The Arab Diaspora

Voices of an anguished scream

Edited by
Zahia Smail Salhi and
Ian Richard Netton

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The Arab Diaspora includes chapters that range in subject matter from a meditation on trans-national literature, to an investigation of the Iraqi Jewish Diaspora in the United States of America. Uniting these chapters is the overriding *leitmotiv* of Diaspora with its multifarious notes of 'otherness', 'strangeness', 'exile', 'dispossession', and indeed, 'yearning'.

While much has been written down the ages on the Jewish Diaspora, there are far fewer studies of the Arab situation. This volume therefore aims to contribute to the study of the plethora of the Arab Diasporic expressions, which range from literary texts such as novels, short stories, and poetry, to the various artistic expressions such as music, dance, and painting, to testimonies voiced through the various media channels such as film, documentary, and the internet.

The Arab Diaspora attempts to explore the fluidity, and pain, of boundaries and exile; Diaspora cannot eschew nostalgia and pain. The main scope of the book embraces the triple, sometimes interlocking foci of the theoretical, the exilic, and the literary. *The Arab Diaspora* is essential reading for those with interests in Arabic and Middle East studies, and cultural studies.

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Introduction

Defining the Arab Diaspora

Zahia Smail Salhi

> But I am the exile.
> Seal me with your eyes.
> Take me wherever you are-
> Take me whatever you are.
> Restore to me the colour of face
> And the warmth of body
> The light of heart and eye,
> The salt of bread and rhythm,
> The taste of earth . . . the motherland.
> Shield me with your eyes.
> Take me as a relic from the mansion of sorrow.
> Take me as a verse from my tragedy;
> Take me as a toy, a brick from the house
> So that our children will remember to return.
>   (Quoted in Said 2001: 179)

Mahmoud Darwish starts his poem with the objection 'but', which warns the reader that the poet is different and therefore deserving a different handling. 'But I am the exile' signifies that I am not a normal person, living under normal conditions 'like the others'.

   This state of fact is further elaborated when the exile asks to be sealed with the addressee's eyes, seeking warmth and safety, which betrays a feeling of loss and insecurity. Once sealed/protected, the exile could be taken 'wherever' or 'whatever you are', and it does not make a difference, for once one has left one's country of origin any other place will only become the house of exile. Therefore, the poet asks for the motherland to be restored for him through various signifiers including colours: 'the colour of face', sensations: 'the warmth of body', and flavours: 'the taste of earth', for all that is left with the exiled of their homeland are landmarks in their memory.

   Although Edward Said argues, 'The Pathos of exile is in the loss of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth: homecoming is out of the question' (Said 2001: 179). Darwish does not lose hope, and despite the evoking of return as not being a possible option for his generation, he hopes

that 'our children will remember to return'. However hope does not wither feelings of sorrow, tragedy, and loss, which all are symptomatic of the Palestinian tragedy resulting in the dislocation and exile of thousands of Palestinians; a tragedy that makes the core of Mahmoud Darwish's poetical oeuvre, which continuously forces the world through the power of poetry to remember the involuntary travel of deportation, forced upon the Palestinians, rendering them a nation in Diaspora, and their continuous hope that their exile will eventually end.

The word 'Diaspora' thus signifies dispersal, scattering, or *shatāt* in Arabic. And although most dictionaries define Diaspora as the 'dispersal of the Jews after the Babylonian and Roman conquests of Palestine' or, 'the Jewish communities outside Israel',[1] the present condition of the Palestinians will automatically result in the addition of 'the Palestinians living outside Palestine' or, 'the extent of Palestinian settlement outside Palestine'.

Ironically, as if the land of Palestine/Israel is the source of dispersal, the gathering of the Jewish Diaspora in Israel meant the dispersal of the Palestinian nation across the world to become the modern days' Diaspora.

Said elucidates,

> Perhaps this is the most extraordinary of exile's fates: to have been exiled by exiles, to relive the actual process of up-rooting at the hands of exiles. All Palestinians during the summer of 1982 asked themselves what inarticulate urge drove Israel, having displaced Palestinians in 1948, to expel them continuously from their refugee homes and camps in Lebanon. It is as if the reconstructed Jewish collective experience, as represented by Israel and modern Zionism, could not tolerate another story of dispossession and loss to exist alongside it, an intolerance constantly reinforced by the Israeli hostility to the nationalism of the Palestinians, who for forty-six years have been painfully reassembling a national identity in exile.
>
> (Said 2001: 178)

However, the Arab Diaspora is not solely made of Palestinians; it encapsulates all Arabs living permanently in countries other than their country of origin. At this point, a clear distinction needs to be made between the various categories of the members of the Arab Diaspora.

Although it is true that anyone prevented from returning home is an exile, Edward Said insists on making some distinctions among exiles, refugees, expatriates, and émigrés. One may also point out the differing causes of becoming an exile; while it is commonly understood that exiles are forced out of their country of origin, as in the case of the Palestinians, other exiles chose to flee their country either for fear of political prosecution, or for economical reasons. Yet, others chose a self-implemented exile for intellectual reasons: either for seeking a better academic career or a better environment for intellectual or artistic creativity.

However, regardless of the reasons that make exiles live far from their homelands and regardless of whether they escaped prosecution or chose to live far from home, they all keep an idealized image of home as a paradise they were forced to flee, and never manage to entirely adopt their new dwellings. As such they share feelings of solitude, estrangement, loss, and longing.

To overcome these feelings they seek to construct a new world that somewhat resembles the old one they left behind. Objects they brought with them as vestiges of their forsaken country will be given an important setting in their new homes and traditional dress will be displayed at special occasions. A micro community that will bring together compatriots at special celebrations will be created, and other commodities such as Arab restaurants that bear the name of an Arab city or monument, Arab food stores, mosques, and cultural centres will be implanted in the host country.

In his book *At Home in the World*, Timothy Brennan rightly remarks, 'But national belonging is not only nostalgia for types of food, scents in the sea air, or the lilt of a people's speech; it is belonging to a *polity*'[2] (Brennan 1997: 44).

Belonging to this somehow artificial polity implements a sense of solidarity among the members of the Arab community in the Diaspora, and a continuous consolidated effort to preserve the community's sense of identity.

This attempt at coming near home while in exile results in two important factors; on the one hand it creates an unnatural world whose *raison d'être* is to ease the pain of being cut off from one's country and culture, but on the other hand, and this is very important, it creates a new landscape in the host country, as new cultural elements are being added to inform the host society about other cultures.

In *Reflections on Exile* Said remarks 'The exile's new world, logically enough, is unnatural and its unreality resembles fiction' (Said 2001: 181).

This is further consolidated in the literature and art of the Arab writers and artists living in exile. A new podium of Diasporic creativity has been created in Western capitals, such as London and Paris, which in the last few decades have become genuine forums for the work of modernist writers from all over the world.

A new Arabic literature is thus created, and although it may have been written in Arabic, such as the works of Tayeb Salih, Haifa Zangana, and Hannan Al-Shaykh, it differs from the literature of the Arab writers who write from the Arab world. The same goes for the literature of Arab writers who write in European languages such as Ahdaf Soueif, Sabiha al Khemir, Zeina Ghandour, and Jamal Mahjoub who write in English, and Tahar ben Jelloun, Malika Mokadem, Hédi Bouraoui, and Assia Djebar who write in French.[3] Although they write in the language of their host country their literature is by no means similar to that of their host country, nor is it similar to that of their country of origin. As such it may rightly bear the epithet of a 'hybrid literature' which bears the marks of both the writers' country of origin and their host country. It also is a space where both home and host

cultures converge, intersect, and even clash, resulting in a third culture, which situates itself in a third space which is that of the Diaspora.

As such while this literature represents a breathing space for the Arab Diaspora, a space through which the authors voice their ephemeral joys and their ever resurrecting pains, it also acts as a bridge between the Diaspora writers' host society on the one hand, and their country of origin on the other.

Just like the writers who produced it, this literature is Diasporic. It is an expression of the pains of exile as it is loaded with the endless search for identity, loss, and longing. And just like its creators occupy a third space within their host society, this literature also occupies a third space as it is not entirely Arab nor is it entirely French or English.

Diasporic writings, however, find their originality in this difference, and as such, refuse to belong to either side of the bridge; in other words, although incessantly complain about the pains of exile, it is exile that created and in it, proliferate. Moreover, it is this aspect of being Diasporic, or exilic that makes it attractive to both parties; while the East uses it as a window to better understand the West, the West also uses it as a means to better understand the East, especially in the case of translated literature or even better when this literature is actually written in a European language.

Such connections are not only made possible, but prove necessary for a better mutual understanding between the East and the West, and for demystifying the image of the 'Other' as being the exotic attraction both to the East and the West.

Edward Said elucidates,

> Much of the contemporary interest in exile can be traced to the somewhat pallid notion that non-exiles can share in the benefits of exile as a redemptive motif. There is, admittedly, a certain plausibility and truth in this idea. Like medieval itinerant scholars or learned Greek slaves in the Roman Empire, exiles – the exceptional ones among them – do leaven their environments.
>
> (Said 2001: 183)

This view is shared by Brennan, who argues 'Eastern European and third-world writers are many things to the U.S. artistic community: a fund of imagery, teachers of hidden histories and traditions, responsible gadflies' (Brennan 1997: 39).

However, acknowledging the contribution of the Arab Diaspora to world literature and art in general, which represents the enlightening aspect of their presence in the West, should not overshadow the political reality; immigration is at the top of the political agenda in the West, and in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, feelings of intolerance resurfaced. Many far-right parties such as the Front National in France gained more terrain and propagated anti-immigrant and racist sentiments. This goes to prove that the call for

cultural diversity among the intellectual elite and the indulgence in the taste of ethnic cuisine and world music and literature can easily coexist with a neglect of political, religious, or cultural claims made by the Arab Diaspora and similar other diasporas.

The chapters in this volume discuss the topic of Diaspora from various angles, making this book a forum where notions of displacement, dispossession, otherness, identity and exile are discussed.

In his chapter 'The betweenness of identity: language in trans-national literature' Yasir Suleiman discusses the identity of Arab Diasporic literature, which he calls 'trans-national', and warns against confusing the identity of the text with the identity of its author.

The chapter sets out the various parameters for dealing with the delicate issue of identity, employing the dichotomy of *qalb* versus *qālib*, and utilizing the different kinds of argument used by the members of each camp. This task is placed in the socio-political context that informs the act of taxonomy. The chapter therefore is a contribution from the sociology of literature rather than critical theory. It refers to a large number of works, but only at the macro level. It also refers to situations where similar issues of literary identity are pertinent in the postcolonial context.

The chapter aims to reflect on the question of identity in relation to language in the context of what is sometimes called trans-national, trans-lingual, and transitional or hybrid literature with roots in the language communities in the Middle East and North Africa.

Chapter 2 'Gendering the imperial city: London in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*', investigates the East–West encounter which began as a colonized–colonizer relationship. It examines this relationship in both ways; the West exoticized the East as demonstrated in the work of the Orientalists as much as the East exoticized the West as demonstrated in the work of Arab writers who take it upon themselves to write back to the West in order to demystify the misconceptions of the East as portrayed in Orientalist literature and art; these writers we may call 'Occidentalists'.

In *Season of Migration to the North*, which many view as an 'Arabian Nights in reverse', Tayeb Salih writes about the reverse traffic, in a mission of writing back to the West.

A child of colonialism who is educated in colonial schools, Mustapha Saʿeed, the novel's central character, comes to London to further his education. However, he soon realizes that he has a mission – that of avenging the East for the ills of the West. Well aware of the West's attraction to the East, he turns his room in London into a trap to which he attracts women, quenches their thirst for the Orient, and eventually leads them to their destruction.

Season of Migration to the North clearly demonstrates that Mustapha Saʿeed had little regard in trying to align with his cultural step-brother and was more intent on actively destroying it as much as he could. This is due to two key factors. The first is because it was part of his genetic disposition; Salih

made Mustapha predisposed to act in the manner he did, but secondly, and most importantly, because he was on a historic mission.

The deconstruction of the novel, leads us to understand that the fate of cultural hybrids is often tragic as their souls are restless, whether in their exile or in their country of origin. In London Mustapha Sa'eed created an Oriental setting to which he attracted his victims, and in Sudan he added to his Sudanese house an English drawing room. Both settings go to prove that Mustapha Sa'eed is out of place in both locations, which explains his fatal mysterious end.

In Chapter 3 'Voices of exiles and the fictional works of Tayeb Salih' Ami Elad-Bouskila takes a further investigation into the work of Tayeb Salih, which he situates in the framework of exilic and post-*Mahjari* Arabic literature.

Bouskila asserts that Tayeb Salih has made a unique and major contribution to the literature of exile, though he prefers to write in Arabic rather than in English, and he is an acknowledged master of the language. His fictional works deal mostly with his village childhood in North Sudan and the villagers' lives. Tayeb Salih's vivid portrayals of the Sudanese countryside and the joys and suffering of simple village folk, have earned him wide praise.

Several major issues serve as background to his writing and are mainly expressed as the cultural clash between East-South and West-North. Thus the artistic structure of his many works (for example, *Mawsim al Hijra ila al-Shamāl*, 1966) can be discussed in terms of 'binary oppositions' and/or 'complimentary opposites'. The ever present image in his works of the 'Other' also fits into this literary patterning of juxtapositions.

In Chapter 4 'Voicing a culture "Dispersed by time": metropolitan location and identity in the literature and art of Sabiha al Khemir', Mohamed-Salah Omri studies the work of Sabiha al Khemir, a Tunisian novelist who writes in English.

In her novel *Waiting in the Future for the Past to Come*, the narrator confesses:

> 'I had told my mother. I will tell your story to the world, your story, Yasmina's and others'…'What language does the world speak?' she asked. 'Oh, it doesn't matter,' I replied. 'A scream is a scream is a scream'.

As such Sabiha al Khemir's novel carries a promise and a challenge. For what language does the world speak indeed? And how to articulate a scream? The answer to the second lies in the subversion of the intertext: Gretrude Stein's 'A rose is a rose is a rose', is charged with a desire to speak out that the American expatriate would not have found alien. The response to the first is in the language of the text, namely, English. Yet between the medium of telling the story, the mother and Tunisia lies a gulf which seems unbridgeable. The illiterate mother is unable to read her own story even if it were written in Arabic; and English is almost alien to Tunisian literature. The likelihood that a woman who was born and educated in Tunisia, would write fiction in

English continues to be remote. For this reason alone the storyteller raises interest. Yet the book is not so much about the storyteller as it is about storytelling. In this novel as in *The Blue Manuscript* (2003), al Khemir strikes the reader by the way she tells her stories, by the attempt to articulate a deeply culture-specific rhythm, and the very personal anguish of her 'foreign' characters. *The Blue Manuscript* presents an additional interest. It enters a sphere rarely attempted by Arab writers even in Arabic, by focusing on Islamic art. The book traces the genesis of the famous Blue Qur'an penned in al-Qayrawan in the Tenth century and follows excavations for it near an Egyptian village by a British team of archaeologists, art historians, and dealers. In the course of the trip, Zohra, the half-English half-Tunisian translator, witnesses the excavations, rediscovers her connections with the culture of her father and mediates between the villagers and the foreign crew.

In the novel al Khemir draws on her other voices. She is an artist, art historian, and archaeologist. Her drawings can be best described as calligraphic. Like ancient calligraphers, she relies on the black ink and the reed pen. Among several works, mention may be made of her acclaimed illustration of the English translation of *The Island of Animals* by Ikhwan al-Safā'. She also researches Islamic art extensively. She has written a book on Islamic sculpture, a PhD dissertation on Fatimid art and architecture, essays on Andalusian manuscripts, and presented television programmes on Islamic art.

In the polyphony of Arab Diaspora, al Khemir appears to be unique but multi-vocal. This chapter explores her fiction, her art and facets of her research. Bearing in mind the specific linguistic situation in the Maghreb, it asks: Why English? And mindful of al Khemir's particular use of the language, it asks: What English? There is indeed foreignness (Walter Benjamin's term) in al Khemir's English. It announces its Diasporic origin in specific ways. Chief among these is the texture of the language, its rhythm, and, particularly in the second book, its reference. In her art as in her fiction, al Khemir traces the rhythms of Arabic and the patterns of Islamic art and inscribes both in her English texts and in her drawings.

In Chapter 5 'Hédi Bouraoui: cross-cultural writing', Najib Redouane studies another Tunisian writer who writes in French from Canada, where cultural diversity is multi-faceted and manifests itself on several levels. Critics often refer to the Canadian literary mosaic created by immigrant writers from various parts of the world who settled in this country and shared their literary artefacts.

This chapter seeks to investigate Hédi Bouraoui's ample contribution to the creation of the concept of 'Transculturalité'. At the crossroads between France (Paris), Tunisia (Sfax), and Canada (Toronto), Hédi Bouraoui is a major writer from the Maghrebian Diaspora in Canada transcending various cultural and literary boundaries.

In Chapter 6 ' "When dwelling becomes impossible": Arab-Jews in America and in Israel in the writings of Ahmad Susa and Shimon Ballas', Orit Bashkin investigates the ways in which Iraqi-Jews constructed their identity

in Israel and their definitions for such terms as 'Diaspora', 'Exile', and 'Homeland'.

The terms 'Diaspora' and 'Exile' had a tremendous impact upon the self-image of Iraqi-Israelis. The various interpretations of 'Exile' in formative Zionist texts assumed that Jewish homeland would lead to the demise of the Jewish people. Therefore, the emancipation of Jews had actually jeopardized their existence because it provoked the anti-Semitism of the non-Jewish majority. In order to assimilate into the Israeli society some Iraqi-Jews adopted this narrative originally developed in Europe. They argued that Iraqi-Jews seemed to be integrated in Iraq during the inter-war period. Nevertheless, the envy of their Iraqi neighbours and the growing influence of Nationalism in Iraq resulted in anti-Semitism, which ultimately led to their mass emigration to Israel in the 1950's.

This narrative, known in Israeli historiography as 'The Failure of the Iraqi Orientation' accentuates the activity of the Zionist movement in Iraq, while shying away from mentioning Iraqi-Jews who supported the Palestinian cause or the Jewish activity in anti-Zionist groups, such as the communist movement.

Nonetheless, in recent years, Iraqi–Israeli intellectuals have challenged this reading of their history. For some, Iraq meant 'homeland' while Israel meant 'Diaspora'. Faced with discrimination in Israel, these writers formed a sense of nostalgia for Iraq, which is commemorated in many fictional texts written in Hebrew and Arabic. The texts reflect a sense of in-betweenness, of writers who once enjoyed a leading position in Iraq and were now marginalized in Israel. These intellectuals were educated in an Arabic speaking environment and consequently their texts convey their fascination from the wording of the Qur'ān and from medieval and contemporary Arabic literature. They thus conceptualize a new image of an Iraqi-Arab-Jew as they interweave the history of the Jewish-Iraqi community into the history of Iraq. They alleged that their community, one of the most intellectual in the ancient and medieval Jewish world, was in fact, an ancient Arab community, rooted in Iraqi space long before the arrival of Islam. I therefore look at images of Baghdad, Basra, and Hilla in their writings in order to explore the concept of the 'Iraqi Diaspora'.

This chapter is based upon the works of Jewish-Iraqi novelists like Sami Michael, Shimon Ballas and Samir Naqqash and on the memoirs of Iraqi–Jewish intellectuals such as Anuwar Shaul and Sasson Somekh. It also draws on theories relating to exile and marginality, developed by Theodor Adorno and Edward Said.

In Chapter 7 'Two trends of cultural activity among Palestinian-Americans', Nir Yehudai sheds light on the Palestinian-Americans living in the United States during the second half of the Twentieth century.

He states that they have experienced increasing ambivalence as on the one hand, many have managed to fulfil the 'American dream' (mainly in the academic, professional, and economic realms) and on the other hand, they

have faced discrimination, and prejudicial immigration policies, and must deal with a negative image, especially in the mass media.

In addition, Palestinians have felt a sense of dispossession and alienation, lacking a national-political centre, usually in the form of a nation state.

There are two particularly interesting phenomena, stemming from the attempt to cope with the American experience: first, the invention and development of a unique Palestinian-American ethnic culture, centering on maintaining the legacy of 1948, creating a literature of memoirs and one which presents an ideal image of pre-1948 Palestine, and researching Palestinian-Arab Material-Culture.

Second, the attempt, mainly by women writers and 'dialogue initiators', to cross over ethnic identity borders, and establish affinities with other ethnic and social groups. This chapter focuses on these phenomena.

In Chapter 8 'From ambiguity to abjection: Iraqi-Americans negotiating race in the United States', Evelyn Alsultany examines the ways in which Iraqis negotiate their identity in the United States. Insisting that contemporary Arab subjectivities in the United States cannot be understood outside of the normalized Eurocentric and Orientalist discourses that shape and inform US culture, this chapter examines the overt and covert ways in which Iraqi-Americans negotiate their precarious status in the United States, where they contend with being posited as uncivilized people who ride camels, live in tents in the desert, have no access to institutionalized education or medical care, and are fanatical about Islam.

This chapter illustrates that on an overt level, Iraqi belonging is negotiated in two principal ways. First is through being a 'good' disciplined citizen. Using a Foucaultian framework that understands power as not only 'repressive' but also as 'productive', Alsultany argues that Eurocentrism and Orientalism, as hierarchical ideologies that privilege European identities over others, produce the ideology of the society. Alsultany illustrates that Iraqi immigrants negotiate their apprehensive belonging through becoming 'ideal citizens' who are not disruptive and who embrace European ideals of civility, productivity, individualism, and capitalism, while simultaneously seeking to preserve their cultural identity through community and family structures.

The second overt way in which Iraqi immigrants negotiate their belonging is through invoking the rhetoric of the United States as a cultural melting pot, a discourse wrought with contradictions from its inception, in order to make legitimate their place in US society.

This chapter claims that the covert way in which they negotiate their belonging and contest Eurocentrism and Orientalism is through Babylocentrism. Much like Afrocentrism, Babylocentrism maintains Eurocentric principles but ousts Europeans from occupying the pinnacle seat of civility. In negotiating being perceived as fanatical-camel-riding-desert-tent dwellers, Iraqi-Americans flip the Eurocentric script, maintaining the logic of racial hierarchy, and reposition Iraqis as modern subjects at the forefront of civilisation.

In Chapter 9 'Beyond the Diaspora: letting Arab voices be heard', Ghalya F. T. Al-Said argues that although the most important political issue for most Arabs is the Palestinian Diaspora, the situation faced by displaced Palestinians living in Western countries is no less difficult than many other similarly dislocated groups living far from their homelands. For them to keep domestic political, religious, and cultural activities alive and, where necessary, visible to Western public opinion, the use of appropriate and effective language is crucial as agendas are hugely affected by language. The problem is that the languages used in host countries are, usually, not the languages used by those finding refuge there. In the United Kingdom, there has not been any significant attempt to gain access to public debate by refugee groups from the Middle East. Their attitudes vary; while some have no wish for engagement with their host culture, others may desire total cultural assimilation. Neither approach advances the cause of remedying the injustice which caused their predicament.

This chapter endeavours to highlight the linguistic and cultural difficulties of refugees who want to communicate effectively with those outside their native group.

Notes

1 The Collins English Dictionary.
2 Brennan's emphasis.
3 One should also acknowledge Arabic literature in other languages such as Italian, Spanish, German, etc.

1   The betweenness of identity

Language in trans-national literature

Yasir Suleiman

Introduction

In his book *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*, Anthony Cohen writes,

> Who has the right to determine who a person is: the person in question, or those with whom the person interacts? In treating the self as socially constituted, social science has denied 'authorship' to the individual, seeing identity either as imposed by an other, or as formulated by the individual in relation to an other. Both views imply the insubstantial nature of selfhood.
>
> (Cohen 1974: 73)

The question and the answer posed by Cohen are germane to the topic of this paper: they allow us to highlight a few points in reflecting on identity. First, they point to the relational nature of social identity, hence the reference to 'an other' as the partner in the social construction of identity. Second, Cohen's use of the terms 'person' in the question, and 'self' and 'individual' in the answer, point to the complexity of identity. In particular, they imply a distinction between 'personhood' as a 'socially constituted' construct, and 'selfhood' as a sense of identity over which the individual can exercise the right of 'authorship', what Cohen calls 'the substance of "me" of which I am aware' (Cohen 1974: 57). Personhood and selfhood are not mutually exclusive: they interact with each other in myriad ways. The one can confirm or deny the other, or it can induce changes in it. Third, talk about change in the preceding sentence highlights the non-fixity of identities. This amounts to a denial of absolute sameness, without however espousing a view of identity that lacks stability. While changing, identities persist through time. Fourth, Cohen's target in the above quotation is the identity of the individual, although as 'personhood' this identity is socially constituted. This is different from group identity, which tends to be categorised by reference to gender, class, locality, region, profession, life-style, religion, nation, etc. In the same way that personhood and selfhood interact with each other in individual

identities, individual and group identities interact in mutually constitutive modes. Located between person and self, stability and change, the individual and the group, identity is relational. It is always part of a process, hence the use of the term 'betweenness' in the title of this essay.

Let me illustrate and add to some of the points mentioned here by providing an example from my personal experience. I could reflect on how I experience my identity at border points in some Arab countries, where my Palestinian origin and British passport conspire to create dissonance in dealing with the officials of the state. Or, I could reflect on the same in dealing with Israeli soldiers at checkpoints in the Occupied Territories (West Bank and Gaza). But I will instead concentrate on a letter I received from the lady who was liaising with me over an invitation to deliver a lecture to members of the Jewish Literary Society – at the Jewish Community Centre in the Edinburgh Synagogue building – in 2000. The following is an extract from her letter:

> Dear Yasir Suleiman
> On the issue of subject matter for the talk to the Jewish Literary Society on 13 February 2000, I understand they would like you to ponder on 'the conflict'.
>   Neither [X] nor [Y] have been able to help me on the delicate issue of how you define yourself. (if you wish to define yourself at all!) i.e. simply Palestinian,
>   Palestinian/Israeli, Israeli/Arab . . . whatever.

The letter writer is aware of the sensitivity of identities. She refers to this as a 'delicate issue'. Because of this she sought advice from (X) and (Y), two Palestinian Christian women who, like her, are members of an Edinburgh inter-community organisation of Palestinians and Jews, called Salam-Shalom. I am not sure why (X) and (Y) declined to help, although they know that I often define myself as a Palestinian when I am speaking in public on issues related to Palestine. Is it because they thought that, since I was going to speak to a *Jewish* society, I might wish to identify myself as a *Muslim* Palestinian? Or is it because of other reasons, for example that I might wish to make my Palestinian identity less visible on this occasion, owing to the fact that (a) the topic of my talk was going to be 'the conflict', and (b) the audience was going to consist of Jews who, breaking with tradition, invited a Palestinian to speak in their Community Centre? Whatever the answer might be, it does point to the sensitivity of identities in inter-communal settings. This is reflected in the truncated reference to the Palestinian/Arab Israeli conflict as 'the conflict' in the letter. Erasure is an understandable identity management strategy in this kind of situation. It shows that identities are situation bound in terms of place, interactants, and contexts.

The letter writer shows remarkable awareness of issues of identity in other ways. She recognises that I have the right to define, or not to define, myself. Assuming that I was going to take the first route, she grants me the right of

'authorship' over how I wish to describe myself. But she immediately offers some help – as if to restrict it – suggesting that I might opt for defining myself as 'simply Palestinian' or as a 'forward-slashed' person: 'Palestinian/ Israeli' or 'Israeli/Arab'. She is also aware that identities are open, and reflects that with the formula 'whatever'. How does all this apply to the literary identity of post-colonial texts in the Arab context? First, the identity of a text of this kind is relational. It involves the text, the author, the reader and the cultures to which it relates. Furthermore this identity is a construction rather than a unit of definition that exists in the text itself. A text cannot be accorded the right of authorship over its identity. Second, the identity of a text is defined by the other texts to which it relates, that is, its intertextuality, in two or more literary traditions and cultures. This is another aspect of the relational nature of literary identity. Third, the identity of a text is not fixed; but it is not totally open either. Fourth, in negotiating the identity of a text we must take context into consideration. This implies that the identity of a text is located at the meeting point of history and literature. Fifth, the identity of a text must be decided by examining the text in question, rather than on the basis of a global assessment of a writer's *oeuvre* or his ideological pronouncements about his identity or political convictions. Sixth, the combination of these factors indicates that literary identities are complex and are always part of a process. Literary identities are always betwixt-and-between. I hope to be able to show how this works by considering some examples.

Language, literature and identity

This chapter is a contribution to the sociology of literature rather than to critical theory. My aim is to reflect on the question of identity in relation to language in the context of what is sometimes called trans-national, translingual, and transitional or hybrid literatures with roots in the language communities in the Middle East and North Africa. The best-known example of this is the Francophone literature(s) of North Africa, although a growing body of writings in English has started to appear in the past few decades. Discussions of this issue may proceed in two ways. On the one hand, we may choose to concentrate on the growing corpus of ideological pronouncements on this issue. Issues of group identity, particularly national and ethnic, predominate in statements of this kind. On the other hand, we may choose to study the linguistic medium of a work or group of works to establish the extent to which language and voice interact with each other to form the identity of the text or texts in question. Regardless of which approach we take, we must not confuse the identity of the text with the identity of its author. A nationally committed Arab writer can write in English or French without detracting from his identity. The same can be true of a Kurdish writer writing in Arabic, or an Arab writer writing in Hebrew. By the same token, an anti-Arab writer can write in Arabic without denying his Arab roots. The problem with the ideological approach to literary identity lies in confusing

the identity of the writer with the identity of the text. In spite of that, I will direct most of the following discussion to the ideological approach to textual identity.

   Those who believe that the language of a text defines its identity would assign a French work by a writer with roots in the Arabic-speaking world to French or Francophone literature. Edwar al-Kharrat (2000) takes this position in his assessment of the works of the Egyptian Jewish writer Albert Cossery, although most of his novels are set in Egypt and deal with what nowadays would be called the subaltern. Kharrat believes that 'literature is language', and that the language of a literary text is a 'decisive' and 'final' factor in establishing its identity. According to this criterion, *Arabesques* by the Palestinian Anton Shammas is a Hebrew novel, *In the Eye of the Sun* by the Egyptian Ahdaf Soueif is an English novel, *When the Sides of the Triangles Collapse ('indamā tasqut adhluʿ al-muthallathāt)* by the Israeli Samir Naqqash of Iraqi origin is an Arabic novel, *The Jurists of Darkness and Feathers (Fuqahāʾ al-dhalām wa al-rīsh)* by the Iraqi writer of Kurdish origin is an Arabic novel, and *Damascus Nights* by the Syrian Rafik Schami is a German novel.

   In October 2001 the well-known Kuwaiti monthly magazine, *al-'Arabī*, devoted its main theme to a discussion of *Francophonie* in the Arabic-speaking world. Edwar al-Kharrat contributed a piece on the identity of Francophone literature (2001: 76–79). In it he explained his position by reference to three factors. First, the language of a literary text determines the ethos and vision (*ruʾya*) of that text lexically, semantically, inter-textually, and culturally. This view is reminiscent of the Whorfian hypothesis which says that language determines thought. Invoking the lexical similarity between *qalb* (heart, content, poetics) and *qālib* (framework, form, language), al-Kharrat asserts that, in literature language (the *qālib*) – rather than content (the *qalb*) – determines the identity of a literary text. Al-Kharrat is a writer of great renown in Arabic, and he speaks in his capacity as one who knows how literature works from within. He also knows French well and is familiar with the French literary tradition. I believe that this gives his view a weight of authority and forces us to consider it seriously. Second, al-Kharrat refers to the Algerian Malek Haddad's famous statement that French was his exile, and interprets it as an admission that his works are French not Arabic. Although Haddad was forced to choose French for writing, he did not consider his works to be part of Arabic literature, but works in the language of exile. Third, al-Kharrat casts doubt on the Arabness of the Arab content of Francophone fiction. He does this by claiming that when the content of certain words and phrases is transferred into a foreign language, especially idiomatic or fossilised expressions, they acquire meanings which are lost to them in the original. This is particularly true of swear words, proverbs, greetings, and prayers. The exotic flavour of these expressions in a French text is not part of their ordinarily recoverable meanings in the original language. There is in fact a double exoticism here: exoticism for the French reader who does not know Arabic and exoticism for the Arab reader because of the new meanings Arabic expressions

acquire when put into French. Al-Kharrat's insistence on language as a criterion of identity may also reflect his own literary experience which accords linguistic innovation and pride of place in the act of creative writing. Hafid Bouazza,[1] a young Moroccan playwright and novelist writing in Dutch, shares al-Kharrat's view on the role of language in identifying a literary text:

> A French writer is a person writing in French. A foreign writer is a person writing in Foreign. A Dutch writer is a person writing in Dutch . . . I refer those who claim that I write in an Arabic kind of Dutch, to the movement of the Tachtigers ('the people of the eighties', a Dutch literary movement in the 1880s known for its baroque use of language). I am clearly part of the Dutch linguistic tradition . . . I am so fed up with all the nagging about identities.
>
> (cited in Willemsen 2000: 81)

Bouazza is arguing against those who seek to place him outside the mainstream Dutch literary tradition because of his innovative/foreignising use of language. He suggests that his 'Arabic kind of Dutch' is better understood in relation to Dutch literary history, rather than mistakenly identified as an attempt at the subversion of the Other's language, which is a major thesis in post-colonial theory. I am not arguing here against this thesis, but against its de-contextualised treatment of linguistic foreignisation as a strategy of subversion of the colonial language. Although one may have a lot of sympathy with Bouazza in his exasperation over the 'obsession' with literary identity, it is still the case that this obsession is indicative of deep-seated cultural concerns intra-nationally and inter-nationally.

Let us now consider the opposite view which claims that the content of a literary work, not its language, defines its identity. Mahmud Qasim provides the most unequivocal expression of this view in his book *Arab(ic) Literature in the French Language* (*al-Adab al-'Arabī al-Maktūb bi al-Faransiyya*, 1996). Qasim states that Arab(ic) literature in the French language cannot be regarded as French literature. The language of a literary text, he asserts, cannot define or submerge the literary identity of the writer of the text concerned. The voice, the setting, and the characters of the text and its world view play that defining role. And since the majority of the Francophone writers, with roots in the Arabic-speaking world, locate their works in relation to this world, their literature must be treated as Arab(ic) literature. For Qasim, it is the *qalb* rather than the *qālib* that defines the identity of a literary text.

There are three major problems with this view as Qasim presents it. The first concerns the shift from the literary text to its author in deciding the identity of the text concerned. According to this thesis, the national/ethnic identity of a writer defines the identity of his/her work. This shift from author to product is an ontological transgression; it is in fact a good example of the error in reasoning which the logicians designate as 'category hopping'. Projecting the identity of the author on the identity of the text, or vice versa,

moves the discussion from one domain of identity to another in a logically invalid way. This however in no way denies that the two domains of identity are related to each other.

The second problem concerns what Qasim means by the noun '*Arab*' and the relative adjective '*Arabī*.' in his book. It is interesting to note here that Qasim sometimes places the two terms in brackets. He hints that he does this in order to avoid any racial interpretation of these two terms. Arabness for him is culturally defined, thus making it possible for this category of definition to include writers of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. He mentions in this connection that the Jewish writers from the Arabic-speaking world writing in French are Arab writers (reminding us from time to time that they never visited Israel, as if to support this position), and he underlines this position by devoting a whole chapter (pp. 183–204) to dealing with their works. There is however an ambiguity in the meaning of '*Arabī*', which I have chosen to render into English with brackets surrounding the suffix -*ic* in Arab(ic). Qasim seems to leave it open as to whether he means by this term *Arab* or *Arabic*. If we take the second interpretation as the favoured reading, then we would be justified to conclude that only literature written in Arabic is Arab literature. This interpretation privileges the *qālib* over the *qalb* in the duality set out earlier. If, however, we take the first interpretation as the favoured reading, then we must conclude that Arab literature can exist in other languages. This interpretation privileges the *qalb* over the *qālib*. Qasim favours this interpretation without, however, abandoning the meaning of the alternative reading. This suggests that literature in French by writers with roots in the Arab world is not Arabic but *Arab*. We may express this by saying that while all Arabic literature is Arab, not all Arab literature is Arabic. If we apply the same criterion, then we must conclude that some of the works of the American writer Paul Bowles are Arab, not Arabic, by virtue of their being set authentically in Moroccan culture. The same may be applied to some of the short stories of the American Allen Hibbard (see Hibbard 1995), unless we invoke the national/ethnic identity of these two authors as a criterion to locate them outside the scope of Arab literature.[2]

Qasim shares the third problem with Edwar al-Kharrat. Both adhere to a dichotomy which, in terms of identity, denies the state of betweenness I have talked about earlier. According to this dichotomy, a work is either Arab or French. Part of the problem for these two writers is their unwillingness to admit a category of writing that is neither Arab nor French, but an amalgam of two (or even more) units of definition. Although we cannot ascertain the reasons for this, it is possible that they are in part related to the meaning and connotation of the term 'Francophone' in Arab cultural and political discourse (see al-Sumayli 2001). Francophone is often used to categorise works standing between two cultural and linguistic worlds. However, this term does not have a universally fixed meaning. Belinda Jack, in her book *Francophone Literatures: An Introductory Survey* (1996), uses the term to

refer to writings in French outside France in a way which validates the centre/periphery duality in the French critical scene. Belgian, Swiss, and Quebec writings in French are Francophone and peripheral literatures in the same way that writings in French from North Africa, Egypt, and Lebanon in principle are. Some sociolinguists (see Bourhis 1982) apply 'Francophone' to refer to those for whom French is the native, official, or working language wherever they are. If we accept this homogenising definition, then all literatures in French are Francophone literatures. This ambiguity of 'Francophone' makes it difficult to use it in a univocal way; this may have discouraged al-Kharrat and Qasim from using it as a principle of literary classification.

In addition, this term has connotations that militate against its application as a category of classification and definition in some Arab societies. On the one hand, its association with literary hybridity is interpreted as a form of cultural bastardy that confers on the mongrel a degree of legitimacy it does not deserve, what the Moroccan Driss Chraibi dubs as 'a little monkey, dressed in European clothes' (cited in Armitage 2002: 40). On the other hand, the term Francophone in Arab discourse is full of connotations of political, economic, and cultural hegemony that are reminiscent of coloniality (see al-'Askari 2001, al-Misnawi 2001, Murtad 2002, Rashid 2001, Rukaybi 1992). We may add to this the feeling that Francophone literature is sometimes regarded as a form of cultural treason, in which acts of self-deprecation take place in the colonial language. This is at least how this literature seems to have been received by some French readers. Abdelkebir Khatibi expresses this attitude in French reception as follows: 'Insult yourselves in our language, we will be grateful to you that you handle it so well' (cited in Carjuzaa 2001: 42). Both Edwar al-Kharrat and Mahmud Qasim are aware of these connotations; this may be a factor in their decision not to recognise a category of writing whose identity lies between 'the completely Arab' and 'the completely French'.

Ghalib Ghanim offers a variation on the content (*qālib*) criterion. The title of his book *Shi'r al-lubnāniyyīn bi al-lugha al-faransiyya* (*The Poetry of the Lebanese in the French Language*, 1981) avoids the ascription of a national identity to the poetry written by Lebanese poets. The fact that this poetry is written by Lebanese poets does not make it Lebanese. Likewise, the fact that it is written in French does not make it French either. There is, however, no suggestion of hybridity in classifying this poetry. This is what the title suggests, although this is contradicted by references to this poetry as 'Lebanese poetry in French' in the book itself. This ambiguity is removed in Ghanim's article in *al-'Arabī* (2001)*: al-Adab al-lubnānī bi al-lugha al-faransiyya 'ala imtidād al-qarn al-'ishrīn* (Lebanese Literature in the French Language in the Twentieth Century). Here this literature is called Lebanese, in spite of the fact that it is written in French. Ghanim justifies this by referring to the rootedness of this literature in Lebanese culture and soil. He adds that this literature is part and parcel of the Lebanese penchant for languages, and of Lebanon's position as a bridge between the cultures of the Muslim East and

those of the Christian West. If we accept this thesis of Lebanese heteroglossia, we may then interpret Ghanim's position as one that treats the Arabic literature of Lebanon as the 'Lebanese literature in the Arabic language'. According to this, the fact that the bulk of Lebanese literature is in Arabic does not, in principle, privilege its linguistic medium in defining the literary identity of the country. Arabic literature is but one of the literatures within the Lebanese literary scene. In this respect, it is on par with the literature in English or Spanish produced by Lebanese writers. This view – which is not explicitly advocated by Ghanim – is a reflection of the position held by segments of the Lebanese society to the effect that all the Lebanese in the Diaspora, and their descendents, are Lebanese. This position assumes great political significance whenever there are calls for a new census to establish the sectarian demography of the country, and for using this as the basis for renegotiating the National Charter of 1943, which gave the Maronites the Presidency. The fact that most of the immigrants are Christian, and that the majority among them are of Maronite descent, explains this position. What is interesting about Ghanim's approach to identity therefore is the subtle way in which it links literary identity to state and sectarian politics, and the way this link is embedded in a version of Lebanese history in which linguistic heteroglossia and cultural uniqueness are advanced as founding myths. For Ghanim, who is not alone in this (see al-Khashshāb 2002), language is not a marker of identity. This view is consistent with some of the French critical reactions to the work of the Lebanese Georges Schehadé, whose poetics and world view display little connection with the land of his birth or to its Arabic literary tradition (ibid.).

There is a possibility of reducing the definitional power of the textual language by invoking the notion of translation, although I have not seen this advocated explicitly in the critical works I have consulted. According to this, hybrid texts may be regarded as implicit translations, at least in some parts, from the language(s) of the home country. Writing, under this interpretation, becomes an exercise in palimpsestry. This is perhaps what the Palestinian–Israeli Anton Shammas means when he says of his novel *Arabesques:* 'Sometimes I feel that this book is written in Arabic in Hebrew letters'(cited in Brenner 1993: 431). Radwa 'Ashur, a celebrated Egyptian writer and academic, refers to the occurrence of this phenomenon in Ahdaf Soueif's novel *In the Eye of the Sun* (see Mehrez 2002). Amin Malak comments on the same phenomenon in Ahdaf Soueif's works (2000: 161): 'The reader feels that the English text is actually a translation whose original, once existing in the author's mind, is now nonexistent.' Hilary Kilpatrick makes more or less the same point in her discussion of Ahdaf Souif's *Aisha*, giving the following examples to illustrate her point:

> Excuse me, excuse me, mother, could you move a little, sister? Just a tiny bit. That's it. Thank you . . . We want to get through, pretty one . . . (148)
>
> There is nothing wrong with you, child, and a thousand men would desire you. But these things are in the hand of God. (96)
>
> Nobody is good enough for her. Nobody fills her eye. (47)
>
> (Kilpatrick 1992: 51)

Edward Said's autobiography, *Out of Place*, provides brilliant reflections on the issue of language, education, and identity. But it also provides some hints as to how the 'translation thesis' may be developed in discussing hybrid texts. In the preface, Said reflects on his experience of writing his memoir in the following fashion:

> More interesting for me as author was the sense I had of trying always to translate experiences that I had not only in a remote environment but also in a different language. Everyone lives life in a different language; everyone's experiences therefore are had, absorbed, and recalled in that language. The basic split in my life was the one between Arabic, my native language, and English, the language of my education and subsequent expression as a scholar and teacher, and so trying to produce a narrative of one in the language of the other ... has been a complicated task.
>
> (Said 1999: xiii–ix)

Edward Said goes on to give example after example of this mixing of languages in his life since early childhood, in a manner reminiscent of Salman Rushdie's statement that he is a translated man. If I understand Edward Said and Salman Rushdie correctly, they seem to be talking about the futility of positing one language as the dominant voice in a hybrid text, a fact that puts translation at the heart of literary language and identity. Soraya Antonius reaches the same conclusion when she says, 'those who write in foreign languages are really translators of their own essence' (2000: 267). This is another interpretation of the 'betweenness' of identity I wanted to convey through the title of this chapter. Like Bakhtin (1981) before them, Edward Said and Salman Rushdie seem to subscribe to the view that 'language is never unitary'. This is where translation may come in, as Assia Djebar seems to hint in a statement on the language of women in her novels: 'I could say "stories translated from ...", but from which language? From Arabic? From vernacular Arabic, or from a feminine Arabic; this is almost to speak of a subterranean Arabic' (cited in Armitage 2000: 55).

The idea of a 'subterranean' or 'subliminal' language is appealing. And so is the idea of translation from this language. However, this use of 'translation' may prove very problematic, because it suggests a degree of unascertainable equivalence between some prior text or texts and the hybrid text. It would however be legitimate to use translation as a metaphor in this context to highlight the linguistic multi-valency of hybrid texts, what Bakhtin describes as 'an artistically organised system for bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language' (Bakhtin 1981: 361). For there is no guarantee that translated terms that seem semantically stable may not in fact turn out to be culturally-networked and semantically multi-valent in a way that subverts the act of translation. A brilliant example of this occurs in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of*

the Sun when Asya, the protagonist, tries to explain to Gerald how difficult it is to translate some Arabic words into English. Referring to the opening two lines from a vernacular poem by Ahmad Fuad Nigm, sung by the blind singer Sheikh Imam: *Sharraft yā Nixon Bāba, Ya btaʿel-Watergate*, Asya says:

> Well, . . . as I said, he says, 'you've honoured us, Nixon Baba' – 'Baba' means 'father' but it's used, as it is used here, as a title of mock respect – as in 'Ali Baba', for example – that's probably derived from Muslim Indian use of Arabic – but the thing is you could also address a child as 'Baba' as an endearment – a sort of inversion: like calling him Big Chief because he's so little – and so when it's used aggressively – say in an argument between two men – it carries diminutivizing, belittling signification. So here it holds all these meanings. Any way, 'you've honoured us, Nixon Baba' – 'you've honoured us' is, by the way, the traditional greeting with which you meet someone coming into your home – it's almost like 'come on in' in this country. So it functions merely as a greeting and he uses it in that way but of course he activates – ironically – the meaning of having actually 'honoured' us. 'You've honoured us, Nixon Baba / O you of Watergate' I suppose would be the closest translation – but the structure 'bitaʿ el-whatever' (el-is just the definite article coming before a noun) posits a close but not necessarily defined relationship between the first noun (the person being described) and the second noun. So 'bitaʿ el-vegetables' would be some one who sold vegetables, while 'bitaʿ el-women' would be someone who pursued women. So Nixon is 'bitaʿ el-Watergate' which, suggests him selling the idea of Watergate to someone- selling his version of Watergate to the public – and pursuing a Watergate policy, but all in a non-pompous, street vernacular, jokingly abusive kind of way. The use of 'el-' to further specify Watergate – a noun which needs no further defining – is necessary for the rhythm and adds comic effect.
>
> (Soueif 1994: 496–497)

The conflict between language and content, the *qalb* and the *qālib*, is mediated in a variety of ways in the literature. Hillary Kilpatrick (1992) acknowledges that content and language can play a role in defining the identity of a literary text, but that the balance of these two units of classification must be assessed on an individual basis. In some cases, it would be possible to assign a 'dual' identity to a given text, for example Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's novel *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960) or Ahdaf Soueif's *Aisha* (1983). Sometimes the language of a text may give way to its content as a principal criterion of classification, for example Isaak Diqs' *A Bedouin Boyhood* (1967). In other cases, the content of a text gives way to its language as the primary criterion of classification, for example Waguih Ghali's novel *Beer in the Snooker Club*, although content plays a role here too. This is an interesting solution. To begin with, it respects the integrity of a literary work as a text in its own right, even when it is part of the corpus of works of the same author.

In addition, it allows us to recognise single and dual national identities as legitimate classifications of the affiliations a text presents, thus relieving us from having to assign it in a Procrustean fashion to the one nationality or the other. There is also the expansion of content in Kilpatrick's solution to include the narrative tradition of the text. Kilpatrick shows that a proper understanding of *A Bedouin Boyhood* cannot be achieved without placing it in the tradition of the *akhbār* literature in Arabic.[3]

Although Kilpatrick puts forward a sensible framework for deciding the identity of a literary text, it is certain that most texts will defy all efforts at neat or contradiction-free classification, even when the taxonomist is one and the same person. Let me illustrate this point by referring to the Algerian critic 'Abdalla Rukaybi (1992). In the 1960s, Rukaybi considered literary works in French by Algerian writers as Algerian, not French or Francophone, basing himself on the *qalb* thesis. In the 1990s, he changed his mind and considered works of this kind to belong to Francophone literature, basing himself on the *qālib* thesis. He explains this change of mind by saying that the situation before, during and immediately after the War of Liberation that ended in Algerian independence in 1962 was different from that of the 1980s and 1990s. In the earlier period, few Algerians knew Arabic well enough to be able to write in it; they also intended their writings as a contribution by the pen in the fight against the French. He points out that some of these writers regretted that they were unable to write in Arabic. Others considered writing in French as a transitionary stage before returning to Arabic. In contrast, some members of the later generation express an infatuation with French and a condescending attitude towards Arabic, turning what was thought to be temporary into a permanent feature (*al-mu'aqqat al-ladhī yadūm*). For these writers, the choice of French over Arabic is driven by an ideology which equates modernity with French and backwardness with Arabic. They also seek to establish for Algeria in all spheres, including the literary domain, a Mediterranean identity that negates its Arab, even Islamic, identity. Rukaybi argues that this difference in the context and the ideological positioning of the writers of the two generations requires a different classificatory schema, one that replaces the primacy of the *qalb* in the earlier period by that of the *qālib* in the latter period. This change of position on Rukaybi's part signals the importance of context and situation in the act of classification. It suggests that different contexts and situations generate different imperatives which the taxonomist cannot ignore. The literary identity of a text emerges from the interplay between text and context. It is both internally generated and externally driven. And there is no doubt that the tragic events in Algeria in the late 1980s and early 1990s played a defining role in Rukaybi's change of mind.

A similar change in literary identity construction seems to have taken place in the assessment of the work of the Lebanese poet and playwright Georges Schehadé. In his study of the reception of Schehadé's work in France, al-Khashshāb (2000) states that, in the 1950s, he was classified as a French

writer on par with other French writers. However, the rise of post-colonialist theory led to his being re-classified as a Francophone writer (He was the first recipient of the Prize of the Francophone States in 1986.) although, as al-Khashshāb says, his work defies this classification in terms of its content and literary sensibility. Al-Khashshāb also mentions how Schehadé's innovative use of the French language was reinterpreted as an example of post-colonial subversion, although it had earlier been placed within the French literary tradition. Although Schehadé continued to assert that he was nothing but a French writer, the French literary establishment started to treat him as a Francophone poet and playwright because of his Lebanese roots.

Whether we rely on language, content, translation, poetics, context, literary sensibility, or narrative tradition the identity of a literary text is not easy to fix. Instead of settling the issue of literary identity in a theoretically prede-termined manner, we may therefore take a pragmatic approach and rely on anthologies, encyclopaedias, bibliographical dictionaries, and other works of a similar nature to settle this matter. Works of this kind relate to a notion of 'the canon', although what belongs or does not belong to the canon is subject to debate. To highlight some of the problems we may face in acting in this way, I will refer to a few examples. None of the six Palestinian writers writing in English and listed in Salma Khadra Jayyusi's *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* is listed in the two-volume *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature*, edited by Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, although the for-mer was published in 1992 and the latter in 1998, and in spite of the fact that Jayyusi's anthology acquired the status of a reference book in English soon after its publication. Yet the *Encyclopaedia* provides entries for some of the Francophone writers, for example Kateb Yacine (Vol. 2: 427). The editors admit that the decision to include writers writing in French in their *Encyclopaedia* is an arbitrary one:

> Equally arbitrary has been the inclusion of some North African writers writing mainly (or in a few cases, exclusively) in French, where the gen-eral cultural context has suggested an exception to the usual principle that 'Arabic literature' is literature written in Arabic.

> (1998: xi)

I am not highlighting this to point to any deficiency in this excellent work, but to suggest that classification is not a task that can be accomplished with-out a residue. I would also like to stress that classification always presupposes a prior schema, and that the schema concerned may encompass considerations other than the purely literary. Salma Jayyusi's *Anthology* exemplifies this in considering the national/ethnic identity of a writer and the content, but not language, of her works as a deciding factor in considering her as a Palestinian writer. In their *Tarājim wa-āthār fī al-adab al-'arabī fī isrā'īl* (*Biographies and Bibliographies of Arabic Literature in Israel*, 1987) Shmuel Moreh and Mahmoud Abbasi adopt a different principle of classification, using language

and territory as the criteria for classifying a writer as an Arab writer in Israel. These differing principles of classification allow Jayyusi, and Moreh, and Abbasi, to include Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim, Anton Shammas, Emile Habiby in their works. In *Modern Arabic Poetry: An Anthology* (1987), Salma Jayyusi relies on language as the sole criterion of classification. Only poets writing in Arabic are included. These differences in taxonomy provide yet another meaning of the notion of betweenness I have used in the title of this essay.

Conclusion

The issues I have touched on in this essay are not new. African writers writing in English grappled with them in the 1950s when they met for a conference at Makerere University in Kenya to produce a definition of African literature. Chinua Achebe, who attended this conference as a young writer, summarised the questions facing the participants as follows:

> Was [African literature] literature produced *in* Africa or *about* Africa? Could African literature be on any subject, or must it have an African theme? Should it embrace the whole continent or South of the Sahara, or just *Black* Africa? And then the question of language. Should it be in indigenous African languages or should it include Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, etc?
>
> (Achebe 2000: 427)

The conference in the end agreed on the following tentative definition: 'Creative writing in which an African setting is authentically handled or to which experiences originating in Africa are integral' (ibid.). Although this is a vague definition, it is nevertheless unequivocal in its sidelining of language as a criterion of literary identity. It seems that the multiplicity of the indigenous languages of sub-Saharan Africa underlies this position. But it is also this multiplicity which gives the non-indigenous languages their currency in the African context. Achebe comments on this as follows:

> There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication. Therefore those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecs with an eye on the main chances – outside their countries. They are the by-products of the same process that made the new nation states of Africa.
>
> (Achebe 2000: 429)

The situation in the Arabic-speaking world is different. Arabic is an indigenous language. It is also the dominant language. Language, therefore, cannot be ignored as a factor in defining literary identity in the Arab context.

In a paper that touches upon this issue, Edward Said asks, with a hint of irritation as if to dismiss the subject as idle talk: 'Who cares about the labels of national identity anyway?' (Said 2000b: 410). This essay shows that many people do. Recent events in the Arab world and elsewhere suggest that the concern with identities has acquired an enhanced relevance in the lives of so many people. Arab Diasporas have added a new dimension to this concern. And so has the conflict between nationism and statism.

   Identity politics has always been with us. We ignore it at our peril. But identities are not immutable. They are always constructed. And they are always contextualised. In short, they are always in a state of evolving betweenness. The problem arises when we try to eliminate difference or over-state sameness in defining identities. Identity resides between the extremes of difference and sameness. It is this which gives identity its tantalising quality. Let me therefore conclude by reiterating what the Palestinian–American poet Noami Shihab Nye says about the vexing issue of literary language in her poem 'Arabic':[4]

   The man with laughing eyes stopped smiling
   to say, 'Until you speak Arabic –
   – you will not understand pain'.

   Something to do with the back of the head,
   an Arab carries sorrow in the back of the head
   that only language cracks, the thrum of stones

   weeping, grating hinge on an old metal gate.
   'Once you know', he whispered, 'you can enter the room
   whenever you need to. Music you heard from a distance,

   the slapped drum of a stranger's wedding,
   wells up inside your skin, inside rains, a thousand
   pulsing tongues. You are changed'.

   Outside, the snow had finally stopped.
   In a land where snow rarely falls,
   we had felt our days grow white and still.
   I thought pain had no tongue. Or every tongue
   at once, supreme translator, sieve. I admit my
   shame. To live on the brink of Arabic, tugging
   its rich threads without understanding
   how to weave the rug . . . I have no gift.
   The sound, but not the sense.

   I keep looking over his shoulder for someone else
   to talk to, recalling my dying friend who only scrawled
   I can't write. What good would any grammar have been
   to her then? I touched his arm, held it hard,

which sometimes you don't do in the Middle East, and said,
I will work on it, feeling sad

for his strict good heart, but later in the slick street
hailed a taxi by shouting *Pain!* And it stopped
in every language and opened its doors.

<div align="right">(in Handal 2001: 243–244)</div>

Noami Shihab Nye juxtaposes her ordinary persona in which Arabic is a language of her heritage, and her persona as a poet for whom feelings can speak in all languages. At that level, the level of universal experience, the particularity of language ceases to be an issue. All languages are equi-distant from that experience and perhaps all they do is to refract it in their own specific moulds. This is a neat way out of issues of literary identity, but it is unlikely to settle the issue once and for all.

Notes

1 Hafid Bouazza was born in Oujda in Morocco in 1970. He came to Holland as a child. He is author of a novel (*Abdulla's Feet*, 1996), a novella (*Momo*, 1998), and a play (*Apollien*, 1998).
2 Allen Hibbard was born in Ohio in 1956. He lived and worked in Egypt and Syria. A collection of his short stories was translated into Arabic and published in Damascus in 1994.
3 Kilpatrick explains *akhbār* as follows.

> A tradition of works consisting of independent anecdotes and other types of information which may be read independently but at the same time relate to a few central themes; only when the connections between the anecdotes and their links with the central themes are taken into account do these *akhbār* yield their full meaning.

<div align="right">(1992: 49)</div>

4 Noami Shihab wrote this poem in Amman, Jordan during a visit to the country in the winter.

2   Gendering the imperial city

London in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*

Zahia Smail Salhi

Seeking exotic venues: the Orientalists' journey to the East

Antoine Galland's translation of *The Thousand and one Nights*, also known as *The Arabian Nights*, between 1704 and 1717, together with European military accounts following the conquests of the Arab East by various colonial powers, brought to the West images of mysterious, exotic locations, and enchanting cities that promised endless adventures. What ensued was a massive stream of artists and writers, leaving industrial Europe, seeking inspiration for their art in Oriental venues, which included cities such as Algiers, Marrakech, Istanbul, Cairo, and the numerous 'virgin' oases tucked behind magical dunes in the Sahara desert. Their expectations knew no bounds; what they were looking for was not limited to a tourist's visit to the locations, but to reach for the inaccessible objects and subjects of an Orient at the dusk of its glories. Whereas Oriental objects became easily accessible and huge collections were shipped to Europe, the Oriental subjects, behind the high walls of Oriental harems, remained for a long time inaccessible, but to the fertile imagination of painters of whom I would like to cite Eugéne Delacroix and his famous painting *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834).

The work of Orientalist painters was soon succeeded by that of colonial photographers who turned their studios into fictitious harems, producing exotic picture postcards, often sent to the Metropolis as proof of colonial appropriation of faraway cities and their indigenous populations.

The simple, fixated, mute and motionless images produced by the colonial photographers were rendered even more realistic by colonial cinema, which, through the medium of the moving, live picture, offered its viewers fictional adventures from the Orient, embodying the encounter with the 'Other' in remote exotic cities and landscapes (Salhi 2004a: 52–55).

Throughout all three media, images of the harem as the luxurious 'prison' in which the Muslim male jealously kept his wives and concubines were propagated, often symbolising Western aggression directed against the East, and consequently maintaining the coloniser's cultural hegemony. Transforming the closed interior into a painting, a widely circulated photograph, or the

moving picture constituted a violation of the sacred confines of this interior and rendered public what would normally be private.

The Empire writes back

It is worth noting that these artistic encounters were taking place during the period of colonisation of these sites, which automatically resulted in a complex relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Moreover, the sexual exploitation of the native woman through the colonial media was often used as an allegory for Europe's colonial rape of the East.

Responses from the East were abundant, and by way of an example I would like to cite Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem*,[1] and Leila Sebbar et Jean-Michel Belorgey's *Femmes d'Afrique du Nord: Cartes postales (1885–1930)*,[2] which are collections of colonial postcards that photographed native women in sometimes erotic poses. As if the appropriation of Algiers, with its historic sites and sea view, did not provide enough subject matter for tourist postcards, the French wanted to have native women in the most unexpected poses, which further symbolised their appropriation of the colony. Alloula testifies,

> History knows of no other society in which women have been photographed on such a large scale to be delivered to public view ... Moreover, its fixation upon the woman's body leads the postcard to paint this body up, ready it, and eroticise it in order to offer it up to any and all comers from a clientele moved by the unambiguous desire of possession.
>
> (Alloula 1986: 5)

In a collection of short stories named after Delacroix's painting, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Algerian writer Assia Djebar[3] responds to Delacroix and other Orientalist painters by exposing the lives of ordinary Algerian women living in Algiers, which this time is a city like any other city in the world, where people lead ordinary lives. She also speaks of colonial Algiers and the ordeal of its population under the yoke of French colonialism. Djebar's concern in her response to the Orientalists is the misrepresentation of Oriental women whom the Orientalists often portrayed as passive subjects, locked up by a vile man in a sumptuous harem. The women in Delacroix's masterpiece are idle creatures who lie adorned as if ready for unending festivities. Furthermore, although 'Delacroix's paintings display a striking technical realism that celebrates the colors and light of the Orient, they often symbolize Western aggression directed against the East' (Salhi 2004a: 54).

In her book, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, Rana Kabbani,[4] exposes the Orientalist Artists as being part of Europe's colonial machine. In her criticism of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' painting *The Turkish Bath* (1862), which

portrays twenty-six nude women in the intimate setting of a Turkish bath, she says:

> The women in the painting all appear to be cloned from one model, as if depictions of one woman in an endless variety of poses . . . The bath here seems to be an occasion for undressing and dallying. The painting is an obvious collage of the hackneyed themes of Eastern sensuality; the women fondling each other, the perfumes, the incense, the music – all convey the endless potential for erotic gratification of such a *lieu*.
>
> (Kabbani 1986: 84–85)

It is needless to cite Edward Said's most acclaimed book, *Orientalism*,[5] which theorised the responses of the East to Western representations.

The twentieth century witnessed a reverse traffic; Arab men began to visit the West either as workers, often brought in by the coloniser as a cheap labour force,[6] or came to Europe seeking knowledge. This reverse traffic brought about a change of aspect in imperial relations. Arab migrants were bewildered by their contact with Western societies; the first feature they reported was the exposure of Western women, who unlike Eastern women enjoyed the same rights as the men.

It is of paramount importance to underline that in both journeys women were the focus of male attention, which in turn put them in an ambiguous position; for the Western man they were almost part of the colonial booty, and for the Eastern man they were the exotic attraction that the West offered its visitors. In both cases, women were the object of misrepresentation, abuse, and sexual exploitation on the one hand, and the embodiment of either the East or the West, with whom the male artist or author wanted to interact as a symbol of the Oriental or Western location or city, on the other.

In this chapter I shall attempt to focus on the Arab writers' journey to the West and the encounter that takes place therein. Although the Arab male's journey to Europe has been the subject of several novels and travel accounts,[7] the Arab woman's journey to the West has been a recent phenomenon in Arabic literature. During the 1990s titles such as *In the Eye of the Sun* by Ahdaf Soueif,[8] *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (The Nights of Strasbourg) by Assia Djebar,[9] *Only in London* by Hannan al-Shaykh,[10] and *Nisā' 'ala Safar* (Women on a Journey) by Haifa Zangana,[11] appeared as testimonies of Arab women's encounters with both the West and the Western 'Other' in European locations.

Season of Migration to the North

For the purpose of this study, I selected Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. Written in Arabic in 1967, it was splendidly translated by Denys Johnson-Davies, a leading translator of Arabic fiction, into English.

When *Season of Migration to the North* appeared in its English translation, it was accurately described in *The Observer* as 'An Arabian Nights in reverse, enclosing a pithy moral about international misconceptions and delusions'.[12]

Such a description leads to several interpretations; is Tayeb Salih writing back to the West a huge postcard like Malek Alloula did in *The Colonial Harem*? one might ask.

Born in colonial Sudan (1898–1956), Mustafa Sa'eed,[13] the main protagonist of *Season of Migration to the North*, is a child of colonialism, and a fruit of colonial education. He describes how he went to a colonial school at a time when the natives regarded them as a means of acculturation, and a great evil that had come with the armies of occupation. Mustafa Sa'eed relates: 'I remember now that people were not keen about them and so the government would send its officials to scour the villages and tribal communities, while the people would hide their sons' (Salih 1991: 20).

The school gave Mustafa Sa'eed his first contact with Western civilization through his acquired fluency in the English language, and eventually education became the cause which took him from one city to another seeking knowledge. He was described by his countrymen as 'the spoilt child of the English and we all envied him and expected he would achieve great things' (p. 52).

The city as a woman

Mustafa Sa'eed's first trip takes him to Cairo where Mr and Mrs Robinson greet him as the child they never had. Mrs Robinson takes him in her arms as his own mother never did, yet instead of the motherly warmth she tries to bestow on him, Mustafa feels a sexual yearning. He says,

> all of a sudden I felt the woman's arms embracing me and her lips on my cheek. At that moment, as I stood on the station platform amidst a welter of sounds and sensations, with the woman's arms round my neck, her mouth on my cheek, the smell of her body – a strange, European smell – tickling my nose, her breast touching my chest, I felt – I, a boy of twelve – a vague sexual yearning I had never previously experienced.
>
> (p. 25)

At this stage the image of Cairo intermingles with that of Mrs Robinson and becomes a European woman:

> I felt as though Cairo . . . was a European woman just like Mrs Robinson, its arms embracing me, its perfume and the odour of its body filling my nostrils. In my mind her eyes were the colour of Cairo: grey-green, turning at night to a twinkling like that of a firefly.
>
> (p. 25)

Mustafa adds further on, 'Cairo was a city of laughter, just as Mrs Robinson was a woman of laughter' (p. 28). Yet, it is Mrs Robinson who introduces him to European culture; from her he learns to love Bach's music, Keats's poetry, and from her he hears for the first time of Mark Twain.

The Cairo the twelve year old Mustafa has come into contact with is an Oriental city that attracted the likes of Mr Robinson, who knows Arabic, recites al-Ma'ari's[14] poetry and is interested in Islamic thought and architecture. Mr Robinson gives Mustafa a tour of Cairo and takes him to visit the Azhar Mosque and drink tamarind juice in a popular nearby café.

The comparison between Cairo and Mrs Robinson also alludes to the fact that the city was then under the British Empire, and thus its complexion harmonised with that of Mrs Robinson.

The next station in Mustafa Sa'eed's journey north is London, where he spends thirty years of his life (1913–1943). As if not in control of his person, Mustafa reports: 'The mysterious call led me to the coast of Dover, to London' (p. 27). The setting and the landscape are completely alien to Mustafa; the vast greenness, the villages standing on the fringes of hills, the red roofs of houses that vaulted like the backs of cows, the abundance of water, and the transparent veil of mist spread above the valleys are all new and strange elements in the life of Mustafa Sa'eed. The only familiar thing he encounters in London is the smell of the place, which he finds similar to that of Mrs Robinson's body. Thus, Cairo the colonial city, and London, the Metropolis, both have the smell of Mrs Robinson, the English woman living in Cairo. This is also indicative of the two cities both being under the British flag. Therefore, Mrs Robinson becomes the symbol of the British Empire, whose body smell drapes the two cities.

Although the London environment is all too new for Mustafa, nothing can defeat him. Free from any feelings of nostalgia for a forsaken homeland or family,[15] he throws himself into the arms of a London that is 'emerging from the war and the oppressive atmosphere of the Victorian era' (p. 29) without any reticence, and finds his way to the pubs of Chelsea, the clubs of Hampstead, and the gatherings of Bloomsbury. At the University of London, he is appointed to the prominent position of lecturer in Economics, lecturing on 'The Economics of Colonisation', a new system of Economics that is more humane, rejecting the colonialists' methods of exploiting the resources of the colonies.[16]

Deeply immersed in his beliefs, Mustafa Sa'eed soon realises that he has a mission to accomplish – that of avenging the East for the colonial ills of the West.

Realising he is attractive to the women of London, who often see in him a black African god rather than a simple human being, Mustafa finds that he and they share an obsession; they are obsessed with the mysterious East as much as he is obsessed with the mysterious West. For this reason, he finds his way to them as objects for his revenge on the West that humiliated him by colonising his country.

> Mustafa uses them sadistically, relishing his power over white women as a partial revenge for the power which white men hold over him and his people. His relationships with these women are really racial clashes in which sadism is returned for oppression.
>
> (Accad 1985: 59)

At this point it becomes obvious that Mustafa engages in a game of sexual politics, in which sexuality takes the form of violence and revenge. Only too aware of the white women's stereotype of the black man as the noble savage who has it in his power to give a woman the sexual experience of her life, Mustafa enters the game with much confidence, and declares 'I'll liberate Africa with my penis' (Salih 1991: 120). Returning to the Empire its dream of the mysterious Orient, Mustafa Sa'eed creates a piece of the enchanting East in his own bedroom in the heart of London. He says:

> My bedroom was a graveyard that looked into a garden; its curtains were pink...the carpeting was of a warm greenness, the bed spacious, with swansdown cushions. There were small electric lights, red, blue, and violet, placed in certain corners; on the walls were large mirrors, so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously. The room was heavy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense, and in the bathroom were pungent Eastern perfumes, lotions, unguents, and pills.
>
> (pp. 30–31)

Having set the trap in his bedroom, Mustafa Sa'eed saddles his imaginary camel and goes on his hunting trips doing everything possible to entice a woman into his bed, after which he sets up for some new prey.

On his hunting journeys Mustafa throws himself unreservedly into the arms of London, and attends various cultural and political events, which he makes his hunting grounds. He states, 'The women I enticed to my bed included girls from the salvation army, Quaker societies and Fabians gatherings. When the liberals, the Conservatives, Labour, or the Communists, held a meeting, I would saddle my camel and go' (p. 30).

His first victim is Sheila Greenwood, who works as a waitress in a Soho restaurant. Mustafa describes her as a simple girl with a sweet smile. He seduces her with gifts and makes her dizzy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense. He testifies that she entered his bedroom a virgin and when she left it she was carrying the germs of self-destruction within her (p. 35).

Sheila Greenwood commits suicide when Mustafa ends the relationship and moves to his next victim, Ann Hammond.

Speaking of Ann Hammond Mustafa declares: 'When she saw me, she saw a dark twilight like a false dawn. Unlike me she yearned for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes I was a symbol of all her hankerings' (p. 30). As much as Mustafa becomes a symbol[17] in the eyes of his women victims, they in turn are approached by him as symbols of London, which in turn symbolises the British Empire. This is put in a more straightforward manner in the depiction of his meeting with Isabella Seymour at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. As they walk side by side he sees in her 'a city of secrets and rapture' and in himself 'a thirsty desert, a wilderness of southern desires' (p. 37–38). The more these women search for the Orient in Mustafa, the more he 'fabricated stories about

deserts of golden sands and jungles where non-existent animals called out to one another' (p. 38). And when he tells Isabella that his parents had been drowned in the Nile, she cries out ecstatically: 'the Nile . . . then you live on the banks of the Nile?', Mustafa replies:

> Yes. Our house is right on the bank of the Nile, so that when I'm lying on my bed at night I put my hand out of the window and idly play with the Nile waters till sleep overtakes me.
>
> (p. 39)

Amazed by what the English women will believe and at the same time overjoyed at tightening his grip on his new victim, Mustafa states:

> The Nile, that snake god, has gained a new victim. The city has changed into a woman . . . You, my lady, may not know, but you – like Carnarvon when he entered Tutankhamen's tomb – have been infected with a deadly disease which has come from you know not where and which will bring about your destruction, be it sooner or later.
>
> (Ibid.)

Like Ann Hammond and Sheila Greenwood before her, Isabella Seymour also commits suicide when Mustafa ends their relationship.

In this hunt of revenge and deep anger, Mustafa resembles King Shahrayar in *The Thousand and one Nights*, who after being betrayed by his wife sets on having a virgin brought to him every night, only to slaughter her in the morning, until Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter, steps in to save her women-folk by gradually weaning him from his habit; She tells him a story every night, to which he listens enraptured, and every time the story reaches its climax, she goes to sleep, and keen to hear the end, Shahrayar spares her life. This relationship lasts for a thousand and one nights, after which he has become a changed person.

Like Shahrayar, Mustafa meets Jean Morris – a Scheherazade who sacrifices herself not in order to save her women-folk, but to stand in the face of Mustafa and destroy the layers of lies he wove around himself, not by telling him a story every night but by standing up to him, and being his arch-rival.

He meets her at a party in Chelsea, and unlike the other women he has met before, she is not attracted to him in the same way as they were; from the first instance she stands defiant and arrogant, telling him: 'You're ugly . . . I've never seen an uglier face than yours' (Salih 1991: 30), and when he opens his mouth to speak she has gone. For more than a thousand and one nights, Mustafa tirelessly pursues her; when he avoids her she entices him to her, and when he runs after her she flees from him (p. 156), until she finally gives in, telling him: 'You're a savage bull that does not weary of the chase . . . I am tired of your pursuing me and of my running before you. Marry me.' (p. 33).

Little does Mustafa know when he marries Jean Morris, that he is heading to the shore of his destruction; his Oriental room does not seduce her, and instead she goes on destroying his most treasured possessions one after another (pp. 156–157). He states,

> My bedroom became a theatre of war; my bed a patch of hell. When I grasped her it was like grasping at clouds, like bedding a shooting star, like mounting the back of a Prussian military march . . . It was as though I was a slave Shahrayar you buy in a market for a dinar encountering a Scheherazade begging amidst the rubble of a city destroyed by plague. By day I lived with the theories of Keynes and Tawney and at night I resumed the war with bow and sword and spear and arrows . . . *The city was transformed into an extraordinary woman*,[18] with her symbols and her mysterious calls, towards whom I drove my camels till their entrails ached and I myself almost died of yearning for her. My bedroom was a spring-well of sorrow, the germ of a fatal disease.
>
> (pp. 33–34)

This time, the city has changed not only into a woman but into an extraordinary woman, and the deadly disease that was to destroy the English women Mustafa had encountered, has now spread into his own bedroom and without doubt has affected him, for in the encounter with Jean Morris, he is the one yearning for her, while she stands as the defiant despot leading the war, and symbolising the armies of the Empire, while the other women symbolised the Orientalists' attraction to the mysterious East. Jean Morris shows Mustafa the other face of London/the Empire; transforming him from the hunter to the prey and reminding him that he is the slave and she the master in the East–West encounter. He notes with much sadness that he is the invader who has come from the South, and she is the icy battlefield from which he will not make a safe return (p. 160). Despite the bitterness of the relationship, and despite his experiencing feelings of ignominy, sorrow, loneliness, and loss, Mustafa cannot break free from Jean Morris, a failure which also symbolises the love – hate relationship, between coloniser and colonised, which often ends in a tragedy. He testifies: 'How often have I asked myself what it was that bound me to her! Why didn't I leave her and escape? But I knew there was nothing I could do about it and that the tragedy had to happen' (p. 162).

The tragedy, does indeed come as a culmination of being cheated, humiliated, and frustrated by Jean Morris, who one cold night in winter stretches out naked waiting for a Mustafa at the peak of despair, inviting him with unprecedented tenderness for a night of 'truth and tragedy', as he describes it. He approaches her with a dagger which she kisses fervently. After much hesitation to respond to her calls, he finally leans over her and puts the blade-edge between her breasts, and eventually plunges it into her heart, with something approaching sexual fulfilment.

In this way Mustafa's den of lies and seduction in London is shattered and transformed into a scene of horror, resembling Delacroix's painting, *La Mort de Sardanapale* (1827–1828). This particular tableau by Delacroix represents Europe's imagined Orient, as it was painted prior to the artist's visit to North Africa. It pictures an Oriental despot sitting on his luxurious bed, watching with detachment as his naked concubines are coldly stabbed by three dark villains. The painting depicts a setting of chaos and destruction, and leaves the viewer with a sense of deep unease. In a similar manner, *Season of Migration to the North* leaves its reader with mixed feelings of disgust and confusion.

After killing Jean Morris, Mustafa Sa'eed suddenly awakens from the big lie that he has built around himself. The long crusade of vengeance has come to a standstill as if he has attained his ultimate target.

Alienation and revenge/crime and punishment

In the courtroom in London, Mustafa is tried not only for killing Jean Morris, but also for being the cause of the suicide of Sheila Greenwood, Ann Hammond, and Isabella Seymour. Silent and indifferent, Mustafa listens as if the person in question was not himself. He wants to stop the whole process as he is convinced that they are wrestling a corpse and not a live person. He is almost compelled to stand up and shout to the court; 'This Mustafa Sa'eed does not exist. He's an illusion, a lie. I ask you to rule that the lie be killed' (p. 32).

But no one hears his silent screams, and while his counsel goes on defending him, claiming that 'these girls were not killed by Mustafa Sa'eed but by the germ of a deadly disease that assailed them a thousand years ago' (p. 33), Mustafa would prefer to be executed. By his execution the lie he had built around himself and of which he eventually became a victim would also be demolished.[19]

Mustafa Sa'eed believes that the deadly disease has affected him too, and while the defence led by Professor Foster-Keen has turned the trial into a conflict between two worlds, a struggle in which Mustafa was one of the victims, this latter is determined that cultural hybrids like himself have no future[20] and the colony should destroy its own creation, that is, the black Englishman.[21]

Although both Professor Foster-Keen and Mustafa speak of a deadly disease, it is not clear whether the two are talking about the same thing. For Mustafa, the disease he means is European violence and colonisation of the East. He says: 'They imported to us the germ of the great European violence . . . the like of which the world has never previously known' (p. 95).

The colonisation of the East by European powers is often described as the colonial rape of the Orient. For the colonised subjects, the rape of their country is often a source of deep humiliation, and despite the efforts of the colonisers to assimilate the natives through education, and the so-called 'civilizing mission', the final result is often the creation of cultural hybrids of the likes of Mustafa Sa'eed, who are destined to live on the cultural margins, as they belong nowhere but remain suspended between East and West. This results

in deep alienation and solitude, and unless the alienated individual extricates himself from his condition by going back to his people and leading their simple life, the ultimate destination of his existence is often suicide.

In the case of Mustafa Sa'eed, he prefers homicide to suicide, and set himself on a mission to avenge his people for the rape of their country through sexual politics, by 'repaying Englishmen for what they did to him by carrying the battle into their very homes, and destroying their wives and daughters' (Abbas 1985: 31). Mustafa claims, 'Yes, my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your home: a drop of the poison which you injected into the veins of history' (Salih 1991: 95).

In his book, *Sexual Encounters in the Middle East*, Derek Hopwood argues:

> The hero Mustafa Said [*sic*] feels humiliated by having lived in colonial Sudan under the British, his character distorted, and on arrival in Britain decides that the best form of revenge is to 'conquer' as many women as possible. In so doing he is attacking his colonial masters at their most vulnerable point. In the colonial situation Sudanese men had thought that British women were not 'sexually accessible' and that there was an 'unbreachable wall' between them. Mustafa said [*sic*] is determined to breach this wall.
>
> (Hopwood 1999: 263)

Regardless of the outcome of the trial, Mustafa feels he has accomplished his mission. He defiantly tells himself in a monologue:

> I, over and above everything else, am a colonizer; I am the intruder whose fate must be decided. When Mahmood Wad Ahmed was brought to Kitchener after his defeat at the Battle of Atbara, Kitchener said to him, 'Why have you come to my country to lay waste and plunder?' It was the intruder who said this to the person whose land it was, and the owner of the land bowed his head and said nothing. So let it be with me.
>
> (Salih 1991: 94)

But Mustafa's claims remain a silent monologue, that he addresses to himself and not to his antagonists in court, which shows that he cannot quite say what he thinks, and makes his conquest a solitary battle that he wages all by himself, despite the fact that he has sacrificed his own self for avenging the honour of his country, and also despite his effort throughout the novel to render this personal quest a national or even international cause. He says,

> In that court I hear the rattle of swords in Carthage and the clatter of the hooves of Allenby's horses desecrating the ground of Jerusalem. The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say 'yes' in their language.
>
> (pp. 94–95)

Yet, Mustafa Sa'eed has always been a lonely person right from childhood; his upbringing as an orphan, rescued from the street and adopted by the English/colonial school, armed him with a capacity to adapt himself to all situations. This is the impression the reader gets from the onset about Mustafa. However, while in London, he lives as a lonely and alienated person, struggling to adjust and acclimatise himself to his foreign environment.

Despite his position as lecturer of Economics at the University of London, Mustafa has not been able to make any tangible friends. This sense of isolation has partially owed to his character becoming twisted to the monster that was the ultimate colonial lie.

Although the West admitted Mustafa into their land as the product of Western hyperbole, in the sense that he has been made into an example of the success that was the ideology of colonialism, 'a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization' (p. 33), he knows that he is only accepted within a limited sphere. Mustafa bitterly explains that although in court some people were trying to condemn him, while some others were trying to save him, he had nothing in common with them. He says:

> Had I asked one of them to rent me a room in his house he would as likely as not have refused, and were his daughter to tell him she was going to marry this African, he'd have felt that the world was collapsing under his feet.
>
> (p. 94)

In the courtroom, Mustafa comes to realise that his masters only admitted him in London to live within a specific margin, 'If only he had stuck to academic studies he'd have found real friends of all nationalities' (p. 59).

At this stage, Mustafa faces a great disillusion, all that the Empire had done for him was not for his own sake as a person, but he was used as a means to display the fruit of the Empire's 'civilising mission' in the uncivilised East. Therefore what the court is trying him for is not only homicide, but most importantly for being ungrateful to his civilisers who had taught him the principles of civilisation.

Although the trial results in a seven-year prison sentence followed by Mustafa Sa'eed's deportation from the United Kingdom, to his country of origin, where he is forced to try to find his roots again, Mustafa's alienation in his homeland leads him to see himself as an uprooted palm tree that cannot take root again. At the climax of his identity crisis and feeling out of place in his birthplace, Mustafa Sa'eed ends his life mysteriously, drowning in the Nile. And in this way the statement of Professor Foster-Keen to the members of the Jury proves true. He said: ' Mustafa Sa'eed, gentlemen of the jury, is a noble person whose mind was able to absorb Western civilisation but it broke his heart' (p. 33).

Place and displacement: London as the city of exile

Place and displacement is a major feature of *Season of Migration to the North*. In London Mustafa experiences a deep feeling of estrangement and eventually comes to believe that the likes of him are destined to live on the cultural margins:

> Marginality is the condition constructed by the posited relation to a privileged centre, an 'Othering' directed by the imperial authority. The 'marginal' and the 'central' are of course psychological constructs, but they have their grounding in the alienation resulting from colonial incorporation.
>
> (Ashcroft *et al*. 1998: 104)

Throughout the novel, the city of London is at the same time the backdrop where the events of the story take place and the Metropolis that symbolises the British Empire against which Mustafa is waging his war of revenge. These two roles are clearly obvious from a simple reading of *Season of Migration to the North*. However, London is also a living character that comes through the novel in such a vivid way that it can only be portrayed by an author who knows its ins and outs very well.

Although the reader is given the impression from the outset that Mustafa is a character devoid of feelings,

> I had felt from childhood that I – that I was different – I mean that I was not like children of my age: I wasn't affected by anything, I didn't cry when hit, wasn't glad if the teacher praised me in class, didn't suffer from the things the rest did. I was like something rounded, made of rubber: you throw it in water and it doesn't get wet, you throw it on the ground and it bounces back.
>
> (Salih 1991: 19–20)

London proves an alienating environment for him, for it is very different from the environment of his childhood. The first thing that strikes him is that London is too orderly in comparison to the chaotic world of his childhood in Sudan. He testifies: 'this is an ordered world; its houses, fields, and trees are ranged in accordance with a plan. The streams too do not follow a zigzag course but flow between artificial banks' (p. 27).

Like the elements of the environment, the people, too, are different. Mustafa is astounded by the way people board the trains with no fuss: 'The train stops at a station for a few minutes; hurriedly people get off, hurriedly others get on, then the train moves off again. No fuss' (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, the most alienating difference between Mustafa and the people of London, is colour; they are white and he is black. Isabella Seymour

asks him: 'What race are you?...Are you African or Asian?' to which he responds: 'I'm like Othello – Arab–African', then she replies: 'Yes...your nose is like the noses of Arabs in pictures, but your hair isn't soft and jet black like that of Arabs' (p. 38). Clearly, Isabella Seymour has a preconceived image of the Arabs, while the appearance of Mustafa is something in-between the looks of the Africans and the Arabs. Such an encounter sets Mustafa in a clear margin; no matter whether African or Arab, he is coloured and therefore does not fall into the race of the English people. Despite living in London for thirty years Mustafa feels that he cannot break the boundaries of his margin and the city of London remains, as ever, an unattainable fortress in a well protected centre. He says,

> Thirty years. The willow trees turned from white to green to yellow in the parks; the cuckoo sang to the spring each year. For thirty years the Albert hall was crammed each night with lovers of Beethoven and Bach, and the presses brought out thousands of books on art and thought. The plays of Bernard Shaw were put on at The Royal Court and The Haymarket. Edith Sitwell was giving wings to poetry and the Prince of Wales's Theatre pulsated with youth and bright lights...For thirty years I was a part of all this, living in it but insensitive to its real beauty.
>
> (p. 36)

Mustafa's sense of marginalisation becomes even more intense during the long British winter, as the temperatures in February drop to ten degrees below zero and the water in the lakes turns into ice: 'The whole city was a field of ice – ice in the streets and in the front gardens of the houses. The water froze in the pipes and people's breath came out from their mouths like steam' (p. 162). This image of London as being extremely cold is conveyed from the first page of the novel, where the author–narrator describes it as the 'land whose fishes die of the cold' (p. 1).

The winter of London mirrors Mustafa's exile and alienation, rendered even more intense by the gloominess of the surroundings which are not lit by a ray of sunshine for days on end. Mustafa states, 'Evening was like morning, morning like night – dark and gloomy. The sun had not shone for twenty-two days' (p. 162). For a person who grew up in the South, where the sun shone throughout the year, such a scene is without doubt depressing, making him often wonder why he had to migrate to the north, if the north's winter is so long and gloomy, which often reflected in the temperament of the people who inhabit such locations.

Yet, Mustafa is caught hanging between North and South, and East and West, a location designated for cultural hybrids who according to *Season of Migration to the North*, are destined for a tragic end. The novel symbolically ends with an outcry: 'Help! Help!'.

Notes

1 Malek Alloula (1986) *The Colonial Harem*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

2 Leila Sebbar et Jean-Michel Belorgey's *Femmes d'Afrique du Nord: Cartes postales (1885–1930)* (Bleu autour, 2002).

3 Assia Djebar (1992) *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, Charlottesville.

4 Rana Kabbani (1986) *Europe's Myths of Orient: Divide and Rule*, London: Macmillan.

5 Edward William Said (1979) *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage books. See also Ziauddin Sardar (1999) *Orientalism*, Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press., A. L. Macfie (2002) *Orientalism*, London: Longman; A. L. Macfie (ed.), *Orientalism: A Reader* (Edinburgh University Press), and Reina Lewis (2004) *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, New Jersey, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

6 In his novel *La Terre et le sang* (1953), Mouloud Feraoun writes about the emigration of North African workers to France. The novel highlights, that driven by the poverty in their homeland, the North African workers traveled to France to find employment in order to improve their families' living conditions. Feraoun gives a detailed description of the deploring squalid rooms they inhabited in France, and the dangerous jobs they were offered.

7 By way of an example: Rifā'a Al-Tahtāwi's, *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī talkhīs Bārīz* (Cairo: NP, 1905); Tawfiq al-Hakim's '*Usfūr Min al-Sharq* (1938); Yahya Haqqi, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (1944); and some Algerian Francophone novels such as Mouloud Feraoun's, *La Terre et le sang* (1953), and *Les Chemins qui montent* (1957), Mouloud Mammeri's, *Le Sommeil du juste* (1955).

8 Ahdaf Soueif (1994) *In the Eye of the Sun*, London: Bloomsbury. Ahdaf Soueif is an Egyptian woman novelist, living in London. In her novel she writes about the experience of exile from an Arab woman's perspective.

9 Assia Djebar (1997) *Les Nuits de Strasbourg* (The Nights of Strasbourg), Paris: Actes Sud.
    Although Djebar lived and continues to live outside her native country Algeria, the events of most of her novels take place in Algeria. *Les Nuits de Strasbourg*, written during her self-implemented exile in the United States in the nineties, focuses on experiences of women of various backgrounds in Europe.

10 Hannan al-Shaykh (2001) *Only in London*, London: Bloomsbury. Hannan al-Shaykh lives in London and writes in Arabic. This is the first novel by her to be set in London, bringing together a group of Arab outcasts (a Moroccan prostitute, a Lebanese homosexual, and an Iraqi divorcee). Although all three have varying expectations from London, and live their marginality in different ways, they all suffer from solitude.

11 Haifa Zangana (2001) *Nisā' 'ala Safar*, London: Dār al-Hikma. Haifa Zangana is an Iraqi woman writer and artist living in London since 1976. She writes solely in Arabic.

12 Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, Back cover.

13 Although the protagonist's name should be transliterated as: Mustafa Sa'id, we prefer to use Mustafa Sa'eed, as in the translation.

14 Abu al-'Alā' al-Ma'arī is a famous Abbasid poet and philosopher.

15 Although Mustafa leaves his mother behind, their separation is described as being cold, as if the person in question was some kind of house mate.

16 An English person told the author–narrator that Mustafa Sa'eed: 'belonged to the Fabian school of economists who hid behind a screen of generalities so as to

escape facing up to facts supported by figures . . . No, this Mustafa Sa'eed of yours was not an economist to be trusted', p. 58 of *Season of Migration to the North*.

  Also Mustafa Sa'eed wrote several books with the following titles: *The Economics of Colonialism, Colonialism and Monopoly, The Cross and Gunpowder, The Rape of Africa*.

17 '. . . she gazed hard and long at me as though I was a symbol rather than a reality' p. 43.
18 My emphasis.
19 A very similar scene can be found in Mouloud Mammeri's novel, *Le Sommeil du juste (Slumber of the Just)*, where the protagonist Arezki faces the French colonial justice. Arezki sat in the court as if the trial did not concern him; he knew well that what the court was trying him for was not his crime of stealing, but for being ungrateful to his civilisers who gave him the principles of civilisation through French education.

  Although Tayeb Salih denies having read this novel, the resemblance between Mostafa Sa'eed and Arezki is enormous.
20 In his novel, *Les Chemins qui montent* (1957), Mouloud Feraoun portrayed Amer N'Amer (son of Amer, a Kabyle man and Marie, a French woman) as an alienated character. Amer described himself as 'un batard authentique!', and his feelings of alienation grew deeper after he felt rejected by the French in France (his uncles).

  Realising that he belongs to neither side, his suffering and sense of alienation reached a crescendo, which eventually resulted in his suicide.
21 Jean Amrouche, A Christian Kabyle poet (1906–1962) wrote: 'cultural hybrids are monsters. Very interesting monsters, but monsters without a future'. Cited in Zahia Smail Salhi, *Politics and Poetics*, 1999: 143.

3　Voices of exiles and the fictional works of Tayeb Salih

Ami Elad-Bouskila

Introduction

Exiles or Diasporas have typified the modern era since the turn of the nineteenth, and particularly during the twentieth, centuries. This phenomenon of emigration for economic, political, and cultural reasons, of individuals as well as communities who sought to settle in other countries, is reflected in various spheres of art, including literature. Emigrant writers moved from their countries of origin, especially from 'Third World' to 'First World' countries; from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh they went chiefly to the United Kingdom, from African countries to France and the United Kingdom, and from China, Japan, and Vietnam to the United States of America and France. It is apparent that from a number of aspects a traditional phenomenon was created, since this was not merely one generation of emigrants but rather several waves in terms of time, space, and place. During the twentieth century, the second generation of emigrant writers, not to mention the third and fourth generations, not only changed countries from homeland to Diaspora, but also the language in which they wrote, from their mother tongue to the local language, primarily English, French, and German.[1] In many respects, the key word to describe their situation is loss, since we are dealing with loss of territory, loss of mother tongue, loss of language usage, loss of environment or, in short, partial loss of the past in favour of the present and the future.[2] In addition to these waves of emigrants, we should bear in mind that there is also a continuous wave of those who leave unrelated to collective events, that is, political, economic, and cultural events, but rather for individual reasons.

The case of the Arab world in the subject under discussion is very similar, since from the turn of the nineteenth century and until the third decade of the twentieth century people emigrated for the same reasons, especially from Lebanon and Syria to the United States and South America, and later to Europe. The literature of these Arab emigrant authors became known as *Adab al-Mahjar* (Diaspora literature).[3]

Since the 1950s a new wave of Arab emigrants, including writers, moved to various new countries, especially European countries and the United States.

This phenomenon of emigration was motivated by the same reasons as the previous waves, but was coupled with other issues such as the lack of freedom of speech in their own countries.[4] It is therefore hardly surprising that we find some prominent Arab authors who have left their own countries for other Arab ones, such as the Sudanese novelist Ibrāhīm Ishāq Ibrāhīm (b. 1946) or the well-known novelist of Saudi extraction 'Abd al-Rahmān Munīf (1933–2004) among others. From a number of aspects they can be defined as *post-mahjari* writers who moved to Western countries, especially to Europe, such as the Syrian short story writer Zakariya Tamir (b. 1931), or the well-known Syrian poet Adonis (b. 1930) and the Lebanese novelist Hannan al-Shaykh (b. 1945).[5] In addition to these authors' output there is also a considerable activity of literary periodicals, mostly in Arabic, such as *al-Nāqid*, *Mawāqif*, *al-Ightirāb al-Adabī*, *al-Kātiba*, *al-Majalla*, and *al-Wasat*, published in Europe, not to mention the Arabic broadcasting channels both in Europe, such as the *MBC* (Middle Eastern Broadcasting Corporation) and inside the Arab world, such as *al-Jazeera*.

The case of Palestinian literature is unique since it can be divided into three main post-1967 groups: first, the literature written by Israeli Palestinian Arabs; second, the literature written in the Palestinian Authority; and third, the Palestinian literature written in the various diasporas, especially in Europe, the United States, and some Arab countries.[6]

The concept of complementary opposites

A better description of the topic under discussion is connected, in my view, with an attempt to create a new model or framework that will enable us to examine this phenomenon, among others, of writers in exile, not in terms of black and white, or in the well-known terms of 'binary oppositions', which can be defined as follows:

> Binary opposition is the principle of contrast between two mutually exclusive terms: on/off, up/down, left/right, etc.; an important concept of structuralism, which sees such distinction as fundamental to all language and thought. The theory of phonology developed by Roman Jakobson uses the concept of binary features, which are properties either present or absent in any phoneme: voicing, for example is present in /z/ but not in /s/. This concept has been extended to anthropology by Claude Levi-Strauss (in such oppositions as nature/culture, raw/cooked, inedible/edible) and to narratology by A. J. Greimas.
>
> (Boldick 1996: 24)

As indicated in the extract, the term 'binary oppositions' only comprises two sides, while the term I prefer to use includes several. Therefore, the term I find more appropriate is 'complementary opposites'. Since we have

not found any definition of this term in literary dictionaries, I would like to define it as follows:

> Complementary opposites are a framework / model / phenomenon / theory / concept in any cultural field that can be used to emphasise qualities of more than one side or two complementary dichotomic features. Therefore, complementary opposites have been chosen to play the role of multifaceted / polyphonic characteristics that allow the reader / spectator / critic – the addressee – to see the work of art from various points of view. There is an entire range of colours between black and white, yet black and white also complement one another.

It would appear that in several aspects this model of complementary opposites can be used as a conceptual frame, which helps us achieve a better understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon, since the issue under discussion is both complex and problematic. Nonetheless, the topic of Diasporas/exiles might describe and analyse one set of features while the other set of characteristics, which relates to the point of departure of the authors, might complete the picture.

Tayeb Salih and the question of lost childhood

Tayeb Salih was born in 1929 in al-Debba village in northern Sudan to middle-class parents. He attended the village primary school, the junior high school in Port Sudan, and completed his secondary studies at the Wādī Sīdnā high school north of Omdurman, from where he graduated *cum laude*. He moved to Khartoum where he enrolled in the faculty of natural sciences, but did not persevere with his studies for a variety of reasons, among them his strong literary inclinations. Tayeb Salih began teaching, but here, too, he did not last long and his urge to travel led him to the United Kingdom where he took a degree in international relations at the University of London.

Tayeb Salih settled in London and served as the director of the BBC's Arabic drama department. He then served a stint as director general of the Ministry of Information in Qatar, and also worked for a short period in the Sudan. He did not return to the Sudan to work, for, in his own words, he did not wish to settle there permanently. The nature of his work would have required him to assume a political position, which is something he has always avoided. Tayeb Salih worked for UNESCO in Paris and was later employed as the organisation's representative in Qatar and Jordan.[7]

Two central facts in Tayeb Salih's life, which became the principal axes around which his literary works revolve, are his birth in a Sudanese village – in which he lived for part of his childhood – and his prolonged residence in England. It may be assumed that someone born in a remote village is bound to give expression to this in his work. In the works of village-born Arab

authors, even after the majority left for the city, their villages, distant in time and space, appear time and again. Some obvious examples are the Egyptian authors ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Sharqāwī (1920–1987), ʿAbd al-Hakīm Qāsim (1935–1990) and Muhammad Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd (b. 1944), and the Sudanese author Ibrāhīm Ishāq Ibrāhīm (b. 1946).

   As indicated earlier, the village is employed as the central stage in the majority of Tayeb Salih's works, either fully, as in 'Nakhla ʿala al-Jadwal' (1953), 'Hafnat Tamr' (1957), 'Dawmat Wad Hāmid' (1960), *Urs al-Zayn* (1966), *Bandar Shāh: Daw al-Bayt* (1971), *Maryūd* (1976–1977), or partially, as in 'Risāla ilā Aylīn' (1960), *Mawsim al-Hijra ila al-Shamāl* (1966) and 'Al-Rajul al-Qubrusī' (1978).[8] Despite the fact that Tayeb Salih left his village, at first temporarily for high school, and later when he left for London at age twenty-four, the village remained etched in his heart, his thoughts and his emotions as a central part of his very existence. It is therefore hardly surprising that some of the characters in the author's works are villagers, the events and customs are those of a village, and that they are all given such full expression in these works.[9] Tayeb Salih never dissociated himself from his village even when he went to live in England; his move was neither planned nor due to economic reasons, nor because he wanted to acquire an education; according to him, it was mere chance that brought him to England. Over the years he made a point of visiting his village at varying times, even though he never went back there to settle. But despite the distance in time and space, the author invariably describes the village from the inside, as someone for whom the real village is in his heart, adding further layers, some realistic and semi-realistic, and some fictional. The distance in time and space has not harmed his relationship with his village and its inhabitants.[10] On the contrary, the distance enables him to present the village as a kind of 'Paradise lost' to which he only returns as a visitor or tourist, and not as a native villager.[11] Thus separated from his village, even at the beginning of his stay in England, he seems to have moved closer to it. Lonely in a foreign land, and in order to maintain contact with it, he wrote stories about the village. Salih testifies:

> When I reached London in February 1953, I found myself suffering in one of the coldest winters England had ever known. The cold seared me and when I recall it my teeth still chatter. I began blaming myself severely, asking: 'how did I then land myself in the first place in this country and what misfortune has driven me here?' It was then, when burdened by longing for my family, my country and my clan, that I wrote a short story entitled 'Nakhla ʿala al-Jadwal' (A Palm Tree by the Stream). That was in 1953 and it was published later in the collection of short stories, *Dawmat Wad Hāmid*; A simple story written very simply. Now when I re-read it, I realise how much I was influenced by an all-embracing longing for my homeland. The story was an expression of longing for its environment and an attempt to evoke it.
>
> (Jibrīl 1996: 20)

Beyond his descriptions of life in the village, its customs and traditions, Salih's characters are the most enthralling and important aspects of his work. Indeed, the author's success in shaping his characters is precisely their appearance as village persons, figures of his first home rather than those of his adopted home in the West. Evidence of this can be found in riveting descriptions of Salih's village characters, including that of the narrator.[12] The author appears to have made no real effort to go deeply into Eastern characters that do not form an organic part of the Sudanese village, like Mustafa Saʿīd in *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl*, who is Sudanese but an outsider in the village, to describe them convincingly and credibly, and this is certainly true in the case of his Western characters. They always remain foreign, alienated and distant, not only from us, the readers, but first and foremost from Salih himself. Possibly the only instance in which Salih describes, forcefully and importantly, Eastern characters who are not from his village, is that of Rabāb and her parents in the story 'Yawm Mubārak ʿalā Shāti' Umm Bāb' (A Blessed Day on the Umm Bab Shore).[13] Because the story was written in Qatar, and the action takes place in that region, the author was able to shape the local characters credibly and with the insight of one who lived in the region (1974–1981) and is familiar with it. Here, too, we can see the relationship between real life and fiction, and when the point in question is his native home, the author describes his simple characters extremely well.

Voices of exile *in Tayeb Salih's work*

The second axis of Salih's life is London. He went to England when he was twenty-four. Without a doubt, leaving for England at a relatively young age continued to be expressed in one way or another in his works. Indeed, the encounter of Tayeb Salih, the author and Sudanese intellectual, with the Western coloniser has provided much material for his works. In contrast to other Arab writers who left for the West and later returned to the Middle East or Africa to settle there,[14] Tayeb Salih has only returned to his homeland for visits.

That these writers returned to the Middle East or North Africa, while Tayeb Salih remained abroad, not only distinguishes him from them, but also raises a question that the majority of literary critics have ignored: is Salih indeed a Sudanese Arab author? How in fact, can we determine a writer's nationality? Is it according to his own wishes and definition or according to other parameters associated with the language in which he writes?[15] For example, is an author like the Moroccan writer Tahar ben Jelloun (b. 1944), who was born in Morocco but is permanently domiciled in France, a Moroccan? In contrast to Tayeb Salih, Tahar ben Jelloun not only lives in France, but also writes in French.[16] Moreover, his prestige is due to his works in French (he was the *Prix Goncourt* laureate in 1987), and not in Arabic. With regard to language, a parallel case may be made for other modern Arab writers like, for example, Palestinian writers who were born in British

Mandate Palestine, but reside abroad, such as Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā
(1920–1994). Is he a Palestinian writer as he is usually presented, or perhaps
he should be viewed as an Iraqi author as some writers and literary critics
think he is?[17] This phenomenon is also true of some Palestinian writers who
live outside their own country and who write mainly in Arabic, but also in
English, such as Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā, and French, such as Afnān al-Qāsim
(b. 1938), in addition to those Palestinian writers who live in Israel and write
some of their works in Hebrew, such as Sayyid Qashūʿa (b. 1976), Anton
Shammās (b. 1950), Naʿīm ʿArāidī (b. 1948), and ʿAtāllāh Mansūr (b. 1934).[18]

   This circle of comparison can be widened to include the *Mahjar* poets and
authors, first and foremost Jubrān Khalīl Jubrān (1883–1931), who was born
in Lebanon and lived in the United States, and some of whose works were
written in Arabic and some others in English. To return to Salih, one should
consider it quite extraordinary that this writer, who has lived outside the
Sudan for most of his life (fifty years at the time of writing), mainly in
England, continues to write in Arabic for reasons of either culture or princi-
ple. Therefore, I would rather consider Tayeb Salih as a *post-Mahjarī* writer, as
is the case with other Arab authors[19] mentioned earlier who either chose or
were forced by Arab authorities to leave their countries, mostly to the West
but not to America, as was the case with the *Mahjar* authors. However, Tayeb
Salih did not write, or more precisely did not publish any literary works prior
to 1953, when he moved to England. Eventually, the distance and separation
from his homeland gave him the initial motivation to write, and writing may
have compensated him for the loss of his home. In any event, although Salih
has written most of his works in England, France, and Greece, Europe con-
stitutes a marginal framework, in contrast to the Sudanese village in which
he lived for but a brief part of his life.

   It should be borne in mind that in his life in the Sudan as well as in
England, in addition to his historical and literary sources, Arabic and
English were reflected not only in his literary works but also in his journal-
istic writing. Salih considers his journalistic writing not a 'waste of time' or
an obstacle to his contribution in the field of 'pure literature', but rather as
a unique literary genre. Furthermore, Salih is very proud of this genre and
his answer to my question (during a long interview which I conducted with
him[20]) is very clear:

AMI ELAD-BOUSKILA: I'd like to ask you if there are any differences between
    your journalistic and fictional writing.
SALIH: Yes, of course. Although I brought to what you call journalistic writing
    some of the fictional techniques, I was not actually writing journalism as
    such. I was writing, I think, what is known in this country as literary
    journalism. I would take a topic or a poet or a writer or a philosopher or
    a historian, and go a little deeper into the subject than is usually done in
    journalism. And some of the products I feel rather proud of.

                                                     (Bouskila 2000: interview)

Tayeb Salih's roots and his new home: a sort of epilogue

Salih is not just another Arab author; he is perceived as something of a phenomenon in modern Arabic literature. A significant part of his somewhat extraordinary status is the fact that he is a writer, and possibly first and foremost, a man who deviates from convention in that he does not live in his own country. The aura surrounding him may stem from a number of factors that are mutually complementary and which are sometimes even contradictory. Therefore, we consider Salih's writing as complementary opposites rather than binary oppositions. Yet it is these that may shed some light on this author's unparalleled importance. As stated earlier, the fact that Salih left the Sudan for England at an early age has far-reaching ramifications not only on him as a man and a writer, but on the attitudes of readers, literary critics, and, so it seems, politicians. It would appear that the fact that Salih left the Sudan (voluntarily, not under duress) and settled in England would include him, if at all, in the category of émigré authors and/or writers in exile.

It should be remembered that significant changes took place in many spheres of the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s. Although, they were first and foremost political, they had their impact on the social, cultural, economic, and religious spheres. These changes, which are still taking place today, come and go in waves, throwing out political and social activists, intellectuals and writers in particular. Yet it should be borne in mind that whereas anyone who was exiled from their country, or left it of their own free will, did so out of necessity, others did so out of choice. Prominent writers who left the Arab Mashriq (like the Arab Maghrib) for other Arab countries or the West are not citizens of only one country, like Egypt for example, but of other Arab countries like Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, or even the Sudan. Thus we find Syrian writers who left their homeland like Zakaria Tamir (England), Salīm Barakāt (b. 1951) (Cyprus/Sweden), Adonis (France), and Rafīq al-Shāmī (b. 1946) (Germany). As far as Iraq is concerned we may mention poets like ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī (1926–1999), who spent several years in the Soviet Union and settled there before moving to Amman, and Surgūn Būlus (1944–2000), who spent most of his life outside Iraq, especially in the United States and England. From Lebanon we may note the female authors Hanan al-Shaykh (England) and Hudā Barakāt (b. 1952) (France). With regard to the Sudan, to which we have naturally devoted more space in our study, there are quite a few writers who left their homeland for Arab countries, like Mukhtār Ibrāhīm ʿAjūba (b. 1946) (Saudi Arabia) and Ibrāhīm Ishāq Ibrāhīm (Qatar), and other Sudanese writers who moved to Western countries, such as Salih (England) and Salāh Ahmad Ibrāhīm (1933–1993) (France).

The language in which the Arab writers in these categories chose to write in the West is of prime importance. We have found that the *Mahjar* writers, particularly those of the first generation, wrote in Arabic as well as in the language of their new home – English, Spanish, and Portuguese. However, many second-generation *Mahjar* writers shifted to the second language, and

in many cases Arabic was either shunted aside or disappeared entirely. The majority of Arab Maghribi writers wrote in the local language, in French in the case of Kateb Yacine (1929–1989), and Tahar ben Jelloun. Other Maghribi writers who moved temporarily or permanently to other countries wrote in two languages, in French and Arabic in the case of ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Meddeb (b. 1946) of Tunisia and al-Muʿtī Qabbāl (b. 1954) of Morocco. Cases in which Maghribi writers moved to France and continued to write solely in Arabic are rare. In the category associated with the subject of our study we find Arab writers who fastidiously wrote, and still write, in Arabic for which they have gained acclaim not only in the Arab world, but outside it too. Among these writers we should note Salih, Adonis, Salīm Barakāt, and Hanan al-Shaykh. Why do we ascribe importance to this? For the simple reason that the option exists of writing in the other's language, the language of the community in which the writer lives, the local language of the majority of the population. In other words, for these Arab writers there exists the conscious choice, made either voluntarily or under duress, of continuing to write in their own mother tongue.

Tayeb Salih whose English was fluent as a youth and who, by his own testimony, excelled in it, was able, after a very short time in England, to begin writing in English. In any event, his technical ability to write in a language other than Arabic existed, and still exists, but it was not brought to fruition. It would seem that this is one of the central points in an attempt to understand the author's inner world, for according to him the objective of his writing is not to describe his own life, which in his opinion is of no interest and he has neither the need nor any vested interest in writing about it. His writing is intended to describe the world in which he lived in the past, therefore, he consciously, and out of free choice, decided to write in Arabic. It may be assumed that a choice of this kind is no small matter and that it stems from the man's motivations, some conscious and some unconscious. It is quite possible that the answer to the question of why Salih chose to write in Arabic and not English – despite his short-lived attempt to write the 'Muqaddimāt' in English – stems from and is linked to the different circles in which Sudanese live and the author's own roots. To conclude, the real author and the person, writing in Arabic or English, and the old homeland as well as the new territory, do not only constitute contradictory features, but rather complement one another.

Notes

1 On Arabic Language and Territorial Nationalism see Yasir Suleiman (2003) *The Arabic Language and National Identity*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, pp. 162–231. For more details on this phenomenon in Arab exiles see Ami Elad-Bouskila (1999) *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture*, London and Portland: Frank Cass, pp. 32–62. Ami Elad-Bouskila (1999d) 'Arabic and/or Hebrew: The Language Usage of Arab Writers in Israel', in Kamal Abdel-Malek and David C. Jacobson (eds) *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and*

Literature. New York: St. Martin's Press, pp. 133–158. Ami Elad-Bouskila (Forthcoming) *Voices of Exiles: Studies in the Works of al-Tayyib Sālih*, chapter 1 Ami Elad-Bouskila (Forthcoming) 'Arabs Writing in Hebrew: Modification and Affirmation'.

2 The connection between territory and language was treated in a very interesting way by several scholars of culture and literature. See for example Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986) *Kafka: toward a Minor Literature*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

3 'Īsā al-Nā'ūrī (1977) *Adab al-Mahjar*, third edn, Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif. Muhammad 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Khafājī (1986), *Qissat al-Adab al-Mahjarī*, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī Barbara Young (1959) *This Man from Lebanon*, New York: Knopf. Josef P. Ghougassian (1973) *Khalil Gibran: Wings of Thought*, New York: Philosophical Library. Francine N. McNutly (1981) 'Mahjar Literature: An Annotated Bibliography of Literary Criticism and Biography in Western Languages', *Mundus Arabicus*, 1, pp. 65–88. Robin Ostle (1992) 'The Romantic Poets' in M. M. Badawi (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Modern Arabic Literature*: Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 96–98. Antoine G. Karam (1997) 'Gibran's Concept of Modernity', in Issa J. Boullata and Terri De Young (eds), *Tradition and Modernity in Modern Arabic Literature*, Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, pp. 29–42. Cornelis Nijland (1995) 'Love and Beyond in *Mahjar* Literature', in Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick, and Ed de Moor (eds), *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, London: Saqi, pp. 46–55.

4 Samāh Idrīs (1992) *al-Muthaqqaf al-'Arabī wa al-Sulta, Bahth fī Riwāyāt al-Tajrība al-Misriyya*, Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb. Jūrj Tarābīshī (2000) *Min al-Nahda ilā al-Ridda: Tamazzuqāt al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabiyya fī 'Asr al-'Awlama*, Beirut: Dār Sāqī. Muhammad Rajab al-Bāridī (1993) *Shakhs al-Muthaqqaf fī al-Riwāya al-'Arabiyya al-Mu'āsira*, Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li'l-Nashr. Muhammad 'Abd al-Salām al-Shādhilī (1973) *Shakhsiyyat al-Muthaqqaf fī al-Riwāya al-'Arabiyya al-Hadītha 1952–1992*, Beirut: Dār al-Hadātha. Marina Stagh (1993) *The Limits of Freedom of Speech: Prose Literature and Prose Writers in Egypt under Nasser and Sadat*, Stockholm: Almqvist Wiksell International. Robin Ostle (ed.) (March–June 1995) *The Quest for Freedom in Modern Arabic Literature, Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXVI: 1–2.

5 For this concept see Elad-Bouskila (Forthcoming) *Voices of Exiles: Studies in the Works of al-Tayyib Sālih*, chapter 1.

6 This definition is used by Elad-Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture*, London and Portland: Frank Cass, pp. 9–13.

7 Qāsim 'Uthmān Nūr (2001) 'Biblyūgrāfīyyā al-Riwā'ī al-Tayyib Sālih (1960–1998)', in Hasan Abbasher al-Tayyib (ed.), *al-Tayyib Sālih: Dirāsāt Naqdiyya*, Beirut: Riyād al-Rayyis li al-Kutub wa al-Nashr, pp. 405–417. Ahmad Muhammad al-Badawi (2000) *al-Tayyib Sālih: Sīrat Kātib wa Nass*, Cairo: al-Dār al-Thaqāfiyya li al-Nashr, pp. 9–44. Talhat Jibrīl (1997) '*Alā al-Darb . . . ma'a al-Tayyib Sālih, Malāmih min Sīra Dhātiyya*, Rabat: Tōb li'l-Istithmār wa'l-Khadamāt; Cairo: Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Sūdāniyya, pp. 12–78. Ami Elad-Bouskila (1999) 'Al-Tayyib Sālih: The Author and his Works', in Ahmed Al-Shahi and Ami Elad-Bouskila (eds), *Al-Tayyib Sālih: Seventy Candles, Edebiyât*, 10(1): 5–32.

8 The short story 'Nakhla 'ala Jadwal' (A Date Palm by the Stream) was written in London in 1953 and first published in the Sudanese journal *al-Qissa*, 10 (October 1960), pp. 11–15. 'Hafnat Tamr' (A Handful of Dates) was written in 1957 and

first published in Sālih's book '*Urs al-Zayn, Riwāya wa Sab' Qisas*, Beirut: al-Dār al-Sharqiyya li'l-Tibā'a wa'l-Nashr, 1967, pp. 21–27. 'Dawmat Wad Hāmid' (The Doum Tree of Wad Hāmid) was written in Debba in the Sudan in 1960 and first published in the London journal *Aswāt*, 3 (1961), pp. 44–45. 'Urs al-Zayn' (The Wedding of Zein) was written in 1960–1962. Two chapters appeared in the Beirut journal *Hiwār*, 10 (May–June 1964), pp. 40–51. The entire novel was first published in the Sudanese journal *al-Khartūm*, 30 December 1966), pp. 97–137. *Bandar Shāh: Daw al-Bayt* was written in 1967–1970. The novel first appeared in Beirut, Dār al-'Awda, 1971. *Bandar Shāh: Maryūd* was written in 1976. Several chapters of the novel were published in the Iraqi monthly *al-Aqlām*, 9 (1972), the Egyptian weekly *al-Hilāl* (December 1976, January 1977), and the Lebanese journal *al-Thaqāfa al-'Arabiyya* (1976). The novel appeared in its entirety in a four-part series in the Sudanese weekly *al-Shabāb*, 205–209 (June–July 1976), as well as in the Qatar journal *al-Dōha*, 19–22 (July–October 1977). 'Risāla ilā Aylīn' (A Letter to Aileen) was written in 1960 and first published in Sālih's '*Urs al-Zayn, Riwāya wa Sab' Qisas*, pp. 29–34. *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl* (Season of Migration to the North) was written in 1962–1966 and was first published in the Beirut journal *Hiwār*, 24–25 (September–December 1966), pp. 5–87. 'al-Rajul al-Qubrusī' (The Cypriot Man) was written in the summer of 1972 and first published in the Qatar journal *al-Dōha* (January 1976), pp. 105–108. For more details on these literary works and their translations see Ami Elad-Bouskila, 'Appendices: Writing by and on al-Tayyib Sālih' in, *Edebiyât*, pp. 127–135.

 9 The role of Salih's characters, especially the villagers, is crucial. The real author relates in one text to another work and we, the readers, should bear in mind that all his literary works are indeed a single work. Looking at the phenomenon of creating one large, undivided text, we note that most of the characters, whether central, secondary, or marginal, reappear in Sālih's writing in various roles, ages, and levels of emphasis. See Ami Elad-Bouskila (July 1998) 'Shaping the Cast of Characters: The Case of Al-Tayyib Sālih', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXIX(2): 59–84 (1989). 'Tatawwur al-Shakhsiyya fī A'māl al-Tayyib Sālih', *al-Karmil*, Haifa, 10, pp. 7–26.

10 The phenomenon of writers who were born in a village and then moved to the city is very common in modern Arabic literature, particularly since the second decade of the twentieth century. For more details on the village novel (*al-Riwāya al-Rīfiyya*) see Ami Elad[-Bouskila] (1994) *The Village Novel in Modern Egyptian Literature*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, pp. 14–53.

11 Salih himself expressed the correlation between the rural world which he left and his childhood which he spent in his Sudanese village. See his words: 'The [literary] work itself may be a search after the lost childhood [...] when the man grows up and enters life's difficulties, the childhood world seems to him as a beautiful paradise', Jibrīl (1997) '*Alā al-Darb...ma'a al-Tayyib Sālih*, p. 12. See also: Halīm al-Yāzijī (1985) *al-Sūdān wa al-Haraka al-Adabiyya*, Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Jāmi'a al-Lubnāniyya, Qism al-Dirāsāt al-Insāniyya, pp. 919–921.

12 The important role that the narrator plays in several of Salih's literary works derives from the autobiographical and semi-autobiographical elements that can be found particularly in this character. See Elad-Bouskila, 'Shaping the Cast of Characters', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, pp. 74–84.

13 The story 'Yawm Mubārak 'ala Shāti' Umm Bāb' was first published in the anthology *Mukhtārāt min al-Qissa al-Qasīra fī 18 Baladan 'Arabiyyan*, Cairo, Markaz al-Ahrām li al-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 1993, pp. 159–166. For more

details of this story see al-Tāhir Ahmad Makkī, 'Muqaddima', in *Mukhtārāt min al-Qissa al-Qasīra fī 18 Baladan 'Arabiyyan*, pp. 45–50. Tāriq al-Tayyib (2001) 'al-Ightirāb 'inda Tayeb Salih', in Hassan Abbasher al-Tayyib (ed.), *Tayeb Salih: Dirāsāt Naqdiyya*, Beirut: Riyād al-Rayyis, pp. 277–280.

14 A partial list of novels that includes different categories concerning encounters between East and West is: Egypt – Tāha Husayn, *Adīb*, (1935), Tawfīq al-Hakīm, *'Usfūr min al-Sharq* (1938), Yahyā Haqqī, *Qindīl Umm Hāshim* (1944), Fathī Ghānim, *al-Sākhin wa al-Bārid* (1960), Luwīs 'Awad, *Mudhakkirāt Tālib Bi'tha* (1965), Yūsuf Idrīs, *al-Sayyida Fiyinnā* (1975), 'Abd al-Hakīm Qāsim, *Muhāwala li al-Khurūj* (1980), Muhammad Jalāl, *Hubb fī Cūbenhāgen* (1980), Bahā' Tāhir, *Qālat Duhā* (1985). From Syria, Shakīb al-Jābirī, his novels: *Naham* (1937), *Qadar Yalhū* (1939), [a revised version of this book was published in 1980], *Qaws Quzah* (1946), 'Abd al-Salām al-'Ujaylī, *Rasīf al-'Adhrā' al-Sawdā'* (1960) and Walīd Hajjār, *Musāfir bilā Haqā'ib* (1979). From Lebanon: Suhayl Idrīs, *al-Hayy al-Lātīnī* (1954). From Jordan: Jum'a Hammād, *Badawī fī Urūbba* (1977), Ĩsā al-Nā'ūrī, *Layla fī al-Qitār* (1974), Muhammad 'Īd, *al-Mutamayyiz* (1978). From Iraq: Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb, *al-Duktūr Ibrāhīm* (1939). From Sudan: Tayeb Salih, *Mawsim al-Hijra ilā al-Shamāl* (1966). From Morocco: Muhammad Zifzāf, *al-Mar'a wa al-Warda* (1972). From Algeria: Sa'dī Ibrāhīm, *al-Marfūdūn* (1981). From Tunis: al-Habīb al-Sālimī, *Matāhat al-Raml* (1994). From Saudi Arabia: Ghālib Hamza Abū al-Faraj, *Sanawāt al-Day'a*, (1980). From Ghana: Ayi Kwei Armah, *Why are We so Blest?* See: Frank M. Birbalsingh (1985) 'Season of Migration to the West: The Fiction of Tayeb Salih and Ayi Kwei Armah', in Mona Takieddine Amyuni (ed.), *Tayeb Salih's Season of Migration to the North: A Casebook*, Beirut: The American University of Beirut, pp.62–72.

15 Some researchers assert that the only parameter which defines the cultural and literary belonging of the writer is the language of his works. See Jihād Fādil (1995) *al-Adab al-Hadīth fī Lubnān, Nazra Mughāyira*, London: Riyād al-Rayyis li al-Kutub wa al-Nashr, pp. 45–53. For a different and more theoretical and comparative approach, see Florian Coulmas (1999) 'Language Masters: Defying Linguistic Materialism', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 137: 33–38.

16 For further information on the Maghreb in literature and the question of the language of writing, see Albert Memmi (ed.) (1985) *Écrivains Francophones du Maghreb, Anthologie*, Paris: Editions Segkers, pp. 7–17. Jacqueline Kaye (ed.) (1992) *Maghreb, New Writing from North Africa*, York: Talus Editions and University of York, pp. 5–7. Jacqueline Kaye and Abedlhamid Zoubir (1990) *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco*, London: Routledge. Ami Elad-Bouskila (1993) 'En deux langues, La littérature moderne d'Afrique du Nord', in Erez Biton and Ami Elad-Bouskila (eds), *Le Maghreb, Littérature et Culture, Apirion*, 28: 86–87. Layla Ibnlfassi and Nicki Hitchcot (eds) (1996) *African Francophone Writings, A Critical Introduction*, Oxford: Berg, pp. 1–6, 33–43. Aida A. Bamia (1992) 'The North African Novel: Achievement, and Prospects', in Issa Boullata (ed.), *The Arabic Novel Since 1950*, Cambridge: Mass, Dar Mahjar, pp. 61–88. Significantly, the Lebanese writer Amīn Ma'lūf (1949–) was the Prix Goncourt laureate in 1993. For more details on Lebanese literature in French see Fādil, *al-Adab al-Hadīth fī Lubnān*, pp. 45–53. Mahmūd Qāsim (1996) *al-Adab al-'Arabī al-Maktūb bi al-Faransiyya*, Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, pp. 70–97.

17 This is the opinion of the Palestinian author Emile Habībī (1921–1996), as he indicated in the course of our discussion during a literary panel which was held

in the early 1990s in Jerusalem. This statement is possibly connected to other considerations. See also M. M. Badawi (1992) 'Two Novelists from Iraq: Jabrā and Munīf', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, XXIII(2): pp. 140–154. Although Jabrā is Palestinian, his literary works belong to Iraqi as well as Palestinian literature. This is the opinion of the Iraqi literary critic Najm 'Abdallāh Kāzim (1987) *al-Riwāya fī al-'Irāq 1965–1980 wa Ta'thīr al-Riwāya al-Amrīkiyya fīhā*, Baghdad: Dār al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqāfiyya al-'Āmma, pp. 8–9. For a similar opinion see *Mu'jam al-Bābatīn li al-Shu'arā' al-'Arab al-Mu'āsirīn*, Kuwait: Mu'assasat Jā'izat 'Abd al-'Azīz Sa'ūd al-Bābatīn li al-Ibdā' al-Shi'rī, 1995, vol. 1, p. 642.

18 Ami Elad-Bouskila (1999c) 'The Other Face, the Language Choice of Arab Writers in Israel', in Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Modern Palestinian Literature and Culture*, pp. 32–62.

19 Some literary critics regard Salih as a *Mahjarī* writer, especially because of his erudition in the Arabic language and its heritage. See Mahmūd Ahmad Haykal (February 1976) 'Bandar Shāh', *al-Dōha*, 2: 131.

20 Ami Elad-Bouskila (22 August 2000) 'The Path and its Stations: An Interview with al-Tayyib Sālih in London', in Ami Elad-Bouskila, *Voices of Exiles: Studies in the Works of al-Tayyib Sālih*, Appendix H (Forthcoming).

4 Voicing a culture "dispersed by time"

Metropolitan location and identity in the literature and art of Sabiha al Khemir

Mohamed-Salah Omri

Introduction: metropolitan location and Diaspora culture

In light of the present state of the Arab peoples, any Arab writer who engages Arab history or collective historical memory is almost destined to nostalgia. The desire which drives the gesture is akin to what Fanon has described as "the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation, and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others" (Williams and Chrisman 1993: 393). This was, of course, true and poignant during the colonial period where the assault on memory reached every aspect of colonized cultures. It remains relevant for Arab Diaspora today. One of the strongest impulses of the diasporic way of being is resistance to the assault on one's culture of origin. For the writer in Diaspora, correction often drives creation. Such resistance and corrective acts are, however, never free from their tie to the Diaspora's specific location. Resistance is relative to the assault: and in the range of assaults on cultures of origin, Islam bears a heavy blow indeed. The reasons are too complex to treat here; but the suggestion would be difficult to dismiss as exaggerated reaction, imagined phobia, or pathetic victimization, in light of the current state of Muslim – Western relations.[1] The implications of this on representation (writing and art) are significant and, at times, disorienting. Writing is imbued with value for the culture of origin.

In addition to this, there is another dynamic, which may be called the politics of position, whereby the Diaspora subject is necessarily implicated in the politics of representation, whether this takes place at the stage of reception (Diaspora culture has a dual audience) or at the level of production (the Diaspora writer and their hybrid identity).

With regard to the metropolitan audience, it is worth noting that the Arab Diaspora writer addresses a reader imbued with well-entrenched Orientalism and accustomed to media images and perceptions. It becomes, therefore, difficult to avoid exoticizing or simplifying the home culture. Mattawa warns that postcolonial writers are at best "forming new mutations of negritude"

(Mattawa 2000: 272). How can a writer guard against this? Mattawa recommends vigilance: "Writing from a postcolonial perspective I think no agency can be shaped without keeping a cold eye fixed on one's marginalization" (Ibid.). There is need for self-conscious positioning.

As far as the home audience is concerned, a writer from an Islamic background might find himself/herself wondering why Islam is more present in his/her Diaspora than it had ever been in the home country. The impulse to critique, which in many cases is at the origin of exile in the first place, may be inhibited or toned down. Between the pressure to simplify and explain to the metropolitan audience, and the desire to critique the culture of origin as well as the host culture, occurs the ambivalence of the Diaspora.[2] Dispersal and fragmentation are at the genesis of Diaspora. At the heart of Diasporic creation is a healing, a desire to reunite, a longing for wholeness; and in the bid for wholeness, the past plays a significant, but problematic role. Stuart Hall suggests that identity is not to be found in archeological rediscovery but in "the re-telling of the past" (Williams and Chrisman 1993: 393). He proposes to look at the nature of the search for identity. Identity is produced during the act of visual or textual representation. Hall notes,

> Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of origin."
>
> (Ibid.: 395)

What goes into Diaspora literature? Beyond the pressures of conflict and polarization, is there specificity to the literature and art of Arab Diaspora?

There are of course shared features, which define Diaspora cultural production. One of the key components is bilingualism or the presence of the native language and culture in the Diaspora text. Khalid Mattawa, the Libyan poet of English expression notes,

> Postcolonial writing in English generally assumes the existence of another language whether the author makes the presence of that ghost language felt or not. When the postcolonial writer uses English or French, he or she is not writing from point zero. Rather he or she is inscribing on a palimpsest of his native language.
>
> (Mattawa 2000: 276)

The Francophone Tunisian writer Abdelwahab Meddeb suggests that this presence amounts to a poetics;

> When I write in one language, the other language is hidden in the first; it is at work somewhere, deliberately and in spite of me. The pressure of

the absent language in the language in which I write can, in the end, make up a poetics.[3]

<div align="right">(Cited in Ollier and Roche 1993: 36)</div>

This palimpsest gains added complexity when the absent language is Arabic because this native culture has traces in the English or French languages themselves. Meddeb observes that the Arab writer who uses a European language is bound to meet, and has to contend with, the Arabic reference, which penetrated European languages and cultures in the medieval period. He says:

> The Arab writer who writes in French, like myself, may encounter during his journey that excluded and past history. This writer can take a detour in his journey to fill up from that old source a second time. He can, while being at the top of modernity, pass via the medieval path in order to find out if that history contains material worth recalling. He would refer to past texts, escaping, secretly, discretely away from his linguistic bilingualism, French–Arab, to the issue which feeds it; the issue from which there is no escape, namely, the problematic of Islam–Christianity in its European formulation.[4]

<div align="right">(Meddeb 2000: 147)</div>

The relationship with the European language of writing becomes, for the Arab postcolonial writer, aware of issues of representation, a form of archeology, or even a search for genealogy.

The hybridity of postcolonial writing/culture challenges the analyst. It is often studied as bilingual or bicultural text, such as Francophone literature of French Africa or Anglophone writing from the Indian subcontinent. We are yet to think appropriately multiple identities and voices, particularly when more than one colonial language is involved. The present paper argues that Maghrebi literature in English stretches this assumption considerably. In addition to the issues involving the bilingual and bicultural or the relationship between mother tongue and the language of the former empire, it introduces a new dimension. Writing in English breaks a link to a language tainted with the colonial experience of the Maghreb.

The meaning of writing in French is perhaps best described by Meddeb:

> On one level, French is a functional language in the Maghreb; on another level, I write in a language that neither my father nor my mother can read. This provides perhaps more freedom to be in excess, immoderation, transgression, violence, blasphemy, eroticism.

<div align="right">(Cited in Ollier and Roche 1993: 20)</div>

French introduces a distance and creates space for freedom to express what may be called repressed or silenced impulses at the personal level. At the level

of the culture as a whole, the stakes are even more poignant. We read in Meddeb's narrative, *Phantasia*,

> To enjoy a communal Islam, which you recognize in the benefits of a language which is to you dead; Arabic, a liturgical and instinctive language, which sustains, by its absence, the creative imagination which you transmit in the French language of the time.
>
> (Meddeb 1986: 66–67)

Arabic language is tied to Islam and is therefore denied its status as language, carrier of secular culture. The writer's task is to extricate one from the other. Meddeb again: "I wanted to disentangle Islam and the Arabic reference in a manner that brings the Arabic letter to its historical reference, next to the Greek, Latin and Hebrew letters" (cited in Ollier and Roche 1993: 21).

North African writing in English may serve the same goals; but it also adds a further distance between text and culture of origin. It poses new problems of reading and interpretation. More poignantly, it raises new questions: Where does the "intermediate" colonial language go? How does it leave its mark on the text? And what are the consequences of this in terms of style? How does this choice of language affect identity politics? What are the traces of classical Arabic and how is the dialect present in the text? The present paper engages some of these issues through a study of the work of the London-based Tunisian writer and artist, Sabiha al Khemir. First, however, a word on the state of English in the Maghreb as a whole and in the writer's native Tunisia in particular, is in order.

In Tunisia, English was initially taught as a third language at a late age in secondary education and at the university level. It was taught as a language of culture, with focus on American and British history and literatures. The purpose was to produce graduates who will be able to teach English as a foreign language in the country. Al Khemir followed this course. Changes occurred in Tunisia recently, reflecting local and global developments. Linking the teaching of English to the needs of the country and moving away form the curriculum outlined earlier has become policy (Jabeur *et al*. 1999: 24). English is called upon to serve a "functional rather than cultural" aim (Ibid.: 9). At the level of cultural content, there is a growing tendency to emulate French departments by giving room to postcolonial, including North African, texts in English.[5] This adjustment occurs within recognition that a wider range of English literatures perhaps closer to students' interests from outside Britain and the United States has become widely available. In recent years, English has been making serious headway at the expense of French at the secondary and primary levels of education. The second language in Tunisia remains, however, French. It still wields power and influence in business and politics and in cultural output.[6] Yet, English is now firmly a voice in the polyphony of languages in the Maghreb.

Al Khemir is a Tunisian in London, a Francophone writing in English.[7] Between the mother and the narrator in her first novel, *Waiting in the Future for the Past to come*, stand four linguistic stations, with corresponding states of consciousness, narrative possibilities, and articulations of meaning. There are four stages of intertextual engagement; four distancing devices; four spaces of rupture; four broken bridges. The mother speaks only the Tunisian dialect, the daughter thinks through classical Arabic and French, and writes in English. It is for this reason that it is imperative to study the text as the site where these languages lead a collective existence. They mix, separate, cross, complement each other in order to make up a multilingual text in the deep sense of the term. That is, a text which is fully decipherable only by reference to all its languages, not only to each one separately but to their interaction also, and perhaps primarily. In addition, language should be seen in a specific way: as a site where the linguistic, historical, and personal histories intersect. It is for this reason that one must ask: In what English does al Khemir write? As a Tunisian with access to and training in Arabic, French, and English, and as a woman born during the postcolonial era, al Khemir was faced with choices and destinies, as a citizen and as a woman. Her fiction explores these choices and destinies. As an exile her work engages issues of belonging to a culture with a weighty past, the fragmentation of the self and longing for wholeness. I will explore first her fiction, then her art.

Al Khemir is an artist, art historian, and archeologist. Her drawings are, for the most part, executed in black ink by reed pen. Among several works, mention may be made of her acclaimed illustration of the English translation of *The Island of Animals* by Ikhwān al-Safā'. She has written a book on Islamic sculpture, a PhD dissertation on Fatimid art and architecture, essays on Andalusian manuscripts, and presented television programs on Islamic art. Her novel, *Waiting in the Future for the Past to Come*, in part tells the story of Amina, a Tunisian young woman who leaves her home town to study in Britain and returns after a long absence and success in education. It is composed of stories, mostly by and about women, narrated from the point of view of a child, and explores the relationship between mother and daughter, exile and home country. The second novel, *The Blue Manuscript*, is a fictional tracing of the genesis of the famous Blue Qur'an penned in al-Qayrawān in the tenth century.[8] It follows excavations for it near a fictional Egyptian village, Wādi Hassoun, by an international team of archeologists, art historians, and dealers. In the course of the trip, Zohra, the half-English half-Tunisian team translator, witnesses the excavations, rediscovers her connections to the culture of her father, and mediates between the villagers and the foreign crew. In the village, 'Amm Gāber, the blind storyteller, the village beauty Zeineb who desires Zohra, and the boy Mahmoud who helps and entertains the crew, play significant roles. The narrative weaves in accounts of the founding of Cairo and the vision and art of the calligrapher Ibn al-Warrāq who created the blue Qur'ān by drawing loosely on historical sources.

Three forks in the road and the "one less taken"

In the title, *Waiting in the Future for the Past to Come*, there is a memory, a promise, and an absence. A return from England to a street named after her father should cause Amina, the narrator, to feel at home. But is she, was she, has she ever been at home? The story, framed by this opening (akin to classical returns home from exile, such as Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* or Emile Césaire's *Retour au pays natal*), traces the feeling of internal exile. Changes are marked in subtle brush strokes and allusions but, most crucially, the past and the present are questioned. The past is recalled through stories and images, mostly of women. Amina is between two visions of herself. For the village she was the home girl who did well in the world of men and was, therefore, no longer a woman; "Everyone congratulated my mother before they left. 'Your daughter, *til'at rajil*, turned out to be a man'" (Al Khemir 1993: 19). Her own stance is different: "I was a woman. I wanted to be a woman and I did not want to be there" (Ibid.: 19). Between the two stands a void, an absence. The present and the future separate the two.

The daughter makes a promise to give a voice to her mother's pain and, along the way, she tells of her own:

> I had told my mother. "I will tell your story to the world, your story, Yasmina's and others" [...]
> "What language does the world speak?" she asked.
> "Oh, it doesn't matter," I replied. "A scream is a scream is a scream."[9]
>
> (Ibid.: 22)

To the mother's pain at the loss of her husband, Amina's father, the latter feels helpless:

> There was nothing I could do. I lay there and absorbed my mother's suffering like a sponge. I grew soggy and rotten and all my life I wished to grow hands strong enough to squeeze it out of me. I wished that from the sponge the pain would flow through the pen and write the story, my mother's story....
>
> (Ibid.: 22)

Amina's own story unfolds between spaces of birth (womb) and death (tomb). The two often merge, creating a continuum, a w/tomb. The birth, or leaving "the warm, eventless abstract darkness," is recalled and recreated many times in the narrative. Amina's room at the university dormitory was "so small that it was referred to as the 'tomb' by one of my friends.... There was no windows and, once inside, I had the strange feeling, again, of going back into the womb" (Ibid.: 158). The desire to inhabit someone else's body persists, "I crept into the central room, not under the bed, not into the cupboard, but into Yasmina's body" (Ibid.: 204). In the *hammam*, Amina

looks at women's bodies with curiosity and envy: "Examining some of the extraordinary architecture of these women's bodies, I stood there wondering what it feels like to live in one of them" (Ibid.: 188). The women appeared at one with their bodies. Their bodies expressed themselves in ways alien to Amina who could only understand the body as language; "Women teased each other and told stories. Words were moist and hot and steamed up until they were dripping. A screen of vapour made them opaque concealing their meaning to the inexperienced" (Ibid.: 188).

Amina's body is alien and alienated throughout the narrative; "I always felt strange living in this body of mine, anyway. In fact, the real me was not living, it was most of the time over my left shoulder, watching closely" (Ibid.: 269). She feels trapped inside "this prison" and often wishes to "sneak out" (Ibid.: 269). The story of Sayyida recalls and echoes this feeling. Sayyida was the best masseuse in the local *hammam* for sixteen years until it was discovered that she was a man. Sayyida was a man who inhabited the intimate space of women while Amina was perceived as a man because of her success in their world. Both transgress socially determined spaces, the private space of woman and the public space of men, but only in disguise. They are trapped in social perceptions of gender. And even when her body is represented in photographs or reflected in a mirror, Amina can still see through the reflection: "There, I saw myself as ugly as I always saw myself" (Ibid.: 231). For a moment, a significant one as I show below, body and "real self" unite. Under Antoine's touch, alone in his car, she felt whole. But the unity was brutally severed by a flashlight and a policeman asking for identity cards. He was trying to identify a crime against social norm and dogma: the unity of body and "real self." Amina runs away as fast as she could (she always does so as a child). "I run with the motto of the time resounding from all directions: 'Behind every citizen there is a policeman...behind every citizen there is a policeman... behind'" (Ibid.: 253). The social/police order at home does not sanction wholeness. It was a must that another order be sought, and exile from home was Amina's salvation. Auntie Houria's story sheds some light on this. The story, because of its recurrence in the novel, creates rhythm and organic unity in the narrative as a whole.

Three sisters set out in search of their destiny. First, they all marry Selim, who is reputed to be possessed by a female spirit (*jinniyya*). But only the youngest one was destined for him. The other two had to search for their appointed fate. One was to reach "the dog with seven chains" and free him from his animal form by feeding him warm home-baked bread. The other sister had to find "the tomb of the exiled" and "cry him up" into life. They disguise themselves as knights and ride until the "road forked into three." Decisions have to be made and they follow their instincts, part ways, and eventually reach their destinations and meet their destinies. What about the third fork in the road? "At the beginning of the third road, lay a jet black feather, on which was written in Arabic calligraphy, with silver ink, 'Take me, you regret, leave me, you regret'" (Ibid.: 100).[10] Auntie Houria's story is

picked up at a crucial moment in Amina's journey. The choices were repeated almost *verbatim* toward the end of the narrative, except for one addition. The third road is now described as "the untraveled road" (Ibid.: 258). Amina makes her choice:

> Up the third road I went, in my lifetime disguise. I went looking for my destiny, for the real self. I rode fast. I rode slowly. I rode through forests. I rode through deserts. I rode through mountains. I rode and rode and rode. I rode so fast and so long, making no distinction between the night and the day . . .
>
> (Ibid.: 258)

Amina leaves a Tunisian university for Britain where, except for scanty information about her degrees, very little is given. She leaves in order to transcend the fragmentation, which divided her into a body and a "real self." Exile, paradoxical as it may seem, becomes a site for unity of the self.

I now return to Antoine's story, mentioned earlier. I suggest that Amina's story with Antoine, while it reveals wholeness, hides exile. Fragmentation is embedded in the relationship. The moment of wholeness is experienced in Tunis, a home which Amina finds alien, with a Frenchman, who is in turn away from home. The two exiles meet at a tenuous point, outside – even against – the social order. It is fitting that their meeting place is a car, a mobile home. Antoine, however, offers only a second road, which appears more like an impasse.

Allegorically, the third road refers to choice of language, English over French and Arabic. The choice is also a parallel to Zohra in *The Blue Manuscript*, who is neither English nor Tunisian. Diaspora, it has been stressed earlier, is a third space, where both home and host cultures converge, intersect, and even clash.

When Amina returns to the village, it becomes apparent that between her and her mother stand two irreconcilable conceptions of home and Diaspora. The mother is proud that her daughter "turned out to be a man," at once the husband she lost to politics and the son she lost to premature death. She now wants a full return home, a reconciliation with the homeland. She evokes the ephemeral and hopeless nature of exile expressed in a refrain: "Oh, you the one who builds in a country other than your own, it's neither for you nor for your children" (Ibid.: 262). The eloquent articulation of the desire to return home as well as the desire itself find echoes deep inside Amina. But deep down her destiny remains unfulfilled. She wonders,

> Now you will have to tell her, tell her that you have not come back, that you never came back, that this was an image of you, a dead image of the past which was temporarily revived for the celebration, just for her, that it was not possible to revive it again, that the dummy feeds off your own blood, that for it to live, you would have to die.
>
> (Ibid.: 268)

On a first impression, Amina's road appears to be a journey forward.

> On the far horizon of the third road, the sun rose. I slid over the side of
> the horse to pick up a leaf that lay at the beginning of the road. A line
> was transcribed in gold ink: "How to learn not to regret."
>
> (Ibid.: 272)

The inscription in Auntie Houria's story has been transformed in colour, in
tone, and in texture. It is now in gold, not in silver; it is written on a leaf, not
on a feather, and it no longer reads: "Take me, you regret, leave me, you
regret" (Ibid.: 100). The feather in the story is now a leaf on the ground, an
abandoned sign on a road not taken. Here, Amina picks up the leaf and takes
the road. She assumes the symbol and initiates the journey.

No longer a feather at the mercy of winds she cannot control, she is now a
subject, in control of her destiny: "The horse neighed and stretched its long
neck, the leaf trembled against the rays of the luminous sun and the Arabic
letters shone" (Ibid.: 272). The mother who waited for the past to come will
have to wait still. Personal history is now a story told to fulfill a promise. A
new past emerges from the calligraphy, a past illuminated by a new vision.

Al Khemir's second novel, *The Blue Manuscript*, attempts to uncover this
shared communal past. The social transformation, the pain of Diaspora in its
social and psychological sense, will now be explored through Islamic art. The
personal history gives way, or leads to the "far-reaching memory." The title of
the first novel is in fact recalled in the second one: "Al-Muizz was carrying
the past into the future" (*The Blue Manuscript*: 25). He was carrying a dream
and the sepulchers of his ancestors. Like al-Muizz, the past needs to be carried
forward, made part of the future. But what past is this? And how does it
affect the present?

Knitting/unknitting

If the first novel is a script of the blues of leaving the habitations of the self:
home, body, mother, village and country, the second is the inscription of a
relationship to the past of a community. If *Waiting* is the story of separation
and exile, *The Blue Manuscript* is the story of connecting and homecoming.
It establishes genealogies and begettings. The future of the past seems to
have come. *The Blue Manuscript* is about roots: setting them, recovering them,
cutting them off. A number of connections will be traced here. They fall
within the overall themes of voicing/re-telling a past, dispersal, fragmentation,
and unity.

Like the tent-maker in the novel, who connects colorful patches day and
night, leaning against the shrine or the village store, the narrator weaves links
between stories and people in a tapestry that does not take its final shape
until the very end of the book. Knitting is a motif in both books and a
method of composition: in *Waiting*, the mother knits constantly while the

daughter, who usually holds the thread, is overcome by the desire to "unknit everything" (Ibid.: 268). The narrator knits together numerous stories and threads.[11] In *The Blue Manuscript*, 'Amm Gāber pulls together threads of myth and history in his stories and songs while the narrator weaves threads of Fatimid history into present-day Egypt. There seems to be a paradoxical metaphor: the rebellion against a woman's expected role as weaver, expressed in *Waiting*, is the very basis of narrative poetics in both novels. Between the two texts run several threads of significant effect on the theme of dispersal and fragmentation. But I will limit myself to only some instances.

Zohra and Amina relate to the language and "Arab culture" in similar ways. "The café swarmed with words. Words mingled in a shower of chatter that bathed them warmly. Shards of conversations surfaced but only Zohra, the translator, caught them" (*The Blue Manuscript*: 1).

In the public bath in the first novel, "Words were moist and hot and steamed up until they were dripping. A screen of vapor made them opaque concealing their meaning to the inexperienced" (Ibid.: 188). The shape and feel of language is explicit. In both cases, these are Arabic words spoken in "Arab" space. There is an intimate relationship between space and expression here. While Zohra catches fragments of meaning,[12] Amina feels the texture of women's sexualized speech but understands it only in part. Both have limited access to meaning.

They are both uncertain about their desires and both long for a voice of their own. In *Waiting* Amina is desired only by Antoine, an outsider. She also hates her body. In *The Blue Manuscript*, Zohra is uncertain about her sexual orientation or desire: there are references to her "bland face," flat chest, to the fact that she is desired by women but not men (*The Blue Manuscript*: 153, 155, 232). Like Amina, she "longed for a voice of her own" and had to leave home to find it. When Zohra was about to find her voice, she was unable to use it; "And tonight she has an important story to tell the world" (Ibid.: 267). Zohra will not tell the story in the novel. She carries the responsibility of representing, of being a witness, not just to Mustapha's confession that he forged the blue Qur'ān found in the dig, but as the guardian of what she had come to see (Ibid.: 270). She questions her role but never really fulfills it.

The past dismembered and re/membered

Any evocation of the past emanates from a cultural history and inevitably constitutes cultural politics. In *The Blue Manuscript*, there is a discernable apology or even embarrassment that Arabs have fallen short of their past. This is expressed across the narrative through oppositions that appear at times binary. Modern-day Cairo, the inhabitants of Wādi Hassoun, Zohra's father, and the Cairene calligrapher stand on one side while Fatimid Cairo, the Green pavilion, Zohra's desire to connect with the father's heritage, Ibn al-Warrāq, and 'Amm Gāber all stand on the other side. Between the two there is a gap,

perhaps even a gaping abyss.[13] There may be even a hint that the legendary Banī Hilāl tribes who devastated Ifrīqiyyā during the Fatimid period have lineage in the inhabitants of the Wādi. The Banī Hilāl's story (Ibid.: 216–217) prepares and overshadows the mob scene (Ibid.: 218–221). If the Banī Hilāl were described as a "plague of locusts" by the historian Ibn Khaldoun (Ibid.: 217), the mob of villagers is portrayed in the novel as "a mighty swarm of locusts" (Ibid.: 219). Modern culture is characterized by noise, the old one by silence. "In the turmoil of the city [Cairo], the world of the pyramids seemed unimaginable" (Ibid.: 9). About this Cairo we read: "The past was present everywhere. Timeless devotion had once transformed hard materials into beautiful lace. Now, time was making it crumble into dust" (Ibid.: 18). Zohra falls in love with the Cairo of the past: "The city was a remnant of a civilization that had been exhausted. And her being was starved of what this city used to be" (Ibid.: 24).[14] The excavations unearth deep anguish in the translator:

> For Zohra, these old objects were carriers of history and her ancestors kept her awake at night. The present mediocrity of her father's reality juxtaposed the sophistication of his culture's past. She felt him unworthy of his heritage. She lay awake, thinking. As the dig went on, Zohra felt that they were digging deep within her as much as in the earth.
>
> (Ibid.: 192)

Zohra reflects on the break with the past: "Such sophisticated artistic production revealed an extraordinary vision and refined lifestyle with no trace connecting it to the present" (Ibid.: 101).

There is, however, fragility about this past. One is even led to wonder whether Fatimid culture was doomed from its very genesis. General Jawhar reports a sign that Cairo was doomed; when he gathered astrologers to choose a fortuitous star, a crow landed on the wires and mislead them (Ibid.: 40). "'It is a bad omen', he thought" (Ibid.: 49). The Arabic letters carefully carved onto the horses' shoes in order to leave the inscription on the ground appear ephemeral. "Before his memory's eye, al-Muizz saw his caravan march into Egypt . . . the horses impressing the principles of the dynasty into the new earth. Then he watched the letters disintegrate and dissolve, erased by the wind before his very eyes" (Ibid.: 40): an empire of signs, and signs that the empire is coming to an end.

When it is revealed that the manuscript was forged, planted, and discovered, the reader is not surprised. One has the feeling all along that the manuscript could only be fake. The account of the genesis of the manuscript makes it inimitable, perhaps even unreal. And even if the original were discovered, it is no longer authentic. It is de-originated, alienated from the spirit of its creation. Between Ibn al-Warrāq, the dream of al-Muizz's mother and the "value" given by collectors, dealers, opaque art historians, and ignorant villagers, stands an unbridgeable gulf.[15] Transfer is impossible, and here

perhaps is where the homage resides. Ibn al-Warrāq, the calligrapher trusted with creating the manuscript, muses:

> This is how my letters must look, just like the moon and the stars in the deep indigo sky with all the mysteries of the night's silent velvet. Golden letters on deep night blue will be my search light in darkness.
>
> (Ibid.: 112)

Is the manuscript returned to its spirit? Will the page of the manuscript ever look the same after reading al Khemir's book?[16] Here is, I think, the major achievement, the attempt to affect the recalling of the past, and the desire to give it a voice different from academic discourse on it.

Zohra the bearer of truth, being the only one who heard Mustapha's confession, is unable to communicate it. Upon return from Egypt, she connects with her father's culture by studying it. "One half of her wanted to tell the other half that she carried the ancestor's history, their culture, not just their genes" (Ibid.: 266). The excavations allowed her to connect with the manuscript. But she can also speak English [Western language]. "She felt she had bridged the gap between the two [East and West]" (Ibid.: 266). "Her father was not really aware of his cultural heritage himself because a breach in history had interrupted life's continuum" (Ibid.: 266). The act of speaking would distinguish Zohra from her father. "Unlike her father, she would be worthy of her cultural heritage" (Ibid.: 270). But, when she meets her excavation mates, her "anger melted in an instant and everything was lost in her confusion" (Ibid.: 270). "And the words of protest about the fake which the translator had been intending to declare never emerged. Contrary to her habit, she did not ask which part of herself, the Arab or the English, had let her down" (Ibid.: 271), and then she began to doubt the whole thing.

Is Zohra a weak go-between rather than a mediator, a translator in the cultural sense? She struggles with voice throughout: getting it, loosing it, wanting to have it, being the voice of others. Zohra has an inherent memory. She connects with 'Amm Gāber only by hearing his voice as he sings or tells stories; by an instinctive feeling of closeness, by a longing she cannot define. But she is also inherently unable to express her connectedness: she will remain a translator, not the voice of the past. Is it because of her hybridity, being half English half Arab? And, beyond her, is English capable of voicing this past? And even more fundamentally, is this past voiceable at all?

At the end 'Amm Gāber gets the last laugh; "'Amm Gāber wiped a drop that had run down his face. And suddenly, for no apparent reason, he burst out laughing, exposing his charcoal teeth which contrasted with the glistening whiteness of his eyes" (Ibid.: 278). He reveals his genealogy, the hiding place of the manuscript,' and perhaps the point. The ancestor says that the manuscript was near the water wheel in Jamal Pasha's orchard,

buried with Ibn al-Warrāq (Ibid.: 277). History is transformed into story, surviving the rupture. But it is a story without listeners (or with uninterested listeners). 'Amm Gāber distances himself from al-Muizz's storyteller who said, "Without his listeners, a storyteller is nothing" (Ibid.: 277).[17] He declares: "My faithfulness is to my stories." Faithfulness is to stories rather than to listeners. The language does not matter: a scream is a scream. The important thing is that the stories of the women in the village (in *Waiting*) and the ancestral stories (in Ibid.) are told. The voiceless must be given a voice.

Between 'Amm Gāber and Zohra connections are significant.[18] But it is 'Amm Gāber who embodies the past:

> 'Amm Gāber came from that world which has encompassed a civilization that was doomed. It was the first time that Zohra was able to formulate that untranslatable emotion which had inhabited her since Wādi Hassoun. But even now, as she looked at the shape of the feeling she was not sure she understood its meaning.
>
> (Ibid.: 262–263)

Zohra is able to feel the connection but not to grasp its sense. Her dual makeup prevents identification with one or the other of the selves that make her. The voice of the past has reached her, but she is not positioned to express it. Most crucial for the issue of voicing is the role of the West in mutilating the past. The novel creates a fictional context in which the original manuscript, and behind it Islamic vision of art, particularly calligraphy, are celebrated. In addition to bad art history and unworthy ancestors, Islamic art has been disfigured by the West. In the novel, the integrity of Ibn al-Warrāq's art and its wholeness has been violated at the hands of dealers. The Englishman Mr Winston, who tore the pages of the blue *Qur'ān* apart and sold them around the world, is guilty of nothing short of dismembering a whole and dispersing it across the world as commodity (Ibid.: 104).[19] Unlike Mr Winston, al Khemir attempts an act of re-membering classical Islamic art in her novel. Her drawings establish a similar connection with Arabic calligraphy and Islamic icons.

Iconography of identity

Etel Adnan, the Lebanese novelist who writes in French and English and is also an artist, suggests that the problem of language choice in her case was solved by art. Painting somehow circumvents the issue by adopting a non-linguistic medium. Yet the connection with and need for the native culture remain. Adnan observes that the presence of Arabic calligraphy in her paintings, mostly in the form of words or letters, is a parallel to the lines which constitute the "canvas" of her life. Calligraphy connects her "directly with the cultural destiny of the Arabs" (Adnan 2000: 142).

What are the genealogy and the meaning of using the Arabic word or the letter in art? Is it part of revival of Islamic art in modern Arabic painting? Does it, together with the use of miniature and other decorative styles, convey an "arabization" of Western art? Does it simply mean a trace or a traceable tie to Arabic language?

There are dangers and problems specific to the Islamic context of this art. Arabic letters carry meaning even, and perhaps particularly, when they stand alone. The reason for this has to do with the *Qur'ān* and its interpretations. A number of Qur'anic chapters start with letters, "Yā Sīn" being the best known but also "The Cow," which begins with the letters *alif, lām, mīm* and "Mary" which starts with *kāf, hā, 'ayn, sād*. These letters, referred to as "*futūhāt*" (openings) needed interpretation and have gained sacred, even liturgical significance particularly in the work of Sufis. Most significant here is the work of Abu Mansour al-Hallāj called *al-Tawāsin* (plural of the letters *Ta Sin*) and Ibn 'Arabī's meditations on letters of the alphabet. Occult sciences and divination (*hurūfiyya, jafr, firāsa*) rely heavily on the use of letters.[20] Using Arabic letters in modern art, particularly the ones singled out in the *Qur'ān* inevitably engages this history.

Because Arabic is the liturgical language of Islam, writing became in itself an act of worship in Islamic culture. Beautiful script was believed to add clarity to truth. The Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn took special interest in writing: "If the pride of other nations is their sayings, our pride is the variety of script because of its nobility. It is read in every place, translated in every tongue and exists in every time" (Al-Banhasi 1980: 92). In theories and manuals of calligraphy, the dot is the origin of all Arabic scripts. The number of dots, which make up a particular letter determines the type of script.[21] The artist using Arabic in a "secular" context is always mindful of the dangers of the choice and the limitations imposed by the tradition. This explains why modern Arab artists have attempted to develop a different relationship with the letter. The Iraqi painter, Hassan Fa'id, argues that he uses the letter as a "dimension not as symbol," for purposes of movement and rhythm. On the artistic level, the modern artist has to contend with a tradition which has reached intimidating heights in the past. In fact, at the level of artistic achievement, the legacy of calligraphy in Arab culture is matched perhaps, only by poetry. The anxiety felt by the modern calligrapher must be quite strong.

Engagement with this tradition has been, however, significant. Mention may be made of the Iraqi Dhia al-Azzawī and his abstract style, the Algerian Rasheed al-Qurayshī's elaborate designs and the Tunisian Naja al-Mahdāwī's calligraphy. It is within this tradition and in dialogue with it that the drawings of Sabiha al Khemir must be seen. I have selected, for in-depth analysis, three drawings from *The Island of Animals*.

The Island of Animals is an abridged and adapted version of the epistle "*Risālat tadā'ī al-hayawān 'ala al-insān*" (The Dispute between Animals and Man), written by the group of philosophers, Ikhwān al-Safā, who were active

in Basra in the tenth century.[22] While the English translation of the text is recent and made to suit a modern public, the dialogue between the original text and the drawings is almost synchronic. The art is clearly an illustration of the Arabic rather than the English text. The imaginative recalling of the tradition in the illustration recreates the time of the epistle in two significant ways. These are the calligraphic nature of the drawings and the understanding of the spirit from which the book emerged.

The first of the figures to be analyzed is the scene where the peacock, the minister to the king, gives council to his sovereign, the Simurgh, about the best suited representative of the birds in the court of the king of the jinn (Figure 1). The peacock, one of the most depicted birds in Islamic art does not really pose a problem. The artist gave it a fine human face to reflect its exhibitionist attitude. The depiction of the Simurgh is a different story altogether. The text describes it as "that large fabulous winged creature who was king of birds" (Johnson-Davies 1994: 28). The Simurgh is completely imagined. Farīduddīn al-ʿAttār, the twelfth/thirteenth-century Persian poet, made this creature both famous and decidedly fictional.

In his *Conference of the Birds*, the hoopoe points the way to its fellow birds:

> We have a king; beyond Kaf's mountain peak
> The Simurgh lives, the sovereign whom you seek,
> And He is always near to us, though we
> Live far from His transcendent majesty.
> <div align="right">(Attar 1984: 33)</div>

Figure 1   The Simurgh.

There is a tantalizing reference to what the Simurgh might look like:

> It was in China, late one moonless night,
> The Simurgh first appeared to mortal sight –
> He let a feather float down through the air,
> And rumours of its fame spread everywhere;
> Throughout the world men separately conceived
> An image of its shape, and all believed
> Their private fantasies uniquely true.
>
> (Ibid.: 34–35)

Al Khemir walks in the footsteps of those who conceived the Simurgh and gives us her "private" fantasy of the bird. The illustrator draws a striking creature in a way that accentuates representation rather than recalls existing renderings of the Simurgh, of which there are several.[23] But since the Simurgh is, in 'Attar's poem at least, a pun on words, a creature of language, al Khemir uses the Arabic for Simurgh to represent the bird.[24] She decorates its feathers and neck with the Arabic word "Simurgh." Since the Simurgh pertains, essentially, to literary device and mythical origin, only the arbitrary sign can point to this most unstable and uncertain of references. In the illustration, calligraphy and knowledge of Islamic history combine to create an image embedded in Islamic spiritual literature and link up with its tradition. The rendering of the bird goes beyond the English text and connects with what al Khemir has called the "far-reaching memory." The Arabic in it may seem ornamental but it is also referential.

A similar process is at work in the drawing of the King of Jinn (Figure 2). Here again the reference is elusive; for no one really knows what a Jinn looks like. The king's throne is decorated in elaborate patterns reminiscent of Islamic or Indian woodwork. His crown and body are decorated with the Arabic words *Malik al-Jinn* (the King of Jinn) repeated and reshaped to fit the outline of the crown, the upper body and the stretched arms. The face, including two pointy ears and the eyes, appears like a mask, something familiar in performances of devils and jinn. Two piercing beady eyes seem to look through viewers and draw them in at the same time, in a hypnotic gesture: Jinn can see but are not seen. They take hold of us, seduce us, and leave us under their control.

The third drawing is the face-off between the animals and the humans (Johnson-Davies 1994: 69) (Figure 3). It is a playful illustration with a hint of the feminist point of the view. The men have a dazzling variety of headgear and beard styles but the same look. They seem puzzled, perhaps by the eloquence of the animals, bemused that their position as masters of the world is challenged by beasts. These, in turn, show a triumphant attitude, and even an occasional smirk. The tension of the story is at its climax here and the men
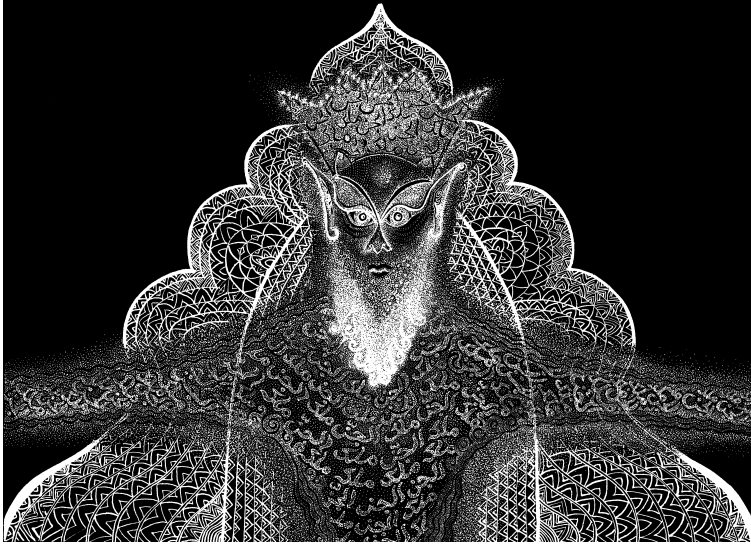
Figure 2 *Malik al-Jinn.*
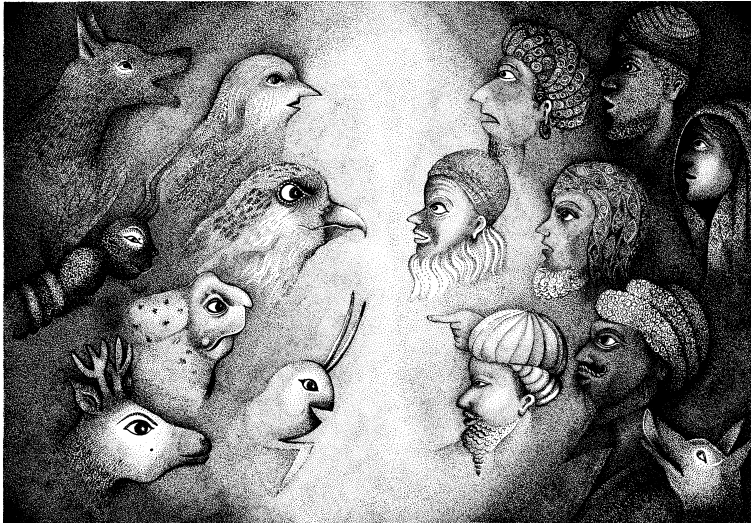
Figure 3 Face-off.

are anxious about the verdict. A woman lurks slightly behind, her face revealed to us, but hidden from the men, and observes the scene with a watchful eye. The text itself refers explicitly to men only; "No less than seventy men decided to stay on the island" (Ibid.: 5). The Arabic original does not exclude women from the community that landed on the island; but specifically states that the delegation which met the king of the Jinn was made up of "about seventy men from various countries" (Sa'd 1997: 147). The possibility that women were present on the boat exists in the original. The illustration of the storm (Figure 4) includes two women clearly visible in the far right of the scene. This picture foreshadows the appearance of the woman in the face-off discussed earlier. In both, the female presence comes through, subtle but unmistakable.[25]

Al Khemir explains her style: "Not unlike photography, the style of drawing itself, based mainly on the dot, is interesting for me in its relation to the particle, the basic component of the universe, and to dust which is the ultimate destiny of everything" (Lloyd 2001: 195).[26] Essentially, there is no difference between the words "dispersed by time" made out of grains of sand in al Khemir's Channel Four documentary and the drawings of *The Island of Animals*. Both reveal the desire for wholeness and betray the conviction of dispersion, painstaking efforts to hold dots together, and painful realisation, as one does this, that the whole is dispersible – an apt metaphor for communal existence of Diaspora. The visibility of the dot on the page betrays fragility. It also makes visible the process of drawing. It lays bare to the naked eye the artist's work: there is no attempt at mimesis or at conveying

Figure 4 Shipwreck.

a reality effect. All the illustrations and book covers made by al Khemir emanate from this principle. They do not illustrate but graphically represent a reading of the text they illustrate. This is perhaps the deep link and reference to the Islamic art of calligraphy. Composing the shape of a bird, for instance, using the words *bismi Allah al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm* draws attention not to the imitation of the bird, but rather to the capacity of the letter (and of the calligrapher, of course) to represent. The awe is not at the accuracy of representation but at the act (and art) of representation. The point is not the bird, rather the calligraphed bird, the letters or words which make up the picture.

Conclusion: voice and silence

Diaspora presents us with the process of representation and construction of identity at the complex juncture where the categories and impulses of empire, nation, religion, gender, and metropolitan location converge. Unlike nationalism, where territory is the ultimate aim and battleground, Diaspora is territory-less. It is a point of tenuous balance. Diaspora implies negotiation of borders and frontiers, exile and alienation, ambivalence, duality, and even duplicity.[27] Based in a "host" space, Diaspora is often defined by outside danger and as dangerous to the outside. (Al Khemir's text and art reflect that fragility and complexity, or rather, that complex fragility.) But beyond its attractiveness to the analyst, Diaspora culture raises serious questions: Is the location of Diaspora a privileged vantage point where speaking out is possible, where double critique, of the home and of the host, is feasible? What relationship does Diaspora entertain with the empire? Does the location create intimacy or opposition? And is there a risk of over-valorizing Diaspora? Is there a danger of privileging the metropolitan position?

For the Arab writer or artist, al Khemir is an example of this Diaspora as a space of freedom that comes with a predicament. Since it is not separable from the situation of tension and even hostility, which dominates much of Arab–Western relations and from the ensuing assault on memory, the relationship of the writer/artist with the cultural past becomes significant even as an utopian vision of an new Andalus becomes more needed.[28] Al Khemir suggests:

> With my far-reaching memory, I am constantly aware of the possibility of al-Andalus (especially between the eighth and the eleventh centuries), where Muslims, Jews and Christians lived together in peace and where the arts and sciences thrived. Al-Andalus, not as a dream or nostalgia, simply a proof, a promising token of the possibility of positive coexistence and interaction between diverse ethnic groups, religions, and a proof of the enriching civilisational outcome of its happening.[29]

(Lloyd 2001: 48)

Voicing the past, and uncovering traces of common ground gain new urgency. Bridging the gap between past and present becomes a metaphor for bridging today's rift between West and East. For, there seems to be a paradox in the rapport today. The presence of the East, particularly Muslims, in the West is unprecedented but the polarization is at its highest. In the opening scene of al Khemir's documentary on Islamic art, "Dispersed by Time," the Arabic version of the title, *wa shattatahā al-zamān*, is written with sand grains in a Maghrebi script. After a brief appearance, wind blows the sand away, erasing the inscription and returning the line to its basic component: grains of sand. (Al Khemir's drawings, we recall, are made up of dots of ink). In her novel, *The Blue Manuscript*, the horses of the Fatimid Emir, al-Mu'izz, set on his epic journey to found Cairo, lift their feet to leave behind inscriptions on the sand, most likely in a Maghrebi script: a signature of presence in the world, "a scar on the map" as André Malraux would say.[30] The voices in Diaspora are multiple. For al Khemir, art and fiction in English are two of these; academic writing is another. But acquiring an individual voice comes with a silence. Amina, in *Waiting*, is able to tell her fragmentation only in a language most Tunisians cannot read; Zohra, in *The Blue Manuscript*, feels the connection to 'Amm Gāber but is unable to articulate its meaning. Can the bilingual speak? "I wonder," says the half-English half-Egyptian Iman, "if what I say is silence because it is English, and some Arabic?"[31] True to its ambivalent nature, Diaspora empowers voice and imposes silence.

Notes

1 Ahdaf Soueif observes, "If the Arab at home is in a state of anger and a permanent form of anguish; the Arab abroad is in a continuous state of defense, justification, protest" (*Alif* 20, 2000: 183).
2 The term "Diaspora" in language refers to "a dispersion," as of any originally homogeneous people (from Greek: dispersion or diaspeirein. dia: apart or through; and espeirein, to scatter). The term was closely linked to religious communities:

   1   The aggregate of Jews and Jewish communities outside of Palestine.
   2   The body of Jews living dispersed among the Gentiles after the Babylonian captivity.
   3   In the New Testament, the body of Christians living outside of Palestine.

   The term has had some history, moving from reference to faith communities to identifying political entities and cultural groups.
3 All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.
4 The original text is "Le Palimpseste du bilingue: Ibn 'Arabi/Dante."
5 Paul Dambovic, who taught literary theory and criticism in Tunisian universities, notes that "Tunisian students are extraordinarily interested in reading North African texts and exploring literary connections with North Africa." ("Theory in North Africa and North Africa in Theory" in *English in North Africa*: 157.)
6 See, for example, Jean Fontaine (1993) *Tārīkh al-adab al-Tūnusī al-hadīth wa al-muʿāsir* (History of modern and contemporary Tunisian literature), Tunis: Bayt al-Hikma.

7 Metropolitan location does also affect Diaspora in unpredictable ways. London, for example, has become a site of the interaction and cross-fertilization among Diasporas, something we have yet to think about properly.

8 *The Blue Manuscript* is forthcoming. Page numbers are as they appear in the original typescript before publication.

9 The mother's pain is closely tied to the politics of nationalism in Tunisia, which consumes the father, then paralyzes him, and finally kills him.

10 Amina's mother saw her road to education blocked by her two brothers because she was a girl: "She had two brothers and there were only two roads to school. Unluckily for her, there was no third road." Amina would not settle for the same fate.

11 The inevitable, and rather overused, connection to Scheherazade has been evoked in a review of the novel by the *Irish Times*. 25.09.2003.

12 "Shards" is the word used, foreshadowing excavated pottery pieces later in the narrative.

13 The character, Glasses, who is the art restoration specialist, remarks: "A gap separates the village from the glorious past crumbling nearby. How had the link between the past and the present been severed?" (*The Blue Manuscript*: 60).

14 In the novel Professor O'brian betrays knowledge of Fatimid Cairo that, in turn, points to the writer's expertise in the area. Al Khemir is author of the PhD thesis, "The Palace of Sitt al-Mulk and Fatimid Imagery."

15 "For some, it [the manuscript] was a copy of the sacred Qur'ān. For others it was treasure, a useful item to realize a career promotion, or a valuable piece of historical evidence" (*The Blue Manuscript*: 247).

   Islamic art history does not fare very well in this novel. There is an attempt at wrestling Islamic art out of the discipline of Art History by creating a context for it, even a polemic (describing Art History as verbosity and sententious mask of art history (*The Blue Manuscript*: 105).

   The existence, even prominence of figurative art in Islam is emphasized here (*The Blue Manuscript*: 158, 189) as it is in al Khemir's television documentary, to which I will return.

16 The famous blue Qur'ān is written in gold Kufic style on blue vellum.

   The blue and gold color scheme is apparently unique, and though the Arabic script moves from right to left, the pages of this Qur'ān – unlike almost all others – were turned from left to right, the left hand page preceding the right.

   Pages from the manuscript are scattered between The Museum of Islamic Art in Tunis; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA; The Museum of Fine Art, Boston, MA; The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, and several private collections. The origin is most likely the city of al-Qayrawān in the ninth or early tenth centuries (size; H. 28.6 cm., W. 35 cm.) (Welch 1982: 21).

   Al Khemir's disclaimer reads: "This novel does not tell its [the blue Qur'ān's] story but hopes to pay homage to it."

17 Similarities between the two are striking: the pronounced nose of the storyteller resembles 'Amm Gāber's; the boy, Mahmoud, like al-Muizz's niece, is mesmerized by 'Amm Gāber's nose (*The Blue Manuscript*: 49); 'Amm Gāber's ancestor was a storyteller sentenced to death by the ruler and had to go into exile out of Egypt (*The Blue Manuscript*: 68).

18 'Amm Gāber has an uncertain gender: "'Amm Gāber looked sometimes a child, sometimes an adult, an old man and even a woman" (*The Blue Manuscript*: 52). This ambiguity makes the connection possible, and perhaps allows the transfer of his stories, from him to Zohra, to occur.

19 Mr Winston, the collector, who bought and dispersed the blue manuscript in the 1920s will see his true nature unmasked by a crow: "The crow gave a high-pitched, resonant 'cruck-cruck,' and descended on the collector's palm with its sharp beak" (*The Blue Manuscript*: 82). Mr Winston is denounced as a crook-crook.

20 Khatibi says about *jafr* and the sacred cosmology associated with it:

> This sort of theory (beyond the reach, perhaps, of archaeology), has pervaded the metaphysic of symbol from East to West, in every sense, and still survives in certain simple stories used by the *fuqahā'* in popular medicine (organic and psychosomatic).
>
> (Khatibi and Sijilmassi 1976: 202)

21 A personal stamp was highly encouraged, but Arabic calligraphy as an art was transferable from master to disciple. Echoes of this are found in meditations about the manuscript in the description of the blue Qur'ān and in the training of the calligrapher Ibn al-Warrāq in *The Blue Manuscript*.

22 *The Case of the Animals versus Man before the King of the Jinn: a Tenth Century Ecological Tale of the Pure Brethren of Basra*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman. Boston, MA: Twayne, 1978.
    All references to the Arabic original are to: *Risālat Tadā'ī al-hayawān 'ala al-Insān* (The Epistle of the Dispute between Animals and Man). Introduction. Fārūq Sa'd. Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1997. All references are to the abridged translation: *The Island of Animals*, trans. Johnson-Davies, London: Quartet Book, 1994.

23 Examples include fifteenth-century illustration of Firdawsi's *Shahnama* and a sixteenth-century illustration of Indian stories, to name just two. See *Arts of the Islamic Book* (59, 168).

24 Attar writes:

> There in the Simurgh's radiant face they saw
> Themselves as the Simurgh of the world – with awe
> They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend
> They were the Simurgh and the journey's end.
>
> (Attar 1984: 219)

    The thirty birds discover in the end of the journey that the Simurgh is themselves. The pun is: "si" means thirty, and "murgh" means bird. See (Schimmel 1975: 307).

25 Al Khemir notes: "When there is a conflict between the cultural identity and the individual identity which has often been the case for Arab women, the journey takes a route of metamorphosis and transcendence." For this, one has to reconcile two different memories, a close memory and a "far-reaching" one. "I would link a 'far-reaching memory' to a cultural heritage" (Lloyd 2001: 46).

26 The dot is also associated with a conception of identity. The letter H in the artist's name is rendered with a dot under the H in transliteration.

> That dot is not visible when one speaks English. I strive to communicate the invisible and the untranslatable in my cultural identity. I have to keep track of that dot from which everything departed in the Arabic language and script.
>
> (Lloyd 2001: 49)

Francophone writers had to face the same issues. One can think of *La blessure du nom propre* by Khatibi and meditations about the proper name by Meddeb.

27 In the Islamic context, Shiʻa Muslims in Diaspora were permitted to confess the opposite of what they believed when they find themselves in the minority: Diaspora is called *Dār al-taqiyya*, the land of veiling, secrecy, dissimulation.
28 I use "utopian" in the sense of what Fredric Jameson calls, the "capacity to imagine change" (Jameson 1991: xvi).
29 It is perhaps within this vision that Glasses, a character in *The Blue Manuscript*, rediscovers his Jewishness through Arabic language and Islamic art.
30 "Arabic letters were pressed into the sand as the caravan advanced. The horses' shoes had been made by a dexterous blacksmith under instruction of the court calligrapher" (*The Blue Manuscript*: 26). Ibn Khaldun mentions in his history that the phrase, al-Mulk li Allah, was written on the foreheads of horses during the campaign by Abu Abd al-Allah al-Shiʻi, the missionary of the first Fatimid ruler in North Africa (*al-ʻIbar*, iv, 75).
31 "It is an awkward contradiction, to live in a country that respects my talent and rejects my wounds, to belong to a country that respects my wounds but refuses myself, says Khalid in *Memory in the Flesh* (Mosteghanemi 2000: 49) this essay is dedicated to Daniel Mosquera, in diasporic friendship, spoken and unspoken.

5   Hédi Bouraoui

Cross-cultural writing

Najib Redouane

The influx of Francophone immigrants that came from Southern countries, such as Africa, the Maghreb, the Middle East, and the West Indies, contributed to the human, social, and cultural growth of Canada. In recent years, new voices in literature have participated in the strengthening of this dynamism that reflects a multiplicity, continuity, and diversity in the French-speaking community in Canada. This outstanding literary evolution prompted a realization of the existence of a literature called *l'autre littérature* or *l'écriture migrante* which became a living and original expression of a collective and shared identity.

Marc Angenot sees the emergence of literature from different cultural communities as a tremendous phenomenon that has taken place over the last twenty years, making Canada a country of many voices in constant expansion.

It should be noted that this literary movement first appeared in the 1960s and became stronger by the 1980s due to an increase in the number of writers originating from the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Latin America. In the 1990s, the literary landscape grew and was enriched by the arrival of writers from Africa and the Maghreb, the southern areas of the French-speaking world.

This chapter will focus on a Tunisian writer who took his native writing with him to a new country. By examining his poems and novels, we will attempt to highlight the specific characteristics of the work this Maghrebian writer, who found that Canada, Ontario in particular, was an ideal place for literary expression. It also allowed him to reaffirm his Arabic background while combining it with his 'Canadianity'.

Born in Sfax, Tunisia on July 16, 1932, Hédi Bouraoui was educated in France and the United States and settled in Toronto, the capital of Ontario. He was a professor at York University where he succeeded in furthering French teaching in Anglophone areas by incorporating literature from the Maghreb, black Africa, and the West Indies into his French programmes.

From his tri-continental experience was born the generous and inventive 'transculturality' philosophy from which would emerge the free spirit of the future. It would inspire his collections of poetry, his novels and his initiatives as an actor of the French-speaking world.

A prolific novelist and essayist, Bouraoui distinguishes himself with his poetic writing and his activist novels, which are breathtakingly exploratory and are meant to be a symbiosis of complex concepts.

His collections of poetry – *Musocktail* (1966), *Tremblé* (1969), *Éclate module* (1972), *Vésuviade* (1976), *Sans Frontières/Without Boundaries* (1979), *Haïtuvois*, followed by *Antillades* (1980), *Tales of Heritage I* (1981), *Vers et l'envers* (1982), *Tales of Heritage II* (1986), *Echosmos* (1986), *Reflet Pluriel* (1986), *Arc-en-terre* (1991), *Émigressence* (1992), *Nomadaime* (1995), *Transvivance* (1996) – made him a poet of modernity. His work is filled with an overwhelming optimism and the effervescence of his lyricism is visible even in the titles of his works.

In his poetry, which shatters the concept of a single identity, we see a man from three continents: Africa, Europe, and North America, and his multicultural universe. His notion of '*Transculturalism*' is an attempt to build bridges, to establish a dialogue between the different elements of the Canadian mosaic, specifically in Toronto, a city whose immigrant population has grown from 30 to 75 per cent in 25 years, and which has become a popular area for poets. Poets like Bouraoui who came from other countries recognize themselves in the poems of *Émigressence*. In the introduction he wrote for this collection, Bouraoui focuses on the emotion behind his poetic and ontological journey that impacts the way he writes:

> Ce qui m'a amené à écrire «Émigressence», c'est le désir profond de miner les clichés qui entourent la notion du déplacement d'un être en lui-même et vers l'autre, d'une nation à une autre, d'un continent à un autre. [...] une quête est un voyage initiatique à l'intérieur de nous-mêmes. C'est donc une découverte de l'autre dans cette démarche qui est aussi, par la même occasion, une découverte de soi.
>
> (Naudillon 1994: 27)

Bouraoui does more than explore human relationships; in *l'Autre* he offers an ontological and philosophical approach to the fear of reality. It was in discovering *l'Autre* that he found similarities or 'echoes' of his own identity and human condition. He calls this approach 'transpoetic' and implements it in his poetic practices:

> Le poète nous permet donc de vivre en harmonie avec toutes les Différences nourries, bien entendu, d'historicité et de divergences. Ainsi les relations humaines peuvent s'échanger dans le respect de l'Autre et de ce que l'on a appelé «la différence intraitable». Le poète convoque tous les savoirs dans une transversalité du questionnement qui libère l'homo faber et l'homo sapiens de toutes les contraintes, provoquant ainsi un Etat d'Etre fondamental à toute entreprise d'expression et de réalisation.
>
> (Naudillon 1994: 26)

Hédi Bouraoui knew, like no other, how to express the duality felt by the exiled: their new-found happiness and their distress: 'Vois comment/ S'épanouit mon moi/Planté dans le pluriel/Écartelé des terres' (Bouraoui 1986a: 50). In examining his poems, one finds a multitude of themes that are important to the poet: traveling, the Maghreb, French and Canadian lands, hope, and tolerance. But what should really earn him recognition is while he was traveling to countries that were bright with colour and light, the poet was fighting his own battles to end slavery, poverty, and oppression.

This constant conflict between the inventive spirit's need for freedom and the attraction to purity is evident in Bouraoui's poetry which shines with the joy of his gift that seems natural to him:

> J'ai choisi de vivre dans les mots [affirme-t-il]
> Au cœur d'alphabet inconnus
> Là où les oiseaux chantent leur silence immémoriel
> Aux quatre coins des cinq continents
> Ainsi les langues me transportent
> Sur l'arcane de mon corps éclaté.
> (Bouraoui 1995b: 13)

The adventure of *Émigressence* begins with this profession of faith and is followed by rich and original poems full of enthusiasm. There is also the Tunisian sun that helps light the way to another light, one that cannot be separated from the mystery of life. Tunisia also appears in this work because it is Hédi Bouraoui's place of birth, where he spent his childhood before moving to France to study. He would also bring his sun into his work, which would help him pursue his *émigressence* to Canada. Deciding to settle in Toronto did not stop him from flying from one corner of the globe to another in a quest to learn about different cultures. From the portrait that he paints of himself, he unknowingly shows us the continuous awakening of the plurality of this *émigressant*: 'Rafistoleur de rêves/ Poète/ Affreux jouisseur/ Tête volcan en éruption/ Cœur étincelle/ Lave sans cendre' (Bouraoui 1995b: 16).

His ultimate dream is for harmony to exist between people and nations, in an *émigressence* of heart and mind. He reminds us that we are all connected, like the branches of a tree. We are branches of different families, but we are ultimately connected to the same roots.

Bouraoui has also written many novels. From *L'îconaison* (1985) to *Ainsi parle la Tour CN* (1999) and works in between – *Bangkok Blues* (1994), *Retour à Thyna* (1996) and *La Pharaone* (1998), the originality of his works is apparent because it involves a personal search for the artistic (a search for new forms) and a critical reflection on literature.

Bouraoui started his novel writing with a novel–poem or a poem–novel which shook the boundaries of classical literature. In fact, *L'îconaison* is a cosmopolitan work that shattered typological barriers and introduced readers to an original literary genre. It was Bouraoui's eighteenth work and a

combination that, in the words of Hédi Abdeljaouad, 'est le lieu où se livrent batailles toutes les dissensions vécues ou feintes, rejetées ou consenties par le poète/critique.' (Abdeljaouad 1986: 32). It was not a novel, or a collection of poems, or an essay. It was a combination of all three and a dialogue full of aphorisms where the author was continuing to tame the language. What makes this poetic story stand out is the absence of points of reference that are present in other works. *L'îconaison* offers no clearly defined characters, no steady intrigue, no punctuation, and the narrative has no logical organization.

La Blessure du nom propre participates in what Khatibi calls 'euphoric writing'. Bouraoui produces a work that feeds on modernity and announces the beginning of a new image, a new iconic era.

In *Bangkok Blues*, Bouraoui takes his literary work one step further than he did in his last novel. This work exists in an intergeneric space where many genres interpenetrate to create a literary expression in his genre. *L'Amour de Virgulus* is about a transnational, traveling, transcultural, and cosmopolitan man. A man of humanity with *Koï de Thailandaise*, a feminine symbol of all women – singular and multiple. It is an intriguing novel that shatters the narrative genre with a poetic construction where colourful and complex action unfolds in Bangkok. This city, affected by corruption and lust, becomes the metaphor of a city that reveals an image of unusual purity and the proliferation of evil. It is a city that has a time space that assures its specificity and coherence.

This text by Bouraoui is important because it contains a strong support between geography, the quest for identity, and aesthetics. In the geography of the city, in the time of his life, and in the space of the text, the narrator succeeds in overcoming his fear and finds himself pursuing his never-ending quest.

This novel is powerfully modern in its construction and in its themes that show an 'écriture très recherché, voire ésotérique et polysémique' (Yesfah 1995: 60).

Bouraoui started the continuous renewal of the novel genre. *Bangkok Blues* is in keeping with the writer's preoccupations. In the words of Robert Elbaz, Bouraoui is able to combine 'une réflexion sur l'être et le langage, le soi et l'autre, la biographie et l'autobiographie, le reportage et le témoignage, etc.' (Elbaz 1995: 149).

These two novels contribute to the strengthening of a new genre, that of the novel–poem in which the discursive tensions contribute to the balance between the poetic work and the narrative sequence.

Retour à Thyma brings the writer back into the domain of Francophone Maghrebian literature. This time Bouraoui goes beyond his focus on *multi* and *trans* cultures to celebrate the discourse of identity in a novel that provides a double presence: the roots of distant Arab traditions embedded in a modern narration of French expression which acts as both a mirror and as a support.

This novel, which combines the characteristics of the detective/police genre, is a metaphysical and political work that explores the Tunisian reality and the current French protectorate without forgetting the wounds of the immigrant influx and the difficulties of integration. It is also a metaphoric novel that, through the city of Thyma, questions this fragmented identity that was alienated through the ages following an indefinite number of colonizations. But the dominating element is the internalization of the historic memory that transforms the present. It is Zitouna, whose Arab name means olive tree, who will take over the task of restoring the past and keeping the traditions of the city and country alive. Zitouna, the 'ancestral woman' and main character of the novel is a woman desired by many men. In many ways she reminds us of Kateb Yacine's Nedjma in her leading role. She embodies what has already existed and already happened.

Zitouna is not only the symbol of Thyma, she is also the embodiment because we read in her the archaeology of desire, of names, and of fact. She is determined to lead a combat with the goal of '*reprendre l'histoire de sa ville dès le début*' (Bouraoui 1996a: 53) which affirms his wish to highlight the greatness of the ancient city that '*a gardé une constante unificatrice de la diversité*' (Bouraoui 1996a: 72).

Through the voice of Zitouna, which gives life to the text, Bouraoui looks at the contemporary history of his native country. For the writer, knowing and mastering one's history is knowing one's self.

Far from being the exception, *La Pharaone* enriched the writer's aesthetic experiences which were born of the voyage and the discovery of the other; *L'Autre*. The framework of the narrative in this novel paints an intimate portrait of the Egyptian civilization, the first African civilization and one of the oldest in the world. Based in Egypt, this novel tells the story of Barka Bousiris, an internationally renowned writer and researcher who travels to the country to speak at a conference and to explain how the mutilated nose of Pharaoh Hatshepsut's sphinx disappeared. Passionate about the values she represents, this traveling poet uses her voice to reveal the truth and to save Hatshepsut from being forgotten. The narrative transforms into a reminder of the glorious Pharaonic past and also acts as a major historic element. To counterpoint this historic and geographic voyage, other stories develop, the most important being the love story between Imane (a young Muslim) and Ayman (a Coptic-Christian). The intertwining of these stories creates interpenetration between the Pharaonic past and the present, between one's self and others.

With his superb, passionate, and metaphoric style, Bouraoui knows how to give his characters souls and give life to the places they visit. He uses images of a work that must leave room for a new, more materialistic world that is menaced by tyranny, repression, Muslim integration, and Coptic separatism. But in this world of divided identities and exclusion, integration undergoes an abounding reconciliation. The glorious union of Imane and Ayman, two people condemned to hatred for ethnic and religious reasons, is not only

a symbol of tolerance but is also synonymous with a multiple and even polyphonic identity.

For Bouraoui, reconciliation involves an ethical and cultural multiplicity, a spatial and worldly diversity. In all of his poems and novels, there is a permanent quest for identity which includes the presence of his African roots which fuel and transform his writing. The accumulation of his human experience through two civilizations, European and American, marked the development of his individuality. In *Ainsi parle la tour CN*, he gave this Toronto monument a privileged representation. In fact, in this work, which mixes the following genres: novelistic, poetic, journalistic and philosophical, the CN Tower reveals its most intimate secrets. It offers its vision from inside, highlighting the characteristics that define it. It acts as a language game that evokes its origin and reaches toward the sky. It represents the role played by the cosmopolitan community that keeps it turning today.

The projects of all his main characters reflect his own wishes. They represent something unspecified about the multiculturalism ethic dear to his heart: *Le transpoétique* and *Les transmigrations*, but would have a magical value if suddenly propelled beyond themselves.

It is important to mention that Bouraoui's texts are powerfully modern in their construction and the themes they explore. They attest to the maturity and talent of this 'multicultural' or 'minority' writer who, on a quest for the self through the other, *L'Autre*, is visibly tied to his place in an Ontario that claims its own identity, even its own literature.

Bouraoui establishes himself as being profoundly African, son of a continent that extends from the countries of the Maghreb to South Africa. He claims his Mediterranean heritage and combines the features of multiple North American influences. His desire to establish connections between his cultures and the one that he adopted makes him a cantor of a multiple identity. His Maghrebian vision, which was nourished by European milk, opened itself to the riches of all the civilizations and was infused with a typically 'New World' dynamism. In Anglophone Ontario, where he worked to make all Francophone Maghrebians, sub-Saharans, and Caribbeans aware of the notion that he proposed of family–state in the worldwide Francophonie, he felt that it represented the ideal of his *créaculture*, a state that favours an intercultural action, a state that encourages and enriches the cultural and humanistic values of all its members.

> Nous avons élaboré, [écrit-il] une sorte d'approche multiculturelle d'une francographie nouvelle dont le champ d'action ne peut être tissé que de liaisons égalitaires et culturelles, relations fraternelles et poétiques qui mettent en exergue l'apport de chacun pour que s'illumine le Tout.
>
> (Bouraoui 1990: 10)

The originality of the work is in the constant renewal of the approach toward human relationships and the language establishing a solid link

between writing, and social and cultural engagement. This is what nourishes this African heritage and nourishes this Tunisian heritage (is Tunisia not one of the countries whose civilizations have been affected by diverse influences?).

Having inherited cultures from three different countries: the Mahgreb, France, and Canada, the writer borrows inspiration from the cultural values that travel through the cosmos, making his identity a better representation of what could be a symbiosis of different cultures. He states: 'Mon identité je l'ai en moi. C'est un croisement multiculturel et pluridisciplinaires sur le plan de la culture et du Savoir' (Benzina 1994: 4).

Reading a work that is as much a poem as it is a novel allows one to draw a constant cultural reference to his Maghrebian roots, to Africa and to his Diaspora in the Caribbean, or in the United States, in Haiti or in Canada. No matter where in the world he finds himself (from Bangkok to Paris, from Pointe à Pitre to New York, from Tokyo to Mexico), Hédi Bouraoui is the cantor of the true liberty of creation free from guilt and the fear of losing one's roots, the aesthetics of liberation and tolerance, filled with African values. Bouraoui's reasons for writing are the stimulating and enriching encounters of civilizations and languages that he carries with him and the attempts to develop transculturality, a real place of creative possibility and to provide a '*Nahda-Renaissance*' to a world that would be without borders.

6 "When dwelling becomes impossible"

Arab-Jews in America and in Israel in the writings of Ahmad Susa and Shimon Ballas

Orit Bashkin

"Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees" (Said 2000: 171), writes Edward Said, since "warfare, imperialism and quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers" have turned modern times into "the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration" (Ibid.: 174). Said, however, notes that

> for the intellectual an exilic displacement means being liberated from the usual career, in which doing well and following in time-honored footsteps are the main milestones. Exile means that you are always going to be marginal and that you cannot follow a prescribed path.
>
> (Said 1994: 62)

This chapter examines the concepts of exile, nationalism and Orientalism in the writings of Ahmad Nissim Susa (born 1902) and Shimon Ballas (born 1930). Susa, an Iraqi Jew who converted to Islam in 1936 wrote an autobiography entitled *My Life during Half a Century* (Hayāti fī nisf qarn),[1] published in 1986. I explore the parts of the text, which deal with Susa's life in the United States to demonstrate the ways in which he challenged the categories of "East," "West," "Muslim," and "Jew" and to scrutinize the changes in Susa's nationalist thinking following his exposure to American life. I also study the representation of the term "America" in the text as a flexible and imaginary category, serving as both a positive and a negative model to contemporary Iraqis.

Shimon Ballas is a Baghdadi born Jew residing in Israel. A professor of Arabic literature in Haifa University, he is the author of numerous novels and collections of short stories in Hebrew. Ballas' prose often focuses on experiences of Iraqi Jews, both in Iraq and in Israel and consequently the theme of exile, as well as the constructed differences between Jews and Arabs, are significant components in his works. Ballas consciously historicizes many of his novels since many of them are based on detailed historical surveys and on adaptations of "true" biographies.[2] His novel *The Other One (Ve-Hu Aher)* was published in Tel-Aviv in 1991. The novel is a sad and vivid evocation of the

histories of both monarchic and Baʿthist Iraq, seen through the eyes of its narrator, Harun-Harry-Ahmad Sawsan whose biography is almost identical to that of Ahmad Nissim Susa. I study this novel as an articulation of the exilic existence of Arab-Jews in Israel. The relationships between the fictitious autobiography, that is the novel, and the "original" text are of particular interest predominantly because they reveal the ways in which the novel echoes narratives from the autobiography on the one hand, and yet critiques and subverts them on the other.

Part I – Susa in America – *Hayātī Fī Nisf Qarn*

"Zaynab in Texas"

In his autobiography, Susa describes his experiences as a student of civil engineering in Texas during the 1920s, and his graduate studies in engineering and history in the early 1930s.[3] This part of the autobiography subverts common themes in Orientalist travel literature. It indicates that an Arab can feel very much at home in America and furthermore, can also feel superior to many Americans. Susa's knowledge of the East is his source of power in the United States. An example is Susa's first day in America. Upon arrival to New York, he is forced to spend the night in Ellis Island for medical examinations. He befriends an American officer, who is intrigued by his origins and queries him about the term "Iraq" and the differences between "Iraq" and "Iran." After a short explanation in which Susa elucidates that the terms refer to two different national entities, the officer offers to drive Susa to his destination, Hotel Lebanon in Washington Street, New York, a street which Susa finds to be a replica of a Lebanese neighborhood (Susa 1986: 166–167). This incident is very telling because it illustrates that to Susa the American officer is the ignorant, albeit kindhearted, native, while he, Susa, who possesses knowledge about the East, is the erudite traveler. Moreover, as Susa indicates, the differences between East and West are not that profound, since Washington Street in New York resembles an Arab space. Immigration and the presence of Arab students, intellectuals and merchants in the United States have subsequently obliterated the geographical differences between America and the Middle East.[4]

The inadequacy of the categories "East" and "West" is manifested in the representation of gender in the autobiography. America causes Susa to contemplate the state of women in Iraq. When comparing the state of women in Iraq to their status in the United States, he bemoans the veil, *hijāb*, and the fact that Iraqi women are deprived of "the light of freedom and education" (Ibid.: 180). The position of women in the United States is thus the secret for "American progress and development" (Ibid.: 187). Nevertheless, Susa transports the images of the Arab peasant girl to the American milieu. In Iraq, as elsewhere in the Arab world, the countryside (*rīf*) and particularly the rural women were often perceived as symbols of national authenticity and sacred

traditions, as exemplified in the novel by Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *Zaynab*.[5] The image of the authentic peasant girl is noticeable when Susa narrates, quite candidly, his romantic escapades in Texas, Colorado, and Paris.

Susa's first girlfriend, Maggie Lee, is a Texan and the daughter of a local clergyman. Maggie Lee, "an emblem of beauty" embodies "a type of old, Christian American family, considered conservative when compared with the families of the big urban centers in the United States" (Ibid.: 192). His second girlfriend, Robbie is described as liberal and promiscuous, although one senses the love and fondness between the two. When Robbie's father passed away, Susa "mourned and wept for him, just as his daughter had done" (Ibid.: 195). Robbie, however, decides to marry another man. "This episode was an assault to my honor and my manhood [...] I thus abhorred the American life, hated everything that was American, and cursed the hour in which I arrived to this land" (Ibid.: 196). Shortly after the marriage, her mother informs Susa that her daughter cannot overcome her love for him, but he refuses to reconsider this relationship. He presents it as a struggle between reason and emotion, a struggle from which reason emerged victorious.

Susa meets his future wife, Mary, on a ship headed to Paris. He discovers that both he and Mary belong to *Phi Beta Kappa* and that she had recently graduated from the University of Iowa. At first, she seems to resemble Robbie (Ibid.: 199)[6] yet later she appears to be similar to his first girlfriend:

> Oddly, this girl remained conservative and loyal to the traditions of the countryside typifying the original Americans, for she did not dance very well, refrained from smoking and wine-drinking and moreover did not socialize, for most of her academic life, with young men since her family warned her of the ploys of men [...]. For that reason, she thought, despite her modern education, that it is illicit for a girl to engage in a romantic relationship with someone other than her fiancé, a man acceptable to her parents [...]. I have noticed that she refrained from doing certain things on Sundays, faithful to the old traditions characterizing the countryside. In short, she combined the conservative Eastern tradition and the modern Western culture.
>
> (Ibid.: 203)

The three girlfriends signify three types of women. Maggie Lee is an Eastern woman, religious, humble, and regarded as conservative by the members of the urban centers. Mary is also Eastern in this respect, since she is devoted to the spiritual practices of the countryside, submissive to her parents, and has reservations about pre-marital sex. She is, however, Western, like Robbie, because she is a university graduate, and belongs to a sorority. Hence he refers to Mary as "the Eastern–Western" girl and perhaps as a model for both American and Iraqi women (Ibid.: 206). None of the parents of his girlfriends object to Susa's relationship with their daughters and indeed encourage it. In the autobiography, then, the discrepancies between "East" and "West" are not

geographical and are converted to distinctions between "rural/authentic" and "urban/modern." The text similarly responds to a rich literary genre, which depicted Arabs and Muslims who migrated to Europe or the United States as mesmerized by licentious "Western" women.[7] By focusing on Susa's acceptance by his girlfriends' families and by asserting that "Eastern Women" could be found in the United States as well, Susa's decision to be "Eastern" or "Western" becomes dependent upon his disposition and the woman he is in love with at a particular moment.

Occasionally, Susa claims that Iraqi life is far superior to American life. He wishes he were ignorant for "knowledge has revealed to me a history of vicious schemes and struggles" (Ibid.: 189). When he was in Iraq, he states, he learned that all men are equal, because for the Arabs, there is no distinction between blacks and whites. Conversely, "in this Western country, I have seen sexual corruption, whites exploiting the blacks" (Ibid.). He goes on to describe the vices in American society, especially racial segregation and the maltreatment of the poor and the weak. The fact that blacks could not sit on buses in places reserved to white people amazes him. His conclusion, then, was that "there is mental comfort and tranquility in ignorance and naïveté" (Ibid.).

The lack of knowledge, or appropriate forms of knowledge, was a dominant theme in Orientalist literature, portraying the East as an uncivilized space. Knowledge for Susa, however, is racial exploitation and intolerance toward the weak, a knowledge that causes him to realize the virtues of Iraq. While at the American University in Beirut, he associated equality with the American and French revolutions.[8] Similarly, upon his arrival in the United States, he marveled at the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of American freedom. Nonetheless, the time he spent in Austin has produced a different definition of liberation and equality in America.

This representation of America was part of the challenge posed to Orientalist travel literature by Iraqis and Arab writers in the inter-war period and in the 1950s, a time when Iraqis claimed the writing of their own geography and history from Western scholarship by composing monumental works in these fields.[9] Following this nationalist current, indigenous Arab travel literature refused to depict a beguiled Easterner in the West and drew attention to the similarities between Iraq, America, and Europe. Let us look at two examples. The Iraqi Christian intellectual Yusuf Ghunayma composed the travelogue, *A Voyage to Europe (Rihla ila Urubā)*, which depicts his travels in Europe and especially his meeting with the Pope. This diary highlights its narrator's familiarity with the European tradition, principally his acquaintance with the culture of the Renaissance. Safā' al-Khulūsī's parody *Abū Nuwās in America (Abū Nuwās fī Amrīkā)* situates the 'Abbasid poet in contemporary America, where he feels very much at home. For instance, he is fond of the pale and skinny American girls, who are reminiscent of the frail slave boys he was keen on while in medieval Baghdad.[10] These texts, as well as Susa's autobiography, function in a similar fashion, by denying and

parodying the dichotomy East/West and by underscoring the similarities between these entities.

At times, however, the United States serves as a model for Iraqis. Susa, for example, pays heed to the mechanisms which enabled the creation of the American nation–state. For him, devotion to the military is a significant means to foster national unity. His admiration of American military order (*nizām*) inspires him to join Cavalry Troop A in his college and he thrillingly describes his successful participation in military drills. Susa is likewise impressed with national holidays and with military uniforms, which, he asserts, transcend and erase class and religious differences (Ibid.: 180). Sports are also linked to militaristic character and national unity:

> The American is enthusiastic about all sorts of physical exercises, particularly ball games...Accordingly, you notice old and young, women and men, boys and girls constantly conversing about sports and famous athletes. When an important game occurs in one of the cities or the universities, the streets are crowded with thousands of people [...]. As for those who cannot witness the game themselves, the radio transmits everything that happens on the field.
>
> (Ibid.)

Sports, then, unify all segments of society. Love of sports is associated with Americans' desire to win at all costs as well as with their willingness to commit to diligent work, "since the premier ideals for the American are movement and speed and [...] national collaboration." Iraqis, for the time being, cannot emulate the American model because they are "divided into groups and parties" (Ibid.: 176).

The creation of national harmony was a very topical question in Iraqi politics. In Iraq, ethnic, religious, and tribal affiliations were central forces that shaped the public and private spheres, particularly under the monarchy and the British Mandate that consolidated these affiliations.[11] As an Iraqi Jew, preoccupied with questions of religious separatism and national integration, Susa often adopts in the autobiography the State-language which dismissed religious and ethnic loyalties as *ṭā'ifiyya*, a dangerous and separatist sectarianism. The national American unity is subsequently an ideal for the ethnically and religiously divided Iraq.

The role of the army in society and the national function of sports are therefore not necessarily "American" in nature and are crucial issues to Iraqi and Middle Eastern politics. Reforms in the army were significant facets in Middle Eastern politics of reform during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a result of national conscription and the institutionalization of education. Furthermore, militarism and military life were fundamental aspects in Iraqi life in the 1920s and 1930s as both Ottoman and ex-Sherifian officers[12] gained weight in the public sphere. Iraqi educators like Sātiʿ al-Husrī and Sami Shawkat similarly championed athletics, gymnastics, and

militaristic education as agencies cultivating healthy nationalist manhood.[13] Susa recognizes these processes in America as well. Here the autobiography functions as a vital historical commentary. It has been assumed that Iraq's interest in militarism was partially inspired by Fascist ideologies that accentuated ultimate commitment to the State (Ibid.: 86–89). Susa's narration, however, implies that such commitments are to be found everywhere in the inter-war era, in every modern State. Susa's narrative suggests that Iraq's experiments in militarism and State-controlled education were part of processes of regulation and conscription, which were not necessarily "German" or "Iraqi" but could also be seen as "Texan" or "American."

"Speaking to the center"

Susa believed that his knowledge of American culture and history, backed with degrees from respectable institutions allowed him to speak the language of the Western metropolis, while remaining faithful to his nationalist Arab ideology and to his resolve to defend the religion of the Arabs – Islam.

In a paper delivered at the University of Chicago, which was reprinted as part of the autobiography, he effectively tackles the prevalent American conventions regarding Muslims and unmasks some of the narratives utilized to depict Islam in the Orientalist tradition. He quotes at length scholars like Richard Burton and historians like Thomas Carlyle to articulate an Iraqi perception of Islam expressed in terminology familiar to his audience. He commences his speech by quoting the missionary John Mott's[14] hypothesis that the interest of contemporary Christianity is analogous to its interests at the time when the Muslims attacked Europe – to battle this barbarous religion. Susa uses Mott as an example of speeches heard from the pulpits of churches and opinions voiced in newspapers' articles, namely the contention that the Muslim is an animal-like being who slaughters Christians. Islam's image, argues Susa, is so negatively perceived in the public opinion, to the extent that it is virtually impossible to purchase books in America that say anything of value concerning Islam. Although Western scholars maintain that they speak the language of science, their discourse is based upon myths and fabrications. He provides a few examples to elucidate this point. The Turks, he maintains, are blamed for inhumane behavior during the First World War, yet no one takes notice of the role played by the Germans on the Eastern front, because they are Westerns. The second set of examples includes a comparison between moments in Muslim, Papal, and Protestant histories, to demonstrate that Islam was no more violent than Catholicism or Protestantism. Muhammad collaborated with the Christians of Abyssinia and his religion has allowed personal freedom for Jews and Christians under the *Jizya* regulations. Saladin was far more humane toward prisoners of war than the Crusaders who had massacred women and children. Biblical characters like Joshua, responsible for butchering children and women during battle, are revered in Judaism and Christianity as models of bravery and heroism.

Consequently, Islam could be regarded as the religion of tolerance, if studied meticulously and objectively. The third example deals with polygamy. The Muslim is considered polygamous, although historically, Islam has actually restricted the number of wives permitted to a man. Moreover, citizens of the United States maintain that Islam encourages polygamy, and yet revere such biblical characters as Abraham, Jacob, and Solomon, all of whom had more than one wife. The paradox is that Turkey, "an Islamic State" declared polygamy illegal, whereas in Utah, the Mormon population still practices this custom quite freely (Ibid.: 219–242).[15]

These postulations, I believe, are not simplistic polemics, but an expression of Susa's mastery of Orientalist discourse since he employs narratives and metaphors familiar to scholars of the Middle East. He exploits the romantic image of Saladin, prevalent in several Orientalist studies, such as Gibb's,[16] to depict Saladin as superior to the Crusaders. His Jewish background enables him to refer to the Bible and to confirm that themes regularly associated with Islam (killing of prisoners of war, polygamy) are not necessarily "Islamic." Finally, he manipulates well-known American stereotypes, such as the barbarism of the Germans or the belief about extensive polygamy among the Mormons, to bring to light the resemblance between Americans and Arabs. His views are certainly the result of his American education, but they are also an integral part of Arab discourses. The accusation against images of the East created by Western scholars of Islam and the Middle East appeared in Egyptian and Lebanese journals since the late ninteenth century.[17] Depicting Turkey as a symbol of a modernized Middle Eastern nation was a recurrent paradigm in the Iraqi press during the inter-war period.[18] The idea that the West had used polygamy in order to depict Muslim women as inferior to the European women was frequent in writings of women's rights advocators like Nabawiya Musa.[19]

Susa applied his perceptive understanding of American life while writing in the Arab press. Although of Jewish origins, Susa was a committed opponent to the Zionist project, in Baghdad as well as in the American University in Beirut. Moreover, he deemed the potential sympathy of Iraqi Jews to Zionism a dangerous religious sectarianism. For example, he cautioned Anuwar Sha'ūl, (1904–1984), an Iraqi Jewish intellectual and the Jewish-Iraqi newspaper *al-Misbāh*, to be attentive to the fact that Jews should unite under the Iraqi nationalist banner since all sects "are sons of the same homeland" (Ibid.: 136–137). In an article he had published in *al-Ahrār* in Beirut, written while in the United States and quoted in the autobiography, Susa explores the ways in which the Palestinian national struggle is presented to Western audiences. The core of the problem, he states, is that "Western civilization, unfortunately, is based upon a materialistic principle 'the strong is superior to everything and everybody' "[20] When Westerners came to the New World, they enslaved the Indians, took their lands and averred that "the Indian was barbaric and the rights were to the civilized (*mutamadiyun*) [?] Westerner" (Ibid.: 245–248).[21] The British, consequently, treat the Palestinians in the same manner the

Americans treated the Indians. Susa provides examples from American newspapers portraying the war in Palestine as a battle between barbarism (the Arabs) and civilization (the sons of Zion and the British). Here his knowledge of American history does not endow him with means to counter such images, but rather increases his pessimism regarding the possibility of solving the distorted image of the Palestinian in the American press (Ibid.). The link Susa makes between his comprehension of American history and culture on the one hand, and his commitment to Arab nationalism on the other, is vital to the debate regarding the Americanized Arabs (*al-muta'amrikūn*). During the inter-war period, the Iraqi government sent a number of students to educational institutions in America and England. This, it was believed, would create capable specific intellectuals[22] and technocrats. Most notable amongst this group was Iraq's Minister of Education and Foreign Affairs, Fadil al-Jamali, who was Susa's friend and colleague at the American University in Beirut and recipient of a PhD degree in education from Columbia University.[23] Leftist and communist intellectuals contended that this group had forsaken Arab nationalism and collaborated with imperialist forces. In a novel published in 1938, entitled *Doctor Ibrahim*, the Iraqi novelist Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb portrayed an Arab, educated abroad, who slowly abandons his ideals in order to achieve influence and capital in mandatory Iraq. Ayyūb claimed that the novel's criticism was pointed at the Americanized Arabs that unjustly gained supremacy in Iraqi society by using their degrees from famous American universities.[24] Susa's accounts accentuate that being Americanized does not necessarily entail a betrayal of Arab nationalism but rather signifies the potential of better representing the Arab cause in a Western milieu.[25]

Susa's remarks concerning Zionism echo the intellectual scene of inter-war Iraq, in which Jews strove to integrate in Iraqi society. The Jewish cultural field witnessed several significant changes in the 1920s and 1930s. Judeo-Arabic,[26] which was the dominant language of the nineteenth century, ceased to be canonical in terms both of cultural production and the daily life. Instead, learning Arabic became an important part of schooling, not only in the public schools, but also in the private Jewish educational institutions, such as *Alliance* (founded 1869).[27] In this sense, Susa was a product of an education system which emphasized Arabic language and literature as a means of cultivating a Pan-Arab identity.[28] Consequently, his autobiography implies that familiarity with the rich Arabic literary and religious tradition was not a mere obligation forced upon students and teachers by the government. Rather, Jews like Susa sought to use it as their entry-ticket to national and cultural discourses in Iraq. Susa's conversion is unique as it symbolizes the ultimate will to integrate in the hegemonic society although a desire to be culturally integrated in Pan-Arab discourse and in Iraqi nationalist culture typified many Jewish intellectuals around in these years.[29] Nevertheless, the fact that Susa converted after his return from the United States suggests that it was in America that his loyalty to Iraq was shaped. It seems to me that

the need to constantly re-defend and re-define Islam to American audiences, as an Arab-Jew, produced a distinctive commitment to Islam and to Iraq, which was far more radical than his nationalist convictions had been in his homeland.

"Bypassing the national"

The autobiography is a product of Ba'thist Iraq. It was written in 1986 when Susa apparently felt he needed to underline, now to Saddam Hussein's regime, his devotion to Arabism and nationalism. The weight Susa attributes to his national commitment in the United States can also be seen as a sort of apologetic justification of his prolonged stay in America, while other Iraqis were struggling against the colonial politics of the mandatory and monarchic regimes. Susa moreover raises his nationalist commitment as an excuse to explicate questionable decisions he had made. An example is his divorce from his American wife, Mary. After they married, the couple arrive at Baghdad. Susa does not convey in detail the difficulties they stumbled upon,[30] but comments like "After returning to the homeland with Mary, we had to live alone because our family was estranged to us" (Ibid.: 206), reveal Susa's excommunication and loneliness.

The couple had a son, Faysal-Jamil, who became ill at an early age. When Mary insists on returning to the United States due to their son's ill health, Susa decides to leave his wife and son in Iowa, despite his father-in-law's promises to provide for their livelihood. His son surprised him "saying: where are you going *daddy*,[31] that is 'my father'? Why are you not staying here with us?" Susa presents it as choosing between "staying in prosperity" or "returning to the homeland to struggle" (Ibid.: 210). The second option won. Susa reproduces here a nationalist discourse by presenting commitment to the motherland as superior to family and love, a discourse that seems to characterize the entire text.

Nevertheless, on June 30, 1952, Susa resumes his relationship with his son, now known as Jimmy, following a letter in which Jimmy informs his father that he is about to be married and then will join the war in Korea. This letter conveys fatherly feelings Susa concealed during the text:

> What father is capable of controlling his feelings, when the pupil of his eye and the essence of his being is led to death in the midst of a horrible, merciless war ... what crimes were committed by these innocent souls? [...] How harsh are human beings to their own kind. Even the wild animals do not attack unless they are hungry.
>
> (Ibid.: 213–214)

Outwardly, Susa comments on the militaristic behavior of America. Locating the criticism of militarism in America does not mean, however, that it cannot be applied to the Iraqi context as well given that "merciless wars" had also

characterized the State's past and present. The war in Korea, therefore, permits Susa to pronounce an anti-militaristic approach, which he silenced throughout the text. He could not have voiced his critique of militarism and the militaristic nature of the Iraqi regime, while trying to portray himself as an emblem of patriotic duty, eager to serve in the State's army and to promote conscription as a channel for the creation of national unity. Certainly, restrictions of censorship in Ba'thist Iraq have likewise curtailed the possibility of critiquing Iraq's militaristic regime. Yet at specific moments, like here, when war and destruction threaten the survival of his own son, Susa is obliged to condemn war as inhumane. He thus allows himself here selected textual liberties very different from the organizing narrative of his autobiography.

Part II – Ballas in Israel – *Ve-Hu Aher*

"Novel and autobiography"

In *Ve-Hu Aher*, Shimon Ballas explores Susa's biography as a way of investigating the self-perception of the Jewish-Iraqi community, the manner in which Jews negotiated their identity, *vis-à-vis* Islam and Christianity, and the Muslim and Arab debates that shaped these negotiations. The relationship between the novel, the fictitious autobiography, and the autobiography is multifaceted. Two themes from the autobiography reemerge in the novel: first, the admiration of the peasant as the authentic representative of the Iraqi land; second, the resistance to Orientalist perceptions of Arabs and Muslims.

The novel echoes Susa's adoration of the peasants by juxtaposing his biography with that of Qasim, a Shi'ite and communist. The discrimination against Shi'ites occupies an important part of the novel, told by Sawsan[32] at the eve of the Iran–Iraq war when the Shi'ites suspected to be Iranian agents, are persecuted and tortured. Sawsan is subsequently reminded of his friendship with Qasim, who was, for him, the symbol of authentic Iraq because of his peasant roots. Qasim is the *fallāh* "created from the good Iraqi soil and from the waters of the Tigris and the Euphrates, the hero of legends, the descendant of Gilgamesh and Adonis" (Ballas 1991: 148).[33] Sawsan's desire to be part of the Iraqi nation-state is manifested in his esteem of rural life. As a child, his bourgeois father forbade him to associate with the *fallāhīn*, but he longed for their company as he walked to the synagogue dressed in his fine clothes.[34] In the autobiography, peasant life is linked to authenticity and tradition, personified in the character of the peasant girl. In the novel, the association to the authentic-peasant nation is connected with Qasim, the son of the *fallāh*, the descendant of ancient Babylon.

The text similarly mirrors Susa's resistance to Orientalist discourse. Susa's three girlfriends are mingled in the novel into one character, Jane, who like Maggie Lee and Marry is a devoted Christian. She is eager to learn the languages of Jesus and his disciples, and is utterly charmed by Sawsan, her charismatic professor of Semitic languages. In a similar fashion to the

autobiography (e.g. to Susa's negotiations with the American officer in Ellis Island), Sawsan's appeal is a result of his knowledge of the East while in America. The Hebrew novel, written for an audience which is not at all familiar with the literary genre discussing the Arabs and Muslims in the West, functions like the autobiography since it parodies the representation of the Arab as a bewildered Easterner fascinated by the Western woman. It accordingly narrates an atypical love story between an educated Arab–Iraqi–Jew and his admiring and bewildered Christian disciple. He describes his ability to "pass" as an American because of his command of English and his Western appearance (Ibid.: 21).[35] Conversely, others who desire to underline his Arabism, are very disappointed once his Jewish identity is revealed because they expect him to be a Muslim. His mere existence, then, resists the familiar categorizations such as the trinity savage– Muslim–Arab because he is an erudite–Arab–Jew.[36] Like Susa, Sawsan advocates a secular Arabism, in which Islam functions as a cultural component, although the latter's commitment to secularism is much more radical than Susa's. Sawsan's secular approach to all religions is demonstrated in his comment that "Abraham was neither a Muslim nor a Jew, if he existed at all" (Ibid.: 14).[37]

The novel, nonetheless, is different from the autobiography since it critiques certain aspects of Susa's life by allowing other voices to enter the narration. Moreover, it elaborates and expands on points where the narrator of the autobiography is either silent or complies with the national discourse, particularly regarding Susa's desertion of his son and wife. In consequence, it both explicates and criticizes the autobiography.

Unlike the autobiography, told in chronological fashion, the chronologically disorganized novel expands on the relationship between Jane and Sawsan, far more than Susa's short observations. Sawsan admits that his love for Jane remained with him for the rest of his life. "When I write these thoughts," he regrets, "I can certainly say that my life would have been far happier had she [Jane] agreed to return to Baghdad with me" (Ibid.: 68).[38] Jane, however, constantly criticizes her husband's fascination with militarism and militaristic culture: his admiration of uniforms, his worship of military conscription as means of uniting the State's minorities and his choosing to ignore the devastating results of militarism in Germany and Italy (Ibid.: 70–71).[39] The view of the army as a nationalist vehicle, as we have seen, has characterized Susa's autobiography. Here Jane's critique operates as a rather negative assessment of Susa's original text and its perception of statehood, militarism, and modernity.

Sawsan's perception of the Arab-Jew is likewise questioned by contrasting his biography to that of As'ad, an Iraqi Jew. As'ad is an influential literary figure, the editor of the journal *al-Rāsid*[40] and a frequent guest at the Iraqi Radio Station, who immigrates to Israel in the early 1970s. The character of As'ad is based on the life story of the Jewish writer and intellectual Anuwar Sha'ūl.[41]

The Iraqi Jews, in Sawsan's narration, possess the morals of a cult, a closed society suspicious of every outsider. As a child, he detested the Hebrew classes in the Jewish school, *Talmud Torah* (Ibid.: 50–51).[42] Following his marriage, his family and friends excommunicate him. This harsh step leads him to detest virtually all Iraqi Jews and indeed all Jews. He disparages Iraqi Jews who avoid military service and is irritated by Jews who insist on eating kosher food in Europe and are unwilling to share their meals with Muslims, thus declaring their separatism (Ibid.: 77). As'ad, nonetheless, represents a different cultural model. The text incorporates a poem written by Sha'ūl, which is presented as a composition by As'ad:

> I take my faith from the religion of Moses,
> Although my home is the creed of Muhammad
> I take refuge in the tolerance of Islam,
> My tongue is the language of the Qur'ān
> I treasure my love to the nation of Muhammad,
> Although I chant the prayers of Moses,
> I shall be loyal as Samaw'al,
> Whether miserable or joyous in my beloved Baghdad.[43]
> > (Ibid.: 56–57)

As'ad, then, fully accepts Arabism, but is unwilling to give up his Jewish convictions. He therefore adopts the model of al-Samaw'al b. 'Adiya, mentioned in the given poem, a celebrated pre-Islamic Jewish poet, admired by Muslims, and a member of the Arabic literary pantheon. For Sha'ūl, as reflected in his autobiography *Qissat Hayātī fī Wādī al-Rāfidayn* (My Life Story in the Land of two Rivers) being an Iraqi Jew meant being an authentic Iraqi:

> The essence of my existence, and thus of my roots in the valley of the two rivers was the focus of my self-exploration during my life in Iraq. Do I belong to one of the descendants of the Israelites that the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar exiled to Babylon?...Am I one of the successors of those who followed them preceding the destruction of the Second Temple at the hands of the Roman emperor Titus...? Or else, am I one of those with the most primeval of Iraqi pedigrees? Am I the child of Abraham who was ordered by his Lord to leave the valley of the two rivers to the land of Canaan?
> > (Sha'ūl 1980: 14)

This conception of the Iraqi-Arab-Jew allowed Sha'ūl to formulate a sort of Arab-Jewish patriotism based upon language, literature, and culture, and not religion. Sawsan views As'ad's model of integration as somewhat simplistic. The model for Jews he opts for is to resemble the Christians in Syria and Lebanon, who epitomized an ultimate integration in the hegemonic culture.

By presenting As'ad's character, the novel enriches Susa's perception of the Iraqi-Arab-Jew and points to diverse cultural options adopted by other Iraqi Jews.

The most severe criticism pointed towards Sawsan is that he collaborated with the dictatorship. This is achieved by comparing Sawsan to Qasim. Qasim, the Shi'ite *fallāh* becomes a lawyer and publishes articles in the social-ist *Ahālī* newspapers, and later adores *Fahd*, the communist Iraqi leader. Although he becomes influential during the days of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, he suffers after 1968 and is tortured both in Iraq and Iran. Qasim venerates Prometheus, al-Hallaj[44] and the devil,[45] who were courageous enough to defy Divine and political authority (Ballas 1991: 139–140).[46] His significance, then, stems from his readiness to struggle for democracy and concurrently reflects the failure of the Iraqi nation-state to realize the revolutionary goals of her sons. Moreover, Qasim censors Sawsan for collaborating with the various Iraqi regimes (mandatory, Ba'thist) and for using his national convictions as a way of escapism. His critique indicates that he and Sawsan represent two types of intellectuals. Qasim seems to be a Gramscian "organic intellectual," an organic part of his community and the peasant classes,[47] as well as a courageous man, willing to speak truth to power.[48] Sawsan is criticized for a Bendian "betrayal of intellectuals."[49] It seems that Sawsan's uncertainties regarding his identity and his rejection by both Muslims and Jews impaired his endeavours to become an "organic part" of Iraq. Unlike the autobiography, subsequently, Sawsan is by no means a model of an ideal integration or a nationalist hero since he is censored for his complicity with the State.

Exile as solution

Upon returning to Iraq from the United States, both Muslim and Jewish communities impeded the integration of Sawsan and his American wife:

> I was not saddened by their boycotting or by being excommunicated, as I was dismayed from seeing Jane in her loneliness . . . We had no holidays in our home [. . .]; we were separated from both Jews and Muslims, remote from our surroundings. Even the food prepared for us by an Armenian cook was different in taste and smell from all the food cooked in the quarter. Our house was an isolated island and neighbors did not visit us.
>
> (Ibid.: 106)

In the autobiography, Susa stressed American commitment to national holidays as a mark of healthy nationalism. Here, however, the lack of holidays underlines the difficulties of the couple to integrate in Iraq, a space which becomes an exile. The inability of Iraq to accept its Jewish minority and the incapacity of the Iraqi Jews to feel at home outside of Iraq situates them in

perpetual exile. Nonetheless, exile is not only experienced by Iraqi Jews. Qasim, too, connotes an exilic existence:

> I think of Qasim. A man in exile, seventy years of age, in a land whose language he does not speak. How does he make a Living? Does he encounter other people in exile like himself? Africans who escaped Apartheid; Chinese, refugees of the Maoist regimes? Arabs persecuted by military coups?
>
> (Ibid.: 135–136)

Exile, then, is not unique to Iraq or to its Jews. The decision to commit to a more humanistic vision of Iraq does necessitate exile but displacement is a global experience shared by people struggling against dictatorial regimes. Exile, nonetheless, can also be an empowering experience, because it becomes an alternative community for all revolutionaries. In that sense, Qasim's experiences allude to Theodore Adorno's appreciation of exile during the Second World War, a time when

> dwelling, in the proper sense, is impossible. The traditional residences we have grown up in have grown intolerable: each trait of comfort in them is paid for with a betrayal of knowledge, each vestige of shelter with the musty pact of family interests. ...It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home.[50]
>
> (Ibid.: 57)

At the end of the novel, Sawsan decides to stand for his beliefs and to condemn the persecution of Shi'ites, fully aware of the fact that he might be exiled or jailed. The novel ends when Susa sits in the airport's cafeteria, after accompanying his daughter to the airport:

> A transition point. A border-checkpoint located on no apparent frontier. A marvelous building, which is a mere station, and those who need it are carrying cards; their names listed in some anonymous travel record. An airport is a twilight zone, governed by invisible people, who roll numbers and letters on the board, announcing orders in powerful speakers, while the passengers anxiously gawk here and there, standing in line, waiting, carrying suitcases and rushing. A group in constant movement. Whereas the person who sits in the cafeteria, happily drinking tea with a piece of cake, has all the time in the world. He travels to no-place and awaits nothing. He had exhausted his potential, and has just departed from his daughter, about to return to his home, to write the introduction to the English edition of his book, and to complete his memoirs, that will not be published during his lifetime.
>
> (Ibid.: 165)

The airport captures Sawsan's life on the borderline, his state of in-between-ness, never belonging to any state or headed to a particular destination. In this last paragraph of the novel, narration shifts from the first person narrative voice to the third.[51] It might indicate that this moment, when Sawsan had decided to speak truth to power, to follow the example of Qasim, is the most lucid point of his consciousness as he ponders about his own life, as if it were somebody else's. It is also a summary of Sawsan's life and simultaneously, a new beginning; while he was always in the margins, he refused to accept his marginality or at least endeavoured to challenge his location. Now, however, this marginality becomes the new basis for his strength.

"The text as a meta *novel"*

The novel is also a *meta* novel, since it intentionally ponders the process of writing, the meaning of the text itself and its relation to its Arab and Israeli readerships. It is similarly a fascinating mélange of literary genres since it amalgamates various types of texts (biography, autobiography, poetry) and refers to a variety of literary traditions, both in Hebrew and in Arabic. Its narrator attempts to write his life story out of fear for his life and to leave something of value behind him, particularly for his daughter from his second marriage, Buthayna, who suffered in school because of the questionable origins of her Muslim/Jewish father. Nonetheless, he considers the writing of an autobiography an impossibility knowing that such texts never reproduce what actually had happened. For example, he questions the sincerity of autobiographies composed by officials since such people do not narrate their personal ordeals as much as they structure texts likely to be read by historians in the future. Given the fact that the text is written as by an Iraqi official (Sawsan himself), this statement also casts doubt on the narrator's own earnestness.

Nonetheless, Sawsan explains that every society needs writing and has its scriptures: by Marx, by Lenin, by Mao (Ibid.: 4). Writing, however, is never an isolated project because every writing incorporates previous types of writing. The Bible, maintains Sawsan, appropriated narratives from the cultures of Mesopotamia, Babylon, and Canaan.

Correspondingly, his autobiography sought to interweave different texts he had published over the years: a book on Jewish history, letters to the Iraqi government, articles and essays he either wrote or translated as a student in the United States, and a review he wrote to *The Times*. The narrator, Sawsan, collects texts about Baghdad: maps by Ibn Hawqal and travel accounts by Westerner voyagers and by al-Yaʿqūbī and Ibn Jubayr.[52] This perception of interwoven narratives is not only relevant to writing but also to his identity as an Arab-Jew, whose culture interlaces cultural motives from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, as well as different languages.

However, this mixture of identities and narratives becomes impossible because Iraqis and Americans reject Sawsan's vision of an intermingled ethos

and shared narratives, since they conflict with accepted norms and sectarian politics. Sawsan's vision is predominantly curtailed by the Iraqi State that propagates a unified national narrative and thus makes it absurd to articulate a complex form of writing. The State's Orwellian newspeak is uncovered in scenes describing the debates at the academy of Arabic language, in which Sawsan is a member. The language of the academy is a mockery, as all discourses correspond to the instructions of the Ministry of Education. It is therefore not feasible for Susa to express an intricate narrative or to give voice to his rich cultural aspirations (Ibid.: 34–35, 58–59).[53]

The novel is also a *meta* text in that it defines its meaning to its readership. When Sawsan is denied permission to broadcast via Iraqi radio speeches delivered by his friend As'ad as transmitted by Israeli radio, he observes that,

> I could not comprehend what fault it [the Ministry] had found in his talk, as he narrates the accounts of his youth in Hilla, and his abundant literary activity. Could something destabilize Zionist propaganda about the longing of the Jews to return to their homeland more than this valiant bond to the homeland of one of its past, most loyal sons? I listened to his soft voice, filled with longing, and tears appeared in my eyes. At this junction, we unite, despite the rift caused by time, in our love for our home-town . . . Only a Hilli denizen can speak with such poignant passion on his childhood. But Asad is a true Hilli, even now, in the land of exile, through the microphone of the enemy, he remains loyal to his first love.[54]
>
> (Ibid.: 47)

Hilla is home, while Israel is a land of exile to its Jewish-Arab sons.[55] The ability of As'ad's texts to destabilize the Zionist national discourse refers not only to the texts produced by Anuwar Sha'ūl in Israel but also to the text *Ve-Hu Aher* produced by Ballas. For after all, *Ve-Hu Aher* manifests the longing of an Iraqi Jew, Ballas, to Iraq, while being in Israel. When writing the novel, Ballas had to take into account the historical interpretation of Jewish life in Iraq, which presupposes that Jews like Susa, Sha'ūl, and indeed Ballas himself, made an enormous effort to assimilate into Iraqi society and failed. The novel subverts the Zionist assumption that the failure of this integration and the subsequent immigration of Iraqi Jews to Israel was an inevitable result of perpetual yearning for Zion by focusing on other factors that instigated this failure. Such factors are the lack of political freedom and democracy in Iraq, the oppression of *all* of Iraq's minorities, the devastating years of the mandatory regime and the silence and betrayal of intellectuals such as Susa/Sawsan who feared speaking truth to power.[56]

Conclusion

The texts presented here obviously need further exploration, either as case studies investigating the genre of autobiography and its relation to the novel,

or as case studies for the composite processes of conversion. A few comments, however, are in order in light of this particular examination.

Both texts problematize divisions between history and literature. Susa's text is an autobiography, a "primary source" to use an outmoded fashion of classification. Yet, its complexity stems from the constant dialogue between various historical and national narratives; the Ba'thist and the monarchic, the Iraqi nationalist and the humanist. The tension is also caused by the narrator's wish to comply with contemporary national narratives, while describing his life in America, and his simultaneous rejection of many aspects of these national narratives. Ballas' fictitious autobiography is a historical study predominantly because it offers a different periodization of both Iraqi and Israeli histories. By exploring Susa's fascination with militarism, the text proposes a historical interpretation that locates Iraq's militaristic characteristics not in the rise of the Ba'th or with 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, but in the inter-war period.[57] The text also postulates a different Israeli periodization. The immigration of Iraqi Jews is by no means a liberating exodus, but rather, in the words of Matityahu Peled, a product of a "capricious history." This "historical caprice," consequently, "prevented Iraqi Jews from responding to the unique opportunity to play a positive and vital role in the development of Iraq, and to contribute to its cultural growth, as was indeed expected by many of Iraq's finest sons" (Peled 1991: 12–13).[58] The definitive moments in Israeli history (1948, "the war of independence," the immigration of Arab-Jews to Israel in the 1950s) are consequently presented as points of rupture between Arabs and Arab-Jews and the source of their tragedy.

Both texts portray the construction of the Iraqi spiritual domain and the struggle to re-define Islam. According to Partha Chatterjee (1993) the institutional colonial world was divided into a material domain, the sphere of economy, statecraft, science, and technology, where the West had proved its superiority and a spiritual domain, an inner realm baring essential marks of cultural identity. The latter was to be modernized by nationalists and reformers but not westernized. Both the novel and the autobiography suggest that in the construction of the Iraqi spiritual domain, Islam was a vital cultural component. Various historical players viewed Islam as a flexible and variable domain that could apply to Muslims, Christians, and Jews. The texts also signal out the resistance of such a secular definition of the spiritual domain, by Muslims and Jews in Iraq and by Americans.

Both Susa and Sawsan refer to the fact that they can "pass" as Americans, that they can perfectly challenge conventions of colonial mimicry[59] because of their command of English, their education, and their understanding of the ways in which colonialism speaks and writes. As Judith Butler has shown, passing and crossing often indicate "the refusal to assume the regulatory norm" and the potential resistance to a certain "symbolic ordering of race and gender" (Butler 1993: 163–164). Susa and Sawsan, then, touch upon the core of colonial anxieties since their ability to pass suggests that colonized subjects could be *completely* similar to the colonizers. Furthermore, they are the ones

choosing whether to mimic the colonizers. Susa for example, chooses to be Western or Eastern according to particular milieus and desires. His romantic escapades, moreover, indicate that not only can he pass as an American, but he is also able to assume the gaze of the white man by educating his Eastern and traditional girlfriends. Since the colonizers cannot really differentiate between the original and the mimicked, the visibility of mimicry becomes an illusion. Susa's and Sawsan's passing, hence, points to negation of and resistance to racial norms and colonial regulations.

One of the thematic concerns of the texts is translation. They mark a historical context, in which Jews like Susa and Sha'ūl, as well as Christian intellectuals,[60] used translation as a mechanism to integrate into the Iraqi community. Iraqi bilingual intellectuals emphasized that their command of foreign languages acquired in European schools did not impair their commitment to Arabism, but enabled them to translate European masterpieces into Arabic. The novel *Ve-Hu Aher* reflects upon translation because the Hebrew text echoes voices from Arabic and Iraqi literatures: the works of Haykal and Hussein, the articles published in Egyptian journals like *al-Muqtataf* and autobiographies such as Sha'ul's and Susa's. The novel brings them to a Hebrew reading audience, often unaware of these literary traditions. Scholars like Ammiel Alcalay had in fact wondered whether the novel might be read as an Arabic novel despite the fact that it was published in Hebrew.[61] I believe, however, that Ballas' mastery of Hebrew facilitates his linguistic maneuvers, which intertwine Arabic within the Hebrew text, thus operating as a bridge between Arabic reading-communities and Hebrew reading-communities.[62] His familiarity with Jewish history assists him to characterize so accurately the Jewish context from which Susa arrived. In that, he manages linguistically to capture the world of Arab-Jews, which incorporated several cultures, and to propose his vision of the complex art of writing. The fact that the text could be read as an Arabic novel, although written in Hebrew, may also be seen as a sort of "passing." In other words, not only can Ballas' hero, Sawsan, challenge the norms of mimicry, but also Ballas himself can perfectly mimic and manipulate the tradition of the Hebrew literary canon.

Anton Shamas had remarked already in 1980 that Ballas gives his reader "wide margins of compassion" by refusing to look at the Arabs as enemies (Shamas 1981: 25). Today we are still very much in need of these margins.

Notes

1 Ahmad Susa, *Hayāti fī nisf qarn* (Baghdad: 1986). Another autobiographical text by Susa was published after his conversion to Islam, and titled *Fī tarīqī ila al-Islām* (On My Road to Islam) (Cairo: 1936; Najaf: 1938). Susa focuses in this text on ideological debates between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. I have chosen to focus on the later autobiography because it is less polemical and incorporates more personal information.

2 His latest novel, *Solo*, for example, centers on the biography of the famous dramaturge and satirical journalist Ya'qūb Sanū', an Egyptian Jew whose literary activity took place in Cairo, Alexandria, and Paris.

3 Susa left Iraq for the United States on July 7, 1925, to study at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas in Austin. After obtaining a Bachelor's degree in civil engineering, Susa participated in workshops and classes at agricultural departments at various universities in Texas, at Colorado College, and at the University of Chicago. He obtained a Masters degree from George Washington University and a PhD from Johns Hopkins University. His dissertation entitled "The Capitulatory Régime of Turkey, Its History, Origin, and Nature" (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1933) was an inquiry into the economic manipulation which allowed the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

4 Susa's autobiography likewise implies that in our world the "West" is located in the "East." "America" existed in Lebanon because of the presence of the American University in Beirut, which was, to Susa, "a Western university, although not a university aimed at slaughtering the Arabic language as intended by some Western colleges in the East." Rather, it encouraged students to love their homelands and cultivated independent thinking, democracy, liberty, and political unity. Furthermore, given that the goals of imperialism were to divide and rule, the American University in Beirut, which gathered Arab students from different parts of the Middle East, essentially subverted the imperialist ploys. See: ibid., pp. 146–147.

5 On the representation of women in the Middle Eastern contexts, see: Juan, R. Cole (1981) "Feminism, Class and Gender in Turn of the Century Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13: 393–405; Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.) (1991) *Women, Islam, and the State*, Philadelphia, PA; Timothy Mitchell (1998) *Colonising Egypt*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, pp. 112–113; Leila Ahmed (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam*, London, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 144–168.

For representation of female peasants in novels like Muhammad Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab: Manāzir wa-akhlāq rīfiya* (Cairo, 1929) or 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sharqawi's, *al-Ard* (Beirut, 1954) see for example; Ami Elad Bouskila (1994) *The Village Novel in Modern Egyptian Literature*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz; Hasan Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghani (1965) *al-Fallāh fī al-adab al-'Arabī*, Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-Lubnāni; Mustafa al-Dab' (1998) *Riwāyat al-fallāh, fallāh al-riwāya*, Cairo.

On female representation in Iraqi literature, see: Shuja' Muslim al-'Ani (1986) *Al-Mar'a fī al-qissa al-'Irāqiya*, Baghdad.

6 He notes that 'she was an only daughter to her parents, as Robbie was' on p. 203, and refers to the fact that he gets a letter from Robbie and Mary around the same time on p. 206.

7 See for example, the relationships between Arab men and European women in Tawfiq al-Hakim (1940) *'Usfūr min al-Sharq*, Cairo; Yahya Haqqi (1973) *Qindīl Umm Hashim*, Cairo; Zaki Mubarak (1931) *Dhikrayāt Bārīs*, Cairo; Rifā'ah Rāfi' al-Tahtāwī (1801–1873), *Takhlīs al-ibrīz fī talkhis Bārīz* (Cairo, 1905); See also M. M. Badawi (1985) *Modern Arabic Literature and the West*, London.

8 Susa called upon Iraqis to emulate the Americans, who strove for independence, as well as the French, whose revolution guaranteed personal freedom (Ibid., p. 139); The discussion of America's role in promoting liberty was delivered in a speech at the American University in Beirut on February 21, 1925.

9 For studies on Iraqi history produced in the inter-war years, see: 'Abbās Al-'Azzawī (1935) *Tā'rīkh al-Yāzidiyya*, Baghdad and particularly his magnum

opus, *Tā'rīkh al-'Irāq bayna ihtilālayn*, Baghdad. See also the works in history of 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani (1933) *Tā'rīkh al-wizārāt al-'Irāqiyya*, Sidon and his *Asrār al-inqilāb*, Sidon, 1937.

In geography, see: Sulayman Faydi (1998). *Al-Basra al-'Uzma*, Beirut. See also the historical and geographical studies of Yusuf Rizq Allah Ghunayma, *Tijārat al-'Irāq qadīman wa-hadīthan, bahth Tā'rīkhī iqtisādī* (Baghdad, 1922), *Muhādarāt fī mudun al-'Irāq* (Baghdad, 1924) and *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī Tārīkh yahūd al-'Irāq* (London, 1997). For the critique of western studies of Arabic literature, see: Ma'rūf al-Rusāfi (1957) *Rasā'il al-ta'līqāt*, Beirut. Additionally, Egyptians and Lebanese intellectuals traveled to Iraq in an attempt to produce indigenous Arab travel literature. See for instance: Zaki Mubarak (1976) *Layla al-marīdah fī al-'Irāq: Tā'rīkh yufassil waqāi' layālī bayna al-qāhira wa-Baghdād 1926–1938* Beirut; Amin al-Rihani (1957) *Qalb al-'Irāq*, Beirut; 'Abd al-Wahhab 'Azzam (1950–1951, second edn) *al-Rihlāt*, Cairo.

10 Safa al-Khulusi (1955) *Abū Nuwās fī Amrīka*, Baghdad. On the text, see: J. A. Haywood (1971) *Modern Arabic Literature 1800–1970*, London, pp. 256–263.

11 Marion Farouk Sluglett and Peter Sluglett (1991) "The Historiography of Modern Iraq," *The American Historical Review* 5: 1411. On sectarianism in Iraq, see also: Yitzhak Nakash (1994) *Shi'is of Iraq*, Princeton; Sami Zubaida (2002) "The Fragments Imagine the Nation: The Case of Iraq," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies – Special Issue Nationalism and the Colonial Legacy in the Middle East and Central Asia* 32/2, pp. 205–215.

12 Sherifian officers – officers who participated in the Arab revolt during the First World War.

13 On the processes of modernity and its link to educational systems see: Mitchell, 63–128; on militarism in Iraq, see: Nasir 'Uqayl (2000) *Al-Jaysh wa-al-Sulta fī al-'Irāq al-Malakī, 1921–1928*, Damascus; Mohammad A. Tarbush (1982) *The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, London and Boston; on education in Iraq and its link to both fascism and militarism, see: Reeva, Simon (1986) *Iraq between Two World Wars: the Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology*, New York. On views on education and nation articulated by historical players, see: Sati' al-Husri's works, *Fenn-i-terbiye* (Istanbul, 1912); *Al-Inshā'* (Baghdad, 1940); *Ārā' wa-ahādīth fī al-tarbiyya wa-al-ta'līm* (Cairo, 1944); Mohammed Fadil al-Jamali (1934) *The New Iraq: Its Problem of Bedouin Education*, New York. See also: Hasan al-Dujayli (1963) *Taqaddum al-ta'līm al-'ālī fī al-'Irāq*, Baghdad.

14 John Raleigh Mott (1865–1955) – Like Susa, Mott was a member of *Phi Beta Kappa*, but more significantly has occupied the position of national secretary of the YMCA of the United States of America and Canada (1888–1915), the secretary-general of the organization's International Committee (1915–1928), and the president of the YMCA's World Committee (1926–1937). He had visited India, China, and Japan, where he organized national student movements and held missionary conferences.

15 The paper was originally written in 1929. Susa was still Jewish when the paper was delivered.

16 Hamilton A. R. Gibb (1974, c 1972) *Saladin: Studies in Islamic History*, Beirut.

17 On the reception of Orientalist literature by Middle Eastern intellectuals, see: Ronen Raz (1997) "The Transparent Mirror: Arab Intellectuals and Orientalism 1798–1950," unpublished PhD thesis.

18 See, for example, William L. Cleveland (1982) *Atatürk Viewed by his Arab Contemporaries: the Opinions of Sati' al-Husri and Shakib Arslan*, Princeton.

19 See, for example, Nabawiya Musa (June 1, 1927) "On Huda Sha'rawi's Voyage to Europe," *al-Balāgh al-Usbū'ī*,: 31. On Egyptian attempts to restrict polygamy and the debates in the Feminist Egyptian movement, see: Margot Badran (1995) *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Princeton, pp. 128–130.

20 The remarks about the "strong" can also refer to the Iraqi context, in which Social Darwinism played an important role. The discourse of Social Darwinism was manifested in articles published in the Egyptian journals *al-Hilāl* and *al-Muqtataf* which were marketed in Iraq. The important neo-classical Iraqi poet, Jamil Sidqi al-Zahawi had articulated these views stating: "The rules determined that the weak should not endure, for the powerful will consume whoever is weak and poor." On Darwinism and social Darwinism in the Arab world, see: Nadia Faraj (1972) "The Lewis Affair and the Fortunes of al-Muqtataf' *Middle Eastern Studies* 7, 73–83; Adel A. Ziadat (1986) *Western Science in the Arab World, the Impact of Darwinism, 1860–1930*, London; Albert Hourani (1998) *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age – 1798–1939*, Cambridge, pp. 125, 143, 167, 171–173, 248–253; 'Abd al-Hamid Rushdi (1966) *Al-Zahāwī: dirāsāt wa-nusūs*, Beirut, pp. 39, 65.

21 Question mark in the original. The paper was originally published in *al-Ahrār*, August 28, 1930 and was later reprinted in the autobiography.

22 The term is taken from Michel Foucault's discussion of the modern intellectual as an individual who works within a discipline with certain claims to aptitude in *specific* forms of knowledge. See: Michel Foucault (1984) "Truth and Power," in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, London pp. 51–75; Said, *Representations*, pp. 4, 11–12.

23 Jamali's life was similar to Susa's in many other respects. Like Susa, he married an American woman. However, unlike Susa, his wife's mother was very unhappy with the marriage. One of the missionaries with whom the mother consulted, told her he would rather see his daughter dead, than married to a Muslim. See: Harry J. Almond (1993) *Iraqi Statesman: A Portrait of Mohammad Fadhel Jamali*, Salem, pp. 30–31.

24 Dhū al-Nūn Ayyūb (1978) *Duktūr Ibrāhīm, al-A'māl al-Kāmila li-Dhī al-Nūn Ayyūb* Baghdad, Vol. III, *al-Riwāyāt*, part I.

25 Susa's position as a proud nationalist in America is stressed throughout the autobiography. Upon passing his final exams with distinction, his "joy is tremendous" since he represents not only himself, but also his country. He joins the *Cosmopolitan Club* in his Texan University, whose banner is "Above All is Humanity" and appears to the first meeting wearing Iraqi-Bedoin clothes. In the meeting, he delivers a speech about Iraq and the Arab lands, their contribution to humanity's progress and plays his *'ud* while his peers enjoyed "the strange Arabic melody," ibid., 188, 172, 174.

26 Arabic written in Hebrew characters.

27 On Jewish integration in the Iraqi intellectual milieu and Jewish–Iraqi Arabism, see: Yizhaq Avisur (1995) "Reconstructing Literary Systems and Linguistic Change Amongst Iraqi Jews in the Modern Age (1759–1950)," in Joseph Shitrit (ed.) *Mi-Kedem u-Mi-Yam* 6, Haifa, pp. 236–254 (Hebrew); R. Snir (1991) "The Arabic Literature of Iraqi Jews – Internal Dynamics of Cultural Systems and Mutual Relations with the Arabic Cultural System," ibid., pp. 254–280 (Hebrew); Sasson Somekh (1988) "introduction," *Diwān Murād Mikhā'īl – al-A'māl al-Shi'iriyya al-Kāmila*, Shifa' 'Amr, pp. 7–18; Nissim Kazzaz (1991) *The Jews of Iraq in the Twentieth Century*, Jerusalem (Hebrew).

On Jewish education see: Fadil al-Barrak (1985) *Al-Madāris al-Yahūdiya wa-al-Irāniya fi al-'Irāq: dirāsa muqārana*, Bagdad; Nissim Rejwan (1985) *The Jews of Iraq: 3000 Years of History and Culture*, London, pp. 210–215.

28 On Pan-Arab education in Iraq, see: William L. Cleveland (1971) *The Making of an Arab Nationalist; Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sati' al-Husri*, Princeton; Simon, chapter 4.

29 On Iraqi Jewish intellectuals, their adoration of the Qur'ān and of Arabic poetry, see: Kazzaz, pp. 65–69.

30 After the marriage, the Jewish community excommunicated the couple.

31 The word *daddy* appears in the original Arabic.

32 I use the name Sawsan in this paper, although it does injustice to Ballas' careful use of names as sites of identification and cross identification. Harun-Ahmad-Sawsan is Harry in America, Ahmad after his conversion and Harun in his Jewish milieu. The configuration and reconfigurations of three names constantly shift in the novel as the ambiguity regarding Sawsan's identity is signified by the names he elects for himself and by the names given to him by others.

33 See also p. 161, in which Sawsan quotes a Babylonian ode in praise of the Tigris, after watching children playing on its shores. The emphasis of Babylonian culture is also reminiscent of Susa's autobiography which frequently expressed pride in the cultures of Babylon, or "the miracles of our culture." See for example Susa, ibid., p. 179.

34 This episode reminds us of the descriptions of the young hero in Tawfiq al-Hakim's *'Awdat al-Rūh*, son of landowners, whose parents do not encourage his association with the *fallāhīn*. See: Tawfiq al-Hakim (1946) *'Awdat al-Rūh*, Cairo.

35 Moreover, Sawsan explains his conversion to Islam as a means of preventing his wife from enduring the humiliation and aggravation entailed in conversion to Judaism. The Christianity of his wife consequently encourages him to become a Muslim and to admit that his own religion is more rigid than Islam. Susa's Shi'ite friend, Fadil al-Jamali was likewise married in a Sunni court for a similar reason. Whereas Shi'ite judges considered a marriage to a Christian as "temporary marriage" (*mut'a*), the Sunni judges considered such a marriage legal. See: Ballas, 1991, pp. 66.

36 Ibrahim Taha asserts that "most of his (Ballas') characters are located outside of the consensus, because all of them are minorities, in the deepest sense of the term," that is, marginal, divided and displaced. Ballas also discloses that he studies "the state of a man displaced from its surroundings and unable to find a hold in the society to which he had arrived." Unlike Ballas' other heroes, who cherish duality, Sawsan, to Ibrahim, attempts to create a one-dimensional identity hoping that his conversion will obliterate the duality. I think, however, that Sawsan's conversion, as well as his perception of Islam, celebrates multiplicity of voices rather than a unified narrative. See: Ibrahim Taha (1988) "Duality and Reception – On the Image of the Other in the Works of Shimon Ballas," *Iton 77*, 218: 22–28 (Hebrew); See also the interview with Ballas (1984) "Torn between Two Cultures," *Iton 77*, 52–53: 40–41 (Hebrew).

37 This is an ironic rephrasing of the Quranic verse: "Abraham was neither Christian nor Jewish, but a Muslim monotheist (*hanīf*)." See: *Al-Qur'ān, sura* 3: 67.

38 Jane's death, for example, is one of the only points in the novel where Sawsan is candid about his confused identity. While standing on Jane's grave, he remarks: "I have buried my youth there, the most beautiful years of my life, I buried Harun Sawsan whom she loved and did not want to replace him with Ahmad." Sawsan looks at the cross on the ground, as "the words of the *fatiha* and the *kaddish* intermingling in my mind. Who am I? Who am I?" (Ballas 1991: 147).

39 Generally, women are presented in the novel as more sensitive than men. For example, Sawsan's Jewish bourgeoisie household is divided along gender lines. Whereas the male member of the family connote middle-class conservatism (his father is depicted as a tyrant, his brother as a jealous bourgeois), Susa's discourse turns from rage and shame to warmth and intimacy, when portraying his mother and sister. In fact, his conversion takes place after his mother's death and during the *farhud*, he secretly sends money to his sister.

40 The journal is probably *al-Hasid*, a literary and cultural journal edited by Anuwar Sha'ūl (1929–1938).

41 On Sha'ūl see: Anuwar Sha'ūl (1980) *Qissat Hayātī fī Wādī al-Rāfidayn*, Jerusalem; Mir Basri (1994) *A'lām al-Adab al-Irāqī al-Hadīth*, London, II/422, Ja'far al-Khalīlī (1957) *al-Qissa al-'Irāqiyya, qadīman wa-hadīthan*, Baghdad, pp. 207–235; Ahmad 'Abd al-Ilah (1989) *Nash'at al-qissa wa tatawwuriha fī al-'Irāq, 1908–1939*, Baghdad, pp. 237–251; Sasson Somekh (1989) "Lost Voices, Jewish Authors in Modern Arabic Literature," in Mark Cohen and Abraham L. Udovitch (eds), *Jews and Arabs: Contacts and Boundaries*, Princeton, pp. 9–21; Samuel Moreh (1985) "The Late Anuwar Sha'ūl," *Pe'amim* 22, pp. 129–131 (Hebrew). Important texts written by Sha'ūl are his collection of translated and original texts, *Al-Hisad al-awwal* (Baghdad, 1930); *Qisas min al-sharq wal-gharb* (Baghdad, 1930), and *Fī zihām al-madīna* (Baghdad, 1951), as well as his translation of Richard Sheridan's *Wilhelm Tell* (Baghdad, 1932).

42 For information about the extent of teaching of Hebrew in Iraq and cultural activities in this language, see items in the Jewish newspaper *al-Misbah*: *al-Misbah*, 21/1/1926, issue, 85; ibid., 7/3/1927, issue 118; ibid., 14/5/1925, issue 52; ibid., 31/7/1924, issue 17; ibid., 28/8/1924, issue 21; Avraham Ben Yaacob (1960) *The Jews of Babylon – From the End of the Ge'onim Period to the Present*, Jerusalem, p. 301 (Hebrew).

43 The original poem was originally published in Anuwar Sha'ūl's (1983) *Wa-baza'a fajr jadīd*, Jerusalem, p. 69.

44 Al-Hallaj (855–922) – A mystic (*sufi*) thinker. His unorthodox views on the possibility of merging with the Divine and particularly his assertion *anā al-haqq* (I am the Truth, i.e. God) led to his brutal torture and crucifixion.

45 The reference here is to Iblis (the devil) in medieval Islamic literature, which describe him as refusing to bow down in obedience to Adam. See especially the portrayal of Iblis in the Qur'ān.

46 In another segment, Sawsan compares Judaism to Islam. The book of Genesis tells us that Jacob fought with God's angel. Muhammad, according to the *hadith* literature describing *bad' al-wahiy*, accepted Gabriel's orders. Thus, Islam is a religion of tolerance and acceptance whereas Judaism is more rebellious in nature. According to Sawsan's definitions, then, Qasim is more "Jewish" than Sawsan. Ibid., pp. 162–163.

47 According to Gramsci the modern capitalist society produces a line of professionals or "organic intellectuals," who organize the new political and cultural systems and are closely linked to their society. Antonio Gramsci (2000) "Intellectuals and Education" in David Forgacs (ed.), *Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, New York, pp. 300–322; Said, *Representations*, pp. 4, 11–12.

48 On the role of the intellectual as speaker of "truth to power" see: Said, *reflections*, pp. 85–102.

49 Julien Benda deals with intellectuals who neglect their ideals and surrender to the State's power. Partly influenced by the Dreyfus affair, Benda averred that his generation's intellectuals have not kept a desired seclusion from the state and

betrayed their commitment to truth and justice. See: Julien Benda (1975) *La trahison des clercs*, Paris; Said, ibid., p. 5.

50 On exile and in-between-ness see Theodor W. Adorno (1974) *Minima Moralia; Reflections from Damaged Life*, Translated from the German by E. F. N. Jephcott, London; Said, ibid., pp. 47–65.

51 Reuben Snir suggested that the airport indicates that transition from the state of in-between-ness is possible, that both Sawsan, and us, the readers, are in a transitional period. I feel, however, that the airport connotes the ultimate form of in-between-ness, from which transition is impossible. The narrator, as we have seen, remained seated, while the passengers are moving. See: R. Snir (1988) "Alone in his Time – Shimon Ballas and the Hebrew Literary Canon; A Portrait of an Elite in Israeli Culture," *Iton* 77, 218, pp. 16–21 (Hebrew).

52 Sawsan also refers to texts read by his Muslim and Jewish friends, such as the works of Salama Musa, Shibley Shumayl, Taha Hussein and 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad, as well as articles in *al-Hilāl* and *al-Muqtataf*. See: ibid., p. 17.

53 Sawsan remarks that such academies exist in all Arab countries, which implies that the Orwellian newspeak is not unique to Iraq.

54 Anuwar Sha'ūl had in fact delivered a few talks on Iraq in the Israeli Radio and also published a few items on Jewish life in Iraq in Arabic journals published in Israel.

55 Other Arab critics shared the evaluation of al-Hilla, a significant pilgrimage site between Baghdad and Kufa, as a homeland of Shi'tes, Sunnis, and Jews, all sharing the same Arabic culture. Sha'ūl defined it as an important religious and poetic center and home to many celebrated scholars, poets and linguists. The Shi'te critic Ja'far al-Khalili, who was Sha'ūl's friend, asserts that the Jews of Hilla were an undersized minority among the general Muslim population. Therefore, they adopted the practices of the local Muslim population and integrated effectively into Iraqi society. See: Sha'ūl, pp. 12–13; Khalili, p. 208.

56 Hanan Hever sees the "ethnic literature" in the Israel as a product of the hegemonic, non-ethnic gaze, which defines the "ethnic" and classifies it as inferior to the universal and national Israeli canon. Ballas, to Hever, constructs an identity of origins that refuses to be located as a representative of "Oriental Judaism," designed by the nationalist discourse since his collective includes both Jews and Arabs. Contrasting Ballas' world with that of Hebrew literature thus exposes its Jewish–Asheknazi identity masked behind a supposed universality. See: Hanan Hever (1998) "Beware Israel of Today's Men," *Iton* 77, 218: 14–15; See also Hanan Hever (2002) "From Hebrew Literature to Israeli Literature," *Theory and Criticism* 20: 183–184 (Hebrew).

57 Sawsan declares that "Had I been a historian, I would have chosen the years 1935–1936 as the 'key period' in Iraqi history" because it was the first military coup in both Iraq and the Arab world, that marked a long period of military coups and revolutions. His archeology of Iraqi militarism, then, begins with Bakr Sidqi's military coup (Ballas, ibid., 87) This historical analysis is found in several studies. Simon believes that Saddam Hussein's policies were partly motivated by Rashid 'Ali's coup (Simon, 168). See also the deliberation of a similar hypothesis concerning the nature of militarism in inter-war Iraq in: Majid Khadduri (1960) *Independent Iraq, 1932–1958: A Study in Iraqi Politics*, Oxford.

58 Matityahu Peled (1991) "A Poetic Autobiography," *Iton* 77, 135–136: 12–13 (Hebrew). Nathan Zach, a celebrated Israeli poet, has likewise recognized the novel's significance to Israeli perception of history. Shimon Ballas, he writes, reminds Israelis of a forgotten fact; that is the involvement of Middle Eastern

Jews in the economic, intellectual, and political life of Arab nations. Its hero, an Iraqi patriot, regards Israel as an entity foreign to the region, and the creation of Western colonialism, with which colonizers sought and still seek to further divide the Arab world. Like Peled, Zach believes that the historical importance of the novel rests in the fact that it neither concentrates on folklore and fanatics, nor mirrors Messianic expectations and the yearning to be saved from exile. See: Nathan Zach, "Building Heavens on Earth," *Haaretz Literary Supplement*, 15/5/1991 (Hebrew).

59 Homi Bhabha defines mimicry as one of "the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge." Colonial education and missionary activity create a "reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*." Incapable of conceiving of a truly "reformed" colonial subject, European colonizers were capable only of ironizing their vision of a reformed man. Their discourse of mimicry, therefore, was constructed around ambivalence since the colonized were different from the Europeans because of their "blood and color," and yet similar to the European in tastes, opinions, morals, and intellect. The facts that these changed objects were "*almost the same but not quite*" accentuated the *visibility* of mimicry and produced a partial presence of the colonizer's gaze by these duplicates. Thus, the "ambivalent world of the not quite/not white" fashioned a system in which the self-esteem of the colonized was entirely dependent on those who defined the "original" and the "mimicked." See: Homi K. Bhabha (1994) "Of Mimicry and Man," in *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, pp. 82–95.

60 Jewish schools like *Alliance* and *Shammash* offered bilingual education to students. Similarly, Christian schools, established by missionaries offered education in both Arabic and French. Thus, Christian intellectuals like 'Abd al-Masih Wazir or Rafa'il Butti were important translators, much like intellectuals like Sha'ūl and Susa. See: Rafa'il Butti (2000) *Dhākira 'Irāqiyya, 1900–1956*, Damascus.

61 Ammiel Alcalay (1996) "At Home in Exile: An Interview with Shimon Ballas," in Ammiel Alcalay (ed.), *Keys to the Garden, New Israeli Writing*, San Francisco pp. 68–69. Nathan Zach believes that had the novel been translated into a foreign language, readers would not have suspected an Israeli Jew wrote it. Zach, ibid.

62 Ballas often declares that he sees himself as bringing together the Arab culture, the culture of the region, and the culture formed in Israel, despite the lack of recognition by the Israeli cultural establishment of the importance of such a bridge as means of cultivating and enriching this Israeli culture. See "Torn between Two Cultures," 40–41; Hanan Hever and Judah Shenhav (2002) "Shimon Ballas – Colonialism and Eastern-ism (*mizrahiyut*) in Israel," *Theory and Criticism* 20, pp. 296–302 (Hebrew).

7 Two trends of cultural activity among Palestinian-Americans[1]

Nir Yehudai

Preface

Palestinian-Americans, estimated to be between 150 000 and 300 000 people, are considered part of the wider Arab-American community, numbering 2–3 000 000 people. As all Arab-Americans, they have experienced increasing ambivalence during the second half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, many have managed to fulfill the "American dream" (mainly in the academic, professional, and economic realms) and on the other hand, they have faced discrimination and prejudicial Immigration policies, and must deal with a negative image, especially in the mass media. In addition, Palestinians have felt a sense of dispossession and alienation, lacking a national-political center, usually in the form of a nation state.

There are two particularly interesting phenomena, stemming from the attempt to cope with the American experience:

1   The invention and development of a unique Palestinian-American ethnic culture, centering on maintaining the legacy of 1948 (and other disasters), creating a literature of memoirs and one which presents an ideal image of pre-1948 Palestine and researching Palestinian-Arab Material-Culture.
2   The attempt, mainly by women writers and "dialogue initiators," to cross over ethnic identity borders, and establish affinities with other ethnic and social groups. This chapter focuses on these phenomena, by the means of presenting some examples out of the many that exist.

Part one: expression of Palestinian-American ethnic identity

Part one deals with expressions of a process among Palestinians which might be termed "ethnic convergence", which has become a salient feature of the Arab community in the United States.[2] Two comments should be noted, which refer to both the first and second part of the chapter:

1   Only a limited number of authors and their work have been examined on the assumption that these represent a wider phenomenon within the population discussed in the chapter;

2   In reference to the creative work, there is no pretension to professional, literary, or linguistic explication or analysis, but rather an attempt to uncover elements which have reference to the subject of the chapter.

May Seikaly determined that attachment to and association with their ethnic culture is a dominant characteristic among Palestinian-Americans, as it is among other Arab-Americans. But Palestinians have intensified this attachment and transformed it into an "entrenched" nationalism, along with a sense of growing commitment, which has taken on deepening significance in light of political events, and thus, has shaped the cognition of self and commonality.[3]

A heritage of sorrow and a sense of injustice have encouraged the development of a political ideology which has reflected the experience and world view of Palestinians, and which has become tied to their ethnic culture. The conditions of past and present, in many cases, have led to adherence to the ethnic culture as an anchor which can provide a sense of stability and belonging. Palestinians in the United States adopt Palestinian customs, traditions, beliefs, and physical surroundings into their life style, encircling themselves with both real and artificial artifacts, traditional dress, pictures, music, food and its characteristic aromas, and linguistic features. The frequent opposition to full assimilation into American culture is often explained by the desire to return to the homeland and the feeling that, despite a lengthy stay in the United States, Palestinians are living there only temporarily.

The memory of the disaster of 1948 (and other disasters: 1967, 1982), and its implications for the Palestinians underwent a transformation, particularly during the last two decades of the twentieth century, a significant transition in the way it has been perceived by the Palestinians in the United States. It has become a central theme designed to provide a feeling of strength derived from a common fate, rather than a feeling of weakness and humiliation which had previously been dominant as an expression of the aggregation of personal experiences of Palestinians, wherever they were. The following are a number of literary expressions which articulate this theme, according to Salma Khadra Jayyusi:

> And Palestine proceeded to tell its story to the world, over and over again, in poetry and fiction; in books of history, of political analysis, of social critique; in personal testimonies of great variety – autobiographies, memoirs, reminiscences, letters, and diaries; in all kinds of writing. Nothing in Palestine's story will disappear. It is an unending narrative.
>
> (Jayyusi 1998: 3)[4]

Memoirs

An important agent of expression for the fostering of the legacy of 1948 has been the writing and publishing of books of recollection and personal biography. A large number of the authors are not writers nor are they active

in the field of historical research, but rather Palestinians who have had successful careers in a variety of areas of American society. They have felt the need to return to the days of their childhood or adolescence by setting down their recollections or personal memories, often following a first or a return visit to the scenes of their childhood. The books belong to a genre which is usually characterized by the fact that it deals with a world of the past which no longer exists, and with an attempt to recreate its locales, its people and its events. The description of the authors' lives after having immigrated to the United States is related with less prominence. Thus, this is a literature dedicated to the intensification of the bond, common to all Palestinians, created by the disaster of 1948. We will relate to a number of literary works, each of which, in its own way, characterizes the phenomenon.[5] In addition, and parallel to book publication, there exists a system of reference, criticism, and quasi-mediation between these books and their target readership in a number of literary magazines, such as: *Al-Jadid, Jusoor,*[6] *Mizna*, and journals such as: *The Link*, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, and a number of Internet enterprises.

On the Hills of God, a book by Ibrahim Fawal, is a literary and historical work, a documentation of the experiences of a seventeen-year-old youth from Ramallah in 1947.[7] The first part of the book describes the life of a seventeen-year-old Christian youth, who has an on-going friendship with a Moslem youth and a Jewish youth, and his feelings as the conflict with the Zionists approaches.[8] Interwoven are scenes of the boys and their families spending time together, along with reference to important events and dates. The narrative leads the reader by small daily steps, as the conflict develops, beginning with a local conflict with a number of British soldiers, continuing with the details of what had occurred at Deir Yassin and information about the battles at the Castle. The young man and his father, who is the town doctor, are represented as having moderate opinions regarding relations with the Jews and the British, and as believing, almost until the last moment that the outbreak of general hostilities can be prevented. In one of the scenes of the book, the boy's father, the doctor, who has been collecting donations for years in order to build a hospital in the town, is requested to contribute this money to buy weapons for the battle. He refuses, insisting that a hospital will always be needed, in response to the arguments that this is not the time for considered and reasonable opinions about money, and that no one knows what will happen during and after the war. The conflict deepens and reaches the town. During the attacks of Zionist soldiers, the boy's father is wounded and killed and all of the town's inhabitants are expelled and become refugees, treading on foot to Jericho. The story, which begins with the words: "...During the last happy summer in Palestine..." ends with the youth's developing insight, as a refugee in Jericho, that Zionist aspirations will not be given up, and that the refugees will not return to their homes in the near future.

Another representative of this genre, although in a more complex fashion which also reflects life in the United States, has been authored by J. Dallal Shaw.

At the end of the 1990s, after retiring, he wrote a book entitled *Scattered like Seeds*, which has been termed a "biographical-political novella." Dallal writes about his experiences, beginning with his childhood in Jerusalem. In the wake of the Six Day War, he visits relatives in a refugee camp in Lebanon and his mother who is living on the West Bank, passing through bridge check-points, and meeting with Palestinians in various places in the Middle East. This sparks a process of "Palestinization," which contrasts with the relative stability of his American career. In the introduction to Dallal's book, a pro-fessor of his at Ithaca College has written an analysis which characterizes many Palestinians:

> A Palestinian, a Middle East student at Ithaca College and at Cornell University, a U.S. trained lawyer and a Persian Gulf businessman, husband to an American wife, father to an American family – Shaw seems always to have been straddling two worlds, two worlds in an uneasy, perhaps irreconcilable, tension.
>
> (Dallal 1998: xii)[9]

An additional element in the large picture of Palestinian literary expression is that of the Palestinian scholar who has earned a place in the academic com-munity, both within the Arab-American, Palestinian, and in other circles, and, at a certain stage, feels the need to write a book of intimate and personal memoirs which reveals great sorrow as well as a sense of personal achieve-ment. This includes, for example, the memoirs of Hisham Sharabi of Geogetown University in Washington and Edward Said, of Columbia University in New York.[10]

Popular art and ethnic art

Hanan Karaman and Farah Munayyer, who have been living in West Caldwell, New Jersey since their immigration to the United States in the early 1970s, have set up and developed an active exhibition of traditional Palestinian dresses and embroidery. In order to further this enterprise, they have set up an institute, located in their home, called the "Palestinian Heritage Foundation." The institute also publishes a newsletter by the same name and its Arabic equivalent, and organizes exhibits and events through-out the United States. An article about their collection and their enterprise appeared in the magazine *Aramco World*:

> Their collection of embroidery and costumes, their sets of coffee utensils, the pillows and slipcovers, in fact, their entire living rooms leave you with the impression that you have entered an original Palestinian home. The collection and the fund which they have set up is dedicated to a mission: to preserve and revive a heritage which is being lost, and to

inform and educate both Palestinians and Americans about a unique aspect of Palestinian culture.

(Friedman 1997: 2–4)[11]

In her own article, Hanan Karaman Munayyer[12] explains and analyzes the sources, roots, and historical contexts of textile art in the Middle East, with reference to the family collection of dresses and embroidery.

The Palestinian-American poet, Lauren Zarou-Zouzounis has written a poem called "Embroidered Memory" which includes reference to Palestinian dress. The following is an excerpt from the poem:

> Arabic tapestry embroidered
> Into my soul
> Is my memory
> Of home
> Red on black pyramids
> Octagons, lines and vines
> Each village distinct
> Bedouin purple and fuchsia
> Red poppies and tulips
> My mother, sixteen – creating
> Vibrant peacocks on linen
> Circle around
> Down, up
> Up, down
> A fine needle in and out
> An artist's tool piercing
> Fabric, weaving culture
> Women of this art
> Fill my heart with hues of
> Red and orange fruit orchards
> Filling the air with aroma
> Of a culture of olive,
> Almond and fig groves...
>   (Zarou-Zouzounis 2001:
>   317–318)[13]

In reference to "ethnic convergence," there is a group of Palestinian artists whose work, while considered "artistic" by every standard, concentrates on the Palestinian in a salient and even declarative manner. These artists devote a significant part of their time and energies to the social and political aspects of the Palestinian issue, and it would appear that they belong to a stream of "politicized art," but this "politicization" comes willingly and from deep feelings of identity and personal obligation, rather than institutional or

national pressure or expectation.[14] As artistic criticism of any form is outside the realm of this chapter, these artists are presented descriptively rather than critically.

Annemarie Jacir is active in movie production, working in the Film Department of Columbia University in New York. Her parents were born in Bethlehem, where they still have family. Jacir deals extensively with the way in which the status and image of Arabs is presented in the American film industry. She states that she is caught in a cycle of discrimination and stereotypes against which she must struggle. In the past few years, she and a number of associates have set up a project called Palestine Films, within the framework of Columbia University, which produced a film called *Satellite Shooters*. The film is a kind of Western, centering on a Palestinian family in Texas. The hero is the teenage son of the family, played by an Arab-American actor. The film deals with stereotypes, with the clash between "Orientalism" and "Occidentalism," with American foreign policy, and with criticism of traditional Arab society.[15]

Jacir had previously produced a number of documentary films, about the health system in the Palestinian Authority and about aspects of Israeli–Palestinian relations during the Oslo process. Jacir is also a published poet. "Untitled Exile Poem" is a cry embodying the sense of loss of homeland and home, and the envy of Palestine for her neighbors who were colonized by countries who ultimately gave up and left their colonies, while Palestine received the "worst possible deal." The following is an excerpt from the poem:

> in America
> the coffee table Arabs
> sip
> sip
> sip
> inventing words because there is
> no English translation
> demanding justice and freedom
> demanding to go home
> reading about Turks in Germany
> and wondering if they hear about us too
> the prophets of Palestine
> now gather in Cairo cafes
> stargazing
> dreaming
> old men inhale life from bubbling nargillas
> they talk and talk;
> who stole the past
> from our wrinkled palms?
> homeless, will we learn

> to carry out houses on our
> backs for our land is gone
> and we still carry it in our heads...
>   (Jacir 2001: unnumbered pages)[16]

Emily Jacir is an artist involved with painting and the plastic arts. She has worked and exhibited in various places both within and outside the United States, has taught Creative Writing at Columbia University, and she is intensively active in Palestinian issues.[17] She has defined herself as a Palestinian artist and in many cases she answers questions about where she is from with the reply "from Bethlehem." She states that all of her artistic work revolves around Palestinian matters, and especially around themes connected with Bethlehem, where her family has roots dating back for more than five hundred years. She explains that in New York, she has relations with many Jewish Israelis, especially oriental Jewish activists with whom she feels identification on several levels. She states that her mother always said that Palestinians and Jews had common roots. According to Jacir, the great Jewish influence in the United States and the negative image of the Palestinians caused her family to hide the fact that they were Palestinian, and when she was a child, at the time the family was living in Chicago, just after their immigration from Bethlehem, she was instructed to say that she was Italian. At present, Emily Jacir is engaged in an additional undertaking, which is clearly Palestinian and artistic in nature: she has set up a large tent in her studio in New York, which symbolizes transience and the reality of being a refugee. On the walls of the tent, she, along with friends and other volunteers, has embroidered in black thread the names of the Palestinian villages which were abandoned and destroyed in 1948. The list of villages is based on the book written by Walid Haladi, *All That Remains*.[18]

Another prominent artist is Samia Halabi, born in Jerusalem in 1936. She later lived in Jaffa with her parents, studied art at the end of the 1950s at the University of Michigan, and moved to New York in the mid-1970s. She states that she still retains scenes of Jerusalem in her imagination, scenes of her family home, and of her grandmother. In addition to her art work, Halabi has set up an Internet site in recent years where she exhibits her work, along with articles and reports, as well as references to and exhibits of the work of Palestinian artists and scenes of the Palestine homeland.[19] Her Internet site includes the following:

> I was born in Jerusalem in Palestine in 1936. Losing my country remained painful throughout my life. Pictures have always fascinated me deeply. I spent hours of reverie looking at the little oil paintings my father brought to our home in Yaffa.
>
> There have been times when paintings possessed me and times when I remember making them with the relaxed ease of a sunny afternoon. Whenever I found myself bored with them, I tried to find new directions.

There were times of confusion when my friends would fear coming to my house because at such times I would besiege them with requests for criticism.[20]

In a caption to one of her paintings entitled "Jerusalem Al-quds," she writes:

Outside the mosque, as a working teenager passed carrying a heavy load, other boys gave me sagacious hints on avoiding seeming like a tourist. Thus, I camouflaged my New York dress, gained access to the mosque grounds now paradoxically guarded by Israelis. Very savvy, the boys had known better than I the implications of this assertion. They encouraged and prodded me. After all, this is our home – theirs and mine. Thus I sat in the light-flooded expanse contemplating this Dome of the Rock – this heart of Jerusalem which used to be open and free.[21]

Prose and poetry

Palestinian existence has found significant expression in personal prose and poetry by Palestinian Americans.[22] The following are a small number of examples from the many which exist, with an opening comment: these texts and many others are, first and foremost, the personal artistic expression of their writers, but their publication, and the continuing reference to them in various quarters, seem to have turned them into communal property of all Palestinians in the formation of a common consciousness. Sharif Elmusa has verbalized the magic of the city of Nablus, and the nuisance of the Israeli occupation, through the eyes of a visitor to the city in the summer of 1986: The ripe pink figs, the luscious tomatoes, the aroma of shish-kabab and roasting coffee, the noisy commercial atmosphere, the soldiers stationed at the checkpoint alongside the University which has been closed down.[23]

Fawaz Turki is recognized as one of the leading and most penetrating Palestinian-American prose writers. In the Introduction to his book, *Soul in Exile*, he describes a meeting of five hundred Palestinians in Algiers in February 1983, at a Convention of the Palestine National Congress. He states that, looking at all of the other Palestinians around him who had come from a wide variety of countries, he feels a kind of dizziness, an emotional vertigo. They have all grown up, not only in different places in the Middle East, but also in Europe and America, in Africa and in the Far East. But in spite of this, they have succeeded in maintaining their communal sense of national identification...so that, today, they understand each other by a common trick of feeling. The years from Karameh in 1968 to the siege of Beirut in 1982 have left no Palestinian alive who has not felt a process of deep internal change...And even more importantly, to set up a Palestine National Congress, a forum dedicated to carrying out democratic discussion, a forum which makes decisions to be implemented by an administrative arm of the

organization. . . .this, in itself is no less heroic, in a part of the world which usually regards these institutions as threatening.[24]

In the Introduction to his book of poems, *Poems from Exile*, Turki is described as having spent the years 1965–1975, wandering through different countries and continents in search of Palestine. In the poem, "Letter from Haifa," he describes a sense of longing for a past which is far away and unobtainable, which has been destroyed by war, exile, and the negation of liberty.[25]

In the poem, "Moments of Ridicule and Love," he writes of Palestinian poets who, in moments of despair, wish for a government whom they could blame; politicians, officials, and elected bodies that they could ridicule; and the thought that the use of this material to write poetry might be like the feeling of first love – delicate and challenging.

In a poem which has appeared in another collection, "The Left Hand of Tel Zaatar," Turki describes a momentary episode of his life in the United States which reminds him of where his "real" life is taking place during the time he is spending in Washington, DC.[26]

It would appear that the above examples, which represent only a small sample of the wide range of Palestinian creativity, enable us to understand how Palestinian creative talent has been mobilized (usually by personal conviction) to support Palestinian interests and how Palestinian interests have been mobilized to sustain creativity. The extent to which the focus on the Palestinian issue has maintained a central position in the cultural experience of Arab-Americans is striking, as well.

Part two: inter-ethnic negotiations

Part two deals with the ways in which Palestinians have expanded the channels of expression and confrontation with the unique aspects of their North American existence beyond the boundaries of ethnic and national Palestinian identity.[27]

Activities of Palestinian creative figures occupy a central position in a process which has taken place extensively in the Arab-American artistic community, and it may signal a general development among wider circles of the Arab community in the American Diaspora.

In an Introduction to an anthology of Arab-American feminist writing entitled *Food for our Grandmothers*, the editor, Joanna Kadi explains the background to her venture.[28] She maintains that Arabs do not exist in American society in conventional times, and in times of crisis they are remembered and are accorded the sense of being a separate group usually associated with terror. Regarding Arab-American women, this distinctive burden is multiplied and they must deal with associations of poisonings and exotic prostitutes. Against this background, the book is an attempt to map out the status of women of Arab origin in American society. Included are writers of a variety of identity groups, women who were born in the Arab world and those who were born in America. The purpose is to assist women and men who must deal with

questions of culture, history, activism, and affiliation, by opening an additional avenue of communication to similar groups in other communities. The title of the book expresses the relationship between the basic, Arab food discovered and appreciated in the homes of grandmothers (and served as a feast of grace after years of wonder and development), and between the comprehensive and the complex: feminist writings which search for connections and relationships with a variety of other groups. As such, the book is divided into several sections, each of which is dedicated to a traditional food: olives, bread, thyme, *labane* (butter milk), vine leaves, and mint. A small number of examples are presented which represent a general phenomenon.

Nathalie Handal, a poet and a researcher of literature, relates to the question: why do "they" (Americans or Arabs) insist on constantly referring to us as "others," a definition which has no content.[29] Handal, whose family is originally from Bethlehem, describes the atmosphere of returning home which she experienced during her childhood, and its subsequent complementation during her first visit to Bethlehem, with the feeling that she actually belonged to two places:

> Most of the time, I feel like we are hunting for the hunter who tried to capture us. Our endless discussion which never ceases to bring us to where we originally started continues every time we speak. We keep asking ourselves how we can be so Palestinian and so American, and so whatever else that lays at the borders. Well, why do we only have to be one person? Why do we only have to have one homeland? There is the homeland inside of us, the one we inhabit, the one in our dreams, may others. I forever thought of myself as being in the frame, when in fact, I was also everywhere in the painting . . . , and I think it is the same for you. As I observe and continue to observe you searching and discovering, being lost, then regaining the surface of yourself, disappearing and reappearing, breathing and remaining completely breathless, I have come to see a pattern – one that exists not only in you, but in myself and in most of the Palestinians, most of the Arab-Americans that I meet. In our journey to finding this identity that we think can be settled, we confuse ourselves, for I have come to believe that we will forever travel in margins, but margins of our own. And those margins are states where eternity also breathes . . .
>
> (Handal 1999: 141)[30]

Later, she expresses the way in which writing poetry helps her to settle the internal conflicts associated with identity and attachment:

> In poetry we are everything and everyone that we are. A country between the real and reality. A universe of bread and water, imagination and the imagined, cosmic unity in the world of words, the harmony of words with no end. In poetry we find each other and lose each other. We meet

love between ourselves. We cross at times our past or our future – we forget the leaking of water and remember only the verses in its drops, . . . remember when we saw each other in the middle of the river, the river between Palestine and poetry . . . remember how the sky was memory, how green, so green it all was . . . I remember this homeland. How can I forget it. How can we ever forget how it sings to us, opens its featured arms, telling us to stay. As poets, our words are our home, poetry our homeland. And so how fortunate we are to have found this place, this tiny place, this tiny infinity.

(Ibid.: 141–142)[31]

Lisa Suhair Majaj, a Palestinian-American researcher, poet, and author, described the process of exposing Arab-American creative talents to a variety of readers, a process of negotiation between cultures which has placed many of these creators in a position of "split-vision," as one eye looks at the American context and the other eye is always directed towards the Middle East.[32] According to Suhair Majaj, the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s revealed a number of Arab-American creative talents, who were the sons and daughters of immigrants. This is true especially of poets whose work runs parallel to the appearance of a pan-ethnic Arab-American identity, which bridges the differences of religion and national identification among immigrants whose background is Arab speaking. This identity has been "nourished" by the renaissance of ethnicity in the United States during the 1970s and the politicization of the Arab Diaspora as a result of events in the Middle East.

There has been, she says, a detachment from nostalgic writing, and the beginning of direct confrontation with the Arab-American past which is more complex than simple stories of personal success, on the one hand, juxtaposed with the sense of cultural loss and assimilation, on the other. Poetry has expressed the encounter with more problematic contexts of life beyond the warmth of the family and the Arab sense of community, the marginalization, the prejudice, the poverty, and the sense of distance, not only from American society, but also from the Arab communities; there is more attention paid to the way in which the Arabs have turned into members of an inferior racial group in the American context. The status of "whites" exists for purposes of respect only and is not permanent, and there is a need to make contact with other non-white groups and to search for ways which will turn racial discrimination into the basis for solidarity and social activism.

Majaj feels that Arab-American feminism must be expressed more strongly and clearly as a way of overcoming oriental labeling of Arab culture and the internal censorship of the Arab community used against writers who attempt to research the negative aspects of the Arab and Arab-American community. There is a need for more social criticism in a general sense toward negative phenomena in the Arab-American community; the complexities of the Arab-American identity must be examined in a more focused manner, an identity which, culturally, is the result of "ethnogenesis," the creation of a

new culture incorporating elements from both the Arab and from the American. There is a need to make use of new forms of cultural expression: not only drama and film writing, but also learning the roles of expressive forms such as dual-language rap music; there must be progress toward a literature which will translate political realities into human terms, and thus, to enable those "on the outside" to develop empathy and increased understanding; there is a need to emphasize the role of the individual in society and in the world, so that aspects of life which do not traditionally belong to the Arab ethos will be considered relevant.

The poem "Departure," expresses the views of Suhair Majaj as it expresses the experience of desertion and abandonment associated with permanent departure.[33]

Naomi Shihab Nye is one of the most prominent of the writers who characterize the phenomenon described earlier. Her writings are varied and have been widely recognized. Her work examines the human condition in diverse places and in different times. The mixed origins of her parents and her life and literary experiences have exposed her to a variety of nations, languages, and art forms. However, Palestinian "reference points" can be discerned throughout her work. It perhaps could be said that the Palestinian component in Shihab Nye's work is characterized by an interesting combination of curiosity and nostalgia, accepted with acquiescence and understanding rather than with emphasis on the tragic, although she does not ignore the elements of suffering and longing. Her book, entitled *Never In A Hurry*,[34] contains reports and short essays. These characterize Shihab Nye's approach to the Palestinian component in her world and the way in which it is integrated with other elements. In an essay called "One Village,"[35] she describes her impression of a visit to a Palestinian village (the former home of her father), where her grandmother lives with Shihab Nye's uncle and his family, having moved to the village from Jerusalem in 1948. The visit took place fifteen years after the last one, when she had been ten years old. After describing the traditional nature of her grandmother's day, the simplicity and timelessness, the familiar sights and smells which had come back to her: the orange blossoms, the wool of the sheep, water flowing over rocks, and the "potent soup of smoke," she comments that this might be what is called a "genetic home," a place which remains in the memory even if one has not been there for most of one's life. Her uncle, her father's brother, is the Mukhtar of the village, and is proud to show her the new shower which he has built in his home. His wife has given birth to twenty children, of whom eleven have survived. The village is ancient and their house is the oldest in the village. Everything is simple and without luxury. The writer describes the return of a healthy and basic sense of belonging, and her references to the difficult circumstances, such as poverty, the adjacent Jewish settlements, the soldiers in an armored vehicle who annoy her as she strolls through the village, the refugee status of her grandmother, are posed as questions and with a sense of wonder about a given situation rather than obvious protest.

Alongside the essays and articles dealing with the Palestinian aspects of her life and family, Shihab Nye has included, for example, an article dealing with Mexican immigrants, their way of life, and their sorrows and confrontations with life in America. The writings about other ethnic groups are characterized by the same sensitivity, along with the same wonder and desire to understand the dissimilar world of close neighbors or far-away people.

A consideration of one of Shihab Nye's books of poetry, *Words under the Words*,[36] illustrates the wide range of subjects and human experience which she uses in her poetry. On the front cover of the book, there is a picture of her Palestinian grandmother from the village north of Jerusalem, and on the back cover, there are words of appreciation for the all-encompassing humanity and respect which stem from her Palestinian-American heritage. In the poem, "Kindness," there is reference to a young Native American who has been found dead at the side of the road.[37] The poem "No One Thinks of Tegucigalpa" is a protest against arms dealers in contrast to the simple people of South America.[38]

In another poem, "Biography of an Armenian Schoolgirl," Shihab Nye describes the world of an Armenian girl, caught between school and family tradition.[39]

Suheir Hammad was born in Jordan in 1973 to parents who were Palestinian refugees who moved to Beirut and then, to Brooklyn, New York. Her poems and her prose speak of exile, of Palestinian suffering, of urban America, as a Black woman in a racist society. Her work has been included along with other writers who have expressed penetrating criticism of the traditional role of the Palestinian woman. In the poem "There are many Usages for the Word Black" she identifies with those who are discriminated against and pursued in various places.[40]

Hammad has ascribed the important transformation in her life to the influence of the African American poet and essayist, June Jordan, born in Harlem in 1936, and especially to her work *Moving towards Home*, a collection of political articles and poetry which appeared in 1989. The following are lines which appear in this collection:

> I was born a Black woman
> and now
> I am become a Palestinian
> Against the relentless laughter of evil
> There is less and less living room
> And where are my loved ones?
> It is time to make our way home . . . [41]

A similar poem written by Hammad is titled: "There are many Usages of the Word Black."[42]

In the poem "Of Woman Torn," Hammad cries out against the fate of a Palestinian girl who was killed by her father and brother for having defamed

the honor of the family, with horrifying descriptions of physical harm, and that of an Egyptian girl who was decapitated by her father during a forbidden honeymoon, who then exhibited the head in the streets of Cairo to prove his masculinity.[43]

In an excerpt from her autobiography, Suheir Hammad describes the attempt of her parents to arrange her marriage, even after they had immigrated to the United States and were residents of New York.[44]

A young man who had never previously even spoken to her, came to her father and asked to marry her, and she wondered how she was supposed to explain that this was the twentieth century and people did not behave this way, not in New York nor in Palestine nor even in Hell, and that she felt like a horse who was being exhibited.[45]

She continues in the same vein: her mother had drunk from the "beverage," so what could she have expected from her husband? What could a woman expect from a man who had the prospects of taking three other wives? This is a story involving too many women who are living in exploitative marriages, where it is a greater shame to be divorced than to be beaten. Too many women are having to learn the "laws of patience and obedience" which are the keys to the Garden of Eden. This is what men are teaching young brides, as they do all the evil to their brides who are still children. One culture has no advantage over another. She states that she is writing about the Yemenite women whose husbands kick their necks because the meal was not tasty enough; Latin girls who are beaten by their boyfriends because there is something they don't like in the girls' facial expression; black women who are exploited like animals by gamblers and drug dealers; white women beaten as they leave abortion clinics. This is the problem of women enchained in a prison of patience and obedience employed as social norms.

Yet another example is of Munir Akash (Al-'Akash). He has published a long essay in the Arabic issue of *Jusoor*, in which he compares the ties between the poem by Mahmud Darwish, "The Indian" about Seattle, the patriarch of the Duwamish and the Suquamish Native Americans of Puget, in contrast to the American ethos and settlement policies, which he claims are based on the Israelite settlement as depicted in the Bible, and in contrast to the settlement legacy as interpreted in modern Israel.[46]

On the glossy cover of the Arab section, there is a large picture of the burial ground of the Blackfeet Native American Tribe in Browning, Montana, at the center of the Reservation of the same name. In the quoted caption at the side of the picture, written in Arabic, Tecumseh, the Native American leader, is reputed to have said (in 1811): "My nation wants peace. All of the Indians want peace. But the foreign white man who has come from afar to take our land away, will not know peace unless it is over my dead body." At the end of 1999, the magazine, *The Link*, devoted an issue to the common fate and the mutual interests of the Palestinians in the territories and to the Cherokee Nation which was evicted by the American settlers from tribal lands.[47]

The lead articles described the process of defeat and dispossession of the Cherokee, and of a visit by a Palestinian delegation to the Pine Ridge Reservation in North Dakota. A comment in the Editor's Column quoted a conversation in which a member of the tribe maintained that she had visited Palestine and had felt as though she was visiting her brothers and sisters.

Fay Afaf Kanafani,[48] an author of Lebanese-Palestinian origin, began to write late in life. She is another interesting personality among feminist writers.[49] She has written the autobiography of a Lebanese Moslem woman who was wed to a Palestinian in a marriage arranged by her parents, and moved to Haifa where her three children were born. At the beginning of 1948, her husband was killed in a shooting on the road while he was on his way to work, and she returned to Lebanon with her family. Her children were considered refugees while she was going home to her parents. In Lebanon, she again encountered the depressing traditional attitude towards women, as she had experienced it in her childhood. She dealt with the dictates of society, making a great effort to lead an independent life as she desired. Her second marriage also ended tragically when her husband was injured in the Civil War, and she arrived in the United States to be treated after a heart attack and finally settled there in 1985. She has donated the proceeds of her autobiography to women who write about women's rights in the Middle East, in order to improve understanding of the lives of women living there. Another example of potent criticism of the lives of Palestinian women is found in a collection of stories by Kathryn Abdul-Baki.[50] The opening story which gives the collection its name "Ameera,"[51] is the story of a battered Palestinian woman living in the native village of the author on the Mount of Olives. Abdul-Baki tells of the incidents she witnessed as a girl, before her immigration to the United States. Ameera, the ill-fated main character, suffers from every possible harm and injury: a husband who is both abusive and unfaithful and who spends his time in a cafe, rather than caring for his wife and sick mother; a spiteful mother-in-law and lack of support from her own father's family. In addition, she and her husband are unable to have children, and, of course, she is held responsible. In the central part of the story, Ameera describes her childhood, when she was a pretty, spoiled young girl. Her husband's mother came to ask for Ameera to marry her son. Ameera was seated on the woman's lap, and the woman checked her hair, her teeth and her chest, and then, arranged the terms. The other stories reinforce the criticism and revolt against the fate of the woman in Palestinian villages.

As concluding remarks there are two aspects which perhaps could be noted:

1   The wealth, the verity and the worth of Palestinian-American creative work in different fields within the Arab-American and the American society.
2   The awareness of the fact that the existence in the American Diaspora offered many Palestinians such opportunities which they were denied in

their homeland and countries of origin. This means to suggest that although Diaspora is usually conceived as a negative experience, in this case Palestinians were able to draw some very significant advantages out of it.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on a wider study, which dealt with some cultural, political, and social aspects of the Palestinian Diaspora in the United States during the second half of the twentieth Century.

2 Jamal R. Nassar (1999) "The Culture of Resistance: The 1967 War in the Context of the Palestinian Struggle," in William W. Haddad, Ghada H. Talhami, and Janice J. Terry (eds) (1999) *The June 1967 War After Three Decades*, Washington, DC: AAUG, pp. 127–148. Nassar emphasizes the change which began in 1967, when the Palestinians began to define themselves and to develop a national identity, independent of Arab nationalism and separate from the Arab states that did not represent them, nor did they recognize Palestinian aspirations. pp. 132–133. Susan Slyomovics deals with collective memory as a source and as a tool in the development of ethnicity. See, for example, her book: Susan Slyomovics (1998) *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press. An interesting approach which is similar to Slyomovics' can be found in an article by Ghada Talhami, appearing in a 1999 collection published to mark three decades since the June 1967 war. Ghada H. Talhami (1993a) "The Power of Remembrance: Palestinians Record their History," in William W. Haddad, Ghada H. Talhami, and Janice J. Terry (eds), pp. 183–191.

3 May Seikaly (1999) "Attachment and Identity: The Palestinian Community of Detroit," in Michael W. Suleiman (ed), *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, Temple University Press, pp. 25–38.

4 Salma Khadra Jayyusi (1998) "Reflections on al-Nakba," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXVIII, No. 1 (Autumn), p. 3. Jayyusi, a poet and a scholar, is the founder and director of PROTA (Project of Translation from Arabic) and lives in Cambridge, MA.

5 Suheir Majaj has written pioneering, in-depth studies of literary expression by Arabs in America in the context of her academic and literary work. The example cited here is one of the many articles which examine literature while taking into consideration relevant historical, social, and cultural elements experienced by Arab-Americans: Lisa Suheir Majaj (2000) "Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race," in Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt (eds), *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature*, Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, pp. 320–337.

6 See, for example, Judith Gabriel (Fall 1998) "Years of the Nakba," Books in Brief, *Aljadid*, vol. 4, No. 25.

7 The author graduated from the Film Department of UCLA, and teaches Film and Literature at a university in Alabama. In the past he served as Chief Assistant to the Director of the film, *Lawrence of Arabia*, David Lean.

8 The biographical information is taken from: John B. Harcourt (1998) "Foreword," in Shaw J. Dallal, *Scattered Like Seeds*, Syracuse University Press, pp. xi–xiv; Kim Jensen (spring 1999) "Palestinian Diaspora in Autobiographical Approach," *Aljadid*, 27, p. 18.

9   Some more books which belong to this genre are for example: Jamil I. Toubbeh, *Day of the Long Night: A Palestinian Refugee Remembers the Nakba*. McFarland, 1998.; Aziz Shihab, *A Test of Palestine: Menus & Memories*. San Antonio: Corona Publishing, 1993; Azmi S. Audeh, *Carpenter from Nazareth: A Palestinian Portrait*. Boulder, CO: Aoudeh Publishers, 1998. There are books of a similar character which were not written by Palestinian Americans, but which have been published in the United States and were publicised and discussed in the same journals. These include for example: Yahya Yakhlif, *A Lake Beyond the Wind*. (Translated from the Arabic by May Jayyusi and Christopher Tingley.) New York: Interlink Books, 1999; Yasmin Zahran, *A Beggar at Damascus Gate*. Sausalito, CA: The Post-Apollo Press, 1995.

10 Hisham Sharabi (1978) *Al-Jamr wa-al-Ramad: Dhikrayat Muthaqqaf 'Arabi*, Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a lil-tiba'a wa-al-Nashr; Hisham Sharabi (1993) *Suwar al-Madi: Sira Dhatyya*, Beirut: Dar Nablus- al-Sweid; Edward W. Said (1999) *Out of Place: A Memoir*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

11 Jane Friedman, "These Stitches Speak," *Aramco World*, Vol. 48, No. 2, March-April 1997, pp. 2–11.

12 Hanan Karaman Munayyer (March/April 1997) "New Images, Old Patterns – A Historical Glimpse," *Aramco World*, Vol. 48, No. 2, pp. 5–11.

13 Lorene Zarou-Zouzounis, "Embroidered Memory," in: Nathalie Handal (ed.), *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*, New York: Interlink Books, 2001, pp. 317–318.

14 Rynearson maintains that artists are often the first who have shaped and expressed new ethnic cultural traditions of a group of immigrants, creating a fusion of cultures, and that these artists become cultural agents in the particular area formed within the dominant culture. Ann M. Rynearson (1996) "Living Within the Looking Glass: Refugee Artists and the Creation of Group Identity," in Ann M. Rynearson and James Philips (eds), *Selected Papers on Refugee Issues*, IV, Arlington, Virginia: American Anthropological Association, pp. 20–44.

15 Lauren Frayer (July 26, 2000) "Annemarie Kattan Jacir: A Palestinian–American Filmmaker Trying to make a Difference," Start.com, Washington, DC; Annemarie Kattan Jacir, "Funding Update" (for the Satellite Shooters), http://www.columbia.edu/~kdr7/funding.html

16 Annemarie Jacir (2001) "Untitled Exile Poem", in: *Mizna*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, pages are unnumbered.

17 From a conversation with the author on February 8, 2000, at a meeting at Columbia University, in New York.

18 Walid Khalidi (ed.) (1992) *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*. Washington, DC: The Institute for Palestine Studies.

19 The Internet address of the artist. See Appendix No. 4 for some of the artist's work, and what she has written about herself. http://www.art.net/samia

20 http://www.art.net/Studios/Visual/Samia/resume/shortbio.html

21 http://www.art.net/Studios/Visual/Samia/pal/pal3/rock.html

22 See, for example, an article written by Ibtisam Abu Duhou who comments that modern Palestinian poetry, in spite of the fact that it is an inseparable part of Arab poetry, has two unique characteristics: 1. It has given expression to the emotional and physical "environment" of Palestinians; 2. "...it is inhabited and dominated by the Palestinian national theme as embodied in resistance to the Israeli domination and occupation and in the struggle for independence and freedom..." Ibtisam Abu Duhou (1993) "Writing for the Palestinian Diaspora

Through Poetry," in: *Span, Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies*, Number 34–35, http://wwwmce.murdoch. edu.au/ReadingRoom/litserv/SPAN/34/ Duhuo.html

23 Sharif S. Elmusa (1996) "One Day in the Life of Nablus," in Amira El-Zein and Munir Akash (eds), *Culture, Creativity and Exile, Jusoor The Arab American Journal of Culture Exchange, Present and Future*, No. 7/8, pp. 361–364.

24 Fawaz Turki (1998) *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary*, Monthly Review Press, New York, p. 7, 11.

25 Fawaz Turki (1975) *Poems from Exile*. Washington, DC: Free Palestine Press, p. 4.

26 Fawaz Turki (1978) "The Left Hand of Tel Zaatar," in Fawaz Turki, *Tel Zaatar was the Hill of Thyme: Poems from Palestine*, Washington, DC: Free Palestine Press, pp. 11–15.

27 The author would like to thank Lisa Suheir Majaj whose literary work and research, along with the author's discussions with her, provided great assistance in dealing with the theme of inter-ethnic negotiation as part of the Arab-American experience.

28 Joanna Kadi (1994a) "Introduction," in Joanna Kadi, (ed) *Food for our Grandmothers: Writings by Arab-American and Arab-Canadian Feminists*, Boston, MA: South End Press, pp. xiii–xx.

29 Nathalie Handal (1999) "Peotry as Homeland and Two Poems," in Munir Akash and Khaled Mattawa (eds), *Post-Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing*, Jusoor: Syracuse University Press, pp. 139–144.

30 Op. cit., p. 141.

31 Op. cit., pp. 141–142.

32 Lisa Suhair Majaj (1999) "New Directions: Arab-American writing at Century's End," in Munir Akash and Khalad Mattawa (eds), *Post-Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing*, Jusoor: Syracuse University Press, pp. 67–81.

33 Ibid., pp. 79–80.

34 Naomi Shihab Nye (1996) *Never in a Hurry: Essays on People and Places*, University of South Carolina Press.

35 "One Village," in: Ibid., pp. 49–70.

36 Naomi Shihab Nye (1995, first edn 1980) *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*, Portland, Oregon: A Far Corner Book.

37 "Kindness," in: Ibid., pp. 42–43.

38 "No One thinks of Tegucigalpa," in: Ibid., p. 138.

39 "Biography of an Armenian Schoolgirl," in: Ibid., pp. 26–27.

40 Suheir Hammad (1996) "Author's Note," in *Born Palestinian, Born Black*. New York: Harlem River Press, p. x.

41 Hammad, p. ix, from "Moving Towards Home" by June Jordan.

42 Suheir Hammad (1996) "Author's Note," in *Born Palestinian, Born Black*, New York: Harlem River Press, p. x.

43 Suheir Hammad, "Of Woman Torn," in Nathalie Handal (ed.), *The Poetry of Arab Women*, pp. 114–117.

44 Suheir Hammad (1997) "Selections from Drops of this Story," in Abby Bogomolny (ed.), *New to North America: Writings by U.S. Immigrants, Their Children and Grandchildren*, New York: Burning Bush Publications, pp. 121–127.

45 Ibid., p. 121.

46 Munir Akash (1996) "The Sacred Executioner, A Reading of the Founding Myths of America," in Amira El- Zein and Munir Akash (eds), *Culture, Creativity and Exile, Jusoor, The Arab American Journal of Culture Exchange, Present and Future*, No. 7/8 (Arab Sector, pp. 5–42) The Chief of the Seattle tribe achieved prominence due to a speech which has been attributed to him dating from 1854 or

1855, and supposedly given on the site of the present-day city of Seattle. The speech, which was given before the Governor of the Territory of Washington, praised the tradition of the fathers, and the nature of the tribal people who were disappearing in the wake of American settlement. During the 1970s, the speech became a kind of political and ideological platform for ecology activists and for those who were fighting for the rights and traditions of the Native Americans in the United States. US researchers have expressed doubt that Seattle had written the speech and given it, and feel that the text was invented later by an American academic.

47 *The Link*, Vol. 32, Issue 5, December 1999.

48 Fay Afaf Kanafani (1999) *Nadia – Captive of Hope: Memoir of an Arab Woman*, Armonk, NY, M. E. Sharpe. In an Introduction to the book by Kanafani, Lisa Suheir Majaj has written that, using discriminating analysis, political under-standing, and feminist criticism, the book covers a life story which included the British Mandate, the creation of a Palestinian Diaspora during the establishment of the state of Israel, and the destruction of civil life during the Civil War in Lebanon. It opens a window on the role of the family in Arab society, on the social limitations which burden women and men, as well, and on the possibilities of struggling against them.

49 Judith Gabriel contends that Kanafani, who was born in 1918, is an Arab woman who was born with a feminist instinct: Judith Gabriel (Spring 1999) " 'Nadia' A Feminist Sojourn Through 20th Century Arab History," *Aljadid*, Issue No. 27, p. 12.

50 Kathryn K. Abdul-Baki (1991) *Fields of Fig and Olive: Ameera and other Stories of the Middle East*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press.

51 Ibid., pp. 3–15.

8 From ambiguity to abjection

Iraqi-Americans negotiating race in the United States[1]

Evelyn Alsultany

Arab-American racial ambiguity

Arab bodies are marked with pre-assigned meanings in the United States: suspected terrorist, presumed religious fanatic, backward; Arabs are "Other," existing outside of the ideological scope of "belonging" within the United States. Located within a racial paradox, Arab-Americans are simultaneously racialized as white and non-white (Joseph; N. Naber; Saliba; Samhan). Not legally recognized by the US government as a minority group, and unable to fit into the racial and ethnic categories used by the US Census: black, white, Asian, Native, and Latino – Arabs are not legally "raced" and therefore presumably white. However, at the same time, signified as oppositional to US democratic civilization, Arab-Americans are placed outside the boundaries of "whiteness," and paradoxically positioned as "not quite white" (Bhabha 1994: 86; Samhan 1999: 210).

This paradox is constructed through a distinct process of racialization. While African-Americans, Asians, and Native Americans are racialized according to phenotype, Arab-Americans are often racialized according to religion and politics. Religious racialization conflates Arabs and Islam, and consequently positions all Arabs as Muslim; represents Islam as a monolithic religion erasing diversity among Arabs and Muslims; and marks Islam as a backwards, fanatical, uncivilized, and a terroristic belief system (Joseph 1999: 260; Naber 2000: 52). Islam has also been constructed as antithetical to the Judeo-Christian tradition in the United States, despite its similarities with both religions. Arab-Americans also face political racism. Being in support of establishing an independent Palestinian nation becomes conflated with supporting terrorism and being anti-democracy and anti-Semitic; an oxymoron in itself since Arabs too are Semitic. In the United States, where Israel is commonly portrayed in the media as the lone democratic and civilized nation defending itself from the barbaric and violent Arabs who surround it, as opposed to an occupying force, violently expelling Palestinians from their homeland, a rhetorical space does not exist for perspectives in support of a Palestinian nation and consequently Arab perspectives are silenced (Naber *et al*. 2001: 6). This exceptional process of racialization positions

Arabs in a peculiar location within the US racial terrain in which they are not racially legible within the operating racial framework and resulted in Arab-American invisibility pre-9/11.

Arab-Americans, like Latinos,

> challenge the U.S. system of racial classification because they do not fit neatly into the given categories. They are neither a race nor a racially homogenous ethnic group. Rather, they are a diverse array of multiracial ethnic groups, bound together by language, cultural ancestry, and discrimination in the United States.
>
> (Rodriguez 2000: 175)

However, unlike Latinos, Arab-Americans are not legally recognized as an ethnic group in the United States. Whereas in the past, racialized groups, including Arab-Americans, would attempt to make claims to whiteness in order to gain citizenship rights, "more recently, defining groups has been a way of including them and ensuring that particular groups are not discriminated against" (Ibid.: 105). Arab-Americans have historically claimed to be part of the Semitic branch of the Caucasian race in order to gain citizenship. Those who were fair skinned and Christian often succeeded in passing for white, while those with darker complexions or Muslims would not qualify. More recently, racism directed at Arab-Americans has gone unrecognized because of their legal status as "white."[2]

Despite lobbying for and being denied legal recognition as an ethnic group by the US Census Bureau, Arab-Americans have often faced discrimination with no legal process because whites are not eligible to sue for racial discrimination.

Debates about racism in the United States have failed to address the ways in which Arab-Americans are racialized. Discussions on race and racism, long limited to relations between African-Americans and whites, have been extended to include Asian-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and only recently South Asians. Discourses on race and racism, both inside and outside of the US academy, have accepted the configuration of race set forth by the state: black, white, Native, Asian, and Latino, rendering Arab-American experiences with racism invisible. As a result, racism, as a discourse, has not been equally available to Arab-Americans to explain and describe experiences of discrimination and harassment as a result of their identity, as it has been for other racialized groups in the United States. While most racialized groups have come to name, identify, expose, and hence collectively resist the racism inherent in Eurocentric ideology, Arab-Americans are just beginning to name and articulate the ways in which racism manifests against them in the United States. I do not mean to suggest that there is a direct correlation between how the state defines race and how individuals and communities understand themselves, but that individuals and groups negotiate their understanding of their racial identity in relation to the dominant definition put forth by the

state. Some Arab-American feminists, for example, have adopted the term "woman of color," regardless of not being legally "racialized" and even when unacknowledged by other women of color. Some Arab-Americans choose to identify themselves as "West Asian" or "North African" on the census, while others have taken their ambiguous racial status and have avoided being racially marked in an attempt to garner proximity to whiteness. A further effect of Arab-American racial illegibility is that despite the racial and religious diversity of the Arab-American population, and regardless of similar experiences of being racialized and marked with derogatory meaning prior to speech or action, Arab-Americans are often seen by whites as non-white and by African-Americans and other racialized groups as white, close to whiteness, or simply foreign, thereby inhibiting coalition building between Arab-Americans and other racialized groups.

The racial paradox and its subsequent consequences radically shifted on September 11, 2001, when inscriptions on Arab and Muslim bodies exploded, positioning "American" and "Arab" as polarized and seemingly irreconcilable. Post-9/11, we witness a shift from invisibility to visibility. No longer ambiguously racialized, Arab- and Muslim-Americans face overt racialization on multiple levels, through government policies and practices of racial profiling, detention, and deportation as well as through individual vigilante acts of discrimination, violence, and murder in the name of patriotism. Race, as a site of struggle, is historically contingent: its significance and meanings shift according to the historical moment. Following September 11, the white/non-white paradox was illuminated: on the one hand, a Gallup poll conducted days after the attacks reported that 71 percent of African-Americans were in support of racial profiling in the case of Arabs and Arab-Americans, confirming that Arabs are not seen in likeness but in difference from other racialized Americans – as foreign. On the other hand the events of September 11, 2001, and the backlash against Middle Eastern and Muslim-Americans (and those mistaken for Arab or Muslim), led to a host of cross-racial, ethnic, and religious coalitions.[3]

As the racial ambiguity of Arabs in the United States was enacted through alternating between defining Arabs as "Other" and as "one of us", and as instances of religious and political racism multiplied, the discourse of race and racism emerged in relation to Arab- and Muslim-Americans.

The research for this chapter was conducted before September 11 to understand how Arab-Americans understand themselves racially in a racial terrain that renders them ambiguous. I conducted interviews with Iraqi immigrants in New York City in 1998. I interviewed persons over the age of fifty who were born and raised in Iraq and migrated to New York City in their early or late adulthood. My interviewees included men and women who are Muslims, Christians, and Jews.[4]

How do Arab-Americans negotiate this paradoxical racial terrain in which they are simultaneously racialized as white and non-white and therefore "not quite white?" How do they narrate racist experiences? How does this racial

paradox affect how Arab-Americans understand and experience their identity? How do they situate themselves within the US racial terrain? How do they experience citizenship and "belonging" in relation to the US nation and the homeland? The Iraqi immigrants whom I interviewed do not name such processes of racism; they do not name political racism, the racialization of Islam, or being racialized simultaneously as white and non-white, yet their words reflect and confirm such concepts. They contend with the Eurocentric and Orientalist regime of truth that positions Arabs as barbaric, backwards, uncivilized, irrational terrorists, behind on the unilinear path to civilization, of which Europe and North America are leaders. Arab-American subjectivity emerges within this framework in which Arab-Americans seek to negotiate and contest the negative significations inscribed on their identities.

As these interviews were conducted before September 11, 2001, they illustrate not only how racism, as a discourse has been less available to Arab-Americans than to other racialised groups in the United Sates, but also how it goes largely unadopted by those interviewed to describe discriminatory experiences. What discourses did they draw upon to narrate racism? There were three predominant ways in which racism was addressed, or rather, circumvented in the interviews: (1) regarding it as accidental; (2) diffusing it through deploying stereotypes; and (3) re-scripting their position within Eurocentric discourses. I will address these interviews and I will return later to a discussion of Arab-Americans in the post-9/11 racial terrain.

Circumventing racialization, accidents, and jealousy in the melting pot

The still prevalent rhetoric of the melting pot nation is often adopted by Arab-Americans. In such an ideology, racism can only appear as accidental or aberrational. When I asked the interviewees if they had experienced racism or discrimination in the United States, all but one responded by saying they have not *because* the United States is a country of immigrants, a melting pot nation. The racism they had experienced, they referred to as "bad experiences" or "accidents."

Ali and Fatiha, for example, married and living in New York City for about thirty years, and owners of an electronics store, conveyed the following in response to a question about whether they have ever concealed their Iraqi identity while living in the United States, a common strategy used by Arabs in America to belong:

ALI: I have never used an alternate identity because I think that America is everybody's country. If you look at the people, they come from all over the world. Even if someone was born here, his father was not born here. People come late. Even people in the government were not born in this country. For example, take Henry Kissinger. He became top person in the White House, in the government of America with Nixon. He became the secretary of state, which is the biggest job in the government of the

United States. And look at Ed Koch, coming when he is 10 years old, becoming mayor of the biggest city in the world. Look at the Koreans, the Japanese, and the Italians, everybody proud of where they come from. Why shouldn't I be proud of where I come from? See St. Patrick's Day? Everybody becomes Irish. They are American.

FATIHA: America is American Indian, but look at where they are. Well, actually, you did have one accident. Remember that lady, she told you to go back to where you come from, to go back to your country. Tell her about that accident. And you went to court and the judge was very nice.

ALI: Yes, she went to consumer affairs. There was a lady and she had a problem with me and she sued me and on top of that, she insults me in my store and she says, "go back to your country where you come from." "This is everybody's country," I tell her, and I ask her where she is from. She says she was born here. I said, "Was your grandfather born here?" She kept quiet. You can't tell me your grandfather was born here also. No way. Finally when we were in court I told the judge that she had insulted me in my store in front of everybody telling me to go back to my country. She was very angry. The judge said, "America is a country for everybody. It is an immigrant country. You should not say these things to him"... He said, "The American Indians are the original people, not you, not me." He said, "my father was an immigrant who came from Italy and my family is still in Italy and I am proud to be Italian-American." I thought if everyone is proud of where they come from, why shouldn't I be proud of where I come from? Iraq is a historic country. Babylon was the first civilization. The first civilization was in Iraq. And also I come from a rich country, not a poor country. We are famous in the world for export in oil and agriculture. So when people ask me what is my name, I say Ali. Where do you come from, I say Iraq because that's where I'm from.

In spite of the exclusionary practices that characterize US immigration history, the rhetoric of the United States as a melting pot nation is invoked to legitimize claims of belonging, irrespective of actual experiences to the contrary. Ali and Fatiha narrate this racist incident, in which their right to belong in the United States was negated, through a tale that affirms the United States as a melting pot nation and hence their legitimate belonging. Although they were told to "go back to your country," a common refrain directed at Arabs and other racialized groups in the United States that positions them as forever foreign and denies them a place within "the nation of immigrants," Ali and Fatiha received the most legitimate (and unusual) affirmation of belonging: a judge in a court of law validated their belonging on the grounds of the melting pot ideal. The moral of their story is that the United States is indeed a country of immigrants and that even white people who claim an exclusive right to belong, are actually immigrants as well. Through naming Henry Kissinger and Ed Koch and listing many ethnicities, Ali and Fatiha place Iraqi immigrants on equal ground to other immigrants. In so doing, they are not necessarily seeking to claim proximity to whiteness,

as immigrants before them have done, but to avoid second-class citizenship status. Since being "raced" implies inferior status, Ali does not speak of himself in racial terms, but in ethnic/non-raced terms, along side Greeks, Italians, Russians, and Jews, seeking to be recognized amongst them.

Whereas Ali relays an ideology of equality, he simultaneously responds to Eurocentric civilizational discourses that position Arabs as "backwards" and "uncivilized." On the one hand, there is no hierarchy of ethnic belonging in Ali's conveyance of the melting pot rhetoric. Recounting the judge's response also adds to this non-hierarchy of belonging since it affirms that the only "true" people of the United States are Native Americans and everyone else is equally an immigrant. Ali ends his narrative with a strong affirmation of self. He declares that he is Iraqi, has a distinctly Arab name, and is proud of his identity, continuing his point about being an immigrant equal to other immigrants in the United States. On the other hand, Ali does not stop at being equal for equality's sake; he goes on to invoke Babylon, "the first civilization," as a marker of Iraqi pride. Not only do Iraqis belong because the "U.S. is a country of immigrants," they also belong because the United States is a "modern" nation and Iraqis are valuable "modern" citizens. Ali stresses that they come from a civilized country that is not poor and that is famous for export, signifying that they are valuable contributors to the world. By virtue of their contribution to the world, their national class status, and their modernity, which has been erased by Eurocentric and Orientalist logics, Ali and Fatiha legitimize their belonging when they are the targets of racism.

Ali and Fatiha do not associate this incident with racism. They refer to it as an "accident" or unpleasant incident, as if it had occurred only once in the many years they have lived in the United States. An illusion is created through the melting pot rhetoric that Arabs "belong" despite Eurocentric and Orientalist logics. The illusion is further compounded by not drawing upon the discourse of racism to explain discriminatory and hostile experiences. Instead, structural and ideological inequalities are substituted for accidental interpersonal interactions.

In addition to substituting racism for an "accident" and seeking to minimize the accident through situating it in a particular interpersonal experience, "jealousy" is also used as an alibi for racism. In relaying the history of their family affairs and business in the United States, Fatiha and Ali spoke of a time when they purchased the building in which they were living and the tenants reacted to their ownership with hostility:

FATIHA: We faced a lot of problems because of jealousy.

ALI: Because people lived in the building before us for years and years and then we came into the building and in a few years we took it over; Jealousy.

FATIHA: They had a meeting and they said: "look at these people, they come from their country, they own the building. We don't know where they come from. How did they get the building, where did they get the money from?" You know; all jealousy.

ALI: They tried to make some trouble for us. We stood very strong. After that . . . we bought this house. The closing was in 1977 and we moved here.

FATIHA: We could not continue living in the building because the people gave us a hard time. They rang the bell. They broke the elevator many times. "People go back to your country"; All jealousies. I couldn't stay in the building.

ALI: They tried to hurt us, a little bit.

ME: And where were they from?

ALI: From all over the world.

FATIHA: From Russia, Chinese, mostly Spanish. No colored people at all. A lot of Irish people. Mainly the Irish people gave us a hard time. They think we are colored and they are white.

The narrative is that "jealous" people tried to hurt them, but they handled the situation well, and the severity was minimized, that is, "They tried to hurt us, *a little bit*." This incident is understood as "jealousy" while there is a racial backdrop: others (Irish) mistakenly perceived them as "colored" or "raced" (African-American). The racial dynamics of brown skinned people owning a building and lighter skinned people reacting with hostility to their ownership is refused. Within their framework, the building consisted of immigrants who were similarly situated – also immigrants to the United States seeking financial success. Ali and Fatiha were no longer similarly situated immigrants when they achieved a level of financial success, leading others to become jealous of their advancement, and lashing out in an attempt to harm them. Fatiha notes that there were no African-Americans or Africans living in the building and that the Irish tenants treated them as if they were "colored" – black. A relation of power was enacted in what Fatiha and Ali perceive to be the "wrong" context, and once again – accidental. Race is extracted from the understanding of this alienating situation: one's self is not understood as racially marked. Racism is rationalized, understood, and disguised as something else – jealousy, signifying that hostility arises from being envious of another's life, possessions, characteristics, etc. Both "accident" and "jealousy" reflect a subjective interpretation of experience in which race is not operating as a primary factor. These attempts to frame hostility as interpersonal, as opposed to structural, and mobilizing explanations based in accidents and jealousy reflects a desire to position oneself as outside of racial politics.

The Iraqis interviewed invoke the melting pot rhetoric to legitimize their belonging. Substituting an explanation of racism with accidents and jealousy are coping mechanisms used to minimize exclusionary experiences. Another strategy many of the interviewees use to combat subjection is to respond, "I am from Saddam Hussein," when asked where one is from.

"I am from Saddam Hussein"

When asked if she has experienced hostility or discrimination, Hamida, an Iraqi Muslim woman who has lived in New York for over thirty years, replied

that she had not. She reasoned that since she is a doctor, she is in a position of power and therefore people do not look down at her. She added that when she is asked where she is from, she replies: "I am from Saddam Hussein," and people laugh. Similarly, Yusef, an Iraqi Christian man who worked for Ford motor company for over thirty years, said that he has not experienced discrimination or hostility as an Iraqi. He said that people in the United States did not know Iraq until Saddam Hussein. Years ago, when he would tell people that he was from Iraq, they would ask, "Where in South America is that?" Now, when people ask him where he is from, he responds by saying, "I am from Saddam Hussein," and people laugh. Ali also said that at times, when he is asked where he is from, he replies that he is "from Saddam Hussein." "I am from Saddam Hussein" seems to be a common response when asked where one is from. Simultaneously confrontational and diffusive, it emerges as a strategy to relieve possible tensions, racisms, and stereotypes within interpersonal interactions. Being from Iraq, which has been constructed as a threatening "uncivilized" entity, is turned into a joke. Rather than replying that one is from Iraq and being immediately racialized, the racialization is circumvented and deferred through humor. The momentary deferment of judgment allows for the possibility of subverting the negative significations associated with Arabs and resignifying Arabness/Iraqiness within the interpersonal interaction. Although most of the interviewees denied experiencing discrimination or hostility, while discussing accidents and jealousy, I would argue that such an answer is a method – a defense mechanism – used to by-pass the imposition of another's distorted perception of one's identity, while not conceding to concealing one's identity. As a tactic to circumvent racism, it ultimately reveals the overarching stereotypes that Iraqi immigrants must contend with daily as immigrants in the United States.

Arab immigrants to the United States are subjected to the Eurocentric and Orientalist regime of truth that divides and marks their bodies with devaluative meanings. The interviewees negotiate and contest these negative significations inscribed onto their identities through the melting pot rhetoric. The melting pot rhetoric, like the Arab racial paradox, contributes to the masking of racist experiences but also enables the Iraqi immigrants to claim belonging in spite of the racism they are subjected to. The discourse of racism, not equally available to Arab-Americans and not eagerly claimed by many Arab-Americans to explain their experiences, allows for Arab-Americans to avoid being identified as "racialized." As Augustin Lao-Montes has written,

> In the United States, the rhetoric of ethnicity serves as a way to distinguish between an allegedly non-ethnic, mainstream American core (implicitly white) and the internal other (ethnicized new immigrants and non-white second-class-citizens). This ethnic paradigm plays the ideological role of obscuring and denying racism and colonialism as significant frames of identity/difference in the United States insofar as it reduces the histories

of racialized peoples (such as African Americans and Puerto Ricans) to an immigrant analogy based on the experience of so-called European white ethnics (Irish, Italians, Jews, etc.).

(Laó-Montes 2001: 11)

Seeking to distance themselves from second-class citizenship status, the interviewees identify themselves as "ethnic" as opposed to "racialized."

Renato Rosaldo claims that although citizenship is understood as a universal concept, it has never been universal or equal in practice. Gender and race have long played a role in distinguishing between first and second-class citizens. Rosaldo claims that citizenship is informed by culture and that we need to understand "the way that claims to citizenship are reinforced or subverted by cultural practices" (Rosaldo 1997: 35). In the case of Arab-Americans, I have pointed to the ways in which the racialization of Islam and political racism prevent Arab-Americans from experiencing full cultural citizenship. We can witness the inherent contradictions in cultural citizenship through the narratives of the Iraqis in which they claim their belonging to the United States because it is an immigrant country/melting pot nation and simultaneously state their lack of identification as "American." Fatiha said that she cannot count herself as "American" because to her an "American" is someone who has blond hair and blue eyes, yet she concedes that she considers the United States to be her home. Hamida said that it is difficult for her to count herself as "American" because of how the media misrepresents Arabs in general and specifically in the conflict between Israel and Palestine; it makes her feel estranged from US cultural citizenship. The Iraqis claimed that they do not identify as "American" because America is associated with being white, because of political racism and the lack of fair representation of Arabs in the American media. Such alienation from United States cultural citizenship does not preclude attempts to subvert hostility and utilize tactics to approximate belonging. Discrimination is by-passed through employing accidents and jealousy as an alibi and through strategically stating, "I am from Saddam Hussein."

"We are not camel-riding people"

Iraqi pride has become linked to notions of Eurocentric civility. All of the interviewees discussed their pride as Iraqis as historically situated and legitimated by an alternate linear narrative of Iraq, Babylon, as the first human civilization. A recurring theme amongst most of the interviewees was responding to the stereotypes people have of them as camel-riding desert-tent-dwellers. As Nawal, a Muslim woman and artist displaced by the Gulf War in 1991 succinctly put it: "We are not camel-riding people". Hamida said that she has been asked about her camels, if she rides camels as a mode of transport.

Both Hamida and Nawal commented that they are very proud to be from Iraq since it is the first civilization. Such narratives reveal the context within which pride is negotiated; it is a context in which Arabs are constructed as "less civilized," closer to the desert and camels, behind on the unilinear path to civilization, and therefore backward. Many of the interviewees seek to demonstrate that such constructions are not only false, but reflections of Eurocentric ignorance. Their Babylocentric narrative is as follows: Not only are Iraqis civilized; they were the first civilization, the first moderns, and those who are known for being civilized today and for being at the forefront of modernity (i.e. Europeans and Euro-Americans) are not as educated as they claim to be; for if they were, they would know about Babylon and its significant place in history.

In speaking about their experiences living in the United States during the Gulf War, Fatiha and her nineteen-year-old daughter, Khadija, said the following:

KHADIJA: There are a lot of people, you know, the uneducated, they don't know a lot of things. There were these people in the neighborhood, remember with grandma? They think we live in tents. My mother told them that someone had to go to the hospital and they said, "You have hospitals?" They thought we live in the desert when Iraq doesn't even have desert areas.

FATIHA: Because people are mostly not educated in America.

KHADIJA: It's all what the media shows them, so it's hard to go against what the media is teaching you.

Khadija comments on how people think they live in tents in the desert. In other words, some people think that they are "backwards" and "uncivilized." Khadija corrects this false impression asserting their modernity through stating that there is no desert in Iraq and of course they have modern facilities like hospitals; Iraqis too are of a modern civilization. The racist stereotypes they confront are attributed to a lack of education, which is compounded by media misrepresentation. The Eurocentric unilinear path to civilization script is flipped and replaced by a linear narrative of Babylon as the first civilization and Iraqis as the pioneers of civilization. Eurocentrism is deconstructed and replaced with Babylocentrism, an ideology similar to Eurocentrism advocating "civility" and each imagining one's ethnic group as the superior population.

The Iraqis interviewed are competing for an elite genealogy of civilization based in history. "Being first" becomes the ultimate claim to belonging. As Ali's narrative illustrated earlier, Native Americans have legitimate claims to belonging in the United States because they were there first. Everyone else subsequently is equally an immigrant. Drawing a similar parallel, Iraqis, having created the "first" civilization, have legitimate claims to belonging to modern civilizations, such as the United States.

Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic*, states that Afrocentrism is a response to Eurocentrism. I would similarly claim that Babylocentrism, in the case of Iraqis, is a response to Eurocentrism. Iraqis find psychological nourishment in the narrative of Iraq as the first civilization and in subsequent European miseducation for displaying a lack of knowledge on this fundamental piece of history (Gilroy 1993: 189). In Babylocentric ideology, Iraqis become dominant by virtue of having historically contributed to "modern" civilization and the logic of racial hierarchy is left undisturbed. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have written, strategies of resistance can be complicit with strategies of power:

> Practices that are resistance to a particular strategy of power are thus never innocent of or outside power, for they are always capable of being tactically appropriated and redeployed within another strategy of power, always at risk of slipping from resistance against one strategy of power into complicity with another.
>
> (Gupta and Ferguson 1997: 18–19)

Babylocentrism, as a strategy to resist Eurocentrism, easily slips from resistance to being complicit with civilizational discourses. The Eurocentric dominant narrative of modernity is replaced with the Babylocentric dominant narrative of modernity, affording Iraqis a secure legitimate place within the modern US world as immigrants. Arab-American subjectivity emerges through this act of re-scripting the hegemonic discourse. The subordinate meanings imposed on their bodies are resisted and their identities are resignified with superior value within the operating regime of power/knowledge (Foucault and Gordon).

Civilizational discourses are not unique to Iraqis, but quite common amongst Arabs. Arabs often point to their history, be it Babylon or Ancient Egypt, as well as to having invented almost everything that begins with the Arabic prefix "al" including algebra, alchemy, and the alphabet to substantiate their belonging in the "civilized world." Whether we call it Babylocentrism in the case of Iraqis, or Arabcentrism in the case of Arabs more broadly, this ideology based on civilizational thought is one way in which Arabs seek to resist Eurocentric civilizational discourses, which are contemporarily represented in the writings of Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis.

The racial paradox that places Arabs in an ambivalent and illusive relationship to race in the United States leads to a variety of alibis and strategies to circumvent and resist being the target of racism. Since racialization leads to second-class citizenship status, the Iraqis interviewed seek to avoid discourses on race in an attempt to secure first-class citizenship. The melting pot rhetoric is used as an alibi to deny being subjected to racism and racist incidents are narrated as accidents. "I am from Saddam Hussein" emerges as a strategy to subvert and defer interpersonal racialization, while Babylocentrism is a strategy to resist Eurocentric and Orientalist inscriptions

on Arab identities. But what happens to this range of strategies and alibis to legitimize belonging and circumvent racialization during moments of crisis, such as the Gulf War, September 11, 2001, or the current war on Iraq? What happens when the Arab racial paradox crumbles and Arabs are blatantly positioned as the enemy of the US nation?

Arab-Muslim American abjection, the Gulf War and 9/11

These strategies to substitute racism with alternate explanations crumble during times of national crisis, such as the 1991 Gulf War and September 11, when "Arabs" and "Muslims" are actively abjected from US cultural ideology as "un-American" and from US national boundaries through detention and deportation. Sandoval-Sánchez has written that the abject body threatens

> to contaminate the symbolic order . . . people of color, homosexuals, people living with AIDS, and migrants in the U.S. must be kept at bay and relegated to the margins . . . Once expelled from the national body politic, the unclean and improper Other is translated as an alien, as a monster, an excess or lack that provokes disgust, anxiety, horror, and fear.
>
> (Sandoval-Sánchez: 548)

The US government enacted a series of measures to facilitate the literal abjection of Arab and Muslim bodies from the nation after September 11, expelling Arabs and Muslims from the United States through deportation. As the embodiment of terrorism and fanaticism after September 11, Arabs and Muslims inhabited the position of the grotesque, provoking anxiety, horror, disgust, and the national impulse to get rid of all things Arab and Muslim. Similarly, during the 1991 Gulf War, Saddam Hussein as a brutal dictator came to represent all Iraqis as barbaric, uncivilized, power-hungry, conniving, and grotesque.

The 1991 Gulf War raised questions about Iraqi citizenship, nationalism, and identity and also brought Orientalist ideology to the fore. Mervat Hatem has written about how the Gulf War accentuated the unstable status of Arabs in the United States:

> Nowhere was the U.S. public repudiation of the Arab "other" clearer than in the way it asked Arab Americans to respond to the war. According to one radio commentator, "In war there are no hyphenated Americans, just Americans and non-Americans". . . . Arab Americans' questionable loyalties were highlighted . . . Only crude choices and defin-itions were available. One could support the war and in this way prove one's nationalist credentials as an American. Or, one could oppose the war and be identified as un-American/traitor/enemy/Iraqi/Arab. There was no place for the many Arab Americans who simultaneously

disapproved of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the U.S. military plans for its reversal . . . These views indicated the deeply held belief that being both Arab and American was an oxymoron to the mainstream: one negated the other.

(Mervat Hatem: 373)

During the Gulf War and even more so after September 11, 2001, violence against Arab-Americans in the United States multiplied and Arabs became targets for FBI questioning. The FBI's stated purpose was to provide Arab Americans "protection" and to inquire as to whether they personally knew any terrorists, a clear instance of Orientalist and stereotypical views of Arabs as terrorists inserting itself into a nationalist project of interrogating Arabs and questioning their legitimacy in the US nation. How did the interviewed Iraqis deal with being in the position of national abjection?

When I asked Ali and Fatiha what their experiences were like living in the United States during the Gulf War, Ali recounted the following:

ALI: Well, in 1991, during the Gulf War, when Saddam went to Kuwait, America led the war to attack Iraq and here the government of the United States, CIA, they think that Iraqi people will revenge back. They think that we are loyal to our country, Iraq, because America hit Iraq very hard, they hit Baghdad. And the FBI went to most of the Iraqis and they came to me too. They came to the store. They know I am Iraqi and they show me their pass and say they are from the FBI. I said, "What happened?" They said, "We want to talk to you." I said, "I will talk to you outside in the restaurant, not in my store." I went out with them and sat with them and they said, "Tell us about your history, what are you doing here, how long have you been here?" I said, "Look, I'm here, I'm American, I love America, whatever happens outside is politics. We are against the war, that is for sure. Our family will suffer. But still we are loyal to this country. We have never done anything wrong here. These are politics. He made mistake, Saddam there. Iraqi people are paying the price. Why I am here? Why I am living in this country? I love this country and I did not do anything wrong and never would. Never! Never! I love this country but of course I feel for Iraq." They said, "Okay, thank you very much." They got up, shook my hand and left. I gave him a true answer [. . .] during that time I did try to stay away from people and not tell them that I am Iraqi. They ask me where I come from and I would not answer. Because some people really hate Iraqis. They think Iraq is against the United States. Every house and every store put out an American flag, as if America is fighting Vietnam. It is really stupid [. . .] I am American. I have an American passport. I am proud. Really I am proud. I love this country. I would sacrifice my life for this country. I have everything; my wealth, my health, good living, my children's education, everything in this country. I love this country very much . . . Better

quality, cheaper price. Better food, cheaper price. Better living. Everything is better. The best is here. God bless America. We protect America, really. If I have to go to the army to protect America, I go. That is if somebody come to fight here, I fight. I do not go there. I protect America here if anything happen. Really if something happens, I protect America. That is a duty. To reward the country that gave us everything, opened up their arms to us. We live here good. We have a good living. We grew up here. We have our wealth, thank God. We have our children. We appreciate this country very much. As an Iraqi I am proud of where I come from. I am proud of my culture, my culture. I tell it to my children and I hope they will give it to their children as well, to our grandchildren. In the meantime, this is our country, we love this country and we say God bless America, we appreciate this country.

In his previous narrative, Ali declared his belonging, validated by a judge, and in this instance, he concedes that he has concealed his identity as the result of the war, public suspicion towards Iraqis, and government questioning. In this section of his narrative, Ali recounts that the US government questioned his belonging during the Gulf War and he asserts his belonging through affirming his loyalty to the US nation. Loyalty, however, is linked to cheaper prices, the accumulation of wealth, and the attainment of "good living." This emphasis on the ability to be a consumer does not negate patriotic devotion, but rather illuminates the central role that being a consumer plays in US citizenship. After 9/11, for example, US residents were encouraged by the President to enact their patriotism through shopping, eating out, and going to plays, through being consumers.

As Arlene Dávila has written, one's sense of rights and entitlements in the United States often comes through being a consumer:

> As the growing literature on transnationalism clearly illustrates, the new diversity ensuing from transnationalism and the flow of populations and cultural goods have not only opened possibilities for new pluralities and hybrid identities, but, most significantly, created new demands for establishing "belonging." And two variables seem to be constant in these processes: culture, involving the existence of particular and lingering hierarchies of race/ethnicity/language/nationality that mediate people's position within any given society; and consumption, insofar as – whether as exiles, citizens, permanent residence, or immigrants – individuals are consumers first and foremost.
>
> (Dávila 2001: 11)

Times of crisis call for different strategies to claim belonging. Declaring patriotic devotion is one such strategy. Patriotism, however, is not based on unconditional love of country, but is mediated by class, financial success, and one's subsequent position as a consumer. Patriotic devotion can also be seen

as a strategy to mask race through its attempt to say, "I am not one of them, I am one of you." Whereas former strategies dealt with interpersonal interactions, patriotic devotion operates to respond to national abjection that does not cease with individuals declaring their love for the United States, and is often accompanied by an attempt to conceal one's identity.

The national abjection of the Arab-Muslim was even more intense after September 11 than during the 1991 Gulf War. When "America" was attacked by a group of Arab-Muslim men, all Arabs and Muslims in the United States faced a crisis as the spotlight of scrutiny shone brightly on them. Chronically suspected of terrorism and facing vast new state measures including and leading to detention, deportation, "voluntary interviews," and revised INS registration requirements designed to monitor, track, and surveil, Arab/Muslim racial status shifted in the United States. As Lisa Lowe has written, "legal institutions function as flexible apparatuses of racialization and gendering in response to the material conditions of different historical moments" (Lowe 1996: 22). In response to September 11, the US government enacted measures, which effectively marked Arabs and Muslims as abjectionable and subsequently altered the "racial formation" in the United States (Omi and Winant). Whereas before September 11, Arab- and Muslim-Americans were not included in discourses on race and racism in the United States, a public discourse emerged after September 11 on whether Arabs and Muslims were being treated fairly or being subjected to racism with the rise in hate crimes and government measures targeting Arabs and Muslims. The discourse on Arab and Muslim race and racism came to the fore primarily through the debate on racial profiling. Many newspapers, magazines, and talk shows sought to discuss whether it was fair or racist to racially profile Arabs and Muslims in airports and through this discourse on racism against Arabs, Arabs became raced in the United States. Prior discussions on racial profiling focused on "DWB" (Driving While Black/Brown), and shifted to "FWA" (Flying While Arab), creating a parallel experience shared by African-Americans, Latinos, and now Arabs in being racialized and criminalized.

Now that the discourse of racism is more available to Arab Americans to explain and describe discriminatory experiences, will it be adopted and used, and if so, to what effect? Though I do not have interview data at this time through which to answer these questions, it does appear that the discourse of race and racism is being adopted and used more frequently. What this shift from racial ambiguity to abjection and racialization has illuminated is that race is still a prominent category in our society, infused with layers of power, forcing us to reckon with it and garner our subjectivity either through it or in spite of it. Race remains a "contradictory site of struggle for cultural, economic, as well as political membership in the United States" (Ibid.: ix). Despite resistance by some Arab-Americans, being raced will prove to be useful. So long as Arab-Americans remain racially illegible within the US racial terrain, and without the appropriate language to address their

exclusion, the inclusion of Arabs into the conception of American citizenship will remain problematic. Racial ambiguity did not rid Arabs of racist experiences, but only allowed them to be masked and go unacknowledged. Circumventing being raced is ultimately about circumventing second-class citizenship status. Being raced has proven to be one way to claim rights in this country and it therefore becomes increasingly important for Arab- and Muslim- Americans to join other racialized groups in demanding first-class citizenship rights and a true democratic melting pot despite skin color, religious belief, or cultural difference.

Notes

1 I would like to thank David Palumbo-Liu, Akhil Gupta, and Renato Rosaldo for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this chapter.
2 See Therese Saliba's essay, "Resisting Invisibility" for a discussion of several legal cases involving Arab-American rights and citizenship, which point to the racial ambiguity of Arabs in the United States. Also see the case of the Iraqi professor who was denied tenure and could not claim that the denial was racially motivated since Arabs are "white": Saint Francis College v. Al-Khazraji, 481 U.S. 604 (1987).
3 Nadine Naber's forthcoming work examines these post-September 11 coalitions.
4 Six people were interviewed: three men and three women; four Muslims, one Christian, and one Jew. Three agreed to be tape-recorded and three did not. As a result, I paraphrase what was said in some interviews as opposed to providing direct quotes. Requesting not to be tape-recorded is significant as they did not want any evidence of their words to remain, fearing either the Iraqi government or the US government questioning them on their views. Of course, all names have been changed to protect their identities. Two of them, I had met before and the other four I met for the first time at the interview. The interviews took place in their homes over a meal. These interviews are too few to draw broad conclusions upon and are by no means representative of all Arab-Americans. They do, however, represent how some Arab-Americans negotiate their identities in the United States. The narrative of the Iraqi-Jew was distinct from the others interviewed but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter. Having migrated from Iraq to Israel and later to New York, he had lived through overt discrimination in Israel as an Arab and therefore had a strong racial identification and did not practice such tactics to circumvent being racialized.

9   Beyond the Diaspora
Letting Arab voices be heard

Ghalya F. T. Al-Said

The aim of this chapter is to suggest that languages used for political messages must often be constrained by those languages (and types of language) used by the organizations that wield power. I will suggest that it is of little value to use language for the benefit only of the communicator, or for the benefit of a small group within an alien culture. This chapter will therefore explore language use by both individual groups of various kinds and governments of various persuasions. Of particular interest to me are those individual groups that seek to promote issues of local importance, communicating these to other communities, which may not share their language. It should be recognized that, frequently, sharing cultural norms such as language is difficult: for example, the English and Americans are not in general well-known for their ability to learn or adapt to using other languages or recognizing the value of other cultures. A recent example comes to mind. While interviewing Taliban and Al-Qaʻeda combatants detained in Afghanistan at the fort of Qala-i-Jhangi in the province of Mazar-i-Sharif, the CIA operatives on the ground spoke in English using phrases such as 'are you a terrorist?' Linguistic and psychological subtlety were not on their agenda – or perhaps even in their vocabulary. This may not have been a problem of training only, but rather of perception. Although it has long been recognized that the CIA are no experts in Middle Eastern politics or languages, and that their operatives in the area are poorly trained, this example (exposed in a BBC documentary on the Afghanistan conflict by Jamie Doran, *Massacre at Mazar*) starkly shows how linguistic failure may give rise to dire consequences. The CIA operative doing most of the questioning died when his threats were taken seriously and the prisoners tried to escape, an attempt later ended by US bombing and General Rashid Dostum's firepower which left 600 prisoners dead.

The lesson must partly be a linguistic one: trying to communicate from a 'superior' perspective, using language as an expression of the communicator's 'superiority' and identity, is likely at best to end in no communication at all, and at worst to end with the kind of disaster witnessed at Qala-i-Jhangi. No one likes to be talked down to. In the case of Qala-i-Jhangi the prisoners clearly felt hectoring communication in English by CIA operatives was

simply a prelude to their executions by those same operatives and their Northern Alliance allies.

Just as the West (and most particularly the United States because of the linguistic homogeneity of its ruling classes) tends to assume that the only valuable listeners are those who share one's language and culture, so Arab governments, instead of promoting local issues in languages understood by other language speakers, tend to focus on using Arabic to promote government agendas, the only audience being their own people. The effect is not dissimilar from those CIA operatives at Qala-i-Jhangi, and is basically like a person so self-absorbed that he only speaks to himself, considering communication to others to be somehow beneath him. Exclusion of those with the means to help or change things globally, by governments unwilling to alter patterns of communication, is one reason for the current lack of understanding between the West and the Arab world. The aim of too many Arab governments is still to communicate only to captive local audiences: the international community seems hardly to exist. While such a narrow cultural agenda may be destructive when used by the powerful (English-speaking cultures) it may be suicidal when used by the weak.

Syria, typically, speaks in Arabic about a narrow range of issues to those who already know what the communication will be about: communication becomes a muddy pool of recycled information. This practice suggests a cultural arrogance (as well as a political naivety): a stigma is attached to the use of any other language except that controlled and known by the government. Out of fourteen papers directly or indirectly sponsored by the government only one has an English language version (the *Syrian Times*: and to make matters worse this has rather inadequate Internet accessibility). There have been some changes since Bashar al-Assad's accession (notably a slight thawing in the amount of criticism allowed in the media) but these changes do not reflect any structural shift. A narrow, inward-looking agenda remains in place.

The importance of the spoken and written language to communicate culture and political needs is obvious. Language's role (both political and social) is changing as world languages undergo change. Whereas even ten years ago it might have been possible for small language groups to maintain their integrity because of geographic isolation, geography is less and less a barrier. This is one of the many effects of globalization. Now the language that has power is not only the language of NGOs such as the IMF and World Bank (both based in Washington), it is the language of those media organizations favoured by such bodies. Clearly English is a vital tool, yet I am not only talking about the importance of a single language group here, but rather of the way language can be used to communicate. We might be talking of spoken languages, or media languages, or, indeed, the language of business and political professionals. Professionals of all types recognize the need to widen and win debates – at the very least to publicize their cause by engaging in debates. What is often so painfully clear is that Middle Eastern

communicators do not see languages as tools of this kind. Language is a powerful weapon for those who know how to use it. For those who don't know the value of language, and of language's channels, or are unable for any reason to access what a specific language can offer, the power of the weapon is just as obvious if not more so. Language when used effectively can empower or disarm. An obvious example is the media.

> [T]he large bureaucracies of the powerful *subsidize* the mass media, and gain special access by their contribution to reducing the media's costs of acquiring the raw materials of, and producing, news. The large entities that provide this subsidy become the 'routine' news sources and have privileged access to the gates. Non-routine sources must struggle for access, and may be ignored by the arbitrary decision of the gatekeepers.
>
> (Chomsky 1988: 22)

It thus becomes more difficult year by year to influence people if you don't have practiced access to the channels of communication. Part of the practice must be to use the language appropriate to a situation in an appropriate and thoughtful way. One of the ways that Chomsky's 'non-routine' sources (perhaps a Palestinian political organization) can be frozen out of any communication is by the lack of professionalism of the source itself. When an Israeli spokesperson addresses the BBC, she or he is usually of British origin; if an Israeli spokesperson addresses NBC she or he is of US origin; when a Palestinian spokesperson addresses a Western news agency she or he is frequently a heavily Arabic-accented male, who simply doesn't know the correct ideological buttons to push – or indeed that they need pushing at all. Political displacement or vulnerability does not, necessarily, make people more thoughtful or humble in their communication: it may drive them into sociolinguistic ghettos, which are comforting places to remain, though not effective places to launch campaigns that will influence others.

Many millions of people every year find themselves displaced in some way. As refugees they experience new communities with languages different to theirs; often very different. A struggle to communicate, to be able to push issues vital to their well-being and to place ideas and demands on the agenda of their host community, becomes critically important. Yet at the same time it is difficult to achieve anything if your use of the language of that host community is inadequate.

Is it possible to communicate effectively when the ideological norms of the host country's media may be very alien?

> Given the imperatives of corporate organization and the workings of the various filters, conformity to the needs and interests of privileged sectors is essential to success. In the media, as in other major institutions, those who do not display the requisite values and perspectives will be regarded as 'irresponsible', 'ideological', or otherwise aberrant, and will tend to fall

by the wayside.... Those who adapt...will then be free to express
themselves with little managerial control, and they will be able to assert,
accurately, that they perceive no pressures to conform. The media
are indeed free – for those who adopt the principles required for their
'societal purpose'.

(Ibid.: 304)

Although Chomsky is here examining the way the media manage to filter out
'aberrant' or deviant ideologies, maintaining the acceptable norm, this obser-
vation of corporate behaviour has huge relevance for the use of language.
Conformity to the 'needs and interests of privileged sectors' can of course be
expressed ideologically: I appear on *Newsnight* and my part in the debate will
be guaranteed because I will not radically disagree with the veracity of the
majority of those ideas discussed. To do so would entail considerable and
complex explanation, something to which television does not lend itself. This
problem is exacerbated for those who differ not only ideologically (perhaps by
being a Palestinian Muslim, and member of Hamas) but more so for those
who also differ linguistically. Such a person must explain terms used in
Arabic, in a translation that may be inadequate or alien to interviewer and
listener. Although the pressure to adapt will be considerable for those who are
already members of the society a media represents, those who speak a differ-
ent language may not feel these same pressures; or, if they feel them, they may
do so as pressures to exclude them or distort their message. Speech is only
ever 'free' for those who agree to share a common ideological and linguistic
ground. For those who cannot share the language of their host state, or who
choose not to, freedom of speech is not only irrelevant: it is an impossibly
perverse statement.

The obstacle of language in such a situation can be seen and felt in many
ways. At a personal level the exclusion of individuals who do not share the
dominant language is easy to observe: they cannot fill in the necessary forms
easily, ask directions and understand replies, or convince members of their
host society that they have something to say which is relevant. Besides this,
there is the continuing debate whether the new community should loosen
what some may see as unrealistic demands on them to accept and expect
newcomers and their culture (most importantly, their language) on equal
terms. In many EU states (Germany and France in particular) adapting to and
adopting the native culture is seen by many as the requisite key to becoming
part of their new homeland. Successive British Home Secretaries' comments
regarding the 'rules' which should be obeyed by newcomers are not untypical
of political responses across the EU and North America.

When the new language is a dominant one such as English or French
there is an assumption that it must be 'natural' for newcomers to use it in
preference to their own, 'inferior' languages. There is a fear that any parallel
use of the languages of newcomers might dilute indigenous culture (or, worse,
somehow corrupt it); this is also the fear of those entering the West, and

perhaps an even more real one. After all, the strength of a language group suggests its influence has begun well before any group of people have even set foot in their host country. Therefore the demands of newcomers may be to continue communicating in the language they came with, and which they associate strongly with a culture and identity they wish to conserve.

This is a curiosity. I see these problems as indicative of a battleground, where political control has been successfully exerted by the most powerful, and used in many situations where a particular government or culture does not wish negative national or social problems to be broadcast across physical or psychological borders. There is often a stigma attached to anyone trying to use another language (perhaps the language of a powerful but alien host community) to propagate and promote issues relating to the new community abroad.

What is happening is a struggle, which is only part of the wider range of confrontations and struggles that constitute society as a whole. 'No "whole way of life" is without its dimension of struggle and confrontation between opposed *ways* of life' (Hall 1986: 37). However too often groups see the challenge of engaging a new society in dialogue as beneath them, and withdraw from the dialogue or refuse to engage in it.

Incoming communities need not fear anything as drastic as total cultural assimilation. What is needed here is a realization that while, to communicate effectively, a communicator has to carry their message in the language spoken by the community he or she is trying to influence, or whose agendas the communicator is attempting to broach, there is no reason to believe that somehow in doing so one is giving up one's own culture as a hostage to alien practice.

Many states have invested heavily in their own linguistically based propaganda. This chapter will attempt to highlight some of these aspects where a language has made it either easy or difficult for some nations or countries to broadcast their agendas effectively.

Visual images in broadcast and newsprint journalism act like the lenses in cameras: where once the image is captured, it becomes a fixed, permanent, digitized record. It also becomes, in some sense at least, a universal language understood universally. This was illustrated forcibly during the recent unrest across the Palestinian Territories, in the face of considerable violence by the Jewish authorities. The camera which captured the faces of the young boys murdered by the Israeli soldiers, especially that of 12-year-old Mohammed al-Dora as his father tried to protect him, did more in terms of pure communication than all the articles written about the current unrest up to that moment.[1] This image transcended the limitations of language. Without it the number of people made aware of the shocking events would have been far fewer.

The difficulty of penetrating a society with information (especially information which may contradict or even just confront accepted opinion) despite the constraints of language barriers may well be one of the greatest problems

facing those wishing to construct an inclusive polity. There may be relatively few political communicators who understand precisely what language and its use can do (or not do) for a cause, and precisely how the systems of media actually work. A graphic such as a photograph or length of video footage has proved itself to be the most successful way of transmitting simple messages and this is unlikely to change in the near future. Creating some kind of true lingua franca will not be as simple as generating Esperanto; while English may come to dominate globally, there will remain areas of linguistic conservatism and poverty where graphics will still be needed. Nothing, however, will subvert the power of spoken and written languages at the everyday level for a very long while: it is still the most effective and usual form of communication. For more complex messages, and especially challenging messages which do not easily fit within the agenda of society, language will continue to be a code that includes and excludes at the same time.

At the outset of the twenty-first century, which communication problems face developing states? How can Third World governments, institutions, or people communicate effectively with the rest of the world, using written language? How can the poorest states attract the attention of the rich, English language dominated Northern Hemisphere? They already suffer the disadvantage of poverty; poverty and disaster create hoards of those with whom the West should sympathize, but infrequently anyone to whom the West is willing to listen. Powerful images appear on Western television screens and are accompanied by Western reporters' commentaries, but rarely by the comments of those directly affected. The poor may suffer, but not speak.

It is not difficult to identify areas where the Third World is unable to send effective messages (in whatever media – from mass to individual voice) about locally important issues. Areas such as debt repayment, the role of bodies such as the IMF, health management, world trade or post-colonial imperialism spring readily to mind. How is it possible to generate a picture to interest and arouse a Western public or government without using the common language of power – often, but not always, English? How is it possible to persuade governments and international organizations to listen and answer reasonable demands constructively? The problem ranges from a spokesperson, whose English might not be good enough to guarantee him a slot on CNN, to a bureaucrat who may not be able to make an adequate case to visiting World Bank officials.

No language is without power, and linguistic power is the consequence of the historical context of that language. Where has it developed? What are its associations? In what context is meaning continually regenerated? The languages of the poorest nations of the world (Cantonese, Hindi, Punjabi, Arabic, Swahili and so on) are one of the impoverishing factors governing the political, economic, and diplomatic relationships between the poor and rich hemispheres of the globe.

An important corollary to this lies in the unwillingness of developing states to leave the security of their linguistic social and cultural enclaves.

This unwillingness to debate wider global issues in a global language is symptomatic of the way most vital local information is focussed within these regions only. There is little desire for these entities to promote real Third World issues outside Third World societies. Plenty of locally based information is processed and reprocessed on educational schedules, through media and local government information centres, even though this information has already been well publicized in those societies. In some cases these facts sustained public opinion in a kind of cultural bubble. (An example of this, within Europe, was Serbia under Milosevic.)

Political corruption and disintegration, breakdown of social cohesion, lack of basic health care, little rule of law, no respect for the basic freedoms recommended in the UN Charter on Human Rights are possibly only marginally less systemic now across the globe than they were fifty years ago. Yet, lack of publicity beyond the developing world has allowed these abuses to remain, to worsen, and frequently to become structurally ingrained in the political operations of a state. The criminalization of political and economic life (Bayart *et al.* 1999) can only happen when there is no transparency: bad practice is allowed to continue because there is no scrutiny. Syria, Morocco, and Egypt are three such examples of systematic internal abuses by governments against their people.

In a world dominated by the linguistic, commercial, and philosophical structures of the hegemony exerted by English-speaking nations (previously the United States and the United Kingdom, now, increasingly including the EU) it may not be so strange that many disadvantaged cultures are tempted to retreat into a past represented by their own cultural and linguistic uniqueness. Such retreats are represented politically by 'fundamentalist' religious ideologies, and although such conservatism may be short term, it runs directly against an important previous historical trend.

Following the Second World War the publicizing of the internal political activities of Western states became the dominant fare of the developing global media. The swift break-up of the British Empire between 1945 and 1970 had perhaps as much to do with the growing universality of the English language, as the 'mother' country's post war enfeeblement. The international community began to debate along lines described by those states which were pre-eminent at the UN – notably the United States and, later, the EU, united by an understanding of basic libertarian principles, frequently encoded in English. This gave those states, which had been British territories, the intellectual (and linguistic) munitions for the coming struggle.

Vigorous journalistic or academic inquiry is the most potent vehicle for uncovering and publicizing abusive governmental and quasi-governmental activities. Most of this work is done by organizations based in or funded by the developed world: developing states have very few organizations or bodies of this kind. States that realized the importance of such bodies have enjoyed the benefits of such publicity, primarily being able to affect Western opinion-formers in their favour.

Since social and historical movement is never a case of annual amelioration, but rather contains strange reverses and alternations of course, the liberating effect of English could not but be at the expense of other cultures and languages. A gain in terms of transparency through a shared global language was for some a loss of cultural integrity. Where a retreat into a linguistic ghetto was impossible, other barriers could be thrown up.

Zimbabwe has stifled media access, while in Saudi Arabia (and many other Arab states) the notion of access is totally alien. Those states that erected barricades of secrecy, such as the former Yugoslavia, almost inevitably began harming themselves: such barricading affects the sense of security of such societies. Often there are unsavoury activities states engage in against their own citizens and these are consistently obscured by hindering the activities of academics and journalists, and the prime tool for this is to decouple the state linguistically from the wider global debate. In Serbia, Milosevic could do very little despite closing down the Western-orientated *Telegraph* in early 1999. Already the cultural borders had become too porous for true containment. Indeed greater access to information, and the increasing powerlessness of governments to adjust its flow, has meant that on a macro scale communication is difficult to control unless one chooses the route of the ghetto.

The incredible speed with which information can now be disseminated (by whatever means, newsprint and broadcast media, the Internet or even physical travel) has enhanced both the potential and the actual depth of the public grasp of a nation's affairs. Operating as 'propagandists' are numerous supra-national and national organizations, often with specific remits from a whole range of clients (states, companies, pressure groups, or even individuals). Information is no longer the prerequisite of the elites: over the past fifty years, with increasing speed and effectiveness, huge population segments have been barraged with a variety of communications. However, the active share taken by the developing world in manufacturing messages rather than merely consuming them, remains very small. After all, within those states there is already a practice of governments not to publicize their activities. The oxygen of publicity can be a poisonous element for some very specific and culturally isolated states and cultural groups. In such societies (adapted to secrecy by years of political practice) the importance of openness in communications is rarely acknowledged. Even in so-called 'open' European societies such as the United Kingdom, there are fears that the Internet may pose a threat to certain inner workings of state life.

Even when issues are promoted by Third World governments or quasi-governmental bodies the methods used are frequently ineffective. There simply is no dialogue going on within these societies – no sense of a society informing itself about important issues. Thus problems of concern fade from the agenda to the point of being dropped from the debate entirely. This is especially the case with human rights, economic or social imbalances, and environmental issues, all of which are denied space for debate on the social

notice board. When such issues are raised their previous absence can be measured by the shock created by their presence.

In Syria, *Al-Doumari*,[2] a satirical weekly published by political cartoonist Ali Farzat, is one such publication. Before it, there had been nothing similar in Syria. Farzat's political cartoons tackled everything from government corruption, masculine identity, the treatment of women and the growth of religious fundamentalism. However *Al-Doumari* has had a difficult course to steer. At first it was careful, but seeing circulation increase, and perceiving the thirst for satire in an audience which had, until then, known only the government line, it became more daring. This lead Farzat into direct confrontation with Assad, and threatened with closure, *Al-Doumari* became for several months much tamer.

Naturally circulation collapsed, and Farzat once more became outspoken in his cartoons. In June 2002 the regime's censors sent in the security forces to the newspaper's offices in Damascus, and staff were ordered to stop printing the next issue; the particular objection of the government had been two pages criticizing the pace of economic change and hinting at government personnel problems. Farzat published a censored version of the issue, with the two pages blank. It may be primarily because Farzat's most powerful cartoons do not use Arabic that this has come to the attention of the Western media.

One result of this 'issue discussion poverty' is that the gap between haves and have-nots grows larger daily. Edward Said in his discussion of Palestinian and wider Arab and Islamic issues, traces out the web of communication deprivation, illustrating that within the Arab sphere of influence there is very little attention paid to how local problems could or should be tackled. The know-how of communicating to a western audience seems beyond Arab writers (or perhaps Arab writers are not concerned with communicating to the West) (Said 1995). He suggests a thorough study of how Arab societies operate: how they receive, disseminate, and digest material relevant to themselves, and how they manage to do the same with material about societies with totally different histories and languages. He believes the use of a specific language in a specific society is of prime importance if an issue is to succeed in being publicized and understood; language is the key to motivating public opinion towards understanding important issues.

For example, English should logically be used for promoting Arab issues in the United States and EU since it is already *de facto* the global lingua franca, and considered the first language of politics and business, and the first language of those most powerful of modern states. This is not to say that those who need to propagandise their cause should not use French in France and German in Germany. The basic thinking must be that these developed states will not come submissively to listen and understand what developing states have to say. Instead, developing states must play the developed world's game, however unfortunate this necessity may be. If developing states want to publicize problems, and create an accurate picture of these to be formulated by those states with commercial and political power, then they

have to approach the developed nations in much the same way as the developed nations approach the developing: if Coca-Cola or McDonald's advertise their presence in Arab societies using Arabic, then, conversely, Arabs must use English in the United Kingdom or United States to communicate their agendas. In Edward Said's opinion (Ibid.), until now the matter of communication protocols has not been regarded as the main cause of the silencing of developing states' voices.

Failure to recognize and use language protocols, that is using language as a political tool in a political environment, creates the circularity witnessed in many developing and certainly most Arab societies. Issues are recycled with no 'external' thinking added. This is a crucial issue. Communicating in the language of the powerful is only the first step: the second is to communicate in ways the powerful can understand and relate to (maybe even ways which fit with their global picture). If the developing world wants the developed to take notice of its problems, then it could hardly do better than imitate the Israelis. The reason Israel is listened to (and believed) is because it speaks to each nation in its own language. The fact that Israel prides itself on the primacy of its own language makes very little difference; Israeli political philosophy values a sense of *realpolitik*. When it comes to propagandizing the Israeli agenda through the dissemination of news about itself, other languages are cleverly utilized. Indeed when the Israelis seek to affect Arab opinion or opinion makers, they speak in Arabic. (In Israel itself, Arabic Israeli-owned newspapers are just one tool, albeit important, of Israeli governance.) Second, when Israeli spokespeople seek to affect the agenda of Western news agencies, they choose those narrative structures already familiar to, or of concern to Western audiences. An example would be following the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York: Israeli spokespeople used the attacks as a way to justify military action within Israel on the 'now you know how it feels' basis.

Within the United States and the EU lobbies echo with developmental issues, each vying for the attention of those with power, or access to power, or even the political leverage possible by appealing to the democratic voice of ordinary people. Edward Said has observed (Ibid., 1996) that in the United States there are thousands of academics constantly defending the rights of Israel, and they do it in English within patterns set up by local agendas. Yet when it comes to Arab academics and lobbyists, despite the fact there are far fewer academics who wish to talk about Arab issues, even fewer think it worthwhile propagating the necessary information in English, or observing how best to insert issues of Arab importance into local agendas. Logic might dictate that the weaker one's numerical position, the more one should use all the tools to hand to achieve one's goals. Arab writers seem to have conceded defeat and withdrawn into a linguistic ghetto.

The United States has two main language groups: English and Spanish (11.8 percent of the US population speaks Spanish as a first or an only language, and this is increasing). For academic and journalistic purposes, English is entirely dominant. However, when it comes to Arab writers

discussing Arab issues the language used is Arabic, despite the fact that fewer than 2 per cent of US citizens speak it as either a first or second language. This is even more surprising when the people who need to listen to and have their political behaviour affected by the Arab argument are unlikely to be Arabic speakers.

One of the biggest propagandists of the twentieth century is the BBC. Beginning its life in 1923 it quickly became an institution able to dictate areas and levels of debate, as well as having it within its power to exclude those it deemed unworthy from the broadcasting agenda. In this sense then it is a typical PSB (public service broadcaster) (McLoone 1996), and one which developed and faced crises in a way similar to many other PSBs (Tracey 1994). The British government quickly understood the importance of disseminating news in a manner suited to both political purposes and audience needs. As an imperial broadcaster with global imperatives, it soon diversified into the vernacular languages of the Empire. Every region had its own broadcasting sub-network, with studios often located in London at Bush House, so that the BBC's reach became truly global before any other comparable broadcaster. The BBC provided news and information about the United Kingdom, its agriculture, industry, politics, and the social interests of its peoples, as well as its take on world events. It became the explanatory mouthpiece for any relevant government position. This generated a raft of useful results, encouraging British trading links at a time when the United Kingdom was going through a major period of innovation. Many ordinary global consumers gained a preference for British goods, education, and culture simply through being part of the BBC World Service audience.

Peter Partner observes that the Arabic service of the BBC (begun in 1938) found a new raison d'être in the 1950s to counteract the positive press Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser was enjoying (Partner 1988). Here was a joining in the lists of two very different ideologies: Arab nationalism given a voice by Arab Radio *Sawt al-'Arab min al-Qāhira*, broadcasting from Cairo and the older waning imperialism of a European order which had lost some of the will and most of the resources to extend its reach globally. However it still could see that language, appropriate use, and an appealing narrative style generated and maintained important communicative processes. Despite constricting corporatism at home, here was communicative outreach at its most effective.

Contrast this with the way Arab media have attempted to influence the world. Since the 1970s, a new rivalry has grown between the various Arab news media in an attempt to capitalize on the relative affluence of the Arab Diaspora in Europe. The first Arabic newspaper to be established in the UK was the daily *Al-Arab* in 1975. Established by the veteran Libyan journalist, Rashad al-Houni, this was also the first Arabic daily to be solely printed and distributed from a European capital (London). Many other newspapers and magazines followed this lead, as well as an Arabic TV channel (MBC – Middle East Broadcasting Centre[3]), established in the late 1980s. MBC broadcasts from London to the Arab world via the Astra satellite, and has

been very successful in capturing a niche in this latest stage of the media revolution. There are now many other stations competing as technology and access to technology becomes cheaper and simpler.

However, where are such media directing their efforts at the non-Arabic speaking world, carrying information about present Middle Eastern problems to those for whom Arab issues had not been on the agenda? Had such channels been developed perhaps the Palestinian problem, the current problems between the West and Iraq and the preceding, disastrous years of sanctions would not have taken the routes they did: alternative voices might have been heard more effectively. The lack of such an effective media offering an alternative perspective may have contributed to, or at least helped maintain the West's poor understanding of the Arabs. Should even a fraction of the vast resources existing in the Middle East be directed towards changing the attitudes of the developed nations, then maybe profound political shifts would be possible. Perhaps a more enlightened Western public would lobby governments to be less sympathetic towards Israel, or indeed towards those Arab despots so beloved of the West. But because little material is broadcast in English from an Arab perspective to show what life is really like either in the Occupied Territories, or as an Arab living under the harsh restrictions of most Arab political systems, the chance to build a bridgehead between two cultural traditions is severely hampered. Shifts in political perspective will take longer and, when they occur, will be less controllable.

Whatever information is gathered about developmental issues (issues of water in Turkey, Jordan, Israel, and Iraq, for example) it has been done by Western news agencies and very much on Western terms. Of course there are other routes for getting messages across. Amnesty International, despite having little or no government support (whatever muscle it has developed coming mainly from those ordinary committed members of the public) has developed an effective lobbying presence globally. Amnesty tailors its use of language depending on its area of operations. In the Middle East Arabic will be used. In comparison, a while ago I was given a leaflet by a group of Turkish demonstrators in front of the Belgium embassy in London. This was written in very poor English, the language used was so sub-standard that it was incomprehensible. Neither English speakers, nor Turks living in the United Kingdom, nor in fact anyone with knowledge of English (except perhaps the writers themselves) would have the foggiest idea of its purpose. For me this event focussed the question of the use of language to propagate information in a particular society for particular reasons. How could a disorganized form of language ever persuade even an interested or sympathetic passer-by, let alone a wider public within a nation which has pride in its language?

Edward Said details a very similar problem, in an interview he cites:

> Arafat never really worked at understanding the Israelis – their political thinking, specific objectives and methods of negotiating. This is a situation of ceasing 'to understand'. This is not a problem of competence

or incompetence only. There are other and graver dimensions to this issue.... Let me give you some examples: is it acceptable to formulate and sign an agreement with Israel without seeking any expert legal opinion? What would explain such conduct except indifference to the fate of the Palestinian people to the point of complicity? Let me give you another example: Arafat and his principal aids in the Oslo agreement, Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) and Abu Ala (Ahmed Quray), do not speak or really understand English, which is the language in which the Oslo document is written. Nor did they seek advice about the language. If you want to sign an agreement with Israel, then you must know that the other party to this agreement will take what you sign seriously, and that you cannot retreat from it except by making more concessions.

(Said 1995: 182)

Proper and appropriate language use is vital, not only in negotiations but in every aspect of the promotion of international issues. Developing states, however, have often failed to take language seriously, even when bringing their problems to international attention. This is why so many humanitarian issues have met a sea of Western indifference. Within the UN, developing states complain about the meagre return they receive for their agricultural produce, raw materials and labour-added goods sold to the West. The prices for cocoa, coffee, bananas, leather, and rubber, hardly merit the labour spent on production. In complaining through UNLO or the World Bank, such governments' complaints fall on deaf ears. For instance, I know of a particular issue noted by a European representative who sat on a board which dealt with trade and economic imbalance between the two hemispheres. In his opinion whatever negotiating position developing countries put forward, their ability to gain a hearing withered almost before it was started. This is because the United States, EU, and Japan (the 'big-hitters' of the G7) could defend themselves by coming to such meetings armed with the latest statistics, economic bulletins and analyses of weather prospects and monetary feasibility studies projected years into the future. Developing states' representatives, on the other hand, are generally unable to reply in kind. Not only do they lack such statistics, but their ability to put forward a coherent case in English is severely limited. Thus their cause is frequently compromised from the start, and this suits the developed world and developed financial interests all too well.

This communication imbalance is only the tip of an iceberg which must take into account the willingness of developing governments to correct these problems. Indeed it usually needs the efforts of a journalist, a writer, or perhaps even an artist of some kind, to come up with an innovative way to bridge the gap. But such efforts are rare; they risk a great deal (artists are easy targets for despots), and need a commensurate commitment to a cause from a broad base of politically aware people. Whatever efforts are made, their chances of success are limited, if they have not been professionally put together

linguistically or visually. Publicity techniques cannot be haphazard, especially since most of the organizations interested in promoting international justice are concentrated in the West. The training and resources required are by no means meagre, and may exceed the abilities of some developing governments let alone individual organizations based in developing states.

The languages of power create different types of messages (not perhaps those preferred by or most beneficial to developing populations) and speak in ways which exclude those groups who may not be 'linguistically preferential'. This exclusion may not always be designed, but the effect is powerful and devastating. Of course there is always a struggle for supremacy in the maintenance of any consensus; here, however, I have tried to describe a struggle merely to be heard. Being able to communicate and understand communication is a vital political tool. Without it, a group, society, state, or even states may become disenfranchised. In turn this destabilises entire regions, and the spiral of impoverishment is tightened and deepened. Just because the process of globalization has English as its first language, cannot by itself guarantee fairness in global communication. Maybe, as has been the case *within* the English-speaking world, language can grow to divide as much as to unite.

Notes

1 The image was captured by an Arab journalist working as a stringer for a French television station.
2 *Al-Doumari*, opened in 2001, is Syria's only independent newspaper, and one of the few truly independent satirical publications in Arabic. The editor claims sales are between 70 000 and 100 000 copies, but this may be an understandable exaggeration. Notably its circulation has dipped (currently it may be as low as 15 000–20 000) as the biting satire lost its teeth, and content became less independent of the government.
3 MBC is owned by a brother-in-law of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia. The house of Saud also bankrolls two pay TV channels (ART and Orbit), and has direct and indirect connections to LBCI (Lebanese Broadcasting Company International, Beirut) and Future (or 'Futur') TV. In November 2001, Future International merged operations with MBC, creating the strongest Arabic language satellite broadcaster. Future TV has also launched into the youth market with new digital channels such as Zen TV.

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