Egypt's intellectual elite, Issa falls between two stools: he becomes an outcast of both the political and literary fields. Published in 1999, after the crack down on *Al-Dustur*, *The Assassination of the Big Man* represents Issa's attempt at coming to terms with this crisis. The novel is at once a suicidal severing with the field of power that totally exposes and ridicules it and an audacious attempt at a laissez-passer into the literary one through its successful manipulation of an uncharted literary genre in modern Arabic literature, namely the satirical, political thriller. Issa wrote the manuscript of *The Big Man* in the US where, according to him, he could distance himself from all kinds of censorship and maximize the limits of the sayable. He completed the writing of the novel that distills his experience within the field of power in two months. He left a copy with a friend in the States, and flew back with the other, having calculated the unpredictability of Egyptian cultural politics and the very real possibilities of censorship. Issa published the novel at his own expense and gave it to *Al-Ahram* for distribution. According to Issa, upon orders from State Intelligence, *The Big Man* was not distributed. After negotiations with *Al-Ahram*, Issa's copies of the novel were returned to him; they were sold out at a reception he held at the Greek Club, Cairo's most recent down town den for the intellectual milieu. Despite, or perhaps because of, the banning, *The Big Man* was reportedly read by the president of the republic himself.

The Assassination of the Big Man is set in the present and without ever naming the place or the actors is able to evoke through the constant use of familiar episodes, incidents and characters, the tragi-comic reality of the contemporary Egyptian field of power both locally and globally. The novel opens with the discovery that the president of the republic has been stabbed to death in his own bed with a dagger that had been hanging on the wall in his bedroom. The president's private secretary summons key members of the cabinet for consultation. As they arrive at the presidential palace, their inner thoughts and consciousness are revealed to the reader in a series of flashbacks that expose the corruption, mediocrity and ridicule of the political apparatus as well as the ministers' anxieties and fears for their fragile positions within the political field. In a long sequence of hilarious fictional episodes that bear unmistakable resemblance to reality, Issa provides the reader with his insider's view of the wheeling and dealing of the field of power. Each chapter represents a satiric parody of current Egyptian political realities: the president's plans for a total change of the cabinet members that terminates in the dismissal of the prime minister with no change at all; the failed assassination attempt against the president at the zoo; the cowardly and complicit role of the press, the parliament, and the media; the orchestrated false elections, the propping up of the president's son as heir to the presidency, the dubious role of the powerful and power hungry business men, *bref*, the entire system, all based on Issa's direct knowledge of the political kitchen.

The central question that preoccupies the cabinet members in the novel is not who killed the president but rather how to preserve the system and their power despite the president's death. To the people, they announce that the president has died a natural death. To the American ambassador, they tell the truth! The role of big brother that is assigned to the United States in the text is another satiric testimony from Issa's long experience within the political field. Upon the orders of the president of the United States, a "fact finding" committee is set up to investigate the circumstances surrounding the president's murder. Its "findings" are not meant for the consumption of the people (who believe their president has died a natural death) but for the democratic political kitchen in the US that does not want to be caught red-handed, or uninformed, should the story of the assassination be discovered and aired. The committee is constituted with the membership of two intellectuals: the blasé, disengaged and silent Egyptian law Professor, Yusuf Radwan, and the naive, committed and rather hysterical, Arab American Professor of Middle East Studies, Rita McKurby (an Americanization of her original name, Al-Maghrabi). In their short lived search for "truth" it is Rita, the catalyst and alter ego, who draws Yusuf Radwan out of his silent disengagement and ultimately becomes responsible for his tragic end in an asylum accused, by the local press, of being a "necrophile," " a grave thief," "head of a gang whose weird pastime is to dig up graves," "caught naked inside a women's graveyard."[x]

As an intellectual, Yusuf embodies the modern history of his country: he is the grandchild of an Islamicist (on his father's side) whose torture he had witnessed as a child, and a communist (on his mother's side) who after being released from the detention camp, entered in the service of the state and died denouncing its corruption and oppression. The experience of his grandfathers leads to his total disillusionment with the field of power. When he is handpicked to serve on the fact finding committee he repeatedly explains to Rita, who firmly believes in her heroic role as "fact finder," that they were only brought to complete paper work and files and not to search for "the truth" that may prove to be disastrous, if discovered. As the keys to the president's assassination begin to unravel, Rita abandons the search for "truth" and seeks refuge in a Sufi order, leaving Yusuf obsessed with what he had so wisely been disengaged from: the search for "truth." When Yusuf begins to deduce that the president, his cook, and the president's swimming pool engineer had all been poisoned by a "foreign expert" and proceeds to act on his deductions, he is denied audience by the authorities who had so far been "cooperative," he is checked out of his hotel, he is stripped of all the files related to the crime, and is finally arrested and put in a madhouse for attempting to conduct an autopsy of the bodies of the cook and the engineer.

Unlike al-Ghitani who in his first novel *Al-Zayni Barakat* shields himself from his contemporary police state by representing it in the past, Issa's *The Big Man* is submerged in the current, everyday political reality. If al-Ghitani uses parody in order to fend off censorship, Issa confronts that very same possibility head on. But could Issa have written *The Big Man* during the sixties? The answer, I believe, is a categorical no. The very representation of the political field in both novels and the respective protagonists' attitude toward it attest to the extent to which these two authors' fictional imaginings

are products of very specific historical moments. In *Al-Zayni* power is concentrated in the hands of two individuals: the *muhtasib*, al-Zayni Barakat, and the supreme *shihab*, Zakariyya ibn Radi whose reign of terror permeates the entire text. Together they represent a highly centralized political power that rules with a confident, ruthless, impenetrable, iron fist, an awe-inspiring parody of the Egyptian political field in the sixties. In contrast, *The Big Man* represents a political field that has been stripped of its power and whose workings are ridiculously exposed. Unlike al-Ghitani's text, Issa's depicts a political vacuum and a political field dominated by the dictates of the market whose interests are dependent on *the* global power that ultimately manipulates the entire narrative. Not only is the representation of the political field radically different in the two texts, but, also the very mode and language of that representation are equally poles apart. Whereas al-Ghitani uses an archaic and sufi-like classical Arabic language, Issa works with the spoken Egyptian dialect, pushing it to the most colloquial, at times "foul" level. Whereas the omniscient narrator in *Al-Zayni* deprives the reader of certain levels of information (top secret reports, covert relationships between characters) thereby increasing the opaqueness of the system, the reader of *The Big Man* is privy to the most intimate, private, and denuding conversations between the president and his men. The president's comments with regard the change of cabinet members, during a meeting with his prime minister, is just one example:

> Listen, everyday I read about poor services in hospitals and people who end up dying…What do people think? Do they think that if they go to hospital they won't die? How idiotic! How greedy! They think that because we have hospitals no one will die. Ungrateful half-wits! That's why I want for the future minister of health, even if he's a ticket collector, to write on the entrance of every hospital the Quranic verse "Everyone shall taste death." And let's see who will object to divine will. (*The Big Man*, p. 59)

Issa's *The Assassination of the Big Man*, like al-Ghitani's text, may be read as his own objectification of his trajectory in the field of power. The satiric mode in which the entire novel is written allows him to simultaneously distance himself from his experience while establishing an intimate and complicit relationship with the reader. The back cover of the novel semiotically attests to Issa's determination to break free from the constraints of both the political and literary fields: an image of the author on the Hudson River in New York with the city in the background, his head turned towards a flock of seagulls, flying across a blue sky. Printed against this image is a series of recommendations and directions to the reader:

> **Advise before you purchase this novel:**
> 1-Reading is an individual responsibility.
> 2-The novel may cause you depression.
> 3-The novel is for adult readers only.
> 4-Do not leave any evidence that you own a copy.
> 5-Do not buy this novel.
> **Directions for Reading:**
> 1-Watch the news before you read this novel.

2-Do not read it at your workplace or where you suspect people's intentions towards you.

3-Readng dosages: 20-30 pages. You may increase the dosage if you can bear it.

4-Do not try to compare between the events in the novel and real life. The author does not wish to be responsible for any similarities.

5-Keep your copy out of sight; preferably, in the refrigerator.

Further, the end of Yusuf Radwan's search for "truth" is not unlike Issa's own. *Al-Dustur* was closed down for daring to cross the redline and speak the truth about prominent and powerful businessmen in Egypt. Like Yusuf Radwan, Ibrahim Issa, the editor in chief of *Al-Dustur*, paid the price: he found himself put away, out of grace, totally marginalized within the field he had so comfortably come to occupy. The tragedy remains however, that Issa's suicidal severing with the field of power did not win him a substitute place within the literary one. Not only is *The Big Man* banned by the political authorities, but it is equally "banished" from grace within the literary one, despite Issa's original and successful distribution of the 3000 copies in a very short period of time. Suddenly boy wonder is transformed into a madman, an outlaw in both the political and literary fields.

Two examples will situate the radically different positions of al-Ghitani and Issa today. As the crisis surrounding Haydar Haydar's novel, *A Banquet for Seaweed*, was at its peak,[xi] and as *Akhbar al-Adab* (the main battle ground) braced itself to defend the issue of freedom of speech and expression with weekly editorials by al-Ghitani denouncing terrorist/fundamentalist discourse against the novel, its author, the publishers, and the minister of culture (a long standing enemy of al-Ghitani against whom he conducted a national battle both in the Egyptian courts and on the pages of *Akhbar al-Adab*), Ibrahim Issa begged the right to differ with everyone. In one of the issues dedicated to Haydar's defense, *Akhbar al-Adab* published an article by Ibrahim Issa entitled: "I Beg Your Pardon... I Disagree With You: What Haydar Haydar Wrote Has Nothing To Do With Freedom of Speech!" The article can be read as Issa's riposte to his marginalization within the literary field. He accuses the Egyptian intellectuals of hypocrisy for suddenly inventing a "classic" out of a "mediocre novel" and for condoning Haydar's "attack" on Islam while condemning his own attack on the president, in his banned novel. He concludes with an outright cry that encapsulates his compromised position on all fronts:

Finally, one could have just put one's tongue inside one's mouth and shut up and avoided this controversy altogether and let you all go to hell...Islamicists and leftists alike. For none of you lent a helping hand or wasted a drop of ink to rescue a banned and persecuted writer for whom they have closed seven papers and whose novel has been banned by national security without any of you dashing to republish it in defiance of power or the sultan. I could have kept quiet and spared myself your disdain for my words but had I been among those who kept their tongues in their mouths I would not be where I am today. [xii]

Ironically, it is precisely because of this sense of banishment that Ibrahim Issa is able to step out of line and publicly defend Professor Saad el Din Ibrahim in his crisis with the field of power, a crisis over which the Egyptian cultural field has, at best, remained silent when not in perfect alignment with the incriminating position of the political one.[xiii] Al-Ghitani's ruthless editorial after Ibrahim's release, which he concludes by calling for Ibrahim's boycott, is a perfect example of this dominant unsympathetic position. [xiv]

In stark contrast is Issa's defense of Ibrahim where he unleashes his wrath and disdain for both the transparent political field and the complicit literary one. He denudes, questions, and mocks the alleged official accusations leveled against Ibrahim and bewails the reactions within the intellectual milieu concluding with a defense of the victim that bespeaks Issa's understanding of their shared position, one that is identical to that of Yusuf Radwan in *The Assassination of the Big Man*: the "mad man" who dared to seek and speak the truth:

> I say I am defending Saad el Din Ibrahim because I believe he is a political victim in this case. I hope that our intellectuals- no matter how different their views- will come to realize that Saad el Din Ibrahim is being assassinated both politically and psychologically because he dared to demand impartial elections and national democracy and because he allowed himself to invite every one of the people to "Be a Partner and to Participate."[xv]

Despite al-Ghitani and Issa's different public positions on issues that preoccupy the intellectual field, their respective fictional representations of the status of the intellectual in his relationship with the political field in their novels are ominously identical. It is true that *Al-Zayni Barakat* and *The Assassination of the Big Man* present the reader with substantially different understandings and hence representations of a "Big One": a political power against which the figure of the intellectual in the text is juxtaposed. It is equally evident that between them, the two texts map out the very nature, manifestations, and workings of this Big One, moving from the all powerful, all oppressive, self-contained police state of the sixties, to a weakened, transparent, and more globally dependent one in the nineties. However, the invariable element in the two texts remains the place and fate of both protagonists, Said al-Juhayni and Yusuf Radwan, whose search for truth leads to their destruction by two political powers whose nature and structure is substantially different. Even though Said is initially the innocent, naïve, and uninitiated young man and Yusuf is the blasé, experienced and all knowing intellectual, they both end up in the same place: crushed, marginalized, scandalized, and irrelevant to the workings of political power. The very last words uttered by both characters in the two novels are the same: Said al-Juhayni's anguished cry at the very end of *Al-Zayni Barakat* "Aaah, they have made me rot, they have destroyed my forts" (*Al-Zayni*, p. 235) is identical to Yusuf Radwan's equally tormented last utterance in *The Big Man* when, after a long period of complete silence in the asylum, all that he can say is: "Aaah, Aaah, Aaah." These agonized and besieged cries by both protagonists who represent the intellectual in the respective texts are all we are left with at the

end. A very disarming position indeed when we consider the time that separates the two works, the transformations that have occurred over that time with regard the political field, and finally the radically different trajectories of both authors within the intellectual field.

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iii Gamal al-Ghitani, *Al-Zayni Barakat*, (Damascus: Ministry of Culture,1974). First published in serilized form in *Roz al-Yusuf* (1970-71); English trans., Farouk Abdel Wahab (London: Penguin Books, 1988) and (Cairo: AUC Press, 2004). All quotations from the text are from the AUC Penguin edition. All references to the novel will be cited in the text of the article.

iv Ibrahim Issa, *Maqtal al-Rajul al-Kabir* (The Assassination of the Big Man), (Cairo, 1999).

v Richard Jacquemond, *Le champ littéraire egyptien depuis 1967*, Université de Provence, 1999. A shorter version of the dissertation has recently been published under the title *Entre scribes et ecrivains: le champ littéraire dans l'Egypte contemporaine* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2003); Arabic trans. Bashir al-Siba'i, *Bayna Kataba wa Kuttab* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, 2004).

vi Jacquemond, *Le champ littéraire egyptien depuis 1967*, p. 464.

vii Ibid.,p. 468.

viii For a more detailed reading of *Al-Zayni Barakat* see Samia Mehrez, "*Al-Zayni Barakat*: Narrative as Strategy," *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim and Gamal al-Ghitani*, (Cairo: AUC Press, 1994).

ix See *Bayan al-Kuttab wal-'Udaba'*, Beirut, *Al-Anwar*, January 9, 1973.

x *The Big Man*, p. 321

xi For a detailed account of the Haydar affair, see Sabry Hafez, "The Novel, Politics and Islam," *New Left Review*, September-October, 2000 and Max Rodenbeck, "Witch Hunt in Egypt," *New York Review of Books*, November 16, 2000.

xii *Akhbar al-Adab*, May 14, 2000, p. 15.

xiii Dr Saad El Din Ibrahim is professor of political sociology at the American University in Cairo and the director of the Ibn Khaldoun for Developmental Studies. He was arrested at midnight on Friday 30 June 2000 and some of his documents were confiscated. At the same time another force from the state security investigation bureau raided the Ibn Khaldoun Center and arrested two of the center's staff. Dr Saad El Din was charged with collecting funds without a permit from the official authorities, misappropriation of funds in a fraudulent manner to prepare forged voting lists and cards, cooperation with others to prepare forged voting lists and cards, preparing public media containing false phrases and rumors and disseminating provocative propaganda that could cause damage to the public interest, and accepting funds from a foreign country with the purpose of carrying out work harmful to the national interest by producing a film [entitled: *Be a Partner and Participate*] that damages Egypt's reputation abroad. He was released on bail on August 10, 2000 and was subsequently re-arrested and imprisoned for one year before he was finally tried and cleared of all alleged charges against him.

xiv *Akhbar al-Adab*, August 20, 2000, p. 3.

xv *Akhbar al-Adab*, May 14, 2000, p. 15.

THE SHIFTING LIMITS OF THE SAYABLE IN EGYPTIAN FICTION

Richard Jacquemond[*]

Since the 1990s, the Egyptian literary scene has been marked by what seems to be at first glance two opposite developments: on the one hand, the growing number of the cases of censorship has generated feelings of harassment and insecurity among writers; on the other hand, anyone who follows these writers' production cannot but notice that they enjoy a greater freedom of expression than they did at any previous stage during the 20th century.

The main reason for this gap between the actual state of freedom of expression – as regards at least literary writing – and the actors' perceptions of it resides in the growing unpredictability of the system. As a matter of fact, the two-players game, with strict albeit clear rules, between the state and the writers, that prevailed under Nasser and Sadat has been replaced, under Mubarak, by a game whose rules are indeed more flexible, but also more blurred, especially because of the interference of third parties who seek for themselves an authority as censors, at the margin of, or outside, a legal system to which they oppose superior, moral or religious norms. This is referred to by the literary milieu as "street censorship", a phenomenon it alludes to in what has become in the last decade the first demand of the Egyptian writers and artists, namely, "the suppression of the multiple authorities which control cultural production" – a formula used in several collective statements and manifestos issued by Egyptian writers in the late nineties. Most of the latest heated debates around censorship were initiated by actors who are neither state officials, nor the now famous Academy of Islamic Research at Al-Azhar, but self-proclaimed censors: journalists, independent ulamas, lawyers, MPs, librarians, publishing houses' employees, students' parents, etc.

However, before analyzing some of these controversial cases, let us insist on what they conceal: the Egyptian writers enjoy since the early 1980s a degree of freedom of expression which is unprecedented under the regime born of the 1952 revolution, and is broader than the one they were granted by its predecessor during the "liberal age".[xvi] This is the result of two converging

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evolutions. On the one hand, the present regime remains attached to the "liberal" image it owes to its strategic alliance with the United States (and Europe), its economical orientations as well as the margin of freedom it grants to the intellectual elite and (some of) its political opponents - although it has steadily refused, over the past twenty years, to take any effective step toward democratization. In this respect, the contrast between the book and (to a lesser extent) the rest of the printed media, which is not submitted to prior censorship, and all the other audiovisual media, where prior authorization from the censors at the ministry of Culture and/or the ministry of Information is the rule, is a good indication of the limits of this "liberal" stand. It also reveals the elitist nature of this liberalism, since only the small minority of the population which produces and consumes printed materials can take part in the public debate and have access to a semi-autonomous space of cultural production. This margin of freedom granted to professions such as those of artist, journalist or writer has come with a return to a strategy of containment of these intellectual producers within a whole cluster of official or semi-official institutions. The Mubarak regime, having realized the failure of its predecessor's politics of confrontation with the intelligentsia, has resumed the old Nasserite model of control of the intellectuals and presents itself as the "impartial" patron of the various cultural fields (literary, academic, artistic, etc.), integrating all their schools, trends or generations within its apparatuses and manipulating, at the same time, the internal struggles within these professional fields according to its own agenda.

On the other hand, these politics have come with a new "revolutionary push" within the literary field. Like its predecessors, the new literary avant-garde known as "the generation of the nineties" is making its way within the field by contesting the boundaries which delimit literary expression and by refusing the interferences of external powers as well as the compromises of the consecrated avant-garde. Ostensibly turning their back to the "great causes" (*al-qadaya al-kubra*), these new avant-gardes – where women and men are evenly represented, a radically new phenomenon – give a literary existence to whole areas of individual or society which were either inexpressible or devoid of literary legitimacy. In doing so, they give publicity to self discourses and self images which the dominant moral either condemns or tolerates on the condition that they remain within the sphere of orality and privacy. This new literary generation has also distanced itself from the state's patronage, as can be attested by the success of its main publishers (the small publishing houses Dar Sharqiyat and Dar Merit, the underground review *Al-Kitaba al-Ukhra*) – although some of its members prefer to publish under the state's umbrella and thus avoid the financial costs of private publishers who often ask the writer to contribute to the publishing costs.

A case of informal censorship: Samir Gharib Ali's *The Hawker*

The latter option was chosen by Samir Gharib Ali (b. 1966) when he published his first novel, in November 1996, in a new collection launched by the state-owned publisher GEBO (General Egyptian Book Organization). *Kitabat jadida*, "New Writings", was the name of the series, with, as its chief-editor, Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid (b. 1946), a seasoned novelist representative of

today's consecrated avant-garde – a move indeed consistent with the "politics of containment" described above.

   The Hawker (*al-Saqqar*) – part of which had been previously published in *al-Kitaba al-Ukhra*, the unofficial organ of the generation of the nineties – is a short novel standing – as it happens often with first novels – somewhere between the formative novel and the autobiography. Its core intrigue is the turbulent relationship between the narrator, Yahya, a young engineer who works (or rather does not) in a state-owned factory on the verge of being privatized, and Melinda, a French student who came to Cairo in order to improve her Arabic and work on her thesis on women in the Mamluk era. This turbulent relationship, described in a very direct, if not crude, manner, is bound to be such because of Melinda's paradoxical position, at once subversive – by her will to reverse the woman's traditional role in general and to "avenge" the Arab woman specifically – and reactionary, in the sense that by imposing this on Yahya, she reproduces the domination of the foreigner/master, the *khawaga*, over the autochthon/servant. Long sections of the novel are occupied by stories, told by Yahya to Melinda, about his family, where several characters were famous for their abnormal behavior. Among them, this story about his grandfather: according to his fellow villagers, this weird man, half wizard, used to seclude himself in a room during the whole month of Ramadan, when he would be fed by demons and "he would relieve himself close to his bed and clean himself with pages of the Koran." (p. 32)

   A few months later, this excerpt and some others were quoted by Fahmi Huwaydi, one of *Al-Ahram*'s leading columnists, as so many examples of blows against the "fundamental values of society" in the name of "freedom". Huwaydi's argument, which he developed in an article entitled "Our need for a new social contract", can be summarized as follows: each society must defend its own identity, which expresses itself through certain basic norms and values, and freedom of speech cannot infringe on these values. He goes on quoting what he deems legitimate cases of censorship in other contexts (in Europe and Asia), and then descends on *The Hawker*, explaining that this novel belongs to a kind of "satanic, nihilist writing that ruins everything that is religious – whether it be Islamic or Christian – and all moral values" and concluding with an explicit call to ban it.[xvii]

   This article triggered a long debate, while the GEBO discretely withdrew the novel from its stands and spread the rumor that it had sold out. This kind of informal censorship presents a major advantage for the authorities, namely, to pay lip service to President Mubarak's commitment to the writers and intellectuals: "No ban without due process of law" – a promise he reiterated on various occasions during the 1990s. Informal censorship is very hard to contest indeed, and the authorities want precisely to avoid judicial cases and the bad publicity they make to the country. But whereas the state tries to enforce this kind of silent, informal censorship, the self-proclaimed censors seek to maximize the publicity of their calls for ban, because calling the public opinion to witness the "scandal" is their best weapon. The case of *The Hawker*'s informal ban also reveals a social diffusion of authority outside the state's monopoly, something that jeopardizes the relative freedom of the writers, but can also be analyzed as a "revenge" of civil society of sorts.

Why does a renowned columnist calling for a "new social contract" care for the first novel of an obscure writer? "How can a novel that will be read by a few dozen readers corrupt a whole people" asks Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid.[xviii] Regardless of Huwaydi's motives, his interference underlines (and plays on) the very heavy symbolic power attached to the written word, completely blown out of proportion in comparison with its actual social diffusion and erected as the showcase and yardstick of society's "fundamental values." From here stems the censor's refusal of the aesthetic distance upon which rests the reading of fiction: as usual in such instances, Huwaydi does not make a difference between the author, the first-person narrator and the other characters, and deems the author responsible for his characters' words and acts. The other side of this shared belief in the quasi sacred value of the written word is summarized as follows by Samir Gharib Ali:

> "I tried to write as simply as we speak, but as I was told by a great poet, what is accepted at the level of oral discourse is unacceptable in writing. I read my novel to a group of workers at the factory [where I work] and no one found anything wrong with it, on the contrary. The problem is within the middle class and its contradictions. They tell us "We support freedom of expression" and then they take opposite positions, they live their lives in a certain way and they think in another one."[xix]

In other words, the written word is related to the dominant class and to the system of values it appoints itself as its custodian and censor. This is why literature cannot represent reality in a neutral, "objective" way. The violence, deviancy or immorality inherent in daily life has to be euphemized and/or dissimulated in order not to shock the elite's "good taste" and not to give "bad examples" to the masses.

As Samir Gharib Ali hints in the above quotation, the various actors who intervened in the polemic around his novel often reacted in an ambiguous way, often at odds with the positions one would have expected from intellectuals who define themselves as "liberal" or "enlightened". Several critics and writers converged in blaming the "vulgarity" that, according to them, pervades the writings of the young generation. A common critique addressed to these young writers is that while rivaling in transgressing the religious and moral taboos, they keep aloof of the most challenging, that is the political one – a critique that it would be unfair to address to *The Hawker*, which is, in its own discrete and low-key way, a very powerful denunciation of the present state of affairs in Egypt.

Many voices rose against Fahmi Huwaydi's intervention, accusing him of "inciting the authorities to repress creativity", or even indirectly arming the "extremists'" hands. However, their apology for the writer's freedom remains conditional: the interference of authorities "external to the circle of creativity" is rejected, but the writer must question his "conscience" and his "sense of responsibility".[xx] Let us police ourselves, the writers seem to say, and the fundamental values of society will be preserved. This compromise is certainly

not very mind satisfying, but it might be unavoidable, given the constraints they have to deal with.

Extending the spectrum of literary possibilities

It is interesting to compare the case of *The Hawker*, a first novel which bears many similarities, both in its artistic content and in its fate with censorship, to Sonallah Ibrahim's first novel *Tilka l-Ra'iha* (1966, English translation *The Smell of It*, 1971), as well as to another novel by Sonallah Ibrahim which appeared few months after *The Hawker*, namely, *Sharaf* (Dar al-Hilal, 1997, French translation *Charaf ou L'honneur*, 2000). Mainly set in a prison in present day Egypt, *Sharaf* is a merciless attack on today's Egyptian, Arab, American, etc. political and economical elites. Nevertheless, not only was it published by the state-owned Dar al-Hilal in what is now the oldest Egyptian literary series, *Riwayat al-Hilal* (founded in 1949), but it was granted the very official prize of "Best novel of the year" at the 1998 Cairo Book fair.[xxi] Of course, it is much harder for censors to attack a consecrated novelist with an international stature such as Sonallah Ibrahim than a young debutant like Samir Gharib Ali. But why does the establishment go all the way round and bestow upon him such an official reward as this Book Fair prize?

The answer takes us back to the containment politics and reminds us that literary prizes do not necessarily add symbolic value to the selected work or writer, but on the contrary, it is often the latter who adds value to the prize he receives. But there might be another explanation to *Sharaf*'s value: this novel, no matter how harsh and virulent it reads, remains within the traditional mode of intervention of the Egyptian reformist intellectual: it points a finger at everything that goes wrong – the corruption, the repression, the deviances, the submission to the foreign powers, etc. – and calls for a change. Most probably, Sonallah Ibrahim would not have been allowed to publish such a novel in the 1960s or 1970s; however, it falls perfectly within the realistic-reformist paradigm that has dominated Egyptian fiction since the beginning of 20th century – precisely since Muhammad al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham*, whose 1907 edition opened with the following epigraph:

> "Although this story presents itself as an imagined one, it is the mere truth disguised into fiction, not a fiction cast in the mould of truth, by which we attempt to expose the manners and customs of our contemporaries and describe the vices that the different classes of men should avoid and the virtues it is their duty to respect."[xxii]

"Expose the manners and customs", "describe the vices" one must avoid and the "virtues" one must cling to: realism and morality are closely linked one to the other and, as a matter of fact, *Sharaf* does not go beyond this traditional, legitimate frame of modern Arabic literature. If this novel innovates, it is not by contesting this paradigm but rather by exploring it systematically and pushing its limits further. Indeed, *Sharaf* presents itself as a novel, a fiction, but the acknowledgements the author addresses at the end of book to the ex-prisoners and prison officers for their help confirms, if there was any need for it, that his description of the Egyptian jails is based on field research and claims to be faithful to reality. "Discipline and reform" (*ta'dib*[xxiii]

wa-islah): this motto of the Egyptian prisons mocked by Sonallah Ibrahim at the beginning of the novel could actually be that of Dr Ramzi Butrus, the Nasserite pharmacist who, by the end of the book, strives in vain to "raise the consciousness" of his prison mates by shouting proclamations from his cell. And one cannot but see in this character a pathetic echo of its creator's position, an anxious questioning of the social utility of literature.[xxiv]

The domination of this realistic-reformist paradigm in modern Egyptian writing also offers the key to understand the debate that surrounded *Diary of a Country Officer* (*Yawmiyyat Dhabit fi l-aryaf*), the third novel of a writer whose previous works had gone unnoticed, Hamdi al-Batran (b. 1950), also published in the *Riwayat al-Hilal* series. Like the famous novel by Tawfiq al-Hakim whose title he pastiches[xxv], and with very similar literary tools, al-Batran draws a gripping picture of the police's work in Upper Egypt in the difficult context of the 1990s (the novel was published in February 1998, three months after the assassination of more than fifty tourists in Luxor, the bloodiest episode in the decade-long confrontation between the state and the islamicist guerillas). In his own manner, al-Batran takes up again with the accurate style, the lively dialogues (in colloquial Arabic) and the art of story-telling of al-Hakim, upon which he has another advantage: while al-Hakim, an urban bourgeois with a cosmopolitan culture, felt totally alienated in the Egyptian countryside, al-Batran is a native of Upper Egypt where he spent his life and career as a police officer.

Upon its appearance, *Diary of a Country Officer* was presented in a lengthy review in *Roz al-Yusuf* (23 February 1998) as a "testimony": while the reviewer correctly qualified it as a novel, he kept quoting its content as if it described real, actual facts. Here are the title and subtitles of the review: "An Officer Tells What Goes on Behind the Police Scenes in Upper Egypt. – The novel reveals daily scandals among officers and their subordinates. – The real boss is the State Security Intelligence chief-officer. – The rivalry between police and justice. – Corruption: citizens' racketeering, electoral fraud, antiques traffic." By cutting off the distance between reality and fiction, the *Roz al-Yusuf* critique was not giving a naïve, non-literary reading of the novel. On the contrary, it was just enforcing the particular reading contract that binds the realistic writer and his reader since Muwaylihi: according to its terms, the recourse to fiction is nothing more than an artifice used to disclose a "reality" the other instruments of social knowledge cannot or do not want to represent.

We find in the foreword by which the late Fathi Ghanim (1924-1999) introduced one of his latest novels a characteristic expression of this particular reading contract:

> "This novel has no relationship with real facts or characters, even though I happen to make mention in it of myself, of the novels I wrote and of my work as a journalist, all of which might lead the reader to think that I relate events that actually took place. This is exactly what I want, for even though what I write is pure fiction, I want the reader to take these facts as if they were real ones, as a faithful recording of reality I deliver him in all sincerity. In other words, I

welcome anyone who gives credence to this story and does not believe or questions my saying that it be imaginary!"[xxvi]

If fictionalization is reduced to a mere artifice, a conniving wink between author and reader, then no wonder that its status remains uncertain and that it be put into question by all those – "naive" readers and censors – who ignore or disregard this reading contract and refuse to make a difference between author and narrator or hold the former responsible for the sayings and actions of its characters. The same journalist who treated *Diary of a Country Officer* as a faithful testimony had, one year before, come to defend Samir Gharib Ali's *The Hawker*, blaming its censors for ignoring "this truth which is common knowledge to any schoolboy, namely that the narrator of a novel is not its author"[xxvii].

It seems that Colonel al-Batran's superiors were alerted about *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* through the *Roz al-Yusuf* review. A disciplinary action was taken against him, on motives such as "disclosure of military secrets". The police hierarchy, rushing into the breach opened by this review, did not take seriously the *paravent* of "fiction". In this particular instance, the literary corporation manifested a genuine solidarity with the persecuted writer: the Writers' Union expressed its support in a press release, and so did many writers, individually. This solidarity was based, once again, on the defense of the reformist intellectual's model and of the social function of the realistic novel. "Truthful literature is a mirror of reality, it can initiate reform and contribute to correct difficult situations", wrote Gamal al-Ghitany in a column dedicated to al-Batran's defense.[xxviii] As a matter of fact, the state's sentence was not too harsh on him: colonel al-Batran was sentenced to one month suspension by a disciplinary court of the Interior ministry, a sentence reduced in appeal to seven days deduction in his salary, and the only charge finally accepted against him was that of publishing his novel without his superiors' prior authorization. Moreover, the novel itself was never censored, formally or informally. However, the outcome of the whole affair has been somewhat gloomy for both al-Batran and his novel. His career in the police has been definitively compromised[xxix] and his novel, despite all its qualities, has not received the critical attention it deserves. The Cairo literary milieu, after paying its duty to the persecuted writer, was not too keen on making a place for this newcomer to the field.

For Bread Alone at AUC: which literature should be taught?

These examples, as well as that of Ibrahim 'Isa's novel *The Assassination of the Big Man* analyzed by Samia Mehrez in this issue of the journal, show that critique and censorship, far from referring to two distinct, opposite spheres, more often complete, sustain and explain each other. More precisely, censors and critics, who are sometimes the same persons, are altogether, each in their own way, custodians of the temple, priests of the religion of literature. This appeared very obviously in another "affair" whose main protagonist was my wife and colleague Samia Mehrez: the polemic that arose around her teaching of Mohammed Choukri's autobiographical novel *For Bread Alone* (1971)[xxx] in a literature class at the American University of Cairo.

The ins and outs of the affair are well-known enough to the community of teachers and researchers on modern Arabic literature and culture for me not to have to recall them here.[xxxi] What matters to me here is to reflect on the implications of the main points of view that confronted each other in the debate. On the censors' side first, and even though they are not always explicit on this point, it seems fair to distinguish between the partisans of an overall ban on the novel and those who simply contest its choice as teaching material. The latter argue that the teacher cannot enjoy the same freedom as the writer because her/his students, unlike the ordinary reader, do not have a free choice; he must therefore "respect the students sensibilities".[xxxii] This is, let's say, the democratic version of an argument which was usually presented in a more elitist way: students are deemed minors ready to fall under all kinds of bad influences – despite the fact that most of them have reached the legal age of majority and that they happen to be in an institution supposed to develop their intellectual aptitudes and faculty of judgment. One only has to replace the students by "the masses" – those eternal minors – to find oneself back to the elitist mentality that dominates the Egyptian cultural field as a whole. Because literary writing is only accessible to a small elite, it has the right to transgress, up to a certain limit, the norms set for the society as a whole. As soon as it gets read beyond these "happy few", reserve and censorship are *de rigueur*.

However, the most significant contributions to the debate came from two other colleagues of Mehrez at AUC. In *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Ferial Ghazoul, professor of comparative literature gave a reading of *For Bread Alone* that sounded like a plea for this "classic of modern Arabic literature".[xxxiii] The core argument of Ghazoul is in conformity with the realistic-reformist theme: the immorality of the literary work is explained and justified by reference not to art's autonomy, but to a social reality itself immoral – the debasement imposed by colonial domination. She roots this argument in language:

> "The entire work as I read it is an exfoliation, a literary play on the multiple and ambivalent shades of meaning latent in a triliteral Arabic root verb *harama* (to deprive/to prohibit) which gives rise to such commonly-known derivations as harem and *ihtiram* (respect). The essential replay is, to my mind, between *haram* (taboo) and *hurman* (dispossession), both related to denial. There are plenty of references to these words -- the forbidden, *haram*, and exclusion, *hurman* -- in a multitude of situations. I believe Choukri's message is that there is an interconnection between the two, and that ultimately one can bring oneself out of this circular hell, just as the 'living come out of the dead ... out of the rotten and the disintegrated,' as he says in his introduction to a 1982 edition of this work."[xxxiv]

And this individual liberation is connected to a collective one:

If some day the people decide to live, fate must bend to that desire
There will be no more night when the chains have broken.

Listening to these famous verses by the Tunisian poet Abul-Qasim al-Shabbi, read to him in prison by a cell-mate, Mohammed Choukri decides to learn reading and writing, the first step toward bringing himself out of the "circular hell."

In short, Ghazoul legitimizes *For Bread Alone* by inserting it within the realistic-reformist paradigm. Like in the novels of Hamdi al-Batran, Sonallah Ibrahim and so many others, the realistic, crude description of social deviance, of the real (under)world's immorality contains a reference – implicit in most of Choukri's book, explicit toward its end – to a superior, moral norm whose realization is hampered by political oppression and social injustice. In this respect, she situates herself on the same ground as her colleague and opponent in the polemic, Galal Amin, a professor of economics at AUC, but also an intellectual in the grand Egyptian tradition, that is to say someone who intervenes regularly into public debates of all sorts, including literary ones.[xxxv] In his answer to Ferial Ghazoul, he intends to prove that no implicit moral can be deduced from the immorality of *For Bread Alone*'s hero/narrator:

> "A novel can be humanistic while describing theft, debauchery, drunkenness or drug addiction, but of course under certain conditions. The most important of them is that the hero, the narrator of the story, he through whom we see the novelistic facts taking place and through whose eyes we judge these facts, must be fundamentally noble (…), intrinsically clean, however dirty be the actions he is led to commit, despite his own will. (…) As a matter of fact, there is not, in the one hundred and fifty pages of *For Bread Alone*, the faintest indication that its hero is intrinsically clean."[xxxvi]

The main merit of Amin's distressing intervention is that it underlines the insufficiency of the "moral" argument used by Ghazoul. Of course, the moral referred to by Ghazoul and that of Amin are not identical, and one may add that she deliberately chose to give an analysis of the work in terms that would be acceptable within the boundaries of the Egyptian context. However, the only consistent defense of the work of art against censorship is to reassert its autonomy, that is to say, the necessary rupture between art and morality.

This was the task Edward Said undertook in a piece published in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, which contained no direct allusion to the Choukri/Mehrez affair but was obviously meant to be his contribution to the debate.[xxxvii] Leaving aside, for once, political commentary, Said spelled the question out with a clarity and an eloquence that remind us that he was, first and foremost, a literature teacher before becoming a "global intellectual" in Sartre's or Chomsky's way. From Plato's *Republic* to the 18th century, says Said in substance, literature and critique have been guided by "what the Roman poet Horace considered the beautiful and the good together." In contrast with this classical representation, romanticism and the following modern ideologies of art have imposed the idea that art can or even must "violate all sorts of canons of good behavior as well as realistic representation. Art was supposed to be different from life; it was intended to subvert ordinary reality; it was created in order to be extreme, not to be 'normal'."[xxxviii]

This radical separation between the beautiful and the good, recalls Said, is never given once and for all. On the contrary, it must relentlessly be reasserted and recovered against all dogmas and all Inquisitions, in the west as much as in the Arab world. However, this seems to be out of reach for most Egyptian writers. In today's Egyptian literary field, a position similar to that of Céline in the French one, consecrated as a great writer in spite of his immorality, seems unthinkable.   Not only because of the pressure of censorship in all its forms – those coming from "above" and those coming from "below" – but also because the dominant ideology within the field itself, what I have called here the realistic-reformist paradigm, has proven its ineptitude to establish an autonomous conception of art and literature.

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xvi More accurately, among the three orders of constraints which restrict freedom of literary expression, two – the moral and the political - have been largely loosened while the third one – the religious – has been tightened.

xvii *Al-Ahram*, 11 February 1997

xviii *Al-Dustur*, 14 May 1997.

xix *Akhbar al-Adab*, 13 April 1997.

xx All previous words and clauses between brackets are quoted from various press sources, mostly *al-Usbu'*, 25 February 1997, and Ahmad 'Abd al-Mu'ti Higazi's column in *Al-Ahram*, 3 March 1997.

xxi These prizes have neither financial nor symbolic value: most of them go every year to the same pillars of the official press and culture, and their recipients' only reward consists in a handshake with the President during the prize handling ceremony. Sonallah Ibrahim happened to be hospitalized that day, thereby avoiding having to confront an embarrassing situation!

xxii Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, *Hadith 'Isa Ibn Hisham*, Tunis, Dar al-Janub, 1992 (1st edition 1898), p. 7.

xxiii It is worth noting that *ta'dib*, which in this context means discipline, is derived from *adab*, which carries both the material meaning of "literature" and the moral one of "properties, savoir-vivre", and thus refers more precisely to the inculcation of *adab* in its moral sense.

xxiv I draw on Samia Mehrez's reading of the novel : see "Dr. Ramzy and Mr. Sharaf: Sonallah Ibrahim and the Duplicity of the Literary Field," in *Literature and Social Transformations*, ed. Wa'el Hallaq, Leiden: Brill, 2000.

xxv Tawfiq al-Hakim, *Yawmiyyat na'ib fi l-aryaf* (1937), English translation *Maze of Justice: Diary of a Country Prosecutor*, University of Texas Press, 1989.

xxvi Fathi Ghanim, *Ba'dh al-zhann ithm, ba'dh al-zhann halal*, Dar al-Hilal, 1991, p. 7.

xxvii Wa'il 'Abd al-Fattah, *Roz al-Yusuf*, 24 February 1997.

xxviii *Akhbar al-Adab*, 29 March 1998.

xxix After the settling of his case, he was transferred in Cairo, a disguised sanction for an officer whose life and family are in Upper Egypt.

xxx Although written in Arabic as *al-Khubz al-Hafi*, the novel appeared first in English translation (by Paul Bowles, 1971), then in French (translated by Tahar Ben Jelloun, 1980) before it could be published in Arabic.

xxxi See Judith Gabriel, "On the Banning of Shukri's al-Khubz al-Hafi", *Al-Jadid*, V-26 (winter 1999), p. 4-5 and 30; Joseph Logan, "Banned in Cairo", *Lingua Franca*, July/August 1999, p. 13-16; and *MESA Newsletter*, XXI-3 (August 1999), p. 13-16.

xxxii This is the argument made by Mahmud al-Rabi'i, chair of the department of Arabic studies (where Samia Mehrez teaches) at AUC, in "Hurriyyat al-ibda' wa-hurriyat al-talaqqi" (Freedom of creation and freedom of reception), *Ibda'*, June 1999, p. 35-40.

xxxiii Note the use of the word "classic", which reveals at the same time the performative value of critical discourse (it becomes a classic because critics say so) and the limits literature teachers impose on themselves (because it is a classic, it can/should be taught, or in other words, teaching non-canonical works is not legitimate).

xxxiv Ferial J. Ghazoul, "When the Subaltern Speaks", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 18-24 February 1999.

xxxv For instance, he had previously taken sides with Fahmi Huwaydi in the polemic about *The Hawker* (see Galal Amin, "Ayyuha l-tanwir, kam min al-gara'im turtakab bi-smik!" (Enlightenment, how many crimes are committed in your name!), *Al-Dustur*, 19 March 1997).

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xxxvi Galal Amin, "Fasl al-Maqal fi-ma bayn al-Khubz al-Hafi wa-Mawsim al-Hijra min infisal" (A Definitive Demonstration of the Difference Between *For Bread Alone* and *Season of the Migration*), *Al-Kutub Wighat Nazar* n° 4 (May 1999), p. 60-63. (Amin uses Tayyib Salih's novel *Season of the Migration to the North* as a counter-example, where immoral novelistic situations are justified by the "intrinsic cleanness" of the hero…)

xxxvii Edward Said, "Literature and literalism", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 28 February-3 March 1999.

xxxviii *Ibidem.*

ARTICLES

Formulating the First-Person (f.) in Two Stories by Egyptian authors Latifa Zayyat and May Telmissany

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One aspect of women's writing that has caught the attention of the critics is the predominance of the 'I' throughout its diverse narratives.[xxxix] Some point to this in order to dismiss women's writing as self-centered, suggesting that male writers have the world for their inspiration while females have only themselves.[xl] A few have been so bold as to suggest that personal narration is an invaluable tool of empowerment for those voices in society that have been marginalized or suppressed.[xli] Still others regard it as an ineluctable predilection, since social restrictions impair women's ability to communicate with and have knowledge of the outside world. Such is the argument of Sawsan Naji who, in her study of women's novels in Egypt, *Woman in the Mirror* [*Al-Mar'a fi al-mir'a*], identifies the "phenomenon of the I" [*zahirat al-ana*] as *the* most important technical feature of women's narrative.[xlii] Working on the presumption that women's writing is autobiographical, she follows the first person pronoun and other forms of 'self' representation throughout women's fiction from the late nineteenth century onwards. Naji does not, however, challenge the notion that women are more self-absorbed than men. Instead, she speculates as to the causes of their apparent self-centeredness and concludes: "Woman drowns in her narcissism perhaps in order to seek refuge in it, or perhaps because she trusts only in herself [...] woman's narcissism is an inevitable result of her subjugated existence."[xliii]

Other scholars of women's writing understand the "phenomenon of the I," and, more specifically, first person narration (whether it be through the voice of the author, in autobiographical forms, or in the voice of a character in autodiegetic fiction), to be emblematic not of narcissistic self-interest but rather of a deferential posture. Susan Sniader Lanser, for example, compares personal voice to authorial (or, roughly speaking, "omniscient") voice and suggests that women prefer the former over the latter because it has humbler claims to knowledge and therefore comes across as less dictatorial and more equitable:

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> The authority of personal voice is contingent in ways that the authority of authorial voice is not: while the autodiegetic "I" remains a structurally "superior" voice mediating the voices of other characters, it does not carry the superhuman privileges that attach to authorial voice, and its status is dependent on a reader's response not only to the narrator's acts but to the character's actions, just as the authority of the representation is dependent in turn on the successful construction of a credible voice. These differences make personal voice in some ways less formidable for women than authorial voice, since an authorial narrator claims broad powers of knowledge and judgment, while a personal narrator claims only the validity of one person's right to interpret her experience.[xliv]

Magda Al-Nowaihi, in her seminal article on Arab women's autobiography—autobiography being a genre that, from a narratological point of view, is formally indistinguishable from autodiegetic fiction—makes a similar observation:

> [They] are interested in creating not simply a female autobiographical tradition but, rather, a tradition that specifically does credit to their need to authorize their voices without posing as authorities from above, to write narratives that are simultaneously antiauthoritarian and authoritative[...] Their autobiographical works are thus marked, and ultimately enriched, by tension, hesitation, and anxiety, particularly regarding their own power and authority as authors. This hesitation that enables them to express collective sorrows and dreams in this seemingly most individualistic of genres.[xlv]

Personal voice, then, would seem to offer writers a mode of narration that is somehow more honest and transparent with regard to its subjectivity than authoritarian omniscience. Yet, for the woman writer, personal voice has another distinct advantage over the impersonal variety: its flexibility with regard to gender allows its manipulator to construct an authorial voice which is grammatically if not essentially feminine—or, as Lanser puts it, "personal narration offers no gender-neutral mask or distancing 'third-person,' no refuge in a generic voice that may pass as masculine."[xlvi]

The two stories under dicussion here, Latifa Zayyat's "Old Age" [*Al-Shaykhukha*, 1986][xlvii] and May Telmissany's "A Song about the Nation" [*Ughniya ʿan al-watan*, 1995][xlviii] both feature autodiegetic narration, that is to say that they are recounted by their narrators in the first-person; hence one may say that they exhibit this "phenomenon of the I" deemed to be so prevalent in women's writing. What I wish to demonstrate, however, is that the authors choose personal voice not so much as a tool of self-representation, however autobiographical the works may or may not be, but rather as a means to establish an authority that encompasses the 'feminine' voice and privileges its agency over a 'masculine' or 'neuter' voice. In our reading of these stories, it is important to consider the 'I' of the narrators as grammatically loaded in a gendered sense, and to see this sexed 'I' in contrast not only to a third-person voice, but also the first-person voice of a male

narrator. For, in a certain light, the male narrator's 'I' is almost as generic (or non-autobiographical) as a third-person voice, since there is nothing to distinguish his 'I' from that of a generic narrator.[xlix] But our narrators' voices are decidedly distinct from a generic third person, and their personal pronouns help them to carve out discursive space for women authors in a mode of narration which is both *feminine* and, at times, *impersonal*. While there is something universal about their project, the textual strategies that al-Zayyat and al-Tilmisani pursue are intimately bound to the rules of Arabic grammar.

Let us consider for a moment the question of the potentially sexist implications of grammatical gender in language and the fact that the mechanisms of linguistic discrimination vary tremendously from one language system to another, as do the methods of confronting it. Many of the attempts to confront sexism ultimately boil down to disassociating the generic from the masculine. For Anglophone writers, this often means divesting language of gender differences—by avoiding the generic "he" and replacing it with "he or she" or "s/he", for example. However, in languages such as Arabic and French, where there exists a certain omnipresence of gender, since virtually every word falls into either the masculine category or feminine category (with a few falling into both), this is hardly an option. Nor is it a legitimate aim, according to Luce Irigaray, who, remarking upon the French language's apparent inability to cope with women in public life (due to the treatment of any group of human beings including a single male as a masculine plural), states the following:

> Instead of dealing with this difficult question, most people wonder whether it wouldn't be better if we were governed by just men or just women, that is, by one gender alone [...] Faced with the need to transform the rules of grammar, some women, even feminists—though fortunately not all—readily object that provided they have the right to use it, the masculine gender will do for them. But neutralizing grammatical gender amounts to an abolition of the difference between sexed subjectivities and to an increasing exclusion of a culture's sexuality [...] What we need to do, on the other hand, and it's essential, is for men and women to have equal subjective rights—equal obviously meaning different but of equal value, subjective implying equivalent rights in exchange systems...[l]

Irigaray invites women writers to assert gender differences, not to gloss over them, and calls on them to demand their full share of discursive space by playfully reconfiguring the sex in syntax. Language is not an immutable object; women should not feel trapped within its confines but rather renegotiate its boundaries and subjugate its resources to their own needs. "Language is a product of the sedimentations of languages of former eras," writes Irigaray. "...It's neither universal, nor neutral, nor intangible. There are no universal linguistic structures in the brain of the speaking subject; rather, every era has its specific needs, creates its own ideals, and imposes them as such."[li] It is just such a process of reworking the rules of writing in which our authors are engaged.

The Generically Autobiographical 'I': Latifa al-Zayyat's "Old Age"

Writer, critic, scholar, and activist Latifa Zayyat (1923-1996) is a prominent Egyptian intellectual of the twentieth century. Her academic career followed a fairly smooth trajectory. She earned a doctorate in English literature in 1957 and was appointed "Professor of English Criticism" at the women's college of Cairo University in 1972. She produced a number of studies in English, including some on Ford Madox Ford, T.S. Eliot, and D.H. Lawrence alongside Arabic-language criticism on Naguib Mahfouz, Tawfiq al-Hakim, and many others. In addition she published Arabic translations of English criticism, including T.S. Eliot's *Critical Essays* (1962). She was also a champion of Arab women's writing and edited an influential anthology of women's short stories in 1994.[lii] Her career as a creative writer, however, was remarkable both for its long period of stagnation and for its intense rejuvenation in Zayyat's later life. Her first novel, *The Open Door* [*Al-Bab al-maftuh*], was published in 1960 to immense acclaim—it was even adapted for the cinema. This was followed by a long creative silence, and her next fictional work, *Old Age and Other Stories*, did not appear until 1986. In the decade that followed she went on to publish a second novel, a play, an autobiography, and a second collection of short stories. Her transformation as a writer is noteworthy. While *The Open Door* is "bold for its time" in that it explores "a middle-class Egyptian girl's coming of sexual and political age,"[liii] it features a linear narrative and plot-driven structure. But what she wrote and published after the twenty-six year hiatus tends to be truly experimental and ground-breaking in a formalistic sense; such that the Lebanese critic Elias Khoury somewhat controversially dubbed her approach to writing as "form through formlessness."[liv]

"Old Age," the title story of *Old Age and Other Stories* [*Al-Shaykhukha wa qisas ukhra*] has a highly complex structure: its narrator is creating her narrative at three different originating moments, and while these narrative instances encapsulated in the form of diary entries are clearly distinct chronologically—they are separated by decades—their stories and their statements (their narrated events and their narrated texts) are not at all distinct from one another textually. This obfuscation of the narrative's plot through the chronological interpolation of narrative timeframes (1984, 1974, 1965) and through the seamless juxtaposition of narrative events (the death of the narrator's husband, the June 1967 War with Israel, the separation of the narrator's daughter from her husband, etc.) is paralleled by multiple and inseparable modes of narration. The narrator's 'I' is thus expressed in 1) personal, even physically intimate, bodily terms; 2) communal, sociological, historical, and national terms; and 3) authorial, grammatically distant and omniscient terms. The narrative modes, like the narrating moments and the narrative events, overlap and intrude upon each other, such that the narrator's voice seems at once autobiographical and generic.

In many ways the structure of "Old Age" is modeled after a never-ending preface, and the anticipatory function of the first-person narrator, a function whose retrospective character, according to Genette, "authorizes the narrator to allude to his future and in particular to his present situation,"[lv] compounds this effect. What we have in these fictional diaries, which constantly allude to

past writing attempts—to thwarted narrative instances—is less about presenting narrative events autobiographically than it is about presenting a series of prefaces or explanations for why those events have gone un-narrated, or at least why their narration has been obscured or incomplete.

The opening lines of "Old Age" provide its first preface, which we might call its external premise. The narrator explains to us that she has rediscovered some ten-year-old diaries [*yawmiyyat*] among her piles of "forgotten papers." She is now a woman of sixty and has a different perspective than she did as a woman of fifty, so she has modified those diaries to account for this change in perspective. No sooner do we arrive at the orienting date of the first diary entry (September 27, 1974) than we are presented with another preface that opens onto another diary which takes us a decade further back in time: "Today is the day I was supposed to shake the dust of ten years off my first diaries, but I didn't do it."[lvi] The narrator then corrects herself—it has only been nine years, thus the situation of the preface has not been reproduced here exactly but with a small variant in the amount of time that has elapsed.

This first diary entry, which in a way reads as another explanatory preface leading to yet another unfinished writing project, also establishes the narrator's familial relationships and their chronological development with respect to her writing. We find out, for example, that her husband Ahmad died in 1964, one year before she started to write her first diary. We know that her daughter Hanan was about sixteen years old when Ahmad died, and we know that Hanan got married four years prior to the narrator's commencement of her 1974 diary entry. This information about the unfolding events is presented in a deliberately perplexing (if organized) manner, and I will not try to tease it out here, I merely wish to point out the dizzying effect it has on the reader who reads chronologically. In any case, our introduction to the narrator's domestic situation, past and present, is followed by her contemplation of another set of memoirs in the form of (unsent) letters addressed to Hanan. But these memoirs—like the dusty diary of 1965, and like the diary of 1974, which has been buried in a pile of forgotten papers—lie stowed away in manila folders. The titles of these folders ("Letters Destined for Hanan But Never Sent," "Letters Written But Not Meant to be Sent" and "Unaddressed Letters") all designate thwarted communication.

Each text that is dug up unearths another text whose cover begs to be lifted. After Hanan uncovers these folders, leafing through the pages of letters that the narrator had labeled "Letters People Aren't Allowed to Peruse," the narrative finally reveals the secret behind the repeated discoveries of (un)written texts: a secret which serves as a key to the autobiographical element in the story. The narrator finds herself leaning on a panel of "the closed door" (an ironic allusion to *The Open Door*), contemplating whether or not her current diaries (presumably her 1974 diaries, although perhaps with their 1984 revisions) should be filed or tucked away in the same notebook with her 1965 diaries. The text leads us through doors, drawers, files, notebooks, and pages in an almost unending process of recovering unpublished writing back to the author's first novel, whose title, which had previously indicated a beginning, has now been changed to signal an end. If

the inclusion of the phrase "the closed door" appears at first to be coincidental, then its self-referential status is cemented in the following lines: "Today a colleague just back from Saudi Arabia stops me in the entrance hall of my office building and asks me after the requisite greetings and salutations about my latest narrative production. My beginnings were promising, indeed very promising, he was saying, while I muttered something unintelligible as I had grown accustomed to muttering after the promising beginnings had turned into ends."[lvii]

If there is any autobiographical material in "Old Age,"[lviii] it appears in the above passage. But no sooner does Zayyat offer up this point of comparison between herself and her narrator, the nearly three decades of literary stagnation that characterize each of their careers, than she starts hammering away at the boundaries of the self, be it hers or her narrator's, by making the autobiographical lose its sense of individuality and become generic. In this regard I would like to refer to the author's own words on the question of the autobiographical in women's writing. In an interview with Somaya Ramadan the author states:

> It is true that a lot of women take the self as the theme of their creative work, and so do men. The important point marking the difference between creativity and non-creativity is how the self is used and to what end. Is the self an end in itself and in a process of exhibition, or is the use of the self functional, offering the reader an insight into life through aesthetic effect? What matters is whether the specific personal experience is confined to the level of the subjective and the particular, or transformed into the level of the general, impersonal, and aesthetic...[lix]

In "Old Age," Zayyat achieves this transformation to the impersonal and general, a switch which might also be designated as the transformation of narrative voice from its personal to its communal mode, by alluding to events experienced communally (the June 1967 war and the struggle for independence of the 1940s). On a thematic plane, she ties the most intimate personal experiences of her narrator to ever larger private and public events expanding the scope of intimacy to include them. For example, the awkward silence that fills the muted conversations between the narrator and her daughter Hanan is finally broken when the latter says, "I have comrades who died in the 67 War. Did you have comrades who died in their youth?"[lx] Hanan's silence turns out to be part of a collective reaction to a national defeat, and it is a silence attributed to an inability to find personal happiness in the face of national catastrophe. "They have robbed our generation of merriment," says Hanan, "and none of us will ever complete a laugh."[lxi] The narrator relates her daughter's experience of history to her own feelings about the 1940s struggle for independence, its protests and the imprisonment of its activists. The narrator thus seems to be attributing her own silence (i.e. her inability to finish a piece of writing) to events of the 1940s in a manner that is parallel to the attribution of her daughter's silence (i.e. her inability to complete a laugh) to the 1967 defeat.[lxii] Thus the narrator's silence—and by extension her voice, is expressed as part and parcel of a communal silence, a communal voice.

On a syntactical plane, Zayyat makes a parallel movement towards the generic, but this movement marks a transition from the personal to the authorial mode of narration. She achieves this by subjecting the first-person pronoun (the 'I') to all kinds of distancing devices and effects as well as the objectification of omniscient narration, such that it loses its association with the personality of the narrator and the personal mode of narration yields to the authorial mode.

From the beginning Zayyat and her narrator posit writing as a confrontation with the self (*muwajahat al-dhat ᶜala al-waraq*,[lxiii] *uwajih nafsi ᶜala al-waraq min jadid*[lxiv]). If, however, the writing project begins as a very personal and almost lonely endeavor, it evolves into a social experience that is anything but individualistic or narcissistic, and this evolution is played out through a syntactical declension of the first person pronoun that demonstrates that the self is completely contingent upon its relationship to other selves. The phrase "the collision of one I with another I"—or, more precisely, the collision of the I with the I" [*istidam al-ana bi'l-ana*][lxv] is used initially in connection with Hanan's marriage partnership and its difficulties,[lxvi] but it is quickly appropriated by other relationships in the text, extending from the sexual relationship of marriage to the mother-daughter bond of childhood; for only a few lines separate the phrase from another bodily union. A doctor diagnoses the narrator's relationship to her daughter as "fetal attachment" [*iltisaq janini*]. The doctor's diagnosis [*tashkhis al-tabib*] in turn represents a collision of 'I's since the word for diagnosis carries a notion of the self within it, and since the narrator resents or objects to the doctor's assessment of her personality [*shakhsiyya*] as well as that of her daughter. The encounter with the page takes on sexual as opposed to maternal dimensions when the narrator writes, "I didn't have the courage to go near the page during the year following my husband's death" [*lam ajsur ᶜala al-iqtirab min al-waraq*].[lxvii] The narrator treats writing or physical proximity with the page as if it were as inappropriate in a period of mourning as physical proximity with another man, thereby positing her writer's block as a form of abstinence.

This contingency of the self is an internal as well as external phenomenon, and the tendency for the I of the narrator to merge, collide or unite with other entities and other 'I's runs parallel with the need she has as a writer for components of her self to split:

> I write this quickly in order to record what Hisham said before this state of split personality, which took hold of me while I was reading my old diaries and which has persisted throughout Hisham's visit, goes away. I know from experience that this split between the woman who observes and the woman who feels won't last for long.[lxviii]

> The pen trembles in my hand. That's not all that Hisham said, not even the most important part of what he said. The I that observes has started to collapse, while the I that feels is expanding to the bursting point.[lxix]

Writing for the narrator of "Old Age" is a schizophrenic process,[lxx] a result of division as much as it is a result of collision. The narrator first expresses her split personality through an opposition between observing and feeling. She also creates some distance in perspective when she refers to herself in the third person as "the woman."[lxxi] She elaborates on this distancing device in the second paragraph cited above in which she no longer refers to herself but rather to an ambiguous subjectivity she calls "the I" [*al-ana*]—a subjectivity which makes the narrator's first-person pronoun a generic entity distinguished from other 'I's only by its grammatical femininity (*al-ana allati tatafarraj...al-ana allati tashʿur*). *Al-ana* [the 'I'] refers both to the narrator herself and to an abstract entity.

Reading Zayyat's generically autobiographical narrative 'I' is much more than a window onto the psyche of a self-exploring and self-absorbed narrator. It also acts as a communal "we" for collective soul-searching—a "we" that is contingent upon audience identification but which is potentially accessible to many audiences (a we that is "Arab" for Arabs, "Egyptian" for Egyptians, "female" for women, "conscientious" for activists, "writerly" for writers and "readerly" for readers.) Furthermore, this weaving together of personal and communal modes of narration is made more intricate by lucid moments of authorial voice, a voice that differs from masculinist constructs of authority by virtue of an omniscience predicated on gender and its markings of femininity.

In her story "A Song About the Nation," May Telmissany subjects her gendered first-person pronoun to distancing effects and devices that are similar to al-Zayyat's. Like Zayyat, Telmissany weaves in and out of authorial, communal and personal modes of narration. So too do we find a tendency in her work to make the feminine generic. There is one major difference, however, between "Old Age" and "A Song About the Nation." In the former, silence, or an absence of voice, is an obstacle to be overcome, an embarrassment of the past and a form of imprisonment. For the latter, silence represents the possibility of noise; it is an unchartered territory opening up onto a bright and productive future.

Negative Space and Deferred Subjectivity in May Telmissany's "A Song About the Nation"

May Telmissany (b. 1965) is a writer and film critic. She has published two novels, *Dunyazad* (1997), which has been translated into English by Roger Allen,[lxxii] and *Heliopolis* (2000), and two collections of short stories, and she is preparing a doctoral thesis on Egyptian cinema at the University of Montreal. The influence of film on her fictional writing is evidenced in its rather striking visual and sonic imagery. Although she is part of a much younger generation of Egyptian writers than Latifa Zayyat, one finds a certain resonance between the two, especially with regard to their experimental use of language. But because Telmissany is a young writer at a relatively early stage in her career, there has not been a lot of published scholarship on her work.[lxxiii]

"A Song About the Nation" watan is homeland not nation["Ughniyya ʿan al-watan," *Naht mutakarrir*, 1995] defines images and explores the contours of

meaning and identity by outlining and filling in negative space. Negative space is a concept from the visual arts in which a space that is generally or usually perceived as empty takes on shape and form.[lxxiv] It works on the principle that the surrounding air is as important in determining a subject's contours as the subject itself. Thus the narrator's self-portrait is fleshed out through the continual repositioning of her figure against its various backgrounds: "I feel myself out," she writes, "in the density of the surrounding air."[lxxv] Telmissany takes this visual phenomenon of negative space and translates it into textual strategies of deferred subjectivity and shifting imagery as her narrator explores the multifaceted aspects of her personal, communal and authorial voice by examining the contours and stretching the boundaries of her body, her identity, and her language and its grammar. In this world that Telmissany creates, the gap, the crack, the cup, the hollow, and the belly become the most exciting textual spaces, defining the forms of the objects engulfing them. The threshold takes on a special significance in this spatial system; for, since it is occupied only ephemerally (i.e. when it is crossed), it invites movement, change and innovation.

In constructing the negative spaces of her text, Telmissany relies heavily on punctuation and, in particular, the "full stop" of the period. The syntactic flow of her story is halting—at times it even seems to pant along with the gasping breaths of its narrator. Each period that the reader confronts draws attention to the silent space that follows it. "A Song about the Nation" is a story rife with incomplete sentences; phrases and clauses are set off by periods—never by commas. Thus a relative pronoun may begin a sentence or end it, and a subject may be disconnected from its predicate. Nowhere is this syntactical crisis more evident than in the opening lines, in which subjectivity in its most tangible, grammatical sense has been deferred (back) by an ellipses, three obstinate periods that inaugurate the story's intermittent postures of silence:

> ... Or like the love. Whose features are lost in the folds of moments that pass just like that like the others. Or like the love. That infiltrates one of the surrounding walls on which names and simple hearts are etched. Like the first delirium. Or like the love that suffocates between one veil and another hanging over the eyes of the sleep-walkers. Like love in God. Or like the love of curling caves. Protected by armed guards... Like the love stolen beneath the eyes of the bawdy. Fearing their tongues that chew on everything.[lxxvi]

Given that there is no readily available subject for this series of predicates, the reader is confronted with an urgent desire to locate such a subject. What is like the love? The reading process is no longer unidirectional, for the story has opened in mid-sentence and thus the reader is tempted to flip back a page, looking for the rest of the thought, that is both its completion and its beginning. The syntax is poetic, drawing attention to its thresholds—those silent or blank spaces dividing fragment from fragment, sentence from sentence, chapter from chapter, and even story from story, forming a kind of dislocated continuity. The possibility that the story's opening signals a kind of textual continuity referring back to an absent subject is supported by the transmissions between chapters. The next chapter opens where the last one

left off. This is literally the case between chapters one and two, with the repetition of "everything" [*kull shay*] and again between the third and fourth chapters, which respectively end and begin with "now" [*al-'an*]. Thus the divisions between chapters serve to propel the text forward, and the way in which the chapters are closed and opened serve to outline the blank, silent, empty space between them—spaces that signify either the inexpressible or merely the unexpressed.

The story's semantic layout, like its syntactic arrangement, repeatedly emphasizes its textual divisions and scenic shifts. In Arabic, the word for "door" [*bab*] may also signify "chapter," and a dual interpretation of the word becomes necessary as the narrator-heroine negotiates the spaces of her text. Many of the chapters begin or end at a threshold, a door or a window that shuts or is left open. Thus the narrator proceeds through the narrative as she moves through her interior setting (a house or an apartment), and the plot unfolds as a text. The chapters are compared to rooms that the characters enter and exit to create theatrical or cinematic scenes. But it is at the door's thresholds—the silent spaces between the chapters—that the action is propelled, and it is there where the creative writing occurs. If the narrator of Latifa Zayyat's "Old Age" navigates her text by opening doors, closets, drawers, and manila folders, thereby discovering writing which has already been written and which needs only to be unlocked and liberated, the narrator of Telmissany's story finds her text by searching for writing which is yet to be written, writing which eludes the confinement of contained spaces and which can only be located ephemerally at the permeable boundaries between them. Throughout the story, the narrator continually extricates her subjective agency, constantly questioning her presence in the narrative by feeling out her incomplete contours and by withdrawing from the scene or exiting the chapter. By the story's end, however, the narrator claims the pivotal ground of the threshold as her own and identifies herself as the subject that crosses them: "I find myself in the accumulation of voices listening to the creak of a new door. I step over its sills and I know that it is I who is stepping."[lxxvii]

Before the narrator identifies herself as the subjective agent, she must first confront the reflections of her self, reflections of a collective and gendered identity, as they exist in society. The first reflection, or misreflection, involves a perception of femininity as it pertains to the nation, an image of a braid that appears before her in the mirror. How does the narrator's national identity relate to this feminine symbol of nationhood? In addressing this question, the following chapter again removes or perhaps displaces subjectivity, but this time the displacement is achieved through visual imagery, rather than through syntax or punctuation.

> Everything falls. As a drop of water runs down an incline. I wash my face and I do not forget the nose, prominent like a challenge. I pass over my neck so drops flow down the gap between my breasts. My belly trembles when that desire to make myself cry comes over me. The faucet is turned off now. In the mirror my eyes don't see. A song out there about the nation says stuff I've heard before. With half an ear. I listen to it now as I direct my gaze at the window. That distant tune comes through it as the image of my twisted braid is sketched

out on the mirror. Like childhood. Or like the desire to bring
back buried time. I close the door behind me and leave the
faucet alone. By design.[lxxviii]

Here the subjectivity of the narrator/heroine is displaced when she looks
into the mirror and does not see her reflection. The music of the patriotic
song intervenes and, when an image does appear on the surface of the mirror,
it is not that of the adult woman whose sensuous contours were mapped out
at the beginning of the paragraph but rather the braided tress of an innocent
young girl, a braid which symbolizes nationhood and woman's role within it.
What is striking is that while there is definitely a nonconcomitant
correspondence between the narrator and the song's image of the braid, the
narrator closely identifies with that misreflection of herself, for it reminds her
of her childhood. It is not just any braid she sees in the mirror but "my
braid" [*dafirati*]. The braid simultaneously represents her and misrepresents
her. The connection is essentially a nostalgic one, for the braid returns the
narrator to her childhood and evokes a "desire to bring back buried time." If
the true or more current reflection of the narrator is kept out of the picture
by the national anthem that intrudes on her space, then it is the narrator who
removes herself from the scene, the bathroom, the chapter. With "I close the
door [*bab*] behind me," the narrator both extricates herself as a character from
the scene and, as an author, ends the chapter, restoring her authority, which
had been threatened by the intrusion of the song that had tried to impose its
infantilized vision of femininity on the adult contours of the narrator.[lxxix]

The narrator's connection to her Egyptian identity is evoked by a patriotic
song that registers in her ear. A voice comes in through the bathroom
window that causes the narrator to see a nostalgic and distorted self-image in
the mirror—a reflected, remembered braid that appears as a misidentification,
a misreflection or at least an identity askew. The twisted braid that she sees in
the mirror is partly her own reflection and partly an image of her as it is
projected by the national song. It is an image of femininity that does not
quite fit; nevertheless, her identification with that image is strong: she claims
it as her own ("my braid").[lxxx]

Later in the narrative, the author-heroine confronts another aspect of
one's social self, namely that of religious identity, be it hers or someone else's.
This encounter takes place when a visual stimulus—as opposed to the aural
stimulus of the anthem—enters her field of vision. The scene is sketched out
in a complex web of intersecting and deflecting glances and gestures. The
tableau here acts as a kind of mirror for the female characters in the story; but
this mirror deflects one's gaze rather than reflecting one's image, creating a
tangential network of feminine identification that leaves the nature of the
various levels of that identification open-ended. In the following chapter, the
narrator and her friend exchange looks with each other and with a picture of
the passion of Christ [*a'lam al-masih*] on the wall:

My friend looked at me and said that it was time for her to go.
Then her glance fell on the empty cup of tea and she stirred
the spoon in the void that reverberated. When she raised her
sharp glance at my silent face, my eyes were contemplating a
panel of Christ's passions hanging on the faded wall. A finger

extends into the open space pointing to the face of the woman kneeling before the cross. (Is that the porter's wife? Or is that just how I think of her?) At the door to the room my friend put down one foot, then another in her black shoes. Steps follow them into the hallway. The door is closed now with a brief farewell. Two empty cups of love.[lxxxi]

The friend looks at the narrator; the narrator looks at the painting; a finger in the painting directs the narrator's gaze at a female figure kneeling before the cross; the face of this figure directs the narrator's thoughts to the porter's wife, a character who is not in the room; finally, as one limb (the finger) points deeper into the painting, another limb (the friend's foot) directs the attention of the narrator (and the reader) outside of the room. The women are deflecting each other's glances and reflecting the image of the feminine as it occurs in the religious art. The woman kneeling at the base of the cross is not identified but she could allude to one of two antithetical figures, the virgin Mary or the prostitute Mary Magdalene. Like the braid that appears in the bathroom mirror, an image inspired by patriotic music, the kneeling woman of the religious painting is a source of identification for the women in the room, even if it is a case of mistaken identity, as is suggested by the parenthetical remark of the narrator's concerning the porter's wife: "Is that the porter's wife? Or is that just how I think of her?" It would be remiss not to notice that the pointing finger that invites the reader and the characters to look at the figure of the prostrate woman is not attached to an agent. "A finger extends in the open space..." but whose?—this synecdoche, whereby a part signifies an unidentified whole, is an apt illustration of the game that Telmissany plays with shifting subjectivities. Is it the finger of the friend who has just stirred an empty teacup (another open space)? Is it the finger of the narrator, the pen of the author, or the finger of Michelangelo's God reaching through the sky to touch his (or her) creation? Is the open space contained in the painting on the wall, or does it describe the room in which the scene is set? Is the open space [*fada'*] the blank page, the open space of the text? It is clear that the author-narrator shares creative agency with others, a theme that is reinforced by the image of her friend's feet stepping over the threshold and closing the door (and chapter) behind her. Whereas the narrator closes the door on the misreflection of her national identity, she allows her friend the authority to close the door on the tangled web of their religious identity. The kind of authority that Telmissany's narrator claims as her own is both personal and shared, intimate and public. By directing the narrator's attention in and out of the room, in and out of the chapter, in and out of the painting, and in and out of herself, Telmissany breaks down oppositions between self and other, artist and audience, author and reader and subject and object. Thus Telmissany's emphasis on what I have termed negative space, her constant reference to the there in her description of the here, posits writing as a fluid spatial continuum, the boundaries of which are forever being stretched by transgressions into the silent spaces at its frontiers.

This continuum has its intertextual component, and Telmissany's narrator sees herself as the inheritor of her mother's oral legacy: "I languished in the light. Half of my face in shadow, half of my mind between her lips. I withdraw from her between the edges of story. And I return to a point of

silence that precedes a new story."[lxxxii] The ambiguity or fluidity of authorship is perhaps most suggestive here, where it is unclear whether the heroine is withdrawing into her own story, or whether in fact she is not retreating from or into her mother's story. In either case, the story is born or reborn at the silent moment that exists in between stories. The full stop of the period comes to symbolize the exciting potential of the next body of text. The oral nature of the mother's narrative is indicated by the allusion to her lips, but her narratives are punctuated as a written text would be. There is no oral/written opposition here: Telmissany presents oral and written modes of narration in tandem. Therefore one may read the point of silence [*nuqtat sukun*] that precedes every new story as either a grammatical or diacritical mark in a text, a period or a *sukun*,[lxxxiii] or a moment of silence, the full stop or the pause that the mark is supposed to evoke or effect. But this point of silence does not signal the end of a sentence or an utterance but the beginning of the next one. The silence of the pause can only be detected and appreciated in relation to the noise that sets it off. Moreover, the motif of the orifice as a source of narrative recurs throughout the text. Indeed, "A Song About the Nation" repeatedly calls attention to hollowed out areas and various forms of containers—evoking caves, the gap between the breasts, the belly, the sink, the cracks in the wall, and empty cups of tea. Perhaps these concave surfaces and spaces, by echoing the structure of the vagina and uterus, replace the convex outlines of the phallus/pen as writing's source. When the narrator extricates herself from the bathroom, she closes the door and the chapter on a phallus-like faucet and leaves it alone. In contrast, the next chapter ends with the narrator's belly regurgitating its contents into the silence of the chapter's end: "and another voice ascends from my belly like the nausea that is coming now."[lxxxiv] This metaphor of writing as morning sickness/childbirth is extended into the next chapter (emphasis mine): "Now I collect my thoughts. *As the things of the day come out of me*. I wake up to my voice. And my moving image. It is I who is. Half-consciousness. Half-being. I feel myself out in the density of the surrounding air. And I talk to myself about things I don't say to others."[lxxxv]

The narrator's subjectivity is finally firmly established. She "wakes up" to her voice and her image and acknowledges herself as the subject: "It is I who is" [*hadhihi ana allati takun*]. But this subjectivity does not coincide completely with the self ('I'), but also with a feminine other; for the relative clause substitutes the third person feminine singular *takun* for the first person *akun*: It is I who is for It is I who am. (Either declension is acceptable.) Thus the narrator's authorial identity cannot be sorted out from that of her mother, whose stories' silent endings prompt her to tell her own, or that of her friend who, like herself, steps over thresholds into uncharted textual spaces; for the narrator's first-person pronoun—her personal voice—is tied directly to her shared communal identity as a female and her omniscient identity as an author.

The statement of awareness or existence that "It is I who is" represents transforms into a statement of action or purpose at the story's end, when the narrator again asserts her subjectivity, but this time she does so as an active agent rather than as a static being. The following paragraphs make up the story's final chapter:

> After I close my door in the end. I find myself penetrating the density of the surrounding air. I talk to myself about things I don't say to others.
>
> I search the cracks in the wall for the meaning of the nation which. Occurred to me in the morning through a voice coming from afar. I find myself listening through the accumulation of voices to the creak of a new door. I step over its sills and I know that it is I who is stepping.[lxxxvi]

The uncanny nature of this final chapter lies in the fact that it describes what is coming after its projected end: the narrative's action is just about to begin. This is evident in two declensions that occur in the above passage. First, the narrator's reflexive statement "I feel myself out in the density of the surrounding air" [*atahassasuni fi kathafat al-hawa' al-muhit*][lxxxvii] has evolved into the forceful assertion "I find myself penetrating the density of the surrounding air" [*ajiduni akhtariqu kathafat al-hawa' al-muhit*][lxxxviii] If, at the story's beginning, the negative space surrounding the narrator is defining her contours, at the story's end she is altering the shape and the contours of that space through her penetration of it. The story's closing line is similarly empowering, for the narrator's earlier assertion of her existence (It is I who is) has been transformed through a kind of declension to (It is I who steps)—thus she has evolved from the subject of a nominal clause into the subject of an active one. And it is the space in which that action occurs—the threshold at the door's sill and at the final chapter's end—that propels her forward and makes her voice an innovative one. The unstifled voice of the narrator reverberates in the void that she has yet to fill. The creak of these silent spaces, the ringing of the empty teacups, the stuttering interruptions of dislocated periods, and the blank spaces between chapters all resonate with the echoes of yet unwritten and unuttered words. Similarly, the relationship between the narrator and the patriotic song, the woman writer and the nation, has yet to be written, but it is one in which she will have a defining and active role, the song that "raided" or "invaded" her in the morning has receded into the background, been subsumed in many other voices, and she can now search for the meaning of the nation in the cracks of the walls. Now that the song has been stored in the spaces of her text, she may approach it or step away from it at will. It no longer acts upon her, defines her, reshapes her, draws her image upon the mirror, or inscribes her voice in the text. Rather, she is in the position of defining its meaning or at least searching for it.

Conclusion

While it is true that Zayyat and Telmissany exhibit the "phenomenon of the I" in these two stories, it is also true that each author, in the course of her text, manages to liberate her narrator's first person from the confines of individuality, thereby transforming her 'I' into a vehicle for collective expression. In "Old Age," Zayyat the narrator successfully distances herself from her 'I' in a move towards a more authoritative voice, but only after Zayyat the author has used the personal pronoun to help establish grammatically feminine markers for that voice. Zayyat moves from the particular to the general, and in so doing impresses her general vision with a

particularly 'feminine', or, if you will, 'feminist,' posture. In "A Song About the Nation," Telmissany's narrator does not progress from a personal 'I' to a general 'I' so much as she defines her personal voice and point of view by way of its constant interplay with other voices (the patriotic song, the creak of the door, the mother's story-telling) and other fields of vision (the mirror, the panel of Christ's passions, the pointing finger). The author constantly interrupts the progression of her protagonist through space and time, not in order to deny her a subjective agency but rather to show her contingency on other (often feminine) agencies through her continuous repositioning between, among and against them.   She does not subject her personal pronoun to quite as many pronounced syntactical games as Zayyat, but she does have her narrator step outside herself by playing around with syntactical structures, as, for example, when she uses the third and first persons simultaneously (*hadhihi ana allati takun*) to assert her existence, or when, to reflect an out-of-body experience she makes herself the subject and object of the predicate (*atahassasuni, ajiduni*, etc). The result of these games, in the case of both authors, is a mode of narration that exploits personal voice in order to establish feminine markers and then abstracts upon that voice to express a collective point of view.

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xxxix For the prevalence of the personal mode of narration in Egyptian women's writing, see the editors' introductions to Yusuf al-Sharuni's anthology of short stories by women writers, *Al-Layla al-thaniya baʿd al-alf: mukhtarat min al-qissa al-nisa'iyya fi Misr*, (Cairo: Al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-ᶜAmma li'l-Kitab, 1975), and to Marilyn Booth's collection *My Grandmother's Cactus: Stories by Egyptian Women* (London: Quartet Books, 1991).

xl In a feminist corollary to this argument, Susan Gubar writes: "The attraction of women writers to personal forms of expression like letters, autobiographies, confessional poetry, diaries, and journals points up the effect of a life experienced as an art or an art experienced as a kind of life, as does women's traditional interest in cosmetics, fashion and interior decorating." See "'The Blank Page' and Issues of Female Creativity," *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 299.

xli See, for example, Susan Sniader Lanser's discussion of first-person narration in African American women's writing in which she suggests that the use of personal voice is "a necessary first location of power" for black narrators in *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 194-219.   See also Shoshana Felman's lyrical exposition on the 'I' as an emblem of the namelessness and voicelessness of women in Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, *What Does a Woman Want? Reading and Sexual Difference*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 142-151.

xlii Sawsan Naji, *Al-Mar'a fi al-mir'a: dirasa naqdiyya li'l-riwaya al-nisa'iyya fi Misr,1888-1985*, (N.P.: Al-ᶜArabi li'l-Nashr wa al-Tawziᶜ, 1989), 8. This phenomenon, as Naji defines it, is not limited to the use of first-person narration but also extends to any self-reflectivity on the part of the author.

xliii Sawsan Naji, *Al-Mar'a fi al-mir'a*, 165-166. In a review article about Naji's book and the state of academic criticism in Egypt generally, Sabry Hafez criticizes Naji for failing to address the difference between what he calls the "I as subject" [*al-ana al-fæila*] and the "I as object" [*al-ana mawduʿ al-fiʿl*] as well as the dimensions of their interconnectedness. See his "*Al-Mar'a fi al-mir'a* wa azmat al-bahth al-naqdi fi al-jamiᶜat al-Misriyya,"*Ufuq al-khitab al-naqdi: dirasat nazariyya wa qira'at tatbiqiyya*, (Cairo: Sharqiyyat, 1996), 253-54. Perhaps it is this failure to distinguish between the two, combined with the conceptualization of the 'I' as always and everywhere a reflection of the author's self that leads her to conclude that women's writing is narcissistic.

xliv Lanser, *Fictions*, 19.

xlv Magda Al-Nowaihi, "Resisting Silence in Arab Women's Autobiographies," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33.4 (2001), 477.

xlvi Lanser, *Fictions*, 19.

xlvii Latifa Zayyat, "Al-Shaykhukha" [Old Age], *Al-Shaykhukha wa-qisas ukhra*, (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-ᶜArabi, 1986), 23-54.

xlviii May Telmissany, "Ughniya ᶜan al-watan" [A Song about the Nation], *Naht mutakarrir*, (Cairo: Sharqiyyat, 1995), 91-96.

xlix Gerard Genette objects to terms such as "first-" and "third-person" on the grounds that they are misleading, since the "I" of a speaking fictional character is grammatically indistinguishable from that of a narrator. Furthermore, due to the narrator's power to intervene in the narrative, he concludes that "every narrating is, by definition, to all intents and purposes presented in the first person." See his *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jane E. Lewin, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 244-245.

l Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 67-68.

li *Ibid.*, 30.

lii Latifa Zayyat, *Kull dhalika al-sawt al-jamil: mukhtarat qisasiyya li-katibat ʿArabiyyat*, (Cairo: Nur, 1994).

liii I quote from the book flap of the novel's English translation. See Latifa Zayyat, *The Open Door*, trans. Marilyn Booth, paperback edition, 2nd printing (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003).

liv [*Al-Shakl fi al-la-shakl*] Elias Khoury "Al-Shahid—al-shahid: tahiyya ila Latifa al-Zayyat," in Sayyid Bahrawi, ed., *Latifa al-Zayyat: al-adab wa al-watan* (Cairo: Markaz al-Buhuth al-Adabiyya, 1996) 111-13. This tribute was presented at a conference held in October 1995, the minutes of which appear at the end of the volume. See page 228. There, Ferial Ghazoul challenged Khoury's phrase, since Zayyat was so keenly attentive to form. Al-Nowaihi refers to the discussion that ensued as a "heated debate." ("Resisting Silence," 493) Many contributions to the conference volume contain valuable analyses of Zayyat's writing. See, for example, those by Sabry Hafez, Samia Mehrez, Itidal Uthman, and Mohamed Berrada.

lv Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, p. 67.

lvi Latifa Zayyat, "Old Age," 25.

lvii *Ibid.*, 28.

lviii On the matter of the autobiographical content and form of Latifa Zayyat's writing, see Sophie Bennet's essay, "A Life of One's Own?" in *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi, 1998) 283-91. The piece is very dense and compact but rife with insights, many of which are pertinent to personal voice. It is particularly remarkable for highlighting Zayyat's textual strategies as she articulated them herself in articles and interviews.

lix Latifa Zayyat, "On Political Commitment and Feminist Writing," interview in *The View From Within*, eds. Ferial Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1994), 246-260.p. 248.

lx Latifa Zayyat, "Old Age," 31.

lxi *Ibid.*, 32.

lxii In a study of al-Zayyat's autobiographical *Hamlat taftish: awraq shakhsiyyah* (*The Search: Personal Papers*, 1996), Al-Nowaihi has shown that al-Zayyat accounts for her 26-year silence by admitting that her experience of imprisonment in 1949 or 1959??, among other things, had broken her as a writer. "Resisting Silence," 495. She comes to this realization during a second imprisonment in 1981. It is interesting to note how the narrator of "Old Age" eludes the autobiographical specificities of personal history, or the personal experience of historic events, referring only to imprisoned "comrades."

lxiii Latifa Zayyat, "Old Age," 24.

lxiv *Ibid.*, 25.

lxv *Ibid.*, 30.

lxvi In fact, the phrase "the collision of the 'I' with the 'I'" follows a long chain of verbs conjugated in the first person describing the narrator's efforts at mediation in her daughter's marriage: "*usalih* [I make peace] *wa-uwaffiq* [I reconcile] *wa-ansah* [I advise] *wa-uʿlim* [I inform] *wa-ahtadin* [I embrace] *wa-udallil* [I pamper] *wa-astamiʿ* [I listen]..." (Zayyat, "Old Age," 30) Thus the whole paragraph seems to be structured around that phrase—the narrator's 'I's are colliding with one another before the 'collision' phrase appears, and, after it appears, there is a shift in focus to the sexual/love relationship between the narrator's daughter and son-in-law. This syntactic game reinforces the thematic content. A doctor has said that the daughter's marriage has failed because of her "fetal attachment" to her mother. The narrator then protests by listing all the things she has done right to make the marriage a success and, in so doing, inadvertently admits a certain intrusiveness on her part, but she then cedes the rest of the paragraph and leaves the final say to the two of them: "two kids terrified by passion in its ideal and its actual, fumbling about in love and in fear of losing love." (*Ibid.*, 30)

lxvii *Ibid.*, 25.

lxviii *Ibid.*, 49.

lxix *Ibid.*, 50.

lxx Al-Nowaihi has observed another form of schizophrenia in *Hamlat taftish*. This schizophrenia is expressed in terms of sexuality and involves the "perceived dichotomy between being respected and being physically desired and desiring." ("Resisting Silence," 495.) The two processes are no doubt related since Zayyat often expresses writing as a sexual function.

lxxi Zayyat employs this technique in *Hamlat taftish* as well. See Hannah Davis Taïeb's remarks on Zayyat's use of the third-person to create a "fusional" voice in "The Girl who Found Refuge in the People: the Autobiography of Latifa Zayyat, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 29 (1998): 202-17.

lxxii May Telmissany, *Dunyazad*, trans. Roger Allen, (London: Saqi, 2000).

lxxiii Hadia Saᶜid has published an appreciative essay entitled "Mayy al-Tilmisani fi al-fada' al-thalith: surat al-ana fi al-akhar wa al-unutha fi al-dhukura" in *Al Katiba* 8 (July 1994), 66-67. It was in response to some short stories Telmissany had published previously in the same journal, including "A Song About the Nation." And Roger Allen has published a "Postface" to his translation of *Dunyazad*, (London: Saqi, 2000), 89-95. Beyond that, there is not much to my knowledge apart from assorted book reviews of *Dunyazad* and *Heliopolis*.

lxxiv Negative space is an important compositional principle in the visual arts. It is a simple concept designed to train the eye of the apprentice to see things in a new way. The line at the edge of a leaf may be determined both by the form of the leaf and by the form of the space that surrounds the leaf. Negative space is of particular importance to sculpture, since, to the eye of the onlooker, a piece of sculpture will renegotiate the space of its environment in a different way from every angle. That al-Tilmisani is heavily influenced by the fine arts, including drawing, music, cinematography and theater, is evident at almost every turn of phrase. Even the titles of the story ("A Song About the Nation") and its collection (*Repetitive Sculptures*) betray these influences.

lxxv May Telmissany, "A Song," 94.

lxxvi *Ibid.*, 93.

lxxvii *Ibid.*, 96.

lxxviii *Ibid.*, 93.

lxxix In her article "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation," the anthropologist Deniz Kandiyoti argues that women in nationalist discourse are often considered to be "the privileged bearers of cultural authenticity," and that they are perceived to be "the custodians of cultural particularisms by virtue of being less assimilated, both culturally and linguistically, into the wider society." *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 382-383. Woman's position in society affords her less contact with other cultures than her male counterpart, thus by virtue of her provincial innocence, she becomes a symbol (or one of the symbols) for all that is culturally authentic. This concept of women as the bearers of authenticity appears to have implications for women writers, who resent the burden of representation and of living up to idealized and infantilized notions of their gendered identity. Male authors can maintain their worldly, cosmopolitan airs and still devote symbolic attention to the nation through an idealization of the female other, while female authors are confronted with this idealization of themselves which seems to clash with their unbounded intellectual and artistic pursuits.

lxxx In an autobiographical testimonial entitled "Writing as a Way Out," fellow Egyptian fiction-writer Salwa Bakr evokes a scene from her childhood which may help to explain the significance of the braid for women of her generation: "When the revolution of July 1952 took place, I was no more than three years old. Three years later I started school, my plaits tied and decorated with ribbons in the colours of the flag of the new revolution. The first songs of my childhood were in support of the revolution and against colonialism, oppression and injustice." *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, ed. Fadia Faqir, trans. Shirley Eber and Fadia Faqir, (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 1998), 35.

lxxxi May Telmissany, "A Song," 95.

lxxxii May Telmissany, "A Song," 96.

lxxxiii A *sukun* [rest] is a diacritical mark placed over a consonant to indicate its vowellessness.

lxxxiv May Temissany, "A Song," 94.

lxxxv *Ibid.*, 94.

lxxxvi *Ibid.*, 96.

lxxxvii *Ibid.*, 94.

lxxxviii *Ibid.*, 96.

THE *NAHDA,* POPULAR FICTION AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

Samah Selim[*]

In the introduction to her book, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, Margaret Cohen reflects on the vexed relationship between poststructuralism and literary history:

> From its inception, poststructural theory has taken shape as an attack on traditional literary history, thoroughly discrediting its organizing concepts. At the same time, however, the contours of a new literary history have remained surprisingly unexplored within the poststructural paradigm, where literary critics interested in history have focused on general questions concerning the relation between history and literature rather than scrutinizing the history of literature per se.[lxxxix]

Cohen emphasizes the importance of the literary archive – in the sense used by Franco Moretti – as both a context and a counterpoint to canonical, 'masterpiece'-based history; an approach that models literature as "conflictual social production" defined by "struggles involving a broad range of writers, readers and texts."[xc] In the process, she shows how the mid-nineteenth century French realist novel fought to establish itself in a marketplace dominated by a plethora of vibrant and successful non-realist fictions, often by slyly appropriating the very narrative codes it competed with. In this French context, Cohen concludes, realism was neither the inevitable outcome nor the unique expression of literary modernity.

'How to write literary history in the wake of postructuralism' is a question that is equally, if not more pertinent to modern Arabic literature which, in this particular domain, has been deployed to underwrite an inflexible teleology of the genesis of Arab modernity as a whole. In the Arabic context, the kind of broadening and historicizing of the literary-historical field that Cohen argues for would aim to unlock the vast archive of forgotten texts, polemics and debates that proliferated and competed during the *Nahda*, and what is usually thought of as the Arabic novel's formative period. Such an effort would allow scholars to radically rethink literary history from a variety of sub-disciplinary perspectives. Moreover, in raising inevitable questions about conventional conceptions of national culture – the way a canon formulates and reproduces

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notions of 'originality' and 'imitation' for example - or about the complex morphologies and social circulation of literary genres, it would also question some of the most basic premises of established *Nahda* discourse. The European origins of Arab modernity is one of these. The ideology of the national subject is another.

This paper is partly the outcome of an all too brief foray into the 'dusty documents neglected in libraries'; in this case, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century fiction collection of the Egyptian National Library where thousands of books and serials languish, unread and unstudied. The paper reflects on the reasons for this neglect while offering the outline of possible readings and contexts that can help to reconstruct the 'legibility' of a major narrative aesthetic - simultaneously modern(ist) *and* popular – that forms the forgotten prehistory of realism in Egypt.

Of all literary genres, the novel is treated as the one that best represents the achievements of European modernity. It is the very record of that modernity: a brilliant testimonial to the triumphant rise of the European bourgeoisie, and a prescient witness to its slow decline. As such, it is a peculiar product – amenable to export, like other European technologies, but somehow resistant to the will of its new owners, as though the ghosts of innumerable Julien Sorels and Emma Bovarys must invariably haunt and meddle with its ideal design. The story of the *Nahda* is closely entwined with the history of the Arabic novel, which is for the most part conceived to have begun with the translation, adaptation and imitation of the European novel towards the end of the nineteenth century. In Orientalist literary criticism, the extent to which Arab writers were able to reproduce this idealized European genre became a kind of yardstick with which to measure the progress and value of the *Nahda* as a whole. The 'defective' or 'immature' novels that are supposed to litter modern Arabic literary history until the middle of the twentieth century are thus treated as a sign of Arab subalternity. Naturally, national literary history tends to be much more generous and nuanced in its assessment of movements and individual works and authors since it is deeply implicated in the construction of a national canon. It nonetheless reproduces a similar paradigm to the Orientalist one: the novel is a Western literary genre imported by the East. The Arabic novel develops from the blueprint of the European novel.[xci] It struggles through a period of imitation and immaturity until it finally arrives at the stage of its self-realization, as a mature and properly national genre, in 1913 (with the publication of Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab*) or 1933 (Tawfiq al-Hakim's *The Return of the Spirit*) or 1956 (Naguib Mahfouz' *Palace Walk*) and so forth.

Viewed from 'below' however - from the vast and hybrid realm of popular fiction - the literary *Nahda* in Egypt becomes a dynamic constitutive process in which the novel, itself a new genre, represented a contested site of emergent social and cultural productions. If we abandon the capitalization of the term, we can perhaps speak of two intertwined literary *nahdas* – one that, partly looking backwards to an antediluvian 'golden age', was invested in an act of genetic and linguistic recuperation (re-naissance) and another that was strictly materialist in the play of its textual and social articulations. If the bourgeois novel in Egypt struggled to realize itself in the *Bildungsroman*, popular fiction

strove towards the social catharsis of melodrama, in the broad and fascinating sense defined by Peter Brooks. Translation was an intermediate zone; a contested site of the novelistic in this constitutive process. First *Nahdawi* and later, nationalist intellectuals celebrated translation as the mechanism through which Arab societies achieved enlightenment and modernity. As such, it was a jealously guarded zone which relied on concepts of originality, transparency and accuracy for the purity of its foundations. The popular fiction of the *Nahda* was also invested in a project of translation but in a much looser and more ambiguous sense. The popular novel cared nothing for origins and genealogies. It raided, plagiarized and fabricated its sources and invented an entirely new literary syntax that drew on heterogeneous – and indeed, it was supposed, mutually exclusive - narrative languages and frames of reference.

Focusing on the Arabic novel in Egypt, I will argue that the construction of a properly national novelistic canon was predicated on the suppression and management of this thriving contemporary field of popular fiction. The strategic charge of cultural 'illegitimacy' was one of the ways in which this suppression was accomplished; a charge that turned primarily on the trope of 'translation' as a deeply ambivalent activity, and that was moreover rooted in the national intelligentsia's profound suspicion of popular culture and popular narrative languages. There is nothing particularly unique about this antagonistic encounter. Literary modernisms in Europe were also defined by their basic hostility to mass culture and mass readerships. What is interesting in the case of Egypt is that this process of suppression and management was heavily inflected by a colonial cultural dynamic built into the very structure of the *Nahdawi* imagination. Popular fiction, translated and otherwise, was censored partly because it eluded the binary articulation of colonial modernity produced on both sides of the imperial divide. Both form *and* content were deemed to be essentially 'Western' *and* scandalously low-brow, or 'vulgar'. Orientalist and nationalist literary criticism had varying degrees of trouble accommodating both of these categories in their definition of the novel, or what Alexander Hamilton Gibb circuitously called "genuine literary productions of a certain literary value."[xcii] On the other hand, the national or 'artistic novel' was required to reproduce an autochthonous, modernist aesthetic, whereby subjectivity was understood to be crucially shaped in and through the colonial drama. The *Bildungsroman* in Egypt constructed an Arab subject perennially and fatefully trapped within the two poles of this singular dialectic, and the emergent canon inscribed modernity in terms of the social and existential trauma of the alienated national subject.

Orientalism and Nationalism

Edward Said and Peter Gran have explored the ways in which Area Studies came to inherit the paradigmatic postures of nineteenth century Orientalism in the post-World War Two American Academy. Both disciplines share the same basic starting-point in relation to the objects of their study – 'the Middle East', formerly, 'Islam' – namely, a resolutely Hegelian dialectic, imperial in its scope and universalist in its application. Invariably, the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798 is offered as the dramatic historical rupture that rouses the Arab world from its centuries-old slumber and introduces it onto the stage of world-history. Gran neatly sums up this shared paradigm: "Modernity is supposed to

come to the Middle East from the West and not from developments within the Middle East itself."[xciii] Related to this stunning absence of agency is the idea of the region's exceptionalism. In the Orientalist imagination, 'Islam' is Europe's antithesis and can never be truly assimilated into Europe's expansive modernity.[xciv] For the most part, *Nahdawi* intellectuals, fascinated and repelled by the overpowering affects of colonial power, reproduced the basic paradox inherent in this paradigm. In nationalist thought, as in fundamentalist polemic, an ethic of identity – still articulated in binary terms - serves as the essential building block of a bifurcated Arab modernity. Selective reformism was one of the ways out of this impasse. Contemporary intellectuals insisted that it was both possible and necessary to maintain Manichean cultural structures (East/West; Orient/Occident; Europe/Islam) while at the same time attempting to produce a selective and harmonious synthesis between them. The deep anxieties provoked by this dilemma are partly responsible for the way in which both Orientalism and Nationalist thought approached the question of Arab modernity as crisis.

Reformism was, if not doomed to outright failure, constantly and essentially beleaguered by the ambivalent "duality of [its] method."[xcv] This, at least, is the position of Alexander Hamilton Gibb, the most prolific and influential British Orientalist of the first half of the twentieth century. Writing on modern Arabic literature in 1929 (or what he called 'neo-Arabic literature' - the neologism itself suggesting an impossible doubling), he has this to say about the essential problem of Arab modernity:

> Its roots lie in the methods of education adopted in Egypt and elsewhere, the twist so given to the minds of the literate classes and their consequent capacity, or lack of capacity, either to adhere to the orthodox Muslim worldview or to assimilate the intellectual basis of Western thought and literature. It is obvious that the imitation of Western models initiated by the violent impact of Western life on the East remained and must remain sterile until such assimilation can issue in a community of intellectual method and aim. The earlier literature of the nineteenth century, swaying between a lifeless reproduction of medieval Arabic models, and an imitation of Western models without sufficient intellectual preparation, could not but be feeble and unfruitful. The whole intellectual life of the people was thrown into confusion by the contradiction in principle between the old system of thought with its dogmatic basis and the intellectual freedom of Western scientific methods.[xcvi]

Gibb's 'community of intellectual method and aim' is clearly written as a deferred utopia. In the meantime, neither 'the orthodox Muslim worldview' nor 'Western scientific thought' can offer a solution. What we are left with is an ontological absence at the center. Between 'lifeless reproduction' and 'imitation' lies impotence – a historical dead-end. Edward Said notes, correctly I think, that Gibb's anxiety over the dialectical boundaries between 'Europe' and 'Islam' lead to his profound pessimism about Arab modernity and modernist intellectuals "whose ideas everywhere reveal hopelessness; ideas unsuited to the modern world."[xcvii]

Marxist and postcolonial critics meanwhile propose a secular, analytic version of the old metaphysical duality as an explanation of the central problematic of colonial societies. Samir Amin identifies the 'provincialist reaction' to Eurocentrism as a potential (and actual) fundamentalism at the heart of *Nahdawi* thought. While "the *Nahda* was a movement that brought with it the possibility of the total re-examination of the prevailing ideology,"[xcviii] Amin judges this opportunity to have been missed because modernist intellectuals were unable for the most part to extricate themselves from the grip of the dialectic described by Gibb, plunging headlong instead into the trap of 'nationalist culturalisms': "In every case it seems to me that nationalist culturalist retreat proceeds from the same method, the method of Eurocentrism: the affirmation of irreducible 'unique traits' that determine the course of history, or more exactly the course of individual, incommensurable histories."[xcix] Partha Chatterjee offers a similar insight into the articulation of national sovereignty in colonial societies. The modern national identities produced by colonial thought hinge on a binary structuring (outer/inner; material/spiritual) of social institutions and practices:

> The material is the domain of the 'outside,' of the economy and statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture.[c]

In an important sense then, the nationalist culturalisms of which Amin speaks only served to reinforce the Orientalist narrative on culture and modernity in the Arab world. The new cultural products of Arab modernity - like the novel - hence came to be perceived as intensely ambivalent social artefacts. In the case of the novel for example, the form was judged to be *ipso facto* European (and that, in the most undifferentiated and idealized way); yet another fully integrated 'technology' travelling in a one-way direction from West to East. Never mind that the roots of at least one important strand of the genre in Europe are surely linked to the medieval narrative traditions of Arab-Muslim Mediterranean culture (here I am thinking of Boccaccio and Cervantes). Never mind again, that at least one strain of the eighteenth century European novel – gothic, for example - was permeated through and through, in terms of both structure and content, by the obsessive encounter with 'Oriental' landscapes and literatures,[ci] or that the 'political unconscious,' to use Frederic Jameson's famous expression, of the French and English novel is literally rooted in the soil of the colonial subject. Never mind that even by the end of the twentieth century, critics still cannot decide on what a novel really is. Orientalists and nationalists agree: the novel arrived in Egypt and the Levant as yet another complete and exclusive product of European modernity. In the first decades of the twentieth century and especially after 1919, Arab writers were confronted with two choices: 'imitation' or 'nationalization,' so to speak. The former could only lead, at best, to 'feeble and unfruitful' results, at worst to a betrayal of the national project. The latter restricted the formal and

thematic possibilities of fiction by privileging first, realism as the only narrative mode adequate to the needs of the emergent nation and second, an archetypal national character as the end of all modern stories.

The Age of Translation and Adaptation, 1870-1925

The history of the Arabic novel is supposed to begin with the various formal narrative experiments induced by the encounter with Western fiction in the middle of the nineteenth century. This initial period of encounter is followed by a period of concerted and prolific translation during which Arab writers in Egypt and the Levant indiscriminately (and altogether poorly) translated and adapted European novels, regardless of literary merit, and moreover without the least scruple regarding faithfulness to the original text or to the legal and moral institutions of authorship and copyright. Though considered on the whole a necessary, if faintly disreputable stage in "the modernization of [Arab] imaginative literature,"[cii] the period is usually placed at the margins of the genealogy that eventually leads to the 'artistic' or properly speaking, national Egyptian/Arab novel in the second decade of the twentieth century (*al-riwaya al-fanniyya*), and which represents a nascent Egyptian *Bildungsroman*.[ciii] Perhaps the best summation of this position, and the most flagrantly illustrative of the ways in which the Orientalist and the National paradigms of modern literary history intersect is the following claim made by Kawsar El-Beheiry, a professor of French at *al-Azhar* University:

> Les écrivains arabes, encore inexpérimentés dans l'art romanesque et n'ayant fait aucune étude dans ce domaine, ne savaient comment écrire eux-mêmes des romans, ni quel thème choisir et quelles règles suivre pour développer ce thème. Cela ne veut aucunement dire que l'étude de la technique du roman est indispensable a toute production romanesque; les grands maîtres du monde entier n'ont suivi a quelques exceptions près, que leurs aptitudes naturelles. Or, les romanciers arabes de l'époque ne possédaient pas ces aptitudes; cela est possiblement du a la longue période de décadence politique et sociale qui a alors frappé le monde arabe. Effectivement, si on consulte les journaux et les revues de la deuxième moitie du XIX siècle, on ne trouve que des traductions ou des adaptations de romans étrangers, français en majorité. *Il n'y a aucun roman, aucune nouvelle ni aucun conte purement arabe* (emphasis added).[civ]

The 'natural' novelistic aptitudes of the world's grand masters can only be reproduced by the inept and decadent Arab author, and after long apprenticeship, as a form of mimicry. El-Beheiry's imperious language, her string of emphatic negatives and her final insistence on the ideal category of 'purity' in relation to culture repeats and exaggerates the critical prejudices of conventional literary history. More to the point, the scholarly obsession with the purity and transparency of chains of transmission masks a deep-seated fear of textual, and hence social, contamination. A process of displacement thus occurs whereby a rich and variegated corpus of fiction is contained within the stabilizing and minor category of 'translation.' This slippage occurs in most major modern literary histories of the period. By a strange sleight of hand, the

two terms – 'translation' and 'popular fiction' – come to stand for each other, the implication of course being that the popular itself is foreign to national culture.

The 'Age of Translation' genus elides multiple genre practices that certainly included, but were not limited to direct translation of European fiction. First, many translators, like Khalil Baydas, often left out the title or the author of the original work, making it difficult, if not impossible to confirm textual itineraries. We know from a number of contemporary writers that original novels were occasionally passed off as translations in order to capitalize on the huge commercial success of foreign fictions. There is no reason to believe that this phenomenon was limited to the specific instances of pseudotranslation mentioned by Jurji Zaydan, for example.[cv] The most comprehensive annotated bibliographies of the period have failed to determine the European 'origin' of the majority of popular Arabic adaptations published serially in the numerous turn-of-the-century periodicals devoted to fiction. Moreover, many of these serialized novels explicitly claimed original authorship. Yet the period is still historically defined as one that turned on simple translation/adaptation, and hence on a crucial evocation of *difference*. In fact, the dominant paradigm of literary history depends on this evocation, and translation is its necessary topos.

Second, because it assumes that translation is a transparent and unmediated activity, the model can neither acknowledge nor adequately interpret the narrative and social function of 'adaptation' and its related praxes – plagiarism and forgery – except as a series of moral judgments on originality and the sanctity of authorship and copyright. Because of this prejudice, there are literally thousands of works of popular Arabic fiction spanning a period of fifty years that have never been studied in any detail, and specifically as a body of novelistic fiction in its own right. [cvi] The 'Age of Translation' model marginalizes this literary production in its entirety, effectively precluding any serious investigation of the novel genre in Arabic outside of the teleology that leads from a vague origin in nineteenth century Europe to local realism and its avatars. And this in spite of the salient fact that between 1880 and 1919 at least, popular Arabic fiction in Egypt, translated and otherwise, constituted by far the lion's share of a burgeoning book and periodical market.[cvii] Even as late as 1937, the readership for this type of fiction was so large that highbrow writers frequently made bitter complaints about its seemingly impervious and ill-deserved popularity.[cviii] Moreover, it was especially, if not exclusively, through the mundane exigencies of commercial translation that the Arabic language was gradually transformed into a supple language of the modern quotidian. While scholars acknowledge the link between popular turn-of-the-century fiction and the modern revolution in the Arabic language, none have ventured to study it in any depth.[cix]

Now, the obvious question is 'why'? Popular fiction – the Penny Dreadful and the *roman de feuilleton* for example - are recognized and studied as seminal fields of literary inquiry in the various European national traditions. Moreover, certain subgenres of the nineteenth century novel (gothic and neo-gothic for example) travelled in time and text across the Middle East and Europe through Byzantine processes of translation and adaptation, and the inevitable plagiarisms and forgeries which follow in their wake.[cx] In Europe, the last few

decades of critical scholarship on popular fiction have laid the groundwork for important interdisciplinary work in literary history and theory.[cxi]   Why not accord the popular novel in Egypt the same kind of literary-historical importance and the same sustained theoretical attention as has been given to its counterpart in England, Italy and France? In response, I propose three related factors. First, the disciplinary social and cultural postures of both modernism and nationalism. Second, the hegemony of the European liberal-juridical concept of the subject, with its related institutions of authorship and copyright in the literary domain and third, the dialectical model of Arab modernity itself, with its systematic fetishization of *content*, or identity.

Bad Books for Bad Readers: 'The Novel of Entertainment and Leisure'

In his classic 1963 study of the Arabic novel in Egypt, 'Abd al-Muhsin Taha Badr argues that the tremendous commercial success of the popular novel between the last third of the nineteenth century and 1919, the date of the Egyptian uprising against the British, was rooted in the growth of mass education and the rise of a semi-literate readership bent on 'escape' from the bitter political and social realities of colonialism.[cxii] Badr's project is ultimately a recuperative one. His introduction to the study is a magisterial attempt to explain Arab literary modernity in reference to the 'decline' that preceded it. Badr explicitly links 'the novel of entertainment and leisure' (*riwaya al-tasliyah wa al-tarfih*) to the persistent resonance of medieval Arabic popular narrative amongst this modern mass readership. His analysis is characterized by the historical tension between 'high' (classical-nationalist) and 'low' (popular) culture. He attributes the decline of medieval Arab culture to its linguistic and literary 'vernacularization', as exemplified by the flawed style and linguistic usage of medieval writers from Ibn Iyas to al-Jabarti, and more generally, by the growing cleavages within what he views as a unitary, canonical Arab cultural tradition: "The most prominent aspect of the age's cultural life was first, the rupture between contemporary culture and the true intellectual and literary tradition of classical Arab civilization and second, the rupture between this tradition and [the culture of] the popular masses…Consequently, most of the age's literary arts deteriorated into the realm of popular literature."[cxiii]

According to Badr, Arabic literary culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century inherits this literary decadence, though through the medium of a new genre. While 'the didactic novel' (*al-riwaya al-ta`limiyya*), however formally inadequate, at least sought to address the great political and philosophical issues of the day, the great majority of the novels produced during this period was made up of commercially profitable romances, adventure-stories, crime-fiction and the like, geared towards a popular audience, newly - and yet marginally - literate. This is what Sabry Hafez calls "the new reading public" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Badr refers to this metamorphosed popular audience simply as "the semi-cultured" (*ansaf al-muthaqqafin*). The third and final stage of the novel described by Badr is 'the artistic novel' (*al-riwaya al-fanniyya*), which signals the triumphant emergence of the autonomous national subject in fiction, and which marks the beginning of the novelistic canon in Arabic.

The opprobrious attitude towards popular culture implicit in Badr's description is rooted in a long tradition of modernist and nationalist critical discourse. In turn-of-the-century Egypt, reformist intellectuals conceived of modern narrative as a kind of social cement. By educating and improving the collective character of the Egyptians, it would prepare them for citizenship in the modern nation-state. On the other hand, these intellectuals - who by and large shared a highly ambivalent attitude towards the Egyptian masses, urban and rural[cxiv] - understood popular narrativity as the antithesis of modern narrative, repeatedly attacking the former as both a cause and a symptom of the corrupt state of these masses.[cxv] The social context of the café-based *hakawati* (storyteller) reinforced their slothful, vice-ridden habits, while the marvellous themes of the popular epic cycle (*sira*) and the folk tale (*hadduta*) contributed to their superstition and gullibility. This specific - and often quite fervid - prejudice against the dominant literary genres of popular culture was built into much of the early twentieth century critical discourse that contributed to the elaboration of fiction as a properly national narrative form. Like Badr, *Nahdawi* intellectuals saw a direct link between a disreputable medieval popular tradition and an equally problematic new genre. They openly and repeatedly complained about the fierce competition to a nascent corpus of legitimate narrative offered by the popular novel, condemning it as yet another sign of the lamentable state of Egyptian culture. They went from outright moral and political condemnation of the genre as a whole in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, to qualified support in the teens and twenties based on a more nuanced understanding of its didactic and artistic possibilities, couched in specifically national terms.

In the nineteenth century, the attack on fiction was morally but also politically based. Writing in 1899, Ahmad Fathi Zaghlul linked the social and political project of *nahdah* to a proper readerly education. Egypt's backwardness was due to the widespread dissemination of "tales and fantasies," "frivolous publications," and "clownish books and novels."[cxvi] In 1882, the journal *al-Muqtataf* justified its initial refusal to publish fiction in an editorial that complained of its dangerous moral effects on the minds of impressionable youth of both sexes.[cxvii] Some critics even blamed popular fiction for Egypt's colonial bondage to France and Britain![cxviii] A couple of decades later, this moral argument was inflected by a highbrow modernist bias that masked a marked contempt for the vulgar culture of the masses. Mahmud Taymur linked popular fiction to the 'inferior classes' of Egyptian society,[cxix] Zaki Mubarak described its authors as belonging to 'the lowest class of literary writers'[cxx] while Tawfiq al-Hakim cryptically stated that "the difference between literature (*al-adab*) and fiction (*al-qissa*) is like the difference between the higher regions of the body and all the rest."[cxxi] In these first decades of the twentieth century, a set of emergent social hierarchies was embedded into the literary taxonomies being developed by national critics and writers, anxious to disassociate fiction from its louche Grub Street stronghold and appropriate it to a respectable bourgeois milieu and worldview; to nationalize it, so to speak. This is precisely why Badr chooses 1919 and Moosa, 1925, as the welcome end of 'The Age of Translation'. Both of these dates are landmarks in the historical narrative of national awakening in Egypt.

Certainly, this modernist anxiety also derived from the realities of the contemporary book market. In a 1918 article in the journal *al-Hilal*, Hasan al-Sharif complained that 'serious' authors (like Muhammad Husayn Haykal) were unable to sell even their miniscule first editions, while detective novels like *The Honourable Thief* and *The Adventures of Carter* went into multiple editions of thousands of copies.[cxxii] The sheer perversity of this anonymous and insatiable reading public is of course compounded by the fact that its preference for 'translated books' tended, not to the great novelists of the West (the Balzacs, the Tolstoys and the Dickens), but to its pulp writers – the unhappy likes of Ponson de Terraile, Pierre Zaccone and Eugene Sue – and moreover, rendered into bad Arabic by mediocre translators motivated at best by the pressures of serial publication, at worst by nothing less than crass greed [cxxiii] - a case of bad books for bad readers. [cxxiv]

By 1963, the novelistic canon was more or less in place. But already much earlier, in the twenties and thirties, writers like Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Mahmud Taymur and Salama Musa were urgently attempting to ground the new genre in a properly national landscape. This new critical concept of "national literature" was a pivotal element in the later canonization of the novel. Its three main distinguishing features were setting, character and time: Egyptian landscapes and Egyptian characters, urban and rural, and an overarching sense of national history were identified as the necessary ingredients for a genuinely national novel. Realist time – or what Lennard Davis has called 'the median past tense' – must develop a steady temporal progression of cause and effect, rooted in the telos of the emergent subject. The expansive and hegemonic interiority of this subject was a largely unprecedented feature in Arabic narrative before the end of the nineteenth century, and its elaboration in fiction was inextricably bound to the linked ideologies of nationalism and romantic individualism as they emerged in Egypt roughly around the time of the First World War and the 1919 revolution. Realism was the natural metaphor for this project. Its main theme was the crisis of the bourgeois subject in a world torn apart by the clash between 'tradition' and 'modernity'.

On the other hand, the modernity constructed in popular fiction was political and social, rather than metaphysical or existential. Popular fiction was cosmopolitan, hyper-realist and generically hybrid.   The same novel offered a pastiche of different modes: *policier*, thriller, romance and melodrama, most often set in the exotic drawing rooms and criminal streets of the modern metropolis – Paris, London, New York, Bombay, Cairo. A sampling of subtitles clearly points to this genetic instability and insouciance. Labib Abu Satit's novel *The Innocents* was subtitled "a literary, romantic *policier*"; Muhammad Ra'fat al-Jamali's *The Beauty's Sustenance (or The Sorrows of Two Lovers)* carried the subtitle, "an Egyptian historical, psychological romance" and Ahmad Hanafi's *The Beautiful Vendor* was described as "a literary, historical, social, love-story."[cxxv]   Niqula Haddad's novel *The New Adam* (1914) is an elaborate philosophical melodrama of social illegitimacy and redemption set amongst the Levantine Christian bourgeoisie of Cairo in the 1890s. In this and other melodramas of the period, property and inheritance, rather than serving as the invisible bases of the hero's coming of age, unleash the descent into intrigue and crime. Niqula Rizqallah's 1906 forgery, *The Lovely Beggar* is a sly

cross between political thriller and *roman à clef* that features a baroque corporation of enterprising thieves and confidence-men drawn from the sinister underworlds of Paris, London and Chicago. The events of 'Abd al-Qadir Hamza's 1908 pseudotranslation, *City of Darkness*, unfold between Paris and Beunos Aires against the corruption and intrigue of the international stock market. Hamza's 'translator's' preface includes an impassioned polemic on socialism and a stinging condemnation of the modern institutions of finance capitalism in Egypt. Other novels explore the contemporary urban nightmares of gambling, alcoholism and prostitution in intricate melodramatic detail.

   Nahdawi writers and critics viewed these elaborate and cosmopolitan fictions as the antithesis of the modern novel, precisely because they eluded the nationalist conceptualization of subjectivity, time and location. If the artistic novel was soberly rooted in the new disciplinary power of the emergent national subject (*al-dhat al-rawiya*) – a kind of domestic composite of the authentic (native) Muslim, middle-class Egyptian - the popular novel wandered promiscuously amongst a vertiginous range of hyperbolic urban characters and capitals, and offered a seductive vision of the drama and corruption at the heart of the modern city. In an important sense, Paris *was* Cairo and vice versa. The popular novel thus committed the cardinal sin of bypassing entirely the colonial dialectic and of rehearsing an 'escape from Egyptian reality.' This then, is the source of the genetic slippage previously alluded to: in the *Nahdawi* literary taxonomy, the spurious popular novel came to be subsumed under the ambivalent and syncretic category of 'translation'.

The People's Entertainments

   The People's Entertainments – 'the most widely circulating illustrated social fiction weekly' in Egypt – began publication in 1904 and ran to 174 numbers in 1911. In his frequent prefaces and notices, Khalil Sadiq, the serial's publisher, was at pains to cast his literary enterprise as first and foremost a service to the nation. He insisted that the best way to accomplish this goal was to contribute to the expansion of a free literary marketplace that would involve the widest possible readership. The *Entertainments* was decidedly popular in its range of titillating and easily accessible fiction. But it also recruited a group of authors and translators – Muslims and Christians; native Egyptians and Syrian émigrés - whose professional activities as lawyers, journalists and civil servants endowed their avowedly profitable literary endeavors with a deep-seated sense of social commitment. Ahmad Hafez 'Awad and Niqula Rizqallah were two of the most prolific contributors to the periodical.   Both were newspaper editors, the former at *Al-Mu'ayyad* and the latter at *Al-Ahram*. 'Awad published ten novels in the *Entertainments*, including one he owned as an original work, entitled *Life and Property*; Rizqallah published fifteen multi-volume adaptations (of works by Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas among others), forgeries like *The Lovely Beggar* and pseudotranslations like *Thieves of Paris*.

   'Awad claimed to have adapted his novels mainly from English and Irish fiction though he never attributed his works to any specific author. In the introduction to his 1904 novel, *The Compass of Hope*, he explains that he had 'extracted' the fiction from 'an English tale': "I gave it the form of a novel, taking great liberties with it and clothing it in resplendent Arab garments in

order to display the lofty wisdom embodied in the divine aphorism, 'Despair not of God's Spirit'."[cxxvi]   Here, the 'English tale' is yoked to the Quranic proverb in a narrative gesture that invokes the possibility of a universal hermeneutic. 'Adaptation' ('Arabization;' *ta'rib*) becomes the metaphor for this horizontal gesture in which the signifiers associated with cultural identities are abstracted to the point where they lose their prohibitive meanings and give way to the ecumenical play of narrative itself. Through the medium of an 'English' story, the Arabic novel – like many popular novels of the period – is preoccupied with the problems of domesticity in a fast-changing world; a world where stable family and gender structures are being reconstituted in dramatic ways. The Arab narrator introduces the English tale with a discussion of marriage and the proper paternal duties associated with it, evoking the heated controversies surrounding Qasim Amin's 'New Woman' and contemporary debates about gender segregation, polygamy and companionate marriage. The retired Captain Grey and his wife and daughter inhabit a pastoral domestic paradise, protected and secluded by the perfect virtue of their little domestic circle. The sudden arrival of the mysterious Fitzpatrick destroys this self-enclosed, well-regulated world. He woos Fanny, Grey's beautiful young daughter and the girl falls in love with him. Her father – otherwise a paragon of manly virtue and sagacity – precipitously allows the couple to be married only to discover soon after the honeymoon that Fitzpatrick is a bigamist. He murders his son-in-law after challenging him to a duel, is imprisoned and commits suicide moments before the pardon which his wife assiduously seeks to procure can be executed. Character and motive are seldom examined in the novel. We never learn for example, whether Fitzpatrick commits bigamy out of overpowering love for Fanny or greed for her father's fortune. The chain of hermeneutic codes of the English melodrama – love, social ambition, betrayal, guilt, revenge; the moral drama of the fiction in other words – is elided by the Arabic text and assimilated to a fluid network of immediate social concerns and sensibilities: the helpless abdication of paternal responsibility in a world increasingly unmoored from its social foundations on the one hand, the fateful hubris of 'despairing of God's spirit;' - of a reading of the world divorced from the opaque and inexorable patterns of human destiny - on the other.

   Similarly, the mimetic codes associated with European realist fiction (and which are curiously, hauntingly always 'there,' in the shadows of the text, for the comparativist reader) constantly give way under the pressure of popular Arabic narrative and rhetorical traditions. Verse and rhymed prose often substitute for the movement of calendrical time. The concrete detail moreover, is always breaking down into the hyperbole of the abstract, the fantastic, the exceptional. From the post-Waterloo Sussex of Captain Grey's retirement, objects and landscapes are regularly transformed into superlative generic emblems of wealth, splendor, beauty, comfort, and so forth. The narrative frequently refers to the inadequacy of description as a means of invoking the ideal it assiduously seeks. Fanny Grey's beauty is presented, in fairy-tale terms, as "the loveliest girl in all creation." The hyperbole of this statement is further amplified by an insistence on the very impossibility of the mimetic act. She is simply 'indescribable' because "no matter how much [the writer] may excel at the [construction of] his images, these are still no more than the mere product of human artifice."[cxxvii] By mobilizing the familiar codes and conventions of the fantastic and epic popular narratives of the Islamic tradition, 'Awad's novel

foregrounds and plays upon the basic deception at the heart of modern realisms – a point the historian will miss entirely by simply reading the novel as a 'failed' translation.

Rizqallah's *The Lovely Beggar* mobilizes a yet more complex array of narrative conventions and motifs. Rizqallah attributed his 'translation' to 'M. Robert' – most likely a reference to the popular nineteenth century French novelist Clemence Robert, whose 1848 novel, *Les Mendiants de Paris* includes a secret society of beggars, modeled after the political secret societies that proliferated in Paris on the eve of the Second Republic. *The Lovely Beggar* also features a society of enterprising beggars, but the similarities between the two works ends here however, for their plots and characters are, in all respects, totally different A detail of plot in Robert's novel becomes inflated into a major narrative strand in Rizqallah's 'translation,' thereby necessitating the construction of an entirely new fiction. Robert's melodrama of French manners under the July Monarchy and her sentimental socialism are reworked by Rizqallah into a biting social satire that wanders off into altogether different tangents. Robert's text – and her name – merely serves as an excuse or a starting point for the Arabic novel. Here, 'adaptation' is clearly an inadequate interpretative or taxonomic mechanism in what must be seen as a representative, rather than an exceptional case. *The Lovely Beggar* is thus more properly a forgery, but a forgery that is also a plagiarism of sorts. It is only in letting go of the moral and juridical judgments attached to these categories that we can begin to construct a genuinely comparative narrative morphology of Rizqallah's novel and hundreds like it.

The novel begins where the average realist fiction would have perhaps ended – with the unlikely marriage between a wealthy and arrogant Marquis and the daughter of a Parisian jeweler. Gilbert, who loves another, is forced to accept her aristocratic suitor when her father is robbed and murdered in mysterious circumstances. The ill-starred match unleashes a torrential one thousand page plot that roams the city's criminal streets and back alleys and fluctuates seamlessly between the morphology of *The Thousand and One Nights* and the nineteenth century *roman noir*. The main plot acts as a kind of frame tale, instigating other, minor narratives that are in turn linked to Gilbert's story by coincidence and accident. A model of feminine virtue in all other respects, the marquise nonetheless conducts an illicit, long-term affair with her lover under her husband's nose – an affair which results in a child that is hidden with a wet-nurse and later, unbeknownst to the marquise, sold to a pair of vicious professional beggars. Aghast and repentant, Gilbert mobilizes an array of secondary characters to search for the child throughout Paris. In a series of magical, last-minute transformations, the child is finally found, the bitter old marquis dies of jealousy and his lovely widow is happily reunited with her lover and their long-suffering daughter. The reigning motif of this frame-tale is 'passion is sovereign' (*al-hawa sultan*). Through the repeated force of this popular Arab proverb, love and carnal knowledge are inscribed in all their ambivalence, as a form of tyranny but also of power and not least of all a complete ethic of justice. Far from condemning the heroine as an adulteress, this double-edged motif points to the inevitability - the legitimacy - of love's excess. Equally foreign to the narrative codes of nineteenth century French

fiction *and* the *Nahda*'s official morality, it is a motif that we find repeatedly, for example, in medieval Arabic narrative literature, epic and fantastic.

The shadowy urban intrigue and social melodrama of the French *roman noir* provide another set of narrative conventions that are played to dazzling effect in the novel. The secret society becomes an organizing trope through which the nefarious structures and interests of modern capitalism are imagined and represented. There are two such societies in *The Lovely Beggar*, each a key to the double mystery that afflicts and confounds Gilbert – her daughter's abduction and her father's murder. Charlemagne Baramouche – Na'ilah's kidnapper and master - is the 'emperor' of 'the society of beggars.' He sells lucrative begging locations to his clients and extracts a regular percentage of their profits. New members are initiated into the society through a bi-weekly 'seminar' in the cellar of a local tavern. Baramouche offers a witty and urbane lecture to his ragged, ingenuous audience complete with statistics, tips and reading material on the craft of begging, as well as directories with the names and addresses of Paris' most generous philanthropists - all for a price of course. Jack Norton, the English arch-thief and assassin who robs and murders Gilbert's father, belongs to 'the general corporation of thieves' – another secret society presided over by Uncle Sam, an American from Chicago. This patrician multinational organization has a charter, a board of directors, a treasurer and even a health insurance plan for its members whose 'shares' in the corporation are directly proportionate to the value of the loot they contribute to its coffers. Through the medium of these twin organizations, Rizqallah draws a sly parody of a predatory international capitalism and its formative role in the functioning of modern urban societies. The European capital is stripped of its specificity and comes to stand for a global modernity in which good and evil, wealth and poverty, wisdom and ignorance are distributed equally throughout all its nodal points. Like so many other popular fictions of the period, *The Lovely Beggar* reinvents the glowing City of Light of the colonial imagination and moves it closer to the extremes of subaltern urban reality – and without the slightest concession to the exacting specificities of realist practice. Rizqallah's contemporary audience must surely have recognized their own city in his darkly generic representation of Paris. Fin de siècle Cairo was also a place where international finance capitalism shaped the surreal social contrasts and tensions everywhere to be seen; a city where criminality functioned as a metaphor for all levels of economic activity from the stock market speculator to the army of brokers and confidence men that surrounded him down to the petty thief and beggar. Realism, in both its literary and social sense, is only one among many ways of conceiving and representing this anarchic and corrupt social experience. (One may also hazard the suggestion that, in 1906 at least, it was also the least interesting way of doing so, for writers as for readers). In *The Lovely Beggar*, modernity is represented through a symphony of hyperbolic modes: parody, melodrama, the fantastic. The claim of 'translation' enables the transgressive representational syntax of this narrative pastiche.

The Scandals of Translation

The most common trope used by historians of modern Arabic literature to describe the technique of turn-of-the-century popular translation is that of 'mutilation' (*tashwih*). Latif Zaytuni's recent study, *The Translation Movement in*

the Nahda, is shot through with this and other metaphors of textual violence and corruption. In Zaytuni's and earlier writers' accounts, popular translation is invariably cast as a kind of crime committed against the institutions of language and literature in general, and the original text in particular. It manipulates and bowdlerizes the text as it pleases. It lies, cheats, maims and steals in order to achieve its ends. The popular translation is a literary bandit of sorts.

Turn-of-the-century translation practices included a wide array of narrative and textual strategies. Adaptation or 'arabization' relied on a complex mechanism of domesticating characters and locations, strategic explanatory asides, lexical substitutions or the addition and deletion of whole passages and chapters in order to emphasize or avoid certain social, political or philosophical issues, or simply shortening or lengthening the novel according to the taste and practical judgment of the writer and the projected interest of the reader. Very often, the act of 'translation' did not even involve a direct encounter with the original text. Mustafa al-Manfaluti for example, who knew no European languages himself, rendered his friends' skeletal translations of French novels into mellifluous Arabic prose.[cxxviii] Khalil Baydas translated Russian versions of English, Italian and German novels into Arabic,[cxxix] while Ahmad Hasan al-Zayat worked from a French version of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Khalil Mutran from a French version of Shakespeare.[cxxx] Tanius `Abduh meanwhile, reportedly translated from memory. According to his disapproving contemporary Salim Sarkis, he "carried with him sheets of paper in one pocket and a French novel in the other. He would then read a few lines, put the novel back in his pocket, and begin to scratch in a fine script whatever he could remember of the few lines he had read. He wrote all day long without striking out a word or rereading a line"[cxxxi] – a truly prodigious feat for a man who published more than 600 'translations' over the course of his career![cxxxii]

Plagiarism, forgery and pseudotranslation – were also common strategies in the production of popular fiction. Many writers did not provide the title or the author of the work supposedly translated (a practice that dates back to the official scientific and administrative translation institutions set up by Muhammad `Ali) merely claiming that it had been 'arabized' or 'adapted' by the Arab author or offering it as a second hand account, with a short preface such as 'a friend of mine who had recently returned from a trip to Europe told me this story…' or simply, 'it is told that…'.[cxxxiii] On the other hand, writers anxious to be published and read deliberately claimed the status of translations for their original works, attributing the work to a real or fictional European author.

Finally, language was a hugely important tool through which translators appropriated the original text while simultaneously forcing open the lexical and syntactic canons of classical Arabic. This was a major flashpoint in the nationalist critique of popular fiction from the teens through the sixties. Critics from Taha Husayn and Mustafa al-'Aqqad to Muhammad Yusuf Najm and 'Abd al-Muhsin Taha Badr deplored what they saw as the outrageous liberties that these popular translators and writers took with the Arabic language, from their deliberate slight to the rules of grammar to their casual and ubiquitous use of foreign loan-words and colloquial idioms. Writing in 1961, Najm puts this

linguistic 'feebleness' (*rakaka*) down to the limited capacities and needs of a semi-literate readership and the hectic publishing pressures of the periodical market: "Most readers were ignorant of the grammatical rules and rhetorical structure of the [Arabic] language. They did not notice errors; all they cared about was that the language be simple and understandable, and the story pleasurable and entertaining."[cxxxiv]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, classical Arabic was in the throes of a momentous transformation. Journalism and fiction were the two most important media through which a highly formal and rigorously policed literary language was made to respond to the new technologies and subjectivities of the modern world. 'Good' translation was reformist in its method. It upheld the strict architecture of the Arabic language while rendering it suppler in its diction and lexical derivations. The sparse, elegant translations of modernist authors and academy members like Hasan al-Zayyat, Taha Husayn and Ibrahim al-Mazini ushered in this transition and smoothed its way. They scrupulously translated the Great Works of Western fiction into a refined and correct modern Arabic idiom.[cxxxv] 'Bad' translation on the other hand was entirely pragmatic in its method. Its aim was not to reify a newer version of the language (or a new world-literary heritage), but to achieve maximum communicability and pleasure. It did not hesitate to ignore the refined art of Arabic rhetoric, to spurn the rules of diction and grammar and to make copious use of the 'vulgar' vernacular in order to achieve this aim. On the whole, bad translation was held responsible for impeding the modern renaissance of the Arabic language. In either case, the challenges faced by translators of any stripe were considerable, as indicated by the plaintive remarks of the translators themselves in their ubiquitous introductions.[cxxxvi] Contemporary critics grudgingly acknowledge the contribution of the popular translators to the modernization of the Arabic language, even if this contribution is understood to be deeply problematic.

The *Nahda*'s controversy over the revival of the Arabic language is a huge subject and can easily fill many volumes.[cxxxvii] For the purposes of this essay, it is the *disciplinary* nature of this struggle that is most important. In another context, Faysal Darraj has singled out the *Nahda*'s fetishization of language as a major strand in the modern re-articulation of the institutions of tyranny in the Arab world. This point acquires an additional clarity in relation to the production and suppression of the popular fiction of the period. In all the senses discussed above, popular fiction *in toto* was treated as a dangerous activity maddeningly beyond the pale of institutional constraint. Hasan al-Sharif's bitter assessment of, and solution to, what he saw as the crisis of the literary revival in Egypt in 1918 is rooted in this sense of outraged authority. As usual, al-Sharif blames this crisis as much on an ignorant and lazy readership as on the greed of unscrupulous hack writers who care more for their pockets than for 'true literature.' More interestingly, al-Sharif bemoans the lack of qualified critics in modern Egypt. He develops the idea, at great length, of the critic as a judge and criticism as a sort of disciplinary institution that can and must select, interpret and administer a public body of circulating texts: "Literature must have an organization to supervise and control it." The critic then becomes "an individual who is superior to all others in the art of interpretation;" "a vigilant and jealous warden" who can "discipline the taste of

the public." The metaphor that al-Sharif here develops finally leads to the ultimate trope of criticism as a regime of power: "Criticism is a government for literature. It protects it from anarchy and attends to its regulation, and critics, if they excel at their work, are at the head of this government kings to be feared and obeyed."[cxxxviii]

While there is nothing inherently unusual about the idea of the critic as a professional arbiter of public taste, Al-Sharif's language is nonetheless remarkable for its vehemence and for the naked institutional power he metaphorically harnesses to his polemic. In the early twentieth century Egyptian context, this was unusual language indeed. Prior to middle of the nineteenth century, the business of literature had been hierarchically intersected by clear social divisions, and the book was more or less the preserve of a small and highly educated elite who happily left the masses to their wandering poets and storytellers. By 1918, the exponential growth of a mass reading public and the dizzying production and circulation of printed texts looked like sheer anarchy to the new bourgeois intelligentsia. Even worse, the majority of these printed texts were fictions, unbound from both the classical Arabic literary and language canons *and* the high conventions of the European genre that they appropriated and carnivalized. Again, translation was the strategic mechanism of this event, in both its strictly literary and its broadly social sense.

Lawrence Venuti has described translation as a project involving a series of power relations between dominant cultural institutions and the act of translation itself. Translation is thus a moment of power; a double-edged sword that can either serve to reproduce or challenge dominant cultural identities: "The authority of any institution that relies on translations is susceptible to scandal because their somewhat unpredictable effects exceed the institutional controls that normally regulate textual interpretation, such as judgments of canonicity. Translations extend the possible uses of foreign texts among diverse audiences, institutionally based or not, producing results that may be both disruptive and serendipitous."[cxxxix]   Both Venuti and R. K. Ruthven focus on the Romantic ideology of authorship, "whose operative terms are solitary genius and unique texts"[cxl] as the key site of the anxieties produced by translation and its first cousins, pseudotranslation and forgery: "Given the reigning concept of authorship, translation provokes the fear of inauthenticity, distortion, contamination."[cxli] In the colonial context, where the dialectic of identity inevitably shapes the cultural encounter, this fear of inauthenticity is operative in an additional sense to the one invoked by Venuti. Badr's insistence on the generic kinship between 'the novel of entertainment and leisure' in Egypt and popular medieval Arabic narrative genres acquires an additional resonance in relation to translation and adaptation. Like the oral epic and folktale, popular translations act as more or less freely circulating narratives, largely unbound from the Romantic conventions of authorship that the *Nahda* appropriated and celebrated.[cxlii] Instead of being understood to emanate from the individual imagination of the unique Self, narrative in this popular oral sense represents a kind of common store of stories that circulate socially in a direct and democratic encounter between audience and narrator.[cxliii] Popular translation provokes anxieties of textual and cultural contamination precisely because it represents a potentially unregulated source of cultural and linguistic transfer, occasioning "revelations that question the authority of

dominant cultural values and institutions."[cxliv]   In this context, forgery and pseudotranslation are especially threatening. Under the guise of 'legitimate' translation, these serve as a convenient means of introducing new ideas and a plurality of linguistic and narrative practices into a closed and hierarchical literary system, and moreover, in a manner designed to circumvent the moral and juridical rules of textual accountability. As such, they are essentially disruptive and anarchic literary acts that simultaneously carnivalize both the foreign and the domestic cultural norms and literary conventions through which they operate.   The great majority of self-proclaiming translations within the Egyptian turn-of-the-century popular fiction repertoire are, in this specific sense, spurious. Many 'translators' affixed the bare initials of some imaginary author onto the volume's frontispiece. Many simply stated that the work had been adapted 'from the French' or 'from the English' original. Clearly, it is next to impossible to ascertain the truth or falsehood of these claims. The attempt itself is perhaps altogether beside the point. The novels in question are fascinating precisely because of the web of semantic and structural ambiguity that infuses the counterfeit text; the wild play of cultural and narrative codes plucked whimsically from a basket of diverse traditions and knit together so as to produce a new text that is both familiar and exotic; playful and profound.

If we agree with Peter Brooks that the 'literature of the masses' is itself the fertile source of the novel imagination, then a sustained and theoretically nuanced excavation of Arabic popular fiction becomes essential to a post-poststructuralist rewriting of the literary history of the *Nahda*. Such an endeavor would eschew the hierarchical limitations of national literature disciplines and ideally explore what Margaret Cohen has described as the basic 'transportability' of the novel form through a study of popular genres *precisely as* open-ended translation projects - in both a strictly textual and a broad worldly sense - across national and cultural borders. Perhaps then it will also become possible to approach meaningfully the Arabic novel from a serious comparatist perspective, rather than as an offshoot of Area Studies and the 'coming of the west' paradigm that this entails.

[lxxxix] Margeret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) p. 4.

[xc] *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

[xci] Some critics have vigorously disputed this claim however, attempting instead to trace the Arabic novel to pre-Islamic and medieval Arabic narrative sources. For example, Faruq Khurshid, *Fi al-riwaya al-`arabiyya fi `asr al-tajmi`* (Cairo: Dar al-qalam, 1960). For a general discussion of this contentious issue of origins, see Hafez, pp. 17-36.

[xcii] H. A. R. Gibb, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, Eds. Stanford J. Shaw and William R. Polk (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) p.300.

[xciii] Peter Gran, *Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840* (Cairo: the American University in Cairo Press, 1999) p. xvii.

[xciv] Perhaps this is partly the reason why Arabic literature is rarely studied in comparative literature departments in the United States. On the other hand, some Area Studies departments still offer modern Arabic literature courses as a window into 'the Arab mind.'

[xcv] Gibb, *Studies*, p.259.

[xcvi] *Ibid*, pp. 258-9.

[xcvii] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) p.281.

[xcviii] Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, Trans. Russell Moore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989) p.129.

[xcix] *Ibid*, p.135.

c Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) p.6.

ci Honoré de Balzac refers generally to this influence and particularly in relation to his own fiction in a letter to Hippolyte Castille: "How can one get across such a fresco [the *Comédie Humaine*] without the resources of the Arabian tale, without the aid of buried titans?" As cited in Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) p. 118.

cii Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997) p.6.

ciii The dates Matti Moosa gives for his 'Age of Translation' in Egypt and the Levant are 1870-1925, 1925 being the year when 'the New School' of writers in Egypt published their modernist manifesto in the first issue of their short-lived journal, *al-Fajr*. Pierre Cachia uses 1834-1914 instead, 1914 being the date of publication of Muhammad Husayn Haykal's foundational novel *Zaynab*.

civ Kawsar Abd al-Salam El-Beheiry, *L'influence de la littérature française sur le roman arabe* (Québec: Editions Naaman, 1980) p.121.

cv 'Abd al-Muhsin Taha Badr, *Tatawwur al-riwaya al`arabiyya al-haditha fi misr* (Cairo: Dar al-ma`arif, 1992) p.144.

cvi All of the extent bibliographies of these works of fiction are partial at best. See Henri Pérès, "Le roman, le conte et la nouvelle dans la littérature arabe moderne," *Annales de l'institut d'études orientales*, Tome III. Faculté des lettres de l'université d'Alger, 1937, pp. 266-337; Muhammad Yusuf Najm, *Al-Qissa fil-adab al-`arabi al-hadith* (Beirut: Manshurat al-maktaba al-ahliyya, 1961) pp. 13-21; Badr, *Tatawwur,* pp. 413-430; Latif Zaytuni, *Harakat al-tarjama fi `asr al-nahda* (Beirut: Dar al-nahar, 1994) pp. 163-171. See also Latifa Al-Zayyat's unpublished dissertation, *Harakat al-tarjama al-adabiyya min al-injiliziyya ila al-`arabiyya* (Cairo University, 1957) and Jak Tajir, *Harakat al-tarjama fi misr khilal al-qarn al-tasi` `ashara*, (Cairo, 1946).

cvii See Sabry Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse* (London: Saqi Books, 1993) p. 56 & p.85; Hasan al-Sharif, "Nahdat al-adab fi misr," *Al-Hilal*, vol. 1, October 1918, p.68; Gibb, *Studies*, p.300.

cviii Najm, *Qissa*, p.25.

cix An exception to this is Latif Zaytuni's recent study, *Harakat al-tarjama fi 'asr al-nahda* (The Translation Movement in the *Nahda*). Zaytuni's book includes an appendix of newly coined and 'arabized' words from the nineteenth century.

cx The marvelous itinerary of *The Arabian Nights* offers a fascinating example of this process. From pre-Islamic Persian to medieval Arabic and modern Indian translations/recensions, the 'text' of the *Nights* travels across eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe, through a variety of adaptations, forgeries and re-writings, into the domain of contemporary fiction: Antoine Galland's 1717 forgery "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp"; Frances Sheridan's *The History of Nurjahad* (1767); William Beckford's *Vathek* (1787) for example. In his essay on Tarchetti's 1865 version of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Lawrence Venuti explores the intriguing politics of adaptation and plagiarism in the context of the nineteenth century popular Italian novel, with its gothic, *feuilleton* and Orientalist sources. "I.U. Tarchetti's Politics of Translation; or A Plagiarism of Mary Shelley," *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992).

cxiFor example, Yves Olivier-Martin, *Histoire du roman populaire en France, 1840-1980* (Paris: Albin-Michel, 1980); Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860*s (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Anne-Marie Thiesse, *Le roman de quotidien: lecteurs et lectures populaires à la Belle Epoque* (Paris: Chemin vert, 1984); Jean Radford, *The Progress of Romance: the Politics of Popular Fiction* (London: Routledge Press, 1986);. Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle: popular fiction and British culture, 1880-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Patrick Bratlinger, *The Reading Lesson: the Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

cxii Badr, *Tatawwur*, p. 121.

cxiii *Ibid*, p. 19.

cxivFor a discussion of these attitudes, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt (*Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991)*;* and Ahmad Zakariyyah Shalaq, *Ahmad Fathi Zaghlul wa qadiyya al-taghrib* (Cairo: Maktaba madbuli, 1966).

cxvMuhammad `Umar – a turn of the century intellectual and social reformer – strongly denounced the decadence of popular narrative in his writing. *Hadir al-misriyyin wa sirr ta'akhkhurihim* (Cairo: Dar misr al-mahrusa, 2002).

cxvi As cited in Badr, *Tatawwur*, p.123.

cxvii Hafez, *Genesis*, p. 85.

cxviii Zaytuni, *Haraka,* p.142.

cxix As cited in Badr, *Tatawwur*, p.45.

cxx As cited in Gibb, *Studies*, p.297.

cxxi As cited in Najm, *Qissah*, p. 25, 1ff.

cxxii Al-Sharif, "Nahda", p. 68.

cxxiii See El-Beheiry, *L'influence*, p.126; Gibb, *Studies*, p. 281; Moosa, *Origins*, p. 105; Najm, *Qissa*, p.23.

cxxiv Sir Hamilton Gibb lamented the characteristic Arab attraction to 'particular currents in French literature" which included Rousseau, De Vigny, De Musset, Victor Hugo and Anatole France – cynics and pessimists all – and expressed the wish that Arab translators would pursue "the propagation of healthier and more constructive elements in Western thought," *Studies*, pp. 280-281.

cxxv Badr, *Tatawwur*, pp. 175-180.

cxxviAhmad Hafez 'Awad, "Fusha al-amal." *Musamarat al-sha'b*, Cairo: Matba'ah al-sha'b, vol. 3, 1904, p.5.

cxxvii *Ibid*, p. 20.

cxxviii Manfaluti rendered the following French novels into Arabic: Dumas fils' *La dame aux camelias*, Chateaubriand's *Atala et René* and *Le dernier Abencérage*, Alphonse Karr's *Sous les tilleuls*, Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Francois Coppée's *Pour la couronne* and Bernardin de Saint Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*.

cxxix The authors translated by Baydas from Russian versions into Arabic are Marie Correlli, Emilio Salgari, L.Műhlbach.

cxxx Moosa, *Origins*, p. 102.

cxxxi *Ibid,* p. 107.

cxxxii Zaytuni, *Haraka*, p.125.

cxxxiii *Ibid*, pp. 121-2.

cxxxiv Najm, *Qissa*, p. 23.

cxxxv Between the two World Wars, the quasi-official Committee for Writing, Translation and Publication (*Lajnat al-ta'lif wa al-tarjama wa al-nashr*) oversaw the translation of a number of canonical Victorian and modernist European authors such as Charles Dickens, H. G. Wells, Thomas Hardy and Oscar Wilde. This work was continued after the Second World War by The Egyptian Writer Publishing House (*Dar al-katib al-misri*) under the aegis of Taha Husayn and which contributed works by Voltaire, Huxley, Gide, Stendhal and Mérimée to the growing corpus of sanctioned literary translations. Moosa, *Origins*, pp. 117-119.

cxxxvi See for example, Farah Anton's introduction to his 1908 translation of Chateaubriand's *Atala*, sections of which are cited in Zaytuni, *Haraka*, pp. 25-26.

cxxxvii For one such study, see Nafusa Zakariyya Sa`id, *Tarikh al-da`wa ila al-`ammiyya wa athariha fi misr* (Cairo: Dar qasr al-thaqafa bi al-iskindiriyya, 1964).

cxxxviii Al-Sharif, "Nahda," pp. 69-70.

cxxxix Lawrence Venuti,. *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge Press, 1998) p.68.

cxl R. K Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p.91.

cxli Venuti, *Scandals*, p.31

cxlii Abdelfattah Kilito's fascinating study, *L'Auteur et ses doubles*, (Paris: Seuil, 1985) explores the fluidity of notions of originality and authorship in the classical and medieval Arabic canon. Kilito shows how the literary strategies that we now classify and expel as forgery and plagiarism formed part of a playful and highly evolved Arabic tradition.

cxliii Zaytuni relates an interesting anecdote in this context: In the introduction to his translation of Michel Zévaco's *Les Pardaillan*, Tanius `Abduh claimed that his impatient readers would telephone him in between installments in order to find out the imminent fate of the characters (*Haraka*, pp.133-4).

cxliv Venuti, *Scandals*, p.1.

STUDENT RECIPIENT
THE MAGDA AL-NOWAIHI AWARD

THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITY IN EGYPT: AN ETHNOGRAPHICAL APPROACH

Amira Abd El-Khalek[*]

Introduction

Most disabled women are stigmatized because of a lack of people's understanding of who they really are. Because they are female and disabled, they are considered to be at a double disadvantage.[cxlv] Poverty and access to social, health and educational services are factors that increase the burden that women face, especially as their bodies do not conform to the ideals that society places on how a woman's body should look.[cxlvi] A woman with a physical disability faces many challenges, not only regarding her image or interactions with people, but in dealing with patriarchal relations of ruling in terms of education, employment, and the social roles expected of her. She is at times pitied, ridiculed or looked down upon, mainly because her body is different and she is presumed to be weak and dependent.

The study I undertook for my master's degree is an examination of the life of five women with a physical disability; it being the most 'obvious' and prone to prejudices and stigma. Three of the women belong to the urban upper middle class in Cairo, one is from a fishing village on the coast of Alexandria (220 kilometers from Cairo), and another one is from a rural village in El-Menya, Upper Egypt. The study adopts a social constructionist view of disability. It therefore emphasizes a social model analysis which stresses society as the primary disabling factor in contrast to the individual model which holds that disabled persons are unable to perform their roles in society because of their impairment.[cxlvii] Most of the stigmas attributed to disabled people, however, come as a result of how society views their bodies, since stigma is essentially a bodily attribute that exposes something 'unusual' about the body.[cxlviii]

The importance of the body cannot be ignored even when a social model is followed. In addition to the environmental barriers of society, one cannot deny the importance of the attitudes of people, which are primarily based on a

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face-value attribution of 'abnormality' to the body. The body becomes the main factor in social stigma; for without this attribute, there is no reason for social prejudice, which is one of the principal themes concerning most of the women interviewed in the study.

Taking Boylan's and Abu Habib's notion that the body constitutes a problem to women, and since disability in this sense is related to the body and changes affecting it, the study explored women's relation to their own bodies and perceptions of it; their disability, and the gendered worlds they live in.[cxlix] My aim was to explore how their bodies are related to their sense of individuality and to their social identities. Hence, I took the body to be a social construct, not a biological one; likewise, disability as a social construct and not an individual problem.

Through the narratives of the five women, I wanted to examine the cultural and sociological dimensions that underlie the construction of disability in Egyptian society. I observed disability as a lived experience and studied its impact on the women's lives and identities. Furthermore, I tried to see how and why women perceive their bodies the way they do; whether there are social or cultural factors involved in that perception; and how this affects their daily lives, their relationships with other members of their communities and their social roles as women. I wanted to shed light on the gendered lived experience and the notions of stigma and normalcy as strong cultural perceptions. Looking at the individual narratives helped to understand how the objective social realities of these women were structured within the three conceptual frameworks of self, community and society (i.e. the individuals' autonomous selves, their immediate surroundings and society at large). The narratives emphasize how these women defy the patriarchal relations in the society they are a part of, and how they identify the roles that are expected of them, providing a deeper understanding of their personal realities and social experiences.

My interest in this research was triggered by my observation of people's charitable attitudes towards disabled people and anthologies of literature by disabled persons in the west. I began to question the presence of a literature by and about disabled women in Egypt, and I found a significant gap. The available literature, to a large extent, is more concerned with disabled men and children than women. They are usually written by 'able-bodied' males and tend to disregard the experiences of women.

I found that there is a need to listen to the voices of disabled people to better understand their experiences. However, my aim was also to question certain assumptions, namely: that disabled women are worse off because of their double or triple disadvantage of being women, disabled and/or poor with limited resources; that they are helpless and dependent; and that they have no social roles. Thus through the narratives of disabled women, I feel that much can be learnt about them and about the prejudices set against them from people in their society.

Theoretical Framework

I based the study on Berger and Luckman's treatise on the social construction of reality, the theories of self and society as described by George

Herbert Mead and social and symbolic interactionism as identified by Erving Goffman.[cl] This framework is particularly influential because it deals with the concept of self and social identity, which is a critical factor in understanding disabled women and how they manage their dual stigma of being women and disabled.

This approach was studied by the French INSERM[cli] in its work entitled "Self Representations and Physical Impairment: A Social Constructionist Approach." The study reports that, in the field of health research, three principle lines of research should be taken into consideration when making a social constructionist analysis of the social identity of persons with a disability. The first would be the way in which the disability is experienced by the individual through daily activities and how this helps to shape her/his identities through personal perception and social interaction. The second is the experiences of the disabled person as represented within the culture. This is based on narratives, biographies, media reports and cultural metaphors and analyses of impairment and disability. The third line of research relates to the inter-mingling of different disciplines - between different social and human sciences such as sociology, anthropology, psychology and medicine - placing them all in a context where the experience of disability is embedded.[clii]

Thus these lines of research constituted the framework on which my study was based. First, the narratives of the women I interviewed show their individual experiences of disability through a phenomenological perception of their embodied selves, including their daily encounters with other people mirroring their social realities, thus reconstructing their identities. Second, the women's narratives relate their experiences against their particular social backgrounds in a way that reflects the different social and cultural interpretations of disability. Cultural symbols and representations through the media and within the community are a significant factor. The third line of research included the integration of theoretical principles of the different disciplines involved in the study, such as disability, gender, anthropology, social psychology, narrative, and body and identity theories, placing the experience of disability into its socio-political context[cliii]. For the purposes of this article and because of its limitations, my concentration will be on the first two aspects with regard to four of the women.

Methodology

The women of this study have physical impairments. Two of these (Abeya and Mervat) are from upper middle class families living in Cairo and have had privileges of education and multi-lingual higher education; the other two (Faten and Boshra) live in rural villages. They barely have the means to meet their basic needs. They have a preparatory-level education in public schools. My questions revolved around how they perceived their bodies, how they thought others regarded them, and their own concepts of self and body, while probing the social and cultural construction of disability in Egypt.

In choosing my informants I did not attempt to seek a representative sample. During the analysis of the findings, it was important to take into consideration certain variables. Different variables such as class, age, education, religion, power relations, time and space – even if touched upon

lightly – enabled me to get a more holistic and objective understanding of the lived experiences of women with disabilities in this society and the cultural perception of society towards disability. However, eventually I found that these variables are intertwined and interchangeable. They are all related to one another, and in this case, they were all overridden by the fact that these women are disabled.[cliv]

In-depth interviews were loosely structured to allow the women to freely express their interests and values concerning their own bodies and experiences. Moreover, I have taken the term 'embodiment' to mean the experience of the body in its social context as Csordas puts it.[clv] Embodiment, as I consider it, is not simply a phenomenological approach of the 'lived body' or an 'embodied consciousness' which focuses more on the body, its taken-for-grantedness and a sense or not of the functions we perform.[clvi] In this context I understand it to be the experience of disability – being an embodied experience stressing the interaction of the women with society and its disabling or empowering conditions; not on their specific impairments or functions of their bodies. My emphasis was on how their bodies and the images of their bodies have been shaped within the context of society and culture thus shaping their own identities.

In these narratives, the four women tell their own individual experiences of disability along the social backgrounds that constitute their lives. By looking into their lives, their relationships, marriages, their education and work, one can begin to understand what it is like to be a woman with a physical disability in Egypt. Each woman has dealt with her disability and perceives her body in a different way. Her own identity and the way she handles life, her social relations, her surroundings and her work all differ from one to another; for though they share the experience of physical disability, they "are not clones but individuals with their own personal hopes, anxieties and preoccupations". [clvii]

The Narratives[clviii]

Abeya: A Lived Experience

Abeya is in her early 40s. She developed rheumatoid arthritis when she was nine. It affected her joints greatly and she was obliged to use a wheelchair four or five years later, in order to facilitate her movement. In her teenage years, she was hospitalized for four months to undergo four operations as well as rehabilitation and physiotherapy.

Abeya has a strong personality and is very outgoing. She is married and has two children: a daughter, 21 years, and a son of 16 at the time of the research. She began her education in a French Language school (usually attended by elite children) but then was forced to go to a Public Arabic school because it was closer to her house. After school, she joined the American University in Cairo and majored in business administration. Later, she decided to pursue a master's degree in sociology and is currently working on her Ph.D. She has her own private business and owns a few shops that specialize in fashion design, jewelry and doll making.

Together with her private business, Abeya is an active advocate of disability rights. She has participated in conferences and seminars and worked with a

few organizations that are disability oriented. But this was not always the case. She had been approached by disability rights activists, but when asked to appear at several meetings and seminars, she felt a need to talk from an established base. She needed to read more and understand the field academically, not simply through experience.

She refutes the image of women as oppressed. Family, friends and neighbours in Egyptian society are extremely important. When Abeya and I were discussing social relations and literary works by women with disabilities in the west, and the concentration of most of them on themes of isolation and loneliness and anger and frustration, she spoke of a drastically different setting in Egyptian society.

> Contrary to what people think, here we have societal and familial support. Over there, there's a sense or feeling of oppression.. of aloneness. Here it's different. Social life is different. I have family and friends who live with me and share everything I do. I don't feel that I am alone or that I need to cry out, or that there's something blocked up inside that I need to let out. I am not ignored.

She asserts: "Our lived experience is our own writing"

> Ours is a kind of lived experience. Not only for the disabled but also for the whole community that you're living in. They see you when you're being carried up and down the stairs and when the chair gets stuck in the door; so automatically they live the experience… The very fact that I exist and live in the community that I live in is that people see me everyday and interact with me and talk to me and I simply live my everyday life amongst them (at school, at work, at home with family, with friends, with children). They know how to react and what to do. I'm not a mystery; nor am I not there.

Abeya's mother was her constant guide and encouragement. It was her mother who first introduced her to 'the chair' and tried to make it look and feel good. Moreover, her mother was a constant companion to her throughout her education and later on with her business. She owes a lot to her mother's patience and perseverance. But most of all, she owes her the outgoing nature that she encouraged in her daughter, for if it wasn't for her mother's insistence to push her into the world and encourage her to do more and be better, Abeya would probably not have known her true potential.

Through our conversations, Abeya focused on the attitudes of people through her own experience. For example, while waiting for someone in the street, even if for a moment, and despite her fine appearance, people would approach her and give her money. She says; "At first I used to feel insulted and upset, but then I just take it. I don't get bothered by it because it comes out of the good will of people." She has gotten used to it. However, her work as a disability activist is mainly to change these views among people.

Abeya also has a way of dealing with people and making them feel at ease. She insists on changing their perspectives by making them see 'Abeya' before seeing 'the chair'. Especially with children, she talks to them getting them into

conversations and approaches them in a way to make them interested in her as a person though they are curious about her chair. Later on they talk to their friends about it and so spread awareness. She says: "The thing with children is that they don't have sensitivities and barriers – not like grown ups". However, on the other hand, "there can be other boys who would come at a point of disadvantage and they would see that I can't run after them so they'd try and take advantage. With these children I watch out, and also show them my strong personality."

Abeya is very conscious of the way people react towards disability; whether they are fearful and resentful, or extremely caring and protective, or whether they consider disabled people as super-humans who have accomplished extraordinary achievements, or they treat disabled persons, and especially women, with the notion that they are invalids.

One of her main concerns – an image she constantly tries to break – is that of "'the hero' and placing us on a pedestal" to borrow Jenny Morris' term.[clix] She says:

> It should not be unusual. It is normal that we do these things. People assume that we are ill so doing the minimal effort will be very difficult for us. They think we will tire very easily, or cannot perform certain things or that when we do, they were extreme achievements…. It is not a challenge; we are just doing what is normal.

She realizes that she is more advantaged than others are, but to her, will power is the principal drive.

> Social circumstances are better but that shouldn't always be the excuse that people hang their misfortunes upon. Personality comes in and many other factors can contribute to that. The important thing is for people not to make us look like superhuman when we do normal things that everybody else does simply because we have a disability and it is therefore assumed that we won't be able to do those things.

Abeya does not see herself as "having" a disability. It is a part of who she is. She is no different than anyone else. She only hopes that her experience and that of other women like her will help to put women with disabilities in their deserved place.

Mervat: "Being Safe – Being Me"

Mervat is in her late 40s. She was three months old when she got encephalitis, which resulted in permanent right-sided haemiplegia. She underwent several operations and intensive physiotherapy for several months in France and England that enabled her to walk unassisted. Starting from the age of 12, she traveled to France for several summers for treatment. Mervat was educated in a French Franciscan nuns' school in Cairo and later joined the American University in Cairo (AUC) where she majored in anthropology and received an M.A. in sociology. She now works as a librarian.

Mervat is single. She recently experienced the death of her mother and now lives with her father. She has two sisters who are both married and have children. She has few relatives and a small number of good friends.

After her studies, she worked at the Social Research Center of AUC where she translated documents, but felt she wanted to do other things. Up until that point, her life had been very sheltered. Her school, travels with the family, college and even the first jobs she had were all within a sheltered and homely atmosphere. She was afraid of going into the 'outside world' and face discrimination and prejudice. She puts it simply and directly: "Actually I was afraid of working; of going into Life. University was sheltered."

Her family life is also sheltered. Sundays are a time for family gatherings, and holidays are spent in a nearby farm owned by her father. Mervat's social life, on the other hand, is restricted to weekends, as her working hours are from 8 to 4, and she prefers to retire early. She spends most of her time reading. Her outings include going to the club or occasionally going out with friends for lunch or coffee.

According to Ali Muhammad Matar, much of the identity of the disabled person depends on the way they were treated by their family, especially in the early formative years.[clx] They are primarily responsible for shaping the character and identity of disabled persons in the way they act and react, bringing out the potentials of their children, providing a role model and instilling in the person values and beliefs which provide the basis for a strong personality or a weak one.

She recognizes that sometimes this over-protectiveness is not good. Even though it shows the good will of her family, it sometimes limits the potentials that she may have. However, she never resented or rebelled against it. She herself is not an outgoing person. She is relatively shy and prefers this sense of shelteredness; it gives her more security. A trusted driver takes her wherever she needs to go, and she goes out with people only known to her and her parents.

Mervat currently works as a librarian in a religiously-affiliated association that caters for the needs of children with mental disabilities. She has been working there for 8 years and likes the sheltered and friendly atmosphere where books are her solace. Mervat works in the documentation unit where she is more exposed to the different portrayals of disability in newspapers, periodicals, films, videos, and television programs. She finds that the Egyptian media's focus in terms of disability is more on men and on Special Olympics[clxi]. In all the television programs dealing with disability, most of the persons interviewed are men or children. Very few women appear.

Mervat feels that persons with disabilities have a certain body image – especially with physical disabilities. She believes that in Egypt, they are not recognized and their rights are lost. They see that it is shameful to be disabled. Moreover, people are overprotective, and it makes her feel uncomfortable. When they see her, they think she is helpless or unable to do certain things, but she knows her limits, and she also likes to feel independent. When asked to describe herself, she said: "I see *myself* – I don't see myself as physically handicapped. I'm like anyone – but I can't do many things like walk or talk properly or go down the stairs very well. But I feel myself like *you* for example."

In the environment of the center, Mervat is able to work quietly and confidently. She maintains the library in perfect condition and makes sure all the books are in their places. She goes about the meticulous task of writing notecards for every book and article, and she maintains good relations with other colleagues. At home, she cares for her father—after the recent death of her mother, and she maintains good relationships with her friends and acquaintances. Her role in life, as far as she is concerned, is satisfying. The death of her mother has also had a great impact on her. Her mother was her shelter and her support. By losing her, she has lost a great part of who she is. "It is difficult," was all she could say to describe how she felt.

Faten: Life in a Fishing Village

Faten is 31 years old. Her case is different from the previous women in that she is younger and her impairment came later on in her life. She is married and has three children. Her eldest son is eight years old, and she has a daughter who is five and a younger son who is two. When she was six months pregnant with her older son, Faten was getting something from a high shelf in her bedroom cupboard and fell off a chair. She broke her thigh; and because she was pregnant, the doctors, fearing for her baby, did not want to operate. They made a primitive sort of sling attached to her bed where she had to stay until she delivered her child. The wound never healed. She underwent several operations, and she has been moving with crutches ever since.

Faten almost finished her basic education. She reached her third preparatory year, but failed and decided not to continue. She lives in the fishing village of El-Mexx with her husband and three children, and with Hasna, a 17 year old girl whom she raised since she was little. Hasna helps her with the housework and with raising the children.

The community of fishermen among which Faten and her family live is a very poor one burdened with problems of health and pollution. A fisherman's catch is never guaranteed. In Faten's words, "one day there can be food, and for the next ten days there isn't any".

Faten has very good relations with her family and in-laws. However, her mother lives far away, and because Faten cannot move and transportation fees are very expensive, she does not visit her very often. She has five sisters and two brothers who come to visit her at El-Mexx constantly. Her mother-in-law lives in an upper extension of the same house, and her husband's relatives live next door. She spends much of her time there.

However, family to Faten has extended beyond mere courtesy visits. Her family, and her husband's family greatly supported her with the house and the furniture since her accident. She had to sell most of her personal belongings, including her wedding ring, and her in-laws also helped financially. Most of their savings go to medical fees and transportation to and from the hospital, which is very costly. Moreover, her relationship with her neighbors is a good one. Despite occasional arguments, they have a solid sense of neighbourliness.

Faten's daily routine consists of waking up early in the morning, making sandwiches, and getting her son and daughter ready for school and nursery.

Her husband, Adel, goes to work, and during the day, she cleans and cooks with the help of Hasna. When they're finished, they watch television until everyone comes home. After lunch, Faten helps the children with their homework and in the afternoons they spend time together watching television or entertaining visitors and guests.

Sometimes they go out, but not very often. She talks with nostalgia about the times when they would walk together or go off to the seacoast in the summer. Her husband takes the children out and so does Hasna and other relatives, but she misses doing these activities with her children. She says, "It's different if they're with their mother. They need it. And I need it too."

Faten is a person who cares very much about personal image and appearance. She likes to put make-up on her face and on the faces of her friends. She also likes hairdressing and hair dying and neighbors and relatives often go to her for trimming their hair or dyeing it. "Especially during the Eid[clxii]", she says, "the house is so full, you can hardly move in it." She enjoys it and is pleased that her reputation for doing it well has extended beyond the small fishing village where she lives. "People come from the wider area of El-Mexx. People I don't even know; because they heard about me from their friends."

What affected Faten the most after her accident was that she felt she had become less attractive to herself and to her husband. Her body image has greatly changed and she has put on much weight. Her temperament or state of mind shows in her appearance and the way she holds her hair or makes up her face.

Neumann and Wright claim that chronic disability causes an extra burden on families.[clxiii] Referring to Wright and Owen[clxiv], they state that where the disability was present before marriage, matters were more stable, because the partner (and in the majority of cases, it is the husband) knows about it, accepts it and has married the woman with full knowledge of the situation. In cases where the disability occurs after marriage, then problems arise and separation and divorce is not uncommon.

Faten and Adel have had their fair share of marital problems. Yet they have not reached the level of separation or divorce. Each is tolerant with the other because of the children, because they understand the limited financial resources and because each one of them knows that none is to blame for the situation they are in. Faten realizes that what happened at the prime of both their lives was a burden on them both.

> [Adel] had only just married and wanted to be happy with his
> bride and have a good life. He was young and wanted to do
> many things. But what happened happened, and the truth is,
> he's always there and helps a lot. Hospital fees are high and so
> are transportation fees if we go anywhere. He's doing his best.

Faten has tried herself at several jobs. Money is scarce for fishermen and their families especially in the area where they live. "With three children and hospital fees that have exhausted all of our savings, the least I can do is work." Besides, it gives her a sense of worth too. "I sit here doing nothing all day,

especially when the children are in school. I'm intelligent and capable, and I can work, so I want to do something useful."

She tried to open a small day-care facility in her house to keep young children, but not many came to her. She also applied at a nearby mosque that had a day care center, but they did not need extra help. She has the will and potential to learn anything to work. She currently volunteers in activities run by a community development association in the area and learns new skills through their programs. Though she thoroughly enjoys hairdressing and beautifying her friends and neighbors, she does not consider it her job. Yet, she would love to open her own beauty parlor.

In most developing countries, because of financial reasons, large populations, scarcity of services that reach faraway places, more effort needs to be exerted to apply the social model in understanding and coping with a disability. The medical approach concentrates more on the physical ailments of the person with a disability and not on the social surroundings that hinder or handicap his/her performance. Nevertheless, Faten has had several encounters with the medical profession. Like most Egyptians she has great faith in doctors and medicine in general. She believes that they will cure her leg. She refuses to admit that she has a disability and considers her situation, a temporary condition. Despite being aware of the difficulties she encounters at the hands of the medical profession. She has been told that a final operation will help to heal her leg but that will cost a fortune. They managed to raise the amount and yet, they have been told that there are no qualified doctors or operating rooms available, or that her infection has to heal totally. They have waited for a year already with no luck. What bothers Faten most of all, is hearing comments of pity or sympathy from people when they look at her or her husband for being with her. She says that what has happened to her has greatly affected her and changed her life:

> Of course it has. It has affected everything in my life: my appearance (I wasn't fat like I am now. I had a very good figure) and my personality. I have become very short-tempered and angry. I don't have patience with anything. Any small word affects me and I don't like this. My children have also changed. They don't listen to me now as they used to. Though I still maintain a lot of control over them, they know that I can't run after them."

Nevertheless, Faten believes her life will return to what it was like before her accident. She will have come full circle—from a "normal life" to "this", pointing to herself and her situation, and then "everything will get back to normal again." With the forthcoming operation, she will require intensive physiotherapy and exercise before she is able to walk, nevertheless, she believes that the operation will be the solution to all her problems. "I'll be able to take the children out and visit my friends and take proper care of my husband." She has put all hope on the operation, not fully realizing that the road to her healing and total cure is still a long way off.

She in turn maintains her role as an assertive woman; one who cares for her husband and her house and her children. She studies with her children when they come home from school; and though she does not work, or go out, she feels that she is fulfilling her role in society. She likes to satisfy her husband's

needs, and despite the impairment, she tries to remain attractive to him. The disability is limiting her to a great extent, in terms of being able to care for him and the children; but as far as she is concerned, she is fully maintaining her role as wife and mother.

Boshra: Stigma and Social Prejudices

Boshra is the youngest of the four women. She is 19 years old. She lives in a Coptic Christian community in a rural village in the north of Menya Governorate. She contracted polio when she was very young and as a result, she moves with the support of a crutch. She has not left her house since she was 13 years old and lives with her parents and her younger brothers and sisters, whom she has helped to raise. She left school after learning the basics of reading and writing.

The village where Boshra lives is small and consists solely of Coptic Christians. A large church lies on its outskirts and serves this village and two other neighboring ones. People know each other but usually like to keep to themselves. Lately, the church with the help of a larger religious organization, has managed to establish a few community and rehabilitation projects. Raising community awareness about different disabilities, acceptance and diversity are among its mandates in order to integrate all members of the community together.

The people of the village, however, are very poor. They live in hut-like houses made of mud. Boshra's family is particularly poor. She is the eldest daughter. Her father works as a farmer for a landowner in a nearby field and his eldest son helps him. Usually, during the holidays, the younger children help. The money they have is barely sufficient for food and a new set of clothes every season if necessary. Television is considered a luxury and is only available in a few houses in the village.

Boshra's fear to leave the house has been strongly based on the attitudes of people around her and on her difficulty to move because when she was little she had problems with other children making fun of her and chasing her. Because of the long distance between her home and school, commuting was very painful and time consuming. Also at school, the inaccessibility of the classrooms and the need to go up and down large flights of stairs was a problem. The school administration did not care to change the location of the classrooms to accommodate her and she was often made fun of because of the way she walked. Also, inside the classroom, because of the poorly-constructed benches, it was painful to stand up every time she answered a question. Eventually she would remain quiet, though she knew the answers, and would consequently be thought of as a bad student.

Stigma, according to Goffman, is a relationship between an attribute and the stereotype that people have attached to that kind of person - whether they know him or not. Believing then that the person with a stigma is not totally human, a set of assumptions and discriminatory characteristics are imposed upon him reducing his life chances.[clxv] Life chances were indeed reduced in Boshra's case. The opportunity to go to school was granted to her because she was the first born and her family realized the importance of education despite financial constraints. However, because of the social stigma associated with her disability she chose to remain at home. Even though her family as well as

members of the church community encourage her constantly to overcome her fear, her instinctive sense of self protection based on her past experience keep her within the safe confines of her home.

In rural areas, social factors and restrictions from within the community also place pressures upon the family; for though the father willingly sends his daughter to school, the surrounding environment might not find it acceptable. They find that the girl's place is at home with her family. To some, the best that they can do is teach the girl to cook, manage the household, to care for herself and find her a husband that will accept her as she is. Though Boshra was given the privilege to go to school despite her being a girl and disabled, society's pressures were too much. She decided that she could serve her family better by staying at home so as not to cause them and herself embarrassment.

The way people perceive disabled persons is one of society's greatest handicaps. "Attitudes towards the disabled can be more of a handicap than the impairment itself. Ignorance and negativism could contribute to the building of social and psychological barriers for the disabled that are much harder to break than physical barriers. In this sense such attitudes become a cause of disability."[clxvi] In *Gender and Disability*, Lina Abu-Habib finds that "Pity, shame, embarrassment, or a mixture of the three, are the reactions most commonly encountered by men and women who have a disability, from non-disabled people."[clxvii] Boshra has not left her house for the past six years. It is these social attitudes and prejudices that have forced her to do so.

However, the church community has played a significant role in providing her with a sewing machine, training her to use it and helping to market the clothes she sews. In addition to physical rehabilitation, they provide counseling and encourage integration with other members of the community. They also spread awareness within the community in an attempt to change the attitudes of people towards disability.

Boshra does not leave her house, but she does not feel that she is not fulfilling a role in society. She helps to make clothes for her family and for people of the community. She has helped raise her siblings and assists them with their homework and education. She feels quite satisfied staying at home and sewing, she does not feel useless; on the contrary, she believes she is doing something worthwhile.

Analysis: The Cultural Construction of Identity

> The disabled person is a live social entity, lives in society, is affected by it and in turn affects it. Society is a cultural, social, economic and political structure, which establishes values and lays down rules of behaviour. An objective treatment of the subject must therefore be based on recognition of the interaction between the disabled and the society in which he lives. In other words, the success or failure of any effort in connection with the disabled will be determined by the relationship between the disabled person and society.[clxviii]

The narratives have revealed the experiences of the four women in terms of their relationships with family, friends and neighbors; their education and work

experiences; everyday encounters with social obstacles, images and challenges. The women have spoken about their identities, their social roles as they see them, their opinions, and their religious and cultural orientations.

From the model of Ville et al, a study of the identity of disabled persons is revealed through three categories: how disability is experienced through day-to-day activities and encounters; their experiences as represented within larger cultural structures; and the integration of different disciplines that enhance this identity. In short, individuals construct their identities out of everyday interactions and from within a normative context defined by beliefs and representations as well as by the social practices and politics of the culture to which they belong.[clxix] The social theory of Mead as well as Goffman's social interaction theories serve to place the experiences of the four women with disabilities in a cultural context enhancing their sense of self and their identities.

Despite their difference in experiences, the narratives essentially synthesize into three main issues; namely, self, community and society. These have helped to shape and form the identity of the four women of the study, and are examples that in a broad sense could be representative of most women with disabilities in similar situations. Moreover, these factors have been set against dynamics of tradition, identity and power to borrow the terms suggested by Göçek and Balaghi.[clxx] Their identity as individuals who are both 'disabled' and 'women' are reflected against their traditional expected roles, or the assumptions about who they are, as well as the power structures that govern these images. The narratives show how the women have shaped their lives around these relations of ruling, and emerged with their own characters and individual identities.

Self, Community and Society

Through a close examination of the narratives, Abeya emerges as a secure and well-established woman. She does not find her disability problematic but strives to understand disability issues deeper in order to be able to 'change' the views and assumptions of society towards women with disabilities. Mervat is a shy, reserved woman sheltered within her family and work environment. Faten's major concern is time. For her, the impairment is 'an accident' and a condition that will pass. There is a temporal pattern in the accident, the consequences that have happened as a result, and the hope in a brighter and better future. With Boshra, it was the social surroundings and negative attitudes of people that led her to stay at home.

However, identity is not solely internal. For social constructionists, "the formation of the self, then, must also be understood in relation to both the ongoing organismic development and the social process in which the natural and the human environment are mediated through the significant others."[clxxi] Humans exist within a social environment, which they influence and are influenced by. Moreover, humans construct their own nature; socio-cultural variations, assumptions, symbols, and categories are none other than the socio-cultural formations of a human-being her or himself throughout historical processes. Hence, some of the principal assumptions and stereotypes that people attach to disabled people are categories that they have formulated over the years. Our identities are shaped by the roles we inhabit and the ways we articulate ourselves to others, for, as Mead stated, we reflect ourselves through

our interactions with others. In the case of the four women of this study, their identities have been shaped through their social interactions. Their selves are projected through their close community and the larger social context they are a part of.

Disability is often considered a personal or family problem rather than a matter for social or state responsibility. "Disabled people are often expected to overcome obstacles to participation by their own extraordinary efforts, or their families are expected to provide what they need (sometimes at great personal sacrifice)."[clxxii] Such is the case of Egypt. When looking at the lives of Abeya, Mervat, Faten and Boshra, their families and friends have been very supportive. The narratives reveal how these women are central to the daily lives and activities of their families and communities. Men in their lives are secondary or revolve around them. Even the women who are married are the main actors on the scenes of everyday life.

Moreover, society at large with its power structures (the educational, social and medical services), its media images and its cultural assumptions of women's roles in society are among the most significant elements that have shaped these women's relations with society, thus enhancing their identities. All four of the women, whether rich or poor, whether in an urban, rural or coastal setting, have had to deal with physical hardships that have in time either lowered their self esteem or raised it. Most of all, they have been constantly challenged to defy the judgmental values of 'normalcy' and the traditional view of a 'disabled woman' as assumed and defined by people in their communities and societies.

To a large extent, persons with disabilities in Egypt are still regarded in a negative way. The voices of persons with disabilities, and in particular women, are still to a great extent quiet. Michael Oliver asserts that for persons with disabilities to get their rights and to change the prevailing assumptions that are inherent in the society, it is necessary for them to speak for themselves. For no matter how sympathetic non-disabled persons are, they will never be the true spokespersons for disabled people.[clxxiii] In the case of Egypt, these women are not 'silenced' oppressively. They simply have not found the means to gather themselves together to speak out. Because the community is closely knit, women find it easier to talk to people they know: their relatives, neighbors or friends. Attempts at grouping disabled women together to discuss matters that concern them and that are particular to their disability and gender are few and mostly individual efforts.

However, the voices of women with disabilities are necessary, not only for their own empowerment, but also to help others overcome their fears of encountering persons on wheelchairs, or persons who walk differently or look different from what they regard as 'normal'. They should be heard in an attempt to normalize and accept women with disabilities. They should also be heard both in order to challenge the widely held beliefs that a woman's place is in the domestic sphere as well as the assumption that disabled women are not even capable of handling that very domestic sphere at any rate.

Conclusion

Ted Cantrell describes four factors that shape the lifestyle of persons with neurological disabilities. He mentions the nature of the condition; the temperament of the person, his or her morale and strength of character; her own personal objectives and aims and goals of what she wishes to achieve; and finally, the available support within the community be it family, friends, neighbours, social and professional help.[clxxiv] With the four women who have shaped my study, these factors have been vital in defining the nature of the disablement, determining what they have achieved and in shaping their character and identity.

My primary concern, however, is having a literature (whether oral or written) by and about disabled women. Too many of these women go through life ignored because they have not been given the opportunity to tell their life stories; and so much can be learnt from these stories. Attitudes of people will change when disabled women are more in the open; and they will not be looked upon as enigmas. When disabled women are further included and integrated into social events and happenings, their abilities, their worth and their self-esteem will emerge and they will be given the opportunity to empower themselves, their families and their communities.

The limitations of this study did not allow me to delve too deep into these women's narratives. What we talked about and what I reproduced are only parts that I found significant to the research. I find that what I have written is only a minimal portion of their histories and does very little justice to their full lives and overwhelming experiences. So much more can be learnt from them and I can only propose and hope that this may be a first step in writing disabled women's worlds.

[cxlv] See Esther Boylan, *Women and Disability*. UK: Zed Books, 1991, Lina Abu-Habib *Gender and Disability: Women's Experiences in the Middle East* UK and Ireland: Oxfam, 1997; Nazek, Nosseir, "Women and Disability" in *Proceedings of the Conference on Capabilities and Needs of Disabled Persons in the ESCWA Region* United Nations, 1992

[cxlvi] Boylan ibid.

[cxlvii] Michael, Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990; T. Shakespeare, Colin Barnes, Geof Mercer. *Exploring Disability: A Sociological Introduction.* USA: Polity Press, 1999.

[cxlviii] Erving, Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 1

[cxlix] Boylan, ibid, Abu Habib, ibid.

[cl] P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* NY: Doubleday, 1966; George Herbert Mead, *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of A Social Behaviorist* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934; Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* New York: Doubleday, 1959; *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961; *Behaviour in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings* New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963

[cli] Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies).

[clii] Isabelle Ville et al., "Self-Representations and Physical Impairment: A Social Constructionist Approach" in *Sociology of Health and Illness.* 16(3). 1994, 301-321

[cliii] For an extensive review of the literature, refer to: Abd El-Khalek, Amira (2002). The Cultural Construction of Disability: An Ethnographical Approach to Women with Disabilities in Egypt. Master's Thesis. The American University in Cairo.

cliv Oliver ibid; Jenny Morris ed., *Able Lives: Women's Experience of Paralysis.* Great Britain: The Women's Press Ltd., 1989; Heba Hagrass *Disability, Gender and Marriage* Master Thesis: The American University in Cairo, 1998; Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch, eds., *Women with Disabilities: Essays in Psychology, Culture and Politics.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988

clv Thomas J., Csordas, ed., *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self.* GB: Cambridge University Press, 1994

clvi M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception.* Trans. by Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1999

clvii International Labor Organization (ILO), *Dispelling the Shadows of Neglect: A Survey on Women with Disabilities in Six Asian and Pacific Countries.* Geneva: International Labor Office, 1989, p. 4

clviii I have maintained the time factor in these narratives as it was 3 years ago when the study was written.

clix Jenny Morris ed., *Able Lives: Women's Experience of Paralysis.* Great Britain: The Women's Press Ltd., 1989

clx Amani Qandil, "Social Aspects of the Disabled in the Western Asia Region and the Importance of their Modification" *Proceedings of the Conference on the Capabilities and Needs of Disabled Persons in the ESCWA Region.* United Nations, 1992: 222

clxi The Egyptian Special Olympics team is one of the world's most competitive.

clxii Islamic Feast.

clxiii Neumann, Vera and Verna Wright, "Rheumatoid Arthritis and Other Inflammatory Arthropathies" in *Rehabilitation of the Physically Disabled Adult.* Goodwill, C. John and M. Anne Chamberlain, ed. London: Croom Helm, 1988

clxiv Wright V. and S. Owen (1976) "The Effect of Rheumatoid Arthritis on the Social Situation of Housewives." *Rheum Rehabil.*, 15: 156-60.

clxvGoffman 1963: 5

clxvi Nosseir 1992: 261

clxvii Abu Habib, ibid., p. 3

clxviii Qandil ibid.,p.207

clxix Ville et al, ibid., 302

clxx Göçek, Fatma M. and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity and Power.* New York: Columbia UP, 1994

clxxi Berger and Luckman, ibid., p. 68

clxxii Wendell, Susan, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Disability" in *The Disability Studies Reader.* Lennard Davis, ed. New York: Routledge, 1997 : 265

clxxiii Michael Oliver *The Politics of Disablement.* London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990; Jane Campbell and Mike Oliver, *Disability Politics: Understanding our Past, Changing our Future.* London: Routledge, 1996

clxxiv Ted Cantrell "The Young Adult with Neurological Diseases" in *Rehabilitation of the Physically Disabled Adult.* Goodwill, C. John and M. Anne Chamberlain, ed. London: Croom Helm, 1988

BOOK REVIEWS

Nadine Méouchy & Peter Sluglett (eds.)
The British and the French Mandates in Comparative Perspectives
Leiden: Brill, 2004, 745p.

Reviewed by Leyla Dakhli[*]

The present volume is the second part of a larger, international research program dealing with the study of the Mandates' history which was inaugurated by a conference in Beirut in 1999. The first volume was published in Damascus by the Institut Français des Etudes Arabes à Damas (now the Institut Français du Proche Orient), N. Méouchy (dir.), *France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946. Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire* in 2002; it dealt specifically with the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon.

This second volume under consideration here focuses on the comparison between the French and the British Mandates in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq. It's constituted of 745 pages in English or French divided into four parts: "Source Materials for the Mandates", "The Spirit and the Letter of the Mandates: Political Praxis and Cultural Perspectives", "The State and the Political, Economic and Technical Elites: Networks, Dynamics, and Nation Building", "Rural and Urban Mobilization: Resistance and Cooperation".

The size of the book (745 pages) can be explained by the ambition of the authors, covering more than two decades in a whole region: "This collection represents the first large scale attempt to discuss the Middle Eastern mandates as a totality." This supposition of the project could be discussed in its own right, but it is not our purpose here. Let me just try to see if the book meets its declared objectives. On a first, the formal level, the ambition of comparing "the application and effects of this very specific form of late colonialism from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives, including

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anthropology, architecture, archival conservation, economics, history, law and sociology" is responsible for the relative dispersion of the articles, giving a panorama of the studies on the different future states, with a very thin thematic connection between them. The division into four parts helps the readers find their way into the book, although some of these thematic divisions do not seem to be the most pertinent.

In the end, the present work on the two Mandates is impressive and appears as a partial "état des lieux" on the studies in the field. But one still has doubts about the book's perspective on the two different systems imposed on the region, even after reading the conclusions. It did not does not seem to have been the ambition of the editors to compare the French and British imperialist forms of the Mandates. They openly claim that priority was given to the comparison of the societies and territories in the region. This is where the project is on the same time interesting and problematic. If the societies can be compared, does it have to do with the Mandates or with a more profound and historically proved coherence of the region?

Some of the articles, even trying to "play the game," often experiment with the difficulties of the Mandates' periodisation. This is clearly the case of Mounzer Jaber's contribution («Le dessous des cartes: quelles règles pour les jeux de l'administration libanaise? Lecture des cartes de visite et documents personnels de Shafiq Halabi", pp. 549-576) which deals with the itinerary of a second-tier Lebanese politician in the 30s and 40s. The use of unusual sources makes the article very interesting, but it does not really address the goal of questioning the Mandate. Some other articles prove the necessity of going back to the pre-Mandate era to understand their purpose: for example, "la francophonie" as a French cultural imperialism that is installed well before 1920.

In my view, the editors did not choose between studying a colonial form, the Mandate, as an experiment of late empire and as a new regime imposed on the territories, or

studying a period, including social, cultural, and political history of the region between 1920 and 1946. As the sources' repertory seems to apply to colonial history more strictly, some contributions and the whole purpose of the introduction engage us to go further, building some kind of Mandate specificity, a Mandate society, a Mandate economy, etc. This question is not inconsiderable. If there is a Mandate history, one must try to understand what is created specifically by the Mandate, what social categories are supporting it, for what purpose. Reading the different contributions, one still has the feeling that this system is somehow an abstract one, but we have to admit that Mandate history does exist as a relevant periodisation.

Some articles suggest what could have been an accurate "comparative perspective" on the two Mandates. The means of comparison could have been the frontiers' layout or the toponymy for example, as suggested in Michael Fischbach's contribution on the British Land Program in Transjordan ("The British Land program, state-societal cooperation, and popular imagination in Transjordan", pp. 477-495). Leafing through the many pages of the book, the perspective of Fischbach's article invites interesting comparison with Frank Peter's chapter for ideas on the Mandates' property system ("Dismemberment of empire and reconstitution of regional space: the emergence of 'national' industries in Damascus between 1918-1946", pp. 415-446). The contributions of Jean Métral ("Robert Montagne et les etudes ethnographiques françaises dans la Syrie sous Mandat", pp. 217-234) and Robert Blecher ("Desert medicine, ethnography, and the colonial encounter in mandatory Syria", pp. 249-268) on the French Mandate are a good point of comparison with the same article of Fischbach on the way colonial knowledge about territories and populations was applied to the Middle East (specifically in ethnographic science and its relations with colonial developments).

Another perspective could have been a comparison of the structure of the Mandate system: this is what Peter Sluglett's chapter suggests ("The Mandates: some reflections on the nature of British presence in Iraq 1914-1932 and the French presence in Syria 1918-1946", pp.103-127) which deals with French and the British specificities. The same can be said of Roger Heacok's through the analysis of the League of Nations' bureaucracy on the case of Palestine ("Le système international aux prises avec le colonialisme: les deliberations sur la Palestine dans la Commission permanente des Mandats à la Société des Nations", pp. 129-142).

Finally, the question of cooperation with the Mandate system, expressed in the last part of the book in relation to social mobilization, has received more ambiguous and subtle elaborations in previous chapters: Robert Saliba's study on "French-imposed eclectism" in architecture ("Looking East, Looking West: Provincial Eclectism and Cultural Dualism in the Architecture of French Mandate Beirut", pp. 203-215), the use of "francophonie" in Jérôme Bocquet's paper ("Francophonie et langue arabe dans la Syrie sous mandat: l'exemple de l'enseignement missionnaire à Damas", pp. 303-319) and Randi Deguilhem's ("Impérialisme, colonization intellectuelle et politique culturelle de la Mission laïque française en Syrie sous mandate", pp. 321-341). This comparative perspective could have addressed - even within these chapters that fail to bring new problematics on the subject - the question of collaboration and westernization with a new perspective: seeing the collaboration not only as a conscious politics of the French or the British, nor even as a cynical strategy of some groups but also as the use of cultural power within Middle Eastern societies, through the possession of "symbolic goods" as foreign languages or techniques. For, as Rashid Khalidi states in his concluding remarks:

> There was a wide spectrum of modes of relating to this late form of colonialism, running from collaboration to cooperation, to accommodation, to ignoring the colonizer where possible, to

non-cooperation, to passive resistance, to public protest, and finally to armed resistance, with an infinite number of possible gradations between them, with individuals and groups sometimes moving back and forth along the spectrum" (p. 703).

This question raises another one, which appears as the gaping absence of the many studies. Significantly enough is the entire absence of addressing the choice between studying the Mandate as a colonial system on the one hand and the Mandate as the framework of local evolutions on the other, i.e. the question of repression and violence in the Mandate order. One can guess that when Michael Provence is writing about "contesting the Mandate", one would like to know more about the French military order in Syria, and the use of violence from the authorities. This question, in the peculiar times we live in today, has great significance in terms of what we call "occupation", and how it is imposed on populations. The problem with a project that sums up the Mandate and the societies during the Mandate is that it tends to erase the importance of how the system itself lives, what degree of violence, division and cooperation it needed to remain in place.

The echoes between the contributions are numerous, and they often suggest other divisions in the book. It generates the feeling that a real collective work on the project could have led to collections of articles with the coherence of the last part. This part actually presents a real project around the study of the mobilizations (against the Mandates, for the Mandates, during the Mandates). And the different studies give us a panorama of the question. The Mandates are compared as a political imposition on space and society. It is precisely because the movements of social protest organize in relation to the Mandate, in a globally nationalist perspective (nationalist against the mandate or micro-nationalist to obtain the protection of the Mandate in the case of Kurds or Armenians), that the different contributions succeed in showing the social and political complexity of the moment.

This is a step towards the study of national movements and mobilizations which does not concern exclusively the states under Mandates but a whole region including obviously, as shown in many contributions, the evolution of Egypt under British governance, post-Ottoman and independent Turkey, the influence of what is called Kemalism or its interpretations: this is suggested in the work of Michael Provence on the Syrian revolts of 1925 ("A Nationalist Rebellion without Nationalists? Popular Mobilizations in Mandatory Syria 1925-1926", 673-692), in Nadine Méouchy's study of the popular movement of North Syria ("Le mouvement des 'Isabat en Syrie du Nord à travers le témoignage du cheikh Youssef Saadoun 1919-1921", pp.649-671).

Reading this fourth part of the book, the absence of contributions from two important authors on the subject is glaring: the work of James Gelvin on popular mobilizations in Syria (at least quoted by Michael Provence), and Elizabeth Thompson's analysis of French colonial paternalism would have been a necessary perspective on the question. I do not know if the conferences "have succeeded in creating an entirely new field of what may one be called "Mandate Studies" (Rashid Khalidi, p. 695), but I am confident that the conference and the book raises many questions about the period of the Mandates, about this peculiar colonial system, and furthermore, about comparative procedure in history. As suggested by Khalidi in the conclusion, this project could be extremely pertinent if the comparison extended to other spaces, other types of colonial systems, other orders.

In a time where the violence of war and occupations are inscribing a new form of colonial investment of territories, mandatory studies could possibly be a place to compare different forms of occupation and colonial presence, and a focus on the way European powers did shape the Middle East. In this perspective, every academic or student or curious person in the field should hope that researchers and specialists as those

who participated in the book do not tend to empty the question of means of power, of forms of domination and imperialism.

The initiative that gave life to this book was launched well before today's "new era" forced us to see such questions as obvious. Reading it today leaves us frustrated, but gives us much material to continue. It also gives us the capacity to see how far we have been in the dissociation from the "tiers-mondiste" studies (at least in Europe with an aggressive ferocity against often communist anti-colonial struggles), tending to study colonial phenomenon without even pronouncing the term of colonialism or going back to the violence it represents so clearly.

Today's situation in the "Greater Middle East" and elsewhere, offering a new scheme on colonial situations could open new concrete fields in the study of this phenomenon. It would be welcomed to trace real comparative perspectives between the conception of society operated by the French Mandate in Lebanon, Palestine or Iraq, through, for example, the politics of minorities, as suggested by the contributions of Nelida Fuccaro ("Minorities and Ethnic mobilization: the Kurds in Northern Iraq and Syria", pp. 579-595) and Keith Watenpaugh ("Towards a new category of colonial theory: colonial cooperation and the Survivors' bargain - the case of the post-genocide Armenian community of Syria under French Mandate", pp. 598-622). Following the use of minority partition, one could listen to what knowledge is generated about Iraq with new keys of comprehension: the minority explanation of Arab societies, the will to try to make frontiers coherent with this idea of "ethnic" communities, the political management of these frontiers through a focus on "clans", "minorities", "communities", etc.

Going back to a more critical perspective on what is colonialism in terms of "social constructions" does not mean relieving the local elites of all their responsibilities in this construction: the colonial power knows how to use their ambitions and they know how to settle their influence on society, controlling the political system with their connections and networks, dominating cultural means and the press. The project of the book opens new directions for researchers, new perspectives of comparison. As outlined in many chapters, the immediate previous period of the ending Ottoman Empire has to be explored to understand how the Mandates were installed, but also how they were accepted by a part of the elite, in particular in Lebanon. Echoing with today's context, it underlines the necessity of a comparative perspective between the Mandates and other forms of colonialism, previous and subsequent to it.

This is probably why the same team of researchers is planning to organize a follow-up conference addressing the period after the Mandates next year, and tracing the evolutions of the different states, proposing a new extension on these same themes, extension in terms of chronology, but also in terms of exploration of the Arab world's contemporary history and historiography. Let us hope that this enterprise is a genuine attempt to extend other kind of comparative studies in the field, making it possible to have collective reflections on what could be interesting or even fundamental to compare to understand past and present in the Middle East.

Kais Firro
Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate
I. B. Taurus, London, 2003, pp. 274, ISBN 1-86064-857-6 (Hardback)

Reviewed by Paul Kingston[*]

Kais Firro's book on the history of the French Mandate in Lebanon is an examination of the disjuncture between nationalist thought and patterns of political

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development in Lebanon. To do so, he plots the development of what Sami Zubaida calls, borrowing from Bourdieu, 'the political field', a concept that is broader and more open-ended than that of the Western model of the nation-state. Despite the 'precarious' character and disputed nature of its modern state, for example, Lebanon has nonetheless witnessed the emergence of a functioning political arena complete with its own recurring political patterns and dynamics. By using the more open-ended concept of 'the political field', Firro can both write about the emergence of these particular patterns of political activity yet, at the same time, not imply that they resemble the more integrated patterns of nation-state formation in the West.

Indeed, most of Firro's book is taken up explaining the fragmented as opposed to integrated nature of Lebanon's polity, be it through an examination of social class formation (Chapter Three), the disparate and self-interested nature of the emerging political elite (Chapter Four), the contradictory nature of cross-community political alliances (Chapter Five), or the growing power and salience of communal as opposed to national institutions (Chapter Six). Hence, while Lebanon may have witnessed the emergence of a political field in the mandate period rooted in "a heightened consciousness of the national dimension of politics" (p. 170, Zubaida, 1989), the political dynamics of confessional competition and elite fragmentation that characterized that field did not provide a basis for stable integration at the national level.

Firro, however, has tried to go beyond simply writing a narrative account of the mandate period in Lebanese history. Indeed, this is what makes his book more interesting. In his account of how present narratives of Lebanese nationalism are influenced by past ones, Firro begins to move into the world of 'historical institutionalism', interpreting the mandate as a formative period where the more salient and lasting structural characteristics of the Lebanese 'political field' were established. It is a process that Firro calls "the entrenchment of the Lebanese system"

(p. 150), one which established "for better and for worse, the road along which Lebanon's society and polity have since traveled" (p. 98). In short, while Firro both titles and begins the book with a discussion of the competing trends of nationalist discourse under the mandate and beyond, this is ultimately a book about resilient colonial legacies. What follows is an analytic summary of Firro's main arguments, followed in the conclusion by comparison of Firro's book with two other recent ones on the mandate period in Lebanon.

The Establishment of the Lebanese 'Political Field'

The mandate period in Lebanon witnessed the development of many of the features of a unified political field at the national level. A flag, a constitution, the establishment of parliamentary institutions, the development of social and physical infrastructure such as ports and roads – all provided some of the basic prerequisites of a modern state.

This was joined by an increasingly active political life – focused on debates over such issues as the territorial borders of Lebanon, French economic policies of austerity in the wake of the depression, French interference in political life symbolized by the suspension of the Lebanese constitution in 1932, and Lebanon's relations with Syria sparked by the signing of the Franco-Syrian and Franco-Lebanese treaties of 1936. In response to these issues, one began to witness the emergence of an increasing if swiftly changing series of alliances across communal divides. These rapprochements between Maronite factions and Sunni Muslim 'nationalists', as Firro wrote, seemed to show "that Muslim as well as Christian elites could work together and find a formula for cooperation" (p. 207). Indeed, in his historiographic survey of writing on Lebanese politics (Chapter 2), Firro refers to the conclusions of Iliya Harik who argues that the mandate period fostered the emergence of a more unified and modern social and political elite, what he called *al-nukhba al-siyasiyya*, whose political outlook was

more realistic and pragmatic and whose education, business, and personal skills successfully competed with the 'patrician' pedigree of the traditional elites (p. 95).

Finally, Firro also critically examines the possibility that the mandate period witnessed the emergence of compromise positions on the hitherto incompatible nationalist goals of Lebanism, Arabism, and Syrianism, something that could provide this emerging national political field with ideological legitimacy. Certainly, this was the hope of those such as the wealthy and influential Roman Catholic merchant, Michel Chiha, whose ideas of creating "unity in diversity" through the adoption of both a modern parliamentary system based upon communal power-sharing and an open economy that could foster the emergence of a "merchant republic" captured the imagination of the French mandate authorities and became the underlying nation-building vision of the Lebanese Constitution of 1926. Indeed, as the 1930s progressed, Sunni Muslims did begin to consider the idea of a separate Lebanese entity, even if they still believed that it would eventually become part of a larger Arab nation; and this was paralleled by the increasing use of Arabist discourse by Maronite politicians such as Bishara al-Khuri, a dynamic which some referred to as "Lebanizing Muslims and Arabizing Christians" (p. 208). With the agreement to the National Pact of 1943, it appeared that this "meshing" of Arabist and Lebanist ideas had reached its successful culmination (p. 209).

Yet, there is a huge difference between the emergence of a political field with its own parameters and rules at the national level and the notion that that political field was evolving in an integrated manner as implied by the hopeful analysis of those such as Chiha and Harik. Firro, for example, implicitly rejects such teleological and, in the end, "invented" notions of Lebanon's history. Indeed, by delving into an historical analysis of the mandate period, Firro presents a dramatically different reality of what the Lebanese 'political field' became and what the National Pact

represented. Debates about Lebanon's national identity did not transcend the Lebanism, Arabism, and Syrianism divide according to Firro. Moreover, the source of that continuing chasm is found in the consolidation during the mandate period of what he calls "the Lebanese system", one characterised not by national integration but by institutionalized sectarianism and factionalism. It is to Firro's analysis of these two features of "the Lebanese political system" that we turn to now.

The Zu'ama and the Entrenchment of Factionalism in the Lebanese 'Political Field'

Chiha's vision of Lebanese nation-state formation was based upon an expectation that a politically dominant and cosmopolitan merchant and professional class would develop. Certainly, social and economic developments under the mandate period saw "shifts in elite formation" (p. 91), much of which was brought about by the expansion of the mandate state itself that sparked the growth of an administrative and profession strata. Firro, however, presents a more complex and hybrid interpretation of the effects of the mandate period on social class formation and elite political practice, writing of "the preservation of traditional patterns within modern socio-economic structures" and of "the coalescence of the 'old' and the 'new'" (p. 98).

Unable in the early 1920s to find willing collaborators among the Sunni urban elites, French mandate policy deliberately worked to consolidate more traditional and rural based social forces as an alternative. They devised an electoral system based upon regional rather than national constituencies that served to privilege candidates and electoral alliances of a local tribal/clan nature. When combined with French readiness to regularly interfere and 'manage' electoral results, one had a recipe that guaranteed the consolidation of the traditional rural tribal and clan elite. Moreover, the French mandatory authorities also promoted land tenure and agricultural development policies that served to reward

these traditional rural social forces further. The result was a consolidation of large latifundias in the 'Akkar, the Biqa' and South Lebanon.

Perhaps the most profound effect on social transformation, however, was brought about by the emergence of the mandate state and its expanding administrative apparatus. As a way of enhancing their traditional status, rural social elites took advantage of the resources of the state in their delivery of patronage to local areas, transforming the nature of patron-client relations into something "more bureaucratic than feudal" (p. 96). Indeed, the emergence of "this new form of patrimonialism" (p. 98) was to become an enduring pattern amongst rural and urban elites alike, eventually pulling Sunni urban notables into the 'political field' as a way of preserving their local *zu'ama* status. In short, rather than promoting the emergence of modern social forces as envisioned by Chiha, Firro concludes that French mandate policies, while transformative, had the far less positive yet lasting effect on the emergent Lebanese political field of strengthening the "oligarchic and dynastic characteristics of the Lebanese elite" (p. 97).

The effects of this neo-patrimonial transformation in patron-client relations were to entrench hierarchically-organized families as fundamental, and factional, units in Lebanese society and politics. While searching for new forms of legitimacy spewed up by modern political discourse on communal or national rights, the *zu'ama*'s main concern was to maintain their local political advantage over rival families. The result was often a high degree of fluidity and volatility in broader political platforms and discourse, especially with respect to the composition of lists during elections. Firro remarks that during the mandate period, "the alliances that leaders formed were almost exclusively motivated by the chances that their list would give them to become elected" (p. 208). Even the National Pact, often interpreted within a 'nationalist' framework, is described by Firro as only coming about "thanks to the confessional and factional dimension of the game played

out….between the elites of Lebanon's different communities among themselves and between them and the Mandatory powers" (p. 209). Hence, fuelled by the patronage provided by the French mandate state and protected by an electoral system that privileged the local over the national, *zu'ama* politics together with its factional consequences became an institutionally embedded feature of the emerging modern Lebanese 'political field'.

Mandate Policy and the Ethnicization of the Lebanese 'Political Field'

The second structural consequence of the French mandate period was the entrenchment of confessional/sectarian politics. Rather than merely being a recognition of the existing communal dimensions of society and politics, Firro stresses the instrumentalist nature of this entrenchment, arguing that French mandate policies forced communities to "redirect" their ways of organization, mobilization, agitation, and struggle in communal directions and in ways that had "a clear hand in pre-empting attempts at nation-building" (p. 151-52).

This communal entrenchment was facilitated in several ways. First, French mandate authorities followed classic policies of divide and rule, playing the leaders of one community off against another and selectively co-opting certain communal elites. Firro documents well, for example, the successful targeting of the traditional Shi'a community leaders by the French in the 1920s as a way of preventing the emergence of a common political front with Sunni Muslim leaders, approaches that these leaders proved only too willing to accept as a way of taking advantage of the new opportunities provided by the imposition of the French mandate (p. 160). Second, the French mandate authorities also saw advantage in promoting the institutional separation of the various communities. In the 1926, for example, the French created separate Shi'a councils and courts (the Supreme Jafari Court), all of which not only contributed to the growth of Shi'a

"particularism" (p. 161), it also fuelled and energized factionalism within the Shi'a community over the right to represent and defend its interests. In 1936, the French took this policy further by a series of decrees that gave separate legal status to Lebanon's religious entities, both with respect to themselves as well as with respect to their relationship to the Lebanese state.

The cumulative and crucial effect of the French policy was the further institutionalization of the communal dimension of Lebanese social and political life and the rise in use of the discourse of 'communal rights' and 'communal equality'. Indeed, Firro at one point refers to it "as the only true basis of legitimacy" (p. 115) and subsequently argues that "although they continued to adhere to a 'nationalist' discourse, the elites almost always acted and reacted as 'representatives' of their respective communities. In this sense their 'nationalist' discourse and ideology served as a cloak for their 'confessionalism', forming the only way in which elites could continue to represent the masses of their respective communities" (p. 149). In short, communal legitimacy increasingly proved to be vital in the factional battles for hegemony within communities. In a description that could be more universally applied to all communal elites, Firro notes how the more recalcitrant Sunni political leaders quickly took "to the political game" after 1936 (the year that the Franco-Syrian and Franco- Lebanese treaties were signed), using the pretext of defending their community's rights and interests "in order to promote advantages for themselves, their clans and their clients" (p. 158). Indeed, the signing of these two treaties in 1936 seems to have been a watershed in Lebanese history, leading to what some at the time referred to as "la vague de confessionalisme" (p. 175), characterized by a heightened competition for a fair distribution of political and administrative posts as well as a noticeable surge in the creation of confessionally-based social and political institutions, the most significant being the two paramilitary organizations within the Maronite and Sunni communities respectively, *al-Kata'ib* and *al-Najada*.

Conclusion

Firro's book is the third to come out on the history of the mandate period in Lebanon in recent years - the other two being Zamir's *Lebanon's Quest: The Road to Statehood 1926-39* (1997) and Thompson's *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (2000) - and it might be useful to conclude by comparing the contributions of each.

Firro's book is a more interpretative and less comprehensive account of the French mandate period than that of Zamir but both tend to reach many of the same conclusions about the weak nature of the emerging Lebanese state, fractured as it is by the confessional and factional nature of elite activity, the latter called 'political feudalism' by Zamir. Indeed, like Firro, Zamir sees factionalism as underlying all national and sectarian conflict in the country. Hence, Lebanon is not only a 'corporation of communities'; it is also a 'corporation of beys' (p. 245). However, whereas Firro focuses on the consequences of these developments for the emergence of a unified Lebanese 'nation-state', Zamir's focus is more on the degree to which mandate state-building processes militated against the emergence of a Lebanese 'civil society' (p. 241, Zamir). Whereas Firro's lament is the lack of a unified sentiment of nationalism, Zamir's is the absence of the true application of liberalism.

Thompson's book remains the most interesting and innovative of the three and one of the principle reasons for this is the more nuanced picture of the effects of French colonial policy that emerges. Certainly, it is clear in all three accounts that the French structured politics in such a way that not only served their geo-strategic interests in preserving stability and solvency, it also left lasting structural legacies on the nature of the Lebanese state. Thompson points to the reinvigorated power of what she calls 'mediating elites', be they rural patrons, urban

bosses, or religious patriarchs (who were chosen by the French as their principal collaborators), as being the root consequence of mandate policies, one that put in place "a paternalistic pact that promoted a fundamental inequality of rights", especially for women (p. 56).

Yet, while all these authors provide a powerful argument about the obstacles to social and political progress in Lebanon, Thompson moves past this negative preoccupation to ask interesting questions about the nature of the "civic order" that remained, one that embodied what she termed a "rights-privilege tension" (p. 7). Rather than implicitly writing off the significance, if even possibility, of civic-minded politics, Thompson recognized the ambiguous legacies of French policy in Lebanon (and of Ottoman policy before it), ones that not only served to entrench sectarian and family interests but also ones that left a constitutional tradition of republican rights. While the French rarely chose to use their political power to enforce these republican rights in ways that could restructure the nature of the emerging Lebanese 'political field', symbolically evidenced by their backing away from an attempt to legislate the right to an optional of civil marriage in 1938, their very existence nonetheless provided resources, if only discursive ones, for those (such as the subaltern groups that Thompson investigates) who wished to restructure the "civic order" away from its confessional and factional tendencies. Given the entrenchment of these rights in the Lebanese Constitution, colonial, post-colonial and post-Ta'if, this tradition must also be counted as a legacy, albeit a much weaker one, of the French mandate in Lebanon.

This also raises questions about "stickiness" of colonial legacies. Zubaida, for example, is very cautious about discussions of "path dependencies", preferring to emphasize historical specificity over historical essentialism (p. 130, 1989). Likewise, in their seminal volume on historical institutionalism, Thelen and Steinmo argue that while "institutions

constrain and refract politics, they are never the sole 'cause' of outcomes" (p. 3, 1992); they do not represent "permanent, immutable characteristics of a political system" (p. 7). At a minimum, as suggested by the work of Thompson on the "civic order", institutional legacies of the mandate period in Lebanon may be numerous and contradictory. Hence, while Firro has offered an interesting and well-researched book, his account of "the Lebanese system" would have benefited from a more significant recognition of the contradictions of 'the political field' that emerged and, hence that despite the entrenched and conflictual nature of the discourses on Lebanese political identity, the possibility nonetheless exists that these divides could be transcended.

Sarah Abrevaya Stein
Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires.
Indiana University Press (Bloomington, Indiana, 2004)

Reviewed by David Biale[*]

As a diasporic people spread over several continents, the Jews are a difficult historical subject. Jewish historians, especially in the modern period, typically limit themselves to one national context and comparative studies are rare. But there is a great deal to be gained by examining parallel processes in more than one context both in terms of how Jewish communities differ from another and what they have in common.

Sarah Abrevaya Stein's wonderful study of the Yiddish and Ladino Press of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries is one of very few that meets this challenge. And it is no mean feat to do so. Any historian of the Jews must know both the relevant Jewish languages and the language

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and historical background of the majority society. Comparing two Jewish communities doubles the task. But Stein demonstrates just such a command of languages and sources: she appears equally knowledgeable in Yiddish and Ladino, Russian and French (as well as some Turkish). Moreover, she has a clear understanding of the complex and different processes of Jewish modernization in Imperial Russia and in the Ottoman Empire, as well as of the differences between Ashkenazi and Sephardi culture. She argues, for example, that embourgeoisement in Russia meant absorption into Russian culture, while in the Ottoman Empire, it meant identification with European – generally, French – mores. But she is equally clear about the similarities between these two communities: both minorities in multi-ethnic empires confronted forces of modernization whose origins were, at least initially, external. This is, then, a study of how two Jewish communities negotiated their entry into the modern world.

Stein has chosen two newspapers, *Der fraynd* in Russia and *El tiempo* in Turkey, as the focus of her book, two windows into the tastes, aspirations and anxieties of both their producers and their readers. *Der fraynd* only appeared for ten years (1903-1913). Although it had some predecessors and many successors, it was a key transitional publication in Yiddish, winning the first mass audience for a newspaper in that language and paving the way for the vibrant Yiddish culture of interwar Eastern Europe. *El tiempo* had a much longer life (1872-1930); it too had some predecessors, but, significantly, it had no important successors since its career marked the rise and decline of modern Ladino journalism (a decline that paralleled the decline of Ladino culture generally). In its heyday, though, one out of every two Ladino speakers may have subscribed to the paper.

Ideologically, the papers differed significantly. *Dar fraynd* started its career espousing a moderate form of Zionism, a position that belies the conventional assumption that Yiddishists exclusively favored the territorialism of the Jewish socialist Bund. During the 1905 revolution and the pogroms that accompanied it, the newspaper shifted to a more radical support for Russian revolutionary politics, mirroring a similar development among many Russian Jews. *El tiempo* was much more "assimilationist" throughout its history, but Stein is careful to avoid this loaded word. Instead, she points out the irony of the paper's advocacy of French culture in a Jewish language. While opposing Zionism, *El tiempo* hardly advocated the disappearance of its readers. Rather, the adoption of a French orientation by Ottoman Sephardic Jews became itself a form of Jewish identity.

Stein advances a general argument about modern Jewish identity that she applies to the Ottoman context. She rejects the terms "assimilation" and "acculturation" which seem to connote a passive process. Instead, she shows how newspapers like *Der fraynd* and *El tiempo* purposefully amalgamated "the poles of local custom, the emerging norms of national body politics and traditional Jewish practice and ritual." In the Ottoman context, this "triangulation" was complicated by "intra-Jewish cultural imperialism" in the form of a French Jewish *mission civilisatrice*. The identity that emerged was not a hybrid of all these influences, but a transformation of them into something "self-consciously 'Jewish,' an essentialist category that held tremendous meaning" since it served to differentiate Jews from their Muslim and Christian neighbors. This is a powerful revision of the postcolonial theory of hybridity in line with other recent scholarship that grants much greater agency to colonial subjects in the formation of their own identities.

In the most interesting portions of the book, Stein examines this process of modernization as the two newspapers synthesized new identities for their readers out of the multiple cultures in which they lived. She charts the use of political cartoons by *Der fraynd*, a new journalistic form that it took over from the Russian press, but infused with Jewish themes. In the wake of the pogroms of 1905-06, cartoons gave way to

photographs of the dead, a new aesthetic in what was to become a culture of modern martyrdom. By the interwar period, the pogrom became the dominant symbol of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, a symbol that eerily prefigured the Holocaust.

In the parallel chapter in *El tiempo*, Stein takes up the "science of healthy living," the attempt by the newspaper to instruct its readers in modern mores. Here, the female reader played a particularly important role since *El tiempo* saw women as the motor of cultural change, a reversal of the role assigned to them as guardians of tradition in Western and Central Europe. French customs were to replace the Ottoman: butter instead of oil, meat instead of fish. But some of this advice involved paradoxes. For example, roses and rose water were signs of the backward Orient, but they could also, in a French context, be signs of cultivation. Indeed, *El tiempo* often took the point of view of the French, viewing the Orient – its own locale and that of its readers – as backwards and exotic. These were Jews who orientalized themselves! Yet, the outsider position of the modern Ottoman Jew also created a sense of nostalgia for earlier times.

Stein juxtaposes this nostalgia, which grew as the culture of Ladino declined, with the much harsher memory of pogroms that characterized Jewish culture in Eastern Europe. To be sure, a similar culture of nostalgia did prevail in Eastern Europe, long before the American *Life is With People*, a nostalgia that gave rise to projects to recuperate the Jews' vanishing folklore. And, there were Jews in the Ottoman Empire, particularly in North Africa, whose memories of life among the Arabs were hardly irenic. But Stein is unquestionably correct in suggesting that the pogrom occupied a unique place in Eastern European Jewish memory.

In the last two chapters of the book, Stein examines the advertisements published in the two papers. These turn out to be fascinating sources that she handles quite deftly. Many of the ads in the Yiddish paper suggest an attempt to foster an intra-Jewish economy for modern goods, while in the Ladino, the emphasis appears to be more on commerce with Western Europe, an emphasis in line with the cultural importance of France. Fashion and health were much more important in *El tiempo* than in *Der fraynd*. Changes in Facial hair and hatwear (especially the fez) for men and dresses and headwear for women in these ads chronicle the shift towards Western mores. Anxieties about digestion and other bodily functions found expression in advertisements for "modern" medicines (including a mysterious pink pill that seems to have cured everything). Stein believes that, in general, the Ottoman Jews were much more anxious about their cultural identities than were the Russian, at least as demonstrated by what she finds in the newspapers. This is certainly a claim worthy of further exploration.

While Stein is very resourceful in extracting cultural information from her newspapers, she occasionally overreaches in her interpretations. Whether the ads for insurance in *El tiempo* suggest a generalized insecurity as the Ottoman Jews lost their share of certain sectors of the economy may be a stretch. And, whether ads in *Der fraynd* for watches demonstrate an increasing sensitivity towards time ushered in by the railroads is equally questionable. It is also hard to believe that microscopic images of snowflakes and telescopic images of the moon "had implications for the way readers understood human as well as natural landscapes" by serving "as a reminder that colonial subjects differed in appearance from Frenchmen…" Finally, I wonder whether the Russian Jews were as insular as the Ottoman Jews were oriented to France. Just as the Russian nobility and bourgeoisie was caught up in a struggle between Slavophilism and Westernism, so the Jews of Eastern Europe looked at once to the West and to their own traditions as they engaged modernity. But these are all minor quibbles with a book well-worth engaging for both its fascinating facts and its stimulating interpretations.

By carefully dissecting the articles and advertisements in these newspapers, Stein successfully shows that the kind of distinctions that most historians accept reflexively about modernizing Jewish societies need to be rethought. For example, although *Der fraynd* was a secular paper and played a key role in the development of secular Jewish culture in Eastern Europe, its readership was quite mixed and, consequently, its advertisements often featured religious objects and books. To quote Stein: "By targeting an enormous diversity of readers and by appealing to a wide range of (at least imagined) needs, advertisements crossed and, in some sense, undermined the boundaries that are assumed to be central to modern Jewish culture: the boundaries that divide popular from elite; secular from religious; political from apolitical; Jewish from non-Jewish; vernacular language from hegemonic, majority, or liturgical ones." The process of Jewish modernization in both the Russian and Ottoman Empires turns out to have been more complex and "muddy" than the usual dichotomies suggest, a conclusion that no doubt applies to modernization writ large.

Isa Blumi
Rethinking the Late Ottoman Empire: A Comparative Social and Political History of Albania and Yemen, 1878-1918
Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2003. 211 Pages + Bibliography. (Paperback)

Reviewed by Ryan Gingeras[*]

Middle Eastern studies has evolved with the political and geo-strategic imperatives of the last century. During the advent of the First World War, historians, journalists and travelers spoke of the "Near East", a region defined by the British Foreign office as encompassing the Ottoman Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Cold War redefined historical research through the birth of "Eastern Europe", "Soviet" and "Middle Eastern" studies. The coming of the so-called "War on Terror" has seemingly

heralded new conditions placed upon the study of southwest Asia, seeking instead to trace the origins of "asymmetrical threats" linked to Islam or terrorism. Isa Blumi's recent work, *Rethinking the Ottoman Empire*, transcends these transient, and often misleading, modifiers consigned to geography, politics and history. In series of essays devoted to the evolution of Ottoman Yemen and Albania during the 19th century, Blumi argues specifically for a more integrative notion of these former Ottoman lands. He convincingly challenges the traditional constructions of the respective historiographies of these regions, drawing a great deal from a diverse array of comparative studies on ethnicity, empire and modernity.

This historical narrative of Ottoman studies had conventionally argued that both Albania and Yemen were isolated backwaters of the imperial Ottoman state. This interpretation has been translated recently into numerous non-academic surveys of the post-Ottoman order in these respective lands. As a result, these portrayals of Albanians and Yemeni have sought to find the historical roots for these "tribal," "backward" and "archaic" peoples. Blumi endeavors to confront both of these themes in his work. According to Blumi, we must first rethink the imperial priorities and vision of the Ottoman state, in order to unmask the relationship between these two poles and the imperial center. During the 19th century, a period during which Istanbul felt itself on the defensive, Ottoman administrators recognized Albania and Yemen as needed sites for imperial reform. Under the aegis of the Hamidian and Young Turk reform movements, imperial officials attempted to regularize and centralize the political, economic and social institutions of these two districts, in the hopes that both would become fully integrated into a more homogenized and modernized state. Isa Blumi elucidates this effort particularly well through his discussion of the expanding Ottoman education system, a particularly favored vehicle of the Ottoman *mission civilice*, in the *vilayet*s of Jannina and Manastir (two provinces with large Albanian populations).In the case of Yemen, Blumi shows a separate, yet parallel, Ottoman attempt at imposing its own version of modernity through its military actions at the turn of the 20th

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century. Through its negotiation of the provincial politics of both Yemen and Albania, the Ottomans betray an inherent misunderstanding of the role of local notables and the peoples they represent. Blumi perceptively argues that the Ottomans, like contemporary observers, were locked into a monolithic perception of both Albanian and Yemeni society, seeing immutable "tribes" and "ethnicities" as the fundamental and deciding agent in local politics.

It is in looking at the flipside of these policies of the Ottoman Empire that Isa Blumi makes his most valuable contribution to Ottoman historiography. In each of his studies, Blumi presents a complex picture of resistance and identity among local populations in both Yemeni and Albania. He is particularly effective in gauging both the actions and the intentions of both imperial and local actors in his treatment of both Kosova and the Malësore, the northern highlands forming the Ottoman border with Montenegro. Through the use of a variety of archival sources, he concludes that the Albanians of the Malësore and Kosova inhabited an environment where social and political boundaries were much softer, allowing locals to move across linguistic, sectarian and provincial lines with greater ease (it is this regard that Isa Blumi is particularly wary of the use of term 'tribe', a term, he argues, is more often used to deny local agency rather than to explain it). The potential for intercommunal violence emerges only when the ability of local actors to traverse these boundaries is hindered, forcing individuals and communities to adhere to an identity or culture imposed upon them by the state. This observation of the relationship between local actors and imperial ideology, Blumi argues, is not one restricted to the Ottoman Empire, but can be found in other corners of imperial or colonial studies (especially within South Asia and Latin America).

The activism of Isa Blumi's work does not confine itself to the historiography of the Ottoman past. Rather he pointedly entreats us to apply such lessons in approaching contemporary issues. In drawing comparisons between such institutions as international aid organizations and the academic publishing

establishments, Blumi warns the reader of the continued use of imperial methods of categorization and negotiation in dealing with provincial crises. This is a point well taken. However, Isa Blumi's work, in its complexity and attention to detail, raises an even more fundamental issue: how do the lessons drawn by scholar translate into the application of reasonable foreign policy or communal understanding? While not fault of the author, this question nonetheless remains unanswered.

Samir Kassir
Histoire de Beyrouth
Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2003

Reviewed by Jens Hanssen [*]

Since the end of the Lebanese civil war, Beirut has received an avalanche of articles in serious European and American newspaper columns, glossy travel magazines and television reports which all celebrate the revived joie de vivre in this city of death.clxxv Beirut is narrated as a very trendy Phoenix from the Flames! The glittering downtown area rebuilt in less than ten years, is oozing urban confidence and is portrayed as somehow emblematic of a general positive mood swing, a an inviting, juvenile insouciance in Lebanon.

Of course this is a packaged commodity. On the one hand, much of this hype is based on the economic bubble billionaire and Prime Minister Rafiq al-Harriri blew up. On the other hand it was intellectually sustained by historical myths about Beirut's blessed geographic position inbetween worlds and the city's long-standing ability to overcome adversity, natural or self-inflicted. The current renaissance of Beirut invites comparisons and parallels in its long history, a search for previous epochs of resurrection, not least because for many the city stands for the

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triumphs of Arab modernity but also for its tragedies of self-destruction.

The Beiruti journalist-cum-historian Samir Kassir has set himself the unprecedented task to offer a deep historical perspective on Beirut, and what he has come up with in his monumental *Histoire de Beyrouth* is a marvelous synthesis of everything we always knew about Beirut's long history but never had available between the two covers of a single book. In over 700 pages, Samir Kassir offers a tour de force chronology of Beirut from the first time Beirut went on historical record on the famous Tell al-Amarna tablets of the 14th century BC to the beginning of the 21. century. In doing so, the author ably brings together for the first time the results of many recent studies on isolated periods of Beirut's history but also imports many of the gaps and some inconsistencies in the existing scholarship. Any engagement in Kassir's book here is therefore a more fundamental assessment of the current state of affairs on Beirut research.

The Question of Urban Continuity

In antiquity, Egyptians, Hittites and – following Alexander the Great's conquest of Syria – Satrap rivalries turned Beirut into contested territory while the rich historical record attests the town's hellenization. In 64 BC Beirut fell to Pompei's Roman legions and by the fourth century A.D. Beirut was "incontestably a Christian city" (p. 64), designated as one of the (many) places where St. George slain the dragon. It prided itself with a renowned Law School which connected the city not only to the intellectual networks of late Antiquity's great cities, Constantinople and Alexandria but also to the Justinian Code which was compiled by its scholars in 538 and is considered the foundation of civil law in Europe.

Kassir shows us how, time and again, Beirut found itself on the edge of the volatile tectonic plates of religions and sub-civilizations: Roman versus Byzantine Christianity, Sunni and Shia empires, Crusader and Mamluk states, Mongol incursions, Ottoman paramountcy and Druze vassalship. Given the plethora of rulers and empires which Beirut belonged to over the enormous time span from 14th c. BC to 18th AD, what has kept this city together, what constitutes its historical continuity as a city (p.35)? How can we speak of one Beirut today, claim its many epochs – in literature, art and architectural style – as part of a single heritage? Kassir asks, is there "linearity" between periods of openness and tolerance and periods of violence and barbarity? With such talent and such promise destroyed on the altar of sectarianism, how can the historian write the epic story of Beirut other than as tragedy?

1. Cumulative History

The rupture between one regime and its successor, between one epoch and the next was never total. Even after the most devastating blow to Beirut's urban continuity in the 6th century AD when, just as Beirut was making a mark on the cultural life of Byzantine civilization, multiple earthquakes punished every heroic effort of reconstruction with new, more violent destruction in 551, 554 and 560AD.

Beirut was conquered 19 years after Muhammad left Mecca but it was not until the growing fame of another Beirut-based school of law around Imam `Abd al-Rahman bin `Amr al-Uza`i and his son Muhammad in the second century Hijri that the town made its mark on "the mental geography of Muslims" (p. 73).

The 171 years crusaders' stay in Beirut was short-lived in the grand scheme of things as Mamluk dynasties filled the vacuum after the ousting of the crusaders. Two Mongol invasions and innumerable epidemics and famines later, Syria in general and Beirut in particular were unstable places and a dangerous trade destination. The Ottoman conquest in 1517 brought peace and prosperity came to provincial towns and port-cities of the Ottoman Empire as transit routes became safer and maritime trade resumed. Gradually, local dynasties emerged within a

system of government that continued to remain fiscal, not territorial in nature.

In this context, Samir Kassir introduces the central figure of Lebanese historiography Fakhr al-Din al-Ma``ani not as the founder of modern Lebanon as he is seen still on account of merging Mount Lebanon and coastal Beirut, but as an efficient landholding bureaucrat whose political authority reached so far inland – way beyond the Orontes and Beqa`a valleys that it threatened Damascus' authority. Like so often in Beirut's and Lebanon's history, the quest for autonomy meant not a challenge of Ottoman rule but rivalry with regional powers.

Up to this point then, the temporal and territorial ruptures in Beirut's political fortunes were neither predictable, nor absolute nor irreversible. What guarantees cities' stability and continuity is urban myth.

2. Myths and Identity

Rome, Athens and Baghdad are famous cities that suffered enormous ruptures and long periods of lifelessness. From the sacking of Rome in 476AD to the Renaissance, its barely 20.000 inhabitants experienced a thousand lackluster years in the shadows of the monuments of past glory. In the 16th century the popes began to tear these monuments down to make room for history's greatest urban reconstruction … until Haussmann's Paris, that is. It may be ironic – though certainly not unique given Solidere's manners – that this renaissance destroyed most of the remaining memorabilia of the very period it set out to 'revive.' The point is that the will to instrumentalize the past created historical linkages and the myth of urban continuity.

In Athens that other great city of Antiquity, this act of instrumentalizing the past took place in the name of nation-building. For centuries, Athens had been an insignificant outback town at the foot of vast archaeological ruins – constant reminders that history had passed on. After a cathartic uprising against the Ottomans in the 1820s, the Concert of Europe imposed a set of new rulers – an odd string of Bavarian kings and the new state's capital was moved from Nauplion to Athens. Grand Hellenistic construction schemes projected urban continuity and a distinct identity as the cradle of European civilization while historical processes inbetween downplayed as irrelevant to the national project.

Finally, as every American pupil knows, Iraq is considered the cradle of urban civilization – an honour which recently turned into a burden when exiled Iraqis in Washington appealed to president Bush's elementary wisdom to attack their country. However, unbeknownst to Americans whose textbooks duly traced the unstoppable westward march of civilization, Abbasid Baghdad became the pinnacle of Islamic high culture. Although Baghdad was completely ransacked by Mongol armies in 1258 subsequent Mamluk and Ottoman rulers reinvested heavily in its urban fabric and thus ensured Baghdad's urban continuity long after Western production of knowledge had abandoned Iraq.

The examples of Rome, Athens and Baghdad show that how ever abrupt cities change or how ever devastating a disaster strikes, the gel that keeps cities coherent historical entities are myths of urban continuity and past glory. There is nothing objectionable about urban myths. Myths are not malicious lies or silly mistakes. Kassir recognizes that the desire to instill a unique identity and loyalty to a place dictates the meaning and relevance of a given historical event. This takes place well after the fact, actually, mostly after historical contiguity has been erased. To study urban myths historically, then, is to trace how people identify with the places they live in how they make sense of it.

One can either reject one myth over another and claim mutually exclusive rights to the city or deconstruct urban myths entirely as the fabrication of the ruling elites to perpetuate their grip on power. Or, as Kassir does so well, one can contextualize urban myths, embed them in their specific historical

process and allow history's cumulative effect free reign. This way, Kassir and other postwar intellectuals allow Beirut to possess a deeply-rooted, authentic identity distinct from both other Arab cities and from Mount Lebanon without taking recourse to cultural exclusivism. This mnemonic strategy presents a place where all the diverse elements of society see themselves reflected in the past. This history heals and is tolerant of the Other.

3. The West: The only engine of modern history?

But if the past serves to give Beirut a stable and authentic essence, what accounts for its history of dynamic transformation in the nineteenth century? Here a methodological problem occurs in Kassir's *Histoire de Beyrouth* that is common in scholarship on identity of places that are deemed of the west but not in it. While the first part of the book ascribed "Beyrouth avant Beyrouth" a connective and inclusive identity-endowing quality and function, subsequent parts ascribed modern Beirut the ability and compulsion to imitate and draw in the transformative powers of the West and modernity itself. Whether it be "Entre Rome et Boston" (chapter 8), as "La ville française," (chapter 12), "petit Paris" (chapter 13), or, of course, the cliché of "La Suisse de l'Orient" (chapter 15), Beirut is declared "a space of Mimetism" (p. 247) where the things copied from the west are material proof of progress and a conscious stepping-out of centuries of unproductive identity accumulation.

If we want to move beyond repeating such clichés of collective memory, we need to find new perspectives and new sources of history – forgotten texts or new archival evidence –that subvert the identitarian master narrative of the history of Beirut. It is particularly urgent because historical documents are hard to get by in Beirut, in part because of wartime destructions, in part because archives are jealously guarded by community guardians lest something untoward about their community is revealed.

In Kassir's book and in every study he draws upon, the curtains of Beirut's modern drama open only in the 1830s, when the

Egyptian occupation opened up the Eastern Mediterranean to European capitalism, in particular the silk trade, made Beirut the port-city of Damascus and people started to adopt "western customs". It is certainly true that foreign consulates and companies began to settle in Beirut from this period onwards. As Leila Fawaz's important study has shown, at mid-century, Beirut was a place where foreigners dominated the economic and political sphere.clxxvi The massive influx of Christian refugees into Beirut after the civil war of 1860 – over 10.000 according to Kassir (p. 275) – brought in European relief workers and more missionaries.

However, it has been overlooked that the devastating war which left an estimated 12,000 Ottoman subjects dead, also ushered in a deep crisis for the imperial government in Istanbul and pushed it to accelerate provincial and municipal reforms. And this they did with considerable success. Thus, by 1871, the British consul cabled to his superior in Istanbul that "the days when Governor Generals trembled before Consular Dragomans had passed - never it is hoped, to return … no Governor General would submit to the subserviency of a Consul which was common twenty years ago."clxxvii

Zuqaq al-Blat; Cradle of Arab Modernity

After 1860, social relations were caught up in what Kassir calls a "cold war of the communities." It was "the fruit of minority militarism" (p. 278-80) and exacerbated by the cult of the *qabaday* (p. 280-284). Meanwhile well-to-do Beirut was concentrated a world apart in the beautiful east Beirut quarter of Gemayzeh. Here the Sursuqs, Bustrus and the Trads built giant palaces and generally upheld the virtues of liberalism in trade and leisure.

Christian Gemayze continues to epitomize our view of historical Beirut thanks to the forty years of preservation activism by Lady Cochraine. However, the constant search for urban continuity, in particular the search for physical traces of it, denies that the history of Gemayze does not represent all of

nineteenth-century Beirut and that its wealthy inhabitants took little part in non-economic aspects of modern Arabic literary production other than fund it occasionally. Any serious examination of the urban geography of the *nahda al-`arabiyya* reveals that not Gemayze but Zuqaq al-Blat – little-known and much-destroyed during the civil war of 1975 – was the centre of modern Arab literature, culture and education in the nineteenth century.

It was here that the Yazijis developed Modern Standard Arabic as we know it, taught and wrote about Ottoman, Arab and Syrian patriotism. Butrus and Salim Bustani pondered the centrality of their country in the global economy as well as the geographical division of labour between 'Bab' Beirut and 'Batn' Syria (which for them included Mt. Lebanon) in the 1880s.clxxviii `Abd al-Qadir al-Qabbani and Khalil Sarkis, the publishers of the two main newspapers, *Thamarat al-Funun* and *Lisan al-Hal*, lived here. Al-Imam Shaykh Muhammad `Abduh found asylum among the literati of Zuqaq al-Blat when he was exiled by Lord Cromer in 1882.

It was here that the Maqasid was founded, and where the Wataniyya, Sultaniyya, `Uthmnaniyys and Patrakiya Schools were located, four of the most prestigious secondary schools in Bilad al-Sham. Even the Syrian Protestant College was located here in its first four years of operation before it moved to the barren lands of Ras Bayrut in 1870.clxxix When Kassir talks about the emblematic openness, cosmopolitanism and intellectual fervor of nineteenth-century Beirut, they mean confessionally mixed Zuqaq al-Blat but credit Christian Gemayze.

During the French Mandate period, Lebanese nationalists realized that they needed Arab nationalism to get rid of the French but needed the French connection to maintain autonomy vis à vis a Syrian or Arab entity. In the light of the above, it is not surprising, then, that another long-term resident of Zuqaq al-Blat, Michel Chiha, should base the most accepted version of Lebanese nationalism on the notion that historically Lebanon has been an open Mediterranean society rather than a closed mountainous one or an undifferentiated Arab one.

The Chimera of Mimetism

From the chapters on the Mandate period onwards (p. 300-494), Kassir is most interested in national politics and tourism as a historical force of cultural change. Despite interesting enumerations of intellectual circles, avantgarde publications and political parties during the 1930s, Beirut's apparent imitation of Paris is the driving force of urban history behind which all else recedes into the background. "Parisianism" – a sub-theme of westernization and apparently a Beirut-specific form of 'mimetism' – is the process of cultural diffusion by which all of Beirut imitates some Parisian way of life. Thus Beirut assimilates into a pre-existing Western modernity which itself is apparently unaffected by its encounter with the East.

All of this was made possible by "the arrival of technical civilization" in Beirut. According to Kassir, this brought about individualism and the emancipation of the self from deep traditions. The implications of this logic are, of course, both highly problematic and paradoxical because in Kassir's story Beirutis became free-thinking citizens by copying the West!

In this lengthy middle part in particular, Kassir's valuable points about Beirut's recurrent contributions to Arab modernity were overshadowed by pages and pages on cinemas, bikinis, fast cars, party zones and other frivolities of westernization. The more one reads on, one cannot help but think that this is not actually a study of urban history! Beirut seems incidental to national, regional and international politics, in particular where there are scholarly gaps on Beirut – most glaringly its significant municipal history. Thus there is never any real sense how Beirut worked as a city, how it was financed or taxed. Towards the end Kassir's book veers off into a consumers' guide for tourists who

like to relive the roaring sixties and who share with his generation the paradoxical idea that tourists brought cosmopolitanism to Beirut (p. 363-9).

A pladoyer for Municipal history

Kassir's book largely ignores the crucial history of Beirut's municipality. This gap is understandable because no academic research on this important aspect of modern Beirut had been available to the author. But Kassir dismisses the Beirut municipality as a powerless institution and bases this claim on the myth that Beirut was modeled on Paris which also famously lacked municipal authority for the longest time (p. 499). To take a gap in the extant literature as a lack in Beirut's history is a grave error. To argue this point through a weak analogy with Paris only makes it worse.

The flipside of Beirut's alleged Parisianization is Lebanonization (p. 402). It is true that the post-1860 the refugees from Damascus and Mount Lebanon have contributed to an atmosphere of fear and loathing in Beirut where sectarian identity – to paraphrase Samir Khalaf – became both emblem and armor. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that unlike the Mutasarrifiyya of Mt. Lebanon, Beirut's main institution of government, the municipal council, was not institutionalized into confessional quotas (what is referred to in Lebanon as the "*sitta sitta mukarrar*" logic) until the French Mandate period.

A chart of the composition of first one hundred popularly elected municipal councilors between 1868 and 1908 demonstrates how widely the religious affiliations of its twelve members oscillated. Generally, elections which were held every two years for six councilors were based on a combination of residential and confessional factors. Two things stand out from the chart: first, although Sunni, Greek Orthodox and Maronite representation was strongest throughout, the ratio of the communities was not predetermined and fluctuated greatly. Second, unlike municipal councils in Istanbul

and Alexandria, after 1877 foreigners were barred from municipal elections in Beirut.

It is impossible to write a history of modern Beirut without an assessment of who was elected to the municipal council, how it operated and how it defended the interests of the city against European capitalism and colonialism, and against the Ottoman imperial government. Only a deep understanding of Beirut's checkered municipal history from Ottoman elitism to French sectarianism to independent PanArabism can offer a critical perspective on the current urban crisis of Lebanon's capital.

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clxxv See, for example, "Beirut gets its Groove Back" in *The New York Times*, March 4, 2004,
clxxvi Fawaz, Leila, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1983).
clxxvii Public Record Office (London), FO/78/2259, September 9, 1871.
clxxviii Fawaz Trabulsi, "Salim al-Bustani fi nass ta'sisi: 'al-bab' wa 'al-batn' suratani li-dawr Lubnan al-iqtisadi," *Mulhaq an-Nahar*, January 11, 1997.
clxxix See Jens Hanssen, "The Birth Of An Education Quarter Zokak el-Blat as a Cradle of Cultural Revival in the Arab World," *History, Space, and Conflict in Beirut; the Quarter of Zokak el-Blat* Bodenstein, Ralph, H. Gebhardt, J. Hanssen, B. Hillenkamp, O. Kögler, A. Mollenhauer, D. Sack and F. Stolleis (Beirut: Orient Institut, 2004).