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THE AGENCY OF ART AND THE STUDY OF ARAB MODERNITY

By Kirsten Scheid*

> "Sir, do I take what you're saying to mean that people have a right to demonstrate?"
>
> "Yes, of course, this shows people are responsible and aware. An example is the massive demonstration downtown, where a record number of people are demanding the fall of the government…."

As the elderly masculine voice intones his list of demands in *fusha*, my listening dulls. This is a list oft-quoted in Lebanon since December 2006, and the rise in gas prices is infinitely more effective in grabbing my attention at the station where I am filling my car's tank on Hamra. But then the voice of the young female student returns with an unusual remark, a challenge to her teacher: "But people are saying that it's a bad demonstration, taking as an excuse its [unattractive] appearance and the garbage everywhere." Granted I had heard this remark from numerous friends and colleagues, but it was the last thing I expected to hear on Itha`at al-Nur radio station, the official voice of Hizbu'llah, one of the main parties to the demonstration. At the suggestion that the demonstration lacked credibility and merit due to its untidiness, the conversation took an even more unexpected turn:

> "Let me explain to you via example. Do you know Leonardo da Vinci's famous picture, *La Giaconda*?"
>
> "Yes, but it's so famous, it's beyond me to comment on it!"
>
> "Exactly," the professor pounces, his argument apparently clinched, "dust cannot detract from its meaning; it is so invaluable. If people were to focus on the dust and miss the painting, they do not deserve to comment on its beauty. And if people will focus on appearances of the demonstration, they are in no position to comment on its meaning in terms of its civilizational value."[1] (Itha`at al-Nur, March 18, 2007)

In an unpredictable way, the *Mona Lisa* is about gritty, local, sectarian politics of downtown Beirut. It tells us how to understand something of what is going on in the confrontation between government and opposition forces. The understanding of the absolute, non-negotiable aesthetic and civilizational value that this painting seems to crystallize displays reality, relevance, and potency when broadcast on a frequency that many downtown dwellers these days are tuning into,

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and when deployed on that channel in response to the ad campaigns promoted by a set of former downtown frequenters seeking to discredit the "usurpers" of Beirut's Martyr's Square. What this means to me, as a person studying art from a position in the Arab world, is that the value and meaning of what gets called "western art" in Lebanon and like areas cannot be understood by confining its meaning-makers to the West. And yet rarely, if at all, are art histories conducted that look at the construction of "western" art in the colonial margins. Indeed, histories as I have encountered them in my field research or heard them at recent conferences tend to assume that art is a new event in the Arab world.[2] While these reviewers differ in the extent to which they regard aesthetic production as a crucial part of ancient or authentic Arab history, they agree that "art" as defined in Western academies (the formally stylized, creative expression of a trained, autonomous individual) is at most a century old in Lebanon and like areas.[3] Moreover, the art that is discussed and explored is almost entirely art that seems to reveal a special Arab experience, that which is patently not of the West. One is much more likely to learn about Mona Hattoum or Shaker Hassan al-Sa`id than about Mona Trad Dabaghi or Taleb Al-Doueik. The *Mona Lisa*, then, would have no role towards the deep comprehension of life in contemporary Lebanon. That famed painting or art too closely resembling it, too obviously derivative from it, gets discarded from studies of the production of art. In this essay I will explore the ramifications of this deliberate lacuna, towards the goal of suggesting that not only does a miscomprehension of local identity and agency result but so, too, does a miscomprehension of the non-local. Why should it be that to make a difference, art must express a pre-extant difference?

Before continuing, I want to make a connection between art histories and other histories of the Arab world, and from it, a plea for more attention to the study of activity that has promoted that entity we today display, sell, plunder, memorialize and otherwise bandy around across the globe as if part of a single category: art. The problem is similar to that which has been identified as stemming from a nationalist historiographic paradigm.[4] Just as the Mandate *Grand Liban* has commonly been avoided as "a lacuna, a tragic gap between the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the achievement of full independence from the French"[5] so un-different art is avoided for being a pathetic gap between ancient aesthetic patterns and modern, individual expression. For a wide variety of Arab nationalist thinkers, the idea that fine-art painting is imported from non-Arab climes has meant often that it is to be scorned for its association with colonialism, which is said to have induced, to quote one, "artistic lethargy and cultural stagnation."[6] Treating (or rather failing to treat) colonial art as unrepresentative of moments in a national biography is not exclusive to Arabs studies. Nora Taylor notes among non-local scholars of Vietnamese art history the same hesitancy to approach the colonial period, the worry that it is less real than the ancient art that preceded it or the nationalist art that followed it.[7] Yet, she carefully distinguishes a local art historiography that treats the colonial period as the most real moment, the most flourishing, for how resistance invoked a nationalist form of expression. What is interesting is that in both historiographies, agency is assumed to lie with the colonizer, while the colonized simply reacts, to be dominated and passive or directed and still passive.

The recent interest in art production in former colonies has taken as a premise that modern art was imported fully-fledged from metropolitan capitals and applied by cultural entrepreneurs to peripheral settings as part of a process of modernization.[8] This style of analysis relies upon the assumption of a stable

quantity, the natives, who at a critical moment absorbed a spreading yet immalleable external substance, the Europeans. There must be a native who can inflect the generic Picasso or Cezanne but neither becomes the genuine quantity nor affect the latter's social existence. But what exactly was a "native" Lebanese painter in the 1920s or 30s, when Pablo Picasso and Paul Cézanne themselves were local phenomena? How did these enterprising young souls who found it imperative to follow their vocation by sailing across the sea define the boundaries of nativity and the horizons of possible belonging? How did their movement help others define other boundaries, sometimes isomorphic with the first and sometimes not? Nationalist visions of art-making have, therefore, prized art that seemed to offer an authentic or counter-colonial expression of an unpolluted, resilient native self. Artwork by the colonized that closely resembles metropolitan production has been systematically discarded as irrelevant to understanding both the local and the global.

Yet if art history has imitated other historical trajectories, it must be noted that this problem is particularly pertinent in the study of a field that by definition is assumed to be valuable to the extent that it reveals in the form of expression an inner self, a cultural essence, unchanging and unaffected by exterior impact. Contrariwise, metropolitan lifestyles and imperial powers are studied in the colonial peripheries as ways of finding out how they came into being, what they consist of, how they work, the argument being that actions on margin reveal truths otherwise obscured.[9] Only a few scholars have applied that insight to studying the dominated through their situations of domination, the copiers and mimic-men who gave birth to the "original."[10] What I want to suggest is that these acts in a realm defined for its makers not by place or race but by skill and expression were important acts *in* society rather than reflections *of* it. Yet what "society" meant for the actors or should mean for us who study them retrospectively can only become apparent if we surrender our historical certainty about the eventual outcome of French cultural boundaries (place) and self-sameness (race). Only then can we grasp what really was at stake in the experience of making and viewing painting in peripheral places like Mandate Lebanon.

To apply my argument concretely, I will explore the handling of art, colonial power, and agency in two histories that deal with painting that defined the meeting of Arabs and French. These studies—*Allure of Empire* by Todd Porterfield[11] and *Orientalist Aesthetics* by Roger Benjamin[12]—are valuable explorations that should be used by any scholar of art at intercultural junctures and particularly of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I discuss them here, however, to contrast their handling of art as social agent and to extrapolate from that difference lessons for a critical history of art and of the Arab world. Thus, I seek to trace a trajectory for studying intercultural encounters through art production in the Arab world, an area that, despite recent scholarly interest in its contemporary art production, has been largely neglected as a site for understanding the role of art in the production of power. The motive for tracing such a trajectory is to provide a basis from which to respond, in these days of consolidating super-power and globalizing art scenes, to two intertwined impulses: on the one hand, the solidification and reification of cultural boundaries that guard the distribution of resources and access to institutions; and on the other hand, the repeated invocation of "civilization" as a justification for acts on society, be they associated with empire-making or resistance-waging.

CONTRASTING STUDIES OF ARAB ART-MAKING

The fact is very few studies of the Arab world specifically employ the lens of art to understand social issues. In part, this seems to be a matter of disciplinary zoning as Lila Abu-Lughod explains, such that the Arab world has not been the site of a long genealogy of literature begetting new Arab art studies each generation.[13] While the medieval Arab world is recognized as having been full of so-called "ornamental" art and aesthetic flourishing, the relevance of artistic production in Arab lands seems to have been eclipsed, according to the standard literature cited above.[14] It is noteworthy that this "eclipse" is held to coincide with the era when European artists are held to have produced a rupture in their disciplines and pursued the path of humanism and individualism as men of the Renaissance.[15]But in part, the zone of disinterest is also a matter of disciplinary boundaries that assume art cannot reveal very much about the workings of social power. Given that majority of studies dealing with the Arab world in English have been motivated by a will to understand power, change, hierarchy, and structure, it seems natural that art should take back-seat to more pressing concerns given the agonistic encounter between the countries of English-language scholars and countries of their Arab subjects.[16] It would be useful to know if art historiography followed a similar chronology in other regional studies – were Asian, African, or Polynesian arts embraced for scholarly review once the regions seemed tamed? Certainly this is the case with indigenous North America and Australia. The purpose of this essay, however, is to suggest what might come of the recent percolation of interest in art production in Arab regions. A subsequent concern would be to grapple with the term "art" itself, to consider what is gained and what lost in its applications beyond the very narrow circles in which it originated.[17]

Does society shape art, or does art shape society? The answer certainly need not be exclusively one or the other, and yet the studies we have on which to base an answer are wholly unidirectional. While sociologists of art have keenly identified the social networks and power relations that make art the production of so much more than a "gifted" individual, they have failed to explain what precisely can be deemed the agency of art in social interactions. As a first step to tracing a new trajectory for studies of art and the Arab world, this essay will review two historical studies of French imperialist art to highlight their provocatively divergent conclusions about the agency of art in social interactions that have resulted in power disparity. Based on this discussion of agency, the essay will move to examine possible new realms of study in art and the Arab world, with an eye to expanding the relevance of this sub-field to social and historical studies generally, and applying its lessons to Arab modernity studies particularly.

It will be clearest to state concisely the difference I detect from the start and move from there through the examples that explain its relevance. The difference between Porterfield and Benjamin's handling of art production is a methodological one and it involves the direction of the history that is being related. For Porterfield, the history of French modern art is a story that begins in 1798 and comprises the persistence of certain strategies despite their varying political fortunes and uses. For Benjamin, on the other hand, it is a story that looks back from the triumph of modernism and finds unexpected antecedents for it as a strategy and subject matter. In other words, the divergence in the authors' theories of art-making relates to the opposing stances they take to view history. Ultimately this plays out in a divergent understanding of artistic agency in society: whereas

Benjamin holds to the standard line that many, but not all, French artists were complicit with their government's imperial and colonial aims, Porterfield shows how these artists were in many ways the *impetus* for those aims. In the first reading, art is ever a secondary effect, a symptom of empire that provides the "cultural context" for acts of art-making; in the second reading, art and empire are more intricately tied – a bond that may better explain the imperial French interest in art and the idea it indexed, "civilization." In other words, the "Orient" as encountered and engaged through brushes, canvases, and systems of paintings, was an important resource for motivating and explaining imperial society as a coalescence of disparate motives and conflicting stances. The result is that in Porterfield's study, far more than in Benjamin's, visual culture is shown to have more agency as a resource for social interaction and subsequently for academic inquiry into that social action. Having outlined the differences, it is useful to explore the reasons for and effects of this different handling of visual culture.

Porterfield's The Allure *of Empire* is not directly about "the Middle East" but about French interactions with that region over the course of half a century – the half of the nineteenth century that was crucial to establishing the basis for an empire that replaced France's North American possessions. What Porterfield examines is the process by which justifications for this new empire were formulated and circulated among the policy-making elite, which included both governmental officers and the newspaper-reading public. Porterfield's thesis is that art played a crucial role in the development of French empire, enabling the various opposing regimes that governed France to unite the public around colonizing policies even as they were divided over policies of internal rule. Porterfield refutes the common notion that French investment in the aesthetic productions of the cultures it conquered was mere exoticism. Linking Napoleon's defeat by the British army in 1798 and the establishment of French control from Senegal to Vietnam at the end of the following century was Art *en majuscule*.

Painting, in particular, was more than government spin, or what Porterfield calls "an officially sponsored and widely broadcast rationale"[18]: painting was the very method by which civilizational status became a social index, demarcating both in its topics and in its style the hierarchy between cultures and justifying the superiority of France over others. Porterfield identifies three strategies continuously used by art-makers (patrons, publics, and artists): 1) setting the French in the role of the historic heir; 2) contrasting the French and their colonized on the basis of moral difference; 3) describing the hierarchy of cultures with an authenticating attention to detail and location. Whether in paintings of battle cycles, decorations of the metropolis, or formulations of new museums, these strategies informed a kind of art-making, that as a national identity project, became a means to promote domination over the colonies *and* enlist support of those among the colonized who also sought to change their societies, while at the same time Art rendered the colonies a point of convergence for the different sectors of French society that were responding in contradictory ways to the legacies of the Revolution.. What is important to note in Porterfield's account of French social dynamics is that these strategies, given the specific historical conditions, were especially effective because of their special medium. Art, that was understood as a medium for one set of viewers to be visual, creative, expressive, formulaic, descriptive, and objective, rendered the colonies a point of convergence for an over-arching notion of French national unity and a common denominator for French identity. As Porterfield argues, "Each post-Revolutionary government

contributed to and called on this new national culture to justify imperialism in the *proche Orient*, as each sought to avoid the political and social fissures bequeathed by the Revolution. Each developed a national project, identity, and culture that fabricated and diffused rationales for imperialism in the Near East."[19]

One of Porterfield's clearest examples of the agency of art is in the case of that magnificent early example of public installation art: the Luxor Obelisk and the ceremonials of bringing it to Paris. Porterfield shows how the public ceremony of erecting the obelisk in 1833 on the former site of the guillotine became a mass expiatory exercise in participatory science, one devoted not to killing failed French citizens but to establishing French civilizational superiority over the most glorious of ancient empires. With this testimony to French conquering, scientifically and militarily, of ancient and contemporary Egypt, the site of so much internal strife and political division was literally cleansed and rebaptized as the Place de la Concorde. The result, Porterfield reminds readers who think they are examining an "art historical" event, is that the subsequent Algerian campaign came to be conceived nationally as both a project upon which the opposing factions of the French body politic could converge and, also, the proper route for the new "fathers of Egyptian civilization," as Adolphe Thiers hailed them and as numerous contributors to the French press chorused.[20]

A second example of imperial art-making carries forward Porterfield's interest in the *work* of art: this was a series of paintings that rendered visible and tangible the "allure of a new imperial culture."[21] Despite Napoleon's dismal military performance in the Egyptian campaign (1798-1801), the paintings produced in France depicting that campaign are among the most splendid, and most influential, representations of a European civilizational superiority over non-European adversaries. These paintings were perhaps the visual analogue of the famed *Description d'Egypte*, but their graphic character made them influential among a different range of audiences. By detailing the artists' procedures and methods for creating authoritative battle scenes, Porterfield shows that these visual strategies were singularly available in painting in a way that made the war events—themselves a military failure for the French forces—the basis for the elaboration of a French political destiny to triumph in foreign lands, a destiny that was at once anti-revolutionary, Christian, and scientific. Porterfield provides plenty of evidence of how the pictures were perceived by their contemporary critics who gladly, it seems, took them as the proof of the wisdom and justice of French imperial ventures despite other, less palpable evidence to the contrary.

Though succeeding French governments would eventually come to differ over revolutionary goals and the extent of external engagement, paintings of the Egyptian campaign, Porterfield demonstrates, "coined a currency that was then converted and reused by succeeding and ostensibly opposing regimes, making the Empire's artistic deposit an enduring imperial legacy."[22] So much so that even the Bourbon Monarchy, which took its charge to annul the feats and policies of the Revolution, sponsored the establishment of a Musée d'Egypte. The story of the institutionalization of Egyptology as a national science and public symbol of French national genius provides Porterfield's third case-study, and this is where Porterfield most strongly makes his case for art as a realm of ideological work with physical and material implications. Nineteenth-century Artists, patrons, critics, and salon-goers converged on Egypt as a "reactionary source for French society,"[23] as Porterfield shows by analyzing in detail not only the decoration and exhibition program of the museum but, also, the multiple political uses to which the tropes it

spawned were put. For example, the racial identity of Egypt versus France was worked out in a series of paintings and prints that came to assert tangibly the whiteness of Pharaonic Egypt against the blackness of its hordes. Porterfield concludes, "The Musée d'Egypte did not so much *reflect* a secure empire as it *cultivated* imperial desire."[24]

If the previous examples have mostly been military or institutional art, the case of Eugene Delacroix's artistic triumph, *Women of Algiers* applies Porterfield's analysis of the flourishing of Orientalist art beyond the confines of a governmental elite of patrons and critics, even in arenas apparently less deferential to governmental agendas. Delacroix's painting has been taken by art historians as the originator of the ethnographic Orientalist school, marked by faithful rendering of first-hand observations. Quashing this productive legend, Porterfield traces Delacroix's seminal work to previously unacknowledged textual precedents, thus showing, in Saidian terms, how dependent it was on prior intellectual structuring of interaction with an East. As Porterfield shows, if Delacroix's work was not unmediated by antecedent representations of the Orient, it was also not, true to local visual experience, and deliberately so, in as much as it flagrantly relied on the violation of local visibility codes. Thus, the symbol of Oriental despotism, the harem, in Delacroix's painting was physically penetrated and liberated in an oily medium that not only offered the vicarious experience of liberation to contemporary French viewers but also justified to them the military "liberation" of contemporary Algerians. As Porterfield says, "Part of the success of *Women of Algiers* and its progeny is that it *evoked* both desire for the harem women and repulsion at the Orient's inferior social and political systems."[25] What this discussion offers to people interested in studying social dynamics is an understanding of how a medium that is historically cultivated through carefully streamlined codes of representation can at once offer difference, or intelligibility in unfamiliar cultural settings, as well as a firm, apparently nonnegotiable sense of how to respond to that "found" difference. In this way the medium of art becomes an immediate social force.

Orientalist Aesthetics by Roger Benjamin can be read as a sequel to *The Allure of Empire*, although it was not intended as such. Indeed, though Benjamin does not take up Porterfield's work, many of his findings support Porterfield's argument that Orientalism, or engagement with a painted Orient, provided a unifying resource for a French society riven with worries about the practices and meanings of being an imperial power or a revolutionary collectivity. For example, one generally ignored aspect of Claude Monet's Impressionism is the degree to which the painter himself declared its debt to the time he served as a soldier in Algeria. Thus, Orientalism, specifically defined as the belligerent appropriation of the foreign and exotic, could reinscribe the jarring, threatening style of Impressionism in the realm of the patriotic. Benjamin, however, interprets his evidence, much of it mobilized for the first time in the study of early modernist French painting, as proof instead of the disengagement of "high art" from French politics. In order to give his work due credit, this essay will detail the argument and findings of Benjamin's wide-ranging and lavishly illustrated work before proceeding to a comparison of the two works and their implications for the study of visual culture.

Seeking to explain "Orientalist art in the time of its historical emergence,"[26], Benjamin intertwines two narrative strings. The first string ties together art world debates about the production of painting based on French *outre-mer* possessions as seen through the careers of individual painters. The second links

a set of institutions that enabled and responded to that painting -- from the established press, to the Society of French Orientalist Painters with its annual fund-raising dinners and exhibitions, to the Villa Abd-el-Tif and Jardin d'Essai[27] that provided secure places for visiting painters in Algiers, to colonial administrative funds for "reviving traditional crafts" and travelling scholarships, to museums such as the National Museum of Fine Arts of Algiers that promoted a "European vision" far from the metropole.[28]

It is important to note that Benjamin's effort to situate Orientalism culturally represents a retraction of his earlier thesis about the centrality of colonialism as a set of practices and ideologies to the oeuvre of the artist Henri Matisse.[29] Previously the art historian had argued that high French modernism was inarguably indebted to invidious politics that it had hidden, thus promoting both the inevitability of colonialism's politics and the triumph of contemporary taste. In his more extensive study, however, Benjamin now asserts that though inescapably inflected by politics, modernist art was never more than a surface for *reflecting* debates raging in society; it could not shape society because it could not create institutions. This retraction represents an affirmation of Benjamin's way of conceiving of art as the outcome of already structured ways of thinking and doing rather than as a formative medium in itself. In the absence of findings indicating that Matisse or other artists were part of a racist conspiracy to control and degrade the Orient in civilizational terms, Benjamin assumes their art must not have been a factor in the eventual control and degradation that occurred. Art, in this newer reading, is stripped of social agency.

Benjamin's treatment of art as the product of finalized mental and social processes is unfortunate because it undermines the evidence that he assembles for seeing art as a formative medium of social power. Benjamin details a multifaceted debate among French art critics over the value of Oriental subject matter in French painting, or that entity which when viewed makes "each Frenchman feel he is becoming more French," to borrow Benjamin's quote from nineteenth-century critic Antoine Castagnary[30]. A recurring motive Benjamin diagnoses, from Duranty to Marx, is the fear for French authenticity, the fear that merely addressing a foreign topic could pollute the French spirit and vigour. For example, a common refrain among painters travelling south was that the Orient "inverted painting."[31] Benjamin takes up the case of Renoir's Impressionism to examine what "problems" Algerian views posed for painters trained continentally: the cramped urban architecture, the stretched landscape, the brightened palette, the prohibited models, and so on. Detailing at length Renoir's schemes to circumvent these obstacles, Benjamin outlines the structures that made Orientalist painting possible and characteristic, such as physically controlled and selected space, currency and clothing bazaars, needy models and privileged posers, perspectival grids and most fundamentally, the commitment to a field of prestige based elsewhere, beyond the space allotted to the Orient. If painting could, potentially, make French viewers feel they were not becoming French or were even becoming less French, and if such painting was to be feared and condemned, then we being to see how style could take on national urgency. Indeed, we begin to see how one may take art about the Arab world seriously to produce understanding of social dynamics instead of dismissing it as seriously flawed (rejected with the pejorative label, "Orientalist") or trivial (rejected with the belittling label, "just art").

Contra Benjamin, one could tease from his study of Renoir's negotiations with "tricky" Arab men or his costuming of *pied-noir* children in native clothing to

understand the experience of these circumventions as the reinstatement of a style that could be asserted or defended as "European" or "traditionally French." It is in light of such data, that revive the experience on the margins of an "Orient," that we may discern how style, one of the strategies discussed by Porterfield, is relevant on the scale of national structure formation, for to some observers, discussions of it were held to solidify the notion of *a single* French identity. While Benjamin himself does not do this, his research sketches out possible trajectories for the expanded relevance of art research to studies of Arab modernity. Building on Benjamin's reinterpretation of Impressionism, a style of art conventionally seen as apolitical, in terms of the power that made it practicable one can explore how the style was a medium by which certain power was crystallized, naturalized, and made socially relevant.

Benjamin indicates, although he himself does not conclude, that the pictures produced through the negotiations he details are essentially the reinstatement of a fragile, faltering cultural identity. To perceive that identity as fragile and in need of great, ambivalent labor, is to provide a new lens for understanding the alternative identities that conjured up its outer limits, Arab, Oriental, Muslim, Colonized, Independent, and so on. Similarly, such effort may provide a more productive means for coming to grips with the seemingly contradictory identities that were involved in promoting art and civilization throughout the time-zone ambitiously named modernity. In other words, one may see in this art work the "staging of modernity" that Mitchell describes as "the orchestrating of image and imagination, the managing of the place of meaning in the social world and the experience of personhood, and the manipulating of populations and ecologies by their reduction to technical schemes and disciplinary programs."[32]. Studies of art media may add much to this burgeoning literature on the modernity as a non-centralized process of exchange.[33] Benjamin inventories the relationship between metropole and periphery in the development of modernity as a cultural and imperial asset: the administrative and mercantile investment in the Society for Oriental Painters; the government burses for artists who could represent France to study in Algiers at the Villa Abd-el-Tif; and the controversial government-sponsored program to "revive" and rationalize Algerian craftwork in the interest of invigorating French industry and commerce. Despite Benjamin's insistence that art cannot create institutions, his research into such programs amply illustrates the agency of art in empire and citizen formation, and in particular, sheds light on the structural nature of that agency.

And this points us to another trajectory. Given that so much was at stake for artists who proved their ability to embody that vague element called Frenchness, it is unnecessary to accept Benjamin's own end-point for his research which is simply to categorize painters who dealt with Algerian views into different styles: "ethnographic," like Gérôme, or "impressionist," like Renoir. Both stylistic types equally, as he shows, found it necessary to refer to the colony to advance their careers as not just French artists but French-rendering ones. From this convergence, Benjamin concludes that the medium of painting became for French viewers "visual evidence of the strangeness and difference of a distant land that could nevertheless be a home to the French and their proudest cultural achievements."[34] Rather than seeing the "strange" land absorbed into given "Frenchness," could we not see that French identity coming into practical realization (being?) through a developing medium? It would be just one step further to suggest that the "unnatural" means to which painters like Renoir resorted

in Algeria to carry out painting as they understood it should prompt a reconsideration of the naturalness and experiential reliability of Europe's own amenability to being pictured. In other words, if the Orient *inverted* painting, as the saying went, then studying that inversion could aid in the subversion of the definition of the European-ness of painting.

In summary, with Benjamin and Porterfield we have two approaches to the role of art in intercultural junctures, and specifically European imperialism. As stated earlier, the difference between the two approaches is essentially a one of direction: Whereas art-as-reflection leaves us with a rich discussion of the cultural *expression* of French colonialism – and little sense of what actually fuelled colonialism other than it's not being art – art-as-agent offers a demonstration of how Orientalist cultural production preceded, instead of followed, the material condition of actual imperial control. "Expression" is a tricky term, as it requires the postulation of an originating force that eventually finds exterior form, and yet, it precludes accounting for how that originating force is itself formed. The result in cultural analyses tends to be an essentializing solipsism. What I want to suggest here, is that grappling with this issue in art may provide a model for dealing with it in other realms of cultural study. However, to carve the way for such research, one must be prepared to surrender Benjamin's methodological assumption that there is a boundary between the periphery and the metropole that is fixed, like the one on the map that precedes his introduction and that of so many texts about the region and about art alike.

MODERNITY AND AN ARAB EAST

As Timothy Mitchell argues, by building on a priori maps, researchers limit themselves from considering how dealing in Orientalist art was part of a process of fixing the map, or rather, fixing it at some social levels *and not others*.[35] Thus it is symptomatic that Benjamin notes only in passing that non-Parisian scenes were just as likely to be served up at the Orientalist salons as were scenes from the Arab East, "almost as if any southern country that was not France was by definition exotic and could be posed as the Other."[36] Consequently, Benjamin describes "Orientalist Aesthetics" as an unsteadily developed cultural system for demarcating access to resources, but researchers could go further actually to analyze it as such in praxis. Were those painters whose fascination with Algerian landscapes revealed to Marxist critic Castagnary a deficiency of patriotism and faith "in the beauty of France and its people,"[37] the people whose activity could be seen to pervert the very connection between French birth, French natural environment, and French commitment? What of the *evolués* (native-born painters) who seemed able to adopt that relationship at will? And how important was it to the notion of French universality or Algeria as *Muslim France* that painters came to paint not like the Germans or Italians but "like the French," as one French administrator avowed at an exhibition which inaugurated Free France in Beirut (see below)?

By taking for granted the geography of colonial interaction, scholars such as Benjamin and Porterfield will inevitably lose a sense of the urgency that faced artists, buyers, and viewers dealing with art in the context of colonial relationships and who were not always certain how to maintain a center. Questions such as those posed in the previous paragraph were loudly debated in the specialized and popular French press, and they provide ample hints to the fact that the very practice of an artistic tradition was part of the nation-making processes. Nations

imply capitals, just as disciplines imply codifications and chronologies imply essences moving stably through time. Each of these ways of describing social phenomena relies on a stable notion of a center, or cultural core – that which is often constructed retrospectively. If one is willing to rethink a given centrality by repositioning it in a posited periphery, as Benjamin says he does by placing Matisse, for example, in the midst of colony-bound artists' caravans, then one should be willing to suspend confidence about the relationship between the two. Benjamin's reluctance to do so may well be an unintended consequence of his complete dependence on French sources and his inability to benefit from Arab sources (written or oral). It is a weakness shared with Porterfield's scholarship, but one that points to yet another trajectory by which scholars of the Arab world may read outside their field to benefit from such rich inspiration and contribute to the decentering of traditional art historical and power analyses. Decentering discourses such as modernity, civilization, and art is not merely a matter of offering a new perspective; it is exigent precisely because of the degree to which such notions rest for their credibility upon an original essence, a central truth.

If, taking cue from Porterfield and Benjamin scholars of Arab modernity relinquish their certainty about the outcome of French cultural superiority and security, we may grasp finally what really was at stake in the experience of making and viewing painting. From this perspective "copies," or paintings with advertised antecedents, will no longer appear redundant or unoriginal. Realizing that at each moment society is being created through unbounded (though structured) interactions, we may attend with a little less distaste to the innumerable Arabic-language tracts in Algerian, or Syrian, newspapers which asserted to 1920s-40s readers that renditions of the local landscape in perspectival easel-painting format proved that there was no inherent Arab civilizational inferiority, especially if the artists executing such scenes were "sons of the country."[38] It is relevant to note that the common phrase for the positionality that validated agency in society was genealogical and not territorial. Likewise, we can distance our analysis from Benjamin's belief that modernist art styles developed in conjunction with the conviction that "easel-painting could be used to claim the colonies as a vehicle for the arts,"[39] seeing this belief as the view from a Paris-dominated perspective, and a view based on the assumption that art-making is a symptom of prior agendas. Reading the Arabic journals of the period, one may appreciate that from another perspective perhaps, that of people promoting easel-painting in other locales, modernism was formulated and realized as a "global" project by people acting on the conviction that art-making was a realm for establishing a political and cultural agenda that assumed parity with the *would-be* colonizers. Their agency, then, helped give colonial discourses their aspect of assumed centrality.

Towards this goal of exploring the construction of centering discourses in Arab modernity, it is particularly helpful to consider Benjamin's biography and analysis of Azouaou Mammeri and Mohammed Racim, two indigenous artists who made easel-painting their profession after having learned it in French schools. Benjamin is able to track their careers from their earliest training to official and popular reception using both administrators' accounts and those of popular French magazines. Although many such painters through the colonies attained great popularity among both colonial officials *and* local audiences, they have been steadily ignored by both nationalist and metropolitan scholars. Neither completely defined as indigenous nor metropolitan, such painters posed a challenge to the boundary between those categories which has led to their being swept under the academic

rug. It is important to note that in analyzing Mammeri's and Racim's art, Benjamin takes short-cuts that lead him to contradictory conclusions. For example, he posits a sort of Arab cultural uniformity when he reads Mammeri's landscapes as "participatory" celebrations in contrast to European-rendered "predatory" appropriations.[40] And yet, because of this very notion of cultural uniformity, Benjamin never really wonders why men like Mammeri and Racim *had* to paint (we are left to assume it is due to some alignment of tastes), why colonial administrators felt the *need* to encourage them with an extensive support apparatus, and why they were taken to exemplify rather than undermine boundaries dividing centers from their margins.

Likewise, Benjamin finds that stylistically "Western" renditions of Arab nationalist leaders *express* the "double-bind" of colonialism for the colonized (referring to Benedict Anderson's study of liberation movements), but he does not see that certain painters may have been re-drawing maps of identity through such apparently paradoxical activity. Consequently, when confronted with the phenomenon of "North African, Saudi, and other non-European[s]"[41] buying Orientalist canvases, Benjamin simply discards Said's insights into the force of culture at political junctures and declares them nullified.[42] If Arabs themselves, he asks, can buy and like this art, does that not mean that Said was wrong about the meaning the art conveyed for cultural evaluations? Here Benjamin lapses into ethnic essentializing to explain the paradoxical activity of members of one ethnic group vis à vis the representation of other members of that group. Benajmin's astonishment at Arabs' "self-Orientalizing" presumes the existence of a stable, uniform, and unchanging group self. Geography has so determined his analysis that he understands art audiences to be acting out their identities rather than creating them in relation to an array of resources.

Building on original data such as gleaned by Benjamin, scholars of Arab modernity could ask many more productive questions that are bound to lead out of the essentialist morass. Exactly who was participating in landscapes like those of Mammeri? Through what processes does Mammeri come to stand for Arabs, or other identities? Could not some people who identified themselves as Arabs have felt that Mammeri was imposing his interests on their relationship to their social space? For example, one of Mammeri's paintings discussed by Benjamin shows young boys at a Koranic school gathered around their teacher and leader in prayer. But had Enlightenment conceptions of space and subjecthood simply revealed their naturalness to Mammeri's subjects and non-European viewers so that even pious men and boys would agree with Mammeri's decision to "participate" in modernist philosophies by appearing in physical form on an imported canvas? What internal boundaries were being drawn as Mammeri claimed this imported format for his social intervention?

Similarly, one may learn much from the very process by which these artists came to such prominence in French-compiled archives. In Algeria, Benjamin quotes the response to Mammeri's work made by Léonce Bénédite, the great Orientalist art organizer: "This is the first time that a Muslim artist offers us an exhibition of painting and of painting fully conceived with our Western vision and methods".[43] Meanwhile from archives relating to the French Mandate in Lebanon, we learn that Gabriele Bounoure, the advisor for public education to the general delegation of Free France introduced the 1941 colonial exhibition in Beirut with the following: "A Frenchman can say this, undoubtedly, without being accused of chauvinism… *Not only is French painting the honor and glory of Europe, but also it is fair to*

advance that one could not paint but in Paris or according to Paris"[44]. To appreciate fully the implications of these assertions, we must not fail to keep in focus the debate recorded by Benjamin over the very notion of a consolidated entity such as "French painting," let alone "Western vision." Focusing on the debates in which easel-painting intervened, however, requires allowing theoretically and methodologically for the possibility that art is not simply reflective of social action but central to it. Locally made paintings, which established the universal feasibility of continental formulae, compel reconsideration of "local expression" and translocal reality. If Mandate subjects participated in the universalizing of a "French modernity," then how did that modernity become French, and how did it shape Arab self-conceptions? If paintings are the subject of strategic moves to demonstrate global affinities and national merit, then whose self do they express?

Scholars of modernity have long noted the centrality of the visual to social action.[45] Mostly, however, studies of a visually experienced modernity have confined themselves to European societies. Studies of modernism in the Arab world face a complex situation. This is because many of the very strategies and claims used to colonize the region such as the strategy of asserting its cultural inferiority or intractability, were the same ones taken up passionately by the people suppressed by modernist movements, and taken up in ways that deliberately emphasized the similarity of motive rather than some deep cultural difference. We can study this either as a confluence of aesthetics ("some Arabs just like French art") or as a convergence on activity posited to have cultural and political agency (people of different social positionings have found certain techniques useful and have contributed to their promotion). Embracing the latter, agential view is to suggest that Bénédite and Bounoure were not so centered in French society via art-making as they were invested in the formation of marginal modernities and far-flung, multiply motivated selves when they looked to people they categorized "Arabs" painting in a style they had learned to call and think "French." To perceive the effort involved in this interpretation by these French administrators, it is important to recall that the very Frenchness of the art being viewed was itself a product of art-making and negotiations formed, as Porterfield revealed, through art. Therefore, we must be very cautious about naturalizing the outcome of the style's Frenchness and, similar, allow for it to belong to and be the product of other makers, too. The pint is that Frenchness was formed for Bénédite and Bounoure outside its alleged boundaries and in social interaction that cannot be retrospectively termed simply "French" in origins.

Indeed, seeing art as formative of social actions, rather than reflective of them, may release scholars of universalizing projects such as modernity, civilization, and empire from the analytical boundaries of essentialism. If Orientalist art-making became a sort of national identity project for Imperial France, it would be useful to know how people practiced the project based on their different social backgrounds, at some remove from the originally intended audiences. Though Porterfield, for example, astutely notes the ambivalences at the very heart of the project, and embedded in the art works themselves, he concentrates on the convergences, only to whet the reader's appetite for learning more about the ways unexpected audiences interacted with the images. Likewise, it would be worthwhile to know how diverse sectors of the society that could be called "Arab" or "Syrian" in relation to the portrayed Oriental world of Matisse or Renoir, responded to the portrayals. Again, while we have histories of other "European" imports and their reception (a word I find limiting of analysis from the outset), we do not have it in

art. This lack, specifically because of the creative and expressive meaning assigned to art (and other indices of civilization), assigns in advance a derivative position prior to having fully analyzed the construction of art as a universal category.

For example, Porterfield's discussion of twentieth-century artists who have responded from a colonized position to French Orientalist art could stimulate more studies of the strategies for engaging an imported concept of modernism that were to some extent attempts to claim space for intervening in and redirecting the importer's own society. An example of such intervention is the 1958 staged public unveiling of Algerian women, under the slogan, "*vive l'algerie française*," which Porterfield interprets as an ideological and visual descendant of Delacroix's painting *Les Femmes d'Algiers*. His analysis indicates why, decades after decolonization, debates about de-veiling "Oriental women" could be so potent even among supporters of veiling. This returns us to the radio dialogue that initiated this essay. The very invocation of an art so universal that anyone should recognize its aesthetic (and spiritual) value and indexicality of civilizational merit (let alone the right to sovereignty and the rest of the long list the *ustaz* recited) demonstrates that that art-centering discourse is still very much alive and kicking, in the sense of having material impact among peoples not known as creators of the *La Giaconda* but certainly known as heirs to it through *al-umm al-hanuna*, or France as the protective mother, a common phrase by which Lebanon's experience of colonialism is referenced. This is not to suggest that "North African artists were influenced by French artists – and vice-versa"[46] as one reviewer blithely summarized Benjamin's narrative, for that would disregard the differing valences of "modern European art" and "indigenous decorative arts" – so clear in their mere titles. Rather, to tune out the discursive life of "fine art" on Itha`at al-Nur would be to cast from view the dispersed and debated process by which fine art has become and is maintained as a civilizational index and an instrument of modernity. Whether or not young female students aligned with the opposition will be granted the right to comment on globally famed paintings or locally framed politics, the ability of globalized art to demonstrate and secure one's right to comment at all has been, again, secured in such exchanges. How, by talking about *L Giaconda*, art, aesthetics taste, and civilization broadly, do people perpetuate their marginality from access to power?

If, as Porterfield has shown, Empire was not merely reflected in fine art but was actually instigated, justified, and consolidated by it, then the art as agent thesis may prompt deeper consideration of the role of forms of "expressive culture" in the formulation and perpetuations of historical movements that have put people in antagonistic contact. The bind in which the colonized find themselves vis à vis modernism, of which they are partners in production but not partners in benefit or ownership, is a legacy that has not left the region. Recent studies have taken up this situation in relation to political movements, workers' mobilizations, residential patterns, and administrative institutions.[47] Given the plethora of visual imagery that has accompanied colonization, decolonization, and post-independence movements, the fact that only one of these has dealt directly and primarily with visual arts is astonishing. (Irbouh's book deserves its own discussion, but its basic argument that—French art education in the colonies supported the colonial agenda—means that again art is held to be shaped by social forces and not vice-versa). Studies of visual culture have much to offer the topic of modernism and the Arab world precisely because they tap a field that historically did not adhere to the map-making that came to divide Oriental and European identities in an apparently natural way.[48] The motive and relevance of such studies would not be to appease a perverse will

to find agency where it has been denied but to prompt more careful consideration of all the factors that seems to have necessitated interactions that cannot be circumscribed by the maps and chronologies of the present. Much as Chakrabarty has found of the investment rational historical consciousness makes in the notion of anachronism, there is a binary opposition invoked implicitly by current art studies between art-less and art-full cultures, and it is this premise which threatens to obscure attention to the "plurality of the now."[49] Although the idea of a civilizational unity is appealing as a call to social intervention, scholarly and political danger lies in naturalizing Bounoure's assertion that twenty nations have been unified into one with a convergence on a painting style. Perhaps the least of these dangers is that scholars overlook the processes by which plurality inhabits the unifying notion of civilization (for Chakrabarty it is "time"), and, moreover, civilization as a powerful notion lives through that very plurality. A greater danger, however, is when human lives are crushed or dehumanized by the appeal to a discourse that tries to standardize, evaluate, and determine access to resources. In this sense, Itha`at al-Nur's invocation of *Mona Lisa* is important to note and confront with a sceptical interest in the production of the potency of social concepts such as fine art and civilization. Regarding the confrontation of government and opposition forces in downtown Beirut, we can see that both are invoking a legacy of *mission civilizatrice* in order to justify their politics, and that in relation to that legacy there will necessarily be a group of people defined excluded from deserving access to valuable national resources.

Lastly, it is important that historical studies and explorations of the formation of modernism plunge into history via art sources, lest the growing interest in contemporary Arab art replicate unwittingly the very discourse that condemned Arabs to colonial status on grounds that civilization would have to be brought across a cultural boundary to them. Indeed, it should be noted that at the forefront of those promoting the idea that art is new in the Arab world and comes to it from inherently foreign sources are many Arab artists themselves. For them, this statement is strategic, but for scholars and ordinary people, it can be tragic, as is shown by the systematic plundering of Iraq since the imposition of sanctions in 1991. Art studies and descriptions of peoples as art full or art free do have political ramifications. While Benjamin and Porterfield were limited to French sources, their own attention to the polyvocality of those sources prompts dealing with Arabic, Turkish, Berber and other sources as archives of social processes rather than reflections of ethnic essences. Along the same trajectory, focusing on art, and perhaps other areas of material media involving combinations of traditional and imaginative thought-processes, as agent of the process of social formation, not an expression of pre-formed social entities, will advance studies of social processes in the region.

ENDNOTES

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[1] This translation is based on paraphrasing notes that were taken while listening to Itha`at al-Nur's transmission at 2 pm, Sunday, March 18, 2007.

[2] For examples see Wijdan`Ali, *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World* (London: Scorpion Publishing, 1990); Wijdan `Ali, "Modern Arab Art: An Overview," in *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World,* ed.

Salwa Mikdad Nashashibi, (Washington DC: The International Council for Women in the Arts and The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1994), p. 72-116; Silvia Naef, *A la recherché d'une modernité arabe: L'évolution des arts plastiques en Egypte, au Liban et en Irak* (Geneva: Slatkine Editions, 1996); `Afif Bahnasi, *Al-Fann Al-`Arabi Al-Hadith*: *Bayna Al-Hawiyya wa Al-Tab`iya* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab Al-`Arabi, 1997). This assumption also undergirded the workshop Silvia Naef organized with Nada Shabout at the Robert Schuman Centre in 2006 under the title "From Local to Global: Visual Arts in the Eastern Mediterranean between International Markets and Local Expectations" and the roundtable Nada Shabout and Ella Shohat directed at the Middle East Studies Association annual meeting in 2006 under the title, "Exhibiting the "Orient" in the Age of Globalization."

[3] Clearly, I perceive difficulty in articulating a term to describe and circumscribe the region of history and experience to which I am referring to in this article. From a very local perspective, the region is Lebanon and environs (Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Turkey, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunis, Morocco) wherein a sense of history being structured through specific encounters seems to be replicated due to common factors. However, from a less-territorially based perspective, the region is much broader and less contiguous. This is a perspective that prizes experiences in the abstract – colonialism, modernism, globalism—and in this term sections of Asia, Africa, rural North America and Europe would be combined, along with certain classes of the Arab world, and so on. See my discussion of this in "Introduction" to Edited File "Al-Khalq Al-Mutabadal: Al-Fann wa Mujtama`at Janubiyy al-Mutawassit"(Mutual Creation: Art and Societies South of the Mediterranean)," in *Al-Adab* 52:1-2 (January-February, 2004); see also Nasser Rabat's reply for more discussion of this troublesome but productive issue, the response to which is absolutely fundamental to the art historian's project in "Fann Janubiyy Al-mutawassit Ma Zala Akhar" (Art of the Mediterranean South Remains an Other" in *Al-Adab* 52:3-4 (March-April, 2004).

[4] See also Elizabeth Thompson, Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Nadia Abu el-Haj, Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Ussama Makdisi, The Culture of Sectarianism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

[5] Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, p. 3.

[6] `Ali, *Contemporary Art*, p. xi.

[7] See Nora Taylor, "Whose Art Are We Studying Anyway? Writing Vietnamese Art History from Colonialism to the Present" in *Studies in South East Asian Art: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. O'Connor*, ed. Nora Taylor (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p.143-157.

[8] See for example, `Ali, *Modern Arab Art*, 1994; Naef, *A la recherché*; Silvia Naef, 2003 "Peindre pour être moderne? Remarques sur l'adoption de l'art occidental dans l'Orient arabe" (Painting To Be Modern? Remarks on the adoption of Western Art in the Arab East)*,"* in *La multiplication des images en pays d'Islam* (The Multiplication of Images in the Countries of Islam) Bernard Heyberger and Silvia Naef, eds. (Istanbul: Orient-Institut, Ergon Verlag Würzburg. 2003), p. 189-208..

[9] Illuminating studies in this context include, Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 319-352; Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1-59; Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Anna Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1993).

[10] Several scholars who have provided productive insight into the issue of mimicry or apparent similarity are Eric Gable, "Bad Copies: The Colonial Aesthetic and the Manajaco-Portuguese Encounter," in *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*, eds. Paul Landau and Deborah Kaspin, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 294-319; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[11] Todd Porterfield, The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism, 1798-1836, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[12] Roger Benjamin, Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880-1930 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

[13] Lila Abu-Lughod, "Zones of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World," in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 18, (1989), p. 267-306.

[14] Examples of such standard accounts are Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, *Islamic Art and Architecture, 650-1250* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); John Hayes, ed. *The Genius of*

Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983); Oleg Grabar, *The Mediation of Ornament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[15] For more on the premises of academic art study as developed since the sixteenth century see Nanette Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins Omission," in *(En)Gendering Knowledge: Feminists in Academe*, ed. Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), p. 222-236; Nanette Salomon, "The Venus Pudica: Uncovering Art History's `Hidden Agendas' and Pernicious Pedigrees," in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock, (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 69-87; Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), p. 33-59; Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits – Gender and the Color of Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992); and Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[16] For broad characterizations of academic study of the Arab world, see Abu-Lughod, "Zones of Theory" and Michael Gilsenan, "Very like a camel: the appearance of an anthropologist's Middle East," in *Localizing Strategies: Regional Traditions of Ethnographic*, Richard Fardon, ed. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press).

[17] For more, see Larry Shiner, *The Invention of Art: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

[18] Porterfield, *Allure of Empire*, p. 4.

[19] ibid.

[20] Thiers quoted in Porterfield, *Allure of Empire*, p. 41.

[21] ibid.

[22] ibid., p.45.

[23] ibid., p.95.

[24] ibid., p.115, emphasis added.

[25] Ibid., p.134, emphasis added.

[26] Benjamin, Orientalist Aesthetics, p. 3.

[27] The former was a hillside villa requisitioned by the French government in 1907 to host artist *boursiers*, and the latter was an experimental garden situated directly below the villa.

[28] Ibid., p.249.

[29] See Roger Benjamin, "Matisse in Morocco: A Colonizing Esthetic?" *Art in America* (November, 1990) p.157-165, 211-213.

[30] Benjamin, Orientalist Aesthetics, p. 27.

[31] Eugène Fromentin as quoted by Benjamin, *Orientalist aesthetics*, p. 48.

[32] Timothy Mitchell, *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.17.

[33] See Mitchell, *Questions,* and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000),

[34] Benjamin, Orientalist Aesthetics, p. 60.

[35] Mitchell, *Questions*.

[36] Benjamin, Orientalist Aesthetics, p. 91.

[37] As quoted by ibid., p.24.

[38] I review Arabophone and Francophone press responses to Beirut-based exhibitions of painting between 1920-40 in Kirsten Scheid, "Painters, Picture-Makers, and Lebanon: Ambiguous Identities in an Uncertain State" (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 2005).

[39] Benjamin, Orientalist Aesthetics, p. 110.

[40] ibid., p.234.

[41] ibid., p.102.

[42] See for example, Roger Benjamin, "Post-colonial Taste," in *Orientalism from Delacroix to Klee*, ed. Roger Benjamin, December 6, 1997 – February 22, 1998 (Sydney, Australia: The Art Gallery of New South Wales), p. 32-40.

[43] ibid., p.228.

[44] Gabriel Bounoure, "Introduction," *Le Salon des Amis des Arts* (Friends of the Arts Exhibition), Exhibition Catalogue, December 13-31, 1941, Beirut, (Archived material, Joseph Matar Archives, 'Idda, Lebanon)

[45] One of the most outstanding works in this respect is Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

[46] Taken from reviews listed by publisher on book's back.

[47] See for example, Keith Watenpaugh, Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Thompson, Colonial Citizens; Timothy Mitchell, Colonizing Egypt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991);

Akram Khater, Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Leila Fawaz, ed., Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) and Hamid Irbouh, Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco, 1912-1956 (London: Tauris Academic Studies. 2005).

[48] Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); also, Maha Yahya, "Unnamed Modernisms: 'Oriental' Filiation or 'Mediterranean' Affiliation in Beirut's Urban-Architecture (1888–1943)" (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, History, Theory and Criticism Program, Department of Architecture and Urban Planning, 2004).

[49] Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe, p. 243

"CULTURE KNOWLEDGE" AND THE VIOLENCE OF IMPERIALISM

REVISITING THE ARAB MIND

Frances S. Hasso*

> "I always knew the Americans would bring electricity back to Baghdad. I just never thought they'd be shooting it up my ass." – Iraqi translator, Baghdad, November 2003[1]

This essay considers the Orientalist culture assumptions[2] about "Arabs," Muslims," and "Islam" underlying United States imperial domination practices in the early 21st century. Such consideration is particularly important in light of the revealed U.S.-sponsored abuse and torture of Iraqis at Abu Ghraib Prison and the explanations and discourses that circulated in response. These culture assumptions operate as a racializing project[3] that occurs at least partly through putative knowledge of gender and sexuality norms. The brutal practices visually represented in photographic and video images, like other practices unrepresented visually but documented in the personal testimonies and reports of Muslim and Arab men prisoners, are constitutive rather than marginal aspects of the U.S. "war on terror."

Since September 11, 2001, U.S.-sponsored torture has been widely documented in Iraq, at the U.S. Naval Base prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in Afghanistan, and in federal custody on U.S. territory. In April 2004, approximately a year after the U.S. invaded Iraq, print media, television, and Internet sources disclosed and began widely reporting on digital photographs that depicted Iraqi men prisoners in the Abu Ghraib facility being tortured by U.S. military and intelligence personnel and subcontracted mercenaries.[4] These and additional images released later, as well as human rights reports and prisoner affidavits discussing prisoner abuse, torture and murder, have indicated the extent to which "culture" assumptions structured which techniques would be deemed effective for the purposes of domination and control. Methods of subjugation depicted and described included undressing prisoners and keeping them naked for long periods of time, photographed separately and in groups; forcing naked prisoners to lay atop each other in human piles; forcing prisoners to masturbate; raping prisoners and forcing them to rape each other or to simulate rape scenes; simulating homosexual and heterosexual encounters in which prisoners are bound, gagged, wearing hoods over their heads, attached to metal bars, and/or leashed; creating scenes in which imprisoned Arab or Muslim men have women military personnel undress in front of them or smear them with menstrual blood; and forcing men prisoners to wear women's panties on their heads or around the midsection of their bodies.[5] Wendy Kozol and Rebecca DeCola have noted how the Abu Ghraib photographs highlight the ironic speciousness of claims that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq was

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liberating and civilizing for Iraqis, "precisely because there is no visible sign of Iraqi political agency."[6]

The torture and violence depicted and the second level of subordination indicated by seemingly casual digital photographing by U.S. military personnel and mercenaries, clearly intended to demean, debase, and control, reportedly for the purposes of recruiting collaborators and informants, are premised on and produced through the prism of Arab and Muslim cultural difference from "us," or the West, particularly with regard to gender and sexuality norms. Such cultural constructions assume the West to be dynamic, modern, and providing potential spaces of resistance, transformation, and freedom for its subjects. In contrast, the East is produced as frozen-in-time and always already oppressive, with subjects who are over-determined by free-standing constructs (e.g. religion, patriarchy, modesty, clan, honor, and so on). The markers of "east" and "west," however, are deceptive because the cultural assumptions of Orientalist racializing frameworks are geographically unfixed: the "traits" are assumed to be psychologically ingrained, producing the plural and emancipated subjectivities of those deemed modern, and a generalized "mind" for those constructed as backward and subordinated, wherever they are located. Consistent with existing racial notions, especially in the United States, Arab and Muslim cultural practices and subjectivities are assumed first to be *known*, and further to be static and untouched by hybridizing processes, a range of debates and contestations, or factors such as colonialism, imperialism, ideology, socio-economic location, and national differences. As a result of such assumptions, diverse groups of people are misunderstood as an undifferentiated "them."

The dominant culture knowledge informing the subordination techniques of U.S. and U.S.-sponsored prison personnel and their superiors, it appears, was that forced nakedness, homo- and heterosexualized degradation and threats, and associations with things and subject positions deemed womanly violated modesty, heterosexual, and masculinity norms (where degradation equals the feminine in misogynist terms), and thus would be peculiarly effective in demeaning the Arab and Muslim men prisoners and breaking their will to resist collaboration. Such (projected?) assumptions are particularly ironic given the long history of Western discursive constructions of "the Orient" in travel and other literature as a ground for "erotic fantasies of aberrant and illicit sexuality," as Hema Chari and others have pointed out. Chari insists that these sexual fantasies were often about subordinating *colonized men to colonizing men*, while at the same time scripting colonized men as "aberrant other[s] to fulfill Western psychosocial needs" to both avow and disavow "sexual desire between men."[7] This does not negate Jasbir Puar=s point that the sexual acts simulated in many of the scenes of Iraqi prisoners were not "specifically and only gay sex acts." Also important is Puar's point that "race and how it plays out in these scenarios is effaced via the fixation on sexuality...."[8] Indeed, my point is that the techniques used in the racial-political subordination of prisoners in the boundless U.S. war on terror and of Iraqis under U.S. occupation continue to be informed at least partly by specious culture knowledge about Arab or Muslim gender and sexuality norms. This "knowledge," moreover, is hegemonic in the U.S. It appears, further, that in the cases under discussion, the "culture knowledge" produced by weak social science is privileged over that found in western travelogues, novels, memoirs, and other writings that have provided so much grist for post-colonial and cultural studies.

THE POLITICS OF CULTURE IN *THE ARAB MIND*

The purported logic behind the torture methods used against Arab and Muslim men at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere, and many of the narratives that circulated in response, rearticulated particularistic assumptions about Arab Muslim "mentalities" and attitudes toward nudity, sexuality, and gender relations as most famously explored and argued in Raphael Patai=s *The Arab Mind*.[9] *The Arab Mind* focused on what Patai variously called Arab "psychology," "mentality," or "mind," explaining to Western readers (assumed to be white, Judeo-Christian, and educated) the cultural habits and ways of being Arab. This agenda is underpinned by a narrative structure that rationalizes and legitimates Western domination over the Eastern other by making a case for the civilizational and cultural superiority of the former. Arab politics as compared to Western politics, and Arab resistance to "Westernization" B with Zionism and Israel constructed as representative of Western modernity -- are recurring and insistent themes in the book.

Patai's study, according to a consultant to the U.S. government for the 2003 Iraq war referenced in an exposé article by journalist Seymour Hersh, became "the bible of the neocons on Arab behavior," who concluded that "Arabs only understand force" and their "biggest weakness...is shame and humiliation." The idea was that "some prisoners would do anything B including spying on their associates B to avoid dissemination of the shameful photos to family and friends," and thus would agree to collaborate with the occupation forces upon release.[10] In his April 30, 2004, *New Yorker* article, Hersh referenced New York University professor of Middle Eastern Studies Bernard Haykel as stating that while "such dehumanization is unacceptable in any culture, ...it is especially so in the Arab world. Homosexual acts are against Islamic law and it is humiliating for men to be naked in front of other men."[11] Such culture assumptions and the techniques of subordination informed by them have been notably unsuccessful as indicated by the strength of the anti-U.S. insurgency; and the anonymous U.S. consultant acknowledged this failure in the Hersh article published in *The New Yorker* on May 15, 2004.[12]

Patai's preface in the first edition of his book operates as a pre-emptive self-defense that situates the author as a credible academic with no intent to harm. Patai informs readers that his claims about Arabs and Muslims emerge from his intensive training in Middle Eastern, Islamic, and biblical studies; informal relationships with living Arabs; knowledge of Arab and Islamic history and theorists (who are deployed throughout the book as anticipating his own arguments about a modal personality); training and experience in the languages of the region, especially Arabic; and "life-long attachment" to people and things "Araby." Readers learn that Patai grew up in Budapest, completed doctoral studies in Hungary and Germany before attending graduate school at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the "spring" of 1933 (earning the first Ph.D. awarded by the university in 1936, and Patai=s second doctorate), where he studied "Palestinology, which comprised the history, historical geography, and topography of the country; and Arabic."[13] Patai=s claims to being attached to Arabs and his educational credentials often provide the basis for defense of *The Arab Mind*.

In summer 2004, the *Middle East Quarterly* [14] republished the foreword to the 2002 reprint of *The Arab Mind*. The foreword was written by Norvell B. De Atkine, who described himself as a retired colonel in the U.S. Army who served in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Vietnam (where he was a combatant), holds a

graduate degree in Arab studies from the American University in Beirut, and "teaches at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina."[15] While we cannot know from available information how military personnel absorbed and applied this training, Atkine writes that *The Arab Mind* "forms the basis of my cultural instruction [of military officers], complemented by my own experiences of some twenty-five years living in, studying, or teaching about the Middle East." He adds that he has "briefed hundreds of military teams being deployed to the Middle East," who upon returning "invariably comment on the paramount usefulness of the cultural instruction in their assignments."[16] While it is difficult to argue or provide evidence that such instruction was *not* useful to these military personnel, my point is that the assumptions and putative knowledge about local culture that such personnel bring with them interactionally *constitutes* culture rather than simply reflecting or respecting its indigenous forms.

Atkine echoes Patai=s stated empathy with and liking for Arabs and Muslims, and describes *The Arab Mind* as scholarly, with "neither animus nor rancor nor condescension."[17] However, since all scholarship is informed by the foundational assumptions, methodologies, and epistemological understandings and subjectivities of authors, it is difficult to argue that the book is neutral or apolitical. The driving arguments in *The Arab Mind* are clearly informed by Patai=s personal history and ideology as a European Jewish Zionist who was the son of an activist Zionist father.[18] My analysis of *The Arab Mind*_reiterates some of Edward Said=s criticisms of the claims and arguments about Arab and Muslim character made by U.S.-based academics such as Sania Hamady, Bernard Lewis, Patai (in earlier works), and others in the 1960s and 1970s, whose research represented what he termed the "latest phase" of Orientalist scholarship.[19] A quick search of the Internet indicates that these works and their authors B dated, over-generalized, and problematic as they are B continue to be recommended by conservative websites, bloggers, and websites sponsored by the U.S. state as providing incisive and accurate explanations of the region and its peoples. In a Google search, for example, I encountered an unclassified U.S. Central Intelligence Agency document that positively reviewed *The Arab Mind* in the context of the overall intelligence utility of "national character research."[20]

The most famous and respected practitioner of this type of research was anthropologist Ruth Fulton Benedict, whose book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* grew from research produced at the request of the U.S. Office of War Information.[21] It is not surprising that these personality-type frameworks have been revived and rearticulated at the dawn of the 21st century, given the extent to which "culture" differences are used to explain the motivations of perceived or real enemies of the "west." The "war on terror" triggered by the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S., and the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq (whose excuses have shifted over time but appears to be primarily motivated by a desire to control the region's natural resources), have had few sovereignty, citizenship, or legal limits. Thus these wars are in special need of an overarching legitimating framework that describes the targets of the war as culturally and civilizationally inferior to those using military power to push the mantle of civilization and democracy.

In defense (published in the "Letters" section of *The Nation,* September 19, 2005) of their late father and his book, Daphne Patai and Jennifer Patai Schneider are right to insist that Raphael Patai cannot be blamed for the possible use of *The Arab Mind* in the training of military personnel deployed in hostile Muslim-majority

or Arab fields, or the torture of Iraqi prisoners by U.S. military forces. Patai and Schneider=s defense is nevertheless disingenuous in its argument that Raphael Patai=s subjectivity is irrelevant to evaluation of *The Arab Mind*, as indicated by their rhetorical question: "Or might it be that Patai=s work is suspect because he is a Jew, a European?"[22] It is widely acknowledged and recognized that Seymour Hersh, the U.S. author of the stories that most famously exposed torture behind prison walls in Iraq and U.S. government complicity at the highest levels, is a journalist and muckraker of Jewish background. More problematic is the daughters= stated assumption, shared by Norvell B. De Atkine, that criticism of *The Arab Mind* is the same as criticism of "having some understanding of a foreign culture."[23] The sisters write, for example, that "We would certainly hope that neocons, the left, the military, the press and others actually turn to scholarship in attempting to formulate their views of cultures other than their own."[24] Atkine uses a similar strategy when he argues that critics of *The Arab Mind* should instead be encouraging education and understanding of other cultures on those cultures= terms.[25] The argument for the importance of cultural education is a red herring, however, in that critics of *The Arab Mind* are likely to agree that cultural knowledge about other societies and peoples is important, as is knowledge of history and language, and being open to new information and ways of behaving in unfamiliar contexts. Such an argument elides the degree to which the cultural representations in *The Arab Mind* are accurate or complete, and how such representations inform politics, policy, and military strategy.

Although *The Arab Mind* has been widely-read by a certain intelligentsia, it cannot be treated as *explaining* torture by U.S. forces (in Abu Ghraib or elsewhere), especially given the ubiquitousness of torture and other extrajudicial violence in U.S. wars and foreign interventions. Rather, the book is one source that has helped to articulate and legitimate longstanding hegemonic European and Western idioms for understanding and controlling the other, especially the Arab and Muslim other, in the service of colonial or imperial projects. While there is little debate that Saddam Hussein was a dictator, it is widely recognized in the region that U.S. foreign, military, and economic policies have historically worked against democratic movements in the post-Ottoman and post-colonial Middle East and North Africa, and the U.S. state has a robust history of supporting policies and individuals that facilitate the interests of U.S. capitalism. Indeed, as Naomi Klein recently reminded readers, people who responded to the Abu Ghraib images of U.S. state-sponsored torture as if it had "never before" occurred suffer from historical amnesia, since torture by U.S. military and intelligence forces has been quite common-place. According to declassified School of the Americas training manuals, U.S. torture methods have included: "early morning capture to maximize shock, immediate hooding and blindfolding, forced nudity, sensory deprivation, sensory overload, sleep and food manipulation, humiliation, extreme temperatures, isolation, stress positions B and worse."[26] These strategies of subjugation were used but denied during U.S.-led and sponsored wars in Vietnam and Latin America. Torture in the Bush II administrations, in contrast, is publicly embraced and defended by the state at the highest levels.[27]

PERSONALITY AND CULTURE IN *THE ARAB MIND*

Because of space and scope considerations, I only analyze parts of *The Arab Mind*. Most claims about Arab personality and culture in the book are overdrawn. Moreover, expositions of "the Arab" occur in negative contrast with an explicitly superior Western mode and way of being, rather than being discussed according to historical foundations, contextual operations, debates, alternative practices, hybridities, plurality, and transformations. This is true despite Patai's occasional folklorist admonitions to the "we" readership not to judge the other by our standards. Not surprisingly given its popularity, *The Arab Mind* is compelling in some of its arguments, not least of which because it makes some research-based truth claims that reasonable people can agree with, and people with knowledge of Arab societies and people can recognize. Patai argues, for example, that there is a "national [Arab Muslim] character" produced from shared culturally-bound child-rearing and socialization processes. What social constructionist, clinical psychologist, teacher, or feminist can disagree that the dominant childrearing and socialization techniques of a group impact self and subject formation? The problem with Patai's formulations is that they are frequently ahistorical, acontextual, and over-generalizing. Arab childrearing and socialization systems, for example, are understood by Patai to be rigid rather than flexible and variable, and all-determining in impact rather than producing different individual trajectories. In his words, there is a "hold [of] traditional values...over the...Arab mind."[28] Within such an understanding, members of Arab societies cannot be individuals, but are similar to drones in a Borg-like collective that suppresses creativity, critical thinking, and individuality.[29] The contemporary reader of *The Arab Mind* can be forgiven for concluding that there is a primordial Arab-Muslim child-rearing system that by definition is impervious to change, history, education, migration, ethnic difference, class, legal context, ideology, television, radio, music, and the Internet.

The Arab character, according to Patai, is "the sum total of the motives, traits, beliefs, and values shared by the plurality in a national population," or the "modal personality."[30] These Arab traits include family cohesion and hierarchical loyalties, honor in death rather than humiliation, self-respect, and dislike of subordination to authority.[31] Men, he argued, over-rely on verbal utterances without the ability to follow through because of access on verbalized demand to the mother=s breast until age three.[32] Child-rearing also impacts achievement orientations, which in turn explains differentials in national development rates.[33] Male virility and manliness are valued by Arabs, as is sexual privacy, although to a lesser extent than virility.[34] Arab "self-esteem" or "self-respect" depends on the sexual honor of women, courage-bravery, and hospitality-generosity, all of which Patai defines as "syndromes."[35] The term "syndrome" implies a disease, disorder, or abnormality. In this case, it appears to be a permanent condition caused by an all-determining and inferior culture that is inculcated especially through child-rearing. Arabs, he argued, "are prisoners of their cultural values" and all their actions are designed to save face.[36]

Patai discussed the Arabic language as stylistically exaggerated and elaborate, full of "florid expressions," giving the language a "delicious quality" in terms of style. Patai compared this style with non-Arabic, "primarily English, standards" of expression, which he described as tending toward the "brief," "dry," and invariably "repetitive" in how, for example, people greet each other in the morning.[37] Arabic language style predictably translates into negative political implications, however, so that "exaggeration and overemphasis intrude even into Arab political statements and discussion." This is illustrated for Patai by the

reported statements of Syrian, Iraqi, and Saudi Arabian leaders to Palestinian nationalist Musa Alami on the eve of the "1948 Israeli War of Independence" that the Arab militaries could easily defeat the Jewish Zionists: "The common denominator in all these verbal assurances was that they were greatly exaggerated statements as to what the Arabs intended or hoped to do, as to what they believed they were capable of doing once they began to fight the Jews; in reality, these statements were not followed by serious or sustained efforts to translate them into action."[38] Because this claim is premised on an axiom about Arab culture as it inheres in the structure and nature of Arabic, Patai and those of similar persuasion have difficulty seeing resemblance between Arab and non-Arab leaders who exaggerate, lie, withhold information, or manipulate reality and information for the purpose of reinforcing their own position vis-a-vis their publics or opponents.

Given the circulation of Orientalist discourse about Arab attitudes toward gender and sexuality in response to the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, it is important to discuss Patai's contradictory claims about "the realm of sex," as he titled chapter VIII of *The Arab Mind*. Patai writes that Arabs consider sex to be "taboo" and "sinful," and indeed are "severely" sexually repressed. In the same chapter, however, he discusses Arabs as "matter of fact," even open, about sex. Sexual openness is demonstrated in popular Arab and Persian erotica, whose "explicitness...is not equaled in the comparable European erotica," an attitude learned by children who freely listen to adults, especially in gender-segregated venues, discuss and banter about sexual issues.[39] After stating that traditional Arab sexual attitudes have changed as they increasingly follow "Western ways," Patai follows with a Freudian-inspired grand theory of the "sexual repression-frustration-aggression syndrome of the Arab personality."[40] He makes many other sweeping and ahistorical claims about gender and sexuality, such as

> Insofar as women are considered inferior to men -- this is a pre-Islamic concept confirmed by the Koran (4:34) B and insofar as the main value of a woman from the point of view of the group is her capacity as potential or actual mother of male group members, if she commits a transgression which makes her unfit for this supreme task of womanhood, she seals her own fate: she must die.[41]

Variability based on place, time, and individuality are irrelevant in the service of these generalized culture claims. Moreover, lived realities are treated as parallel to norms. Even when Patai references empirically-based studies, they often do not substantiate his expansive statements, as occurs, for example, in his discussion of Arab versus Western male sexualities in the 1950s.[42]

Regional cultural precepts in the contemporary period delineate that sexual relations should be limited to marriage. At the same time, restrictions on sex outside of marriage by the monotheistic religions have always actively competed with a range of illicit sexual activities by men and women of all backgrounds. Indeed, a range of sexual practices and attitudes are demonstrated at various points by Patai as well. He randomly notes, for example, "Even before the onset of Westernization, the relative freedom enjoyed by young men and girls even among the most noble Bedouin tribes often led to love affairs between them, and many a girl became pregnant, frequently with tragic consequences."[43] It remains true that in most Muslim-majority countries, Muslim men are allowed to marry up to four women at a time (a small proportion does so) and sex outside of marriage by women is treated more seriously than men's violations. At the same time, using Patai's framework,

only "Westernization" can explain individual challenges to male dominance, a particularly ironic claim since such dominance remains part of most Western institutions by custom if not by law. Such framings easily allow Occidentalist reversals (in which the East is superior) by cultural fundamentalists, so that indigenous challenges to male hegemony or hetero-normativity are discursively and strategically constructed as inauthentic mimicry of the West.

With respect to virginity and honor, Patai states that: "Both virginity and 'ird [honor invested in women's sexual propriety in patriarchal terms] are intrinsically parts of the female person; they cannot be augmented, they can only be lost, and their loss is irreparable."[44] While the connections Patai makes between hegemonic concepts of honor and unmarried girls' and women's virginity and sexual propriety are accurate in most parts of the Arab world, hymen repair surgeries in Lebanon, Morocco, Egypt and Turkey, for example, indicate that girls and women are willing to violate and indeed redefine the meaning of these precepts. It is also important to recognize the existence of girls and women who marry without being virgins and without undertaking hymen surgeries (or are unmarried and sexually active). Similarly, many men and women are redefining the terms and nature of marital contracts, and the nature of the licit in sexual terms. While empirical research always remains to be done, existing evidence indicates that changes are ongoing with respect to sexuality and gender relations, and there have always been differences among variously situated Arabs and Muslims, challenging many of Patai's unequivocal statements.

With respect to homosexuality, Patai is again contradictory in his claims regarding an Arab mind, although he familiarly recoups the idea of Western superiority. Moreover, Patai assumes the homosexual subject, Western or Arab, to be male. He writes:

> [T]he attitude to homosexuality is more liberal among the Arabs than it was in the West until the 'gay liberation' movement of the last few years. The taboo on homosexuality is not so strong as it was in America in the 1950s..., and 'the active homosexual role in particular is thought of by the Arab students as compatible with virile masculinity.' In this respect, the Arab attitude coincides with that of the Turks, among whom performance of the active homosexual act is considered as an assertion of one's aggressive masculine superiority, while the acceptance of the role of the passive homosexual is considered extremely degrading and shameful because it casts the man or youth into a submissive, feminine role.[45]

Patai states that while "in most parts of the Arab world, homosexual activity or any indication of homosexual leanings, as with all other expressions of sexuality, is never given any publicity," such practices "seems to be common" and "popular opinion...takes no stand against them."[46] Despite this apparent sexual polymorphousness, Patai concludes that Arab sexuality is marked by "polarities," and "in comparison to the West [which has a more "athletic" attitude], the realm of sex constitutes more of a problem for Arabs and hence elicits more concern and more preoccupation."[47]

Patai's sex and gender analyses are weak partly because his arguments often rest on hegemonic religious and moralistic precepts, rather than how variously located people respond and behave, and how these responses and behaviors differ across time and place. As a result, rather than revising his argument or weakening it,

Patai's random deployment of research, personal experience, various and sundry statements by "locals," and language knowledge (he frequently makes leaps from an Arabic word root, or *masdar*, to the meaning and implications of conjugations), either provide evidence for his argument or are "exceptions to the rule."[48]

The Arab Mind provides few tools for understanding the emergence of non-heteronormative sexual movements, communities, and identities; generational rifts (with young people who are more socially conservative or more socially liberal than their parents); ideological disagreements; class and urban-rural differences, and so on. Moreover, ongoing cultural and moral debates in the U.S. about abortion, gay marriage, the heterosexual family, divorce, homosexuality, and birth control seem to compel different comparisons between "Arab" and "Western" ways. These issues were not resolved in the U.S. at the time Patai was writing, and remain contentious today. Specifically, rather than Patai's easy juxtaposition of a collective Arab mind against an individualist Western self, notions of liberal individualism are historically contested in the U.S., and continue to be so, especially for women, people of color, the poor, working-class people, sex-gender minorities, immigrants, non-citizens, and intersections thereof. Neither the differences nor the similarities between Western and Arab or Muslim provide a basis for easy judgments of either as culturally or socially superior to the other.

GENDER, SEXUALITY AND CULTURE KNOWLEDGE IN THE IRAQ WAR

While there had not been widely circulated *visual* evidence of torture and sexual assault of Iraqi girls and women by 2004, there were reports of their torture, murder, and rape by U.S. forces directly and by Iraqi forces under U.S. supervision, including in the February 2004 International Committee of the Red Cross report on detainees and prisoners in Iraq.[49] An Associated Press story by Scheherezade Faramarzi about women prisoners held by U.S. forces in Iraq captures how framing gender and sexuality as "traditional" Iraqi or Muslim cultural problems distracts from deeper feminist analyses and critiques of imperial operations. In the AP story, Faramarzi describes Iraq as "a conservative Islamic tribal society where women are closely guarded" and writes that nine women Iraqi prisoners between the ages of 20 and 30 were, according to "human rights activists," being used by U.S. occupation forces as bargaining chips Ato pressure wanted male relatives to turn themselves in." The issue of the Iraqi women prisoners had reemerged because a U.S. woman journalist, Jill Carroll, had been taken hostage by insurgents and was being threatened with death unless the Iraqi women were released. Faramarzi writes that "the practice of detaining women in security raids has become an inflammatory subject in this conservative society, where men sometimes kill female relatives who have been raped because of 'shame' brought to the family." While the author does not mention that holding hostage family members of wanted individuals are gross violations of human rights, she does include a statement from an Iraqi woman activist working on behalf of women detainees that only "some" men surrender in response to the arrest of their "wives, daughters and mothers," [50] indicating the limits of U.S. assumptions.

Cultural "tradition" discourses situate Iraqi responses to the imprisonment of women as uniquely Arab-Muslim and thus a mark of Iraqi backwardness, which in turn discursively legitimates foreign occupation. Similarly, the Arab "tribal" culture framework as explanatory discourages a comparative analysis that may find

nationalist patriarchies to be working similarly when one compares Iraqi responses to the U.S. detention, rape and/or torture of Iraqi girls and women, with U.S. representations of and responses to the injury, supposed capture and rape by Iraqis, and highly touted U.S. military "rescue" of Private Jessica Lynch from an Iraqi hospital between March 23 and April 1, 2003.[51] More generally, primordial and essentialist understandings of gender and sexuality in Arab or Muslim cultures do little to clarify the social operations of gender and sexual frameworks in various contexts. Such culture shortcuts miss the possibility that new misogynist iterations of honor, East/West binaries, and patriarchies are being developed, and leave unanalyzed the purposes these iterations serve for the institutions, groups, or individuals encouraging them. The few press stories that have discussed how victims and families are responding to assaults, detention, and torture of Iraqi girls and women indicate a range of realities, including raped women who have committed suicide following prison release; released girls and women who have disappeared with their families; family members who have killed women and girls who had been sexually assaulted; family members who have refused to do violence on former female prisoners with support from local religious leaders; family members and released prisoners who speak publicly about their ordeals; family members and released prisoners who want to remain anonymous; and one woman, Huda Alazawi, who reported that she was divorced by her husband following her release.[52] Since 2005, a number of additional rape and rape and murder cases of Iraqi women and girls by U.S. and Iraqi forces have been revealed. In February 2007, moreover, two Iraqi married women did the unusual when they reported on Arabic satellite stations separate incidents of being gang-raped in their homes by Iraqi policing personnel.

Following the revelations of torture at Abu Ghraib prison, the most widespread discourse, especially in Western media sources, explained its significance and outrageousness within the framework of humiliated, homophobic, and conservative Arabs or Muslims. For example, Julio Godoy quoted a French woman academic as saying that U.S. torturers (like their French predecessors in Algeria) used knowledge of Muslims to design effective torture methods, such as "humiliating" them through nudism in front of women and using dogs to intimidate and hurt them.[53] In an article published in the Dublin-based *Sunday Business Post*, Tina Marie O'Neill opined that "reaction in the Arab world to images of US troops abusing Iraqis in Abu Ghraib prison has been one of predictable rage. Homosexuality and public nudity are at odds with conservative Islamic culture."[54] The author does not consider anger to be a rather predictable response from any group watching abuse by unaccountable power, in this case an invading and occupying power that used the legitimating language of liberation. The outrage of torture is trumped by the putative "cultural" outrage produced by images of nakedness and simulation of pornographic acts.

While many Western and U.S. feminists and queer activists have been critical of the Iraq war and the torture of Iraqi prisoners, some have at the same time reproduced the problematic culture discourses discussed in this essay. While feminist Zillah Eisenstein called the events torture, because of unidimensional understandings of gendered subjectivities, sexual torture by U.S. white women soldiers could only be understood as women behaving like men, rather than recognizing the imbricated gender, racial, sexual, and class subjectivities of men and women.[55] A U.S. on-line queer magazine pundit recognized the way in which

sexualized abuse portrayed in the released images was treated as exceptionally outrageous, so that the

> thousands of Iraqis [and Afghanis] killed by U.S. bombs, long-range guns, and by 'accident' when their homes are raided or their cars stopped at checkpoints have bothered few consciences. But snapshots depicting homosexual humiliation provoked abject public apologies from the President Bush and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld....[56]

In the service of a queer agenda in the U.S., this anti-war writer confounds consensual sex with rape, and the humiliation of prisoners with the games sexual partners play. Sex is highlighted and violence elided when the author further argues that it is public nudity, homosexuality, and the presence of women that makes these events "so outrageous to Muslims." Such a representation reproduces a contemporary Orientalist fantasy of backward, repressed, patriarchal Arab or Muslim societies. In this fantasy, moreover, "out" queers, undressed bodies, and public sexual expression and displays of affection are assumed to represent the height of modernity and advancement.

Rather than focusing on its sexualized aspects, or extracting the sexualized torture from context and history, Arab and other Third World journalists and editorialists were the most likely to treat the Abu Ghraib torture as part of a larger violent, subordinating, imperial U.S.-led project in the region that included the dropping of "500-pound bombs" and killing, non-sexualized torture, and other violence by coalition forces throughout Iraq.[57] These events were seen as part and parcel of the destruction of Iraqi social and physical infrastructure, as well as individuals and their communities, who were not "treated with the respect human beings deserve."[58] In Azmi Bishara=s words, the real "perversion" was a foreign occupation which by definition requires "physical subjugation," repeatedly reminding readers to "Ask the Palestinians!"[59] News reports, editorials, and activists from the Arab world commonly used the exposés of U.S. torture in Abu Ghraib to discuss their own repressive militaries and governments; execution in a variety of countries whose regimes are supported by the U.S. government; U.S.-sponsored or perpetrated torture and killings in prison facilities in Guantanamo and Afghanistan; and kidnappings and disappearances of suspects.[60] Many also used the Abu Ghraib revelations to demand an end to torture by regional states, as well as accountability for previous torture.[61] Discussion of torture by regional states (including rape of political opponents) in the independent Arab press pre-existed the Abu Ghraib revelations as well.[62]

In an illustration of the unbounded nature of Orientalism and its Occidentalist reversals, some Muslims or Arabs responded to the Abu Ghraib torture revelations by articulating a "we" that was oppositionally and *essentially* different from a Christian or Western "them." Some of these native commentators and journalists communicated outrage against humiliation and reproduced convenient East versus West caricatures of culture and homophobia. For example, an Iraqi (or Iraqi American) male graduate student in Middle Eastern studies at the University of California, Berkeley, whose editorial was published in the *Los Angeles Times*, criticized former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's specious distinction between "abuse" and "torture," but reinforced a sense of collectively injured Arab masculinities:

> But for a proud nation shocked by photos depicting the sexual abuse of its men, [the distinction] represents callousness and insensitive rationalization in the face of a moral quagmire.... [T]he photos of U.S. soldiers abusing and humiliating naked Iraqis are a direct blow to the essence of their pride.... It is also a cruel reality that all the approximately 10,000 detainees have been stigmatized by the shame at Abu Ghraib, *no matter what those detainees claim*... Americans and their allies must understand that Iraq is not a pragmatic society when it comes to religion, culture and sexual mores. (emphasis added)[63]

To conclude, this discourse relies on reified and reductive definitions of "culture" without recognition of complex social dynamics, change, differences, historical context, and internal social debates and differences. In this case, while a number of men prisoners from Abu Ghraib testified to their torture while masked or did not use their names,[64] quite a few pointed themselves out in the torture pictures, have testified, and are bringing charges against various agents of the occupation authorities.[65] In addition, a number of Iraqi men detained at the Abu Ghraib prison provided sworn and signed statements to U.S. military investigators in January 2004, before the photographs were widely revealed, which are translated into English. In these statements, which are published by the *Washington Post* and available on-line, the men are explicit and extensive in describing the torture and violence, including of the sexualized varieties, that they directly suffered and watched others suffer at the hands of U.S.-sponsored military and intelligence personnel, as well as their ongoing fears and nightmares, indicating that they are interested in holding their torturers accountable.[66] Their insistence on justice also demonstrates the limitations of the hegemonic culture knowledge that is the focus of this essay.

ENDNOTES

The author wishes to thank the peer reviewer of this essay and Maha Yahya.

[1] Cited in Mark Danner, "Abu Ghraib: The Hidden Story," *New York Review of Books*, vol. 51, no. 15, (October 7, 2004), http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article_id=17430 (accessed February 20, 2007).
[2] As Edward Said wrote: "As a system of thought about the Orient, [Orientalism] always rose from the specifically human detail to the general transhuman one; an observation about a tenth-century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia.... [T]he great likelihood that ideas about the Orient drawn from Orientalism can be put to political use, is an important yet extremely sensitive truth.... It necessarily provokes unrest in one's conscience about cultural, racial, or historical generalizations, their uses, value, degree of objectivity, and fundamental intent." Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Book, 1978), p. 96.
[3] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[4] Some of these photographs can be found at http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=2444; http://photos.signonsandiego.com/gallery1.5/view_album.php?set_albumName=Abu_Ghraib_prison_abuses; http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/introduction/; and http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2006/02/16/abu_ghraib/. Links to documents, reports, articles, commentary, and images related to the Abu Ghraib prison abuses can also be found through Julia LeSage's website, *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, "Abu Ghraib and Images of Abuse and Torture," http://ejumpcut.org/archive/jc47.2005/links.html (accessed February 26, 2007). Former prisoners have testified that military and military-affiliated personnel not only photographed, but regularly videotaped torture, rape, and murder.

[5] Torture and violence have included a range of other techniques, including electric shock torture, severe beating, suffocation, the use of un-muzzled dogs to threaten prisoners, keeping prisoners in stressful positions for extended periods, sleep deprivation, noise torture, withholding food or provision of infested or dirty food, extended isolation, and "waterboarding," or submerging prisoners in water or sewage, drowning or nearly drowning them. Danner, "Abu Ghraib"; Mark Benjamin, "The Abu Ghraib Files," *Salon.com,* (February 16, 2006), http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2006/02/16/abu_ghraib/ (accessed February 22, 2007); Emad Mekay, "Rights: Abu Ghraib Said to Influence Prison Abuse in Egypt" (June 22, 2004), IPS-Inter Press Service, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2006); Suzanne Goldberg, "Bush Memos Reveal Stance on Torture," *Manchester Guardian Weekly* (July 2, 2004), Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2006); "Conspiracy to Torture," editorial, *The Nation*, vol. 281, no. 22, (December 26, 2005), p. 3-5; Moustafa Bayoumi, "Disco Inferno," *The Nation,* vol. 281, no. 22, (December 26, 2005), p. 32-35; Raymond Whitaker, "A Year of Horror: More Bombs, More Pain, More Tears," Part I, (December 26, 2004), *Independent on Sunday* (London), Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2006); Josh White and Scott Higham, "Use of Dogs to Scare Prisoners Was Authorized" (June 11, 2004), *The Washington Post,* Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 21, 2006); Josh White and Thomas E. Ricks, "Iraqi Teens Abused at Abu Ghraib, Report Finds" (August 24, 2004), *The Washington Post,* Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 21, 2006); Josh White, "Abu Ghraib Dog Tactics Came from Guantanamo" (July 27, 2005), *The Washington Post,* Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 21, 2006); Josh White, "Documents Tell of Brutal Improvisation by GIs" (August 3, 2005), *The Washington Post,* Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 21, 2006); Tracy Wilkinson, "Iraqi Describes Humiliation of Prison Abuses; Haider Sabber Abd Was Stripped, Beaten and Mocked" (May 6, 2004), *Los Angeles Times,* Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed July 21, 2004); Scott Wilson and Sewell Chan, "As Insurgency Grew, So Did Prison Abuse" (May 10, 2004), *Washington Post,* http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A13065-2004May9?language=printer (accessed July 20, 2004); Charles Arthur, "Secret Film Shows Iraq Prisoners Sodomised" (July 16, 2004), *The Independent*, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2006); Eitan Felner, "The Painful Lesson Israel Learned About Torture" (June 1, 2004), *International Herald Tribune,* Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed July 2, 2007); Luke Harding, "Women: After Abu Ghraib" (September 20, 2004), *The Guardian* (London), Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2006); Toby Harnden, "I Considered Suicide, Says Prisoner Degraded by GIs" (October 21, 2004), *The Daily Telegraph* (London), Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2006); Seymour M. Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib: American Soldiers Brutalized Iraqis: How Far Does the Responsibility Go?," *The New Yorker*, (April 30, 2004), http://www.newyorker.com (accessed July 20, 2004); Seymour M. Hersh, "The Gray Zone: How a Secret Pentagon Program Came to Abu Ghraib" (May 15, 2004), *The New Yorker*, http://www.newyorker.com (accessed July 20, 2004).

[6] Wendy Kozol and Rebecca DeCola, "Remapping the Visual War on Terrorism: 'U.S. Internationalism' and Transnational Citizenship," in *ReThinking Global Security: Media, Popular*

Culture, and the "War on Terror," ed. Andrew Martin and Patrice Petro (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), p. 188 and p. 179-205.

[7] Hema Chari, "Colonial Fantasies and Postcolonial Identities," in *Post-Colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*, ed. John C. Hawley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 277 and 279 p. 277-304.

[8] Jasbir K. Puar, "Abu Ghraib: Arguing Against Exceptionalism," *Feminist Studies* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2004), p. 522-534.

[9] Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1973).

[10] Hersh, "The Gray Zone."

[11] Hersh, "Torture at Abu Ghraib." These statements make little sense given the long tradition of gender-segregated public baths in the Muslim and Arab world. Moreover, textually, homosexuality is no more admonished in Islam than it is in Christianity or Judaism. Finally, such cultural claims are classically Orientalist in their non-acknowledgement of complex social practices and histories regarding sexuality.

[12] Hersh, "The Gray Zone."

[13] Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind,* p. 1 and 3.

[14] It is not irrelevant that the *Middle East Quarterly* is published by the Middle East Forum, a nonprofit think tank that, according to its own mission statement: "works to define and promote American interests in the Middle East through research, publications, and educational outreach. The Forum's policy recommendations include fighting radical Islam (rather than terrorism), convincing the Palestinians that Israel is permanent, reducing funds going to the Middle East for energy purchases, slowing down the democratization process, and more robustly asserting U.S. interests vis-**à**-vis Saudi Arabia. In addition, the Forum works to improve Middle East studies in North America." http://www.meforum.org/about.php, 2006 (accessed January 13, 2006).

[15] Norvell B. De Atkine, "The Arab Mind Revisited," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. xi, no. 3 (Summer 2004), p. 47-55; foreword by Atkine and biographical description for Atkine can be accessed at http://www.meforum.org/article/636.

[16] Ibid, p. 3.

[17] Ibid, p. 4.

[18] Palestine was under British colonial rule during the 1930s and Patai, according to various sources, was the son of a "prominent scholar, editor and Zionist who published a biography of [the founder of the Zionist movement] Theodor Herzl...." Patai's father founded "the Zionist organization in Hungary and was instrumental in procuring support for the settlement of Jews in Palestine, where he settled with his family in 1939. Raphael Patai migrated to the U.S. in 1947, where he taught until his retirement in 1966." John D. Stinson, "Raphael Patai Papers, c. 1904-1988," The New York Public Library, Humanities and Social Sciences Library Manuscripts and Archives Division, http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/spe/rbk/faids/patai.pdf, (February 1991), p. 2.

[19] See Said, *Orientalism*, esp. p. 284-328 and p.134, 349.

[20] Lloyd F. Jordan, *Review of The Arab Mind*, released in full July 2, 1996, CIA Historical Review Program, http://www.cia.gov/csi/ken_csi/docs/v18i3a06p_0001.htm, p. 29-32 (accessed January 15, 2006).

[21] A biography for Ruth Fulton Benedict can be found on the Vassar College website, which also indexes her archived notes, correspondence, and research writings: http://specialcollections.vassar.edu/benedict/benedict_text.html; Ruth Fulton Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1946).

[22] Daphne Patai and Jennifer Patai Schneider, "Minding 'The Arab Mind,'" *The Nation*, (September 19, 2005), p. 2 and 24.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Atkine, "Arab Mind Revisited," p. 3.

[26] Naomi Klein, "Never Before! Our Amnesiac Torture Debate," *The Nation*, vol. 281, no. 22, (December 26, 2005), p. 11-12.
[27] Ibid; Anthony Lewis, AThe Torture Administration," *The Nation*, vol. 281, no. 22, (December 26, 2005), p. 13-15.
[28] Patai, *The Arab Mind*, p. 117.
[29] According to a web-site about the television program Star Trek Voyager, Borg are Ahumanoid drones" with "cybernetic implants embedded inside and outside their bodies. These implants connect all the drones to each other in a massive collective called the hive mind, which suppresses each drone's individuality...." http://www.startrek-voyager.info/j.html (accessed January 15, 2006).
[30] Patai, *The Arab Mind*, p. 18.
[31] Ibid, p. 21-22.
[32] Ibid, p. 31-32.
[33] Ibid, p. 37.
[34] Ibid, p. 92 and 99.
[35] Ibid, p. 96-97.
[36] Ibid, p. 103 and 105-106.
[37] Ibid, p. 50.
[38] Ibid, p. 51.
[39] Ibid, p. 118, 128 and 136-137.
[40] Ibid, p. 128-131.
[41] Ibid, p. 125.
[42] Ibid, p. 130.
[43] Ibid, p. 132.
[44] Ibid, p. 120.
[45] Ibid, p. 134-5.
[46] Ibid, p. 135.
[47] Ibid, p. 140-141.
[48] Ibid, p. 134.
[49] *Report of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) On the Treatment By the Coalition Forces of Prisoners of War and Other Protected Persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq During Arrest, Internment and Interrogation* (Geneva: ICRC, February 2004). This document, which was prepared by the ICRC for the state signatories of the Geneva Conventions, was leaked and is widely available on-line; also see Al-Jazeera, "Iraqis Reported Dead After U.S. 'Gang Rape,'" (June 9, 2003), available on http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/463A40A8-7DA8-492E-B0A4-73F71EFB8609.htm (accessed July 22, 2004); Annia Ciezadlo, "For Iraqi Women, Abu Ghraib's Taint" (May 28, 2004), *Christian Science Monitor,* Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2004); Luke Harding, "Women: After Abu Ghraib;" Remy Ourdan, "American Tortures, Iraqi Claims" (June 30, 2004), *Le Monde* (Paris), in French, FBIS translation, World News Connection (accessed July 21, 2004); Roubba Kabbara, "Human Rights Groups Claim Iraqi Women Raped At Abu Ghraib Jail" (May 28, 2004), Agence France Presse, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed July 21, 2004).
[50] Scheherezade Faramarzi, "Female Prisoners Are Point of Contention in Iraq," *The Cleveland Plain Dealer,* January 22, 2006, p. A3.
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[53] Julio Godoy, "Iraq: U.S. Prisoner Abuse Likened to French Torture of Algerians" (June 28, 2004), IPS-Inter Press Service/Global Information Network, Lexis Nexis Academic Universe (accessed January 9, 2006).

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[55] Zillah Eisenstein, "Sexual Humiliation, Gender Confusion and the Horrors at Abu Ghraib," *Peace Women*, (June 2004), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, http://www.peacewomen.org/news/Iraq/June04/abughraib.html (accessed July 20, 2004).

[56] News Slant, "Queer Doings at Abu Ghraib: The Hypocrisy Over the Abuse," *The Guide: Gay Travel, Entertainment, Politics & Sex,* (June 2004), http://www.guidemag.com/magcontent/invokemagcontent.cfm?ID=7B54C7B5-C094-4252-B3E7CB4988D33ECC (accessed June 7, 2006).

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[59] Azmi Bishara, "The Dialogue of Cultures at Abu Ghraib," *al Hayat,* (May 6, 2004), http://english.daralhayat.com/opinion/05-2004/Article-20040514-851f2387-c0a8-01ed-0022-da17ccd6b808/story.html (accessed January 19, 2006).

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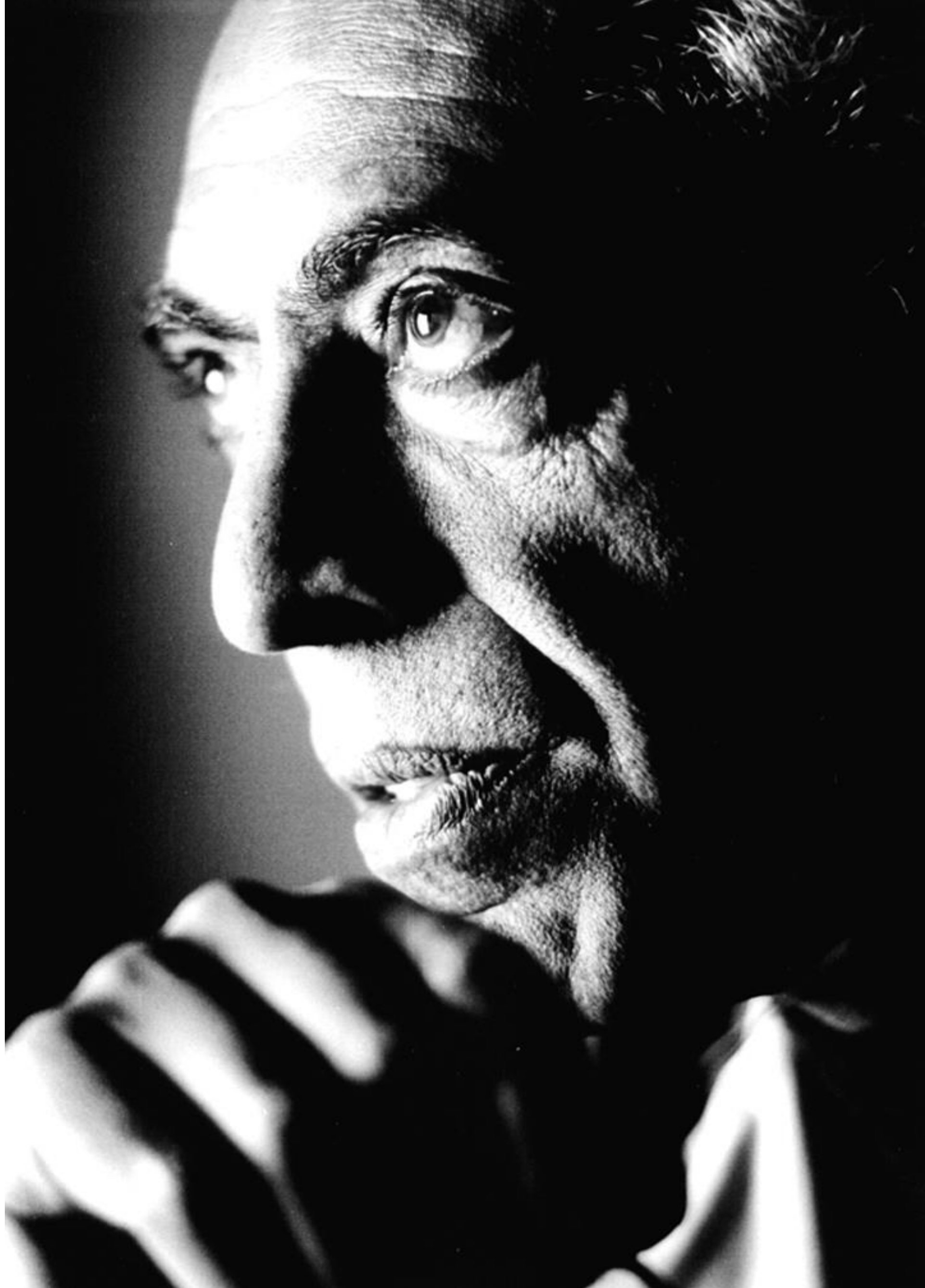
WRITING: - A "TOOL FOR CHANGE"
'ABD AL-RAHMAN MUNIF REMEMBERED



Abdel Rahman Munif (Photograph courtesy of Munif's family)

WRITING: - A "TOOL FOR CHANGE" 'ABD AL-RAHMAN MUNIF

AN INTRODUCTION

Sonja Mejcher-Atassi*

'Abd al-Rahman Munif (1933-2004) not only described the second half of the 20th century as "the era of the novel" in Arabic literature,[1] he himself was one of the most renowned Arab novelists of the time. He published his first novel *al-Ashjar wal-ightiyal Marzuq* (Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq) in Beirut in 1973. It opened a new world to him. Different from his previous political activism and far from political power, it – in his own words – presented a new and compelling means to contribute to the creation of "a more humane, free and just society."[2] Writing turned into a "tool for change," as Munif explains.[3] Munif's novels reclaim a past that has been subjugated to Western versions of history or neglected altogether. As Munif says in an essay with the telling title "al-Riwaya al-'arabiyya: Tarikh man la tarikh lahum" (The Arabic Novel: The History of Those Who do not Have a History), the novel records history in a different yet truer way than do history books, because it focuses not on the big events that make history, so to say, but on everyday life.[4]

But Munif was not only an outstanding novelist. He was also a distinguished intellectual and the author of several studies on political, socio-economic and cultural issues. All his writings were grounded in lived experience.

Born in Amman in 1933 to a mother from Iraq and a father from Najd in today's Saudi Arabia, Munif left for Baghdad to pursue his University studies in the early 1950s. It was a time of heightened political as well as cultural activity. A student of law but also a political activist (Munif was an early member of the Ba'th party which he left again in 1963, when the party seized power in Syria), Munif participated in the demonstrations against the Baghdad Pact and together with other likeminded students was expelled from Iraq. He continued his studies in Egypt where he graduated in 1958 from Cairo University. He subsequently went on to Belgrade, former Yugoslavia, where he obtained a Ph.D. in petroleum economics. In 1961, he returned to Beirut, then settling in Damascus to work as an expert in the Ministry of Petroleum. The Arab defeat in the June War of 1967 marked Munif significantly. The *hazima* [defeat] not only opened his eyes to the crisis facing the Arab Middle East; it played an important role in his taking up writing. The rise of the Arabic novel as a major form of expression in the second half of the twentieth century, writes Munif, has to be seen against the background of the Arab defeats since the *nakba* of 1948, notably the *hazima*.[5] In 1973, he again left for Beirut, this time to work in journalism. He edited the cultural journal *al-Balagh*. It was in Beirut – a city known for its socio-political as well as confessional

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diversity, freedom of the press and rich cultural life – that he started to pursue his interest in literature in a serious way. Due to the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, he left Beirut to settle anew in Baghdad. He worked as consultant for the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and as editor in chief of the journal *al-Naft wal-tanmiya* (Petroleum and Development). The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and the repressive political situation in Iraq under Saddam Husayn drove him away from Baghdad again. In 1981, he moved to Paris from thereon devoting himself entirely to writing. His magnum opus, the quintet *Mudun al-milh* (Cities of Salt, 1984-1989) was mainly written in Paris. Convinced that his and his family's place was in the Arab Middle East and not in Europe, he moved back to Damascus in 1986, frequently visiting Beirut, until his premature death in 2004.

Although Munif turned from political activism to literature, he remained outspoken about his political ideas to which he remained true throughout his life. In *al-Dimuqratiyya awwalan, al-dimuqratiyya da'iman* (Democracy First, Democracy Always) published in Beirut in 1992, he expresses his commitment to democracy – not as a magic key or a solution in itself but as a tool to face, deal with and solve the region's problems.[6] During the so-called "Damascus Spring" (*rabi' Dimashq*) that followed the death of President Hafiz al-Asad in June 2000, the Syrian opposition openly voiced its discontent with al-Asad's dictatorial regime. Munif was one of the first to sign "The Petition of the Ninety-Nine" (*bayan al-tis'a wal-tis'in*) which called for political reform, democracy and human rights.[7] In his last book published before his death, *al-Iraq: Hawamish min al-tarikh wal-muqawama* (Iraq: Side notes from History and Resistance, 2003), he describes Iraq's modern history as a national struggle against foreign rule, bringing to mind Iraq's will to independence in the light of the country's renewed occupation by foreign troops. Munif was a fierce critic of Saddam Husayn. At the same time, he condemned the war on Iraq which re-ignited his political radicalism of former days.[8]

The great extent of Munif's "symbolic capital"[9] accumulated over the years in different cities, gave him a pre-eminent position as an Arab novelist and intellectual. His intellectual integrity gained him much respect, especially among the younger generations of Arab intellectuals. But it also caused him serious trouble. He was deprived of his Saudi citizenship in 1963. He subsequently held different passports but was not able to solve the problem of citizenship permanently – not only for his sake but also for that of his children. Having lived in various Arab cities (Amman, Baghdad, Cairo, Beirut and Damascus), Munif was at home in the Arab Middle East, at large. Nevertheless, he was aware of the severe loss caused by exile. He opens his essay "al-Katib wal-manfa" (The Writer and Exile) with the words: "To be exiled means, to begin with, that you stand accused."[10] Munif's literary œuvre is of a transnational character. It can be described according to Georg Lukács' understanding of the novel as being grounded in a changing society (as compared to the classical epic in which cultural values are reinforced and celebrated as stable and unchanging) and giving voice to a "transcendental homelessness" (transzendentaler Obdachlosigkeit).[11] In its "transcendental homelessness" the novel came to stand for a new homeland in Munif's life and provided him with a new sense of identity and belonging

Celebrated as the Arab novelist *par excellence*, Munif has not been awarded the critical attention he deserves, especially in the English language. His premature death on January 24, 2004 meant the loss of a great novelist but also the loss of an intellectual voice that made a difference in our lives, the loss of an individual ready to take positions irrespective of the difficulties he may face, and the loss of a man

who knew to enjoy life despite its hardships and spent time in creative seclusion as well as in joyful gatherings with friends and family. In paying homage to Munif, the aim of this issue is to make his voice heard anew, to contribute in bringing it back to life.

The first section is devoted to "NARRATIVE, HISTORY & POLITICS". It starts with Ferial J. Ghazoul's "*Ard al-sawad*: A Novel Formulation of People's History of Iraq" in which Ghazoul examines Munif's last novel *Ard al-sawad* (Land of Darkness, 1999), a trilogy of approximately 1500 pages, which takes the reader back in time to Daud Pasha's rule as governor of Baghdad in the first half of the 19th century. Ghazoul focuses on the creative transformation of Iraq's history through the daily struggles of the common people, into fiction. As she argues, *Ard al-sawad* is not only a historical novel but a narrative that brings to the fore the silenced voices of the dispossessed, deprived even of their history.

In "*Upon Leaving the Bridge* & *Endings*: A Redemptive Journey", Maher Jarrar depicts the loneliness of the novels' respective heroes, or better: anti-heroes, Zaki al-Nadawi and 'Assaf, as expressing a crisis within their societies which both are eager to overcome. Whereas Zaki in *Hina tarakna al-jisr* (Upon Leaving the Bridge, 1976) accomplishes reunion with his community, 'Assaf in *Nihayat* (Endings, 1979) is only fully accepted by his community after his death. In their protest resonates the outcry against the evils of Arab societies that *Sharq al-mutawassit* (East of the Mediterranean, 1975) came to stand for. The novel addresses the *non-dit*, or what remains unsaid, of political prisoners through which "writing as a tool for change" is made manifest. Munif returned to this theme more than fifteen years later in *al-An wa huna aw sharq al-mutawassit marra ukhra* (Now and Here or East of the Mediterranean Once Again, 1991), to dissect the manner in which political oppression and prisons have remained a harsh reality in the region. As Elias Khoury puts it in "Rewriting the Novel", the prison in the Arab Middle East is "the first indication of the authority's crisis and society's anguish at the same time."

In "De/Construction: Two Edges of a *Magian Love-Story*", Nisrine Jaafar takes us back to one of Munif's early novels. *Qissat hubb majusiyya* (Magian Love Story, 1974) is Munif's only novel set solely in a European context. It deals with a perennial theme in modern Arabic literature: the relation between East and West, as seen through the eyes of an Arab student who falls in love with a European woman. Although the novel stands out within Munif's literary oeuvre, its unnamed narrator has much in common with the more mature characters in Munif's later novels and with the author himself, as Jaafar concludes, naming the experience of exile and loneliness and their readiness to resist political oppression as common features.

Eric Gautier's "History and Fiction in *Mudun al-Milh* (Cities of Salt)" brings us back to the historical value of Munif's novels. *Cities of Salt* deals with the transformation of the Arabian Peninsula triggered by the discovery of petroleum. Taking it as a case study, Gautier addresses far-reaching questions, such as: Can the novel fill the gap of history writing, especially with regards to a country like Saudi Arabia that has not been easily accessible to historians, or does blurring the lines between history and fiction bring to the fore a reality of its own that may shed new light on the reality we take for granted?

The second and third section "MUNIF ON ART" and "IN HIS OWN WORDS" show Munif not in his capacity as novelist but in a different light: as an art lover. My contribution, "Munif's Interest in Modern Art: Friendship, Symbolic Exchange and the Art of the Book", examines Munif's rapport with modern visual art, especially painting. Munif was not only in close contact with artists, such as Dia

Azzawi and Marwan Qassab-Bachi, he also tried his own hand at drawing as the special edition of his autobiography *Sirat madina* (Story of a City) published in Beirut in 2001 shows. His own article about the late Iraqi artist and sculptor Jawad Salim (1919-1961) and the Monument of Freedom (*nasb al-hurriya*) gives evidence of his profound interest in modern art in the region. It is published for the first time in Arabic and in English translation with the kind permission of the Munif family.

In the forth section "MUNIF: A BIO-HISTORY", Sabry Hafez gives an insightful and comprehensive survey of Munif's life, his political and intellectual engagement as well as his vast literary output which has brought Munif recognition beyond the Arab world as an outstanding figure in contemporary world literature. Hafez' contribution "An Arabian Master" was originally published in the *New Left Review* 37, January-February 2006. It is republished with the kind permission of the author and the journal. The section also includes a review of Maher Jarrar's *'Abd al-Rahman Munif wal-'Iraq. Sira wa-dhikrayat* ('Abd al-Rahman Munif and Iraq. Biography and Memories, Beirut 2005) which consists of a study on Munif's novel *Ard al-sawad* and a series of interviews with the author. The interviews give insight into Munif's life trajectory – so closely linked to political events in the Arab world – from his own personal perspective.

The fifth section "MUNIF: POETICS OF A LIFE" provides a biographical sketch and a list of Munif's works, his literary texts as well as his political, socio-economic and cultural studies, in Arabic and in translation. It also includes a selection of letters (written by the Palestinian-Iraqi writer and intellectual Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and the Syrian artist Marwan Qassab-Bachi to Munif and by Munif) that give an idea of Munif's extensive correspondence.

Munif's oeuvre makes us discover ever new aspects as we engage in rereading and rewriting, as Khoury says in his contribution. Munif's political engagement, his early involvement in the Ba'th party as well as his early call for democracy, and his reception in the Arab world and abroad are other interesting facets of Munif's legacy that are to be addressed in future work. If this issue can encourage further research, it has fulfilled its aim. A helpful link for all interested to know more about Munif is the webpage www.munif.org which is currently under construction by his family. I would also like to mention Munif's posthumous publications by his widow Su'ad al-Qawadiri. *Umm al-Nudhur* (Mother of Vows) was written in Damascus in 1970 and tells of Munif's early childhood in a Qur'anic school (kuttab). It was published in Beirut in 2005. *Asma' musta'ara* (Pseudonyms) and *al-Bab al-maftuh* (The Open Door) are collections of short stories, published in Beirut in 2006. Furthermore, I want to draw attention to the special issue edited by the cultural supplement of the Lebanese daily *Mulhaq al-Nahar* no. 621 (1 Feb, 2004) in homage to Munif.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Ferial J. Ghazoul, Maher Jarrar, Elias Khoury, Nisrine Jaafar, Eric Gautier and Sabry Hafez for their contributions, enthusiasm and patience. I also thank the *New Left Review* for the kind permission to republish Hafez' article. Moreover, I would like to thank Karam Nachar, Zein Shoueiri and Jim Quilty for their translations and proof-reading as well as Maher Jarrar and Mohammad Ali Atassi for helpful comments and open ears. Regarding the visual material, I thank Marwan Qassab-Bachi, Dia Azzawi, Yusuf Abdelki and Loulouwa Al Rachid.

The issue would not have been possible without the Munif family: Su'ad, Hani, Azza, Yasser and Laila. I thank them for their interest in the issue, their help with written as well as with visual material and their friendship.

Last but not least, I would like to extend my gratitude to the editors of *MIT-EJMES*, Maha Yahya and Jens Hanssen, for their encouragement and support.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The transliteration of Arabic names and book titles varies in English and French. Hence ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif in English but 'Abdul Rahman Mounif in French.

ENDNOTES

[1] ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Katib wal-manfa. Humum wa-afaq al-riwaya al-ʻarabiyya* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-ʻarabiyya, 1992), p. 40.

[2] ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif in Robert B. Campbell, *A'lam al-adab al-ʻarabi al-mu'asir. Siyar wa-siyar dhatiyya/Contemporary Arab Writers* (Beirut/Stuttgart: Orient-Institut der DMG/Steiner, 1996), p. 1274.

[3] Munif, *al-Katib wal-manfa*, p. 163. Maher Jarrar addresses this issue in his contribution.

[4] Munif, al-Katib wal-manfa, p. 43.

[5] Nizar ʻAbidin, "Hiwar ma'a ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif", *al-Ma'rifa* no. 204 (1979), p. 195.

[6] ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif, al-Dimuqratiyya awwalan, al-dimuqratiyya da'iman. Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-ʻarabiyya, 1992), p. 5.

[7] See Muhammad Ali Atassi (2004). "Laysa ʻurdatan lil-bay' wa-la lil-shira'", in: *Mulhaq al-Nahar* 01.02.2004 no. 621, p. 13-14. For the petition, see Samir Kassir, *Dimuqratiyyat Suriya wa-istiqlal Lubnan. al-bahth ʻan rabi' Dimashq* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2004), p. 209-211, and in English translation: Alan George, (2003). *Neither Bread Nor Freedom* (London/New York: Zed Books, 2003), p. 178-181.

[8] See Maher Jarrar, *ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif wal-ʻIraq. Sira wa-dhikrayat* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-ʻarabiyya, 2005).

[9] The term is used according to Pierre Bourdieu as marking a degree of accumulated prestige, based on a dialectics of knowledge (connaissance) and recognition (reconnaissance). See Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques. Sur la théorie de l'action* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 116.

[10] ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Katib wal-manfa*, p. 85.

[11] Georg Lukács, Die Theorie des Romans. Ein geschichtsphilosophischer Versuch über die Formen der großen Epik (Munich: dtv, 1994 - first published in 1920), p. 32.

ARD AL-SAWAD

A NOVEL FORMULATION OF PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF IRAQ

Feríal J. Ghazoul*

History, and its transformation into fiction, has contributed to the rise of the Arabic novel. The Lebanese Jurji Zaydan (1861-1914) popularized the historical novel by focusing on dramatic events in Arab-Islamic history. He wrote more than twenty novels presenting heroes and romances drawn from chronicles. Though the Egyptian Nobel Laureate, Naguib Mahfouz (1911-2006), is not known for his historical novels, he did start his fictional career with novels situated in ancient Egypt and based on Pharaonic history. Within the last decades, the historical novel has flourished in the Arab World and is showing technical and structural sophistication as well as a variety of strategies and modes of appropriation of history and even re-writing of history. The works of Gamal al-Ghitany, Salwa Bakr, Bensalim Himmich, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif as well as works of such Anglophone and Francophone writers as Ahdaf Soueif and Amin Malouf attest to a wealth of experimentation with the subgenre of the historical novel. In this essay, I shall explore how one of the most prominent Arab novelists has innovated by writing a historical novel of epical stature highlighting "people's history" – to use a term that has been popularized by the work of Howard Zinn -- of Iraq.

THE AUTHOR

'Abd al-Rahman Munif (1933-2003), novelist, economist, historian, art critic and an oppositional intellectual, turned to fiction after his disappointment and frustration with party politics.

His last monumental work, *Ard al-Sawad*, in three volumes covering 1500 pages, narrates imaginatively an obscure but indicative era of Iraqi history – that of the early nineteenth century during the reign of the enigmatic Daud Pasha.[1] It is, as the novel asserts, in the author's prologue, a love hymn to Iraq. It reproduces the Iraqi dialect in its dialogue, the variety of Iraqi ethnic groups and classes, and above all those political passions that constitute both Iraqi dynamism and doom.

Munif is Iraqi on his mother' side and Saudi Arabian on his father's side though he was stripped of his Saudi nationality in his life time for his involvement in leftist politics. He was born in Amman and he documents in *Sirat Madina* (*Story of a City*) his childhood and the impact of his maternal grandmother on him.[2] In *Ard al-Sawad*, Munif is writing about his motherland rather than his fatherland.[3] A patriotic attachment to Iraq is unmistakable in this novel as well as in his non-

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fiction book published in 2003, *Al-'Iraq: Hawamish min al-Tarikh wal-Muqawama* (Iraq: Notes from History and Resistance), written after the occupation following the second Gulf War, and in which he makes use of the historical texts he read in preparation of *Ard al-Sawad*.[4] Fictional as *Ard al-Sawad* is, he does not paint for us larger-than-life portraits of his compatriots. The Iraqis we encounter in this epic work have the strength and weaknesses of people everywhere yet their destiny is shaped by geo-politics: Iraq as a crossroads of different civilizations, coveted by imperial powers. Medievalist geographers referred to Baghdad as the navel of the earth, as if it were the center of the universe. He who possesses her possesses the rest. In many ways, Baghdad is presented in Munif's work as the target of worldly ambitions paralleling and contrasting to the position of Jerusalem in the spiritual realm.

THE TITLE

Though *Ard al-Sawad* is first and foremost an artistic endeavor, one is often surprised -- when researching the subject -- how many of the characters are actual historical figures and how many of the events did take place. To start with the title: it is both poetic and historical. Iraq was called "ard al-sawad" in the middle ages. Literally, *ard* means land and *sawad* means black but also green. Iraq was called the black land because coming from the desolate desert, the immense stretches of fertile land and palm trees seemed dark green to the observers, thus the epithet*, ard al-sawad*, the land of blackness or greenness. That is why in rendering it in English, translators have wavered between calling it "Land of Darkness" and "Fertile Land" (Abdel-Qadir) The title itself carries within it the possibility of both, an intersection of opposites, since black stands for mourning and death and green for fertility and life. Add to the above that "al-sawad" in Arabic refers to common people as opposed to the elite, to the masses and specifically to the dispossessed, and the richness of the title begins to overwhelm the meticulous reader.

In some sense Iraq "the dark land" is simply an ironic inversion of its ancient name.[5] It is said that "Iraq" comes from "Uruk," the Sumerian word (and city) that means shining and light ('Ali Sa'di). Thus, *Ard al-Sawad* is both the dark land and the light land. If I dwell on the title it is because it points to a certain complexity that colors the work by tapping on different meanings, ranging from the actual and historical to the imaginative and playful. The verbal irony and rhetorical play of the title are based on historical names of Iraq.

THE PROLOGUE

Munif opens his work by citations from a Mesopotamian literary text -- a Sumerian epic -- in which the poet sings:

"O Sumer, the great country among all countries
You are immersed in penetrating and constant light".

Just as the novel of Munif is based on history, the title is based through evocation on different epochs of Iraqi history and ways of naming Iraq. *Ard al-Sawad* opens with a citation from a Sumerian ode for Iraq then moves to an excerpt from a Babylonian poem in which the poet bemoans the losses that have befallen his country.[6] After "strangers have destroyed Ur" another excerpt laments the city

in words that could very well have been written by contemporary Iraqi poets describing the devastation that has befallen present-day Iraq:

> "O Lord Anana, the city has been destroyed
> like shattered pottery. Its people fill its corners.
> Its ramparts demolished and the people are wailing;
> They wail at the lofty gates, where they used to stroll,
> and in the streets, where they used to have festivities -- their bodies scattered.
> In its squares where they celebrated, the corpses of the murdered are in heaps."

Just as in the finale of the novel, where a glimpse of hope is based on the Iraqi governor managing to oust the imperial viceroy, so do these excerpts selected by Munif from the extant ancient literature of Iraq. They end with an uplifting hymn to the city and its resurrection:

> "The city wears light
> And gets the heads of the arrogant to bow.
> Strong are thy hands, and generous is thy chest:
> No sooner does your terrible beauty shine
> than the wrong doers and the wicked fall
> into the cracks of the earth."

Finally, in this prologue, Munif cites an ancient Iraqi narrating his dream to his mother and asking if the geomancer would interpret it. Is this an invitation to decipher *Ard al-Sawad* where the locals overcome in the end the arrogance of the empire?

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Ard al-Sawad is essentially about the rise of Daud Pasha to prominence and power and his confrontation with the British Resident in Iraq, Claudius James Rich, "who behaved much more like a local potentate than a foreign diplomat".[7] Daud Pasha (ruled 1817-31) was the last of the Mamluk leaders of Iraq, who initiated modernizing programs similar to those of Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt, including founding industries and schools, training an army, and starting a printing press. Though Iraq was then part of the Ottoman empire governors of different parts were practically autonomous. The governor of a given province had to consult with Istanbul and get its agreement to his policy and had to pay taxes. The conflict between the tribes and semi-autonomous central government in Baghdad was an issue that often caused strife. Furthermore, the Ottoman empire was weak and the European colonial powers had their eyes on its possessions. There was a colonial scramble for the Middle East before there was a scramble for Africa in the nineteenth century. The rivalry for Egypt and the Fertile Crescent was between France and Britain. Thus Napoleon's victories and defeats were of instant relevance to politics, not only to European politics, but to Middle Eastern politics as well. It had implications for the people in the Arab world as there was a struggle between powerful European countries over their control. All of that is reflected in this historical novel of Munif: issues such as which consul general is more influential, and who speaks better Arabic among the foreign consuls and who throws the bigger party, are not random conversational curiosities. These exchanges are

indicative of certain success in the competition between Powers to whose hegemony the natives were subjected.

Equally important in this period (early half of the nineteenth century) in the Arab world is the attempt by local rulers, from whatever background (Albanian, Georgian, etc.), to assert a measure of autonomy not only from the Ottoman empire but also from the colonial powers. This attempt was accompanied by efforts to modernize and be, if not self-sufficient, at least not dependent entirely on one source for its welfare and security. Muhammad 'Ali Pasha of Egypt is a prime example and model for Daud Pasha of Iraq, and later for Ahmad Bey of Tunisia. Thus references by the common people to Muhammad 'Ali and his Press that published the Gazette are not simply conversational and anecdotal. It is indicative of the push to modernize and to find one's place in the sun. Daud Pasha in his own way tried to achieve power, control the rebellious tribes, establish a local army, and guarantee access to goods without reliance on a foreign power. The British in the person of their representative Resident tried to wage an economic war against Daud Pasha, foment trouble for him by encouraging opposition, and offering him weapons that will invariably cause him trouble with Istanbul. As for their method of attracting ordinary people, it was through offering them material and social privileges, using intelligence and spying, and above all dazzling the masses with pomp and technology.

The real life of Daud Pasha was as melodramatic as a life could be. He was kidnapped from his Georgian family when he was twelve years old and was taken to Baghdad. There was a political need to have such slaves who would not have any family connections except that of their patrons and thus they would be loyal clients to their masters. Daud was sold in Iraq and moved from one owner to another until he ended in the palace of Sulayman Pasha the Great, Governor of Iraq – himself a Mamluk and an ex-slave. Having been brought up as a Christian, Daud soon converted to Islam and developed interest in theological issues. As a Mamluk he could only excel by proving himself: he showed practical sense, a gift for languages, and an inquisitive mind. He progressed in the Seraglio of the Governor until he became the seal bearer of Sulayman-the-Great and ended up marrying the daughter of his master. All the historical details known of the life of Daud Pasha have been incorporated in the novel, including reference to extant letters he dictated in Georgian to his secretary Pietro, addressed to his mother Mariam in Tiflis in 1821 in which he referred to himself as "King of Happy Babylon." His name was originally Davit (Daud) son of Giorgi Botsholashvili. His interest in his original family continued and he supported them financially.[8]

As for the antagonist Claudius James Rich (1787-1821), he is equally real and had an equally melodramatic life. He figures with his wife Mary prominently in Munif's novel. Mr. Rich wrote a 2-volume description of his travels and stay in Iraq under the long title of *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and the Site of Ancient Nineveh; with Journal of a Voyage Down the Tigris to Baghdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis*, edited by his widow and published in 1836. Rich's life is no less amazing than that of Daud Pasha.

Born in Dijon, France, he was taken as infant to Bristol, England. He got interested in Arabic at a very young age, and by the time he was fifteen, he knew it well along with Hebrew, Syriac, Persian, and Turkish.[9] He was assigned to the civil branch of Indian Service but was allowed to go to Egypt with the Consul-General. But there was a shipwreck, and instead he went to Constantinople, and visited other places before ending in Egypt.[10] He perfected his Arabic when he was in Egypt and

then went to Palestine and Syria and later Iraq "in the guise of a Mameluke" and then sailed to Bombay.[11] There he gained the trust and admiration of Sir James Mackintosh and married his daughter Mary. He was appointed a Resident (equivalent to a Consul) in Baghdad. There he chose a place to live which was central for his political maneuvering and intelligence.[12] Around 1813 he suffered bad health and left Baghdad for a while then again when his health failed him. He went to Kurdistan and wrote about his impressions while collecting antiquities and manuscripts. After the clash he had with Daud Pasha, he went to Basra and from there to Shiraz (in present-day Iran) where he caught cholera and died.

The clash between Rich and Daud Pasha is commented on from the point of view of Rich's relative (great-great nephew) in a chapter in a book entitled "Final Dispute Between Rich and the Pasha 1820-1821".[13] This version insists on the heroic stature of Rich:

> "Rich found himself virtually a prisoner . . . the Pasha intimated very strongly that he was not to leave, and Rich imagined he was kept in hostage. . . . [Rich] was feeling far from well; the affair had strained his nerves considerably and brought back his feverish symptoms. He knew he could escape . . . but if he did, it would have looked like flight, which was not to be thought of."[14]

Rich himself comments on some of the events he witnessed in his diaries. After he describes how thriving Baghdad was under the rule of the Mamluk governor Sulayman Pasha (the father-in-law of Daud Pasha), he writes:

> "He left three sons, who were much beloved by the people of the town for his sake; and much respected, therefore, by his successors in the Pashalik. The two remaining ones live with their respective mothers, affluent . . . the eldest, had made himself very formidable, and finally succeeded, through much treachery and falsehood, in becoming pasha. He enjoyed his dignity but a very few years, and was overpowered by his own brother-in-law Daoud, who put him to death, and afterwards received from the Porte the firmaun confirming him in the government."[15]

FROM HISTORY TO FICTION

The first volume of the saga of Daud Pasha starts at the deathbed of Sulayman the Great with his three sons Sa'id, Salih, and Sadiq and his four sons-in-law one of which is Daud Pasha. Early on we recognize how calculating Daud Pasha is and how politically astute. Knowing that his opportunity is not yet ripe, he leaves Baghdad for Basra and immerses himself in literary and theological studies. Palace intrigues of that period were made worse by the Wahabi conquest, which blamed the Governor of Baghdad for the assassination of Saud ibn Abdul-Aziz. Feuds and assassinations followed ending with Sa'id the eldest as the Governor. When the tribes revolted Sa'id called on his brother-in-law Daud for help. This annoyed his mother Nabi Khatoun who had refused in the first place to have Daud marry her youngest daughter. As observed by historian and social anthropologist Tom Nieuwenhuis, "another factor in the formation of factions within Mamluk-dominated circles [is] the role of some influential women in the haram".[16]

This chapter exposes the setting and the characters and presents the theme of political struggle and fratricide, the role of women in courtly intrigues, the

homosexuality of Sa'id and his infatuation with Hamadi, and the competition between the two Jewish bankers for the title of *sarafbashi* (prime financier). The subsection of the book by Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq*, entitled "The Sa'id-Dawud Struggle (1815-1816)" show how faithful Munif has been to historical records including names of minor characters and agents.[17] The relation between Hamadi and Sa'id in the historical text is rather a personal friendship where Hamadi enjoys "almost unlimited protection by Sa'id" -- without any insinuation of an erotic partnership.[18] Rather it is somewhat a political alliance between Sa'id and Hamadi -- chief of 'Aqil tribe – as Said "came to build his power upon tribal forces more than upon Mamluk guardsmen and the 'Aqil were the most loyal and useful of the former".[19] Other historical texts insinuate, however, the debauchery of Sa'id but not in any detail. Clearly, what Munif did is combine the two historical reports and thus created of Hamadi a partner and not simply an ally.[20]

Munif provides further details about the household affairs of the palace intrigues and scandals including the insanity of Nabi, Sa'id's mother, after she witnesses the cruel beheading of her own son. Such domestic details are probably the imaginative additions of the novelist who turns dry chronicles into a literary work. But many of the characters even the minor political figures are historically real such as Sayyid 'Alaywi, Halet Effendi, Jasim Beg al-Shawi, Rustum Agha, Hamud al-Thamir al-Sa'dun, etc. The competition between the two major Jewish bankers, Sassoon and Ezra, and the role of the latter as Daud's major finance Controller is partly attested by historical records. The famous Sassoon family of Iraq established its networks as far as India, partly because it had to seek fortune elsewhere as it was not favored and some of its members came under the wrath of Daud Pasha. Munif incorporates certain historical reports about Jews of Baghdad in the nineteenth century and weaves them in with the story of Sassoon and his rival Ezra in *Ard al-Sawad*.[21]

Munif definitely had access to the journals of Rich (as edited and published by his widow) and thus he was less motivated to imagine his thoughts; he could reproduce his minute reflections as when he renders the following reflection of Rich in *Ard* III:[22]

> "In the colour of the horizon was that perfect black, that total absence of light, which Lord Byron has fancied in his horrible dream of the extinction of the sun."[23]

Munif is also helped in depicting the psyche of Mary Rich by an appendix in the book of Claudius Rich that is entitled "Fragment of a Journal from Baghdad to Sulimania by Mrs. Rich".[24] Other minor characters that Munif draws in the company of Rich are historical and add to the colorful cultural scene in nineteenth century Iraq: Cofa Ovanness, the native secretary, an Armenian by birth; Delli Samaan (mad Simeon), a Christian who bought antiquities for Mr. Rich; Jaafer Ali, one of Rich's servants from Lucknow, India; etc.

THE PROTAGONIST

While we can read Daud's trajectory as that of a Prince, in the Machiavellian sense of the term, a ruthless ruler who does everything to guarantee his authority and control, the character is at the same time humanized. This is particularly so when domestic scenes portray him as a father and as lonely soul longing for his distant mother.

Munif informs us about Daud's loneliness even though he was surrounded by admiring courtiers.[25] He realized that such admiration is not to be counted on and he needed to know the truth and what is being said even if unpleasant. He used two to tell him what is going on: Fayruz in the Salamlik (men's quarters) and Naila Khatun in the Haramlik (women's quarters). Daud came to know Fayruz when the latter frequented the shrine of Abdel-Qader al-Gaylani. Fascinated by the grave and learned personality of Daud, Fayruz agreed to be his servant and follower. While Fayrouz was attracted to Daud as a matter of personal choice, Naila -- older than Daud and like him brought up in the Seraglio of Sulayman Pasha -- came to be a trusted nanny for his handicapped daughter. Naila married twice but did not have children; she turned to worship and prayers.[26] She was particularly fond of Daud's daughter Muhsina who was born just before Daud's trip north. The child was loved dearly by her father but was unable to walk though she could speak well.[27] Munif describes Naila's endeavors to cure his daughter, from taking her to various shrines to doing good in the hope that divine mercy would cure the child. She also took her to all the medical and pseudo-medical authorities she could find.

Daud Pasha is also humanized by presenting his longing for his Georgian family: he suffered insomnia and recalled his mother, Mariam in Tiflis, and his father and two brothers. He wrote them from time to time in Georgian that he could only dictate but not actually write.[28] But while paternal and filial passions mark Munif's Daud, his love life is hardly touched on, though he had more than one woman in his life. Being married to Nazli the daughter of Sulayman Pasha -- his first wife -- did not prevent him from having others. When one of his concubines got pregnant he would marry her by divorcing one of his four wives, but never Nazli.

Daud, as portrayed by Munif, was a very private person. He did not want the common people to know about his intimate life or everyday life. Yet, he was talked about in the markets and the cafés -- how he fed his own gazelles in his mansion, how he had a Georgian wife, Mary mother of his son al-Mu'tasim, etc.

PEOPLES' STORIES

Though Ard al-Sawad revolves around Daud Pasha, it presents in its unfolding lively characters from all walks of life who make up a social tapestry of Baghdad in yonder days. These common people frequented Shatt Café (River Coffee House) in a popular neighborhood in the heart of al-Karkh – the more popular section of Baghdad as opposed to Rasafa where the wealthier people lived, Munif is likely to have created these characters, and juxtaposed them to the characters in the mansions of the Governor and the British Resident.[29] The stories of the many characters that populate *Ard al-Sawad* are not narrated one after the other as in the *Arabian Nights*, but in bits and pieces. We read the incidents related to Muhsina, the handicapped daughter of Daud, for example, in different chapters of the book and it is for the reader to connect these scattered bits and pieces to make sense of this girl's predicament among the teeming characters of this work. On overhearing the conversations of these common characters as they interpret their surrounding world and as they gossip about the elite, we are introduced to the worldview of Iraqi people in the early nineteenth century.

Some of these common characters add humor to the predominantly tragic events of this era with its wars, strife, floods, and plagues. Zaynab Kushan is an example: she appears and reappears in the novel, always complaining about her

small plot of land that had been confiscated by a former Governor of Iraq. Her obsession, coupled with her far-fetched ways to get it back – including positioning herself near the gate of the Governor's mansion so she can plead her case with anyone going in or out – is funny and particularly when her complaint and pleas are in a colorful Iraqi dialect.

One of the most interesting in terms of characterization is the one-eyed Hoby. He was a defender of the poor and used to work in leather tanning**.** When he differed with his boss, and his boss made fun of him, he stabbed him and killed him.[30] He ran and became an outlaw. His idea of religion is not orthodox: for him piety comes from the heart and is not a matter of rituals. He did not fast in Ramadan, for instance, but he did stop drinking in that month.

Another equally colorful character is Sifo who is the childless water-carrier. His quarrels with his wife, his stubborn character, his willingness to help, are all depicted sympathetically. As for Hasun, the groom, the simple and kind soul who was dazzled by Mrs. Rich riding a horse in a parade, he was egged on all the time. Having waved at the crowd and in the direction of Hasun, all his acquaintances in the Café teased him about Mary Rich's infatuation with him and he took that seriously with all the humorous consequences. The Barber, the Mulla, the Artist, have also their intertwined and entertaining stories. But the principal subplot that runs through the novel and partakes in the life of the Seraglio and the common people is the tragic story of Badri.

Badri Salih al-'Ulu falls in love with a dancer named Najma but is unable to possess her, much that he tried. In describing Badri's infatuation with Najma and her dancing as if she were dancing to express her pain and yearnings, Munif waxes lyrical in moving passages that contrast stylistically to the down-to-earth writing in the rest of the work.[31] He learns that she is in the Citadel, kept there by a jealous lover. He tries to get a glimpse of her and takes a boat in the Tigris, pretends to be a poet, and asks the boatman to stop right in front of the Citadel. The illiterate boatman in the meantime tells him about his travels to India, China, and Java, and informs him of a book that has been given to him. Badri reads from the book and the story is a variant of Sindbad's first voyage where the island on which the passengers disembark is in fact an enormous whale; and when it sinks the passengers drown. Later on when Badri has been sent to reside in Kirkuk, he discovers that Najma has become the mistress of Talaat Baqa, one of the officers there. As he saw her moving around from one man to another he lost interest in her.[32] Badri eventually gives in to his mother who finds him a bride. On returning to Kirkuk after Badri completes his "engagement" to Zakiyya, thc girl selected to him by the family, he learns that Najma has been assassinated. He in turn is assassinated later on the very day when his bride arrives to join him. It is not clear who killed him at the time but it turns out later that it was a political crime. Badri had refused to join the opposition to Daud Pasha that was fermenting in north Iraq and led by 'Aliywi, the former army leader of Daud who was exiled to the north.[33] In revenge for the reluctance of Badri to join in the opposition to Daud, though he was tempted by money and power, 'Aliywi sends two of his guards to kill him and then when they report that the mission had been accomplished, 'Aliywi shoots both of them to keep the person behind the assassination unknown.

In the story of Badri, the mourning of his mother, the depression of his father, the insanity of his bride as well the initial steps in choosing a bride and the celebrations -- are all depicted in minute details. We learn from *Ard al-Sawad* about Iraqi customs, music and songs, kin relations, and death and wedding rituals as if we

were reading a source book in social anthropology -- all woven artistically within the work.

TYPOLOGY OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

The historical novel is not new but the kind of historical novel Munif wrote in *Ard al-Sawad* is an innovative formulation as it focuses on the *people* and how they mobilized to help when challenged by catastrophes such as the flood or rallied on the side of Daud Pasha when confronting the British presence. It has been said that history is written by the victors, and if that is so, then historical fiction is the re-writing of history from the point of view of the dispossessed – at least in this case. Fiction permits the imagination to fill in the silences of history and it articulates the silenced voices of the subaltern. In that sense, Munif's magnum opus, *Ard al-Sawad*, is more than what is usually called "Documentary-Historical Novel".[34] It is also an anthropological novel as it depicts the human fabric in its micro-organization: the rituals, beliefs, prejudices, generosities, gossip, power confrontations, and gender relations of ordinary folk.

In other words, in addition to being a historical novel based on research and document, it is also a portrait of a people through a lens positioned below. When Midhat Al-Jayyar criticized *Ard al-Sawad* for its too numerous subplots and plethora of characters and their dialogues, he is really judging it by the expectation of an organic novel with a climax, where the minor characters are simply there to help further understand the main characters. In other words he looks for a hierarchical structure in which there is a definite center.[35] However, Munif's novel is closer to an epic where we find subplots galore and where an entire national fabric is exposed. The stories of minor characters and their conversations in Café al-Shatt might not add to the quest of Daud Pasha, but the novel is not only about the Governor of Baghdad. It is primarily about the people of Baghdad in the reign of a given Governor of Baghdad. The compact sequence that is missed by Al-Jayyar then is not indicative of literary weakness, but of a renunciation of a certain ideology of a form, characterized by the illusion of sequence centered around a hero.[36]

Hegel divided historical consciousness into three types: original, reflective, and philosophical. What he meant by his tri-partite division is the following. In original consciousness, the writer recalls the past as it was; in reflective consciousness, the writer considers the relation between past and present; and in philosophical consciousness, the writer concentrates on how to write history.[37] In *Ard al-Sawad*, we see Munif recalling the past in a documentary fashion, and thus we find original consciousness; insisting on the relation between the ancient past and the nineteenth century (time of narration) through his prologue (and possibly on present-day Iraq, if we see in Daud Pasha a mask for a contemporary ruler of Iraq who sought to consolidate his power and challenge colonial hegemony by modernizing his country), and thus we find reflective consciousness. Finally, there is an element of implicit philosophical consciousness in *Ard al-Sawad* as Munif focuses on how to write history that presents the voices of the common people of Iraq, using fictional techniques to restore their voice. His work is novel in the two senses of the terms: it is *a novel*, and it is also *a novel way* of presenting Iraqi history. Munif in this novel seems to anticipate the plea of Ranajit Guha -- the South Asian

historian and one of the intellects behind *Subaltern Studies* -- to "recover the living history of the quotidian" and to "recuperate the historicality of what is humble and habitual" and this can only be done when the historian becomes a creative writer.[38]

ENDNOTES

[1] Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 221-276
[2] 'Abd al-RahmanMunif, *Story of a City: A Childhood in Amman* Translated by Samira Kawar, (London: Quartet Books), 1996.
[3] 'Abd al-RahmanMunif, *Ard al-Sawad*. 3 vols (Beirut: Al-Mu'asasa al-'Arabiyya lil-Dirasat wal-Nashr, 1999).
[4] 'Abd al-RahmanMunif, *Al-'Iraq: Hawamish min al-Tarikh wal-Muqawama* (Casablanca: Al-Markaz al-thaqafi al-'arabi lil-nashr wal-tawzi',2003), p. 7
[5] In Arabic rhetorical traditions, naming can indicate the thing and its opposites (see Berque *L'ambivalence*), thus *darir* (blind), can be called *basir* (seer), or *salim* (safe) for some one who is hurt.
[6] Munif, *Ard,* p. 12)
[7] Saleh, Zaki *Mesopotamia (Iraq) 1600-1914* (Baghdad: Al-Ma'aref Press, 1957), p.123
[8] Yusuf 'Izz al-Din, *Daud Pasha wa-Nihayat al-Mamalik fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad: Dar al-Basri, 1967), p. 5-63
[9] Claudius James Rich, Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and the Site of Ancient Nineveh; with Journal of a Voyage Down the Tigris to Baghdad and an Account of a Visit to Shirauz and Persepolis, edited by his widow, 2 volumes (London: James Duncan, 1836), Volume I, p. xv
[10] Rich, ibid, p. xix-xx
[11] Ibid, p. xxi
[12] Ibid, p. xxv
[13] Constance M. Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days* (London: John Murray, 1928), p. 295-301
[14] Ibid, p. 299-300
[15] Rich, Narratives of a Residence, Vol. I, p. 4
[16] Tom, Nieuwenhuis, Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq: Mamluk Pashas, Tribal Shayks and Local Rule Between 1802 and 1831 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), p. 23
[17] Ibid, 16-24
[18] Ibid, p. 17
[19] Ibid
[20] Munif does not mention his historical sources though he does mention in his book *Al-'Iraq* that he consulted historical works. It is clear that he read everything available to him on Iraqi history of the first half of the nineteenth century in both Arabic and English.
[21] David Solomon Sassoon, *A History of the Jews in Baghdad* (Letchworth: Soloman Sassoon, 1949), p.122-127
[22] Munif, *Ard,* p. 155
[23] Rich, Narratives of a Residence, Vol. II, p.10
[24] Rich, *Narratives of a Residence* Vo. I, p. 331-375)
[25] Munif, *Ard* I, p. 236
[26] Ibid, p. 238
[27] Ibid, p. 239
[28] *Ibid,* p. 300-305
[29] See plan of Baghdad in Jones & Collingwood *Memoris of Baghdad, Kurdistan and Turkish Arabia* (London, 1857) Map 884.03, p. 304.
[30] Munif, *Ard* I, p. 136
[31] On the different stylistic registers in *Ard al-Sawad*, see Al-Jayyar 249-50 and Abdel-Azim 267-8.
[32] Munif, *Ard* II, chapter 57
[33] Ibid, chapters 78-84
[34] See on the typology of the historical novel Joseph Turner, "Types of Historical Narration," *Genre* XII: 3 (Fall 1979): 333-55.
[35] Midhat Al-Jayyar, "Qina' al-Sard fi *Ard al-Sawad*," *Fossoul* 65 (fall 2004/winter 2005), p.258
[36] See on this point, Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* VII: 1 (Fall 1980).
[37] Ferial J. Ghazoul, "Al-Riwaya wal-Tarikh," *Fossoul* II: 2 (January-March 1982) p. 296

[38] Rosinka Chaudhuri, "Historicality in Literature: Subalternist Misrepresentations," *Economic and Political Weekly XXXIX*: 42 (October 16, 2004) p. 4658

UPON LEAVING THE BRIDGE AND ENDINGS

A REDEMPTIVE JOURNEY

Maher Jarrar*

MUNIF: INTELLECTUAL AND WRITER

When Munif's fourth novel, *Hina taraknа al-jisr* (Upon Leaving the Bridge) was published in 1976, Munif had already been celebrated as a creative writer among Arab critics. His first two novels, *al-Ashjar wa 'ightiyal Marzuq* (The Trees and Marzuq's Murder, 1973) and *Qissat hubb majusiyya* (A Magian Love Story, 1974), were regarded as a breakthrough in modern Arab novelistic tradition. M. Badawi depicts his third novel, *Sharq al-Mutawassit* (East of the Mediterranean, 1975), "as a most powerful indictment of the methods of torture employed by a police state, a remarkably vivid account of the destructive effect of political tyranny on the lives of innocent human beings, while at the same time being an eloquent expression of man's unconquerable spirit."[1]

Early in his life, when he was still a high school student in Amman/Jordan, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif joined the *Ba'th* party. In the fifties of the twentieth century, the pan-Arab, nationalist *Ba'th* party "excited the minds of a whole generation," as Patrick Seale puts it.[2] The *Ba'th* represented a call for Arab independence, unity and social revolution, ideas that attracted – together with *Nassirism* – hundreds of school students, intellectuals and other circles of the urban petite bourgeoisie in the Arab World.[3] Later during his university life in Baghdad, Cairo, and Belgrade, Munif became an active member in the party and occupied high ranking positions. Nevertheless, he belonged to a faction in the party that advocated decentralization, more freedom and democratization. In 1963, the conflict between the various factions within the *Ba'th* party became very tense and Munif was expelled from the party. He gave up direct political engagement altogether in 1965, carrying within himself a deep feeling of bitterness and frustration towards the decadence, cruelty and tyranny that took hold of the political life, state institutions and regimes in the Arab world. This sense of resentment culminated in profound despair and disappointment after the disgraceful defeat of the 1967 war. Some time after 1965, Munif turned to the world of literature driven by an urge to speak up, lament and change.[4]

Munif's early novels convey an existential preoccupation, a concern with the victimized Arab individual living under the sways of decaying, totalitarian and oppressive regimes. His fourth novel, the one we are dealing with here, attempted a synthesis of the qualities of Munif's earlier writing. It explored the experiences of a

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lonely man, single-minded and defeated yet constantly struggling to distinguish some sign that would help him overcome this sense of failure – which turns out at the end of the novel to be a communal frustration (p. 213). This voice expressing defeat, loneliness and emasculation was to be heard in Munif's first novel, *al-Ashjar wa 'ightiyal Marzuq*; although it remained there confined to a few passages and did not become a soliloquy of self lament as in *East of the Mediterranean* and especially in *Hina tarakna al-jisr*. More than once, Mansur 'Abd al-Salam, the main protagonist in *al-Ashjar*, reproaches himself:

> "How did the story start, oh Mansur? You leap now like a grasshopper, you rave, you want to destroy the world, yet you cannot destroy a fly… it is better for you to hold your tongue, to shut up." (*al-Ashjar*, p. 192)
>
> "I want to crucify myself on a palm tree. I want to seclude myself in a cave on the top of a mountain. I just want nothing." (p. 196)
>
> "You are only now a scabby rooster, whose feathers are plucked out, you are bankrupt… just equal to a fly." (p. 210)

THE BRIDGE

A similar reprimanding tone ardently dominates the narrative in *Hina tarakna al-jisr*, creating an atmosphere of restlessness and bafflement. The protagonist Zaki al-Nadawi, an 'I'-narrator, is immersed in the flow of memory events while seeking refuge in hunting - due to a thwarting experience. His refuge consisted of an open natural space, a desolate wilderness. His only companion was his three year old dog 'Wardan', with whom he shares a single shabby room situated at the periphery, east of the city.

The whole setting can be viewed from one spot at the novel's opening, in a compact scene at dusk when only the howling of jackals fills the nightfall over the open country in self-contained, physically isolated surroundings by the marshes. The whole story, covering some two-hundred pages, is an example of a 'stream of consciousness' novel in which space reflects the sense of defeat and loss.

The focal point in the shift to the past is the obsessive memory of leaving "the bridge". A bridge is a compelling symbol of contact, mediation and mobility, of crossing barriers, over-reaching, connectedness and passage.[5] Constructing such a threshold that advocates union, re-union, and 'bridging,' a certain separation is usually associated with sacrifice.[6]

The narrative time and span could be concluded from the text. The "defeat of the bridge" happened some years prior to the narrative time: three years after the defeat, Zaki met, by coincidence, the senior officer who was in charge of them (p. 119). The narrative time stretches over some five months, between December and April (p. 12, 123, 147, 209, 211) of the year "1968". This date is derived from a conversation between Zaki and an old hunter aged sixty-four, who tells Zaki that it has been twenty years now since he stopped hunting for ducks - from the time when Lake al-Hula fell (p. 169). Al-Hula fell to the Zionist troops in 1948 and was dried up completely by 1957.[7] The lake used to be located in upper Galilee, where the Jordan River – which used to flow through the lake - formed a natural border with Syria. The marshes, where Zaki spends his time hunting are located somewhere east of al-Hula (p. 174). These specifications allude, immediately, to building up a bridge to cross over to the other shore, the occupied

lands. One should keep in mind here that the simile of crossing the bridge over the Jordan River has found popularity in modern Arabic poetry and songs referring to the Crossover back to Palestine (*Jisr al-'awda*).

At the beginning was the bridge: A metal bridge (p. 116) bolted together with solid screws (p. 98, 117) by nine soldiers (p. 185; on page 115 it is mentioned that the number was only seven): Zaki al-Nadawi, the 'I'-narrator, mentions – besides himself – the names of six other soldiers: Hamid, Ra'if, Dhiyab, Ramzi, Ahmad and al-Kurdi nicknamed The "Camel" (p. 79-80, 98, 115-118, 125, 127, 135, 185, 187).

It must have been a remarkable time, that of the bridge! During the first month of a blind, sticky, dusty, and heavy summer, the seven men were building a 'military' bridge some four kilometers from the river – the border to be crossed. They constructed a speckled, silver colored bridge (p. 79, 97), "happy and boastful like a child" (p. 137), and shining like a "festival of rainbow colors" (p. 97, 99). They set up a bridge "that represented the last image of joy," they gave it a name and sang for it (p. 114, 117, 118, 187). However, when the moment arrived to move it to the river and cross over it, they left it there 'alone on the ground' for seven days and nights. The men spent the time perturbed, laying down in the ditches like scared rats, waiting for an order urging them to "move the bridge to the river, to set it up there, and to defend it until they die!" (p. 125). On the seventh day, the instructions were clear, "Retreat! Just retreat and let everyone manage his own way out." (p. 78, 174)

The story line (*fabula*) is a concatenation of non-events. Feeling defeated, Zaki became too inward-looking and although he has the chance of roaming freely in the fenland, his thoughts have become a prison. There remains no escape for the reader/addressee from the grip of the narrator's point of view and his obsessive lamentations. He fixates his sense of loss and devastation on chasing the 'Queen of the Ducks' (p. 42, 47, 48, 51, 53, 59, 101, 105-106, 131, 135, 201). He associates her with the bridge (p. 16, 17, 39, 94, 135), at times praising her beauty, and at others calling her a bitch (p. 14, 29-30, 34, 77, 200), a female demon (p. 62, 68, 95) and a sorceress (p. 9, 16). The story line flows in a 'stream of consciousness' mode, where the space of hunting and chasing - which triggers unfulfilled expectations and a variety of stimuli elicited by the succession of day and night, and by the change in weather - indicates a focus on the interior landscape of the narrator, whose internal preoccupations are interfering with his ability to match response to reality. The nature of the story demands a confined, unified setting and a specific timescale, an essentially wild landscape under a grim changing weather.

The bridge is an elemental force. It is significantly the visual focus that provokes memory, which takes here a pattern repeating itself by way of conceptual association with the Queen of the Ducks – which becomes an 'icon' functioning as a symbol that signifies something other than itself.[8] The bridge becomes an obsession to which Zaki relates everything out there in the world that is not the bridge: even time becomes "outstretched in front of us like a bridge" (p. 23). Zaki asks for the memory traces of the 'defeat of the bridge' to be engraved within the soul of the Queen of the Ducks, the soul of his dog, and in nature, fearing all the while that such memory can be wrecked by the passage of time.

What al-Nadawi is actually seeking is a bridge of communication between himself and reality, a bridge which he can stretch out in order to open up a human dialogue with others, so as to rescue his self-worth. When he sees the old hunter for the first time, he addresses his dog, Wardan, telling it that he, Zaki, "should stretch

out a bridge between himself and the man." (p. 56) The bridge which was a symbol of traversing to victory becomes a source of failure and "lack" and a drive towards *delusion*.

Most significantly, Zaki refuses to acknowledge the death of his father, the same way he denies that the bridge is defunct (p. 43). In one of his soliloquies with his dog, he says "had my father been alive, then, we would have achieved a lot." (p. 38) He carries deep love and respect for his father; he calls him "a sage" and longs for his company, especially during those moments just before sunset, when he used to sit with him to watch the swallows in the inner garden of their home open up to the sky under the grapevine (p. 22-29). The father figure is the only solid image and authority with which he can identify – although he feels towards the old hunter a kind of a filial bond - while he deems other authorities, "the big-ones up there," as cowards and despondent; he hurls his scorn down on the leaders who have lead to the defeat (p. 17, 46, 115).

The chase never ends; the Queen of the Ducks does not fall prey, but rather remains flying and, in its place, Zaki shoots down an owl (p. 195-205). The Queen of the Ducks, the hope for 'revenge' and for change that he carries within himself, will never fall prey. It is a hunt that would reveal the pattern of desire that fuels a quest that can be quenched only when his spirit stops lamenting and finds its way to inner equilibrium and a reconstructed communal identity:

> "During a night towards the end of March we sat together, three men who have a work at the same place. When I started telling them about the bridge, the telephone-operator – whom I had not seen for a long time, but whose voice I frequently heard every day – asked me to stop talking
>
> - For the walls have ears, they will kill you!"
>
> - I replied, "I am not mentioning any specific one; I am just talking about the bridge!"
>
> - The bridge! Doesn't it allude to a meaning?
>
> The other man, my room-mate, smiled sadly and said:
>
> - It is always possible to build bridges; what is difficult is to build human beings- new human beings!
>
> …..
>
> When I left the two men, many strange and confused ideas came to my mind. I thought about the words they uttered. They sounded full of hope (literally, it looked bright) and very near to things that I cherish.. I decided to act in a new way." (p. 209-210)

The defeat has paralyzed Zaki and made him lose his sense of personal identity. Yet, to accept what has happened he should embark upon the search for a new moral system; something which he is not able to instigate, because– more than three years after the defeat of the bridge – he still feels impotent, and carries the scars and the ravages of an experience that bears within itself the residues of what actually represents a collective fright. In this sense, Zaki represents all the intellectuals *cum* "soldiers and common people" who have lost the sense of control over their lives, their trust in the state and its institutions, and still more damaging, a sense of their identity. After the sudden, accidental death of his dog Wardan, Zaki decides to quit his loneliness and join his community, "even before the sunset of the first day, I became lost amongst the jam of the crowds, I started realizing the sadness in their faces, and I became convinced that all the men knew much about

the bridge and that they were only waiting… waiting to start something off." (p. 213)

The critic Georges Tarabishi makes a comparison between Zaki al-Nadawi and Santiago in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, where both protagonists are fanatically chasing a prey. Yet Santiago, Tarabishi argues, shows a decisive will, a high sense of endurance, maneuvering, and strategic thinking. Zaki reveals passivity, pessimism, and lack of calculated acts. Tarabishi asserts that, "the core of Hemingway's message is that man might be crushed, he might die, but he never surrenders. Whereas Munif's message is that a defeated man is a crushed man even if he is still alive."[9] Tarabishi contends further that *The Old Man and the Sea* embodies a Promethean, Western spirit born from the determination of the Enlightenment and Modernity, whereas *Hina tarakna al-jisr* discloses a sense of defeatism that is so deterministic and pessimistic leaving no place for human reasoning and action.[10]

This comparison is in my opinion too far fetched and open to question. Firstly, whereas Santiago is a professional fisherman, who has spent all his life at sea, Zaki, to the contrary, is an amateur hunter and a frustrated intellectual. Contrary to what Faysal Darraj indicates, Zaki al-Nadawi is not a mere soldier.[11] Most probably, he is an engineer like his other colleagues who were given a task to set up a military bridge. He seems to have been a stern "leftist" who believes that both poetry and religion represent a downfall (p. 136-137). Secondly, the main theme in Hemingway's novel is the act of struggle with the fish which indicates willpower and perseverance – to the extent that the image of the fish is tied to a specific figure whose story it constitutively defines, functioning thus as a theme,[12] while in *Hina tarakna al-jisr*, the Queen of the Ducks is an 'icon' representing the bridge which is a symbol of defeat and lack of will. Thirdly, Hemingway wrote his novel at a later stage of his career; whereas Munif was still at the beginning of his career still probing with different voices and perspectives.

The novel is a symbolic redemptive journey, a voyage across an essentially terrifying, untamed land of renunciation and self-disdain, and at the same time it is a cry of protest against authoritarian Arab regimes. The self-indulgence of the 'I'-narrator is linked to an undertaking that the anti-hero assumes genuinely, namely, an outcry against the loss of personal freedom, autonomy and authenticity.

ENDINGS

In 1977, less than a year after the publication of *Hina tarakna al-jisr*, Munif's fifth novel *al-Nihayat* (*Endings*, 1988), appears. In *al-Nihayat*, the theme of a lost paradise and a lost past is a seminal one. The critic Salah Salih remarks, that "the events of this novel take place in a village called al-Tiba, located at the borderline with the desert. The desert demarcates the end of fertility, agriculture and security. Within this binary opposition between the idea of a beginning and that of an end, the events proceed emphasizing the existence of successive dearth seasons and their doggedness."[13]

Whereas *Upon Leaving the Bridge* is told in the "I-narrative form," *Endings* commences with the observation of an all-knowing narrator who from the first sentence announces the advent of hardship that prevails over the scene, "drought, drought again!" In this novel, Munif experiments further with voice and with time-space *chronotopes* that organize the centers of the narrative events.[14] In *Endings*, Munif adopts a more "lyrical" approach, resulting from what Ralph Freedman

describes as "the transformation of the perception into networks of images, designs or patterns of imagery portraying the halting of the flow of time within constellations of images or figures."[15]

Roger Allen, Professor at the University of Pennsylvania and a renowned authority on modern Arabic Novel, has translated the novel into English and devoted some nine pages to its study.[16] Allen argues that "The omniscient narrator has a particular eye for detail; one might almost say that it is the eye of a social scientist, concerned with characteristics and models of usual behavior (noting, of course, variations from the norms as they have been described). From such an approach, readers inevitably find themselves drawn into the world created by a narrator who shares with them an immense concern with nature and the environment."

The main theme in *Endings* is that of upcoming changes to a different, unpredictable order: drought, madness, ruptures in human relations as well as in the cycle of nature, struggle between a generation that is withering out and a new generation that left its village at the edge of the desert in search of a more 'humane' life in the city. These massive somber changes have to be dealt with by the unsuspecting people of al-Tiba, who are overlooked by the state authorities and left to face their own fate. From one year to the other, the government postpones its promises to establish a new road and to construct a dam, which would irrigate their lands and produce electricity, (*Endings*, p. 32, 37-38).

The villagers are perplexed by the words of their sons living in the city who assert to that, "this land's only good for feeding rats. That's all. But you people keep hanging on here as though it's paradise on earth. Give it all up and move to the city! You'll find life there a thousand times better than it is here." The villagers were actually "quite prepared to accept whatever was sent out to them and distribute it with scrupulous fairness…They used to listen to this talk from the big city. They would hear all about the earth dam which was due to be built." After the death of 'Assaf, the villagers of al-Tiba were left deserted: the village mayor tells them, "You're on your own when it comes to fighting the government, the army, locusts and who knows what else" (*Endings*, p. 71).

The main protagonist 'Assaf, a loner, was "the great stallion, as beautiful as a cloud-burst of rain; foster-father of the poor… loved everyone and killed himself so that people could carry on... 'Assaf a giant among men" (*Endings*, p. 71). 'Assaf, unmarried, is somewhere between the forties and fifties, tall, with a slight bow, lean, yet endowed with a strong physique. Ever since the age of thirteen, after the death of both his parents, he abandoned the village to live in the mountains and valleys, sleeping in caves and struggling with wolves. With time, the villagers got used to 'Assaf and started to treat him as a fool. "No one felt alarmed or threatened by his scruffy clothes and taciturn demeanor, or even by the string of oaths he would unleash from time to time when someone pinned him down and started firing provocative questions at him. People initially regarded him with a leering kind of sarcasm, and that turned eventually into laughter" (*Endings*, p. 21-22). 'Assaf was filled with silence, he "was something of a mystery" – a man who lives on hunting together with his dog (*Endings*, p. 19-25).

'Assaf, who is an uneasy character, with an uncomfortable desert outlook, belonged to the old certainties of the desert as opposed to the different rigidities and aspirations of the invading city. In this sense, he can be seen as a marginal, *liminal* character, who leaves the network of social classification occupying thus an ambiguous, symbolic existence.[17] Explaining types of *liminality*, Victor Turner argues

that, "they consist of a confrontation between that domain which pertains to the person, that is, social structure and cultural order, and that which belongs to the individual, that is, the critical and potentially creative destruction of that order."[18] *Liminality* is a threshold within rites of passage temporally located between and outside ordinary time.[19]

The story line is uncomplicated: During the seasons of drought, some of the village's young generation living in the city, arrive in al-Tiba together with friends from the city in order to organize a hunting trip for their city friends. The villagers, though worried about the situation, try to persuade 'Assaf – the son of the desert, hence a familiar with its secrets - to guide the company in their hunting trip. 'Assaf refuses vehemently out of great respect to the habitat and its environment; "All these people want to do is kill animals. They used to kill absolutely everything in sight," he argues (*Endings*, p. 47). 'Assaf surrenders grudgingly to the insistence of the villagers. The company, traveling with a four-wheel drive and a Volkswagen, pounces on their hunting trip. When they arrive to the hunting grounds, 'Assaf insists on hunting on foot away from the cars. A ghastly sand storm overshadows the whole scene, and when the storm is over 'Assaf is found dead with his dog trying to fervently dig him out of the massive sand that had covered his body.

'Assaf's body is brought to the house of the village mayor (Mukhtar), where it was laid out with the villagers gathered around it till the break of day. "The worst thing we did to 'Assaf, said the Mukhtar, was to let him fight on his own. Even his dog was better than us. At least it tried to save him. We did absolutely nothing." (*Endings*, p. 75) The villagers gather around 'Assaf's body, are plaintive of their passivity towards all the changes that were befalling them.

The death of the *liminal* 'Assaf becomes a sacrificial death undertaken by the community. R. Girard explains "the death of the individual has something of the quality of a tribute levied for the continued existence of the collectivity. A human being dies, and the solidarity of the survivors is enhanced by his death. The surrogate victim dies so that the entire community, threatened by the same fate, can be reborn in a new or renewed cultural order."[20]

The villagers stayed awake that night, gathered around 'Assaf's body and "so began the incredible all-night session, something al-Tiba had never witnessed before. Almost everyone who was there said something. They talked of many things. The guests told stories too, but the people of al-Tiba did not understand them too well" (*Endings*, p. 77). With this scene starts the second part of the novel carrying the title, "Some of the Stories from that Remarkable Night." (*Endings*, p. 78-128) Roger Allen notices that, "the villagers are masters at telling tales in a particular way, a very prevalent traditional craft in the Arab world, that of the *hakawati*."[21]

There is something in the setting that invites a comparison with a similar scene that came to be known in Arabic tradition as "The Sayings of the Philosophers (or Wise Men) at Alexander's Death-bed." This is a collection attributed to the renowned Nestorian physician and translator from Greek and Syriac into Arabic, Hunayn ibn Ishaq (d. 260/873).[22] Fourteen philosophers gather around Alexander's tomb to lament him and say wise, reflective thoughts about death and the futility of life. This tradition, which came to be connected to Alexander's death, was translated into Hebrew in the first half of the thirteenth century and thence into Spanish and other European languages to become a part of the pseudo-Challisthenes *Alexander Romance*.[23] It enjoyed from an early time great popularity among Muslim writers, e.g., al-Ya'qubi (d. 284/897) in his history

book.),[24] and al-Mas'udi's (d. 346/956) in his *Muruj al-dhahab*.[25] Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (d. ca 412/1021) mentions that, upon the death of the Buyid ruler, 'Adud al-Dawla (d. 372/983), some philosophers eulogized him in imitation of the "Sayings of the Philosophers at Alexander's Death-bed."[26]

Munīf borrows the same setting of the rite of mourning, where the men conducting a wake over 'Assaf's body tell fourteen tales all of which reveal episodes involving animals. By evoking these two scenes of the funeral oration genre, Munif iterates the 'symbolic' and 'singular/fictional' death of 'Assaf in a *transtextual* relation to the 'unique' funeral oration of the wise conqueror, Alexander (bearing in mind that any comparison between 'deaths' remains inconceivable, taken from an external perspective, and superficial).[27] But, whereas Alexander represented the arrogance of power (which the official 'funeral oration' constitutes and consolidates),[28] 'Assaf, remains a liminal loner, son of Mother Nature. Accordingly, the similarity between Alexander and 'Assaf rests upon two common traits: wisdom and having a vision. 'Assaf's funeral oration is thus populated by simple villagers who realize in the deceased a wise hero that died for a 'utopian' vision of a better world of harmony and abundance.

Two of the tales, numbers 6 and 9, are taken from the memorable early Arabic *Kitab al-hayawan* (Book of Animals) by the celebrated al-Jahiz (d. 255/868). It is first with *Endings* that Munif starts leaning on the rich Arabic narrative heritage, employing the implicit weaving of stories inside one another, subsequently generating each other. But, whereas the philosophers in their laments reflect upon the theme of the futility of life (power, arrogance, wealth and human hopes) in the face of death, the anecdotes told by the villagers ruminate about the damage caused by man to his natural habitat and about his cruelty towards animal life.

Roger Allen rightly maintains that the main focus of the novel is not on individuals, but rather on the village itself, al-Tiba and the community as a whole. Allen argues that "this is very much a novel that focuses on community and environment, but readers are gradually – very gradually – led towards a specific series of events that underline the work's environmental message."[29] Peter Willows –who reads *Endings* from the approach of both Gestalt psychology and semiotics– maintains that these stories, "which follow the death of the messianic 'Assaf [are] a sort of grieving process in the book, made whole beyond the sum of the parts of these many stories." They contribute, moreover, "to the animal-man image of 'Assaf who is one with nature."[30]

The death of the "messianic 'Assaf" and the ensuing redemptive grieving process conclude a symbolic initiation rite, a fertility ritual endured by the community, where death brings forth rain,[31] in order to close up the stages of the ritual process. Van Gennep calls them: rites of separation – rites of margin or *limen* and rites of reaggegation.[32] The dead man's procession turns into a wedding:

> "As it wound its way from the Mukhtar's house to the graveyard, the procession was guided by unseeing hands and voices. The Mukhtar himself had three weapons which he used to protect his house, but he dispensed with all of them and chose instead to carry 'Assaf's old weapon. From time to time he loaded and fired it, it almost felt as though he were at a wedding… No one can remember how it all happened even at the very end. 'Assaf's body had just reached the grave when the women of al-Tiba gave him a welcome befitting such a man. Nothing was made to seem special or unusual. Yet no sooner had the coffin arrived and been lowered to

> the ground in preparation for burial than the women gathered in a circle and started a rhythmic, orderly dance with blended elements of sadness, joy, pleasure, insanity and anger." (*Endings*, p. 136-137)

Although rain is not made as a consequence of this ritual, yet, a substitute is in sight, the water-dam. The cars, loaded with men, set off for the city and the Mukhtar was heard saying, "I'll come back on top of a bulldozer and begin the job myself. Then al-Tiba will begin to appreciate the real meaning of life, instead of having to endure this living death it leads every single day." (*Endings*, p. 140)

The critic Faysal Darraj, concluding his short depiction of *al-Nihayat*,[33] maintains that "The overall structure of the novel formulates the hunt as an encircling metaphor that separates between beginnings and endings as well as between a wicked present and a future that would never come."

CONCLUSION

Both characters Zaki al-Nadawi in *Upon Leaving the Bridge* and 'Assaf in *Endings*, are gripped with their loneliness, both of them are solitary and "eccentric". Yet, their loneliness, in one of its facets, is an expression of a crisis within their society. It is the type of solitariness that Georg Lukács had delineated in the literature of "traditional realism," where "the fate of such individuals is characteristic of certain human types in specific social or historical circumstances. Beside and beyond their solitariness, the common life, the strife and togetherness of other human beings, goes on as before."[34] Zaki left his loneliness in order to reunite with his community, wait with them and plan for a new start (*Upon leaving the bridge*, 209f.; p. 5 above). It seems as if this start were to be materialized through the redemptive death of 'Assaf, which brought forth a new hope in a better life, with water abundance and in harmony with the environment. The unfulfilled act of crossing the bridge in *Hina tarakna 'l-jisr* was symbolically achieved through the ceremonial *rites of passage* initiated through the death of 'Assaf. Yet, the redeemer is no more than a witness, a milestone on the road to change that should be endeavored by the society as a whole.

Although both novels, The Bridge and Endings, belong to Munif's earlier endeavors marked by their "traditional realism," one might sense that he was building on the rich experience he had already accumulated in his novelistic career and was breaking new grounds that would pave the way for his *Cities of Salt* quintet (1984-1989) and his trilogy, *Ard al-sawad*, 1999 (Arable Land).

The closure of both novels can be regarded as symbolic, where the signified reflects the drastic actuality of real victims of the disintegrated society. In this sense both novels stand as a protest against the evils of Arab societies; they carry at the same time a hope in positive change and a better future. More than once, Munif had asserted that for him, writing represented not only a 'catharsis', but a "tool for change."[35] He perceives the novel as a beautiful means of enlightenment; he says: "It is not an exaggeration to say that the novel flourishes and blooms whenever tragedy wins through, injustice becomes general and contradictions prevail in a certain society. In those vital historical moments, the novel becomes an agent expressing the people's condition and a mirror reflecting their miseries and hopes."[36] "The novel, as I understand it and as I conceive of it," says Munif, "is a beautiful tool that leads to knowledge and enjoyment at the same time. It makes us

more aware and more sensitive to the environment we live in and to our human condition."[37]

ENDNOTES

1 Mustafa M. Badawi, "Two Novelists from Iraq: Jabra and Munif," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23:2 (1992), p. 148. 'Abd al-Rahman Munif as a prominent public writer cum intellectual has given this theme much of his attention. Cf. on the theme of Arabic novels of prison, Maher Jarrar, "The Arabic Novel Carries its Cross and Asks the Son of Man: Iconography of Jesus in some Modern Arabic Novels," *Poetry's Voice – Society's Norms: Form of Interaction between Middle Eastern Writers and their Societies*, eds. Andreas Pflitsch and Barbara Winckler (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2006), p. 72-73.

[2] Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 30.

[3] Hanna Batatu, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 473-482; Hanna Batatu, The Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi Revolutions: Some Observations on their Underlying Causes and Social Character (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1984), 1-22.

[4] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Katib wa 'l-manfa*, ed. Muhammad Dakrub (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya lil-dirasat wal-nashr, 1994), 163.

[5] Carl-Martin Edsman, "Bridge," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 2., ed. Mircea Eliade (New York and London: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), p. 310-314; Hans Biedermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meaning behind Them*, tr. James Hulbert (New York and London: A Meridian Book, 1994), p. 49-50.

[6] Carl-Martin Edsman, "Bridge," p. 310-314.

[7] *al-Mawsu'a al-Filastiniyya,* (Damascus: PLO, 1984), vol. 2, p. 284-294.

[8] Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images. A Literary Iconology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 15.

[9] Georges Tarabishi, *Ramziyyat al-mar'a fi 'l-riwaya al-'arabiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1981), p. 7

[10] Ibid., p. 8-12

[11] Faysal Darraj, al-Riwaya wa ta'wil 'l-tarikh: Nazhariyyat al-riwaya wa 'l-riwaya al-'arabiyya (Beirut: al-Marakaz al-thaqafi al-'arabi, 2004), p. 216

[12] Theodore Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images*, p. 15.

[13] Salah Salih, *al-Riwaya al-'arabiyya wa 'l-sahra'* (Damascus: Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 1996), p. 224-25.

[14] Michail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 84, 250.

[15] Freedman, Ralph, The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Herman Hesse, André Gide and Virginia Woolf (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[16] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2nd ed., 1995), p. 222-230.

[17] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p. 94.

[18] Victor Turner, *Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols* (Tucson and London: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), p. 148-163.

[19] Ibid., p. 133.

[20] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, tr. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 255.

[21] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel*, p. 226.

[22] D.J.A. Ross, *Alexander Hiustoriatus: A Guide to Medieval Illustrated Alexander Literature* (London: University of London, 1963), p. 9, 61-61; S.P. Brock, "The Laments of the Philosophers over Alexander in Syriac," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 25:2 (1970), 205-218; 'Ali b. al-Husayn al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'ādin al-jawhar*, vol. 6, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Publications de L'Université Libanaise, 1979), p. 148.

[23] D.J.A. Ross, *Alexander Hiustoriatus*; S.P. Brock, "The Laments".

[24] Ahmad al-Ya'qubi, *Tarikh*, vol. 1. (Beirut: Dar Sadir and Dar Bayrut, 1960), p. 143-145.

[25] 'Ali b. al-Husayn al-Mas'udi, *Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar*, vol. 2, ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Publications de L'Université Libanaise, 1966), p. 10-13; S.P. Brock, "The Laments", p. 207; Ihsan 'Abbas, *Malamih Yunaniyya fi 'l-adab al-'arabi* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya lil-dirasat wal-nashr, 1993), p. 127-42.

[26] Ihsan 'Abbas, *Malamih Yunaniyya*, p. 140.

[27] Thomas H. Macho, "Tod und Trauer im kulturwissenschaftlichen Vergleich," *Der Tod als Thema der Kulturtheorie*, ed. Jan Assman (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 91-95.

[28] Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, *The Work of Mourning*, eds. Jacques Derrida (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 18, 19.

[29] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel*, p. 226-227.

[30] Peter Willows, "Gestalt Psychology, Semiotics and the Modern Arabic Novel," *Applied Semiotics/Sémiotique appliqué* (www.chass.utoronto.ca/french/as-sa/ASSA-No15, 2005), p. 8.

[31] James Frazer, *The New Golden Bough*, revised and edited by Theodor H. Gaster (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 76-78; Mircea Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane. Vom Wesen des Religiösen* (Frankfurt, a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1987), p. 114-115, 169f.

[32] Victor Turner, *Blazing the Trail*, p. 133; but see the reservations of Thomas H. Macho, "Tod und Trauer", p. 91.

[33] Faysal Darraj, *al-Riwaya wa ta'wil 'l-tarikh*], p. 220-223.

[34] Georg Lukács, Georg, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, tr. from the German by John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1972), p. 20.

[35] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Katib wa 'l-manfa*, p. 159, 163, 214-215; Maher Jarrar, *'Abd al-Rahman Munif wa 'l-Iraq: Sira wa dhikrayat* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-thaqafi al-'arabi, 2005), p. 33-34.

[36] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Katib wa 'l-manfa*, p. 40.

[37] Ibid., p. 42.

نكتب الرواية من جديد

الياس خوري

بعد موته تذكرت أنني لم اسأله ذلك السؤال البديهي: لماذا كتب الرواية نفسها مرتين؟ وحين طرحت عليه السؤال كان زمن الأجوبة قد انتهى.

مات عبد الرحمن منيف تاركاً لنا نحن القراء مهمة البحث عن الجواب. وحين نقترب من الجواب نكتشف أنه أكثر صعوبة من السؤال نفسه، وأنه علينا أن نعيد كتابة الرواية مرات لا تحصى، من أجل أن تتوقف السجون وقمعها ورعبها عن أن تكون الموضوع الأكثر إلحاحاً على الضمير العربي.

تجربة عبد الرحمن منيف تمتد على مساحة روائية شاسعة، وتحدها أعمال كبرى: ثنائية السجون، خماسية مدن الملح، وثلاثية أرض السواد. افتتحتها الأشجار واغتيال مرزوق، ثم عبرت الجسر ورسمت مع جبرا إبراهيم جبرا عالماً بلا خرائط، قبل أن تتعدد في سير وكتابات نقدية ورسوم. لا يمكن اختصار هذه التجربة في أحد محاورها، فهي من الغنى والعمق بحيث تغري القارئ بالانخراط بل والضياع في عوالمها. كأنها رحلة داخل أرجاء المشرق العربي، من جزيرة العرب إلى العراق ومن الأردن إلى سوريا. كأن منيف هو الكاتب العربي الذي أخذه منفاه إلى اكتشاف أوجاع هذا المشرق العربي فكتبها ورسمها شخصيات ومواقف، تعيد كتابة التاريخ من مناطقه الهامشية والمعتمة.

والعتمة العربية عي عتمة السجون. ففي التزاوج العجيب بين النظامين الانقلابي والأوتوقراطي، وبين الملكية والجمهورية التي صنعتها العسكريتاريا، تحول السجن في بلاد العرب إلى العلامة الأولى على أزمة السلطة ومعاناة المجتمع في آن واحد.

السلطة لا تملك سوى شرعية القمع العري، بعدما فقد الانقلاب شرعيته وتلوث بالعجز والفساد والهزيمة.

والمجتمع لا يعاني من القمع وحده، بل أيضاً من عدم القدرة على بلورة بديل ديموقراطي ينقذه من قبضة وحشية أودت به وقادته إلى ما يشبه الهلاك.

بين الأزمة والمعاناة نشأ فن أدبي جديد حاول الاقتراب من العوالم الداخلية للسجون، وكتب استعارة كبرى عن واقع المجتمعات العربية.نعرف أن الأدب تحرر من فرضية الأغراض التي سادت طويلاً في النقد العربي الكلاسيكي، وحاول كسر ثنائية المدح–الهجاء التي بنى عليها النقاد القدماء أساس نظريتهم النقدية، من أجل الوصول إلى آفاق بلا حدود، تحتل فيها الأنا الفردية دورها المحوري في اكتشاف مداخل جديدة للتجربة الأدبية.

غير أن رواية السجون في الأدب العربي المعاصر، قد تكون الاستثناء الذي يؤكد القاعدة.

الموضوع أو الغرض، يحتل في هذا الأدب موقعاً كبيراً، ويأخذه عبر أقلام من مصر والجزيرة العربية وسوريا ولبنان وفلسطين والمغرب، إلى مناطق جديدة، يتحول فيها السجن إلى كناية أو حكاية رمزية تقترب من الحياة العربية، وتكتشف الحكايات المطمورة تحت التعذيب والأنين والغياب.

لم يكتف منيف بحكاية رجب في رواية "شرق المتوسط"، بل ذهب إلى عادل وطالع في رواية "الآن..هنا" من أجل أن يؤكد ضرورة كتابة الحكاية.

بين الحكاية وضرورة كتابتها يقع الصمت العربي الذي حول الحضور غياباً، والتجربة هباء.

وعى منيف، منذ قطيعته مع تجربته السياسية في حزب البعث، أن مهمة الكاتب أن يكتب. كان يكتب كأنه في سباق مع الكلمات. ويكتشف أسلوبهأأساليبه في سياق الكتابة. يعود إلى التاريخ أو يبحث في أرشيف الذاكرة الشفوية، أو يلتقط ذبذبات الكلام، من أجل أن يصل إلى تخوم ما لم يكتب. هذا هو جوهر القلق المنيفي الذي وضعه في طليعة مرحلة جديدة في الأدب العربي المعاصر. إنها مرحلة الانتقال من الموقف إلى الحالة، ومن القضية إلى الإنسان. في الحالة يتبلور الموقف، وفي الإنسان تتجسد القضية، ولا سبيل إلى هاتين الغايتين إلا عبر الكتابة.

افتتاح تاريخ الجزيرة العربية روائياً ليس أقل أهمية من كتابة تاريخ السجون، والبحث في الخيبة المرزوقية، ليس سوى جزء من التفتيش عن لغة مطابقة أو ملائمة بحسب ابن خلدون.

إن وضع منيف في سياق الرواية الراوية العربية المعاصرة، لا يضيء لنا تجربة هذا الروائي الكبير فحسب، بل يسمح أيضا بفتح باب النقاش حول الصمت الذي حاولت الرواية اختراقه، من أجل الوصول إلى بناء مرآة الروح العربية التي تشظت وتناثرت، ولم يبق لها من ملجأ سوى اللغة.

أريد أن أتوقف أمام ثلاث مسائل:

1- إذا وضعنا ثنائية السجون في سياقها نكتشف أنها تأتي استكمالاً لأعمال روائية افتتحتها رواية "تلك الرائحة" لصنع الله إبراهيم. تجريبية إبراهيم التي بنيت على محور العجز عن الكتابة، وفي داخل صيغة أنا الفرد التي تحاول ترميم ذاتها من خلال لغة سردية متقشفة، تتخذ بعداً آخر في روايتي منيف. الكتابة لا توال همّاً مركزيا، والسجن صار استعارة للمجتمع، لكن منيف يتوغل في التسجيل، ويبني واقعيته الرومانسية من خلال علاقة رجب بأمه، في الرواية الأولى. أما في الرواية الثانية فنذهب إلى واقعية عارية، يجسدها انتقال السجن بأسره إلى مستشفى "كارلوف" في براغ، حيث يمتزج مرض المجتمع بمرض شخصيات الرواية، وتصير الكتابة وسيلة للحوار مع الذات ومع التاريخ.

2- يمكن قراءة الجزء الأول من خماسية "مدن الملح" بوصفه اقتراباً من مناخات الواقعية السحرية، غير أن الرواية سرعان ما تطيح بالتوقعات، وتذهب إلى واقعية تأريخية، تحكمها ضرورة كتابة ما لم وربما ما لن يكتب. متعب الهزال بطل الرواية الأسطوري يغيب في نهاية الجزء الأول من الرواية، وهو يشبه في ذلك المؤلف الذي يتعمد الغياب. يغيب المؤلف والبطل، كي تتحول الرواية متواليات تسجل التاريخ وتكشف عاره الكبير.

3- قد تكون ثلاثية "أرض السواد" رواية تاريخية بالمعنى الكلاسيكي، لكننا نكتشف أن النسيج الروائي البغدادي الذي صنعه منيف، يقود إلى مغامرة الدخول

في اكتشاف آليات السلطة، والتآمر العثماني المملوكي، وحكم العسكريتاريا التقليدية، الذي صار نموذجاً سارت عليه العسكريتاريا الحديثة.

الثابت في المحاور الروائية الثلاثة هو شبح السجن وآليات القمع وأوجاع الإنسان.

بالكتابة، أي بتحويل الكلمات مسامير للذاكرة وحوافز للوعي، افتتحت كتابة منيف الأفق، وأخذتنا إلى جحيم العرب، ومآسي المقهورين الذين حولتهم الآلة القمعية أشباحاً.

كيف ينطق الأشباح؟ ومتى يتكلم الموتى؟

هذا هو سؤال عبد الرحمن منيف. خاض في الأشكال والأساليب، سافر إلى المدن والأرياف، عبر الصحراء، وعاد وعلى أوراقه ندوب السجن، والأمل في أن تكون الكتابة مدخلاً إلى فتح أبواب الجحيم.

همس حكاياته بخفر.

لكن كلماته تدق الأبواب وتدعونا إلى كتابة الرواية من جديد كي نقفل أبواب السجون وننصرف إلى صناعة الحياة.

WRITING THE NOVEL ANEW

Elias Khoury*

Translated by Zein Shweiry*
and Sonja Mejcher-Atassi

After his death, I remembered that I never asked him that evident question: why did he write the novel twice? When I finally asked, the time for answering was over.

'Abd al Rahman Munif died leaving the task to us, the readers, to search for the answer. When we draw nearer to the answer, we discover that it is more difficult than the question itself and that we have to rewrite the novel countless times, in order for prisons and their repression and horror to cease being the most insistent subject in the Arab conscience.

'Abd al Rahman Munif's experience extends to a vast novelistic space. It is bordered by three major works: the two volumes on prisons, the quintet Cities of Salt and the trilogy Land of Darkness. It was launched by Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq, then crossed the Bridge to draw with Jabra Ibrahim Jabra A World without Maps, before it multiplied into biographies, critical writings and drawings. This experience cannot be reduced to one dimension. It is rich and deep to such an extent that it lures the reader to be absorbed, if not lost, in its universes. It is like a voyage into the Arab Mashriq, from the Arabian Peninsula to Iraq and from Jordan to Syria. It is as if Munif is the Arab writer whose exile drove him to discover the suffering of this Arab Mashriq. He wrote about it and drew characters and plots out of it in a way that rewrote history starting from its marginal and oppressed regions.

The major Arab obscurity is that of prisons. In the strange intermarriage between the revolutionary and autocratic regimes, between the monarchy and the republic, produced by militarism, the prison in the countries of the Arabs has become the first indication of the authority's crisis and society's anguish at the same time.

The authority possesses the legitimacy of naked oppression only, after the coup d'état had lost its legitimacy and was tainted with failure, corruption, and defeat.

Society does not suffer from repression alone, but also from the incapacity to attain a democratic alternative which would save it from the fist of brutality that led it to its so-called doom.

Amidst crisis and anguish, a new literary art came to the fore. It tried to get closer to the inside worlds of prisons and to write a major metaphor about the reality of Arab societies.

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We know that modern Arabic literature has been liberated from the objectives that dominated classical Arabic criticism for a long time. It tried to break away from the tandem of eulogy-satire on which the ancient critics had based their critical theories, in order to reach boundless horizons where the individual assumes his unique role in discovering new perspectives to the literary experience.

Nevertheless, the novel of prisons in contemporary Arabic literature might be the exception that proves the rule. The theme or objective in this literature plays a very important part. It sets out with writers from Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Morocco to new worlds rendering the prison a metaphor or a symbolic tale of Arab life. Buried stories are unearthed from beneath torture, misery, and absence.

Munif was not satisfied with the story of Rajab in the novel "East of the Mediterranean" but went to Adil and Tali' in the novel "Here…Now" in order to insist on the necessity of writing the story.

Between the story and the necessity to write it is the Arab silence that has turned presence into absence and experience into nothingness. Since his break with his political experience in the Ba'th Party, Munif realized that the writer's mission is to write. He used to write as if he were racing with words and in the process he discovered his style of writing. He goes back in history, searches in the oral memory archive, or catches the vibrations of words in order to get to the edge of what has not been written. This is the essence of the Munifian anxiety which he has placed at the avant-garde of a new stage in contemporary Arabic literature. It is the stage of transition from the position to the situation, from the cause to the person. In the situation, the position crystallizes, and in the person, the cause materializes. There is no route to these two objectives except through writing.

Launching the history of the Arabian Peninsula in the novel is not less important than writing the history of prisons. Looking into the Marzuqian defeat is but part of searching for an adequate language, according to Ibn Khaldun. Situating Munif in the context of the contemporary Arabic novel does not only shed light on the experience of this great novelist. It also opens the discussion about the silence that the novel has tried to break, in order to construct a mirror of the Arab soul which has been scattered and dispersed. Language has been its last resort.

I would like to draw attention to three issues:

1- If we place the two volumes on prisons in context, we find out that they complement novelistic works inaugurated by the novel "That Scent" by Sonallah Ibrahim. Ibrahim's experimentation was built on the incapacity of writing. Written in the first person, it tries to reconstruct itself through an austere narrative language that acquires another dimension in Munif's two novels. Writing is still a vital concern, and the prison has become a metaphor for society, but Munif immerses himself in creating his romantic reality through Rajab's relationship with his mother in the first novel. As for the second novel, we sense a naked reality, exemplified in the transfer of the whole prison to Karloff Hospital in Prague, where the sickness of the society merges with the sickness of the novel's characters. Hence, writing becomes a means of dialogue with the self and with history.

2- The first volume of the quintet "Cities of Salt" can be read as something close to magical realism. However, the novel quickly dissuades expectations and moves towards a historical realism driven by the necessity of writing what has not been, and probably never will be, written. Mut'ib al-Hadhdhal, the novel's legendary hero, disappears in the first part of the novel. In this aspect, he resembles the author who is intentionally absent. Hero and author disappear in order for the

novel to turn into a succession that records history and discovers history's major shame.

3- The trilogy "Land of Darkness" can be considered a historical novel in the classical sense. But we discover that the Baghdadi novelistic texture created by Munif impels the reader to embark on the adventure of discerning authority's mechanisms, the Mamluk Ottoman conspiracy, and the traditional military regime which has become the foundation of the new military regime.

The common point of the three novelistic axes is the specter of prison, the mechanisms of oppression, and the suffering of man. In writing, in turning words into memory anchors and awareness incentives, Munif has opened horizons and taken us to the hell of the Arabs and the miseries of the oppressed whom the repressive machine has transformed into ghosts.

How do ghosts talk? When do the dead speak?

This is 'Abd al Rahman Munif's question. He was engrossed by shapes and styles, traveled to cities and rural areas, crossed the desert, and came back with the scars of the prison on his papers and the hope of opening the doors of hell through writing.

He whispered his stories bashfully.

However, his words knock on doors and call on us to rewrite the novel in order to close the doors of prisons and turn our attention to the art of life.

ENDNOTES

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DE/CONSTRUCTION: TWO EDGES OF A MAGIAN LOVE-STORY

Nisrine Jaafar*

> "Humanity's noblest sense, sight, coincides with our noblest faculty, reason. Each symbolically reciprocates the other. This hegemony reflects the thinking of Plato and Aristotle…and the Judaeo-Christian tradition reinforces the Greek tradition. The Biblical myth of creation states that 'in the beginning' all was in total darkness; 'then God commanded, "Let there be light" – and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw.' (Genesis 1: 3-4)…The corollary of this vision of light, sight and God is the binary opposition of the equation of darkness, blindness, death, the Devil and evil."[1]

INTRODUCTION

Similarly to the myth of creation, the protagonist in Munif's *Magian Love Story* builds on *the look* (*al-nadhra*), as the cornerstone to his *fabula*. The entire story is imbued with a religious pulse, which results however in deconstructing religious institutions – namely, the church in this context. If the 'I'-narrator in Munif's second novel[2] paves the way for the deployment of his narrative by borrowing a crucial constituent from the story of creation (i.e. sight),[3] he only does so to shake the religious edifice and challenge the notion of 'sacrality', forcefully transmitted to human beings through "the sacred fathers" (8, 28, 30, 32, 36, 37, 43, 79).

In fact, through sight, the narrator's own myth seems to be that of "re-creation" through fixation on a single object of desire[4] that he renders more and more abstract as the narrative gradually unfolds. Nonetheless, the repercussions of this double-edged re-creation/fixation process only prove detrimental to a "lost" character who subsequently endures major "internal destruction."[5] Hence, the narrator's original quest for meaning develops into a confession scheme *à la* St. Augustine, addressed to the implied reader rather than to the religious community that he displays no respect or sympathy for (5-8). This scheme brings out the protagonist's vulnerability, fallibility as well as his "hunt" for a hope – solely derived from his sacred[6] beloved's tempting[7] eyes.

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine admits that temptation is brought forth by the 'eye'. Yet, being the Platonic he is, 'beauty' for him culminates only in God; and, it is towards this God that sight has to inevitably be oriented, to avoid the 'fires of hell.' While the main character in Munif's *Magian Love Story* engages in a narrative motif which somewhat simulates Augustine's confessions, he nevertheless refrains from adopting any moral negativism attributed to 'sight' in the ascetic tradition. That is, the latter harshly condemns "unchastened gazing,"[8] i.e. *the look* or '*le regard',*[9] whenever it diverts from the Creator himself. Conversely though, the 'I'-narrator in

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A Magian Love Story discerns a new "goddess" through 'the look' that he eagerly starts to worship.[10]

Even so, he seems to embrace the 'Sartrian' postulation that 'the look' acts as a double-edged, fatal and fatalistic instrument.; for, just as Sartre questions the meaning of 'being seen' and the risk embedded in it,[11] Munif's protagonist explicitly laments the exchange in 'looks' with his beloved, which carries him through the rocky path of constant and unfulfilled yearning (14, 22-5, 29, 33-4, 39).[12] This might possibly elicit the reason why his 'love story' is depicted as *Magian*: always magically animated but never really rendered tangible.

Amidst such mixed signals and feelings and at the heart of a poignant psychological mess that the narrator experiences, can 'seeing' remain 'believing' – as popular wisdom often reiterates? Is the reader supposed to believe the protagonist's tale about the actual existence of a beloved Lillian? Could it not be the mere work of a disillusioned man's imagination, seeking to (re)construct a love-story, an institution or even an iconic figure: anything of worth and value to cling to?

Visibly, the 'I'-narrator is not relying on Cartesian premises to draw his account. So, what is the sensorial experience he describes doing in the novel, and how far-reaching is it in re-constructing – if not de-constructing – new modes of 'seeing' and 'believing'?

DISILLUSIONMENT INCARNATE

When Adrian Lyne adapted Vladimir Nabokov's famous novel *Lolita* into the big screen, he chose to open the narrative with an intriguing yet important detail, stated in the first person by professor Humbert – the main protagonist – who directly relates it to the audience, as if to redeem or justify himself. In fact, Humbert confesses that his mind fails to function like that of an adult. Stuck at age fourteen during which he happens to have lost his beloved, Humbert ceases to develop both at the emotional and psychological levels. Still lingering, despite the years, in 1921 Cannes – where he had met Annabelle and explored the meaning of passion with her, prior to her accidental death four months later – professor Humbert constantly exacerbates his own grief by animating within himself a fierce sense of melancholy, bordering on madness. It is not until the brisk appearance of the juvenile Lolita, that he re-embarks on an unquenchable yet hopeless search for lust and "love".[13]

Similarly to Nabokov and Lyne's anti-hero, Munif's main *personage* in *A Magian Love-Story* catches the thread of narration from the beginning, to introduce his problematic situation: not only is he yearning for a love affair that cannot possibly materialize; he is also suffering from the loss of his mother's affection at a tender age – a deficit that sharply determines his rapport to women, especially prior to the unforeseen encounter with Lillian.[14] Even though this deep sense of loss is sporadically highlighted throughout the text (20, 73), its impact is vividly felt in the narrator's illustration of his restless life – to the extent that he transforms into an identical twin of Nabokov's Humbert; in that, he openly admits to be inhabiting a man's body but simply reasoning with a child's mind (107). Moreover, he regards the latter as a deficiency, underlying not only his personal trauma but a whole generation's struggle[15] with a city that "survives on students'[16] aspirations and ruthlessly annihilates their future prospects" (110).

It is noteworthy here that the novel's fifth chapter,[17] which reflects on the narrator's relationship to the host city, also maps out some crucial *raisons d'être* for

his defeat and justifies hence, the sort of jargon permeating the text. Indeed, from sexual frustration to much-awaited socio-political relief, the journey led by Munif's narrator and his fellow foreign students is one of 'futile mobilization' in pursuit of volatile dreams. According to the 'I'-narrator, what deeply marks this pursuit is mere 'cowardice' alone – an impeding motif that occupies considerable space within the narrative (16-26). The narrator links cowardice to defeat in a riddle-like question (25-27-108), which simulates the puzzling genesis of the chicken and egg: which one comes first and which is subsequently engendered? Such unanswerable query however, traps the narrator in a vicious circle of wondering(s) and wandering(s). His entrapment renders the thought of meeting 'redemption', an idea *per impossibile* (79) and imposes a melancholically monotonous tone on the narrated experience. In a sense, Munif's main character turns into a *'pendulum'* (14-19); for, like a '*pendulum'* – which always indicates time but never dictates it – he is synchronized to outline his pain, deception and many defeats, but falls short from breaking the strenuous repetitive motion of his life.

Failing to maintain a firm grip over circumstances compels the narrator to both reinforce his self-portrait as a 'coward' and order the implied readers to symbolically flagellate him in rebuke (26). However, far from assuming full responsibility for his declared 'cowardice', he blames 'nature' for conspiring with 'the city' against human beings (23), by casting upon them a major unbreakable curse. In the narrator's eye, everything is cursed – even the balcony from which he manages to first oversee his beloved. He actually perceives this balcony as the vital 'testimony to his end' (36).

The notion of 'ending' hereby evoked, is expected to bear the protagonist's psychological collapse and far-fetched disillusionment alone. Nevertheless, the 'end' allegedly imposed on the narrator when he crosses Lillian from his hotel balcony, paradoxically marks the beginning of a rejuvenated search for meaning. The same encounter that drives the protagonist insane makes him wonder, in retrospect, about his five-year 'ephemeral' journey at the heart of an 'alien' host-city (103); and, it is this encounter – which blurs the lines between 'reality', 'diction' and 'narration' – that motivates him to ponder crucial if not existential questions: does the 'curse' derive from love or is it an intrinsic, inescapable part of his life? What is love anyway (34)? Is it a definable entity? How does the idea of desire emanate and how does it subsequently degrade into a painful outcry (45)?

Even though he reluctantly utters the word 'love', the narrator depicts the latter's conquest of his heart in almost the same fashion that Idwar al-Kharrat's Mikha'il does, throughout the opening pages of *Rama wa 'l-Tinnin* (Rama and the Dragon);[18] i.e., both protagonists discern in 'love' a drift towards solitude and at the same time, a bitter-sweet 'adolescent' strife to overcome this solitude. Yet, while the two protagonists tend to examine the probable intertwinement of 'love' and un-consummated adolescence,[19] Munif's shaken narrator oscillates between perceiving love as a 'stupid mistake' (15) or a definite need, transcending the immediacy of carnal desire. Then again, he does not provide ready-made answers and, for that matter, does not possess any.

Swimming in a sea of pressing questions, the 'I'-narrator revisits his own life in a deconstructed narrative, which completely resembles him. The dramatic incisions that his questions cause within his own memory make it possible to piece up not only the history of his disillusionment but also the story of his attachment to Lillian – be it Lillian the woman or the thought thereof. After all, as Kundera

indicates, "a question is like a knife that slices through the stage backdrop and gives us a look at what lies hidden behind it."[20]

FRAGMENTED *FABULA*: THE STORY OF A BROKEN NARRATOR

Throughout the narrative, Munif's protagonist remains anonymous. His harsh, expressive and scolding "I" sharply addresses the reader and other implied listeners[21] – creating thus, manifold layers of narration, reading and interpretation – without providing any elicit indication of his identity, nationality or "home."[22] The only details this character willingly reveals – albeit in bits – consist of his occupation as a foreign student in an unspecified European country and a shaky approximation of his age at the time when the main story unfolds.[23]

In fact, there is a temporal disparity between the process of narration and the actual development of reported events within the narrated story; for, the solo *raconteur* pours his heart out only years later.[24] Even so, the storyline itself is divided into manifold but succinct timeframes.

The overall framework, within which the main story develops however, is that of a ten-day holiday at a seemingly bourgeois hotel in the mountains, towards the end of summer (9, 27). While the narrator relates his escape to the necessity of finding some rest (18), his discourse unveils a high level of anxiety and distress that even nature – with its lakes, pine-trees and bathing spots (9, 10, 40) – fails to alleviate. The anonymous protagonist seems to face heightened uncertainty vis-à-vis strangers who share his vacation, vis-à-vis relationships with women and vis-à-vis "books."

Based on the stream of consciousness, his discourse reveals all at once, a sense of self-imposed exile, psychological unsettlement and sharp self-awareness, which persist even after he moves back to the city – rendering him thus, more vulnerable and bare before the readers' gazing eye.

While "stripping naked"[25] (the deliberate act of completely exposing one's inner self) is a perilous endeavor, the narrator ventures into soliciting the readers' immediate attention – as indicated above – by spilling his words and weaknesses out boldly; that is, he does not camouflage his excessive sadness (16) or low self-esteem (8). Instead, he stages these two main components of his personality as intrinsic parts of the 'truth-formula'; i.e., parts of a narrative that he strives to present as viable and non- illusive. It is worth mentioning here, that the narrator is fully aware of the fact that his words are not necessarily cathartic. Hence, he constantly guards against the readers' potential backlashes; yet, he still seeks to establish a new channel of interaction through their imagined presence – since all avenues for communicative exchange have been severed, with a surrounding that merely allows for ephemeral relations.[26]

If his life has so far resembled the tedious longing for a 'Godot' that fails to come along, why does the narrator take on another addressee who cannot possibly reciprocate his exchange or offer him constructive feedback? By doing so, Munif's protagonist probably tries to lead a 'normal' life 'with rhythm', in which he no longer orbits solo; for, throughout the largest proportion of his narrative he only roams intimate/inner spaces, from which he attempts to extract – in flashback form – scattered excerpts of an eclipsed life.

In fact, the narrator's all-encompassing deception begins with the church as an institution led by 'potential murderers'; namely, 'the sacred fathers', whose ultimate pleasure is often derived from torturing innocent creatures (37, 141).

Similarly to Zaki al-Naddawi,[27] who renders Wardan the 'scapegoat-dog' the sole recipient of his fury, this anonymous protagonist chases the 'alleged' guardians of the church and makes them – rather understandably – bear the cross of his anger.

While his story is written in a confession-like style, the narrator's main purpose is to profoundly challenge the church's dogma and its inculcation of distorted beliefs into the pious' minds.[28] This does not however imply that the protagonist discards 'spirituality' per se. On the contrary, it is the intricate yearning for a 'spiritual haven', which fuels his attachment to Lillian's eyes and contributes to dissolving manifold ties with his surrounding – material and otherwise.

For instance, failure to derive 'serenity' from 'books' makes him cast the latter off, as yet another source of disillusionment (14, 16, 24). While the direct reason underlying such intellectual crisis is not explicitly evoked, the narrator – initially a poetry-avid (88), a painter (77) and art appreciator (101) – reveals great cynicism towards and low affinity with the printed word.

On a more intimate plane, his disenchantment is intensely expressed vis-à-vis sexuality. Driven by a palpable sexual frustration, the one-man-show narrator tries to lead an allegedly 'promiscuous' life. His random process of experimentation is nevertheless accompanied by a bitterly-felt distinction between sex and 'love'[29] (20), which coins the former to a pejorative and degrading connotation.[30] Paradoxically though, Munif's unsettled protagonist excessively probes 'carnal desire' – albeit in vain – for meaning and affection. That is, he engages in a trail of sexual rapports to different women;[31] then, repeatedly – but not coincidentally – lands on 'ephemeral' bonds, regardless of their longevity.[32] Such for example is the case with Mira (18-19), whom he 'unorthodoxly dates' for about three years. Actually, his so-called relationship to Mira is depicted as bearing the most substance;[33] for, it involves not only sex, but also a blend of emotional, familial, and mental exchanges.[34] Even so, the narrator cannot remain faithful to her or, deliberately abstains from remaining thus. Upon his return from the ten-day holiday, Mira loses much of her appeal in his eyes (65) and both individuals drift further apart – despite his subsequent and trivial attempts at winning the 'fleeing'[35] Mira over in bed again.

Indeed, rather than providing the narrator with inner tranquility and reconciliation, the hotel visit seems to enhance his sense of alienation from people in general, especially those 'strangers' who temporarily share the ten-day journey. Sinking in a world of his own, the anonymous protagonist eyes the surrounding crowd with a lot of disdain[36] (22-23). Hence, he downgrades other visitors' presence at the hotel to an insignificant proliferation of unfamiliar faces, yielding two parallel yet completely paradoxical outcomes: the restraint on his privacy and the enhancement within his inner self, of even more solitude (10-11). As a result, the 'I'-narrator tends to merely orbit around his worries, individual speculations and thoughts. That is, he takes refuge in inner closed spaces, which do not necessarily procure him a concrete sense of security; for, security (at least in Foucauldian terms) implies not a complete prevention of disorder, but a certain management of the latter; and, the anonymous protagonist seems to possess no control over his chaotic state of being – even after he meets Lillian.

FIXATION/RE-CREATION

Until his encounter with Lillian at the beach, the narrator seems to lead a tumultuous inner life, running in undetermined directions and primarily dictated by

the afore-outlined disillusionment. The unexpected emergence of 'her eyes' however, engenders what could possibly be deemed a 'resurrection'. As the sole 'familiar' creature around (33), Lillian manages – particularly through her eyes – to become the narrator's subject of focus, then gradually, the center of his fixation(s). It is neither a pure coincidence nor an element of surprise that her name is unraveled almost forty pages into the novel – since the anonymous protagonist is thoroughly consumed by the aura around her *look* alone. Actually, the entire 'love affair' is built on the decisive effect of a 'glance'; from then onwards, the narrator leaps slightly but not consistently, outside his inner confines – only to soon re-embrace, an unfocused circular motion in search of Lillian.

Before exploring the nature of this search however, I would like to pause at the ambivalent effect of 'sight' on the narrator – as a major '*élément déclencheur*' beneath his desperate pursuit.

While casting a major emphasis on the sacredness of Lillian's eyes, Munif's 'I'-narrator depicts the double-edged corollary that stems from their sudden appearance; indeed, not only do these eyes fill his heart with 'love' (14, 22, 25, 29, 33-4, 39), they also constitute a perilous tunnel at the end of which awaits him both 'madness' (19) and 'defeat' (22) – two symbolic incarnations of psychological death.

The interplay between love, madness and defeat ties – once again – into al-Kharrat's vision in *Rama wal-Tinnin*, where the main character Mikha'il, ponders crucial speculations about the expandable and solitary essence of love: expandable because it bears neither a beginning nor a discernable end; and solitary, because it kills the 'beholder' then 'resurrects him dead' on a daily basis (6) – as though love were a relentless but doomed 'hunt' for something, someone, anything.

If I elect to employ the word 'hunt', it is specifically because Munif's 'I'-narrator, who is completely haunted by Lillian's 'gaze', strives – albeit in vain[37] – to possess the object of his fixation and in turn, earn salvation. This being said, he tries to establish a communication channel with the desired object through 'sight' – turning himself thus into a sort of 'voyeur', seeking to relinquish his loneliness. Nevertheless, voyeurism only buries him deeper in the grave of solitude and, just like the mythical Sisyphus, his quest for redemption remains bitterly wishful. Throughout the novel, Munīf's narrator swims in the deep sea of yearning, but wakes up – over and again – to a sour realization: that shallow foams are but his sole share of the overwhelming emotional tide he experiences with every 'look'. Having somewhat assimilated his 'sort', the narrator cynically warns readers against any 'grandiose' final expectations; for, they will inevitably fall on 'nothing tangible towards the end of narration' (59).

Is the entire story based on an illusion then? Is it a dream? Is it the creative work of the 'I'- narrator's imagination, in a desperate attempt to escape emotional drought?

While plausible answers to such questions may never be reached, it is worth turning to the protagonist's idiosyncratic re-creation of meaning, for speculative reflections. In the process of fixation he undertakes, the protagonist gradually rids his love for Lillian from all possible 'impurities'. Therefore, he discards the ideas of sex and carnal desire (34) from their alleged bond. By doing so, he transposes Lillian to a different plane than that of everyday life – rendering her half woman, half Goddess in some instances; and completely divine in others (25).[38] The more divine, angelic or transcendental her depiction, the more she escapes his grip. Yet, in an almost masochistic fashion, the narrator savors her abstraction and becomes

more adamant vis-à-vis her pursuit; hence, his engagement in a ceaseless search for the 'beloved', even after they head back to their original urban setting.

In fact, the narrative is symmetrically divided between the protagonist's quest at the mountain resort and that which he envisages in the city. Both seem to mirror and prolong each other; since, the narrator fails to derive a sense of closure from his earlier 'hunt'. Indeed, on the tenth and final holiday evening, Lillian and the anonymous *magus*[39] experience a first 'up-close' meeting (58). Behind their dancing-ball disguises, their respective eyes manage to meet and mutually draw them closer. The whole scene is painted with an intense blend of melancholy and lust, which transcends however, the immediate physicality of the moment. Lillian ceases being 'flesh and bones'; rather, she transforms into a lashing ball of light that ignites his innermost parts – without really salvaging his aspiration for 'meaning'; that is, the ephemeral nature of their encounters,[40] renders the thought of possessing the iconic Lillian, an idea *per impossibile* (60).

Even so, the narrator lays his love before her 'gazing eyes' (59) and ventures into an everlasting cyclical journey. In the city, the 'I'-narrator almost relinquishes his average student life and roams the streets for a glimpse of his elusive Lillian. From this 'clinging' attitude, springs a host of pressing questions about the essence of his search: What does the tale of his 'love' for this woman-turned-icon ensure? Does it render his eclipsed life less absurd or more strenuous? Is clinging to the improbable idea of finding her, more soothing than holding on to all other fallen institutions? If the quest for Lillian is a *Magian* one, then it embodies quintessential devotion, which fails to result in emotional fulfillment. So, by embarking on such a tumultuous expedition, is the narrator observing a ritual of self-torture and annihilation or a process of self-healing? Alternatively, could it be that the protagonist is simply 'cursed' – as he often reiterates in the narrative?

Whether his wrist is tied to a deeply-rooted curse or not, the anonymous narrator finds himself trapped in a circle of 'wandering' and 'wondering'. As the city turns into yet another dark labyrinth, his search for Lillian becomes more absurd; and, from the intricacy of his situation, Munif's 'I'-narrator develops a sense of animosity towards this host city (91). He even accuses it of murdering its 'progeny', i.e. of choking its inhabitants both physically and mentally through the myth of civilization.[41] Actually, a stormy moment of yearning for Lillian unravels the 'I'-narrator's utter disillusionment with a luring and ruthless system of belief, designed by the city to cynically disappoint its occupants: luring for its vivid promises to sow the seeds of 'civilization' and ruthless in its failure to indicate that the latter concept is merely bogus.

At this stage, the story confers the pre-mature feeling that it would circularly end where it initially started: with a protagonist who has relinquished everything. Yet, while the solo narrator promises to trade his entire life repertoire for a single and final 'glance' from the elusive Lillian (105), his mind-boggling 'fixation' on her makes him delve into a re-evaluation process – which paves the way for a slight glimpse of hope. Glossing over the general relationship between cities and their dwellers, over his particular five-year stay in the unnamed host town, over the broader concepts of God, religion, sex and friendship, the protagonist attains a certain level of 'reconciliation' that allows him to move on; i.e. transcend his most mundane concerns.[42]

Whether he gives in to 'reality', surrenders or adjusts – and the narrative allows for no definitive assumptions – a single fact prevails: that the centrality of

'iconic Lillian' has prompted a rejuvenated journey beyond the tight confines of his wretched inner self.

CONCLUSION

"Narration, as a form common to both the novel and history does remain in general, the choice or the expression of an historical moment."[43]

With an array of distinct characters and a fertile literary repertoire, Munif has *par excellence*, 'historicized' the Arab individual's undying struggle with a region that 'bathes in oil' and harbors – among other destructive landmarks – oppression and political corruption. Subserviently 'leached' to ignorant foreign powers, with their Machiavellian ruses and abusive instructions on the successful conversion of the oil industry to an eternal curse, this region marginalizes its own people and often condemns them to permanent exile – even where they do not physically depart. Almost all of Munif's novels sharply and 'polyphonically'[44] echo these concerns; even more, they carve them in the reader's mind, so that History never leaves the 'bridge' of memory and errs in wilderness like the solitary Zaki al-Naddawi.[45]

Similarly to al-Naddawi, the solo protagonist in *A Magian Love-Story* is a lonesome anti-hero, who holds the thread of narration and lashes the reader with a convoluted narrative about everything: life, religion, exile, sexuality and crumbling institutions – but most of all, love. Orchestrating multiple layers of narration, the anonymous and identity-ridden 'I'-narrator converts his experience with marginalization, oppression and suffering into language, i.e. into communication – that begins with the 'look' and ends in the 'word'.

Actually, through the 'look' (*al-nadhra)*, Lillian ensnares Munif's protagonist – only to then become, the torch that lights his rocky path and against which he measures the darkness of his surrounding. This process of abstraction, which endows Lillian with an almost transcendental connotation, is best achieved through narration. It is noteworthy that the narrator realizes early on, that words are not necessarily cathartic and that they would fail in accounting for Lillian's essence. Nevertheless, it is only through the 'multi-layered' narration he ventures into and the perennial unraveling of stories within the basic love-story – in an Arabesque-like fashion – that Lillian actually stands out. As language fails to contain her, as she escapes the immediacy and 'mediocrity' of the word (130), Lillian transforms into the ultimate abstraction of an icon-model. In her ability to haunt his memory, she subsequently manages to restore his distilled hope in a future yet to come (130).

Faced with a host of convolutions that render him an *exilé*, by widening the chasm with his surrounding, the 'I'-narrator seems to bear the same scars as many other pioneering characters of the Arabic novel; namely, those intellectuals who woefully endure existential crises vis-à-vis the West –specifically regarding sexuality.[46] What distinguishes this particular protagonist though, is the fact that his ever-unconsummated passion constitutes an intrinsic but incomplete part of a larger whole; i.e. part of a more developed set of worries and concerns. If the 'I'-narrator leads an alleged promiscuous life in the host city, it is because he simply lacks affection and not because he wishes to conquer the West through sex. Underneath his abundant exploration(s) of women's arms, lies a vehement attempt at both retrieving 'meaning' and burying his disillusionment – an endeavor which falls short however, from materializing in any of his experiences. When Lillian comes into the picture though, the solo narrator perceives in her the belief, the strength and the

unique catalyst of meaning, he had long been seeking. And, despite his realization that 'meaning' was a prospective 'vision' rather than a palpable entity, Munif's character insists on following the beloved's trail – rendering hence his pursuit, a *Magian* one in the true sense: somewhat shamanistic, helplessly devoted and everlasting.

In sum, the fragmented protagonist does not totally surrender and also refrains from playing the lethal game of silence. In spite of what he recurrently labels the 'futility of words', he keeps narration flowing without turning into a pretentious preacher or an *ideologue*. In his resistance, this character constitutes a sort of prelude to subsequent Munif-styled creations. Tortured, exiled, sensitive, always aware but still eager to fight back, this anonymous *magus* mirrors the outstanding author who aptly crafts his experimental persona; and, it is based on his model that more mature characters will develop in Munif's chef d'oeuvres.

ENDNOTES

[1] Anthony Synnott, The Body Social: Symbolism, Self and Society (London: Routledge, 1993), p.209.
2 This novel (1974) is his second after Al-Ashjar wa ightiyal Marzuk (The Trees and Marzuk's Assassination, 1973).
3 On page 9, the last sentence indicates that the entire story begins when "our eyes suddenly met." Translation mine.
4 The object of fixation is a woman that the narrator meets during his vacation. Her name is Lillian.
5 Subhi al-Ta'an, 'Alam 'Abd al-Rahman Munif al-riwa'i: Tandhir wa injaz (Damascus: Dar Kan 'an, 1995), p.142.
6 Abdel-Rahman Munif, Qissat Hubb Majusiyya (A Magian Love-Story) (Beirut: Al-Mu'assassa al 'arabiyya lil-dirasat wal-nashr, 1990; 5th ed.): "Anti muqaddasa" (You are sacred), p.13.
7 Temptation here is not synonymous to seduction. Rather, it implies the act of stealing the narrator from his surrounding and moving him to a different plane of being.
8 A. Synnott, p.212.
9 Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, translated by Hazel Barnes (London: Routledge, 1989).
10 He labels her "my worshiped one" (Ma'budati), p.24-5.
11 J-P Sartre, Being and Nothingness. (L'enfer c'est les autres).
12 "I don't care any longer…I have undertaken the path of (Juljula) rattle;" "I am a Magian Christ burning a thousand times each second," p.59. Translation mine.
13 Adrian Lybe (Director), Lolita (1997): Humbert Humbert, a British professor coming to the US to teach, rents a room in Charlotte Haze's house after seeing her 14-year-old daughter, Dolores (Lolita) who deeply reminds him of his deceased beloved Annabelle and to whom he is instantly attracted. Although he hates the mother, Humbert marries her to be close to the girl. Both embark on a journey together, in which they attempt to conceal the fact that they share more than a step-father/daughter relation. Profound jealousy and animated guilt caused by "forbidden" love seem to drive the man emotionally labile.
14 Munif's character admits to be constantly "living the past," with the main reason behind his feeling of deprivation being the loss of his mother at age six, p.20.
15 "And the days were fed up with our random cyclical movements...our manly bodies supporting childish minds," p.107. Translation mine.
16 Especially foreign students in this context.
17 Mainly, p.107.
18 Idwar al-Kharrat, Rama wal-Tinnin (Beirut: Dar al-adab, 1990), p.6-8.
19 Idwar al-Kharrat, Rama, p.8. 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, Qissat Hubb, p.20.
20 Milan Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p.247.
21 The narrator indicates to readers that he has already laid his case before an unsympathetic "friend," p.6.
22 The protagonist alludes to a "home country" that he ends up returning to towards the end of his "tale" (p.127, 128 and 129).
23 "In my thirties…a bit more…a bit less…it does not really matter," p.37. Translation mine.

24 The narrator often reminds the reader that a long time has already passed. For instance, he says: "Now…after long years," 15; "Now…Yes now. And after the years have gone by," p.23.

25 Georges Bataille, Erotism, Death and Sensuality (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1956), p.17.

26 S. Ta'an, 'Alam 'Abd al-Rahman Munif al-riwa'i, p.144.

27 Munif's solitary 'I'-narrator in Hina tarakna al-jisr. 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, Hina Tarakna al-jisr (Beirut: Dar al-'Awda, 1976).

28 Between pages 80 and 85, the narrator undertakes a 'real' confession in church that he embarks upon to ridicule the system even further and cunningly explain why the scared fathers are of no viability.

29 The narrator never clearly defines 'love'; rather, he ponders a host of questions about its nature.

30 According to him, sex tarnishes relationships; this is why he never thinks of Lillian as a sexual object.

31 Paola, Radmilla and Mira are the three cases he elaborates on. What these three women share in common is the fact that they are all his university colleagues; yet, each possesses distinct personality traits that the narrator grasps, depicts and even plays on during his respective encounters with them.

32 In most instances, his sexual encounters with women are either coupled with or followed by a feeling of exhaustion, bordering on defeat. During the act and immediately after its completion, the narrator delves into an introvert, almost esoteric, reflection on the amount of 'sadness' and despair ruling the world, p.32 –which leads his 'partners' to often walk out on him (e.g. Radmilla, Paola).

33 Among all other relationships, pre-dating Lillian's sudden appearance in his life.

34 Together, Mira and the narrator read poetry and appreciate artistic productions. Similarly, her mother displays sincere affection towards him and treats him like a cherished member of the family.

35 Just like him, Mira finds herself a different life in the arms of another man (a colleague at work).

36 The narrator repeatedly sheds negative judgments on those strangers' sexual mores and behaviors.

37 Lillian is already married; so, from the very start, she belongs to another man.

38 "She is the mother of fertility," p.25. Translation mine.

39 The narrator describes himself as the 'most Magian" living creature, p.33. I also borrow the word Magus from John Fowles' novel, bearing the latter title (1965).

40 Lillian and the narrator meet twice only. On two other occasions, they briefly come across each other without being able to exchange words or even prolonged glances. In fact, it is not until their unplanned and last encounter at the train station that they entertain a sort of conversation – albeit a succinct and time-restrained one.

41 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, Qissat Hubb, p.92. Interpretation mine.

42 For instance, attempting to snatch Radmilla from Ivan to satisfy his ego or fighting with Mira for no viable reason.

43 Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1967), p.35.

44 Save maybe for: Qissat hubb majusiyya and Hina tarakna al-jisr.

45 'Abd al-Rahman Muni, Hin trakna al-jisr.

46 Take for example, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Suheil Idris or Tayyib Salih.

HISTORY AND FICTION IN
MUDUN ALl-MILH (CITIES OF SALT)
BY 'ABD AL-RAHMAN MUNIF

Eric Gautier

ABSTRACT

Mudun al-Milh (Cities of Salt) is a quintet unique in modern Arabic literature. The novel recounts one century in the history of the Hudaybi Sultanate, from its foundation to the discovery of oil, which leads to the end of traditional Bedouin life, and the Sultanate's accession to the modern industrial world. The history of this imaginary sultanate is, in fact, the future projection of a real country – Saudi Arabia.

How should this work be classified? Is it a novel or a narrative account? How can it be considered fiction when behind the related events and characters loom true events and key figures who have marked the history of Saudi Arabia? It is worth noting that some literary critics refused to classify this work as a novel. The author also provoked an angry response from the highest Saudi authorities, who apparently did not regard the work as fiction. Thus, for researchers who are scrutinizing the history of Saudi Arabia – a history not easily accessible to historians and sociologists – there is a great temptation to consider the work a historical document that may provide a better understanding of the country. Munif enjoys blurring the lines, deploying an assortment of historical criticism, which endows his account with credibility and provokes a "real-life" effect for the reader. He plays with his knowledge of the society in question, mobilizes all reliable historical techniques in the service of the text and, as he puts himself in a historian's shoes, plays with the truth as well as with what is plausible.

We do not deny the importance of studying literature for the sake of attaining knowledge of various societies but wholeheartedly subscribe to it. We believe that sociologists, political pundits and historians have a duty to take literary works into account and not to brush aside so-called fiction from the fields of research. This is especially true in the case of a country like Saudi Arabia and a work like *Mudun al-Milh*. However, we must not be misled, nor forget the fictional nature of the work and the fact that each author has his own imaginative universe and his own perception of space, time, and persons. Researchers cannot limit a novel's function to a tool for sociological study. A writer is not only a photographer of reality; rather, he creates his own reality as well. One can ponder this vision of reality, analyze this creation and strive to uncover the intentions of the author and his way of seeing the world and giving it meaning.

HISTOIRE ET FICTION DANS *MUDUN AL-MILH* (LES CITES DE SEL) D'ABDUL RAHMAN MOUNIF

Eric Gautier*

Le présent travail s'inscrit dans une optique de recherche qui se propose d'étudier comment les écrivains et, de manière plus générale, les cultures appréhendent les qualités du monde qui nous entoure. Cette recherche me conduit naturellement à réfléchir sur les rapports complexes qui existent entre littérature et réalité. Étroitement liée à l'évolution des sociétés dont elle est le produit, la littérature arabe contemporaine se prête particulièrement bien à servir cette optique de recherche. Le roman que nous avons choisi d'analyser ci-dessous le montre bien.

Mudun al-milh (Les cités de sel) est le huitième roman d'Abdul Rahman Mounif[1]. Il s'agit d'une pentalogie sans équivalent dans la littérature arabe contemporaine, moins par ses dimensions (5 tomes et 2446 pages), que par l'importance des thèmes qui y sont abordés. L'auteur y relate en effet la transformation d'un désert, habité par des tribus bédouines et sédentaires, d'abord en un Etat centralisé, puis, après la découverte des gisements d'"or noir", en une monarchie pétrolière, un Etat pseudo-moderne avec tout ce que cela comporte de bouleversements aussi bien sur les plans environnemental, économique, social et politique que sur le plan des mentalités. Le roman passe ainsi en revue plus d'un siècle de l'histoire du Sultanat Hudaybite, depuis sa fondation jusqu'à l'avènement de la civilisation industrielle moderne.

UNE FICTION AUX ALLURES DE RECIT HISTOREIQUE

Une des caractéristiques principales des romans de Mounif est que les espaces qui y sont décrits, ainsi que les personnages mis en scène ont des noms imaginaires. *Mudun al-milh* n'échappe pas à cette règle : même si l'Egypte, la Syrie, les Etats-Unis, la Turquie ou l'Angleterre sont évoqués explicitement, à aucun moment l'auteur ne dévoile dans quel pays se déroule l'action proprement dite. Cependant, il a volontairement glissé une série d'indices dont la fonction est de détourner le lecteur de l'espace fictionnel pour l'orienter vers la réalité historique.

L'action du roman se déroule dans trois espaces principaux : Wadi al-‘uyun, Harran et Mawran (seule l'intrigue du tome 4, *Al-munbatt*, a pour cadre d'autres espaces situés en Allemagne et en Suisse). Wadi al-‘uyun, le premier espace posé par la narration, est une oasis. Lorsque la compagnie américaine découvre du pétrole dans le sous-sol de la région, ses habitants se trouvent soudain projetés dans le vingtième siècle. Situé à quelques jours de marche du *wadi*, Harran est un petit

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village côtier qui, en un temps record, est transformé en un important port pétrolier. Enfin Mawran, autrefois « désert noyé dans les sables et l'oubli »[2] se métamorphose en capitale d'un Etat moderne.

Nous voilà donc dans une zone au climat désertique, peuplée d'hommes et de femmes s'exprimant dans une langue arabe où l'on décèle aisément une « coloration » bédouine d'Arabie[3].

Ces éléments nous permettent déjà de situer les événements relatés dans le roman dans un des pays arabes du Golfe où la découverte d'énormes ressources pétrolière a contribué aux changements sociaux et économiques qui ont bouleversé le rythme de vie ancestral.

En m'appuyant sur une abondante documentation tant historique que sociologique, et en remettant dans l'ordre chronologique la documentation fournie par le roman, j'ai démontré que derrière le royaume imaginaire des Hudaybites du roman, se camouflait un pays bien réel, le Royaume d'Arabie Saoudite[4]. Sans entrer dans le détail, il est facile d'établir un parallèle entre ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman Ibn Saoud et le sultan Khuraybit. Comme le fondateur de l'Arabie Saoudite, Khuraybit se trouve en exil lorsqu'il décide de se lancer à la reconquête du royaume de ses ancêtres. La manière dont il parvient à prendre le pouvoir rappelle l'éviction d'Ibn Rachid de Riyadh, la capitale du Nejd, par ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. Les deux hommes sont également convaincus d'avoir vu leurs destins en rêve. Sur le plan physique, ils sont tous les deux décrits comme étant de grande taille et possédant une force hors du commun. En outre, ‘Abd al-‘Aziz et Khuraybit épousèrent plusieurs femmes qui leur donnèrent de nombreux enfants. Après la mort de leurs fils aînés, ils reportèrent leur affection et leurs efforts sur deux autres fils qui leur succédèrent aux commandes de l'Etat. On notera enfin que Khaz‘al et Fanar, les fils de Khuraybit, sont les sosies des rois Saoud et Faysal d'Arabie Saoudite.

Au niveau du récit, l'auteur-narrateur semble assumer son propre discours. Il s'agit d'un narrateur omniscient qui parle à la troisième personne. La narration se veut objective et le récit des évènements est présenté au lecteur comme un récit historique. À titre d'exemple nous citerons le début du tome 3 (p 9-10) : « Nous sommes au début du siècle (...) En ce temps-là, tout était sujet à reconsidération et à nouvelle répartition : les idées, les régions, les Etats, même les rois, les sultans et les princes de moindre importance (...) Markhan Ibn Hudayb qui était l'émir de Mawran et de ses environs à deux jours de marche, avait été vaincu (...)» Ainsi, durant la lecture, nous avons souvent le sentiment de ne pas pénétrer dans un univers de fiction, mais plutôt dans un épisode de l'histoire d'un pays bien réel. Cette impression est renforcée par l'absence de héros et le grand nombre d'acteurs en présence (270 acteurs). Poussant plus loin la comparaison entre discours romanesque et réalité historique, j'ai confronté la matière du roman aux travaux scientifiques portant sur l'Arabie et lu les principaux ouvrages de référence sur ce pays, en particulier les études consacrées aux mutations spectaculaires dont il a été le témoin depuis que le pétrole a jailli de son sous-sol. J'ai constaté que *Mudun al-milh* traitait des mêmes problèmes que ces ouvrages scientifiques. La destruction de l'environnement et des modes de vie traditionnels, l'abandon de certaines valeurs ancestrales, l'occidentalisation, la baisse de l'autorité et de la solidarité traditionnelles, la construction d'une autorité nouvelle, le développement d'infrastructures et d'activités économiques importées d'Occident, sont autant de problèmes auxquels sont confrontés à la fois les personnages mis en scène par Mounif et les habitants de l'Arabie, dans la réalité.

Il me semble donc opportun de souligner dans ce cas précis la similitude du travail de l'historien et du romancier, tout au moins dans cette étape initiale, c'est-à-dire au moment où chacun d'eux s'efforce de rassembler les données qu'il utilisera plus tard. Il apparaît clairement que Mounif a longuement exploré les travaux scientifiques concernant l'Arabie Saoudite, de manière à être en mesure de poser les vrais problèmes.

À ce stade, il me paraît également nécessaire de prendre en considération l'itinéraire personnel de l'écrivain, fils d'un Saoudien originaire du Nejd, et lui-même expert dans le domaine de l'économie pétrolière. Contrairement à beaucoup d'historiens (occidentaux en particulier), Mounif a pu compter, lors de l'élaboration de cet ensemble littéraire, sur des données issues d'une expérience vécue. Dans son ouvrage *Al-katib wa-l-manfa*[5], il écrit ceci :

> « Oui, j'ai vécu cette vie lorsque je me trouvais dans les régions situées au nord de l'Arabie Saoudite, près de la Jordanie. Il existe, d'une façon ou d'une autre, entre beaucoup de scènes du roman et moi-même, un lien étroit. J'étais proche des débuts du pétrole. Aujourd'hui, nous voyons les choses dans leur état final et leur image nous semble lointaine, mais quand on se retourne vers le passé pour analyser les différents éléments, nous approcher de la matière première et comprendre comment s'est opéré l'agrégat, on ne peut qu'être étonné (...) »

En outre, lorsqu'il explique les raisons qui l'ont poussé à écrire *Mudun al-milh*, il définit lui-même sa mission, en tant qu'écrivain, en ces termes :

> « En ma qualité de romancier, face à la grande et dangereuse complexité [de la conjoncture dans les pays du Golfe], qui a ses racines dans le passé, il m'est apparu nécessaire, pour traiter de la situation actuelle, d'étudier l'histoire de cette région, de suivre comment elle a évolué et d'observer les répercussions de ces évolutions [sur le présent]. En ma qualité d'habitant de cette région et une de ses victimes, étant donné mes études sur l'économie pétrolière, et mon travail, depuis de longues années, dans ce domaine, mais aussi, parce que je n'ai pas encore trouvé la formule politique qui permettrait de provoquer le changement ou d'y contribuer, j'ai pensé que le roman serait la formule la plus apte à lire de façon réfléchie, objective, et esthétique aussi, cette société. C'est ce qui m'a poussé à écrire les cinq tomes de Mudun al-milh, pour que ce roman soit une des lectures qui servent à comprendre une société à une des étapes les plus importantes de son évolution. »[6]

La vision de l'Arabie telle que Mounif la présente au lecteur est donc intéressante parce qu'il s'agit d'une vision interne, d'une vision formée à partir d'une expérience vécue. Il s'agit également d'une vision globale : habituellement, un travail scientifique traite d'un aspect de l'Arabie. *Mudun al-milh*, au contraire, offre au lecteur une vision globale du pays, de son environnement, de son système socio-économique, de ses rouages politiques, de sa culture et de sa langue. Son auteur y explore, sous différents angles, les tensions qui se développent entre les individus et une société que le pétrole vient de créer. Aucune couche socio-économique n'échappe à la critique et parmi les quelque 270 acteurs du roman, nous comptons des représentants issus de toutes les classes de la société. Il est possible d'élaborer

une typologie de ces différents acteurs : Mut'ib al-Hadhdhal, Umm al-khosh, Ibn Naffa', Mufdi al-Jad'an, Shamran al-'Utaybi, Salih al-Rashdan représentent le type du Bédouin attaché aux valeurs traditionnelles et qui refuse les changements. Hasan Rida'i, le Hakim, et Husni Karkar sont représentatifs de l'étranger venu à Mawran pour s'enrichir aux dépens de ses habitants. Ibn al-Rashid, l'émir Khalid al-Mashari et les sultans hudaybites symbolisent le pouvoir, la dictature soutenue par l'Occident. Al-'Ajrami, Ibn Shahin sont les symboles de l'autorité religieuse corrompue, etc.

Des questions se posent donc au lecteur : Comment appréhender cet ouvrage ? Comme un roman ou comme un récit historique ? Peut-on parler de fiction lorsque, comme nous l'avons vu ci-dessus, se profilent derrière les événements relatés et les personnages mis en scène, des événements et des personnalités réels qui ont marqué l'histoire de l'Arabie Saoudite. Nous rappelons à ce sujet que certains critiques[7] refusèrent au livre le statut de roman, tandis que son auteur s'attirait les foudres des plus hautes autorités saoudiennes. Apparemment, celle-ci n'avaient pas du tout perçu cette œuvre comme de la fiction. Alors, la tentation est grande pour le chercheur qui étudie l'histoire de ce pays - lequel reste difficilement accessible à l'historien ou au sociologue - de voir dans la matière qui nous est livrée par l'écrivain, une sorte de document lui permettant de mieux comprendre ce pays. De son côté, Mounif s'ingénie à brouiller les pistes, en déployant l'arsenal critique de l'historien afin de doter son récit d'une crédibilité et de provoquer l '« effet de réel » chez le lecteur. Il joue de sa connaissance de la société en question, mobilise des techniques d'accréditation historique pour les mettre au service de son texte, n'hésitant pas à se glisser dans la peau de l'historien, jouant avec le vrai et le vraisemblable. Ainsi, il pose parfois un regard ironique sur le travail de l'historien. Dans plusieurs séquences du roman, "le narrateur-romancier" critique implicitement l'histoire et la façon dont elle est constituée. Il insiste, en particulier, sur le fait que l'histoire est en général l'histoire des vainqueurs. Tome 3 page 147, nous lisons : « La guerre d'Al-'Awali et ses trois batailles sont d'une telle complexité, les faits sont si enchevêtrés, les intérêts de chaque partie si confus et divergents, les informations sont si contradictoires, qu'il est difficile de les raconter ou d'écrire à leur sujet. La diversité des rapporteurs, le fait qu'ils se contredisent souvent, le déplacement des forces en présence, leurs revirements, la disparition de nombreux témoins - pour des raisons sur lesquelles il n'est pas nécessaire de s'étendre - transforment l'histoire en une somme de mensonges et de trucages. Ensuite, si l'histoire est en général l'histoire des vainqueurs et exprime leur point de vue, ces vainqueurs ont souvent tendance, pour blesser davantage les vaincus et s'en moquer, à raconter le même événement de multiples manières (...) »

La guerre d'Al-'Awali est ici présentée comme un événement historique qui doit être commenté. En faisant allusion à la complexité des faits, aux intérêts de chaque partie, aux nombreux rapporteurs qui, parfois, n'ont pas été les témoins directs de l'évènement qu'ils décrivent, l'écrivain évoque aussi les problèmes de la véridicité du fait historique et, surtout, de l'objectivité de l'historien qui a pour mission de le commenter et de l'analyser. D'objectivité, il en est une nouvelle fois question, lorsque le narrateur fait état des nombreuses versions qui ont cours à propos du coup d'Etat par lequel l'émir Fanar/Faysal renverse Khaz'al/Saoud. Ce coup d'Etat est relaté à trois reprises dans le roman : une première fois dans le tome 2 (p. 591 à 619), une deuxième fois au début du tome 4 (p. 7 à 23), une troisième, enfin, dans la seconde partie du tome 5 (p. 226 à 245). Dans le tome 2, le lecteur découvre le coup d'Etat dans les optiques de Shamran al-'Utaybi et du Hakim Subhi

al-Mihmalji. Pour Shamran, qui symbolise le peuple de Mawran, la nouvelle du coup d'Etat et des incidents qui secouent le palais est perçue avec une certaine indifférence, voire de la lassitude. Il n'est pas dupe et sait bien que si le sultan Khaz'al est éliminé, un autre descendant de Khuraybit viendra prendre sa place et rien ne changera réellement. Il n'en est pas de même pour le Hakim, dont Mounif a fait le symbole de l'étranger venu à Mawran pour s'enrichir au détriment des indigènes, et réaliser de folles ambitions personnelles. En ce qui le concerne, la prise de pouvoir de Fanar est une terrible nouvelle et équivaut à une condamnation à mort (tome 2 p. 606).

Dans le tome 4, c'est le point de vue de Khaz'al qui nous est livré. Il est un des derniers à être informé du coup d'Etat fomenté par son frère. Lorsqu'il l'apprend, il se trouve en Allemagne, avec sa suite, en voyage de noces. Ici, c'est une version négative des événements qui nous est donnée : celle de Khaz'al et de ses proches conseillers. Le sultan se considère comme la victime d'une trahison qu'il ne méritait pas. Un affront personnel lui a été adressé (tome 4 p.18-19). Il exige de l'Ambassadeur du Sultanat Hudaybite en Allemagne, qu'il fasse parvenir, dans les plus brefs délais, un message à son frère le sommant de lui faire des excuses. S'il refuse, il se mettra hors la loi et devra répondre de ses actes devant la justice de son pays. Bien qu'il ait perdu tout contrôle de la situation, il s'imagine retournant dans son ancienne capitale pour défier ses ennemis.

La vision du camp adverse est décrite dans le tome 5. Pour Fanar et ses partisans, l'éviction de Khaz'al représente un soulagement, presque une libération. La quasi-totalité de la famille hudaybite était exaspérée par les agissements du Hakim et ne supportait plus la main-mise étrangère sur l'exécutif. Avec l'aide du chef des services secrets et de la police, Fanar devient rapidement le maître absolu du sultanat et ne se soucie guère des "gesticulations" de son frère qu'il sait condamné à l'exil.

Faire état de ces différentes versions ou interprétations du même événement, c'est pour l'écrivain montrer qu'il utilise les méthodes de l'historien. Mais tout en mobilisant ces techniques d'accréditation historique, Mounif joue avec le "vrai" et le "vraisemblable". Précisément à propos du coup d'Etat dont nous avons parlé ci-dessus, il est peu probable qu'il ait pu être un témoin direct des faits. Il est donc important de revenir sur l'expression de "vision interne et globale" que nous avons utilisée précédemment et de faire remarquer que la biographie de l'écrivain montre qu'il n'a jamais véritablement vécu en Arabie Saoudite alors qu'il a successivement résidé dans la plupart des pays du Proche-Orient. Si l'on veut reconnaître une valeur documentaire au roman cette remarque est essentielle. Elle est encore plus vraie lorsqu'il est question de la vie privée des sultans hudaybites, notamment de l'organisation du *haram* sultanien et de la description des rapports entre les différentes épouses et le sultan.

On remarquera également, au niveau formel, que l'ordre dans lequel les cinq tomes de cet ensemble romanesque ont été publiés ne correspond pas à l'ordre chronologique des événements qui y sont relatés. Ainsi les faits les plus anciens ne sont pas relatés dans le premier tome, *Al-tih* [L'Errance]. De même, si, sur le plan chronologique, le tome 2, *Al-ukhdud* [Le Fossé], est la suite du tome 1, en revanche le tome 3, *Taqâsîm al-layl wa-l-nahâr* [Variations de la nuit et du jour], n'est pas la suite du tome 2. Il en est de même en ce qui concerne le tome 4, *Al-munbatt* [Le Déraciné], et le tome 5, *Bâdiyat al-zulumât* [Le désert des ténèbres].

Réduire *Mudun al-milh* au récit d'événements historiques serait donc réducteur de la richesse du roman qui précisément ne suit pas l'ordre chronologique

et mélange les périodes. En outre, même si le roman est écrit à la troisième personne, et même si le récit s'affiche comme une narration objective des événements, c'est bien souvent le point de vue d'un acteur ou d'une classe d'acteurs qui est donné. Dans le tome 1 par exemple, les événements sont le plus souvent relatés du point de vue des Bédouins à la fois émerveillés et effrayés par les bouleversements qu'ils sont en train de vivre. Ils ne parviennent pas à comprendre pourquoi les bulldozers, perçus comme de véritables démons de fer et d'acier, retournent et dévastent la terre de leurs ancêtres. Les arbres apparaissent être les premières victimes des tortures que leur infligent les nouveaux venus. D'autres fois, c'est son propre point de vue que l'auteur tente d'imposer au lecteur.

UNE VISION NEGATIVE DE L'HISTOIRE DE L'ARABIE

Certes, le roman qui nous intéresse a une incontestable valeur documentaire : il nous rend accessible l'évolution de la société saoudienne sur près d'un siècle de son histoire, évolution vue par un témoin arabe. Cependant il n'est pas une description simple et objective de la réalité. Dans un premier temps, je le qualifierai plutôt de réflexion sur la réalité ou comme le dit Jamal Barut, à propos de certains romans syriens, de "récupération"[8] de la réalité et de l'histoire. Mounif ne copie pas le réel, il dégage ce qu'il signifie pour lui. Il prend appui sur l'histoire de l'Arabie Saoudite, mais nous donne surtout sa vision -négative- des transformations qui ont touché ce pays depuis le début du siècle. D'ailleurs, ce jugement négatif ne se limite pas à l'Arabie. Il est valable, non seulement pour les autres pays producteurs de pétrole mais aussi, pour ceux qui ne produisent pas la « pisse noire » (tome 5 p. 569). Dans *Al-katib wa al-manfa*[9], Mounif déclare d'ailleurs à ce sujet : « Cette richesse [le pétrole] (...) a en général des répercussions négatives, au niveau social, sur les pays producteurs et non producteurs de pétrole. » Selon lui, depuis que le pétrole rapporte de l'argent aux pays producteurs, une cassure s'est opérée entre les citoyens de ces pays et ceux des autres pays qui attendent d'éventuels cadeaux ou émigrent dans le but de s'enrichir.

Dans ce roman, Mounif semble bien décidé à décrire ou plutôt à dénoncer un système et son mode de fonctionnement, sans doute pour mieux le combattre. Rappelons à ce sujet que cet auteur est aussi celui de *Sharq al-Mutawassit*[10], un roman qui fit beaucoup de bruit à sa sortie et qui constitue un véritable réquisitoire contre la torture et toutes les formes d'oppression en vigueur dans les pays situés sur la rive est de la Méditerranée. Il se définit lui-même comme *taqaddumi* [progressiste]. Par l'intermédiaire de ses héros, il se bat pour tenter de sortir le monde arabe du sous-développement économique, culturel et, surtout, politique, déclarant : « Le monde arabe est une grande prison. Il faut lutter pour détruire cette prison et créer un univers plus humain »[11].

Que l'on croit ou non à l'impact des textes littéraires sur les réalités politique et sociale, lorsque le premier volume de cette pentalogie, paraît à Beyrouth en 1984, plusieurs pays arabes interdisent sa diffusion et son auteur se voit déchu de sa nationalité saoudienne. Le sujet abordé par l'écrivain choque les autorités de ce pays qui lui reprochent de donner une vision dégradante et fausse de l'histoire de l'Arabie. En revanche, les lecteurs arabes accueillent favorablement cet ouvrage et même en Arabie Saoudite, des copies du texte sont vendues clandestinement... En Occident, et en particulier aux Etats-Unis, les critiques voient immédiatement en ce roman « une oeuvre majeure de la littérature arabe contemporaine ».[12]

Certains critiques diront, peut-être à juste titre, que Mounif a tendance à forcer la note et d'infléchir certaines descriptions dans le sens qui lui convient. C'est le cas notamment dans les passages où il nous montre les princes hudaybites découvrant la technologie occidentale[13], ceux qui sont consacrés aux chefs religieux[14], ou aux trois sultans Khuraybit, Khaz'al, et Fanar. Les premiers sont tournés en ridicule, les seconds sont décrits comme des auxiliaires corrompus du pouvoir, tandis que les troisièmes apparaissent incapables de gérer leur pays et d'éviter sa transformation en « Cités de sel ». Nous rappelons que cette métaphore illustre le fait que ces villes qui ont poussé si vite au milieu du désert grâce aux pétrodollars, sont vouées à disparaître lorsque les ressources pétrolières seront épuisées (elles fondraient comme un édifice de sel sur lequel on verserait de l'eau). L'écrivain proclame ainsi l'urgence de la situation en Arabie et dans les pays du Golfe arabe : selon lui la baisse des prix du pétrole brut n'est que l'avant-goût de leur chute. Lorsque le pétrole s'arrêtera de couler, qu'adviendra-t-il de ces villes construites en toute hâte? Que deviendront les habitants des gratte-ciel de verre, lorsque l'électricité sera coupée ? Quand les riches et les étrangers auront fui la région, ceux qui resteront seront désemparés. Coupés du milieu naturel, quel sera leur avenir ? En ce qui le concerne, ce roman est un moyen de mettre l'opinion publique arabe et internationale en garde. À travers la littérature et cette description négative des transformations qui secouent Mawrân, il invite ceux qui se sentent concernés par les problèmes évoqués à une prise de conscience qui devrait les conduire à un changement positif.

Par l'intermédiaire du roman, Mounif nous fait enfin part de ce qu'il entend par « progrès », en définissant ce qui n'est pas le « progrès ». Le pétrole, qui représente une source de revenus non renouvelable, constituait pour les Etats de la région une possibilité réelle de sortir du sous-développement. Selon lui, l'occasion n'a pas été saisie. Quelques individus possèdent, à eux seuls, des centaines de milliards de dollars qu'ils dilapident en privant leurs peuples et les générations futures de conditions d'existence plus acceptables. Il insiste également sur la non-prise en compte des modes de vie et des mentalités des populations locales qui a abouti à la transformation de ces populations au niveau pragmatique, seulement, et qui a donné naissance à des individus « égarés » entre deux cultures[15].

UNE REPRESENTATION MYTHIQUE DE L'HISTOIRE

Je pense que contrairement à ce qu'ont pu affirmer certains critiques, *Mudun al-milh* est bien une œuvre de fiction où s'exprime, non seulement le point de vue du romancier mais aussi tout son génie créatif. Ainsi, derrière certaines descriptions en apparence neutres et détachées, c'est l'imaginaire de l'auteur qui s'offre au lecteur attentif. Pour illustrer ceci, nous nous proposons de nous arrêter quelques instants sur une séquence du roman qui se situe à la première page du tome 1 de notre pentalogie. Le choix de cette séquence n'est pas fortuit : séquence d'ouverture du roman, elle constitue en effet le type même du texte dit descriptif et réaliste, puisque le narrateur y évoque avec beaucoup de précision et de minutie Wâdî l-'uyûn, l'oasis où se déroule l'action de la première partie du roman. Nous sommes donc au début de l'intrigue, avant l'arrivée de la compagnie pétrolière. Cette description est l'occasion, pour le narrateur, de présenter cet espace avant les transformations, et de l'opposer au désert qui l'entoure. Voici donc un extrait de la séquence en question :

« Wadi al-'uyun...

> Soudain, au milieu du désert dur et hostile, surgit cette tache verte qui semble jaillir du sous-sol ou être tombée du ciel. Elle est différente de tout ce qui l'entoure, ou peut-être serait-il plus juste de dire qu'il n'existe entre elle et ses environs aucun lien. D'abord perplexe, ébloui par ce contraste, le spectateur commence à s'interroger : comment l'eau et la verdure ont-elles jailli dans un endroit pareil ? Mais ce sentiment d'étonnement s'efface peu à peu, laissant la place à une sorte de respect mystérieux puis à la contemplation. Il s'agit d'un des phénomènes rares par lequel la nature manifeste tout son génie, toute sa force et reste difficilement explicable.

Wadi al-'uyun apparaît peut-être familier à ceux qui l'habitent. Il ne suscite pas chez eux de grandes interrogations car ils sont habitués à voir les palmiers recouvrirent le wadi, à regarder les sources couler de toutes parts en hiver puis au début du printemps. Toutefois, malgré l'habitude, ils sont persuadés que c'est une puissance bienveillante qui les protège et leur facilite l'existence. Lorsque les caravanes approchent, enveloppées dans un épais nuage de poussière, abattues par la fatigue et la soif, lorsque dans la dernière étape, elles accélèrent la marche afin d'arriver au plus vite à Wadi al-'uyun, elles sombrent dans une sorte d'ivresse proche de la folie. Pourtant, dès que l'eau est en vue, elles parviennent à contrôler leur exubérance et justifient leur attitude en disant que Celui qui créa le monde et les hommes créa en même temps Wadi al-'uyun, à cet endroit précis, pour les sauver de la mort dans ce désert perfide et maudit. Une fois la caravane installée, les marchandises déchargées, lorsque les hommes et les montures se sont désaltérés, une douce torpeur qui se transforme rapidement en un sentiment de bonheur absolu, s'empare de tout. On ne sait pas si elle est due au climat, à la douceur de l'eau ou peut-être à l'atmosphère sécurisante qui règne ici ; elle touche non seulement les hommes, mais aussi les bêtes qui deviennent moins obéissantes et se montrent moins enclins à porter les lourds fardeaux ou à poursuivre leur marche.

S'il est vrai que les oasis d'Arabie sont arrosées pendant la saison des pluies, que l'on peut s'y désaltérer et s'y abriter du soleil, l'eau y est beaucoup moins abondante que dans cette description. De même, le climat désertique est rude, mais les Bédouins vivent dans le désert qui n'est pas toujours synonyme de mort comme c'est le cas dans notre texte.

Le toponyme de Wadi al-'uyun, littéralement le *wadi* des sources, apparaît ici sous-tendu par une forte connotation euphorique : il sert à désigner un espace où le spectateur est frappé par l'omniprésence de l'élément aquatique (sources jaillissantes, eau douce et fraîche, etc.). L'accent est mis également sur la végétation luxuriante, l'humidité, et le climat frais et humide qui exerce une influence bénéfique sur la population autochtone et les caravanes de passage. A l'opposé, le désert est un espace sec, hostile, et stérile, où il est impossible à l'homme de vivre. Il est doté d'une forte connotation dysphorique et se trouve plus ou moins assimilé à la mort et au diable.

En analysant de manière précise le passage en question[16], on se rend compte que Mounif idéalise le *wadi* et avec lui le genre de vie que mènent ses habitants depuis des siècles. Cet espace est perçu comme un lieu paradisiaque et miraculeux qui possède d'ailleurs les mêmes traits catégoriels que le Paradis coranique. On notera en outre que cette description de l'oasis est truffée d'éléments lexicaux et stylistiques qui sont clairement « d'inspiration coranique ». En revanche,

le désert possède les mêmes caractéristiques que l'enfer coranique. Dans une séquence ultérieure du roman[17], le lecteur constate que ce lieu paradisiaque n'existe plus, ou plus exactement qu'il a été transformé en un espace déshumanisé, assimilé à l'enfer et à la mort, après l'intervention des bulldozers au service de la compagnie pétrolière américaine.

A travers cette description et son apologie de l'eau et de l'humide, Mounif nous offre en quelque sorte sa vision du monde idéal et du bonheur éternel. Il insiste également sur l'opposition passé-présent : le *wadi* s'oppose au désert comme la vie et la mort, le paradis et l'enfer, le passé et le présent... On pourrait résumer – certes de manière un peu caricaturale – la suite du roman en disant qu'elle relate la destruction de cet espace, et par déduction, la destruction de la vie, du passé, du bonheur. Même si l'on croit reconnaître, à la première lecture, un espace appartenant à une certaine réalité géographique ou humaine, on finit par découvrir que les éléments utilisés par le romancier sont partie intégrante d'un ensemble cohérent au service d'un imaginaire fortement structuré. Au-delà de la simple description, nous sommes plutôt en présence d'une représentation mythique de l'Arabie et de son histoire, puisqu'elle tourne autour de l'opposition entre le passé et le présent qui symbolisent aussi le bien et le mal. Enfin, dans cet univers dualiste, plane la promesse du châtiment : la désintégration des cités de sel, celle-ci intervenant comme une sanction finale symbolisant l'échec de plusieurs générations.

CONCLUSION

Cette étude nous entraîne à réfléchir sur le problème des relations entre réalité et fiction, historien et romancier. Mon propos n'est pas de nier l'importance de l'étude de la littérature pour la connaissance des sociétés, concept auquel j'adhère totalement. Selon moi, le sociologue, le politologue ou l'historien ont même le devoir de prendre en compte la production littéraire et de ne pas écarter les oeuvres dites de fiction du champ de leurs recherches. C'est encore plus vrai dans le cas d'un pays comme l'Arabie Saoudite – un des pays les plus mal connus du monde arabe et dont l'évolution contemporaine est difficilement accessible aux chercheurs étrangers - et d'une œuvre comme *Mudun al-milh*. Celle-ci ne doit pas être écartée du champ des recherches qui portent sur l'Arabie, sous prétexte qu'elle appartient au domaine de la fiction. J'ai d'ailleurs essayé de montrer que l'opposition, établie habituellement, entre d'une part un travail historique, objectif et s'intéressant à la réalité, et d'autre part un roman, une oeuvre de fiction, subjective, n'est pas toujours valable.

Cependant, nous ne devons pas nous égarer et, à l'inverse, oublier la nature fictionnelle de l'œuvre, le fait que chaque écrivain a son propre imaginaire, sa propre perception de l'espace, du temps, et des personnes. Le chercheur ne peut limiter la fonction du roman à un simple outil/moyen de connaissance des sociétés, car l'écrivain n'est pas seulement un photographe de la réalité, il crée aussi sa réalité, ses mythes à l'intérieur d'un imaginaire individuel et collectif. On peut alors s'interroger sur cette vision du réel, analyser cette création, découvrir les intentions de l'auteur, sa manière de dire le monde et de lui donner un sens. *Mudun al-milh* est une oeuvre de fiction. Pourtant, cette fiction peut nous aider à mieux comprendre l'histoire. On se souviendra des mots de la romancière française George Sand qui disait, à propos de Balzac, qu'elle trouvait dans ses romans « la réalité complète dans la complète fiction ».

ENDNOTES

[1] ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, *Mudun al-Milh,* (Damas : Matba‘a al-‘alam, 1989).

[2] Ibid., tome 3, p. 9.

[3] Eric Gautier, Individu et société dans la littérature romanesque du Moyen-Orient : l'Arabie Saoudite à travers Mudun al-milh d'Abdul Rahman Mounf, thèse de doctorat dirigée par Heidi Toelle, (Aix-Marseille 1, 1993), p.238-245.

[4] Ibid., p. 19-25

[5] ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, *Al-katib wa al-manfa humum wa afaq al-riwaya al-‘arabiyya* , (Beyrouth : Dar al-fikr al-jadid, 1992), p. 154.

[6] ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, *Al-dimuqratiyya awwalan al-dimuqratiyya da'iman*, (Beyrouth : Al-Mu'assasat-al-‘arabiyya li al-dirasat wa al-nashr, 1992), p. 222.

[7] A l'occasion d'une conférence donnée à l'Institut Français d'Etudes Arabes de Damas en 1994, l'écrivain et critique syrien Nabil Sulayman refusa d'attribuer le statut de roman à cet ensemble littéraire. Dans une lecture de la traduction américaine des deux premiers tomes de la pentalogie (traduction de Peter Théroux, avec une préface de Graham Greene), le critique américain John Updike reprocha à Mounif son réalisme : Cf. « Sultan's work and silted cisterns », (*The New Yorker*, 17 octobre 1988, p.117-121).

[8] Muhammad Jamal Barout, « Le roman syrien et l'histoire : premières interrogations », in actes du colloque *Le roman syrien contemporain, racines culturelles et rénovation des techniques narratives*, (Damas : IFEAD, 2001), p. 75-81.

[9] ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, Al-katib wa al-manfa humum wa afaq al-riwaya al-‘arabiyya, p. 149.

[10] ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, *Sharq al-Mutawassit*, (Beyrouth : Al-Mu'assasa al ‘arabiyya li al-dirasat wa al-nashr,1975).

[11] Correspondance avec ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, mai 1989.

[12] David Lamb, « Selling the camel, bulldozing the oasis », (*Los Angeles Times*, 29 mai 1988), p. 3.

[13] ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, *Mudun al-Milh,* tome 1, p.424 (découverte de l'automobile), tome 1, p. 403 (découverte du poste de radio).

[14] Ibid, Tome 3, p. 282 et suivantes, tome 2, p 258 et suivantes.

[15] Ibid, Tome 1, p. 131.

[16] Cf. Eric Gautier, «Le *wadi* des sources», in *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*, (Damas :IFEAD, 1999), tome 51, p. 229-248.

[17] ‘Abdul Rahman Mounif, *Mudun al-Milh*, tome 1, p. 131.

MUNIF ON ART

MUNIF'S INTEREST IN MODERN ART

FRIENDSHIP, SYMBOLIC EXCHANGE AND THE ART OF THE BOOK

Sonja Mejcher-Atassi*

Remembered as Arab novelist *par excellence*, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif is not usually known for his interest in modern art. However, it was much more than a pastime. Modern art occupied an important place in Munif's life. Whoever visited him in his apartment in the residential neighbourhood of al-Mizza in Damascus can attest to this. His apartment is crowded not only with books but also with paintings by various Arab artists. Most of the paintings were given to him by the artists. Munif lived with the paintings as if they were real beings, changing their places frequently in order to look at them anew, keeping them from turning into mere *objects d'art* or part of the furnishing.[1]

Munif's interest in modern art dates back to the time he spent as a student in Baghdad in the early 1950s. The years preceding the 1958 revolution in Iraq were marked by heightened political as well as cultural activity. Munif then was more interested in politics. He was an active member of the Ba'th party. He left the party in 1963, when it came to power.[2] But Baghdad's cultural life was to have a lasting impact on him. As regards modern art, Baghdad was a centre of avant-garde movements. In this context one has to remember the Baghdad Group for Modern Art (*Jama'at Baghdad lil-fann al-hadith*) which was founded in 1952 by young Iraqi artists who later came to be celebrated as the country's foremost artists, namely Jawad Salim (1919-1961) and Shakir Hasan Al Said (1925-2004), in addition to the Palestinian intellectual and writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1920-1994).[3] As stated in its manifestoes, the group aimed at producing art of international significance and local character at the same time.[4]

Since the 1950s, Munif not only spent much time in the museums and galleries of the many cities he lived in, especially when living in Paris in the 1980s, he followed the development of modern art in the Arab world closely. He engaged in close friendships and fervent dialogues with many artists. Although not a professional art critic, he wrote numerous essays on art and artists in the Arab world, among them Fatih al-Mudarris (1922-1999), Marwan Qassab Bashi (b. 1934), Nadhir Nab'a (b. 1938), Na'im Isma'il (1930-1979), Ardash Kakafiyan (1940-1999), Jabr 'Alwan (b. 1948), 'Ali Talib (b. 1944), Jawad Salim (1921-1961) and Mahmud Mukhtar (1891-1934). He was planning to publish these essays in book form, but he died before he was able to do so.[5] Munif did not only write about art and artists, he

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also tried his own hand at drawing, as the special edition of his *Sirat madina* (Story of a City), discussed later, shows. Asked about his interest in art, he responded:

> "First, I like fine art and thus it is natural to share this appreciation with the public. Second, there are precedents of authors and poets who "read" and wrote about the works of artists. This writing, even if it is not academic, is a parallel reading of a work of art that may shed light on aspects and discover aspects in it that the skilled critic does not see. Third, there is a rupture between the arts, especially in the Arab world, where each art grows separately from the others, a condition that weakens art in general, at a time when the novel could build bridges between these arts."[6]

One of the "precedents of authors and poets who "read" and wrote about the works of artists" was Jabra. He came to be one of Munif's closest friends and served him as a model – not only in his capacity as distinguished writer and intellectual but also as an author interested in modern art.[7] Like Jabra, Munif considered the novel a bridge between the arts. Together they wrote *Alam bila khara'it* (A World without Maps, Beirut 1982). This co-authored novel raises many questions, not only in regard to authorship. It can be considered "a novel on the art of novel writing," as Muhsin Jasim al-Musawi suggests,[8] and, furthermore, a novel critically reflecting the role of the artist in contemporary Arab society.

Most of the artists Munif wrote about were his friends and like him outstanding figures in the field of cultural production, be it in Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo or any other city. Not only did he write about the works of artists, they in turn produced drawings and paintings that figure as illustrations on his book covers At a time when the Arabic book market is flooded by cheap and rapid publications, Munif's books stand out. It is difficult to say whether he first wrote about an artist or whether the artist first produced the illustration. Rather, the give and take between writer and artist is to be understood as a gradual process of symbolic exchange between friends and outstanding figures in the field of cultural production.

This article focuses on the artists Dia Azzawi and Marwan Qassab-Bashi and their contributions to Munif's books. Just like Munif's writing on the works of artists, their drawings and paintings offer "a parallel reading" – of a literary text that "may shed light on aspects and discover aspects that the skilled critic does not see." Methodologically, the article draws inspiration from Laurie Edson's approach of reading relationally across the fields of literature and art. Such an approach challenges our ways of seeing and reading by calling into question the boundaries usually drawn between the verbal and the visual.[9]

AZZAWI

The Iraqi artist Dia Azzawi (b. 1939) was part of the so-called sixties generation in Baghdad and deeply influenced by The Baghdad Group for Modern Art. In 1969, he together with other young Iraqi artists founded The New Vision. The group called for a free and creative rapport with Iraq's cultural heritage, allowing room for individual approaches.[10] Having studied archaeology and art in Baghdad and headed the Iraqi Antiquities Department, Azzawi is known internationally for combining contemporary artistic practices with characteristics

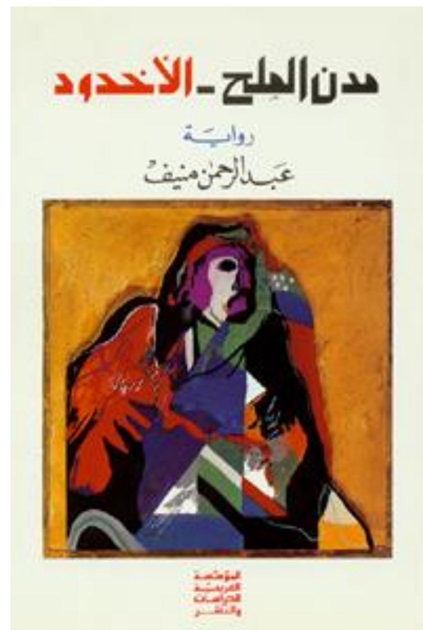
drawn from the Arabic-Islamic heritage and beyond it the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia. He has lived in London since 1976.[11]

Apart from being a painter, Azzawi has a profound interest in graphic design, having worked in book illustration and produced many *livres d'artiste* (artist's books) since the early 1960s. The art of illustrating books has a long and very elaborate tradition in Arabic culture.[12] The *livre d'artiste*, however, originated in Europe. It emerged as a significant art form in early 20th century France as a reaction to the mass-produced book.[13] It used to be published in a limited edition, usually not exceeding three hundred copies, and issued unbound (*en feuilles*) in a box or case. Each illustration in the *livre d'artiste* was an original. However, its definition has aroused much scrutiny since the 1960s when new forms of *livres d'artiste* started to proliferate worldwide in the general context of socio-political activism.[14] The *livre d'artiste* has become a powerful means of expression for Arab artists.[15] As Azzawi points out, it establishes a link with the Arabic-Islamic heritage in which book-making was valued highly and is part of contemporary artistic practices worldwide, at the same time. It liberates art from being a painting, a decorative object hung on a wall to give evidence of its owner's refined taste. Issued in the form of a book, it emphasizes the narrative capacity of images and calls for a visual reading.[16] Azzawi's *livres d'artiste* are manifold. They range from signed limited editions to offset multiples and one-of-a-kind volumes. All of them are on Arabic literature – on classical Arabic literature, like the *Mu'allaqat* or *Alf layla wa-layla*, as well as on modern Arabic literature written by such acclaimed authors as al-Jawahiri, Adunis, Yusuf al-Khal or 'Abd al-Rahman Munif.

Munif never wrote about Azzawi. However, Azzawi not only produced numerous book illustrations for Munif's *Mudun al-milh* (Cities of Salt), he turned the novel into a valuable *livre d'artiste*. He was fascinated by its minute description of life in the desert and the transformation of the desert triggered by the discovery of petroleum.[17] *Mudun al-milh* has been described as "the grand oil novel of the lands of the Gulf."[18] A visual reading of the novel through the lens of Azzawi's book illustrations and *livre d'artiste*, however, shows that there is more to the novel than the theme of petroleum.

AZZAWI'S BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS

Azzawi's illustrations figure on the book cover as well as inside the book of *Mudun al-milh*'s second edition (vol. 1 and 2), published in Beirut in 1986. They visualize some of the characters described in the novel. The book cover shows Mut'ib al-Hadhdhal (fig. 1) who is a central character in the novel's first volume *al-Tih* (The Wilderness). In the novel, he is introduced as a descendant of Jazi al-Hadhdhal who is remembered by the desert community of Wadi al-'Uyun for his resistance to the Ottomans at the end of the 19th century. After "the butchery of Wadi al-Uyun"[19] caused by the discovery of petroleum in the region about forty years later, Mut'ib al-



Hadhdhal himself becomes a legendary figure in the community's collective memory, revered for his resistance to the Americans and their local allies. Azzawi depicts him in bright colours, his face leaning forward sternly, standing out against a sand-coloured background. His depiction corresponds to the way he is described in the novel, when suddenly appearing before his son Fawwaz and other members of the community.

"At that very moment, as a brilliant flash of lightning rent the sky, creating fear upon fear, Miteb al-Hathal appeared. He seemed enormously tall and rather white skinned. He had his staff in his right hand and pointed it at them from the other side of the wadi. His physical form was so clearly discernible and so extremely powerful that he appeared to be closer than the opposite bank – as if he were directly over the water."[20]

Azzawi's black and white drawings included as illustrations inside the book focus on some of the novel's other characters (fig. 2-6). Each drawing is provided a page of its own. However, the incorporation of Arabic letters into the drawings establishes a graphical likeness to the text. The introduction of Arabic letters into modern art is a prominent feature in the Arab world. It is closely linked to an artistic reorientation, as promoted by the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, that set in with the *nakba* of 1948 and distanced itself from the powerful model of Western art, seeking inspiration instead from the Arabic-Islamic heritage, here from calligraphy.[21]

In figures 2 and 3, the letters are clearly legible as the names of two characters described in *Mudun al-milh*: Umm Ghazwan and Ibn al-Rashid. However, the latter's name is cut in two – whereas "Ibn al-Ra" is written horizontally, the last part of the name "shid" continues vertically – just like Ibn al-Rashid himself is torn apart between his Arab origins and his alliance with the Americans. In figure 4, the letters on the right side of the drawing are clearly legible as "Harran al-'arab" (Arab Harran), as the Arab quarters in the port city of Harran are called as

opposed to the American quarters.[22] But the letters in the upper left corner of the drawing do not form any coherent word at all. In figure 5, the letters in the upper part of the drawing,

just below the site of a camp, are only reminiscent of Arabic letters. Like the novel's characters, they are engrossed in a process of transformation. It is a forceful and violent process, as the dismembered body in the drawing's foreground bluntly shows. The miserable state some of the characters are in is in sharp contrast to the proud figure of Mut'ib al-Hadhdhal, shown in figure 6.

Just as the illustrations draw on the Arabic visual heritage, namely the tradition of Arabic calligraphy, the novel borrows narrative techniques and idioms from the Arabic literary heritage. It incorporates numerous quotations from classical Arabic literature, ranging from Imru' al-Qays to al-Jahiz and Ibn Qutayba. Allusions to the *Qur'an* as well as to popular salvation narratives, like *Sirat 'Antara bin Shadad*, *Zahir Baybars* and *Bani Hilal*, further enhance the novel's bond with the Arabic literary heritage. Similar to the traditional Arabic story-teller (*al-hakawati*), the narrative voice holds on to the oral transmission of events. The use of colloquial Arabic and numerous Arabic proverbs in the dialogues lends the

narrative an overall authentic character.[23] *Mudun al-milh* has been considered "a break-through in Arabic narrative art."[24] Its English translation, however, has aroused less favourable reviews. The American novelist John Updike, for instance, accuses its author of being "insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel."[25] "Munif may be among the most misunderstood and underrated Arab writers in terms of his formal experimentation," says Stefan G. Meyer, whereas he is "trying to fashion a novel that is uniquely 'Arab' in its view of history as well as in its narrative style."[26] A visual reading of *Mudun al-milh* through the lens of Azzawi's book illustrations, however, brings this aspect to the fore.

AZZAWI'S LIVRE D'ARTISTE

al-'Azawwi's *livre d'artiste* on *Mudun al-Milh* was issued in a limited edition of fifty examples only in London in 1994. Issued in a box, it consists of a bound copy of selected abstracts of the novel's five volumes printed in Arabic and English with black and white illustrations and a folder with six coloured prints, signed and numbered (fig. 7). The prints highlight an important aspect of the novel that was mentioned briefly, when referring to Azzawi's portrayal of Mut'ib al-Hadhdhal that shows on the book cover of the second edition: colour. Like the novel, the bound copy of the *livre d'artiste* starts with the lines:

> "Wadi al-Uyoun: an outpouring of green amid the harsh, obdurate desert, as if it had burst from within the ground or fallen from the sky."[27]

Colour is ascribed a prominent place in the novel from the very beginning. As Kamal Boullata points out, the Arabic language contains "an abundance of words that describe the visual world" – especially as regards the different shades of colour.[28] In *Mudun al-milh*, Munif deliberately draws on this legacy. Azzawi's use of colour in the prints brings to the fore the different shades of colour described in the novel. The majority of prints focus on the colours of the desert, different shades of ochre and brown, interspersed with black lines and writing. Here, the Arabic letters are clearly legible. One print includes

the phrase: "Shame on you all" that Muhammad al-Mudawwar cries out, when he finds Umm al-Khush dead (fig. 8). It highlights the sheer desperation as it takes hold of some of the characters, while the Americans and their local allies of royalties and subordinates go ahead with their business. A couple of prints capture the colourful life, as it existed in Wadi al-'Uyun before the discovery of petroleum in its rich vegetation and abundant water: green, blue, yellow and red. One of them incorporates the novel's description of Wadi al-'Uyun as "an outpouring of green amid the harsh, obdurate desert" (fig. 9).

A central theme in so-called *jahili* (pre-Islamic) literature, the desert has become a prominent theme in a number of Arabic novels in the latter part of the 20th century by authors, such as Hani al-Rahib, Ibrahim al-Kuni and al-Tayyib Salih.[29] Munif's minute perception of the desert, however, is rare. Similar to the village of al-Tiba in his novel *al-Nihayat* (Endings), the desert oasis of Wadi al-'Uyun in *Mudun al-milh* is more than a geographical place. It is described as "a salvation from death", "a miracle" and "an earthly paradise."[30] Its description shares many characteristics with the *Qur'an*'s imagery of paradise.[31] Its unspoilt, heavenly character of former days contrasts its harsh reality after the discovery of petroleum, as seen through the eyes of Mut'ib al-Hadhdhal's son Fawwaz, on his return to Wadi al-'Uyun.

> "When they reached Wadi al-Uyoun, it seemed to Fawaz a place he had never seen before. There was no trace of the wadi he had left behind; none of the old things remained. Even the fresh breezes that used to blow at this time of the year had become hot and searing in daytime, and a bitter cold penetrated his bones late at night. The men who had gathered there, he did not know from where, in their tents and wooden houses, were a bizarre mixture of humanity; they bore no resemblance to anything a man would recognize"[32]

Just as the place has changed, so have its inhabitants who have turned into "a bizarre mixture of humanity" with "no resemblance to anything a man would recognize." The transformation of Wadi al-'Uyun and the surrounding desert, triggered by the discovery of petroleum, goes hand in hand with profound changes in society. Similar to Azzawi's book illustrations discussed above, the illustrations in the bound copy of his *livre d'artiste* focus on some of the novel's characters. They capture their agonies and longings in the face of profound social change. It is as if they were trying to find answers to the distressing question raised in the novel:

> "How is it possible for people and places to change so entirely that they lose any connection with what they used to be? Can a man adapt to new things and new places without losing a part of himself?"[33]

Reading across the fields of literature and visual art challenges the powerful frames and narratives through which we are accustomed to look at the world. Reading *Mudun al-milh* through the lens of Azzawi's book illustrations and *livre d'artiste* encourages us to look beyond the novel's value as a sociological study of an otherwise unwritten history – "the grand oil novel of the lands of the Gulf". It sheds light on the novel's local colour, the experimental zeal with which it presents its view of history from within a narrative that remains connected to the Arabic literary heritage while it is part of contemporary literary practices worldwide, at the same time. Only through its local character, argues Munif, can the Arabic novel attain international significance.

> "The more our novel is local, the more it becomes world-class. In other words, the closer it comes to sincerity in portraying the local atmosphere and the deeper it goes into people's life, even if they are only a small group, the more it approaches being world-class."[34]

Munif's concern with the Arabic novel's local character has much in common with the Baghdad Group for Modern Art's call to produce art of local identity yet international significance, as it reverberates in Azzawi's book illustrations and *livre d'artiste*.

MARWAN

The Syrian artist Marwan Qassab-Bashi (b. 1934) left his native city Damascus in 1957 to study art abroad. He arrived at the College of Visual Arts (today: University of Fine Arts) in Berlin, Germany, where he was later to be appointed professor. He has become part of the Berlin art scene and internationally acknowledged. He is the artist Munif wrote about most extensively, devoting an entire book on him, *Marwan Qassab-Basha: Rihlat al-hayat wal-fann* (Marwan Qassab Bashi: Journey of Life and Art, Berlin 1996).

Munif's and Marwan's life trajectories intersected briefly in the mid 1950s, when they socialized among the same group of young intellectuals in favour of socio-political change in Damascus. When Marwan left for Berlin and Munif for Belgrade, they lost sight of each other, until Munif was invited to a reading in Berlin in 1992 and visited Marwan in his atelier. This time, the contact was to last and became one of close friendship. Keeping in touch through a correspondence, they exchanged their ideas about literature and art and the world, at large. Whereas Munif's letters, with all the warmth and generosity of genuine friendship, retain the character of a correspondence, Marwan's letters are written in the form of a private journal, including stream-of-consciousness passages, drawings and small aquarelles. In the light of their correspondence, it was likely that Munif and Marwan would engage in joint projects.

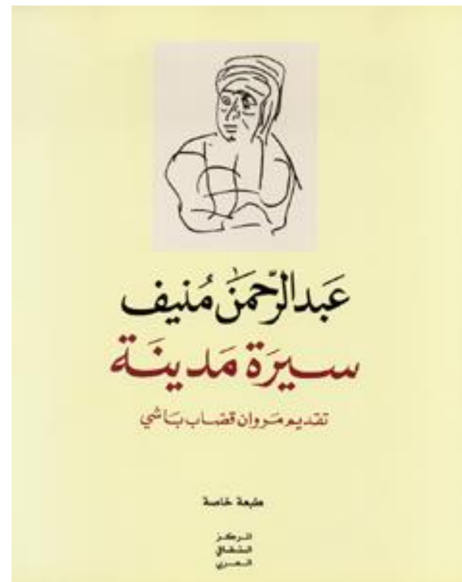
MARWAN'S BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS

Since the mid-1990s, Marwan has contributed significantly to Munif's books. His paintings and drawings are displayed as illustrations on the book covers and, in some cases, also inside the books. Most of the paintings and drawings were especially produced to accompany Munif's books, preceded by several sketches.[35]

The new edition of *al-Nihayat* (Endings), published in Beirut in 1999, is a good example. Printed on a yellowish paper, the book cover shows a drawing of the novel's protagonist 'Assaf and his prey of partridges, his face hovering above the desert. It is reproduced in a brown colour above the lettering of the novel's author and title in black and red (fig. 10). The illustrations inside the book are in black and white. They visualize 'Assaf accompanied by his dog, hunting for partridges, when he was found dead in the desert and on his deathbed. A detail of Munif's portrait, painted by Marwan in 1996 while on a visit to Damascus, is shown with a listing of his major publications on the book cover's inner back side (fig. 11). While Munif can clearly be discerned, the portrait shares some similarities with the many paintings simply entitled "Head" that have become characteristic of Marwan's work. These give the impression of purely abstract paintings at first sight. The facial traits are in a continual process of composition and decomposition, as they take shape upon closer examination. As "facial landscapes," they show a preference for earthen colours: red, brown and yellow – the same colours that are used in *al-Nihayat*'s book cover. They are reminiscent of the colours of the landscape that Munif evokes in his novels and that Marwan left behind, when he embarked on a new life in Berlin.

Marwan does not usually work in book illustration. As he says, he did not work together with Munif for commercial reasons but for symbolic ones, having in mind their close friendship and his genuine admiration for Munif's novels.[36] Marwan has been living and working outside the Arab world since the late 1950s and has only resumed close ties and more of a physical presence in the region recently.[37] In 2005, his work was finally presented to a large public in his homeland in an exhibition held in one of the major historical venues in Damascus, the Khan As'ad Basha.[38] Although Munif was no longer there to share this important moment with his friend, his portrait – in addition to portraits of his wife and children and a selection of Marwan's letters – figured prominently in the exhibition. For Marwan, his friendship with Munif has been closely associated with a sense of a homecoming. In the form of book illustrations his paintings and drawings have left the confines of museums, art galleries and private collections and have been introduced to a broad reading public in the Arab world. In choosing to work with Munif – one of the most renowned Arab novelists whose books are being published in the 10th and 15th editions – Marwan might have been drawn to select "the most monumental of all scales open to literate art, and not the slightest; the form that may travel furthest, touch widest, and that could just possibly even last the longest, if we continue to read."[39]

MUNIF'S DRAWINGS

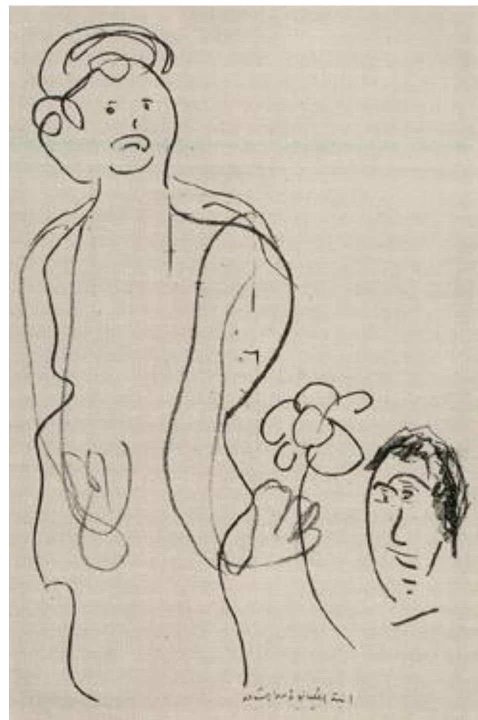


Apart from contributing to Munif's books with illustration of his own, Marwan prepared a special edition of Munif's *Sirat madina* (Story of a City), first published in 1994, which came out in Beirut in 2001 (**fig. 12**). As Marwan's preface "'Indama yarsumu al-katib" (When the Writer Draws) indicates, the special edition shows Munif in a new light. He is not only the author of such acclaimed novels as *Sharq al-mutawassit* or *Mudun al-milh*, he is also an artist engaging in different art forms: writing and drawing. The special edition includes about fifty drawings by Munif. However, it would be misleading to consider Munif doubly talented. The book is the result of the friendship and symbolic exchange between two artists of different artistic fields, one a novelist and the other a painter.

In the preface, Marwan tells about the circumstances in which the special edition came into existence. It was by accident that he came across Munif's drawings during a visit to Damascus in 1995. In his study, in bookshelves next to his desk, Munif used to keep a number of sketchbooks, small books with plain white paper. When working on a book, he from time to time reached out for them and started drawing, interrupting the lengthy process of writing with drawings executed in a matter of seconds. Munif considered his drawings no more than a pastime.[40] When Marwan put forward the idea of a special edition, he first objected. But after discussing the issue more thoroughly, he agreed. The special edition was neither to be a *livre d'artiste* nor a *livre de luxe*, a lavish edition for the collector, but a book that the general public could afford and would, at the same time, take pleasure in reading.[41]

Sirat madina is usually read as an autobiography. Recent autobiographical narratives in Arabic literature "have broken with the traditional rural model inaugurated by Taha Husayn, and have made the city the key site for formative experience," writes Yves Gonzalez-Quijano.[42] "The city practically becomes a character in its own right", he adds, referring to *Sirat madina*.[43] As the book's title indicates – *sirat madina* (story of a city) – it even becomes the principal character, the protagonist. Munif places his story into the broader context of the city's story. *Sirat madina* is informed by sociological concerns.[44] At the same time, it borrows some of its techniques from the novel, as Munif says in the foreword. It thus engages in a melange between fiction and non-fiction, as is typical for autobiographical narratives in modern Arabic literature.[45] As Munif says, *Sirat madina* is not a "historiography" of Amman. But read through the eyes of a person who lived in Amman at the time – referred to throughout the narrative in the third person singular as the child – "it might contribute to an additional vision."[46]

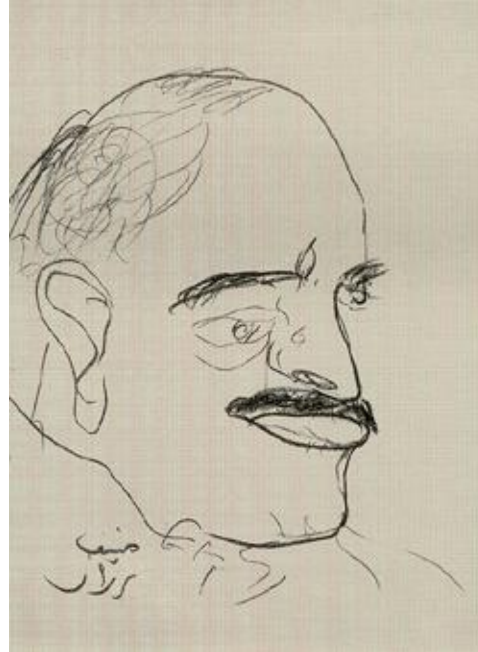
The city takes on its traits through the people who live in it. Some are relatives and acquaintances of the child, others people figuring prominently in Amman's public life at the time.[47] The narrative sets out in the aftermath of World War I and ends with the *nakba* of 1948. The reader follows the child upon discovering the city throughout his school years, until he becomes a young man, leaving the city for Baghdad. Through his eyes, he sees Amman turning from a remote town on Jabal Amman to an ever expanding city. Giving voice to seemingly marginal events and people swallowed up "by the ocean of life, which does not give many the chance to stop to catch their breath",[48] *Sirat madina* may be part of "Amman's forgotten history".[49] As such it partakes in "writing the history of those who do not have a history" – a task Munif ascribed to the novel.[50]



One of the drawings included in the special edition looks like a first preparation for the book. It has the form of a genealogical tree (fig. 13). But most of the drawings visualize characters described in the text (fig. 14-16). All drawings are in black ink. They were produced in one hasty continuous line, as memory recalls characters and scenes spontaneously, outlining them roughly in a matter of seconds. As such they are in stark contrast to the text and its careful description of life in Amman. In the foreword Munif mentions the difficulties one faces in writing about the city of one's past, turning it into words that are but "the pale shadows of life".

"Man's narrative about the city that, to a certain extent, means something special to him does not seem possible. It is very difficult and sometimes intractable because the question which arises is: what can be said and what is left out? (…)

> Writing about the city of the past, that one loves, transforms this city into words. The same words, however brilliant, slippery, significant, or cunning, rarely go beyond being the pale shadows of life. Or, in the best of cases, a touch from outside, or only an approach, while knowing that life itself was richer, more intense, and full of details that are difficult to bring back once again."[51]



Having these difficulties in mind, the question arises whether the drawings have enabled Munif not only to visualize certain characters and places but also to capture some of the "details that are difficult to bring back once again" with words alone. Several bring before the reader's eye the fleeting character of popular everyday life in Amman. Just like in a comic strip, the visual and the verbal here interact within the drawing. As the captions tell us, we see 'Abd al-Ra'uf and Umm Ahmad chatting in the street, their neighbour Umm Khalil watching them.

Art history has long been dominated by the idea that temporal succession is the domain of literature and spatial extension that of painting, as was maintained by Lessing in his *Laokoon* (Berlin 1766). But the capacity of visual images to tell a story has increasingly gained attention.[52] A narrative along visual images different from that of a verbal text is presumed to be more erratic, uncontrolled, affective, immediate and hence closer to the unconscious.[53] The drawings in the special edition of Munif's *Sirat madina* constitute a narrative in its own right, a starting point for memories and stories to unfold that have been suppressed in the text by the troublesome question of "what can be said and what is left out?" Not to be dismissed as the doodles of a great writer, Munif's sketch-like drawings capture the people and places of Amman as memory recalls them spontaneously.

CONCLUSION

Azzawi's book illustrations as well as his *livre d'artiste*, Marwan's book illustrations and Munif's own drawings show that visual images do have the capacity to tell a story and to offer a parallel – visual – reading of a literary text that may shed light on otherwise ignored aspects. al-Azzawi's and Munif's illustrations clearly bring to the fore the local character of Munif's novels, his quest to give voice to the neglected part of history from within a narrative that not only follows Western models but remains linked to the Arabic-Islamic literary heritage. It is this very quest that Arab artists, like Azzawi and to some extent also Marwan, have pursued in their works.

Azzawi and Munif have contributed significantly to Munif's books. Both share a common fascination for Munif's novels through which they have kept in touch – al-Azzawi from his exile in London and Marwan from his exile in Berlin – with their respective homelands, Iraq and Syria. However, due to the close friendship, the give and take between writer and artist is more obvious with Munif and Marwan. The special edition of *Sirat madina* was born out of this give and take. Transgressing literary genres, *Sirat madina* can be described as an autobiography, a novel and an additional vision to historiography at the same time. The special edition, furthermore, is a fine example of an illustrated book in which the text and the drawings represent two different narratives, a verbal and a visual narrative; or, as Marwan suggests, two different ways of leaving traces.

> "In our many conversations 'Abd al-Rahman repeated more than once the necessity to leave our traces and to "scratch" what we can as a duty to bear witness of our generation to the future. If we succeed it is not bad, if not we have done our duty. I liked his expression "scratching" for what it contains of will, challenge, and direct sign of the intellectual's trace on the issues of his time. I understand "scratching" as two lines: the line of the word and the line of the drawing by the writer."[54]

Leaving traces – "scratching" – here is closely linked to bearing witness, to the intellectual's engagement with his time and concern for the future. It is the necessity of leaving traces, of "scratching," we can conclude, that has motivated Munif not only to write but also to be interested in modern art and to try his own hand at drawing.

IMAGES

(All images are published with the courtesy of Dia Azzawi, Marwan and Munif's family)

Fig. 1	Azzawi, book cover of 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Mudun al-milh. al-Tih* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya, 1984, 2nd ed.).
Fig. 2-6	Azzawi, book illustrations to ibid.
Fig. 7	Azzawi, *livre d'artsite* of 'Abd al-Rahman Munif's *Mudun al-milh*, 1994
Fig. 8-9	al-Azzawi, prints of the *livre d'artsite*.
Fig. 10	Marwan, book cover of 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Nihayat* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya, 1999, 10th ed.)
Fig. 11	Marwan, portrait of 'Abd al-Rahman Munif reproduced in ibid.
Fig. 12	'Abd al-Rahman Munif, book cover of *Sirat madina* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-thaqafi al-'arabi, 2001, special edition).
Fig. 13-16	'Abd al-Rahman Munif, book illustrations to ibid

ENDNOTES

This article is based on my D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford 2005. An earlier version was given as a lecture organized by the Anis K. Makdisi Program in Literature at the American University of Beirut in memory of ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif, 27.01.2005.

[1] Munif in an interview with the author, Damascus 27.08.2003.

[2] On the early years of the Ba'th, see especially Hanna Batatu, (1978). The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Hazim Jawad, one of the political leaders of the Ba'th in Iraq at the time, gives a personal account of Munif's political involvement in the early years of the Ba'th in "Fi dhikra arba'in ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif" in: al-Quds (London), 06.03.2004. See also Maher Jarrar, ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif wal-ʻIraq. Sira wa-dhikrayat (Beirut: al-Markaz al-thaqafi al-ʻarabi, 2005), p. 21-32.

[3] See Ulrike al-Khamis, "An Historical Overview 1900s -1990s," in Maysaloun Faraj (ed.), *Strokes of Genius. Contemporary Iraqi Art* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), p. 21-46.

[4] See Shakir Hasan Al-Said, *al-Bayanat al-fanniyya fi al-ʻIraq* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1973), p. 25-29.

[5] He wanted to devote one book to modern art in Syria and another to modern art in the Arab world, at large. He had more artists in mind, like Rafi al-Nasiri (b. 1940), ʻAsim al-Basha (b. 1948), Suha Shuman (b. 1944), ʻAdli Rizqallah (b. 1940) and Adam Henein (b. 1929) but he died before he was able to put his ideas onto paper. I thank Su'ad al-Qawadiri for this information.

[6] Iskandar Habash, "Unpublished Munif Interview – Oil, Political Islam, and Dictatorship," in: *Al Jadid*, 45 (2004) www.aljadid.com.

[7] Jabra was not only a founding member of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, he also participated in many of the group's exhibitions with paintings of his own. Moreover, he was a distinguished art critic. He published several books on modern art in Iraq, notably *Jawad Salim wa-nasb al-huriyya* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1974).

[8] Muhsin Jasim al-Musawi, *al-Riwaya al-ʻarabiyya - al-nash'a wal-tahawwul* (Beirut: Dar al-adab, 1988), p. 282.

[9] Laurie Edson, *Reading Relationally Postmodern Perspectives on Literature and Art* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000).

[10] See Al Said, al-Bayanat al-fanniyya fi al-ʻIraq, p. 31-35.

[11] See Institut du monde arabe, *Dia Azzawi* (Paris: Institut du monde arabe, 2001).

[12] See Marie-Geneviève Guesdon and Annie Vernay-Nouri (eds.), *L'art du livre arabe. Du manuscrit au livre d'artiste* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 2002).

[13] See W.J. Strachan, The Artist and the Book in France. The 20th Century Livre d'Artiste (London: Peter Owen, 1969).

[14] See Renée Riese Hubert and Judd D. Hubert, *The Cutting Edge of Reading: Artists' Books* (New York: Granary, 1999) p. 8.

[15] See Guesdon and Vernay-Nouri (eds.), *L'art du livre arabe*, p. 177-199.

[16] Azzawi in an interview with the author, London 28.11.2003. To render the Arabic-Islamic heritage of book-making more visible, Azzawi engaged in an ambitious project: a facsimile of the 1237 manuscript of the Maqamat of al-Hariri, copied and illustrated by the thirteenth century Baghdadi calligrapher cum miniature painter al-Wasiti. The facsimile was published with an introduction by Oleg Grabar by TouchArt in London in 2004. Moreover, he has built a large collection of contemporary *livres d'artiste* from Iraq.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Fouad Ajami, *The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), p. 125.

[19] ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Tih* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-ʻarabiyya lil-dirasat wal-nashr, 9th ed. 1999), p. 124. Translated by Peter Theroux as *Cities of Salt* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 106.

[20] Ibid., p. 174. English translation, p. 152.

[21] See Sharbel Daghir, *al-Hurufiyya al-ʻarabiyya: al-Fann wal-huwiyya* (Beirut: Shirkat al-matbu'at, 1990) and Sylvia Naef, *L'art de l'écriture arabe: Passé et présent* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1992).

22 Arab and American Harran can be described in Frantz Fanon's words as "the settler's town" and "the town belonging to the colonised people, or at least the native town, the negro village, the medina,

the reservation (…) a town of niggers and dirty arabs". Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* translated by Constance Farrington (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 29-30.

[23] See Eric Gautier, *Individu et société dans la littérature romanesque du Moyen-Orient: L'Arabie Saoudite à travers Mudun al-milh (Les villes de sel) de 'Abd ar-Rahman Munif* (Unpublished Doctorat de l'Université de Provence, 1993), p. 237-267.

[24] Issa J. Boullata, "Social Change in Munif's Cities of Salt," *Edebiyât. The Journal of Middle Eastern Literatures*, 8, no. 2 , (1998), p. 191. See also Nedal al-Mousa, "Experimentation with Narrative Techniques and Modes of Writing in 'Abd al-Rahman Munif's Mudun al-milh: al-tih," *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures*, 4, no. 2, (2001), p. 145-156; Yumna al-'Id, *al-Rawi wal-mawqi' wal-shakl. Bahth fi al-sard al-riwa'i* (Beirut: Mu'asassat al-abhath al-'arabiyya, 1986), p. 123-176.

[25] John Updike, "Satan's Work and Silted Cisterns," *The New Yorker* (Oct. 17, 1988), p. 117-118.

[26] Stefan G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel. Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), p. 76, 72.

[27] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Tih*, p. 9. English translation, p. 1.

[28] Kamal Boullata, "Visual Thinking and the Arab Semantic Memory," *Tradition, Modernity and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature. Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata*, eds. Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 2000) p. 296-302.

[29] See Salah Salih, *al-Riwaya al-'arabiyya wal-sahra'* (Damascus: Ministry of Culture, 1996); Richard van Leeuwen, "Cars in the Desert: Ibrahim al-Kuni, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif and André Citoën," *Oriente Moderno*, 16, no. 2-3, (1997), p. 59-72.

[30] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Tih*, p. 9-10. English translation, p. 2.

[31] Notably in *sura* 15, 45-46 and in *sura* 55, 46-50. See Eric Gautier, *Individu et société*, p. 36.

[32] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Tih*, p. 157. English translation, p. 135.

[33] Ibid., p. 156. English translation, p. 134.

[34] Nizar 'Abidin, "Hiwar ma'a 'Abd al-Rahman Munif," *al-Ma'rifa*, no. 204, (1979), p. 199.

[35] Marwan in an interview with the author, Berlin 03.06.2004.

[36] Ibid.

[37] In the 1990s, he held solo exhibitions in Damascus, Amman and Cairo. Moreover, he made a bequest of a collection of etchings and watercolours to the children of Palestine that was displayed at Birzeit University and the Khalil al-Sakakini Cultural Centre in Ramallah in 1998. Since 1999, he has supervised the annual Summer Academy at the Darat al-funun in Amman, Jordan, which brings together art students from different Arab countries.

[38] See Mouna Atassi, *Marwan. Dimashq-Birlin-Dimashq/Marwan. Damascus-Berlin-Damascus* (Damascus: Atassi Gallery/Goethe Institute, 2005).

[39] Carol Hogben, "Introduction," to *From Manet to Hockney. Modern Artists' Illustrated Books*, eds. Carol Hogben and Rowan Watson, (London: Victoria&Albert Museum, 1985), p. 36.

[40] Munif in an interview with the author, Damascus 20.03.2002.

[41] Marwan in an interview with the author, Berlin 03.06.2004.

[42] Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, "The Territory of Autobiography: Mahmud Darwish's Memory for Forgetfulness," *Writing the Self. Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, Stefan Leder (London: Saqi Books, 1998), p. 317.

[43] Ibid.

[44] See Tetz Rooke, *'In my Childhood'. A Study of Arabic Autobiography* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1997), p. 197.

[45] As Dwight R. Reynolds writes, it is this mélange between fiction and non-fiction that sets autobiographical narratives in modern Arabic literature apart from the Arabic literary tradition, aligning them instead with the novel, as it emerged in Western literatures. Dwight R. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self. Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 10

[46] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Sirat madina* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-thaqafi al-'arabi, 2001), p. 31.

[47] The latter include Shaykh Taqy al-Din al-Nabhani (1909-1977) who was the founder of the Islamic Liberation Party and Munif al-Razzaz (1919-1984) who was a well-known intellectual and an early member of the Ba'th Party.

[48] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Sirat madina*, p. 37. English translation by Samira Kawar: *Story of a City. A Childhood in Amman* (London: Quartet, 1996), p. 5.

[49] Ibid., 141. English translation, p. 170.

[50] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Katib wal-manfa. Humum wa-afaq al-riwaya al-'arabiyya* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya lil-dirasat wal-nashr, 1992), p. 43.
[51] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Sirat madina*, p. 31-32.
[52] See, for instance, Alexander Sturgis, *Telling Time* (London: National Gallery, 2000); Hilmar Frank and Tanja Frank, "Zur Erzählforschung in der Kunstwissenschaft," in *Die erzählerische Dimension. Eine Gemeinsamkeit der Künste*, ed. Eberhardt Lämmert, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), p. 37-40.
[53] See Aleida Assmann, Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999), p. 410.
[54] Marwan Qassab Bashi, Preface to 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Sirat madina*, p. 27.

IN HIS OWN WORDS

Jawad Salim, *The Monument of Freedom*, 1959-1962, Sahat el Tahrir [Liberty Square], Baghdad, Photograph courtesty of Loulouwa Al Rachid

نصب الحرية

عبد الرحمن منيف

يعتبر جواد سليم وفائق حسن اهم وابرز اثنين اسسا للفن العراقي المعاصر.واذا كان فائق قد تقدم جواد قليلاً من حيث العمر والممارسة، وعاش بعده طويلاً ايضاً، الا ان بصمات جواد وتأثيره على هذا الفن اكثر وضوحاً، خاصة وانه ليس رساماً فقط، بل ونحات ايضاً،وقدم في المجالين انجازات ذات مستوى رفيع، بحيث تشكل هذه الانجازات نقلة نوعية في التطور الفني ليس في العراق وحده ، وانما على مستوى المنطقة العربية كلها.

في هذه الاطلالة السريعة سنقتصر الحديث عن جواد، وسنحاول تخصيص دراسة لاحقة عن فائق حسن.

يعتبر جواد سليم فناناً رائداً، ويتصف بالاضافة الى انجازاته الفنية في مجالي التصوير والنحت بانه منظر، او على الاقل صاحب وجهات نظر؛ يتجلى ذلك في السلوك وفي المواقف ثم بالكتابات التي تركها، رغم قلتها. وقد تسنى له ذلك بحكم موهبته الفذة ، ومن خلال مشاركته في المجموعات الفنية التي نشأت في العراق خلال فترة الخمسينات،او مجموعة " الرواد "، ثم بانشاء جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث بعد ذلك .

أما كيف قُدّر له ان يحتل هذا الموقع، فان الموهبة ترافقت مع الاجتهاد والتجربة من ناحية، وصدى لاحتكاكه ومعايشته لحركة الفن العالمية من خلال دراسته في فرنسا وايطاليا ثم انكلترا، وايضاً بحكم صداقاته وعلاقاته بفنانين من مدارس وبلدان مختلفة، من ناحية ثانية؛ ثم بحثه الدؤوب في البيئة والتراث عن جذور يمكن الاستناد اليها، كي يتميز فن هذه المنطقة عن غيره من حيث الملامح والنكهة والاسلوب ، من ناحية ثالثة .

ولاشك ان المرحلة التاريخية التي ولد وعاش خلالها جواد تعتبر ذات اهمية خاصة ، اذ كانت مرحلة مخاض وتفاعل وبحث عن الجديد في جميع المجالات ،

وبالتالي شكلت البدايات الاساسية لاتساع وتطور الفن العربي المعاصر ، وهي التي اعطت لهذا الفن ملامحه وحددت اتجاهاته ، الامر الذي انعكس على الاجيال الفنية اللاحقة، خاصة وان جيل الرواد مهد الارض واوجد بعض التقاليد التي اصبحت بمثابة المثل والمحددات للاجتهادات اللاحقة.

فاذا اضفنا الى ذلك المدى الزمني المحدود الذي اتيح لجواد ، والمتمثل في الحياة القصيرة التي عاشها ، وكانت مليئة بالمعاناة والمصاعب والكيد، فاننا نزداد اكباراً وتقديراً لانجازاته العملية والنظرية ،ونتساءل ماذا لو امتد العمر بهذا الفنان المميز ، واتيحت له ظروف عمل مواتية ؟ وماذا لو ان المناخ الذي عاش فيه اكثر استعداداً وسخاء في تهيئة المستلزمات الضرورية لنهضة فنية ؟

لكن قبل اصدار الاحكام ، او اعطاء تقييم كامل لانجازات جواد سليم ، وبالتالي تقدير دوره وتأثيره ، يجدر بنا ان نتوقف في محطات حياته الاساسية ، ومعرفة الظروف والعوامل التي اثرت عليه ، لكي يكون حكمنا اكثر دقة ، ومبنياً على معطيات حقيقية وملموسة .

ولد جواد في انقره عام 1919، لاسرة عراقية . كان ابوه عسكرياً ومركز عمله في هذه المدينة . كان جواد الابن الثاني ، وقد تأثر منذ نعومة اظفاره بابيه الذي كان يمارس الرسم كهواية، وله لوحات عديدة ، ابرزها لوحة للسراي في بغداد رسمت في العقد الاول من القرن العشرين . ولقد اثرت هذه الهواية على الابناء جميعاً ، بحيث مارسوا التصوير ، خاصة وان الام ايضاً اتصفت بذوق فني مميز ، واهتمت ببعض الفنون ، خاصة التطريز (1)

لكن مثلما هي العادة في احيان كثيرة : الموهبة الكبيرة تجّب ما دونها ، او ان الظلال الكثيفة التي تتولد نتيجة الحجم تحجب او تقلل مما حولها ، وهذا ما حصل حين ظهرت ثم تميزت عبقرية جواد ، اذ بالاضافة الى توقف الاب عن الرسم ، بعد ان تفوق عليه ابنه ، جواد ، فقد حصل بين الاثنين ما حصل بين بيكاسو وابيه : اعتراف الاب والتسليم والشعور بالفخر ان هذه الهواية وجدت من يتابعها في الاسرة . حتى الاخوة ، والاخت ايضاً ، ورغم استمرارهم في الرسم ، والمكانة المميزة التي احتلها نزار ونزيهة، فان ظلال جواد غطت عليهما ، او لم

تتح لهما ان ينالا ما يستحقان من مواقع واهتمام .لقد حصل هذا دون تخطيط ودون قصد ، وليس بفعل جواد ايضاً، وانما هي مسارات الاشياء في هذه الحياة اغلب الاحيان، ونتيجة الاعتراف بالموهبة الاكبر والاقوى ، والتي تفرض نفسها دون فرض ، بحيث تصبح في النهاية امراً واقعاً ، وهذا ما حصل لجواد مقارنة باخوته ، وبالنسبة للرأي العام .

ولان للفن اولوية مطلقة بالنسبة لجواد ، فما كاد ينهي دراسته الثانوية ، حتى كان من اوائل الذين تم ايفادهم الى باريس لدراسة الفن . لقد حصل هذا عام 1938 ، اي خلال احدى الفترات الخصبة في تطور الفن الفرنسي ، وحين كانت باريس مقصداً لكثير من الفنانين الاجانب الذين جاءوا اليها واتخذوها مكاناً للاقامة اول الامر ، ثم اعتبرها بعضهم موطناً دائماًُ. لكن ما كادت سنة تمر على اقامة جواد في باريس حتى نشبت الحرب العالمية الثانية، الامر الذي اضطره الى مغادرة فرنسا الى ايطاليا ، على أمل ان يواصل دراسته في روما، غير ان الحرب لم تتأخر في الامتداد ، اذ وصلت الى ايطاليا ايضاً ، مما حمله على العودة الى بغداد . وفي بغداد تم تعينه مدرساً لمادة النحت في معهد الفنون الجميلة .

كانت فترة اقامة جواد في باريس وروما فترة اطلاع وبداية الدراسة ، ولقد تسنى له خلال ذلك ان يزور المتاحف ، ويتعرف على المعالم والآثار ، وان يحتك ايضاً باجواء الفن ، ويتعرف على عدد من الفنانين . أما بعد عودته الى بغداد فقد انصرف الى الممارسة والتجريب واكتشاف الاحتمالات والامكانيات ، خاصة في ظل اجواء بالغة الغنى شديدة الحراك ،اذ كان العراق ، والمنطقة بشكل عام ، في حالة مخاض عام سياسياً واجتماعياً وفكرياً ، وكان الاستعداد قائماًُ وقوياً لتقبل الجديد والتفاعل معه . كما ان كل مثقف وفنان كان يواجه اسئلة على اكثر من مستوى ويبحث عن اجابات لهذه الاسئلة الحارقة .

وفي هذه الفترة صادف توفر عوامل اضافية كان لها بالغ التأثير على الحركة الفنية ، بما فيها جواد سليم ، ولعل ابرز هذه العوامل : وجود افواج كبيرة من البولنديين ، كان بينهم عدد من الفنانيين . وقد قدر لهؤلاء ان يحتكوا ويتفاعلوا مع الجو الفني العراقي ، وقامت بين جواد وبعض هؤلاء الفنانيين علاقات معرفة ما

لبثت ان تحولت الى صداقة ، بعد ان اكتشف الطرفان وجود اشياء مشتركة ، بما فيها التأثر بمدارس وببعض الفنانيين ، ولعل الانطباعية الجديدة والتعبيرية الفرنسية ، وعلى رأسها بيير بونار ، الفنان الفرنسي المميز، من القواسم المشتركة التي ساعدت وقرّبت بين جواد وبين هؤلاء الفنانيين .

ابرز ثلاثة من الفنانيين البولنديين الذين أثروا على حركة التشكيل في العراق : جابسكي وماتوشاك وجوزيف باريما، اذ ارتبط الثلاثة بصداقات مع فنانين ، بمن فيهم جواد، وكانوا بالاضافة الى ممارسة الرسم وتقديم المثل ، حريصيين على لقاء المثقفين ومناقشة القضايا الفنية والثقافية ، كما كانوا يبدون آراءهم بانجازات الفنانيين العراقيين ،الامر الذي كان له تأثير هام على جواد ، كما صقل مواهبه وخياراته.

الى جانب الفنانيين البولنديين وما تركوه من تأثير ، فقد كان لبعض الفنانيين او نقاد الفن الانكليز الذين صدف وجودهم ضمن القوات المرابطة في العراق ، واحتكوا باجواء الفن العراقي، تأثير على الحركة الفنية ، وعلى جواد تحديداً (2) .

أما حين اكتشف جواد الواسطي ومدرسة بغداد الفنية، فقد اخذت الحلقة ، ثم النظرة، بالتكامل ، وتعززت هذه النظرة من خلال الاطلاع على انجازات هذه المدرسة، وما ميزها من اسلوب والوان. وحين اضيف اليها تماسه بالآثار العراقية القديمة ، من خلال عمله في المتحف العراقي ، وفي مجال ترميم المنحوتات تحديداً ، فقد اصبح العمق التاريخي ذا تأثير مباشر وقوي على نظرة جواد ، خاصة وقد ترافق ذلك بصلات تزداد وتقوى بذوي الاختصاص ومراكمة المعلومات ، وبالتالي عمق الفهم والتذوق للخصائص والاساليب والاساطير التي ميزت فنون وادي الرافدين ، الامر الذي ستظهر نتائجه لاحقاً في عدد متزايد من اعماله الفنية .

هذه المصادر والمناخات المتعددة لثقافة جواد ومعارفه سوف تخلق له جذوراً تمتد عميقاً في تربة بلده من ناحية ، وسوف تجعله وثيق الصلة بتيارات الفن العالمي المعاصر ، من ناحية ثانية ، مما اوصله الى خيارات مهمة في رحلته

الفنية . فالموضوعات الشعبية ، بما فيها من الوان وازياء وعادات ، اعتماداً على الفولكلور ، والخروج الى الهواء الطلق من اجل التقاط الموضوعات والاضواء والملامح ، خلافاً لعادة الرسامين من الجيل السابق الذين كانوا يؤثرون المراسم المغلقة ، ويعتمدون على الذاكرة في استعادة الاشكال والالوان ، ويتركون للخيال والرغبة فرصة الاضافة والتزيين والنقل ... هذه العوامل والاضافات ، كان لها تأثير في دفع الحركة الفنية ، وتهيئة الفرص لانطلاقة جديدة بالنسبة لجواد ، وهذه الانطلاقة تتأخر حتى تعبر عن نفسها بكثير من الجرأة والجدة.

الفترة الممتدة بين عودة جواد الى العراق ، وسفره من جديد لمواصلة دراسته ، وهذه المرة الى انكلترا، لم تكن فترة عطالة او انتظار، فقد القى بنفسه في اتون التجربة والاكتشاف على اكثر من صعيد ، وتأكد من خلال تدريس مادة النحت في معهد الفنون الجميلة ، ثم اثناء عمله في المتحف ، ومن خلال الانجازات الفنية ، خاصة النحتية ، التي قدر له ان يقوم بها ، تأكد انه منذور للرسم والنحت معاً وبنفس المقدار ، وانه يحبهما ومتعلق بهما بحيث لا يستطيع هجر او الفكاك من اي منهما ، ولعل في الرسومات التي انجزها، ثم منحوتة البنّاء بشكل خاص التي فرغ منها قبل سفره مجدداً الى بريطانيا، ما يشير الى ان جواد سيبقى ، والى النهاية ، موزعاً بين هذين الفنين ، وانه لا يقوى على ان يتخلى عن اي منهما.

لكن للنحت متطلبات ومناخات ليس من السهل توفرها ، خاصة في بلد مسلم وضمن الفترة الاولى التي قدر لجواد ان يعيشها خلالها ، اذ بالاضافة الى الارث الذي تولد نتيجة التحريم الديني للانصاب ، وارتباط النحت بهذه النظرة ، فان الاعباء المادية والفنية التي يستلزمها النحت ، لايمكن للفنان بمفرده ان يوفرها ، مما يستدعي تدخل وتعاون جهات قادرة لتوفير مثل هذه المتطلبات، الامر الذي اصطدم به جواد اكثر من مرة ، خلال مراحل عمله ، لكن الصعوبات والعراقيل كانت تدفعه ليصعد ويتجه الى تصريف طاقته الفنية في مجال الرسم ، والذي لا يعتبره مجرد بديل او تعويض ، وانما هو حقل آخر يمكن ان يبدع فيه ، وان يكتشف من خلاله احتمالات فنية قد لاتتاح في مجال آخر ،وهذا ما جعله موزعاً ، لكن بصيغة ايجابية بين هذين الحقلين ، دون ان يستغني عن احدهما، او اعتبار

اي منهما تخلياً عن امكانية المعاودة الى الآخر عندما تتاح الفرصة وتتهيأ الشروط ، مع التأكيد مجدداً انه يمكن الاستفادة من بعض المفردات ونقلها من حقل الى ثانٍ ، ومن مرحلة الى اخرى ، خاصة بعد ان تُجرب هذه المفردات وتنضج وتملك خاصية الانتقال بايجابية ورحابة .

ومع ان جواد سليم رسام ونحات بنفس المقدار ، الا انه ليس كذلك في نفس الوقت ، اذ حين " يغرق " في الرسم فانه رسام قبل واكثر من اي شيء آخر ، اي انه لا يرّحل اساليب نحتية الى رسمه ، وكذلك الحال وهو ينحت اذ يفعل ذلك بروح وباسلوب النحات وحده ، الامر الذي لا يظهر بنفس المستوى لدى فنانيين آخرين يمارسون ، او يضطرون لممارسة ، الفنين معاً او بالتناوب .

هذه الصفة في فن جواد سليم من المفيد ان يجري تأملها باستمرار ، لان الفنان، في غالب الاحيان ، يضطر الى حمل جزء من ادواته من حقل الى آخر ، ويُعرف بالتالي ان كان نحاتاً يرسم او رساماً ينحت ، اذ تشي به حرفته الاصلية ، او تحمل من آثارها الكثير. جواد يتطهر قبل ان ينتقل ، فحين يحمل الفرشاة يبدو انه لا يتعامل مع غيرها ،وكذلك الحال اذا نحت ، اذ يبدو نحاتاً منذ البداية ، ولا يجيد امراً غير النحت او اكثر منه ؛ ان هذه الصفة تتطلب مجالدة للنفس وتدريباً عالياً ، وايضاً معرفة دقيقة ونزيهة لكلا الفنين ، وما يتطلبه كل واحد منهما من وسائل وطريقة تعامل .

لقد مرت اوقات على جواد سليم لم ينحت خلالها ، وانما تفرغ بكليته للرسم، نظراً لعدم توفر شروط او مستلزمات النحت ربما بسبب المرض ، او لانه يعتبر الموضوعات التي يريد التعامل معها اكثر ملائمة للرسم ، ولعل هذا من حُسن حظ الفن العراقي لان الامر لم يقتصر على المهارة التقنية ، او الثقافة النظرية ، اذ بالاضافة لاجتماعهما فيه معاً ، فان روح البحث كانت تتملكه ايضاً ، ورغبة التجذر في المكان كانت تسيطر عليه ، خاصة وانه انفتح على الفنون القديمة ، السومرية والبابلية والآشورية ، اصبحت زاداً فنياً له.

ومن الصفات التي ميّزت جواد ايضاً ان الفكرة او الموضوع يبقى ملازماً له فترة طويلة ، وبعد ان يقّلبه على جميع وجوهه ، ويمتحن احتمالاته كلها ، وربما

يجربه ايضاً ، وحين ينتهي من اعداده على نار هادئة يجد له المكان الذي يلائمه ، او الصفة التي يعبر بها عنه . فالام مثلاً ، وهو موضوع يعني الكثير لجواد ، ورغم المشاهد المتعددة التي اتخذها، فقد ادخره لفترة متأخرة وكان يرتئي ان يعبر عنه نحتاً بالدرجة الاولى ، وهكذا ، وبعد ان استكمل ادواته ، وتأكد انه قادر على ان يعطيه اكمل صورة يستطيعها قام بانجازه . ويمكن ان يقال الشيء ذاته عن بعض اللوحات التي رسمها ، كالقيلولة ، مثلاً ، اذ ان الموضوع ، ظل مؤجلاً فترة طويلة الى ان جاءت اللمعة الابداعية التي تقول له كيف يجب ان يعبر عنه.

ومع انه من الصعب تجزئة جواد الى مراحل او فترات زمنية، او التعامل مع نحته دون الرسم ، فان التقسيم ، اذا بقي اجرائياً فقط ،يساعد على معرفة اكمل وادق لمسيرته الفنية.

فالرحلة الاولى الى فرنسا وايطاليا ، كانت بمثابة اكتشاف لمصادر الفن المعاصر، واحتكاك بمعالمه الرئيسية من حيث المراحل والمدارس والاساليب ، الامر الذي كّون ميولاً واولويات مبدئية لخياراته وتأثراته ، لكن باعتبار ان هذه الرحلة لم تطل، واعقبتها العودة الى بغداد ، وما رافق ذلك من بحث وتماس مع مؤثرات اخرى ، وقد اشرنا الى بعضٍ منها، فان الشخصية الفنية لجواد تكونت باقل قدر من العوامل الضاغطة ، خلافاً لفنانيين آخرين حين يقعن تحت تأثير مدارس او اساليب بذاتها، ويصعب عليهم تجاوزها بعد ذلك ، كما حصل مع عدد من الفنانيين ، بما فيهم بعض العراقيين ، الذين تأثروا بالانطباعية الفرنسية مثلاً ، ولم يستطيعوا مغادرتها بعد ذلك الا جزئياً وبارتباك ظاهر .

جواد احتفظ بمسافة ، واحياناً بمسافة كبيرة ، بينه وبين المدارس والاساليب التي كانت سائدة في اوروبا. واذا كانت قد ظهرت تأثيرات بيكاسو في بعض رسومه ، وظهرت تأثيرات هنري مور ومارينو ماريني في بعض منحوتاته ، فان هذه التأثيرات ما لبثت ان تراجعت بمرور الوقت ، كما ان مدارس واساليب اخرى وازنتها، لان قوة الابداع الذاتية لدى جواد من المتانة والحيوية بحيث صاغت شخصيته الفنية بوضوح وتميز، خاصة وانه استطاع ان يهضم ثم يكّيف الكثير من العناصر والمؤثرات لما يعتبره افقاً فنياً يريد تحقيقه او الوصول اليه ، كي تتكون في

المنطقة العربية اضافة بمقدار ماهي مرتبطة بمسيرة الفن العالمي ، فانها تعبر عن شخصية محلية لها ملامحها واسلوبها ، وقد تتصل ايضاً بمدرسة بغداد التي بلورها في وقت سابق الواسطي ، وتتصل ايضاً بروح الفنون القديمة للمنطقة.

عودة جواد اذن الى بغداد وبقاؤه فيها طوال فترة الحرب ، وقيامه بتدريس مادة النحت في معهد الفنون الجميلة ، قبل ان يعاود الدراسة من جديد ، وهذه المرة في بريطانيا ، جعله اكثر نضجاً واستعداداً كي يكون مستقلاً، واكثر قدرة على التمييز لالتقاط ما يعتبره ملائماً له؛ ومن يدرس اعماله الفنية قبل السفر ، ثم اثناء اقامته في انكلترا ، يكتشف مدى القوة في هذه الاعمال ، وبداية تبلور شخصية متميزة ، الامر الذي لا يظهر بنفس الوضوح لدى فنانيين آخرين .

لا يراد القول هنا ان الدراسة لم تضف الكثير لجواد ، او انه تكّون واكتمل قبل ان يسافر ، ما يراد الاشارة اليه ان جواد كان في مستوى من النضوج والمعرفة بحيث تمكن ان يستوعب ، وفي فترات قصيرة ، ما لم يستطع غيره استيعابه بهذا المقدار او بهذه السرعة ، وسوف ينعكس هذا على النتائج لاحقاً .

مرحلة الدراسة لجواد في انكلترا انتهت عام 1949، عاد بعدها الى بغداد ، لتبدأ من ذلك الوقت ، والى حين وفاته ، عام 1961 ، فترة الانجاز الحقيقي ، النظري والعملي، من خلال اشتراكه مع آخرين ، خاصة فائق حسن ، في تأسيس جماعة الرواد ، من اجل ارساء دعائم قوية للفن ، سواء باقامة علاقات بين الفنانيين الذين يتفقون على قواسم مشتركة، او ايضاً اشاعة اجواء فنية عن طريق المعارض المشتركة وتبادل الآراء والنقد الفني لما يعرض، توسيع دائرة المهتمين والمتذوقين للفنون الجميلة ، خاصة وان تلك الفترة في العراق وفي اجزاء اخرى من المنطقة ، كانت حافلة بالاحداث والاحتمالات ، نتيجة الحراك الشعبي والتغيرات العاصفة التي اخذت تتوالى بتأثير القضية الفلسطينية بشكل خاص.

عودة جواد للتدريس في معهد الفنون ، دفعت به للاحتكاك بشكل واسع ويومي بحركة الثقافة والفن بكل معنى الكلمة ، وبالتالي عجلت بتبلور شخصيته واسلوبه ، خاصة وان الجو خلال تلك المرحلة كان حافلاً بالافكار والمخاضات على اكثر من مستوى .فالشعر الحديث اخذ يشق طريقه بكفاءة وجرأة ، وقدم نماذج

باهرة لشعراء سوف يحتلون مواقع بارزة على خارطة الشعر العربي الحديث ، امثال السياب والبياتي وملائكة ومردان وبلند الحيدري .

ومع الشعر كان المعمار ، بالنظرة والتطبيق ، من حيث استعمال اساليب جديدة ومواد جديدة ، وبرزت الى العيان خلال تلك الفترة نماذج مميزة انجزها مكية والجادرجي ومظلوم وقحطان عدني ، وكان اغلب هؤلاء ،اضافة الى رؤيتهم المعمارية المتقدمة ، ذوي صلة بالفن التشكيلي، تذوقاً ومشاركة واقتناء ،مما هيأ تفاعلاً بين الحقلين من ناحية ، وصلة فيما بين العاملين فيهما ، من ناحية ثانية .

ثم المسرح والنماذج الشجاعة التي اخذ يعرضها ، سواء من حيث الموضوعات او التجسيد ، وتلك الكوكبة من الممثلين الذين كانوا في كنف معهد الفنون الجميلة او الى جواره ، والذين ساهموا في خلق سوية مسرحية من نمط جديد .

ترافق كل ذلك مع كتابات نقدية تواكب الانجازات الفنية والثقافية ،وتتناول الجانبين النظري والتطبيقي ، وقد كان على رأس النقاد ، كتابة او ترجمة ، جبرا ابراهيم جبرا ، الذي ساهم بنشاط بارز في بلورة الاتجاهات الجديدة في معظم القضايا الفنية والثقافية ، وساعده في ذلك تعدد اهتماماته ومشاركاته ، وايضاً حالة الحراك التي اخذت تزداد وتتسع خلال تلك الفترة بحثاً عن جديد يعكس حالة الحراك ويعبر عنها .

جواد في خضم هذه الاجواء كان على صلة بأبرز ممثلي الاتجاهات الجديدة، والحوار حول جميع القضايا ، بحثاً عن اجابات،عن ملامح اكثر وضوحاً وتحديداً،ويستتبع ذلك نشوء حلقات وعلاقات تتخلل بعضها السياسة،وتعبر عن نفسها بمواقف واجتهادات تاخذ شكل تجمعات ثقافية او فنية ، ولذلك لا غرابة ان يصبح جواد ضمن جماعة " الرواد " التي اسسها فائق حسن وكان ابرز الفاعلين فيها.

تركزت اهتمامات جماعة " الرواد" على الرسم في الهواء الطلق ، والتعامل مع القضايا الريفية سواء أكانت موضوعات والواناً او مناخات ، وقد يكون هذا اضافة الى النزعة الانطباعية ، ما شكّل قواسم مشتركة لهذه الجماعة . أما البعد

الفكري ؛ أما البحث عن جذور بمّد الجسور مع الفنون القديمة للمنطقة ؛ او محاولة استيحاء اساليب كانت موجودة في فترة سابقة ، فان هذه لم تكن ضمن اولويات او هموم معظم افراد هذه الجماعة ، عدا جواد الذي كان يشارك الآخرين بضرورة التماس مع اساليب وموضوعات جديدة ، وكان يقّدر موهبة فائق حسن والوانه وتقنياته ، والنظرة الجديدة التي حملها من فرنسا ، لكن كان لديه ايضاً ما يتجاوز ذلك بحثاً عن افق جديد ، وعن شخصية مميزة ، ليس لفنه فقط وانما لفن المنطقة كلها، وهذا ما جعل لرحلته مع " الرواد " لا تطول كثيراً ، اذ ما لبث ان انفصل واسس " جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث "

الجماعة الجديدة ، بعناصرها وبيانها الاول ، ثم بالمعارض التي اقامتها ، تشكّل نقلة كبيرة في تطور الفن العراقي المعاصر ،لانها،في احد دوافعها،كانت استجابة للحراك الاجتماعي الذي يجتاح العراق والمنطقة ؛ وكانت تعبيراً عن القلق والبحث ورغبة الاكتشاف للآفق وللجذور معاً ، في محاولة لاضفاء الطابع المحلي ، والوصول الى الشخصية الخاصة للمنطقة ،وللاستفادة ايضاً من الموروث الهائل والمتراكم على شكل طبقات دون ان تعرف ماهيته او يستطاع الوصول الى جوهره .اذ لا يكفي تقليد الغرب، او اعتماد الخطوات والصيغ التي اتبعها ، من اجل الانتقال والارتقاء ، فالانطباعية رغم كونها نقلة مهمة في تطور الفن ، ومعايشة الموضوعات والمناخات اكثر اهمية من تخيلها ، وبالتالي فان التماس مع الطبيعة بعناصرها ومكوناتها تشكل قفزة مهمة ، الا ان البحث يجب ان يجري عن حالة تتجاوز ذلك وتتمرد عليه ، مما يستدعي فكراً واقتحاماً واسلوباً جديداً ، وهذا ما يجب ان تضطلع به " جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث" .

يشير جبرا الى ان هذا التوجه ترافق مع ظهور الموجة الوجودية في فرنسا، والتي لاقت في المنطقة العربية ارضاً خصبة ، وربما يكون تفسير ذلك ان النظريات الاخرى لم تلاق مناخاً مواتياً ، لعدم ملائمتها او للطريقة السيئة التي عرضت بها، مما دفع لاستقبال الموجه الجديدة بشكل ايجابي .

ان " جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث " سجل لمرحلة فنية بالغة الاهمية في تاريخ العراق ، اذ بالاضافة الى بيان التأسيس ، فان اسماء المشاركين وانجازاتهم ،

والنقد الفني الذي رافق المعارض التي اقاموها ، خاصة في المرحلة الاولى ، تشكل هذه الوقائع السجل التاريخي الذي يمكن ان يدون حول ما طرأ من تطورات فنية ، ومدى تأثير المدارس والافراد ، ولهذا فان تاريخ الجماعة هو ، بمعنى ما ، مرآة او تاريخ الفن العراقي والمراحل التي مر بها ، ثم العوامل والمؤثرات ، الايجابية والسلبية ، التي لعبت ادواراً في بلورة الحركة الفنية .

تكونت جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث في نيسان 1951 ، وكان عدد الاعضاء ، في البداية ، ثمانية . وقد صدر البيان الاول للجماعة ، ويتضمن النظرة الى الفن ، والدور الذي يمكن ان يضطلع به في المجتمع ، كما يحدد ، ولو نظرياً ، القواسم المشتركة للموقعين عليه، وكان يفترض ان يكون دليل عمل ، لكن نظراً لعدم وجود اساليب راسخة، ومدارس محددة للفن ، ولضعف التقاليد الفنية بشكل عام فان تعبيرات الفنانيين تفاوتت .

مع البيان الاول، وقد قرأه شاكر حسن آل سعيد، القى جواد سليم محاضرة ، واعقب هذين معرض لاعضاء الجماعة كان بمثابة الاعلان عن ولادة هذه الجماعة الفنية الجديدة ، خاصة وان البيان والمحاضرة ركزا على اهمية علاقة الفنان بالجمهور، وضرورة الاستفادة من اساليب التعبير الفنية العالمية ،دون اغفال اهمية التراث الفني المحلي ، ومحاولة خلق الشخصية الفنية المميزة .

صحيح ان بيانات فنية سبقت بيان جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث ، وقد ظهرت في مصر خلال عدة فترات سابقة ،الا ان تلك البيانات كانت امتداداً او صدى لما كان يحصل في اوروبا. فالبيان الاول الذي صدر في القاهرة عام 1938 ، وكان بعنوان " يحيا الفن المنحط" بدا رداً على الحركة الفاشية في اوروبا اكثر مما كان تلبية لحاجة محلية . كما صدر بيان آخر عام 1940 يدعو بحماس الى اعتماد الاساليب التجريدية والسريالية في الفن . بيان جماعة بغداد صدر عن هم مختلف ، وكان يطمح الى تحقيق فن ينبع من المنطقة ، اذ ان الرغبة بعمل جديد ومستقل كانت قوية لدى اعضاء الجماعة . قد يكون التعبير عن هذا الشيء الجديد والمشتعل غامضاً ، غائماً ، وربما متفاوتاً ، تبعاً لتصور كل واحد من الجماعة ، غير ان توجهاً جديداً ، او نزوعاً جديداً بدأ يظهر .

ورغم تفاوت اعمال المجموعة من حيث العدد ووضوح التجربة الجديدة، الا ان الاعمال التي عرضها جواد في المعرض الاول اتسم بعضها بعناصر شرقية ، كما ان اللغة التي حاول استعمالها في التعبير،رغم كونها لغة محلية ، فقد تخللها تأثر واضح بمدارس غربية ، الامر الذي سيتم تلافيه في معارض لاحقة من قبل جواد والآخرين .

ومع ان نقداً سلبياً غير قليل وُجّه الى جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث بعد معرضها الاول ، الا ان الحوارات التي جرت في الصحافة وفي حلقات المثقفين والمهتمين ، حول البيان والمعرض اشارت الى اهتمام متزايد ، والى الدور الذي يمكن ان يلعبه الفن في حياة الناس ، خاصة في مثل الاوضاع والظروف التي كان يمر بها العراق ، اذ ان الحراك الاجتماعي ، والصراع السياسي ، والاساليب التي كانت تتبعها السلطة لمنع التعبير والتغيير، ميزت الحياة الثقافية والفنية ، الامر الذي سيعزز وضع " الجماعة " ، ويزيد عدد اعضائها ، ويجعلها اكثر نشاطاً ، وبالتالي اكثر حضوراً .

واذا كان معرض الجماعة الاول بدا جنينياً في اجتهاداته ، ولم يستطع ان يعبر بوضوح عن الطموحات الاساسية للمشاركين فيه ، فان المعارض اللاحقة عبرت عن تطور ملموس : زاد عدد الاعضاء المنتسبين للجماعة اولاً ، ثم برزت تعبيرات اوضح في توجهات بعضهم الفنية ، خاصة جواد ، ولعل ابرز ما يشار اليه هنا : الوحدات الزخرفية المستمدة من البيئة او من التراث ، والتي تشي بالشخصية . قد يكون شاكر حسن الاسبق في ادخال هذه المفردات ، ومنذ المعرض الاول ، مما ساهم في خلق هذا المناخ ، اي اعتماد الزخرفة العربية الاسلامية ،كتعبير عن الهوية، الا ان آخرين جاروه ثم تجاوزوه في المعارض اللاحقة. يضاف الى ذلك ان جواد اكتشف مفردات او تعابير اخرى ذات دلالة ايضاً ، لعل ابرزها العيون السومرية ، اي الواسعة في وجوه الشخصيات التي يرسمها ، ثم الهلال والقوس.

اهمية جواد لا تتمثل فقط في التقاط هذه المفردات وتوظيفها في عمله الفني ، وانما في تطويرها المستمر ، وفي اعادة التوليد ، بحيث تصبح رمزاً او اقرب الى

الرمز ،خاصة وان طريقة الاستخدام تجاوزت النقل الحرفي او الاستعارة الى التشكيل المركب ، ولعل هذه ما اصبحت تشي بشخصيته اولاً ، ثم ما اصبحت من صفات الفن العراقي بعامة ، مع التطوير الذي يأخذ شخصية كل فنان.

ان العيون الوسيعة التي ميّزت وجوه جواد اصبحت احدى العلامات للفن العراقي المعاصر. يضاف الى ذلك :الالوان الشفافة ، وبعض الاحيان الالوان الصريحة ، وقد التقطها جواد ، من خلال احتكاكه بحياة الحرفيين واصحاب المهن ، ولعل ابرز لونين احتلا مساحات مميزة في لوحاته : الاصفر والاسود، ومشتقاتهما.

وبمقدار ما ظهرت هذه المفردات في اللوحة المرسومة، فان منحوتاته استفادت من رموز المنطقة ايضاً ، ولعل ابرز رمزين ظهرا هما الهلال والثور، فالهلال ظهر في عدد غير قليل من لوحاته ، وكان العنصر الوحيد ، تقريباً ، في تشكيل منحوتته السجين السياسي ، والذي اشترك فيها بمسابقة عالمية نالت الجائزة الثانية ، وفي هذا تأكيد على المناخ الفكري الذي يعيشه جواد ، وتأكيد ايضاً على الجو العام الذي كان سائداً في العراق بشكل عام ، وتأكيداً اخيراً على الالم الذي يشمل العالم كله نتيجة وجود ظاهرة السجن السياسي ، الامر الذي استدعى اجراء مسابقة عالمية لهذا الموضوع تحديداً.

أما الثور الذي ظهر في اعمال جواد،خاصة النحتية ، فكان تعبيراً عن احد رموز الحضارة الرافدينية ،كما يعتبر دليلاً على القوة والخصوبة معاً ، واخيراً امتحان لاحتمالات هذا الرمز وما يمكن ان يتولد منه ، الامر سيكون احد المفردات الرئيسية في تمثال الحرية ، الاثر الابرز من آثار جواد سليم

تتالت معارض جماعة بغداد للفن الحديث ، سنة بعد اخرى ، وتفاوتت المعروضات، من حيث صلة القربى فيما بينها ، ومن حيث الالتزام بالبيان الاول ، وبدا واضحاً ان ما يمكن ان تحققه الجماعة هو خلق المناخ الملائم للانتاج الفني اكثر مما هي قادرة على تحقيق مدرسة او اسلوب فني واحد ، وهذا ما سوف يوّسع هوامش الحركة والاجتهاد، وما سوف يجعل لكل فنان شخصيته المتميزة ، الامر

الذي يستدعي الاشارة الى هذه الخاصية في التطور الفني للجماعة ، وما سوف يظهر في البيان الثاني لها الذي سيصدر عام 1955 .

في خريف عام 1955 سوف يصاب جواد سليم بعارض صحي ، يضطره ملازمة الفراش فترة غير قصيرة ، وبالتالي يمنعه من ممارسة النحت ، ورب ضارة نافعة كما يقال ، اذ من خلال التفرغ للرسم ، ونتيجة التأمل واعادة ترتيب الاولويات، سوف يكون قادراً على انجاز عدد من اهم لوحاته ، مستفيداًً من الالوان الصريحة التي توصل اليها ،من التخطيطات التي كان قادراً على انجازها قبل ان يقدم على تنفيذ اللوحات ، ومدخلاً بعض الرموز الجديدة، خاصة الاشكال الهلالية ، مما سيؤدي الى تحقيق اهم واجمل النتائج في الرسم العراقي. من اللوحات التي نفّذت خلال هذه الفترة : " صبيان يأكلان البطيخ " و" موسيقى في الشارع " و "حكاية النساء وكيدهن عظيم "، والمستمدة من الف ليلة وليلة، وهذا يدل على احد فروع قراءاته وبحثه في كتب التراث ، ومحاولة الارتكاز على جذر وهو يختار الموضوعات .

لقد حقق خلال هذه الفترة قفزة في الفن العراقي ، خاصة في مجال التصوير ، ولعل مجموعة اللوحات التي اشرنا اليها ، وتلك التي اطلق عليها " بغداديات" ، وقد تناولت موضوعات من الحياة اليومية ، ومن التراث ، تعتبر من اهم انجازات الفن العربي بشكل عام.ولابد من الاشارة هنا الى ان جواد خلال هذه الفترة من تطوره اكتسب ملامحه الخاصة وربما النهائية ، واصبح تأثير الفنانيين الآخرين ، الكبار والخطرين ، قليلاً او معدوماً ، ويمكن ان نشير هنا الى بيكاسو وميرو وبونار.

طبيعي لا يمكن اعتبار الاعمال التصويرية لجواد، وفي اكثر من فترة، ذات سوية واحدة ، فهي تتفاوت من حيث القيمة او من حيث الاضافة التي تشكّلها ، خاصة وان جزءاً مما ينتجه كان بدافع تامين متطلبات الحياة ، ولم يكن هذا الجزء يبقى طويلاً او تسلط عليه الاضواء النقدية ، لانه يسافر او لا يعرض الا في اضيق الحدود.

يذكر جبرا في هذا المجال ان بعض اعمال جواد ، خاصة البورتريهات ، النسوية تحديداً، كانت تذهب مباشرة الى صاحبات العلاقة دون ان تتاح لها فرص العرض العام او الواسع ، وان اعمال بعض المعارض بيعت جميعها ،ولم تؤخذ لبعضها صور فتوغرافية ، وبالتالي لا يعرف الى من ذهبت او اين استقرت ، وهذه كلها تشكل خسارة كبيرة للفن العراقي، كما لا تتيح الامكانية لاعادة دراسة جواد دراسة كاملة ودقيقة ، مما يبقي جزءاً غير قليل من تراثه مبعثراً وغير معروف .

ولان جزءاً من تراثنا الثقافي والفني بشكل خاص ، لم يّدون او لم يصور، ولان شهوده بدأوا يغيبون تباعاً ، وليس من التقاليد الجارية ان يكتب ذوو العلاقة مذكراتهم او ان يحتفظوا باوراق ، فان الكثير من الحقائق والوقائع المتعلقة بهذا التراث سوف ينتهي دون ان يتاح التقاطه من براثن النسيان ، خاصة وان ذوي العلاقة ، من اقارب واصدقاء، لا يعتبرون ان مهماتهم بل من واجبهم ، ان يحتفظوا بالكثير مما يخص الذين رحلوا ، ثم ان يقدموا هذه الاشياء الى الجامعات ومراكز الابحاث او المتاحف المتخصصة ، كي تتولى هذه الجهات بدورها الحفاظ عليها ثم اتاحتها امام الدارسين .

جبرا ، صديق جواد الذي رافقه منذ بداية الخمسينات ، والذي كان على صلة وثيقة بكل التفاصيل المتعلقة بتلك المرحلة ، وحين تصدى للكتابة عن نصب الحرية ، اضطر الى استعارة دفتر مذكرات جواد، وقد استفاد من بعض التفاصيل المتعلقة بالنصب ، وبجواد الانسان والفنان ، ويبدي جبرا اسفه انه لم يصور دفتر المذكرات الذي اعاده للورنا ، زوجة جواد ، مع انه يجب ان يتاح للرأي العام ، رغم الحساسية والدقة في بعض الاجزاء ، لان الفنان يصبح ، او يجب ان يصبح واضحاً ومتاحاً حين يمضي الى الضفة الاخرى من النهر ، كما يقال ، اذ لا حاجة لان يبقى غامضاً وقصياً، كما لا يعتبر ان الاطلاع على التفاصيل ماس بحياته او تعدٍ على خصوصياته .

فاذا اضفنا الى ذلك : المناخ السياسي الذي كان مسيطراَ خلال تلك الفترة ، وما اتسم به من كبت للحريات ، وتحريم اي حوار جدي، واعتبار القضايا السياسية مجموعة من الاسرار والالغاز العصية على الفهم او التفسير ، فان

الكتابات الاخرى ، او اساليب التعبير الموازية ، يمكن ان تكشف جزءاً مما كان قائماً ، والذي لا يرد في الكتابات او المطبوعات الرسمية .

ولان المناخ السياسي المسيطر كان بهذا الشكل ، فان احدى النوافذ المتاحة ، والتي يمكن الاطلال عبرها ، هي نافذة الفن التشكيلي ، من خلال الموضوعات التي يختارها ، او طريقة التعبير. فالفن ، حسب تقدير السلطة السياسية ، لا يبوح بشكل مباشر ، او لا يقول شيئاً واضحاً ومحدداً ، كما ان الذين لهم علاقة به قلة معزولة ، وهذا ما جعل السلطة تترك هامشاً للفن ، وقد استطاع الفن ان يستفيد من هذا الهامش ، وان يعّبر ، قدر ما تتحيه له امكانياته ، الامر الذي ييسر قراءة المرحلة ، وان يكن بشكل غير مباشر ، وبالتالي استكشاف او تقدير الكثير من المحطات والمناخات التي كانت سائدة.

جواد الذي اندمج بحركة الثقافة والفن منذ ان انهى دراسته وعاد الى بغداد ، وباعتبار انه كان مسكوناً بهموم وعلاقات متنوعة ،فقد اصبح له حضور مميز ونشاط متعدد الوجوه ، وربما هذه الميزة كانت من علامات الحياة الثقافية والفنية في العراق فترة الخمسينات ، اذ بالاضافة الى التنوع ، فان القنوات كانت مفتوحة ومتواصلة وتغذي كل واحدة الاخرى ، مما اكسب الكثير من النشاطات غنى اضافياً واهتماماً يتجاوز ذووي العلاقة ، وكان هذا سبباً في الاختراق الذي حققه الشعر الحديث ، والذي بدأ من العراق ،وهو ذاته الذي كوّن الحاضنة للتشكيل العراقي ، فقد كان تنوع الاهتمامات ، وتعدد الثقافات والاختصاصات عاملاً ايجابياً في فتح آفاق جديدة ، وخلق اهتمام لدى قطاعات متعددة متزايدة.

جواد وهو يندمج في هذا الجو ، علاوة على كونه مدرساً لمادة النحت في معهد الفنون الجميلة ،وفي كليات ومعاهد اخرى ، كان يكتسب المزيد من الثقافة والتأثير ، وبالتالي يوسع علاقاته واهتمامه ، وينقل كشوفه الرائعة الى مجالات متعددة.

فكشوفاته الهلالية مثلاً لم تقتصر على السجين السياسي –المجهول ، اذ انتقلت الى اللوحة ، الى الملصق وانتقلت حتى للاقراط التي كان يصنّعها لزوجته ، لورنا ، التي تشاركه الرسم ، والى زوجات اصدقائه ، وشارك جواد ايضاً في اعداد

اغلفة الكتب لاصدقائه ، ما يعني ان الفن ليس مجرد قدرات تقنية ، او فروعاً معزولة ، وانما هو نشاط ومناخ وامكانية ان يفيض على كل ما حوله ، وقد وسّع هذا في دائرة المهتمين والمتابعين.

وكما اشرنا سابقاً ، توالت معارض الجماعة ، بمعدل معرض كل سنة ، تقريباً ، لكن بدا ان الآفاق والطموحات التي هدف اليها البيان الاول ليس من السهل ادراكها ، مما استدعى صدور بيان جديد يعطي لكل فنان الحرية في ان يعبر عن نفسه بالطريقة التي يرتئيها ، واغفل البيان الجديد ، في نفس الوقت ، الاشارة الى الرؤية الفنية او الفكرية المشتركة، كما لم يشر الى ضرورة بعث ما اندثر من تراث فني . وكان معنى ذلك : الاستمرار في خلق المناخ الفني ، لكن دون قيود ، واتاحة حرية اوسع لكل فنان ان يختار ويجرب ويبحث اعتماداً على اجتهاده .

لم يغفل جواد خلال هذه الفترة ، ولم يتخل، عن النحت. واذا تعذر عليه القيام باعمال نحتية كبيرة ، نظراً لما تتطلبه من وقت وتكاليف ، فقد واصل انجاز منحوتات صغيرة او متوسطة الحجم ، وكان ينضج في ذهنه احتمالات لاعمال قد تتاح له الفرصة مستقبلاً من اجل تنفيذها ، ولن تتأخر هذه الفرصة كثيراً ، فالاحتقان السياسي ، والذي بلغ ذروته بعد توقيع حلف بغداد ، وانتهاج سياسة اكثر ارتباطاً بالغرب ، واكثر تشدداً تجاه الجماهير والحريات العامة ، هذا الوضع ما لبث ان انفجر على شكل ثورة قام بها الجيش في تموز 1958 ، كما ادت الى تغيير جذري ، بما في ذلك اسقاط النظام الملكي واسقاط الطاقم الذي حكم العراق طوال عقود متواصلة.

مع سقوط النظام الملكي وقيام ثورة تموز تعالت الدعوة كي يشترك الفن ويعبر عن الحدث الكبير الذي وقع ،ووقع الاختيار على جواد ليتولى هذه المهمة.

يقول جبرا واصفاً طريقة جواد في اعماله الفنية الاساسية : " ان الفكرة لديه تشغله وقتاً ليس قصيراً ، ولها مظاهر وتجارب عديدة الى ان تأخذ شكلها النهائي ، ويظهر هذا في اكثر من عمل له ، ثم كيف اخذ شكله النهائي في تمثال الحرية " (4)

نصب الحرية هو اكثر الاعمال الفنية العربية المعاصرة شهرة واهمية ، الى جانب تمثال" نهضة مصر " لمحمود مختار ،اذ لا يكاد يذكر التمثال الا ويحضر اسم جواد سليم ، كما لا يذكر اسم جواد الا ويقترن بهذا التمثال ، لانه خلاصة فنه وانجاز عمره ، ويعتبر اثراً فنياً مميزاً وذا مواصفات تجعله في مصاف الانصاب الهامة في العالم كله.

ورغم ان التمثال يعبر عن عبقرية جواد وشخصيته ، كنحات مميز ، وصاحب رؤية فنية خاصة به ، الا ان الاثر في جوانب منه ، وبتفاصيل اساسية ، حصيلة للمدرسة الرافدينية من حيث طبيعة الرؤية وطريقة الانجاز . كما ان الشركاء المباشرين او غير المباشرين الذين كانوا الى جانب جواد ، والذين ساهموا بالافكار والاقتراحات والتنفيذ ،لعبوا ادواراً ، بنسب ومراحل ، في اعطاء هذا النصب الالق الذي يتميز به.

فان يختار جواد سليم النحت الناتئ ، لا النحت المجسم ، خلافاً للطريقة المتبعة في اقامة التماثيل ، خاصة في اوروبا ، يدل ، اولاً ، على الرغبة بالاستقلال والعودة الى الجذور للاستفادة من التراث الحضاري لوادي الرافدين ، اي المنحوتات السومرية والآشورية ؛ والثاني : الجو الثقافي الخصب في فترة الخمسينات ، والذي اعطى الكثير من الانجازات ذات التميز والنكهة المحلية.استناداً الى التراث والقدرة على المزج بين فروع المعرفة والثقافة ، بحيث كانت النتيجة خصوبة متعددة الوجوه والتعبيرات.

يعتبر رفعة الجادرجي ابرز المشاركين الذين وقفوا الى جانب جواد منذ وقت مبكر ، حصل هذا بحكم الصداقة الوثيقة التي ربطت الآثنين ، مما ادى الى خلق نظرة واحدة او متقاربة ، تعززت اكثر نتيجة الحوار الخصب والمستمر الذي رافق الفكرة ثم العمل ،ولذلك تعتبر اقتراحات ومساهمات الجادرجي ذات اهمية كبيرة، وقد تأكدت اكثر خلال مرض جواد ثم بعد غيابه ، اذ لعب دوراً حاسماً من اجل انجاز العمل ، وبالشكل الذي اراده جواد ، وقد تخلل ذلك بعض الخطورة ، اشار الجادرجي الى جزء منها في كتابه " الاخيضر او القصر البلوري" . ان هذه

التفاصيل بالغة الدلالة والاهمية ، فهي تروي بعض الاحداث الجديرة بان تبقى في الذاكرة ، للدلالة على الاجواء والتحديات التي كانت سائدة.

ومثلما كان لرفعة الجادرجي دور مميز في رحلة جواد الفنية ، خاصة نصب الحرية، فان النحات محمد غني حكمت ، الذي كان تلميذاً لجواد في بغداد ، ثم مساعداً له في ايطاليا اثناء التحضير وانجاز العمل ، واخيراً في التنفيذ مع جواد ثم بعد غيابه ، ان هذا الفنان يحمل الكثير من صفات التفاني ، خلافاً لآخرين حاولوا وضع العراقيل او تحريض المسؤولين كي يكون لهم دور ، وبالتالي فان مساهمته تكتسب صفة مزدوجة : انكاراً للذات، واعتبار العمل الفني لا ينهض الا اذا اخذ شكله وموقعه ، بغض النظر عن النوايا.

ورغم الفجوة في العلاقة بين الفنانيين ، خاصة اثناء مرض جواد في ايطاليا ، فقد تم تجاوز ذلك في وقت لاحق ، وبقي محمد غني وفياً لاستاذه وقدم ما يجب ان يقدم باخلاص.

أما لورنا سليم، زوجة جواد ، فقد كان لها حضور ايجابي فعال منذ بداية علاقتها بجواد، ثم بعد ان جاءت الى بغداد . فالعين الاجنبية التي لم تتعود مناظر والواناً وعلاقات تكتشف حين تراها اموراًً غير مألوفة ، وقد تعثر على مواد او علاقات تلائم العمل الفني ، وهذا ما يفسر ، ومنذ بداية وصول لورنا الى بغداد ، اهتمامها برسم البيوت العراقية القديمة ، ولالتقاطها الزخرفة ، ومن ثم توظيفها في اللوحة التي رسمتها ، ولذلك يمكن ان يدرس تأثيرها على جواد وتأثير جواد عليها ، اعتماداً على الرموز والالوان والاشكال المشتركة.

أما بخصوص دورها في نصب الحرية ، اثناء اقامتها في ايطاليا ، ثم بعد غياب جواد، فان رفعة الجادرجي يورد مجموعة من الوقائع والتفاصيل التي توضح جوانب من هذا الدور . واذا قدر لهذه المرأة – الفنانة ان تكتب سيرتها مع جواد فلابد ان نقع على معلومات وصور تضيء جوانب اضافية في حياة وعمل هذا المبدع الكبير .

ويمكن ان يشار هنا ايضاً الى تأثير جبرا ابراهيم جبرا ، بحكم الصداقة التي ربطته بجواد ، والدور النقدي الذي يمارسه عموماً في الحياة الثقافية والفنية في

العراق ، وكيف ان مساهماته كانت ذات اهمية اساسية في خلق الوعي والذائقة الفنية . وتعتبر دراسته عن جواد ونصب الحرية دراسة رائدة ولا غنى عنها ، اذ تنير جوانب هامة في مسيرة هذا الفنان ، وتقّدم قراءة ممتازة للنصب . ولقد اعتمدت عليها بشكل اساسي اثناء التعرض لتفاصيل متعلقة بهذا النصب .

والآن ، وقبل الشروع في الحديث عن تفاصيل نصب الحرية ، يجدر الالماح الى ان جواد لم يكن يملك الا تصوراً اولياً ولبعض اجزاء النصب فقط.اذ ما عدا القسم الاوسط (او الذي سيصبح هكذا لاحقاً) وهو عبارة عن الجندي الذي يحطم القيود ويقفز نحو الحرية ، ويمت هذا الجزء بصلة لتمثال السجين السياسي ، ماعدا هذا القسم ، فان باقي عناصر النصب جاءت تباعاً وعن طريق الترابط والتداعي معاً.

حين كلّف جواد باقامة نصب لثورة تموز لم يقدم سوى فكرة اولية لما يمكن ان يكونه القسم الاوسط لهذا النصب ، وتحديداً الذي اشرنا اليه ، ثم اخذت الاجزاء الاخرى تتكامل في خياله ، بالتشاور مع الذين تعاون معهم ، خاصة رفعة الجادرجي.

فاختيار النحت الناتئ له علاقة بجذور تاريخية ، لان نموذجاً كهذا يتطلب تجاوز مبدأ الكتلة نحو افق ممتد ، وهذا ما جعل الجادرجي يقترح فكرة الافريز الذي ينتشر فوقه النصب، ربما بتأثير رؤية اللافتات التي ملأت الشوارع ، وقد ظهرت فجأة ، وكانت بمثابة الصرخة.

ان فكرة اللافتة تتضمن في الذاكرة والوجدان الشعبي معنى اعمق وابعد ، تتضمن الدعوة الى المشاركة وتحمل معنى الراية التي يجتمع الناس حولها ، كما ترمز الى رابطة من نوع يقرّب ويحدد ، وتشير في نفس الوقت الى الترحيب والتكريم ، لذلك فان اختيار هذا النموذج ، ليشاد عليه النصب ، يحمل معاني هامة ، ويفيض عنها الى معاني رمزية اخرى. فالافريز حين تنتشر فوقه وحدات النصب وتاخذ شكل الختم الاسطواني ، وهو ابرز ما خلفه السومريون من آثار، فان هذه الوحدات تمتد وتتوالى لنقرأ من خلالها تاريخاً ، ونشهد احداثاً ، ونعرف اننا في هذا المكان بالتحديد من العالم .

وبعيداً عن اللافتة او الختم الاسطواني التي كونت القاعدة او الارضية للنصب ، فان " قراءات " اخرى تتسلل للذاكرة ، فقد يشهد فيه بعضهم بيت الشعر العربي المؤلف من صدر وعجز ، باعتبار انه يروى او يسمع بطريقة الايقاع الشعري ، اي الصوت الذي يعقبه الصمت ، نظراً لان كل وحدة في النصب مستقلة ، ولها ، في نفس الوقت، علاقة بما قبلها ثم بما بعدها . ورأى غير هؤلاء في النصب علاقة بالمسلات الفرعونية ، حيث جرت العادة ان تروي المسلة وقائع واحداثاً تمجد الملك الذي امر باقامتها ، وبالتالي فانها تروي تاريخ هذا الملك وتلك الحقبة . ويمكن ان يقال ايضاً ان النصب يشبه بيت الشعر ، ومن المعروف ان بيت الشعر تقاس اهميته وكرم صاحبه بطوله وعدد الاعمدة التي تسنده .

اذا انتقلنا من القاعدة ، الافريز الذي قام عليه النصب ، الى التفاصيل نجد ان الارتفاع الذي تم اختياره عن الارض هو ستة امتار ، أما طول الافريز كله فيبلغ خمسين متراً ، وعرضه عشرة امتار . ولعله من اكبر النصب في العالم .

وباعتبار ان النصب يروي تاريخاً، فان التعامل معه يبدأ من اليمين الى اليسار، لانه يسجل ثلاث مراحل : مرحلة قبل الثورة ، وما تخللها من قهر وعبودية واستعمار ، ثم مرحلة الثورة ذاتها ، التي حطمت القيود ، عن طريق الجيش ، وحررت الشعب . أما المرحلة الثالثة فانها ترسم ما ينتظر العراق من نمو وازدهار وتآخ ، عن طريق الصناعة والزراعة معاً اللذين سيخلقان الرفاه، وان العرب والاكراد ، سكان البلاد ، يؤكدان العيش المشترك والتعاون. هذا عدا عن الرموز الاخرى ، مثل مياه الانهار وقوة الحياة وخصبها ، وكلها تمثل ما يزخر به هذا البلد وما ينتظره من تقدم وقوة وعزة.

عدد وحدات النصب اربع عشرة، وهو ما يرمز الى تاريخ 14 تموز ، تاريخ قيام الثورة . وهذا العدد يشكل ضعف العدد الرمز حسب التقويم البابلي ، والذي يحظى باهمية وقداسة معاً ، فالارض مكونة من سبع طبقات ، وكذلك السماء ، وايام الاسبوع هي سبعة ايام،والارض تم خلقها في سبعة ايام ، وهكذا ، مما جعل اختيار الرقمين ، ذا دلالة لا تخفى .

يبلغ عدد البشر الموجودين في النصب خمسة وعشرين، يضاف اليهم الحصان في البداية والثور في نهاية النصب ، وكل هذه الكائنات مليئة بالحيوية والقوة والوعد . اكثر من ذلك : ان مخلوقات النصب تضّج بالحياة والعنفوان ، وتوحي بالقرب والدفء معاً ، حتى لتظهر، في لحظات كثيرة ، وكأنها مستعدة لمغادرة اماكنها ، ومشاركة الناس حياتهم ومشاعرهم ، لانهم مثل الآخرين او صورة لهم ، وهذه من المزايا النادرة التي يحسها الانسان تجاه بعض الاعمال الفنية ، فهي قريبة ، مألوفة الى درجة تصبح جزءاً من المحيط والمناخ، وهذا ما يشكّل احد مظاهر عبقرية جواد في خياراته وفي طريقة التعبير عن هذه الخيارات.

واذا كان تاريخ العراق الماضي قد اتضح من خلال اجزاء النصب،فان آفاق المستقبل لا تغيب ، خاصة من الرموز المبثوثة في ثنايا العمل ، وتحديداً في القسم الأخير . الامر الذي يحرك خيال كل من ينظر اليه بحثاً عن الآتي .

ورغم ان النصب ارتفع شامخاً منذ عام 1961 ، يروي ، بعبقرية ، جزءاً من تاريخ العراق ، بعد ان نجا من القصف الاميركي الوحشي الذي تعرضت اليه بغداد اكثر من مرة ، فلابد من الاشارة الى بعض المصاعب والتحديات التي واجهت هذا النصب في اكثر من مرحلة .

فبعد تكليف جواد بالعمل طُلب اليه ، تلميحاً في البداية ، ثم بايحاء، وصولاً الى الصراحة المطلقة ، ان يتضمن النصب صورة لعبد الكريم قاسم ،زعيم الثورة ، وحين لم يلتقط الرسالة او لم يستجب اليها بدأت المضايقات ، سواء بوقف التمويل او تأخيره ، ثم معاكسات السفارة في روما ، وصولاً الى التحدي ، وقد ادى ذلك الى مرضه ودخوله الى المصّح وبقائه فترة غير قصيرة . وفي هذا الخصوص يورد رفعة الجادرجي مقداراً من التفاصيل الموجعة . وظل الامر كذلك في مراحل لاحقة ، وحتى الايام الاخيرة قبل ازاحة الستار عن النصب .

لقد واجه نصب الحرية مصاعب وتحديات في اكثر من مرحلة ، ولعله في ذلك يشبه تمثال نهضة مصر لمختار، وهو امر متوقع او مألوف في العالم الثالث ، حيث اللحظة تسيطر على الزمن كله ، والمزاج يتحكم في اتخاذ القرارات ، والروح الفردية هي السائدة ، والتنافس غير المشروع اساس النظرة والعلاقات ، والكيد

الخفي الدافع في اتخاذ المواقف ، وغالباً ما يدفع الفنان الثمن ، وهذا ما حصل مع جواد .

اذ بعد المضايقات العديدة التي تعرض لها من اجل وضع صورة للزعيم في صلب التمثال ، والحصار الذي ضُرب حوله لارغامه على ذلك ، ثم بسبب الارهاق الجسدي وهو يواصل العمل، وقيامه شخصياً باعباء لا تناسب وضعه الصحي ، تعرض جواد ، مرة اخرى، لازمة قلبية . ورغم المحاولات التي بذلت لانقاذه في المستشفى ، الا ان الازمة كانت ثقيلة الى درجة لم تمهله طويلاً ، اذ فارق الحياة في الشهر الاول من عام 1961، ولم تثبت ، حتى ذلك التاريخ ، سوى قطعة واحدة من النصب . أما القطع الباقية فقد تولى رفعها وتثبيتها رفعة الجادرجي ولورنا سليم ، ورفع الستار عن النصب في الموعد المحدد ، وكما اراده جواد ، اي دون اضافة الصورة ، وكما ناضل هو والذين عملوا معه كي لا تكون!

بغياب جواد ، ولم يكن قد تجاوز الثانية والاربعين ، خسر العراق فناناً عبقرياً ، ورغم الخسارة فان الآثار التي تركها تحكي قصة فنان مميز ، وتروي تاريخ احدى اهم الحقب، فنياً ووطنياً ، لعراق القرن العشرين .

وفي محاولة لقراءة ابرز آثاره النحتية : نصب الحرية ، والالمام ببعض التفاصيل المتعلقة بهذه المأثرة الهامة ، رأيت ان استعير بعض ما كتبه جبرا ابراهيم جبرا حول هذا النصب.

الهوامش

انعام كجه جي ، *لورنا، سنواتها مع جواد سليم*، دار الجديد، 1998، ص 39

علاوة على الفنانيين البولنديين الذين اقاموا فترة في العراق ، فان احد الفنانيين والنقاد الانكليز ، كنث وود، الذي جاء الى العراق ضمن القوات البريطانية التي رابطت في هذا البلد ، عام 1944 ، كان ذا تأثير مميز على جواد ، اذ يعتبر ابرز نقاد عمله خلال تلك الفترة.

جبرا ابراهيم جبرا ، جواد سليم *ونصب الحرية* ، وزارة الاعلام ، بغداد 1974

THE MONUMENT OF FREEDOM*

'Abd al-Rahman Munif

Translated by
Karam Nachar*

Jawad Salim and Fa'ik Hasan are considered the two most prominent founding fathers of contemporary Iraqi art. Fa'ik preceded Jawad in life and practice, and long outlived him too. But Jawad's impact on Iraqi art is more apparent, especially since he was not only a painter, but also a sculptor. In both fields, his accomplishments were of such a high caliber that they could qualify as a turning point in their own right in the artistic development of Iraq and the entire Arab world.

In this brief overview, we will only talk about Jawad and attempt to devote a later study to Fa'ik Hasan.

Jawad Salim is considered a pioneering artist. Besides his many accomplishments in both painting and sculpture, he was a theorist, or at least he had opinions. His opinions were reflected in his behavior, in his stands and in the few writings he left behind. His accomplishments were possible because of his unique talent as well as his participation in the many artistic groups that came into being in Iraq in the fifties and sixties, such as the Pioneers and after it the Baghdad Group for Modern Art.

But as to how he was able to occupy this place, one has to take into consideration several other factors. His talent was accompanied with diligence and experience and enriched with exposure to international art movements through his studies in France, Italy and England and through his many friendships with artists from other schools and countries. Moreover, there was his meticulous search in the environment and in the cultural heritage for roots that could distinguish the art of the region and set it apart in terms of features, flavor and style.

There is no doubt that the period Jawad lived in was of special importance. For it was a period of turmoil, interaction and a search for everything new in all fields. Thus, it was the formative period of contemporary Arab art that gave it its features and delineated its directions. This had an impact on future generations of artists; especially insofar as the generation of pioneers paved the way and founded

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certain traditions which would subsequently serve as norms and markers for later interpretations.

When you consider Jawad's short life and the many sufferings and difficulties which it was fraught with, we cannot but pay him more respect and show more reverence for his practical and theoretical accomplishments and wonder: What if he had lived longer and had better working circumstances? What if his environment had been more ripe for and conducive to a true artistic renaissance?

But before giving a complete assessment of Jawad Salim's achievements, we should stop at the most important stages of his life and know the circumstances that influenced him.

Jawad was born in 1919 in Ankara to an Iraqi family. His father was a military officer based there. Jawad was the second oldest son. He was influenced from an early age by his father who practiced painting as a hobby. He had many paintings, the most important of which is the one of the *serai* in Baghdad that was painted in the first decade of the twentieth century. His hobby had an impact on all the children inasmuch as they all practiced painting. The mother, too, had a distinct artistic taste and practiced certain arts, especially embroidery.[1]

As is often the case, real talent overshadows what is beneath it. This is what happened when Jawad's genius emerged. Not only did the father stop painting, but he also recognized the superior nature of his son's talent and took pride that the hobby had found a member in the family to keep it going. It was a similar scenario to that of Picasso and his father. Although his brothers and sister kept painting, and despite the special place Nizar and Nazihah were able to achieve, Jawad's talent still overshadowed theirs. They simply did not receive what they deserved in terms of recognition. This happened not only because of Jawad's talent but probably also because of the course of events. Nevertheless, it was ultimately the recognition of his superior talent – a talent that imposed itself apart from effort and by the virtue of its mere existence – which became a matter of fact. This is what happened to Jawad in comparison to his brothers with respect to public opinion.

Art had absolute priority for Jawad. He had hardly finished his high school education before he was sent to Paris to study fine arts. This was in 1938, during one of the most fertile periods in the development of French art and when Paris was a destination for many foreign artists who took it as a place of residence first, with some eventually coming to consider it home. But hardly a year had passed during Jawad's stay in Paris before World War Two broke out. He had to leave to Italy, hoping to continue his studies in Rome. But the war was quick to spread there as well, forcing him to return to Baghdad. There, he was appointed an instructor of sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts.

Jawad's stay in Paris and Rome was a period of preliminary learning. He had the chance to visit museums, to get to know landmarks and ruins, to get acquainted with the art scene and to be introduced to many artists. After his return to Baghdad, he turned to practice, experimentation and the exploration of possibilities and options in a very rich and dynamic milieu. At that time, Iraq and the region in general were in a period of political, social and intellectual upheaval. A readiness to accept and interact with the new was present and forceful. Every intellectual and artist was facing questions on more than one level and looking for answers to them.

Many other factors in that period had an immense influence on the artistic movement and on Jawad Salim as well. The most important of these was probably the presence of Polish soldiers, a number of whom were artists who interacted with the Iraqi artistic community. Jawad was introduced to some of these individuals and eventually became friends with them after the two groups discovered they had many things in common. They were all influenced by the new French impressionism and expressionism, especially the work of artist Pierre Bonnard.

The three most influential Polish artists in the movement in Iraq were Jabski, Matuchik and Joseph Parima. They engaged in friendships with Iraqi artists including Jawad. Besides painting and providing models, they were careful to meet with intellectuals and discuss artistic and cultural issues; furthermore, they often expressed their opinions concerning the accomplishments of Iraqi artists, something which had a significant impact on Jawad and helped hone his talents.

In addition to Polish artists, English artists and critics who passed through Iraq with the British forces stationed there came in contact with Iraqi art and had an influence on the artistic movement in general and Jawad in particular.[2]

But this chain of influences was only complete when Jawad came to discover al-Wasiti and the Baghdad school of art. His unique perspective was informed by the achievements of this school and set it apart in terms of styles and colors. His work at the Iraqi Museum and in sculptural restoration brought him closer to ancient Iraqi art and accentuated the historical depth of his approach. At the same time, Jawad's network of relationships with experts became more extensive and his knowledge expanded; it further fostered his understanding and appreciation of Mesopotamian mythology and arts, things which would come to have an increasing influence on his artistic work.

On one hand, the diverse springs of Jawad's education rooted him very deeply in his country's soil while at the same time building bridges that connected him to the currents of contemporary international art, on the other. This led him to make many important decisions during his artistic journey: his use of popular subjects, of colors, costumes and traditions, Iraqi folklore, in addition to his practice of going outside, so to speak, to find subjects, colors and features (in contrast to painters of the older generation who preferred staying in their workshops and relying on memory to retrieve shapes and colors, and let their imagination and desire add, embellish and move). All these factors and others gave a powerful thrust to the artistic movement and provided Jawad with many opportunities for a fresh start. It will take time to fully articulate what this start was.

The time between Jawad's return to Iraq and his second trip to continue his studies, this time in England, was not a period of idleness. Jawad threw himself into the flames of experiment and discovery on more than one level. Teaching sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts and working at the museum and with his artistic accomplishments, especially in sculpture, he realized that he was meant for both painting and sculpture equally. He realized that he liked both to the extent that he was unable to quit either. The paintings he produced at the time and especially the sculpture The Mason which he had finished just before departing to Britain were all indicators that Jawad was to keep practicing both of these arts and that he was unable to abandon either of them.

But sculpture required its own tools and its own atmosphere, things which were not readily available, especially in a Muslim country and during the first period of Jawad's life. Thus, in addition to a religious ban on idols and the association between sculpture and paganism, sculpture was an artistically and financially

demanding art which an individual artist could not always manage alone. This required the intervention and cooperation of other capable parties, something which Jawad confronted more than once during his work. These difficulties and obstacles pushed him to channel his artistic energy into painting, not as a secondary replacement but rather as another domain for his innovative skills, with certain artistic possibilities which were not available in other areas. Dividing his time between sculpture and painting had, in other words, a positive hue. His practice of one did not mean the abandonment of the other or the dismissal of the possibility of returning to it once there were opportunities and amenable conditions. It was also possible for the tools and methods of one domain to benefit those of another and for one stage to be of help to another, especially once these tools and methods had matured with practice and become flexible enough to be used positively and freely across different artistic fields.

Although Jawad Salim was as much a painter as a sculptor, he never practiced both at the same time. For when he immersed himself in painting, he was a painter first and foremost. This means that he did not employ his sculpting style in his paintings; likewise, when he sculpted he did so with the spirit and style of a sculptor alone. This does not appear to the same degree in other artists who practiced, or had to practice, these two arts at the same time or alternately.

It is useful to keep thinking about this characteristic of Jawad Salim's art. For the artist is often pushed to import some of his tools from a certain field into another and therefore be known as a sculptor who paints or a painter who sculpts; his original skill betrays him in a way and proves him much more resilient. Jawad almost goes through ablutions before moving from one to another. When he carries the paintbrush, it seems as if he does not work with anything else. The same holds true when he sculpts, for he seems like a sculptor from the beginning, one who does nothing but sculpture. This trait requires a great deal of self-discipline and much practice, in addition to a detailed and objective knowledge of both arts and of what each of them requires in terms of methods and approach.

Periods occurred in Jawad Salim's life when he did not sculpt and was just painting. This was perhaps due to the unavailability of some of the prerequisites of or conditions for sculpture or because of illness or because he thought the subjects in mind were more appropriate for painting. This was probably to the benefit of Iraqi art, since the matter was not limited to his technical skill or theoretical knowledge. In addition to combining those two, Jawad Salim was moved by a spirit of research and the desire to root himself in space; he was especially open to ancient arts, Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian, which became tantamount to his artistic reservoir.

One of the characteristics that distinguished Jawad was that a subject or idea stayed with him for a long time. Only after he examined a thing's many facets, tested its possibilities, and slowly finished preparing for it, would he place it in its appropriate place or in the medium that best expressed it. The mother, for example, was an important theme for Jawad and despite the numerous scenes it featured in, he held back for a long time and intended primarily to articulate it through sculpture. Thus, once he perfected his tools and was sure he could give the subject his best efforts, he started working on it. The same thing could be said about other paintings, like the Siesta. The subject had been kept in abeyance until the flash of innovation that gave him insight into its articulation arrived.

Although it is hard to divide Jawad into phases or periods of time or to treat his sculpture apart from his painting, doing just that – even if it remains

strictly heuristic – helps achieve a better and more complete knowledge of his artistic career.

The first trip to France and Italy was like an exploration of the sources of contemporary art and a contact with its main features in terms of periods, schools and styles; this was what formed his tendencies and priorities in terms of choices and influences. But since this period was short and followed by his return to Baghdad and an accompanying search for and contact with other influences, Jawad's artistic character was shaped with a minimal amount of dominant factors, unlike other artists who fall under the influence of a single school or approach which eventually becomes hard for them to go beyond. This happened with some artists, including Iraqis who were influenced by French impressionism and were unable to depart from it except partially and then with great difficulty.

Jawad kept a distance, sometimes a significant one, between himself and the dominant schools and styles in Europe at the time. A certain influence by Picasso was admittedly apparent in his paintings as was the imprint of Henry Moore and Marino Marini on his sculptures. But these influences had scarcely come into effect before they started declining and were mitigated by other schools and styles. The individual innovative prowess of Jawad was solid and supple enough to allow for a distinct artistic character to emerge. Especially since he was able to absorb and then adjust to the many elements and influences of what he considered an artistic horizon that he wanted to achieve and arrive at, in order for something connected to the progress of world art to also exist in the Arab world. Such art would exhibit a local character with its own features and approaches and could be linked to the Baghdad school which was founded at an earlier time by al-Wasiti; it would also connect with the spirit of the ancient arts in the region.

Jawad's return to Baghdad and his stay there during the war and the sculpture course he taught at the Institute of Fine Arts before his went back to his studies in England, all made him more mature, ready to be independent and better equipped to pick and choose what he deemed good for him. An examination of the works he produced before his second trip and during his stay in England would reveal their force and the genesis of a distinct character – something not as easily discernable in other artists.

I do not want to say here that studying did not contribute much to Jawad; nor do I want to say that he had already been artistically formed before his travels. But I do want to highlight the level of maturity and knowledge he had, a quality that allowed him to absorb in short periods of time what others could not in terms of amount and speed. This will have important implications later on.

Jawad's studies in England ended in 1949. His subsequent return to Baghdad ushered in a period of real accomplishments which lasted until his death in 1961. This happened at a theoretical and practical level through his participation – along with that of others like Fa'ik Hassan – in the formation of the Pioneers Group. Its purpose was to establish solid bases for art, to build relationships among artists who had much in common, and to spread artistic culture through collective exhibitions, the exchange of artistic opinion and critique and finally through broadening the circle of those interested in fine arts. This time in Iraq and other parts of the region was especially conducive to such efforts as many events were taking place. Moreover, possibilities were wide open as a result of popular mobilization and upheavals especially in the wake of the Palestinian nakba.

Jawad's return to teach at the Institute of Fine Arts pushed him into the midst of the cultural and artistic movement. It quickly honed his character and style,

especially since the period was fraught with ideas and changes on more than one level. Modern poetry was leading the way with skill and audacity. It provided brilliant examples of poets who would come to occupy prominent places on the map of modern Arabic poetry, like al-Sayyab, al-Bayati, Mala'ika, Mardan and Buland al-Haidari.

Like poetry, architecture was employing new styles and material, both in theory and in practice. Many original designs emerged in that period, produced by Makkiya, al-Jadirji, Mazlum and Qahtan Adani. Most of them were attuned to fine arts. This paved the way for an interaction between the two fields and a relationship between their main practicioners.

Theater was also making impressive advances and presenting new and courageous forms and themes. There was of course a group of actors and actresses who were around the Institute of Fine Arts and contributed to creating new theatrical standards.

All of this was accompanied by critical writings addressing the practical and theoretical aspects of art. Leading the critics was Jabra Ibrahim Jabra who played a prominent role in setting the agenda for most artistic and cultural questions. His many interests and activities helped him, as did the renewed dynamism which was growing and looking for what was new that could reflect this dynamism and articulate it.

In the midst of all this, Jawad was in touch with the most important representatives of new schools. He was part of an ongoing discussion centered on all pressing issues, relentlessly looking for answers as well as clear and sharply defined ideas. Networks which were partly political emerged and expressed themselves in stances and interpretations that took the form of cultural and artistic groups. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Jawad joined and played a prominent role in the Pioneers Group which was founded by Fa'ik Hassan.

The Pioneers Group's interests focused on painting landscapes and the articulation of rural themes in subjects, colors and scenes. This, in addition to the impressionist touch, is probably the main defining trait of the group. The intellectual dimension, i.e. the search for roots in the ancient arts of the region or the revival of styles that were present at an earlier time, was not a priority for nor of interest to most members of the group. Though he shared their quest for new subjects and approaches and valued the talent of Fa'ik Hassan, his colors, techniques and the new perspective he brought from France, Jawad had broader aspirations. He sought a new perspective and a special character not only for his art but for the region as a whole. Jawad's time with the Pioneers had thus soon come to an end. He left them and founded the Baghdad Group for Modern Art.

This new group was a turning point in the development of contemporary Iraqi art in terms of its members, its first manifesto and the exhibitions it later organized. In one way, it was a response to the social turmoil pervading Iraq and the region; in another, it was an expression of restlessness, a quest or a desire to explore the past and the future at the same time. It was an attempt to capture a certain local mark or character of the region and to make use of its immense legacy that had accumulated in many layers without ever being defined or seriously penetrated. Emulating the West or following the same steps or formulas it followed was not sufficient for progress. It is true that impressionism was an important development and that living in a certain environment is more important than imagining it and that the quest for nature was a significant step forward; but, the search should be for a state that transcends this and rebels against it. This requires a

new set of ideas, styles and incursions and this was what the Baghdad Group for Modern Art had set itself to accomplish.

Jabra remarks that this development coincided with the emergence of French existentialism which was favorably received in the Arab region. A possible explanation for this is that, unlike previous theoretical currents, existentialism was not incompatible with the Arab World, the things which ironically encouraged the positive reception of these new theoretical influences.

The Baghdad Group for Modern Art was an emblem for a very important period in Iraq's history, since in addition to its manifesto, the names of its members, their accomplishments and the critiques accompanying the exhibitions they organized – especially in the first period – all represent a historical chronicle of artistic developments and the influence of certain schools and individuals. The history of the group could thus be perceived as a mirror or a history of Iraqi art, the stages it went through and the different influences – be they negative or positive – which have shaped its development.

The group was founded in April 1951. At the beginning, its members numbered eight. The group's first declaration included its view of art and the role it should play in society. The manifesto specified – though theoretically – the common denominators among its signatories and was supposed to act as a work plan. However, the absence of established methods and specific artistic allegiances created certain divergences among the eight artists.

After a reading of the first manifesto by Shakir Hasan Al Said, a lecture by Jawad Salim took place and an exhibition of the artists' works followed. This was to declare the birth of a new artistic group. The manifesto and the lecture emphasized the importance of the relationship between the artist and the audience as well as the necessity to take advantage of international modes of artistic expression without neglecting the importance of the local artistic legacy, i.e. the quest to create an authentic artistic character.

It is true that many artistic manifestos preceded the one by the Baghdad Group for Modern Art. Indeed, many had appeared in Egypt during previous periods. But they were by and large an echo or a derivation of European developments. The very first manifesto, for instance, which appeared in Cairo in 1938 with the title "Long Live Degenerate Art" was more of a polemical response to European fascism than an answer to any local need. Another which appeared in 1940 forcefully encouraged the adoption of abstraction and surrealism. The manifesto of the Baghdad Group came out of a different concern. It yearned to produce art that sprang forth from the region. The desire for something new and independent was very strong among the members of the group. The expression of this burning desire might have seemed puzzling, nebulous and different for each member; but what is certain is that a new direction or at least tendency was born.

The works of the group varied in terms of number and clear originality. But Jawad's works in the first exhibition combined Eastern elements; he used a local medium of expression with clear influences of Western schools and styles. It was something that Jawad and others would try to avoid in subsequent exhibitions.

A significant amount of negative criticism was directed at the Baghdad Group for Modern Art after its first exhibition. But subsequent discussions in the press and among circles of intellectuals and critics about the manifesto and the exhibition pointed to an increasing interest in the role art might play in people's lives, especially during the circumstances that Iraq was going through. Social turmoil, political strife and the different methods the authorities tried to curtail

change were all characteristic of the cultural and artistic life at the time. This would help consolidate the status of the group, increase its membership and make it more active and hence generally more effective.

The first exhibition was perhaps embryonic in its interpretations. It was most likely unable to articulate very clearly the basic ambitions of its members. But subsequent exhibitions reflected a tangible development: the numbers of members increased and the expression of the artistic views of some became clearer, especially those of Jawad. I am specifically referring here to the ornamental units inspired by local culture which were most expressive of a new language. Shakir Hasan was probably the first to introduce this new vocabulary from the very first exhibition, which most likely helped create this new mode, i.e. the use of Arab Islamic adornment as an expression of identity. Others were quick to follow Shakir's lead in subsequent exhibitions. In addition, Jawad employed other expressions of equal significance, like Sumerian eyes: the big eyes of his characters' faces, in addition to the crescent and the arch.

Jawad's importance does not only lie in picking up these vocabularies and employing them in his work, but also in the way he constantly reworked and recreated them. This reached a level where they became of an allegorical nature, especially since he never employed them literally but always through complex reproduction. This specific trait not only bespoke his own maturing artistic touch, but also reflected more broadly on Iraqi art, notwithstanding the individual character of each artist.

The big eyes which distinguished Jawad's faces have thus become one of the important markers of contemporary Iraqi art. One could probably add to that the transparent and sometimes loud colours which Jawad probably picked up during his interaction with artisans and workers. Black, yellow and their derivatives were perhaps the colors occupying the most significant parts of his paintings.

As much as these themes were employed in Jawad's painted works, parallel ones appeared in his sculpture. The two most recurrent local symbols were those of the crescent and the bull. The first appeared in many of his works and was the one constituent element of his sculpture The Political Prisoner which came second in an international contest Jawad participated in [see image of monument for freedom p. 116]. This work helps us understand the intellectual world in which Jawad lived. It also clues us into the general spirit of the time in Iraq and the universal pain produced by the phenomenon of political oppression. In fact, it was the general theme of that international contest.

The bull also featured in many of Jawad's sculptures. It was a symbol of Mesopotamian civilization and a sign of strength and virility. It was almost like an experimentation of this symbol and it could generate what would become one of the main themes of the Monument of Freedom, Jawad's most important work.

Many exhibitions of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art followed, year after year. The works varied in their themes and in their commitment to the first manifesto. Eventually, it became clear that the group could do more in terms of creating an environment conducive to artistic life and production than in actually forming a certain school or a unified artistic style. This in fact would leave room for individual interpretation and mobility and, hence, for each artist and his special character. It also calls attention to this special trait in the artistic development of the group, something which would appear more clearly in its second manifesto in the year 1955.

In the fall of that year, Jawad Salim fell ill and was forced to be bedridden for not a short while. This stopped him from practicing sculpture for some time. But he turned to painting again and as a result of contemplation and a reordering of priorities, he was able to finish some of his most important works, making use of the loud colors he discovered and the preliminary drawings he finished earlier. He introduced some of his new symbols, especially crescent shapes, something which led to some of the most important and beautiful results in Iraqi art. The paintings he finished during that period include "Two Boys Eating Melon", "Music in the Street" and "The Story of Women and their Great Deceit" which was taken from *The Thousand and One Nights*, a telling indication of Jawad's reading and research in cultural classics and his attempt to anchor himself in a certain milieu when picking subjects.

Iraqi art was able to leap ahead during this period, especially in the field of painting. The group of paintings we just mentioned and those which Jawad called "Baghdadiat" which dealt with themes from daily life and from the heritage are probably some of the greatest and most representative of that period. Here, one should mention that Jawad's art at this time acquired its special and perhaps final features. The influence of other, important and serious artists like Picasso, Miro and Bonnard became minimal if it was not completely gone.

It is only natural that Jawad's paintings were not all of the same quality or caliber. They vary in their value or with respect to the new contribution they constitute, especially since Jawad sometimes painted in order to make a living. This did not amount to a significant portion of his works, however, and was not subject to critical assessment as such works were often exhibited in minimal and private circles. In this regard, Jabra mentions that some of Jawad's works, female portraits in particular, were usually sent directly to those who commissioned them without ever being publicly displayed and that some of the works he did display were sold before any photographic pictures taken or destination data kept for them. This is a huge loss for Iraqi art, since the possibility of a complete and accurate evaluation of Jawad's work will henceforth remain slim and his production dispersed and partially unknown.

Because part of our cultural and especially artistic heritage was never written down or photographed, because living witnesses will ultimately all disappear, and because it is uncommon for the relevant people to write their memoirs or to keep a private archive of papers, many facts and events related to this heritage will eventually fall into oblivion. This is especially the case since relatives and friends do not consider the preservation of the deceased's possessions and their donation to universities, research centers or museums part of their responsibilities.

When undertaking to write about the Monument of Freedom, Jabra – Jawad's friend since the early fifties and privy to all the relevant details of that period – had to borrow Jawad's journal and was able to make use of certain details relating to the monument and to Jawad the person and the artist. He deplores how he did not keep a photocopy before returning the journal to Lorna, Jawad's wife. Despite the sensitivity of some parts, Jawad's memoirs should be open to the public; for the artist becomes or should become transparent and accessible once he moves to the other bank of the river, so to speak. There's no need for anything to remain vague and distant; knowing the details would not touch his life or impinge on his privacy.

If we add to all this the dominant political environment of that period, the repression of liberties, the prohibition of any serious dialogue and the elevation of political issues into a certain set of taboos, secrets and riddles, the consultation of other writings and parallel modes of expression might reveal part of what was happening which is never mentioned in official writings and publications.

Given this political environment, one of the possible means of expression was that of art, through subject selection or the method of expression. Art, according to regimes and political authorities, doesn't speak in plain language and never says something clear and precise. Those in touch with art are an isolated few and perhaps this is why the authorities usually allow art some marginal room. Art was able to make use of this room and to speak out as much as possible. Though rather indirectly, this renders understanding the period somehow easier and hence makes the exploration and evaluation of periods and environments more possible.

Because Jawad had immersed himself in the cultural and artistic movement after he finished his studies and returned to Baghdad and in light of the fact that he was possessed of a variety of concerns and relationships, he developed for himself a distinctive stature and a publicly engaged lifestyle. Perhaps this was one of the distinguishing markers of cultural life in Iraq during the fifties. For, in addition to being diverse, channels among the different cultural domains were open and allowed for mutual enrichment. As a result, each of them became more relevant and multidimensional. Modern poetry made an important breakthrough, starting from Iraq and so did art. The diversity of interests and the multiplicity of cultures and specializations were important factors in opening new horizons and encouraging interest among new growing sectors.

In engaging himself in that life and, at the same time, teaching sculpture at the Institute of Fine Arts, Jawad was gaining in knowledge, influence and exposure. He was constantly broadening his interest and relationships and transferring his fascinating explorations into several new fields. The theme of the crescent, for instance, did not stop with the Unknown Political Prisoner but was soon transported to paintings, posters and even to the very earrings he used to make for his wife, Lorna – who was also a painter – and his friends' wives. Jawad also took part in designing his friends' book covers. This meant that art was not just a technical skill or an isolated enterprise; it was, rather, the very activity, environment and possibility of informing its surroundings. This in turn contributed to drawing more people into art's circle.

As we mentioned before, the exhibitions of the Baghdad Group were mounted approximately once a year. It was becoming clear that the goals the group had set for itself in the first manifesto were not easy to accomplish. This called for a new manifesto which allowed each artist the freedom to express himself in the way he deemed best. The new manifesto did not mention any common artistic or intellectual worldview; nor did it refer to the importance of reviving a certain artistic heritage. The message was clear: to continue to create an artistic realm, but without any restrictions and to give each artist more freedom to select, experiment and research based on his own interpretations and conviction.

Jawad did not neglect or abandon sculpture during this period. Big projects were harder to work on given the time and money they required, but Jawad continued to produce small or medium-sized sculptures. Schemes for works he might get the chance to work on were becoming clearer in his mind. The chance would come soon. Political turmoil had reached a head with the Baghdad Pact and the adoption of a policy which was at once pro-Western and authoritarian. The

explosion took the form of a revolution lead by the military in July 1958, and lead to radical change. The monarchy was overthrown and the elite, which had ruled Iraq for many decades, was gone.

With the July revolution and the fall of the monarchy, art was called upon to take part and articulate the great event. Jawad was selected to do the job.

Describing the way Jawad worked on his major works of art, Jabra says that "an idea with him takes a lot of time; it involves many shapes and trials until it assumes its final form. This appears in more than one of his works and in the way his Monument of Freedom finally materialized".[3]

Along with Egypt's Awakening by Mahmud Mukhtar, Jawad's Monument of Freedom is the most famous and important contemporary Arab work of art. The monument and Jawad Salim's name are mentioned almost interchangeably. It was, after all, his lifetime's masterpiece and is considered a special work of art of international importance.

The work is without a doubt an expression of Jawad's genius and character, as a sculptor of a unique artistic vision. But the impact of the work, in some of its parts and main details, is also the product of the Mesopotamian school in terms of vision and execution. There were some direct and indirect partners who stood with Jawad, contributed in thoughts, suggestions and implementation and played their part, in different proportions, in giving the work its special allure.

Jawad's choice of relief sculpture rather than three-dimensional sculpture – the more traditionally European model – shows a yearning for authenticity, for a return to the origins of Mesopotamian civilization as exemplified by Sumerian and Assyrian sculpture. It is also representative of the rich cultural life of the fifties, which has given most of the work of that period a special local character. Anchored in heritage and the ability to blend different branches and methods of knowledge and practice, the outcome was always a multi-faceted wealth.

Rif'at al-Jadirji was the most important contributor to the project and stood with Jawad from very early on. This is probably rooted in their strong friendship. Their similar artistic views and continuous dialogue informed the work throughout its different stages. The suggestions and contributions of al-Jadirji were therefore very important and became more so during Jawad's illness and after his death. al-Jadirji played a decisive role in the work's completion in the form Jawad had always wanted. This involved a certain risk which al-Jadirji partly revealed in his book *al-Ukhaydar aw al-qasar al-billauri*. These details are very significant and telling of certain events and challenges the work faced and are, therefore, worth recalling.

Like Rif'at al-Jadirji, the sculptor Muhammad Ghani Hikmat also contributed in important ways to Jawad's artistic journey and especially the Monument of Freedom. He was Jawad's student in Baghdad, his assistant in Italy during the preparation of the work, and finally his partner and successor in its actual execution. Hikmat's most important quality was perhaps his selflessness, which puts him in sharp contrast with many others who either tried to thwart the project or encouraged state officials to play a more intrusive role in the process. His contribution is therefore doubly important: first because of his altruism and second because of his insistence that any work of art is only fully realized when it reaches its final shape and installation, any intentions notwithstanding. Their friendship seems to have suffered during Jawad's illness in Italy. But this was overcome later and Hikmat remained loyal to his teacher and acted according to this loyalty.

Lorna Salim, Jawad's wife, also seems to have played a positive role from the very beginning of their relationship and then after she arrived in Baghdad. Her

foreign eye was able to discern the unusual in terms of scenes, colors and relationships and locate the material most suitable for their portrayal. This probably explains her interest, starting her arrival in Iraq, in picturing old Iraqi houses and her employment of Islamic ornamental miniatures in her painting. One could probably examine the mutual influence Jawad and Lorna had on each other based on common symbols, colors and shapes in their works. Rif'at al-Jadirji mentions a set of events and details which clarify Lorna's contribution to the Monument of Freedom during her stay in Italy and then after Jawad's death. If she were to write her life story with Jawad, one would definitely come across some illuminating information and details about the life and work of this great artist.

Finally, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's influence should not go unnoticed. His friendship with Jawad, his public role in the cultural and artistic life in Iraq, in addition to his contribution to creating a general artistic awareness, all stand at the root of this influence. His study on Jawad and the Monument of Freedom is truly indispensable. It illuminates important aspects of Jawad's life and provides an excellent interpretation of the work. I have mainly relied on it to address certain details of the work.

But before examining these details, we should first remember that Jawad did not have a preliminary scheme except for the middle section of the imagined monument. Except for this part – which stood for a solider breaking his chains and jumping towards freedom and which was partly related to his earlier sculpture of the Unknown Political Prisoner – the rest of the work was later developed through both intentional and spontaneous association. When he was selected to make a monument that commemorated the July revolution, Jawad only submitted his scheme for the middle section. The other parts were slowly coming together in his imagination through continuous discussion with his friends, especially Rif'at al-Jadirji.

The choice of relief sculpture was linked to historical roots. The model was meant to go beyond the one bulk principle into that of an open horizon. This propelled al-Jadirji to propose the idea of an arch across which the monument would stretch. Perhaps this was a result of banners which had suddenly appeared and filled the streets, almost like a scream.

On a deeper level, the idea of a banner evokes certain meanings in the collective popular memory. It includes a call for participation and represents a flag around which people can convene. It symbolized a bond, in other words, which can at once delineate an identity and express hospitality and glorification. There was another important meaning imbued in the choice of the arch: that of the Sumerian cultural legacy. After all, the arch on which the different castings of the monument were supposed to stand took the shape of a cylindrical seal, one of their most important achievements. These different castings were supposed to stand and flow into one another, in the process narrating a history, revealing events and telling us - the beholders - where exactly in the world we were.

Apart from the idea of the banner and the cylindrical seal, other interpretations of the monument come to mind. For example, some see in it the form of a line of Arabic poetry, containing a first and second hemistich. It is narrated or heard with a certain poetic rhythm, a voice followed by a silence as each casting of the monument stands alone and is at the same time in harmony with the one that comes before and the one that comes after. Others see in the monument a form with close affinity to the Pharaonic obelisks, since they too tell the story of the king who ordered their erection, narrating on the way the history of his epoch.

Again, the monument could be compared to a verse of poetry since they are both valued according to their length and the number of pillars supporting its structure.

The monument is six meters high, ten meters wide and stretched over a fifty meter long arch. It is probably one of the biggest monuments in the world. The fact that the monument records history, means reading it from right to left as it chronicles three stages of Iraq's history: The first is the pre-revolutionary period and its dominant modes of subjugation, exploitation and colonialism. The second stage is the revolution that destroyed the shackles of the past, with the help of the army, and liberated the people. The third stage outlines Iraq's future: the growth, prosperity and fraternity awaiting it. Agriculture and industry are to pave the way to opulence and the Arabs and the Kurds are to live together in piece and harmony. The water of rivers and the force and fecundity of life were other symbols of the immense potential of the country and the power, progress and glory it was destined for.

The monument has fourteen castings, alluding to the date of the revolution. It was also twice the symbolic number at the root of the Babylonian calendar, a number at the same time both important and sacred. The earth was made of seven layers and so was the sky, the week was seven days long and the world was created in seven days. There is no doubt that the choice of the numbers was far from arbitrary.

There are twenty five humans in the monument, in addition to a horse at the beginning and a bull at the end. All these creatures are full of vitality, spirit and promise. Their lively and proud features are coupled with inspiring feelings of warmth and closeness, so much so that one cannot but think sometimes that they are about to leave their places and share their lives and feelings with people. The intimacy one feels with these creatures is indeed a rare occurrence between humans and works of art. The extent to which the work seems so naturally part and parcel of its surrounding nature is only another testimony to Jawad's genius in his selections and the way he expressed them.

The Iraqi past emerges in the parts of the monument and so does the future. It is imbued with several symbols of the work, especially in its final section. It touches the beholder and moves his imagination as he yearns for what is coming.

The monument has proudly stood erect since 1961, telling with eloquence part of Iraq's history. It survived the several barbaric American bombings of Baghdad. But its share of difficulties dates to way before that. From the very beginning, Jawad was asked in implicit as well as explicit ways to incorporate a portrait of Abd al- Karim Qasim in his work. When he failed to respond, he became a subject of harassment, blackmail and downright threat. This reflected negatively on Jawad's health and he entered the hospital and stayed there for quite some time. al-Jadirji brings out many painful details on this subject. This situation basically persisted until the very last days before the monument was finally displayed.

Like Mukhtar's Egypt's Awakening, the Monument of Freedom faced many difficulties. This is typical of the Third World where the fad of the moment governs time, the whim controls decisions, the ego rules supreme, illegitimate competition underlies judgments and deceit moves actions. The artist is often the one to pay the price: thus, Jawad.

After all the pressure he went through to add the picture of the leader to his monument and the virtual siege he was put under subsequently, Jawad carried on working as his physical condition continued to deteriorate. Ultimately, he was hit

by another heart attack and despite efforts to rescue his life, his heart stopped in January of 1961. Only one casting of the monument was by now put in its place, the rest of the castings were to be raised and positioned by Rif'at al-Jadirji and Lorna Salim. The monument was fully installed by its due date, and without any leader's picture – exactly the way Jawad and those who worked with him had wanted and struggled for.

Jawad died at the age of forty two. Iraq's loss was immense. But it would find solace in his works, works that tell the story of a distinguished artist and the history of one of the most important artistic and political phases of Iraq in the twentieth century.

In my attempt to interpret his most important work, the Monument of Freedom and to gather some details about it, I have relied on what Jabra Ibrahim Jabra has written about the subject.

ENDNOTES

* This article war written in Arabic in 1998. It is published here for the first time in Arabic and English translation with the kind permission of Munif's family.

[1] Inam Kajahiji, *Lorna Salim, sanawatiha ma'a Jawad Salim* (Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1998), p. 39.

[2] English artist and critic, Kenneth Wood, who came to Iraq with the British forces stationed in this country in 1944, had a similar impact on Jawad as he was considered a more prominent critic of his works in this period.

[3] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Jawad Salim wa-nasb al-huriyya* (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, 1974).

MUNIF: A BIO-HISTORY

AN ARABIAN MASTER

Sabry Hafez*

The premature death of ‘Abd al-Rahman Munif on 24 January 2004 brought to an end the career of not only a major Arab novelist but also one of the most remarkable figures of contemporary world literature. It is difficult to think of another writer, in any language, whose life experience and literary enterprise has the same kind of dramatic range—or whose writing remains under posthumous ban in his homeland. Among Middle Eastern societies, the Saudi kingdom has notoriously been in the rearguard of any kind of modern culture. Yet this is the society that was to produce, however indirectly and involuntarily, one of the most advanced and incendiary writers of the Arab world, politically active as militant or technician across five countries, author of fifteen novels—including the most monumental of all modern narratives in Arabic—and another nine books of non-fiction. It will take some time for the scale and detail of this achievement to be fully registered. But an interim account is overdue.

Munif's father was a Saudi caravan trader from Najd who travelled widely in the Middle East, establishing homes in Syria and Jordan as well as Arabia; his mother was an Iraqi from Baghdad. He was born in Amman in 1933, the youngest son in the family, a few months after the first concession to the Americans to explore for oil was signed by Ibn Saud in Riyadh, an event to which he linked his own fate. For the arrival of the Americans heralded the beginning of the end of a world in which merchants like his father could roam freely in the Arab lands, unhindered by borders or politics. Soon after Munif's birth, his father died. The family remained in Jordan, where he was brought up largely by his Iraqi grandmother, while his elder brothers took up their father's trade, and provided for the household. Munif has left us a vivid description of his childhood in Amman, where he went first to a *kuttab* for traditional learning of the Qur'an, before being admitted to an elementary school next to the headquarters of Glubb Pasha, the British commander who largely ran the Transjordanian state for the Hashemite dynasty under the Mandate.[1] Political events pressed on the boy from the start. Among his first memories were the mysterious death of Ghazi, king of Iraq, in 1939, and the pro-Axis—because anti-British—sympathies of most ordinary people in Amman during the Second World War. In his early teens, he witnessed close-up the disastrous Arab–Israeli war of 1948, and the catastrophe that befell the Palestinians at the hands of Zionist forces with the complicity of the—now formally independent—Jordanian monarchy; events that made a profound impression on him. In the summer, he would spend his holidays with the Saudi side of the family in Najd.

In 1952 he obtained his baccalaureate and went to Baghdad to study law. At Baghdad University he found an intense political ferment. The campus teemed with political groups covering the whole spectrum from communists to the pro-

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British conservatives, with many shades in between, and Munif became an early member of the Ba'th Party, establishing himself as one of its most cultured and trusted cadres.[2] His Saudi nationality made him a prized figure in a movement of pan-Arab ambitions, providing him from the start with an advantageous position in its germinating organization. In 1955 Nuri al-Said's regime signed the Baghdad Pact with Britain, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, unleashing a wave of protests in the region, and Munif was banished from Iraq for his political activities before completing his university education. Moving to Egypt, he arrived in Cairo in time to witness Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal and live through the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of 1956. A year later he obtained his degree in law, and in 1958 won a Ba'th Party scholarship to Yugoslavia, where he studied the economics of oil at Belgrade University, completing a doctorate in 1961. Arab nationalist fervour was at its peak and the nationalization of the oil industry in Iraq was high on the agenda of the Ba'th. The party was preparing cadres who could run the industry in years to come, and Munif clearly saw his future in this field.

Upon his return to the Arab world, Munif worked for the Ba'th Party head office in Beirut for a year or so. When, in the spring of 1963, the Ba'th came to power almost simultaneously in Iraq and Syria, he was critical of the brutality of the Ba'th coup and its aftermath in the former. This led Salih al-Sa'di's government to deny him entry to Iraq when he needed it most, having recently been stripped of his Saudi nationality as a threat to the kingdom.[3] In the autumn, when a counter-coup ousted the Ba'th regime in Iraq, he went to Syria, where the party held on to power, and worked in the Oil Ministry for a decade (1964–73). But it seems that his years in Yugoslavia had radicalized Munif, endowing him with too much sceptical humanism and questioning intellectualism to be a good party member. Gradually becoming a discordant voice in its ranks, he resigned from the Ba'th in 1965. But he remained committed to a revolutionary transformation of the Arab world. In the years after the searing Arab defeat in the Six Day War and the crushing of Palestinian resistance by the Jordanian monarchy in 1970, he wrote his first book, a well-documented study of the future of the oil industry. Published in Beirut in 1972, it laid out many of the basic policies later pursued by the Iraqi Ba'th.[4]

LITERARY DEBUT

In the following year Munif published his first novel, *Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq*.[5] Coming to fiction late, when he was almost forty, he could draw on first-hand knowledge of political life in several Arab countries, and an intimate experience of certain kinds of revolutionary organization and their outcomes. By this time, the scene had darkened nearly everywhere. In Syria, the radical anti-imperialist wing of the Ba'th leadership had been ousted when Hafez al-Asad toppled Salah Jedid, in an epilogue to the Jordanian Black September, and a more repressive regime installed. Nasser, after a vicious persecution of the Egyptian Left, had expired while publicly embracing King Hussein. Such was the immediate background to Munif's earliest works of fiction, architecturally characterized by a striking dualism. *Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq* opens with two strangers meeting on a train in an unnamed Arab country.[6] The first, Ilyas, is an ordinary man who has lost his orchard in a gamble and the woman he loved in childbirth, and with them all traditional bearings and peace of mind. Descending into the alienated world of hired labour, as a waiter, hotel worker, street vendor, he clings to the hope that a better life is still possible at the next station of his life, that a kinder woman

and more beautiful trees can yet be found. His fall is representative of the destruction of a rural community and its way of life that had become the experience of so many ordinary Arabs, but Munif does not exonerate him from responsibility for his plight, as the contradictions in Ilyas's narrative multiply to reveal an ingrained mentality of defeat, which thrives on accepting fate and attributing blame for it to others.

The fellow traveller to whom he tells his story is, by contrast, an intellectual, setting out to serve as interpreter to a French archaeological mission looking for clay tablets in the desert of a neighbouring country. Mansur too is a product of loss, formed by a catastrophe on a larger historical scale, the Palestinian *nakbah* of 1948. Conscripted to fight in one of the Arab armies against Israel, he saw at first hand the spirited enthusiasm of the young soldiers of the time, and cannot come to terms with the way in which the disaster has been absorbed by the surrounding regimes. 'I understand that we are defeated once, I understand that we are defeated a hundred times, but what I cannot understand is that we conceive our defeats as victory'. Like many Arab intellectuals Mansur then goes on to spend several years studying in Europe, before returning to teach history at a university, which from the outset he wants to do with a difference—'certainly not the history of the kings, hucksters or pimps who try to look like roosters, but of simple people who went unnoticed, whose names no one mentioned in a book, or bothered to inscribe on a piece of marble'. This approach to the past does not endear him to the authorities, particularly when he draws the attention of students to the farcical way in which Faisal was crowned King of Iraq in 1920. Mansur's questioning of the legitimacy of the Arab regimes, his exposure of the rampant corruption and lies that dominate public life in the Arab world, and above all his reminders of the constant Arab failure to check the Zionist colonial project, make his brand of history lethal and inadmissible. He is interrogated and dismissed. After three years of unemployment, poverty, humiliation and excessive drinking, he is granted a passport to go into exile—a condition that would become one of Munif's most frequently recurring themes.[7]

The interaction between these two retrievals of the past, each narrative woven with stray reminiscences and repeated digressions, gives a sharp questioning edge to the novel as it probes the sensitive question of continuous Arab defeat from the perspective of the insider. The university teacher is no more able to master his fate than the farmer. Typically, Mansur cannot reconcile private life and public roles; unable to take the Belgian girl he loved in Europe back with him, he also refuses to stay in Europe for her, and is then no more successful with an Arab woman at home. Personal and political failings reflect each other. The conclusion of the novel takes the form of a third-person report by a journalist. On learning that his principled friend Marzuq has been murdered by the regime at home, Mansur tries to shoot himself in the mirror, and ends up in a mental asylum. But what becomes of his contemporaries is worse. As he tells an old comrade who has become one of the beneficiaries of the new regime: 'I trust that previous generations were better than ours, for as soon as our generation took the stage, it descended into corruption, chicanery, nepotism and kleptocracy. It is the ugliest of generations, but it does not recognize this'. *Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq* can be read as a lesson in the alternative history for which Mansur suffers exile, its narrative discourse undermining every official version of the past and present of the Arab world since the time of the Mandates.

PRISON FICTION

The positive reception of the novel encouraged Munif to leave his dreary job in the Oil Ministry in Damascus and move to Beirut, working as a journalist. He arrived with an unpublished second novel, *Sharq al-Mutawassit* (East of the Mediterranean), which Munif held back from publishing for three years. Its subject was political torture and imprisonment, a theme that would become one of the most prevalent in modern Arabic literature, and had already produced a certain body of fiction.[8] Munif's novel, however, was of exceptional power and ambition, aspiring to write the ultimate political prison in all its variations, for it takes us to seven political prisons and lives with its hero in them for five years, during which there is scarcely any kind of torture he does not suffer. An epigraph from Pablo Neruda speaks to the need never to forget such suffering.

In a nameless Arab country, a corrupt tyranny arrests and imprisons all who would challenge it, and then tortures its prisoners to force them to betray their comrades and recant their beliefs by signing a document of complete submission to the authorities, with a putrid justification destroying their self-respect and freedom. The acceptance of such a document is represented in the novel as being synonymous with death, and its selection as the starting point of the narrative charges it with a deep sense of shame and remorse. The story recounts the life of Rajab Isma'il, a man from a simple background whose family invest their dream of a better future in his education, sharpening his sense of duty to work for social change. While still a university student he joins a clandestine organization, and as soon as he graduates is arrested and sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment. The novel consists of six chapters alternating between two first-person narratives, one told by Rajab as he fights for his sanity and honour, the other by his sister Anisa, together with whom he had once hoped to write a novel.

In prison Rajab, regularly visited and encouraged by his mother, steadfastly endures every brutality without renouncing his beliefs or uttering a word that might help his jailers hunt down others. But after five years of resistance, his mother dies, a number of his trusted colleagues sign the shameful document, the woman he loves abandons him and he is afflicted by a rheumatic disorder that enervates his resolve. Anisa, taking over the right of visitation, weakens his will yet further as she reports the vivid life outside. To secure his release, he signs the disgraceful document, and leaves for treatment in Europe with an exit visa granted in exchange for collaboration with the authorities—a promise to inform on former comrades abroad. By the time he reaches France he is virtually a spent man. But a doctor who had fought in the Resistance helps him recover his health and sense of worth, telling him 'you need to preserve your anger and fight back. If you succumb to grief and remorse, you'll be defeated as a man and finished as a cause'.

To redeem himself, Rajab decides to write a novel that will reveal the true extent of the atrocities occurring east of the Mediterranean, and to travel to Geneva to submit detailed testimony to the Red Cross of the different types of torture suffered by political prisoners in his country. But when he learns Anisa's husband Hamid has been arrested because of his own failure to file reports on militants abroad, he sends his testimony to Geneva by post and goes home. The police are waiting for him. After taking Rajab back to prison, they release Hamid. Three weeks later, Rajab returns blinded and broken, and within a few days is dead. Barely a week passes before Hamid is arrested again, held responsible for leaking the circumstances of Rajab's death to a newspaper abroad. In a final scene Anisa

discovers her son 'Adil collecting empty bottles and filling them with petrol in order to destroy the prison and release his father.

The optimistic note, passing responsibility for a continuation of the struggle to the next generation, is not carefully wrought into the narrative, coming as much of a surprise to the reader as to the mother. But the power of the novel lies in its bleakness, and the delicate balance it holds between the fate of the prisoners and the lot of those outside, rather than in this weak ray of light at the end—or even its suggestion that the writing of a fiction could be an effective weapon against political oppression, which in the world it depicts must seem like wishful thinking. Like many novelists' early works, *East of the Mediterranean* promises more than it delivers, but it has a freshness and ferocity that have made it the most enduring and popular of all Munif's works. He was himself conscious of some of its limitations, writing in an introduction to its twelfth reprint that 'I was aware of dealing with a taboo subject, political prison, and practised restraint and self-censorship throughout its composition'. Written in a spare, staccato prose, the novel aims at a violent precision, whose only concession to formal experiment is its alternation of narrative voice.

A year after moving to Beirut, Munif published a much slighter fiction, *Qissat Hubb Majusiyyah* (A Magian Love-Story), that is a clear anomaly in his œuvre. Its theme is one of the perennial concerns of modern Arabic literature, the incurable fascination with the Occident, and the tale relies on a standard ploy of the genre, an Arab student in Europe—usually male, but recently also female—embroiled with one or more Europeans of the opposite sex. Munif's student narrator has several such love affairs, of varying depth and length, but becomes obsessed with his one object of an unconsummated desire, a married woman whom he meets at a mountain resort. There the exchange of a few looks is enough to ensnare him and ignite an unappeasable passion. The novel is hopelessly romantic and works only as a metaphor for a deep fascination with, and the impossible acquisition of, the Occident. Its appearance was rapidly eclipsed by the publication of *East of the Mediterranean*, which Munif gave to the printers the following year, and whose public impact was deep and immediate.

FORMS AND POLITICS

Munif's emergence as a major Arab writer at the time of the October War of 1973 and the ensuing oil boom coincided with a shift of political and cultural power in the Arab world from its old centre to the emerging peripheries.[9] The stripping of his citizenship by the Saudi monarchy had, if anything, enhanced rather than reduced his cultural capital and sense of identity. Now paradoxically he was perceived as a Saudi, at the time when his country was at the peak of its power and prestige, for the chronic unpopularity of the House of Saud in the Middle East was temporarily suspended in the wake of the oil embargo it imposed in 1973. The emergence of a talented and progressive writer from this famously backward part of the Arab world was treated with surprise and delight. A new literary atmosphere had been developing since 1967, liberating Arabic literature from traditional narrative bonds to enable a more modernist sensibility, in which a polyphony of contending voices tended to undermine the authority of plot. The internal cohesion of the novel came to depend more on the internal memory of the text than any causal logic of progression from the past, and the individual hero gave way to the antihero, or to an elaborate network of relationships in which all characters attain

equal importance in their struggle to make sense of an absurd world, which features in this fiction as a kind of epistemological maze.[10]

Munif's relationship to this wave of modernism, from which he benefited, was ambivalent. He was aware of its appeal and relevance to the time, and learnt from it, but never embraced it as wholeheartedly as many of his contemporaries. For them, the Arabic novel was called on to undergo a radical transformation into what Adorno once called a 'negative epic'. For, as Adorno put it, 'if the novel wants to remain true to its realistic heritage and tell how things really are, it must abandon a realism that only aids the façade in its work of camouflage by reproducing it'.[11] This is not an adage Munif ever quite accepted. He experimented freely with devices of plot and narrative figuration, where he could be very bold, and had nothing of *verismo* in him. But he still aimed at representations of reality that were readily intelligible to Arab reading publics, not least his Saudi compatriots, unfamiliar with more radical modernist conventions.[12] Was the wide popularity he thereby eventually gained as an author also a weakness? Naguib Mahfouz once said that when he was writing *The Cairo Trilogy* he knew that he was using an outmoded style, but felt the set of experiences he wanted to depict dictated it.[13] Intuitively, Munif—a generation younger, whose principal forms were far less traditional—probably felt something similar, controlling or adapting his impulses towards formal innovation to the historical purposes at hand.

In 1975, after publishing *East of the Mediterranean*, Munif moved to Iraq to work in the Office of Economic Affairs of the Revolutionary Command Council (1975–81). These were years when the Ba'th regime, benefiting from a vast increase in oil revenues after 1973, was modernizing the country rapidly in a Progressive Front with the Communists. While there is some uncertainty about his role in Baghdad at this time, it is clear that he was trusted for his Ba'thist past. He was made a member of the prestigiousPan-Arab leadership of the international Ba'th confederation, put in charge of the influential monthly *al-Naft wa-l-Tanmiyah* (Oil and Development), which was lavishly financed by the government, and published a sequel to his earlier study of the oil industry, *The Nationalization of Arab Oil*.[14]

Knowing Munif well, as I did, it is hard to imagine this insightful intellectual and avid reader of literature as an insider to a Ba'thist regime in power. He appeared rather an eternal exile, whose independent mind, deep-rooted values, self-doubt and constant questioning would be anathema to party discipline. His reserved demeanour and fastidious manners in society were often mistaken for coldness and emotional incapacity. In fact, they were the products of years of clandestine political activity and a necessary defensive mechanism to protect himself and guard his time. If anything was deeply ingrained in him, it was an acute sense that he had started his literary career late and had wasted valuable years, making him determined to safeguard the primacy of his writing. He once told me that literature was his passion all along and that he was regularly accused of distracting his comrades from their political tasks by inciting them to read too much of it.[15] Yet there is no doubt that the long political experience and wide knowledge of the region he gained from years of clandestine party work gave his writing a pan-Arab relevance and maturity, along with a sense of detachment, that would help to make him so widely renowned.

HUNTINGS

In Baghdad, Munif combined his official duties with a prolific output as a writer, producing three novels and co-authoring a fourth. The first of these, *Hin Tarakna al-Jisr* (When We Abandoned the Bridge, 1976), already showed his restlessness and capacity for formal reinvention. The novel consists in its entirety of a long monologue by a lonely hunter, Zaki Naddawi, whose only companion is his dog. Every day he goes out into the forest, where the only person with whom he exchanges a few sentences is another old hunter, before returning home with his game. The novel takes us through many of his hunts, which take place throughout the seasons, and in several different climates. But his inner thoughts always return to a bridge on which he once worked as a soldier. Constructed but never used, it was then abandoned—metaphor for the Arab armies that were built but retreated without honour in the struggle against Israel. Wherever the chase takes him, he remains haunted by the fact that men neither crossed the bridge nor destroyed it before they withdrew. Like all hunters he dreams of the ultimate game, the imaginary bird which he calls the 'queen-duck'. On a moonlit night he finally sights his quarry, and brings it down. Wading into the water to retrieve it, he finds only the ugliest of owls—symbol, in Arabic culture, of doom and misfortune. The futile hunt of the individual ends by reproducing the collective defeat against which his whole memory is a protest.

Coming close on the heels of this story, *al-Nihayat* (Endings, 1977) could appear in one way a companion piece, since it too tells the tale of a solitary hunter and his dog. But it is quite distinct as an enterprise, looking forward to aspects of the world portrayed in *Mudun al-Milh* (Cities of Salt). For here the setting is the desert, and the conflict is not only between a traditional community, living precariously on the edge of hunger, and modern urban rapacity, but between nature itself and human misuses of it, of which the villagers themselves are not innocent. Structurally, *Endings* represents a much more radical break with standard narrative conventions than *When We Abandoned the Bridge*. The novel takes place at the time of a prolonged drought in the desert, which threatens the existence of a community that is depicted quite impersonally. Now completely dependent on game for survival, its members need more than ever the ability of the outsider who is their best huntsman, the enigmatic 'Assaf, who has always tried to persuade them not to kill off surrounding species by over-hunting. Knowing the desert intimately, 'Assaf exemplifies a bedouin ethos marked by a deep respect for nature and a sense of the strict limits to be put on the use of its valuable resources. He is willing to put his unique skills at the service of the community, but not to uphold the privileges of a few at the expense of the many, since 'hunting is created for the poor who do not have their daily bread'. Yet when a group of crass sportsmen arrive from the city in cars for a shoot, he consents to guide them, and when a terrifying sandstorm engulfs the party, sacrifices his own life to save those of the sportsmen whom he disdained. With his death, the novel abruptly shifts register. At an all-night vigil, in which the whole village participates, fourteen disturbing fables are recounted by the mourners, each treating of birds or animals and all ending with their abrupt destruction or disappearance—some taken intertextually from the classical Arabic of Al-Jahiz.[16] The funeral of the hunter becomes an act of collective catharsis, releasing the villagers to work together on a dam to secure them against future droughts. In its sharp discontinuity of structure, mosaic use of short stories, and

poetic impersonality of tone, *Endings* remains one of the most advanced fictions in contemporary Arab literature.

COUP-STRUCK TEHRAN, ONEIRIC BAGHDAD

Displaying once again his versatility, Munif followed this experimental work by writing a realist novel of political intrigue, *Sibaq al-Masafat al-Tawilah* (Long Distance Race, 1979). Yet it too contains anticipations of Munif's *chef d'œuvre* of the next decade, for if *Endings* presages the traditional ways of the desert portrayed in *Cities of Salt,* the subject of *Long Distance Race* is the arrival of the American empire of oil that will obliterate them. The setting of this prelude to his great theme is Iran, not Arabia, and the race is between the British, the waning imperial power in the region, and their new rivals, the Americans. The narrative time is 1951–53, the years of the rise and fall of Mossadegh's government, and the place—unmistakeable, if never stated as such in the novel—is Tehran. The novel opens with the nationalization of the oil industry and is narrated by Peter McDonald, an employee of the Iranian oil company. But this is merely his cover—in reality he is an agent of British intelligence, which selected and trained him in Zürich, then sent him to Beirut before dispatching him to Tehran. In Beirut, he has picked his accomplices and pawns for his work in Iran: 'Abbas, a feudal politician and former minister, Shirin, his intelligent, beautiful and wanton wife, and Mirza, a military man with intelligence credentials and wide experience in subversive operations. Shirin becomes Peter's mistress, but is later quite willing to trade him in for his American counterpart when she senses that her lover is losing ground. But his most important ally is Ashraf Ayatullah, specimen of a new breed of Iranian youth, educated in the West and convinced that their future lies with it, deaf to the 'language' of the old man in power and his rhetoric of national independence and social justice. The old man, presiding over a loose coalition of progressive forces, has no strong party behind him. But his enemies are highly organized: on the one hand the Shah with the Americans behind him, on the other the British smarting from the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

Prefaced by quotations from Churchill and T. E. Lawrence, the novel traces the competition between the declining colonial power and the ascending empire, played out under the watchful eye of an unnamed but ever-present Soviet menace to the north. Peter is full of contempt for the Americans, 'pigs with golden collars around their necks, who never do the right thing at the right time'. The two predators share only their condescension towards the peoples of the Middle East in general, and Iranians in particular—the British viewing them as sullen ingrates, the Americans as primitives in need of civilizing by the United States. As they foment rival plots to topple a democratically elected government, we are shown the inner mechanisms of corruption and subversion that culminate in the violent ouster of Mossadegh, leaving the leader of the Free World, rather than the Mother of Parliaments, in charge. The novel ends with the sunset of the former hegemon, as Shirin throws an extravagant party for the victors of the coup, bidding her old lover farewell with a mixture of nostalgia and scorn.

By the time *Long Distance Race* appeared in 1978, the political situation in Iraq had deteriorated, as Saddam Hussein became de facto ruler of the country, repressing not only the Communists but any alternative centres of power within the Ba'th Party itself, before assuming the presidency the following year. Privately, Munif is said to have told friends that the Iraqi regime was now little better than the

Saudi. Certainly, an ominous pall hangs over the city of Baghdad in the novel he went on to co-author with the Palestinian writer Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *'Alam Bila Khara'it* (A World without Maps), which appeared in 1982. Jabra, a generation older than Munif (1920–94), was a distinguished writer of more psychological bent, a translator of Shakespeare and Faulkner into Arabic, who had long been a towering intellectual presence in Baghdad. The friendship between the two left a deep mark on Munif, and produced that most unusual of full-length fictions, a collaborative work.[17]

A World without Maps offers a fresco of a huge city that has descended into obscurity and chaos. Its authors dub it 'Ammuriyyah, but there is no mistaking the topography and details of Baghdad, whose metamorphosis from the calm town of a near past, with still rustic values and tribal bonds, into a frenzied metropolis in constant flux, heartless and impenetrable, is graphically depicted. We are plunged into a world of perpetual mutation, whose ruling force is disorientation, outgrowing any attempt to survey it. The impact of a bewildering transformation of space on the most basic modes of human existence and interaction thus at one level commands the imagination of the book. The writer at the centre of the novel, 'Ali Najib, is himself professionally concerned with problems of urbanization, which are always viewed dialectically, rather than purely negatively. The city is associated with the tomb: it buries the characters' past, hides their origins, entombs rural life and tribal ethics. But it is also a womb that offers shelter from an often merciless nature—the chosen habitat of modern humans, yet also their most hated prison. In this representation, there is no doubt which of these identities is dominant: the novel is full of satirical comments on 'Ammuriyyah and the idea of the metropolis itself. At another level, a world without maps is also, inevitably, one in which any political direction has been lost. Hopes and ideals have vanished along with every landmark.

Here, much as in Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*, where the creative process alone can retrieve the past, it is only by the act of writing that the inscrutable city can be probed. The protagonist of *A World without Maps* is engaged in writing a novel about 'Ammuriyyah, the metropolis in which he lives and whose fictitious nature is disclosed to the reader from the outset. His two previous novels, analysed and discussed by various other characters, are also about the life of the city. We thus have two novelists writing about a novelist who wrote two novels and is writing a third in the course of the text, while at the same time participating in the life of the fictitious city they are creating. Deliberately, this triple framing makes it as difficult to follow the plot of *A World without Maps* as it is to live in the disorienting grip of the proliferating city. The result is a highly complex form that involves the devices both of a jigsaw puzzle and a maze. The former is used to assemble, piece by piece, the real life story of Najwa al-'Amiry, lover of 'Ali Najib and wife of a friend, whose elusive relationship with the protagonist mirrors his efforts to fathom the mystery of the city and humanize it. The latter composes what can be called the detective plot of the story: the enigma of Najwa's murder, introduced at the beginning of the novel, which remains unsolved at its end. In the absence of any cartography, no clarification is possible: her death will be as indecipherable to her lover as the city is to its inhabitants, doomed to remain in the grip of its maze.

THE SAUDI QUINTET

A World without Maps was published in Beirut in 1982. A year earlier Munif had left Iraq. His departure from Baghdad in 1981 came after the unleashing of the war against Iran in 1980, at the apogee of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. A sympathetic portrait of popular forces in a fictional Tehran was by now no more acceptable to officialdom than a disturbing vision of their absence in an imaginary Baghdad. In these circumstances Jabra persuaded Munif to abandon active political life and devote himself entirely to literature. The experience of writing a novel together with the older man, who was not only much more widely read but a gifted teacher, as well as an established author and critic, had plainly changed Munif, increasing his self-confidence and scope as a writer. For his subsequent work is marked by a startlingly new range and depth that probably owes much to the lengthy critical discussions that must have accompanied the joint creation of 'Ammuriyyah, and fired Munif to conceive his own geography of the imagination—a parallel world like Hardy's Wessex or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha.

For this he needed quiet and distance. On leaving Baghdad, Munif did not relocate to Damascus or Beirut, but moved with his family and his savings to France, taking up residence in Boulogne, near Paris, where many a famous exile had passed his days. There Munif wrote his quintet, Cities of Salt. Originally planned as a trilogy, the complete work took seven years to write, and at two thousand five hundred pages is the longest novel in modern Arabic literature. Epic in scale and ambition, it depicts the traumatic social transformation that came about with the discovery of oil, wrenching traditional desert communities into exploited and oppressed urban populations, and nomadic tribal rivalries into centralized police states. In one sense, it can be—and often is—read as a huge canvas of the brutalities of modernization and its devastation of customary ways of living. The novel seeks to capture the nature and rhythm of a pastoral world that has now been largely swept away, to record its practices and relations, its popular lore and moral beliefs, its forms of memory and of solidarity, and to show what becomes of them once petroleum is extracted from the sand: the enormous leap from traditional desert life, with its bedouin ethos and cosmic sense of time, to the frenzies of consumerism and conflicts of class and wealth in ultra-modern cities. It depicts the arrival of modernity in these conditions as inseparable from the proliferation of tyranny, and oil riches as an evil feeding corruption, greed and human weakness. We watch the crushing of the life of the desert, with its freedom, independence and dignity, under the wheels of a repellent juggernaut.

But though there is a powerful sense of loss in the novel, which mourns the destruction of a world Munif half-knew as a boy, Cities of Salt is far from a simple threnody for tradition. With two technical works on the economics of oil and years of engagement in the Ba'th cause behind him, Munif was scarcely a foe of mineral wealth or modernity as such. It is the cruelly perverted form that modernization has taken in the Arabian peninsula that is the commanding subject of the quintet, and that gives the work its remarkable form. For in the foreground is a tribal saga—the story of the feuding tribes of Arabia and the triumph of one particular tribe over the others through treachery, violence, manipulation of religious dogma and the enlisting of foreign support; and of how the feuds continue within the triumphant tribe, once it has achieved a monopoly of power.[18] Saudi Arabia is the only country in the Arab world that is named after a family. Munif, demolishing the historical lies on which this dynasty has based its legitimacy, etches

a savage portrait not only of its brutality, perfidy and hypocrisy, but of its consistent servility to foreign overlords and sabotage of any moves to economic or political independence in the Arab world. From beginning to end, the House of Saud stands revealed as a dependent of imperial suzerains—first Britain and then the United States. Behind the tribal saga lie the Western empires of oil and their role in thwarting any progress in the region.

Munif's great novel is composed with an extraordinary formal freedom. Each of its five volumes has a different narrative structure, unlike any of the others, and their sequence breaks apart any conventional chronological order. Unifying them is an utterly distinctive tone, at once acerbic and poetic, delivered in an impersonal third person, charged with irony and figural intensity. Generally short, vivid sentences, at times veering close to aphorisms, alternate with terse dialogues in actions that unfold to a kind of epic voice-over. The story—or succession of stories—is told with a continuous energy that seems to belie the huge length of the whole work, and with gifts of metaphoric imagination capable of throwing up images of arresting power or beauty. Aiming at a 'middle language' between classical and colloquial Arabic, Munif was himself not entirely satisfied with the style he arrived at. But as a vehicle for fusing history and fiction on the grandest scale, it is strikingly effective.

The title of the quintet—not of the first volume, as in English—is a judgement: the Cities of Salt built by a grotesque dynasty in the Arabian desert, where oil will one day give out, are barren pillars of artifice destined for ultimate dissolution. To recount the history of the kingdom that created them, Munif devised an original solution to the problem of balancing fact and fiction in his novel. At one level, the narrative of Cities of Salt is a faithful reproduction of the main episodes and landmarks of Saudi history, from the turn of the century to the time of the first oil shock—in effect, a gigantic historical roman à clé, in which the successive actual rulers of the kingdom and their familiars, with the thinnest of disguises, are the principal dramatis personae. But all these figures and events are transposed by Munif's peculiar modes of storytelling into a semi-mythopoeic register, so that the reader is never left in any doubt that this is a work of highly-wrought fiction, as well as an eerie report of political realities. The extreme twisting of time in the novel further distances the direct data of history from their imaginary correlates. The first volume of the quintet covers what in real time are the years from 1933 to 1953. The second deals with historical events between 1953 and 1958. The third reverses to the equivalent of 1891 and ends around 1930. The fourth moves forward to the years between 1964 and 1969. The fifth, which is divided into two parts, first doubles back to 1920–35, and then shifts to 1964–75.[19] The reasons for such a complex structure have been much debated, as have its aesthetic merits. The effect, however, of its switchbacks, overlaps and disjunctures is to estrange the annals of Saudi despotism for the less expected purposes of fiction.

CAMELS TO CADILLACS

The opening volume of *Cities of Salt*, entitled *'al-Tih* (The Wilderness), begins in a pre-modern and pre-national time in the oasis of Wadi al-'Uyun, where a bedouin community lives in traditional simplicity and unity with its surroundings, and seeks to record the forgotten social history and popular geography of Arabia. Into this setting there suddenly appears a small group of Americans, with a strong recommendation from the local emir to the pragmatic elder Ibn al-Rashid, on a

mysterious mission which they never explain to the local people. They are resisted by the fiercely independent Mut'ab, who instinctively suspects them. In his understanding of a harsh—yet also beautiful—environment and respect for its natural rhythms, Mut'ab is a more developed and mythologized version of 'Assaf, the hero of *Endings*.

But he is also a fighter and prophet, whose forebears defended the oasis against the Turks as he will against the Americans, who are bent on destroying the oasis in search of oil. When their yellow tractors finally tear up its trees, he vanishes on his camel into the desert, entering legend as a mythic figure in collective consciousness, and the scene moves to the coastal town of Harran where the Americans need to build a port and a pipeline to the wells they have drilled. There the uprooted bedouin are tricked into becoming exploited construction workers, as the emir presides over the growth of a company town and a class society, enforced by police thugs. When a selfless local healer is murdered by the latter, a strike breaks out, the police open fire but cannot quell the workers, and the emir departs. The entire action of the novel, based on the first discovery of oil in Ayn Dar in the early thirties through to the first strikes in Dhahran in the early fifties, is delivered in the style of an oral storyteller, recounting the fate of a community rather than a set of individuals. New characters enter and old ones disappear in a relay that minimizes, without abolishing, the significance of personal identities. These are features of *'al-Tih* that drew a famously crass comment from John Updike, who announced: 'it is unfortunate that Abdelrahman Munif appears to be insufficiently Westernized to produce a narrative that feels much like what we call a novel. His voice is that of a campfire explainer'—and one denigrating Americans with 'the maledictory rhetoric of the Ayatollah Khomeini' (sic) to boot.[20]

In the second volume of *Cities of Salt*, the optic abruptly alters. Where *'al-Tih* offers an impersonal panorama of sociological changes over two decades, *'al-Ukhdud* (The Trench) zooms in to a few highly coloured years of political history, in which the Saudi dynasty itself—almost entirely off-stage in the first volume—becomes the focus of the narrative, against the background of the transformation of the tribal seat of Riyadh ('Muran') into a modern capital. Here the form of the novel is a court intrigue, and the spirit of the story—which runs from the sudden death of the founder of the Saudi kingdom, Abd al-Aziz ('Khuraybit'), in 1953 to the coup that ousted his son Sa'ud ('Khaz'al') in 1958—closer to Suetonius than Cowper or Scott. The title of *The Trench* alludes to the Qur'anic verse in which the infidel ruler of Mecca casts believers into a pit of fire: 'Self-destroyed were the owners of the trench, of the fuel-fed fire, when they sat by it, and were themselves the witnesses of what they did' (LXXXV, 4–7). The religion that consumes the inhabitants of Muran is the vicious modernity of a petro-despotism, fusing tribal structures with tanks and secret police, gargantuan corruption with political oppression, avid consumerism with ferocious bigotry and hypocrisy. Here too popular life produces those who resist this world, but the central character of the novel concentrates all that is worst in it—the Syrian doctor Subhi al-Mahmalji, modelled on the real-life figure of Rashad Pharaon, who was long a key political adviser and crony of the dynasty. Driven by greed, ambition and vain pretension, Subhi amasses a fortune in land speculation, helps set up the intelligence apparatus of the regime, and supplies his daughter to the bestial appetites of the Sultan—a minutely observed portrait of King Sa'ud—as his latest fifteen-year-old wife. Just as the marriage is celebrated, a palace coup packs ruler, daughter and doctor off into exile.

TRACKING THE DYNASTY

Munif planned a third volume, but found the themes he wanted to address exceeded the scope of a single novel, producing three sequels instead of one, published simultaneously in 1989. Of these only the first, *Taqasim al-Layl wa-l-Nahar* (Variations on Day and Night) has been translated into English. It recounts the rise to power of Khuraybit, the historical Abd al-Aziz, with the backing of the British over his tribal foes in Arabia, this time in a narrative style closer to that of a mediaeval Arabic chronicler than that of a popular storyteller, with frequent allowance made for different speculations or versions of events in circulation at the time. Comparable to Subhi in structural position within the novel, which is set in the epoch preceding *The Trench*, is the English agent and adventurer Hamilton—a fictional double of St John Philby, with an admixture of T. E. Lawrence—of whom Munif draws an unforgettable portrait.

With *al-Munbatt* (The Uprooted), we revert to the destiny of the exiles of *The Trench*, as the evicted Khaz'al settles with his entourage into gilded impotence in Baden-Baden, his health failing, while Subhi is cast out, his daughter commits suicide and his wife and son abandon him for America. The shortest and most concentrated of the quintet, *The Uprooted* presents once again a shift of register, as it traces the descent of Subhi—once odious, now almost tragic—towards madness, and Khaz'al towards death, in a style not unlike a psychological novel of a more classically European type. It ends with the Chekhovian image of a groom speaking to one of Khaz'al's horses after his death; the only being left with whom communication is possible in the solitude that remains. Finally, *Badiyat al-Zumulat* (The Desert of Darkness) concludes *Cities of Salt* with a dramatic bifurcation: 'The Memory of a Distant Past', recounting the youthful years of the future King Fanar (i.e. Faysal) under his father, and the way he was robbed of the succession when his brother Khaz'al saved his father from an assassination attempt he had staged himself, in order to become the heir; followed by 'The Memory of a Recent Past', which shows in detail the way Fanar eventually toppled Khaz'al, in the coup of which we get only a parting glimpse in *The Trench,* and went on to create an ever more vigilant and ruthless despotism himself, before being finally cut down by a younger American-educated member of the tribe.

As befits any monumental work, *Cities of Salt* has earned its share of criticisms, some more founded than others. A legitimate reservation about the quintet is its tendency to idealize the bedouin past with a romantic nostalgia as a serene and well-ordered way of life, and to leave open the suggestion that the peculiarly distorted and corrupted forms of state and society created by oil wealth can be equated with modernity as such, overlooking its real gains and benefits. Less justified is the complaint of certain Arab critics that Munif peoples the later volumes of the quintet excessively with historical figures, to a point where too many characters in the novel stand for real characters outside it—some going so far as to claim that Munif essentially reproduces Aleksei Vassiliev's landmark history of Saudi Arabia in fictional form.[21] This charge is grossly unfair. *Cities of Salt* teems with vividly created characters, ordinary people like Mut'ab al-Hadhdhal, Mufdi al-Jad'an, Shamran al-'Utaybi, Salih al-Rashdan and Shaddad al-Mutawwi', courageous opponents or tragic victims of the disaster it depicts, as well as containing brilliantly rendered portraits of those who in historical fact engineered and profited from this disaster. The novel offers a powerful account of the emergence of the Saudi

security state, and the neo-colonization of Arabia that accompanied it, but is not a mere encoding of these developments. Rather it constructs a fictional universe of remarkable imaginative coherence that is a passionate cry against what Munif once called the trilogy of evils afflicting the Arab world—rentier oil, political Islam and police dictatorship—and a profound call for justice and freedom.[22]

A HOSPITAL IN PRAGUE

On completing *Cities of Salt*, Munif returned—now freed from earlier restraints—to the theme of his first novel with *Al-An Huna aw Sharq al-Mutawassit Marrah Ukhra* (Here and Now, or East of the Mediterranean Again, 1991), a more comprehensive, sophisticated and tightly focused work than its predecessor. In the twenty years separating the two novels, political prisons had proliferated in the Arab world, their evil technologies intensified and cruelty attained new levels of barbarism. The setting of *Here and Now* is a hospital in Prague where ex-political prisoners are sent by their parties for treatment, to seek a cure for their bodies and souls. The hospital, however, is no isolated cosmos, but a locus of contending forces in which external political powers are also at work. The Czech doctors and nurses form part of its dynamics as much as the one-time prisoners, their visitors and opponents, and often appear to be pawns in a complex game of cynical politics. The two major protagonists, Tali‘ al-‘Urayfi and ‘Adil al-Khalidi—the one from Muran, the other from ‘Ammuriyyah—are both leftists who have spent years in jail. In Part I, ‘Adil recounts their common experience after being released from prison. Part II is given over to Tali‘'s voice, and the papers he leaves ‘Adil after his death. In Part III ‘Adil takes over again after the death of Tali‘, as if his experience is the mirror image of the other, or its continuation. The two experiences criss-cross each other to offer a picture of what one might call the universality of prison experience in the Arab world. Tali‘'s death lends special weight to his testimony, which seeks to instil not fear of the atrocities he catalogues, but admiration of the capacity of human beings to withstand them. Urging that anger be directed against the condition of political incarceration itself, he notes that mass apathy and passivity have a share of responsibility for oppression and corruption in the Arab world. His death signifies the end of a certain kind of socialist idealism.

The general continuity and cohesion of the novel comes from ‘Adil, who offers a more sophisticated outlook. From the stream of visitors and political luminaries who flock to his hospital bed and seek his approval or merely his opinion, we get a much wider sense of the Arab political spectrum than could be gleaned from Rajab's rather vague oppositional views in *East of the Mediterranean*. But these visitors all suffer from the common illusion that exiles are capable of changing dire realities at home. ‘Adil has no time for such self-deception, telling them it is one of the reasons for the ebb of revolutionary struggles in the Arab world, the persistence of tyrannies and loss of popular hope for change. Characteristically, exile politics not only sells short the sacrifices of comrades still in prison, but breeds intrigues and hypocrisies that are the antithesis of what liberation really requires—genuine democracy, regular capacity for self-criticism and acknowledgement of errors, a loyal sense of collective organization and refusal of factionalism. ‘Adil's insistence on the need to oppose logic to terror, human beings to political deities, falls on deaf ears. Heedless, his listeners continue as before with their tragicomic coffee-table rivalries, ferocious exchange of accusations and insults, and dismal jockeying for petty powers or favours. It is from the sterility of this

scenery that 'Adil's vision of what another Arab politics could and should be like draws all its force for the reader.

Here and Now appeared in 1991. By this time Munif's savings had dried up, and he was forced to leave Paris, which he reluctantly did; he was to spend the rest of his life in Damascus. By now he was a celebrated author in the Arab world, writing prolifically on literary, intellectual and political matters, producing some eight volumes of essays on them over the next decade. But the principal work of these years was his final novel, *Ard al-Sawad*, 'The Dark Land'.[23] If *Cities of Salt* is Munif's tribute to Arabia as the land of his father, this is his homage to Iraq as that of his mother, to whom it is dedicated, along with Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, with whom he had dreamt of writing it. The novel was clearly motivated by the ordeals of Iraq at the time of its writing, suffering from the tyranny of a ruthless dictator and crippled by the callous sanctions of the 'international community'. As such it can be read as a fictional message to the Iraqi people on how to deal with foreign designs and spare the country impending catastrophe.

FINALE – DUEL IN IRAQ

In form, *Ard al-Sawad* is not a pendant to *Cities of Salt*. It belongs to a different genre, the historical novel proper. Nor is its architecture similar. For although published in three volumes, which appeared together in 1999, running to some fourteen hundred pages, it is difficult to call it a trilogy, since its narrative flows continuously from chapter 1 in the first volume to chapter 133 in the third. Where *Cities of Salt* is essentially a twentieth-century epic covering eight decades (1902–75), and depicting a contemporary world from its origins to the threshold of the present, *Ard al-Sawad* is set far back in the early nineteenth century, and deals with a concentrated span of just five years (1817–21). The space of the novel is also much tighter. Where *Cities of Salt* takes its characters far afield outside Arabia, from Beirut, Damascus, Amman and Alexandria to Geneva, Baden-Baden, Paris or New York, *Ard al-Sawad* never leaves Iraq, where the action is set essentially in Baghdad, with some events in Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah, and on the lower Euphrates. Its character-system is also quite distinct. Real historical figures appear as such, amidst a throng of invented ones, as in the classical historical novel described by Lukács, if with the inversion he had already noted in the thirties—actual political actors taking the leading roles, and fictional characters the lesser ones.

Comprising three outlying provinces—Mosul, Baghdad and Basra—of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq had been ruled since the early eighteenth century by a series of *mamluk* pashas of Georgian origin, technically governors responsible to the Sultanate in Istanbul, but in practice virtually independent rulers. Munif's novel revolves around the struggle for control over the region between the ablest of these, Dawwud Pasha, and the British Resident in Baghdad, Claudius Rich, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Iraq was in economic decline, torn by sporadic revolts in the north against the central power in Baghdad, subject to Iranian pressures from the east and Wahhabi incursions from the south (Karbala was sacked in 1801), and the object of British designs as a way-station to India. In Egypt, by contrast, the great military commander and administrator Muhammad Ali (1804–45)—of Albanian origin—had set about building a modern state capable of defying European and Ottoman intentions, in due course crushing Wahhabi pretensions in Arabia too.

A generation younger, the remarkable figure of Dawwud Pasha was a more cultivated and civilian counterpart, a widely read scholar who spent years studying with the eminent Jaylani, but proved himself a master politician in his rise to power in Baghdad.[24] After a brief background, the novel opens as Dawwud, now installed as governor, embarks on a programme of reform to construct a strong modern state capable of resisting British manoeuvrings in Iraq, which were laying the ground for its colonization. Influenced by the example of Muhammad Ali, but well aware that the peoples of Ard al-Sawad were for historical, cultural and geographical reasons very different from the Egyptians—forming a complex mosaic of discordant ethnic, religious and tribal groups, shaped by a harsh continental climate and unpredictable floods—he sets about unifying the country, dispatching his janissary commander, Sayyid 'Ulaywi, to bring the north under control, and quelling the continual feuds between neighbouring tribes that had been draining the region's resources. He develops industry and agriculture, modernizes education and promotes trade, turning Iraq during his time into a prosperous commercial entrepot where European and Indian goods are widely distributed; in this period, the population of Baghdad doubled.

Ranged against Dawwud is Claudius Rich, the prototype of a long line of flamboyant colonial adventurers—among them Lawrence, Henry McMahon, Percy Cox, Philby, Glubb and Gertrude Bell—instrumental in fastening British imperial control on the Arab world. Boasting of a command of Arabic, Persian and Turkish while still a boy in Bristol, Rich was gazetted into the East India Company at the age of seventeen, and spent three years travelling in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Turkey before proceeding to Bombay where he married the daughter of the British governor and was appointed by him Resident in Baghdad at the age of twenty-one.[25] He landed with his bride in Basra in 1808, and over the next nine years built up a position of formidable power from his base in the Residency in Baghdad. Unlike Dawwud, Rich never liked Iraq or its people. His main interest in the region was to bring it under the control of the British Empire, as a market for British goods and concessions, and—as a more personal sideline—to amass the largest possible collection of its antiquities (coins, gems, tablets, codices) and dispatch them to Britain. In these years of weak governors and often chaotic conditions, he acquired many friends and allies in policy-making circles in both Baghdad and Istanbul, not to speak of employees and spies from the Jewish and Christian minorities in Iraq, enabling him to control the local incumbents or even appoint or remove them from behind the scenes.

THEN AND NOW

With the arrival of Dawwud Pasha, however, Rich more than met his match: a leader with a historical project and a politician unwilling to play second fiddle to anyone. A clash between them was inevitable, and the novel brings the two characters to life through its graphic account of the various plans and counter-plans which each of them launched against the other. Munif's portrait of the Englishman is the most fully fleshed-out and vividly realized representation of a colonial adventurer in modern Arabic literature. Rich is a product of the invigorating surge of imperialism that whetted the British appetite for the Arab world in the wake of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. His exaggerated sense of himself and the power of the country he represents, his 'orientalist' disdain for Arabs and overstated claims of linguistic fluency, his clandestine intrigues and ostentatious processions through

Baghdad, unfurl before us. Pitting his youth and his skills at the British art of divide and rule against the long experience of the Pasha, he uses every weapon at his command to bring Dawwud down, from venal sex to financial blackmail, from arranging trade blockades at Basra to create food shortages to suborning the governor's top military officer, Sayyid 'Ulaywi.

The third historical character in the novel, this commander cuts a tragic figure. After many successful battles in the service of Dawwud, he develops his own power base in the north, drawing on English money and Iranian support, but in his arrogance over-reaches himself, conspiring with Rich against the Pasha in 1818. Eventually arrested and tried for treason, he is condemned to death. With 'Ulaywi's execution, the schemes of the Resident finally crumble. Driven out of Baghdad, in his last months Rich continues to hover near the lost object of his desire, before despair takes its toll and he succumbs to an epidemic in Shiraz.[26]

This political drama is never, however, isolated from the popular life of the time, whose depiction lends the novel its specific texture and verve. Many of the ordinary characters in the narrative are as vivid and rounded as the main historical protagonists: the regulars at al-Shatt Café, the singer Thamir al-Majul from the south who becomes a private performer for Sayyid 'Ulaywi, the Jewish madam Rujaina and her bevy of girls, the simple Badri who rises to become a military aide to the Pasha. The struggle for power at the top is not fully possible without the involvement of so many ordinary people, who are caught up in every step of its development. We see the pervasive impact of Dawwud's reforms in daily life through the customers of al-Shatt Café, as well as through the career of Badri, who is a direct beneficiary of them before falling victim to 'Ulaywi's conflict with the Pasha. His love for Najmah, one of Rujaina's girls, and abortive marriage to Zakiyyah, which leads by a masterly twist of the narrative to his death, take us to the inner landscape of popular existence in Baghdad. Around it extends a vibrant sociological reconstruction of the life of the city, with its streets, cafés, brothels, markets, offices, festivities, domestic space, and rival centres of power in the Pashalik and the Residency. The interplay between this affectionately recreated world below and the harsh exigencies of the struggle above is one of Munif's finest achievements. *Ard al-Sawad* is by far the best Arabic novel on Iraq. Its publication in the last year of the century made a fitting conclusion to Munif's career as a novelist.

But it was not his last word as a writer. In 2000, soon after its appearance, he told an interviewer: 'The present sufferings of the Iraqi people could move a heart of stone. It is a suffering that, besides its cruelty and injustice, gives an indication of the Dark Ages through which we are living, in which a blind superpower attempts to impose its hegemony on the rest of the world. This merits opposition all the world over'. His own contribution was a study of Iraq from the British occupation of 1917 to the Anglo-American occupation of 2003, *Notes on History and Resistance*.[27] In it, Munif recalled the great uprising against Britain in 1920 and ended with the infamies of the US and its returned collaborators—'the most ignominious and shameless opposition in the world, a collection of kiosks selling lies and illusions'—as another resistance was igniting against them.

ENDNOTES

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[1] He describes these years in *Sirat madinah* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya, 1994), his partly fictionalized memoir of Amman, of which an English translation was published as *Story of a City: A Childhood in Amman* (London: Quartet, 1996). A fuller account can be found in a book-length interview in which Munif also provides details on his controversial and thorny relationship with the Iraqi Ba'th Party: Maher Jarrar, *'Abd al-Rahman Munif wa-l-'Iraq* ['Abd al-Rahman Munif and Iraq] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya, 2004).

[2] Munif's intellectual and political orientations were closer to those of the Communist Party at the time, but he vehemently opposed their acceptance of Israel, and slavish adherence to Moscow's line. His strong nationalist sentiments and views on Palestine led him to reject the CP and instead join the Ba'th, in which he was a critical and radicalizing influence.

[3] Thereafter travelling on Algerian, Yemeni or Iraqi passports.

[4] The original title in Arabic: *Mabda' al-musharakah wa-ta'mim al-bitrol al-arabi* [The Principle of Partnership and the Nationalization of Arab Oil] (Beirut, 1972). The book seems to have been published either independently by the author or by the Party, for it has no recognizable publisher. Its first part surveys the history of American penetration of Arabia and the Gulf and the political context in which the oil companies were forced – after much resistance – to accept the principle of partnership. The second part of the book is devoted to a study of the history of the Iraqi oil industry, and suggests how the latter stands to benefit from a much more radical approach, bordering on nationalization.

[5] He completed the novel in the spring of 1971, and it appeared in 1973.

[6] With the notable exception of his last, Munif's novels rarely designate the country in which they are set, even where the reference is clear. As he once put it: "If, for example, we discuss the political prison in a confined territory such as Iraq or Saudi Arabia, it seems as if we are exonerating other places or as if political prisons do not exist in these places, especially when we know they exist from the Atlantic to the Gulf. Thus I consider the generalization of this subject is the ultimate specificity." Interview given to *L'Orient Express* in 1999 under the title "Crisis in the Arab World" and translated in *Al Jadid*, no. 45, 2004.

[7] "To be an exile means that you are an accused person from the outset. Never mind the nature of the accusation or from where it emanates, the important thing is that you acquired an ambiguous status whose explication results in more and varied accusations. You accept this ambiguous status and act accordingly as an ambassador for a cause and a people, even though no one has nominated or empowered you . . . You escaped prison and restrictions in your land, but you become an uninvited guest in another land, and this makes you undesirable, an incessant question that begs an answer and a bargaining chip in a political and cultural game beyond your control." 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Katib wa-'l-manfa: Humum wa-afaq al-riwaya al-'arabiyya* [Writer and Exile: Issues and Perspectives on the Arabic Novel] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya, 1992), p. 85–7.

[8] In Egypt, Yusuf Idris had published *al-'Askari al-aswad* [The Black Policeman] in 1960, and Sun'allah Ibrahim *Tilka al-ra'ihah* [The Smell of It] in 1966; in Morocco, Abd al-Karim Ghallab had written *Sab'at abwab* [Seven Gates] in 1965; in Iraq, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Rubay'i's *al-Washm* [Tattoo] appeared in 1972. Later contributions to this genre include Naguib Mahfouz's *al-Karnak* [Karnak, 1974] and Sun'allah Ibrahim's *Najmat aghustus* [The Star of August, 1974] from Egypt; Turki al-Hamad's *al-Karadib* [Karadib, 1998] from Saudi Arabia; and 'Aliyah Mamduh's *al-Ghulamah* [The Young Woman, 2000] from Iraq.

[9] Another beneficiary of this shift was the Sudanese writer 'al-Tayyib Salih, whose *Mawsim al-hijrah ila al-shamal* [Season of Migration to the North, 1968] was greeted enthusiastically, as were Palestinian poets like Mahmud Darwish, who gave the gloomy post-1967 scene some hope. The same shift was also behind the instant success of Munif and the very positive, often exaggerated, reception of his work. Munif himself stressed the significance of the Six Day War for his own writing: "The defeat of 1967 pushed me toward the novel not as a means of escape but of confrontation. It had an unforgettable effect: to see such a vast area as the Arab world – with all its enormous clamour and slogans – crumble and fall, not just in six days but a mere few hours." Interview in *Banipal*, October 1998.

[10] For a consideration of the ways in which the Arabic novel reacted to social and cultural changes with a series of new textual strategies of modernist inspiration, see Sabry Hafez, "The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 1994, p. 93–112.

[11] Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, vol. I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 32.

[12] The leading Syrian writer and critic, Sidqi Isma'il, criticized Munif for a 'rudimentary realism' and 'documentary representation of the life and spirit of the masses through the mind of an intellectual', clashing with what was essentially a 'novel of ideas', in his introduction to *Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq*.

[13] See Sabry Hafez, *Najib Mahfuz: Atahaddath Ilaykum* [Interviews with Naguib Mahfouz] (Beirut, 1973).

[14] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Ta'mim al-Bitrul al-'Arabi* (Baghdad, 1976).

[15] See 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *Dhakirah li-'l-Mustaqbal* [A Memory for the Future] (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-'arabiyya, 2001), p. 50.

[16] Abu 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Bahr (c. 776–868), known as al-Jahiz, 'the goggle-eyed', was the greatest prose writer of classical Arabic, an author of encyclopaedic erudition and acuity, who left behind some two hundred works.

[17] It is not, however, the first experiment of its kind in modern Arabic literature. In 1936 Taha Husayn and Tawfiq al-Hakim co-wrote *Al-Qasr al-Mashur* [The Bewitched Palace], which among other things seeks to purge the creative process of its authorial tyranny, allowing characters to question the motives of their creators, and rebel against them. This novel is not only the precursor of *A World without Maps,* but one of the operative subtexts of the latter's fictional world, where there is, on one level or another, a constant dialogue with its structures and themes.

[18] For a detailed study of this novel as a tribal saga, see Amina Khalifa Thiban, *Transformation and Modernity in the Desert Tribal Saga: Cities of Salt*, PhD thesis submitted to SOAS, University of London, 2004.

[19] The historical events behind these dates were as follows. In 1891 the Saudi tribal leader 'Abd al-Rahman was driven from his lands by the Rashidi. In 1902 his son 'Abd al-Aziz, founder of the modern Saudi state and later often known in the West as Ibn Saud, retook Riyadh, and by 1930 had conquered all of the area of today's Saudi Arabia. In 1933, 'Abd al-Aziz granted the first oil concession to what would become Aramco. The first oil fields were pumped in 1938; a pipeline to Dhahran was completed in 1950; the first strikes in Dhahran occurred in 1953. In the same year 'Abd al-Aziz died, and was succeeded by his son Saud, who had saved him from an assassination attempt in 1935. Saud was deprived of his power by his brother Faysal in 1958, attempted a comeback in 1962, and was finally forced to abdicate and driven into exile in 1964, when Faysal seized the throne. Saud died in 1969. Faysal was in turn assassinated by a nephew in 1975. The only significant modification of this chronology in the quintet is the compression of Saud's loss of power in 1958 and his eviction in 1964 into a single coup by Faysal, depicted from different angles at the end of the second and in the middle of the fifth volumes.

[20] No parody of Western ignorance and condescension could better the ineffable remark with which Updike concluded his review: "The jacket flap tells us *Cities of Salt* has been banned in Saudi Arabia. The thought of novels being banned in Saudi Arabia has a charming strangeness, like the thought of hookahs being banned in Minneapolis": *Odd Jobs*, New York 1991, p. 563–67. Martin Amis characteristically gawps with admiration at these fatuities, in his own inimitable tone: "You have only to look at the bibliographical lead-ins to feel your lower lip tremble: "*Cities of Salt*, by Abdelrahman Munif, translated from the Arabic by Peter Theroux. 627 pp"—627 pages! Yet Iron John dispatches that one" – N*ew York Time*s, 10 November 1991.

[21] Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 1998). The Russian original appeared in 1982, the Arabic translation in 1986.

[22] "Crisis in the Arab World," *Al Jadid*, no. 45, 2004.

[23] Ard al-Sawad, literally the Black or Dark Land, is the old name for Iraq used by the Arabs who conquered it in 651 AD – Some say because they reached it at dusk, or the shadows of the dense palm groves made the land dark; others because they were astonished by the contrast between its lush fertility and the parched yellow desert from which they had come. Munif plays on the ambiguity of phrase.

[24] Dawwud Pasha (c. 1774–1850), who came to Baghdad as a Georgian slave-boy at the age of ten, ruled Iraq from 1817–31. He later went on to govern Bosnia (1833–35) and Ankara (1839–40), before ending up as guardian of the shrine at Medina (1840–50), where he died and was buried.

[25] For a biography by his grand-niece, see Constance Alexander, Baghdad in Bygone Days: From the Journals and Correspondence of Claudius Rich, Traveller, Artist, Linguist, Antiquary and British Resident at Baghdad, 1808–1821 (London: John Murray, 1928). Munif's novel, which is based on thorough historical research, raises doubts about the extent of Rich's linguistic achievements: the two translators he employed play important roles in the narrative.

[26] See Alexander, *Baghdad in Bygone Days*, p. 263–92, and Rich's own accounts of his trips to Kurdistan and Persepolis.

[27] 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *al-Iraq: Hawamish min al-tarikh wa-l-muqawamah* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-thaqafi al-'arabi, 2003).

MUNIF: POETICS OF A LIFE

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH*

Translated by Sonja Mejcher-Atassi

- ʻAbd al-Rahman Munif was born on **May 29, 1933** in Amman to a father from Najd and a mother from Iraq.
- He spent his first years with his family that travelled between Damascus, Amman and some Saudi cities.
- His secondary schooling ended in the Jordanian capital with the beginning of his political activism and his membership in the newly founded Ba'th party.
- He enrolled in the Faculty of Law in Baghdad in **1952**. With the signing of the Baghdad Pact in **1955**, Munif together with a large number of Arab students was expelled to the Republic of Egypt.
- He continued his studies at Cairo University to attain the degree in law.
- In **1958**, he pursued his graduate studies at Belgrade University, Yugoslavia, where he obtained a doctoral degree in economics in **1961**, specializing in the economics of petroleum.
- He went back to Beirut where he was elected a member of the Ba'th party's pan-Arab command for a few months.
- In **1962**, his organized political affiliation with the Ba'th party ended after the conference of Homs which was marked by differences in practice and vision.
- In **1963**, he was stripped of his Saudi passport by the Saudi embassy in Syria, taking his political affiliations as pretext, and it was not even given back to him after his death in **2004**.
- In **1964**, he returned to Damascus to work in the field of his specialization in the Syrian Company for Petroleum, "Company for the Export of Petroleum". Afterwards he worked as director for the marketing of Syrian raw petroleum.
- In **1973**, he settled in Beirut where he worked for a few years in the journal al-Balagh.
- In **1975**, he left Beirut for Baghdad where he worked as a petroleum expert. He was in charge of publishing a journal that dealt with oil economics, "Development and Oil", which had a big echo. He stayed until **1981** when the Iraqi-Iranian war broke out.
- He left for Paris where he devoted himself exclusively to writing novels. The first volumes of *Mudun al-milh* (Cities of Salt) were the most important outcome. He returned to Syria in **1987**.
- In **1987**, he settled in Damascus to continue writing, going back and forth between Beirut and Damascus until his death on **January 24, 2004**.

‘ABD AL-RAHMAN MUNIF

NOVELS

- (1973). *al-Ashjar wa-ightiyal Marzuq*.
- (1974). *Qissat hubb majusiyya*.
- (1975). *Sharq al-mutawassit*.
- (1976). *Hina tarakna al-jisr*.
- (1977). *al-Nihayat*.
- (1979). *Sibaq al-masafat al-tawila*.
- (1982). /Jabra Ibrahim Jabra. *’Alam bi-la khara’it*.
- (1984-1989). *Mudun al-milh*.
    1. (1984). *al-Tih*.
    2. (1985). *al-Ukhdud*.
    3. (1989). *Taqasim al-layl wal-nahar*.
    4. (1989). *al-Munbatt*.
    5. (1989). *Badiyat al-zulumat*.
- (1991). *al-An … huna aw sharq al-mutawassit marra ukhra*.
- (1999). *Ard al-sawad*.
- (2005). *Umm al-Nudhur*.

SHORT STORIES

- (2006). *Asma’ musta’ara*.
- (2006). *al-Bab al-maftuh*.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

- (1994). *Sirat madina*.
- (2001). *Sirat madina*. Introduction by Marwan Qassab Bashi.

LITERARY AND ART CRITIQUE

- (1992). *al-Katib wal-manfa. Humum wa-afaq al-riwaya al-’arabiyya*.
- (1995). (ed.) *al-Qalaq wa-tamjid al-hayat. Kitab takrim Jabra Ibrahim Jabra*.
- (1996). *Marwan Qassab-Bashi: Rihlat al-hayat wal-fann*.
- (1998). *Law’at al-ghiyab*.
- (2000). *Jabr ... Musiqah al-alwan*.
- (2001). *Dhakira lil-mustaqbal*.
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SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

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[*] This sketch was translated from Arabic with permission from Munif's family. It is available on www.munif.org

CORRESPONDENCE

This selection of letters offers a glimpse into Munif's rich yet hitherto unstudied correspondence with other writers, artists and intellectuals. I thank the Munif family for making these letters available.

This selection includes:

1. A letter written by the Palestinian-Iraqi writer and intellectual Jabra Ibrahim Jabra to Munif. The letter is dated May 15, 1982 – al-Mansur, Baghdad. Jabra starts the letter by excusing himself for not having written earlier due to his many obligations. He mentions his lectures at Baghdad University, his introductions to books on music and art in Iraq, and his translations of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as well as Dylan Thomas' poetry. The main part of the letter is devoted to Jabra's and Munif's joint novel *'Alam bila khara'it* (*A World Without Maps*, 1982) whose proof sheets Jabra had just received. He is confident that the novel adds something new to the Arabic novel – the atmosphere of Ammuriyya, the fictitious city in which the novel takes place. Furthermore, he voices the idea of writing another novel together with Munif. Their childhood memories, he says, should play an important part in it. Jabra ends the letter by expressing how much he misses Munif (who had left Baghdad for Paris in 1981) and the evenings they spent talking together.

   Jabra and Munif met in Baghdad in the early 1950s. When Munif settled again in Baghdad to work with OPEC in the 1970s, they became close friends.

2. A letter written by the Syrian painter Marwan Qassab-Bachi to Munif. The letter is not dated but was most probably written in early 2002 in Berlin. Written in the form of a private journal with little drawings and aquarelles interspersed, Marwan expresses his longing for Damascus. For him, Munif is an essential part of Damascus, part of its very soil, "a rock between Najd and Baghdad", as he says. He tells his friend of his new studio in Berlin.

   Marwan and Munif met briefly in the mid 1950s in Damascus and then again in the mid 1990s, when Munif was invited to a reading in Berlin. Marwan has contributed significantly to Munif's books in the form of book illustrations that now figure on all the new editions.

3. A letter by Munif to Marwan Qassab-Bachi dated March 15, 2002 – Damascus. Munif writes about the beginning of spring, life starting anew. He mentions that he suffers from health problems but says that his pain is minimized by the books that wait to be written. He concludes by saying that he is going to write a longer letter another time, this letter was just to say hello.
   S.M.-A.

JABRA TO MUNIF

المنصور ٨/١٥
بغداد
٨٦/٥/١٥

أخي العزيز عبد الرحمن

تأتيني الرسالة منك نسمة منعشة، وصوتاً حميماً، في وقت واحد.
ولك كل الحق في العتب، وأنا أماطل في الكتابة رغم كل الوعود والعهود.
ورغم أن الكتابة أصبحت الآن أشق مما كانت فيما مضى – وهي كانت دائماً صعبة
شاقة، ولكن متعتها المثيرة تعوّض عن كل صعوبة ومشقة، بل رغم أن
إعمال الذهن بحد ذاته أصبح محفزاً أقرب إلى المستحيل. لك، إن استطعت،
أن تشغل ذهنك، تهيئه، تنشّيه، الخ. أما أن تجعله يعمل على الطريقة
التي عوّدته إياها، بحيث يقذف إليك بالأفكار والصور والشخصيات
والذكريات، فضلاً عن الكلمات الغريبة، والجمل التي تراوح بين الثلج
والنار – فيبدو أنه يحرن ويجمح ويرفض، كالحمار الذي يزرع حوافره في
الأرض ويأبى الحركة رغم كل العصي المنهالة على مؤخرته.

ومع ذلك فإن انشغالي في الفترة الأخيرة يذهلني أحياناً. في الأسابيع
القليلة الماضية هيأت وبيّضت مباشرة بالإنكليزية من ٢٢٠ صفحة، وألقيت ٣ محاضرات
(آخرها قبل يومين، بالإنكليزية، في كلية الآداب، للأساتذة وطلاب الماجستير
في قسم الأدب الإنكليزي)، وانتهيت من كتاب "السونيتات" لشكسبير
(٤٠ سونيتة، مع مقدمة دراسية، وهوامش، ورسوم لراكان دبدوب) –
وسلّمت المخطوطة [illegible] لنشرها قريباً، [illegible] مقدمتين، إحداهما
عن الموسيقى والأخرى عن الفن في العراق. هذا بالطبع فضلاً عن العمل اليومي
ومراجعة [illegible] ترجمتي لكتاب "ديلان توماس"، و[illegible] "عالم بلا خرائط"،
وما نسيته كثير، كالعادة. وهذا كله بالطبع، ليس إلا انشغالات –
أما انثيال الذهن العجيب فيكاد يكون في حكم الغياب. وتحريضك [illegible]
دافعاً ومحركاً ومنعشاً – [illegible] أن أفرغ من الحلقة الدراسية
الخاصة بالنقد الفني التي كلفت برئاسة اللجنة التحضيرية لها – وستنعقد
في يومي ٢٥ و٢٦ أيار، الخ الخ. (بهذه المناسبة، اعتذرت أخيراً عن الذهاب

٢

الى مؤتمر الدراسات العربية في امريكا، لأكثر من سبب [illegible] وهذا معناه أنني لن أمرّ بباريس في طريقي، كما كنت آمل. ولكن، لعله يتاح لي أن أزور آخر باريس.)

عندما وقفت بعزم روايتنا، أدركت كم مشوقة هي، ومن [illegible]، كم من القرّاء سيغوصون إلى الأعماق الحقيقية عند صدورها؟ الراجح - وربما عجز القرّاء عن الغوص - أننا استطعنا أن نحمل لهم هذه الأغوار الزلقة، المتداخلة، اللذيذة والمرعبة معاً. ولا بدّ أن البعض سيغوصون ويتيهون معنا، وبعضها يعودون إلى واقعهم. يعودون وكأنهم أناس آخرون. ستصبح شيئاً نحتاج إليه أحياناً، أن الرواية العربية، بعد روايتنا هذه، وصوفيات جديدة تملؤه أجواء جمهورية دستويفسكي [illegible] السلوم وصيام الرجعة، وصوفيات نجود العامري ومبارزة... هل قلت «صوفيات»؟ لماذا لا يتركنا رائع في عالمنا أن يكون جذوره غائرة في اللاعقل المنطقي «عقلانياتنا» العاثرة الكابية المتلبسة؟

أنا أعلم انك تريد لي أن اتحدث عن رواية لنا قادمة. فأنا أتخايل منذ أشهر، انتهت حالي مرة [illegible]، ولست ملحّة على الموضوع. ولكنني كنت مخطئاً (أو مصيبة) ظننت أنها ستكون البداية لعمل جديد. ولكنني كنت نخرجها من تحت جلدي وجلدك، اذا لم ننشر، ما لم بعد خرائط، وعاجلاً نخرجها من تحت جلدي وجلدك، سنكتب رواية من نوع مختلف في دواخلنا. واظن اننا، في المرة القادمة، سنكتب ذكريات الطفولة، بالطبع، أو منفصلة بطريقة أخرى. أو هكذا يجب ان نفعل. أزاما نتهرّب من الرعب والدموع والغضب التي نحياها؟ تنفي السبوع الخفي الخفي. لماذا لم أم أننا نلقي بأنفسنا في خضمّه، وليغرق كل من لا يتقن السباحة؟... لماذا لم تشمل أحاديثنا الطويلة نبش وكيف نحددها عبر هذه المسافات التي تفصل بيننا بتداخل الجغرافي، رغم كل صور الشوق والخيال والتشوّف؟ وربما ستكون، ما زلت أحدس بأننا سنحددها، وندخل فيها، إلى ان تبلغ المنطقة البعيدة التي تتحول فيها حتى البلوغ إلى نوع من الإبداع الرهيب.

٢

فوجئنا هنا بقرارك ترك العمل على «العلم والتكنولوجيا».
الذي سرّني بوجه خاص أن تكون قد رتبت أمورك على نحو يضمن لك
حياة كريمة، أنت والعائلة، دون إرهاق كبير. في هذه الأثناء،
بدأ صاحب دار واسط في قضايا نشر الكتب. في أذهاننا
برنامج طموح لنشر الكتب ذات المستوى الجيد، في حقول المعرفة كلها.
هل وجدت في «ملازم وعالم بلا خرائط» ما فاجأك؟ لا أظن.
سوى اللازم «قطع» كلمات علاء في النهاية. المفروض أن كلامه
مستمر، ولذا كان الرواية تنتهي بفارزة (وليس بنقطة، كما
فعل المنضد، وقد صححت هذا الخطأ). في يوم ما سأعطيك نسخة
مصورة عن المخطوطة - لقد صورت عنها نسختين قبل إعطائها لعمر.
وقد وعد أن يسدد المبلغ معي قبل نهاية تموز (حتى الآن لم آخذ
منه أي اتفاق موقع). وقد أعطيته صيغة عقد وعد بأن يطبعه
ويوقعه بثلاث نسخ، واحدة لك، وأخرى لي، والثالثة له. وكان لا
بد من تحديد فترة زمنية لملكية الناشر للكتاب، وبعد [illegible] من
الإقناع، تحددت الفترة بأربع سنوات من تاريخ إحالة الرواية إلى
الطبع. وقد اتفقنا أن يكون حسابي منفصلاً تماماً عن حسابه معك
أو مع بعض كتبنا الأخرى.
أطيب أشواق لك ولسعاد والأطفال مني ومن لطيفة،
وسلموا جميعاً لأخيك

م

سلامي إلى الأصدقاء في باريس جميعاً.
ومن هنا فؤاد التكرلي ومحسن الموسوي
يسألون عنك دائماً ويبلغونك تحياتهم.

MARWAN TO MUNIF

Privat: Bayerische Straße 8 · D-10707 Berlin · Telefon & Fax. 0049 (0)30 885 46 31
Atelier: Schmargendorfer Straße 25 · D-12159 Berlin · Telefon & Fax. 0049 (0)30 852 36 67
Professor Marwan Kassab-Bachi

عزيزي عبد الرحمن ،
أنا أحبك كثيراً وأفكر بك كثيراً ويحملني الشوق والحنين
للحضور بأني مقيم معكم في زاوية ما في دمشق ، بيت ترابي
يكون بيتي فيه مرسم وبعض الكتب وعندما ينادي المؤذن
لصلاة الغروب أهمل ذاتي وأتوجه إلى داركم مع الأمل
والرضا .... أو تيرون الهوينا مع ما بقي من ذاكرة الصيف
وروائح الياسمين والليلكي حتى تصلون البيت الترابي، بيت
الأخ والصديق المشتاق مروان .. يكاد البداوة تتغلب
على آدابي مع الورق لأقول ... هل الحياة . لماذا نحن بعيدون
ربما ما أقول هو رومانتيكية الساعة المتأخرة وعالم برليني بين
العواصف وبعض الثلوج والليل - ولكن لا ، إن شوقي لترابي
كبير ولو سمحت لي ظروف المداد والورقة وقدرة البوح
لقلت أني أحبكم وأتمثل فيك خلاصة الوطن والأرض والعطاء
وأراك جزءاً وكلاً من أرضي وترابي وذاكرتي تشع عيناك بالنور
والسؤال المستمر ، من ذاكرتي لهذا الوطن المباع وذلك
التناقض الهائل بيننا وبين الواقع وحضارة الإنسان ، ولكننا
أعطينا ما قدرنا عليه دون سؤال أو انتظار إلا الحب والتفاني
والسؤال . ارتبطنا بالإنسان ومصيره وارتبطنا بأرض
تسمى أرض العرب ،
وهكذا ، وكالعادة أشطح في البوح مع الحروف والصور
والورقة الأبيض دون فكرة سابقة إلا الرغبة في اللقاء معك
على هذه المادة العجيبة ، الورقة ، المداد وسيران الروح
في لقاء صديق قريب ، وأراك حالاً حتى بيننا نذكر
وأنا أحاول بجهد التقاط ما تشع به عيناك من إشارات
الوجود بنور حبيب يشع بثبات وإرادة عن كل ما جاء
منك بآلاف الصفحات والعنون ، لتبقى قريب منك
هذه الساعة لأحاور بصيرتي وألواني التقاط بعضاً
مما يأتي منك وأنت كالصخرة الملساء المنداة ما بين نجد
وعمان وبغداد ودمشق وفي بطنها ينابيع الإنسان ه

marwan

لأرجع الى غرفتي، الى حدودي، والى مرسمي!
لقد بدأت العمل رغم جدة المرسم وبياضه، إلا بياض مخيف
أكان ورقة أو حائط أو قماش. جاءت بعض بقع اللون
على الأرض وكل من سار على الدرب قد يصل .. إلى أين!
إلى حلم رافقنا في بطن الأم، من نحن وأين ينتهي الكون،
وهناك الفرق الأكبر بين الصناعي المهني وبين من يحاول
السير في الأنفاق ليصل الى بعض نقاط انفراج النور، طريقة
مسيرة متعبة ولكنها لذيذة ومشجعة ولكن ما أصعب الوصول إلى
الزهور والنور وبعض شقائق القناعات ولكننا نقف مع
إعياء شديد مع الشهادة لنشق الطريق الى شهادة جديدة
وما أصعب الطريق المفروشة بالأمل والخيبة ونحن نسير بين
الأشواك وهنا الروح.
إن مرسمي جميل وهو يشبه صومعة ومحراب يشع بالنور (الأعلى)
وهو مثل فراش الحبيبة في يوم اللقاء الأول يلامس هبات
النور .. ومسيرة الألوان وتيارها في أخاديد المادة حتى
تلتقي من جديد مع نجوم الضوء ومعرفة ليصمت في مساحة
جديدة وإيقاع عجيب. أشعر بالأمل أحيانا مع بعض
الإحباطات من حديقة الماضي حيث علي أن أحفر نحو مصادر
الينبوع والانفتاحات وإن ما يقلقني كثيرا، لعن الله
المادة، الالتزامات الكثيرة بسبب البناء والقروض، ومن
الطبيعي أن يكون هناك قليلا من القلق عندما أتحدث
عن هذا الأمر لصديقي عن (الصورة) .. وصورنا كم
أحسن صورة.! هل هذا من القرآن أو أنه ارتجال مني
لا أذكر، ولكن لا بأس بذلك،

أعمل الآن على لوحة انعكاس ثلاثية وتواجهني
مشكلة النور .. يا للتعاسة! كان مرسمي
يجلب لي النور من اليمين وأنا أعمل المرآة
عندما أرسم .. ياله من تصور رجعي! الضوء
من اليمين .. والآن يأتي الضوء من أعلى وعلي
التكيف مع هذه الحالة. حالة النور مصدره.
هذا مصدر كتابي لكم اليوم وسيكون في المستقبل
مصادر أخرى. المهم هو النور، النور
والفسحة لأرواحنا ونفوسنا مع حبي الكبير لكم.

أحسن صورة.! هل هذا من القرآن ...
لا أذكر، ولكن لا بأس بذلك،

أعمل الآن على لوحة انعكاس ثلاثية وتواجهني
مشكلة النور .. يا للتعاسة! كان مرسمي
يجلب لي النور من اليمين وأنا أعمل المرآة
عندما أرسم .. ياله من تصور رجعي! الضوء
من اليمين .. والآن يأتي الضوء من أعلى وعلي
التكيف مع هذه الحالة. حالة النور مصدره.
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والفسحة لأرواحنا ونفوسنا مع حبي الكبير لكم.

MUNIF TO MARWAN

١٥/٣/٢٠٠٢

العزيز مروان

تحيات عاطرة واشكرك لذكرى على حملة تضامن، وانتظار الاخبار الاخيرة.

بدأ الربيع في دمشق، انها انتفضت تفاصيل الاشجار المزهورة، تراها على مد النظر، ابيض وزهر. اما اوراق الاشجار البازغة الصغيرة فانها مهرجان للفرح ودليل جارح على قوة الحياة. فالعود التي كانت الى ايام قليلة سابقة يابسة تفجرت فجأة عن براعم في كل شيء ومنها تطل الاوراق الصغيرة تعبيراً عن الحياة وتأكيداً لوجودها الناضر. انها الحياة و[illegible] [illegible] مشاهدتها وتأملها يحس الانسان بالتفاؤل والتجدد وبامكانيات [illegible] تبقى الحياة وتستمر، وعلى الانسان ان يلتقط درساً من هذه الحالة.

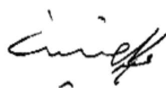
هذه اول رسالة اكتبها بعد انقطاع طويل.. طويل. احببت الكتابة مرات، واليوم وجدت نفسي مدفوعاً لان اكتب اليك. كل الذي الموجود هنا يسير الى [illegible] الغارقة في البرودة والعتمة، واريد ايضاً ان اذكرك ان الربيع آت، وان السنونو بدأ [illegible] السماء. صحيح ان سنونو واحدة لا تأتي بالربيع ولكنها تبشر انه آتٍ وانه لن يتأخر كثيراً.

ومثلي لا اكتب فانا اقرأ. تصور الحياة دون قراءة، ما اشد جفافها وقسوتها، لكن ما يخفف من الشعور بالمرارة ان لدي قدراً غير قليل من الكتب المؤجلة، وكلما تنشط القراءة، لكن العين اليمنى اللعينة تأكل الضوء من العيون، وتترك من الوقت ما يكفي. يجب ان اختصر قراءة الصحف، لانها متشابهة ومملة، تكفينا العادة، ويقال اخلاص!

هذه الرسائل ليست مثل رسائلنا المتبادلة، انما هي عملية تسخين لكي نعاود سيرتنا الاولى في الكتابة المنتظمة والدائمة، ولذلك اعتبر الاختصار اكثر ميزة، ومن المطلوب ايضاً ويكون لكل شيء قوله: مرحباً، او حين ترى كلمة مرحباً سوف تتوالى الاسئلة والكلمات وتنفتح الانسان جعبته ويقول كل ما عنده.

وصحتي ما تزال الآن مستقرة، بدأت العلاج قبل اكثر من شهر، بالحمية، في خطة صعبة، لكن في الايام الاخيرة الوضع افضل. الدوام مع هذه الصفحة اسبوعياً، وعلى ضوء الفحوص الاخيرة سوف تتحدد الخطوات التالية.

مع اهتمامي تحياتي وتحيات الجميع والى لقاء قريب.



BOOK REVIEWS

Maher Jarrar (ed.)
Abdel Rahman Munif wal Iraq: Sira wa Thikrayat
Beirut: Al Markaz al Thaqafi al Arabi, 2005

Reviewed by Abdel Razzaq Takriti*

Abdel Rahman Munif wal Iraq: Sira wa Thikrayat [Abdel Rahman Munif and Iraq: Biography and Memories] features Munif's last interview, a piece by his close friend Talal Sharara and a critical essay by Maher Jarar. This collection offers valuable insights into the remarkable life and work of one of the most important Arab figures of the past quarter-century. Alas, although its title promises a thorough memorial consideration of Munif's connection with Iraq, it is thematically disjointed, touching upon a broad range of issues affecting the entirety of the Arab world. It tries to do too much in too short of a space, jumbling autobiography, political theory, historical analysis, eulogistic prose and literary criticism. This is by no means a unique failing. Previous Munif non-fiction volumes, including *Al Kateb wal Manfa* and *Bain al Thaqafa wal Siyasa* have similarly suffered from lack of focus.

Nevertheless, there is much to be appreciated in this collection. Talal Sharara's memorial account movingly conveys the impact that Munif had on those who knew him and Maher Jarar's engaging but regrettably short study on *Ard al Sawad* places this Iraqi trilogy in historical context. Above all, Munif's last interview brings to the fore his remarkable political past, his life history as a pan-Arabist cadre between the *Nakba* of 1948 and the *Naksa* of 1967. It moreover highlights his reflections on the role of the intellectual in an era of confusion and occupation.

Munif was a child of the late mandate era and he was exposed early on to its major events. His recollection of that period in *Abdel Rahman Munif wal Iraq* strongly affirms the centrality of Palestine for Arab thought and practice:

> people were broadly divided into two factions: patriots, and those who directly worked with the authorities. The latter were always suspect. People were generally patriotic and their patriotism was measured by the issue of Palestine, every event used to be measured in terms of its connection with the cause of Palestine (p.17).

Here, as elsewhere in his interview, Munif emphasizes a dichotomy between "authority" and "society." For the latter, Palestine exemplified the gravest example of injustice and oppression in the region, as well a symptom of a broader problem of Arab fragmentation. Young intellectuals like Munif were concerned that this fragmentation would continue after the end of the British and French presence. The Arab world was confronted with a perilous dualism: the emerging political body was the imperially sponsored local state, but the incendiary imagination was pan-Arab. Different paths were advocated towards resolving the antinomy and Munif was first exposed to proposed political solutions as a high school student in Amman.

The process of his political absorption illustrates the richness of the secondary socialisation undergone by the youth of his generation. In his experience, teachers figured prominently, encouraging him and his classmates to issue a magazine expressing their patriotic views, pushing them to write and suggesting topics to them (p.19). Moreover, activists interacted with the youth, influencing their opinions. Munif happened to come across one, a customs official, who used to provide him and his friends with Michel Aflaq pamphlets and other

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Ba'athist publications (p.18). After reading such tracts and mingling with cadres, Munif joined the Ba'ath party, working in its branches in Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Yugoslavia.

Many intellectuals of Munif's generation had a similar record of partisan involvement , believing in the indispensability of notions of organisation and party work. Munif offers a framework for understanding this phenomenon in his important account of the contemporary history of Arab intellectuals, emphasising three distinct phases. The first phase was the turn of the century, marked by the rise of visionary public intellectuals committed to social justice in various realms. Munif cites in this regard Taha Hussein's dedication to popular education, Jamil Sidqi Al Zahawi's devotion to social reform and Al Jawahiri's promotion of Iraqi national consciousness. The second stage, which was experienced by Munif in his youth, arrived with the advent of political parties. "The political party became stronger than individuals regardless of their qualities and positions, and the intellectual's role grew as they moved closer to the political party and contributed to its position" (p.82). The third stage, whose impact we are still living today, involved the alienation of the intellectuals from political parties as party apparatuses became increasingly oppressive, tying as opposed to liberating intellectuals and societies.

Munif himself experienced this failure in the 1962 fifth national conference of the Ba'ath (the notorious Homs conference). During that pivotal conference, he severely criticized the course of the party. Some of his reservations at the time were structural, concerned with decision-making mechanisms and Aflaq's undemocratic style of leadership. Other points of contention were issue-based, focused on

> the question of Iraq, especially after the events of Mosul and Kirkuk in 1959 which had led to a bloody atmosphere. Our group was of the opinion that a Ba'athist coup would bring in utterly destructive winds, and we were worried about the effects…(pp. 31-32)

Having lost the vote by a small margin, the opposition split from the party. This was a difficult time for Munif. Along with his membership, he lost his salary and was harassed and subjected to restrictions. Moreover, his attempts to help pilot a viable leftist alternative never blossomed. Finally, the Saudi authorities stripped him of his citizenship. Having spent his political cartridges, Munif eventually moved to letters, a realm that had always been familiar:

> Party and political work was my window of communication to others, as if it was a way of changing the world through ordering intellectual-political relationships. When I was in the party, I wasn't one of the highly disciplined people. I was accused of "corrupting" the youth of the party through luring them into reading, the theatre, and the novel, and into conducting literary and intellectual discussions. [In my opinion] the literary text is part of political culture. And when I hit a barrier that I couldn't overcome, I had to find another way of communicating with others (p.34)

For Munif, this move was compulsory, but not satisfactory:

> The intellectual, no matter how important and prominent they become, cannot change society. Those who make change are the people, and what organizes the people and activates their social role is the association or the party and not some blind anarchical movement but a conscious and open-minded movement. Here I would like to emphasize that I am

not talking about any particular party or ideology (p.90)

But whereas Munif is adamant about the need for movements, associations and parties, and calls for a new relationship to be forged between them and intellectuals, he is highly critical of the discourse of "civil society" and NGOs. Many NGOs in his estimation have been used for the sake of private gain or foreign agendas, and have further contributed to de-politicization in the Arab world. In contrast, conscious movements, associations and parties should express the political concerns of the population, should be self sustaining (as opposed to foreign funded), and should serve people's immediate needs which include "the support of unions, development of social welfare, raising consciousness and combating illiteracy" (p.87). They should moreover continue to cling to the principle of self-determination, consistently denied in the Arab world, especially in occupied Iraq and Palestine.

In spite of references to roles of parties and intellectuals, Munif is overly vague in his treatment of specificities. This undoubtedly arises out of his assumption over the past three decades of the role of a disseminator of consciousness as opposed to an involved political actor. Munif is here not unlike the German Jewish intellectuals who- amidst the rubble of fascism- had undertaken a desperate shift from social theory and political action to "critical theory." He had indeed chosen in these imperial times to focus on the question of raising awareness about- and sentiments against- the current order sustaining the realities of foreign occupation and domestic oppression. In *Abdel Rahman Munif wal Iraq* he did so ably, recounting the past of the liberation movement as he experienced it and emphasising the need for its political revival, echoing a hope that was elaborately expressed by Herbert Marcuse: "the break through the false consciousness may provide the Archimedean point for a larger emancipation-- at an infinitesimally small spot, to be sure, but it is on the enlargement of such small spots that the chance of change depends."[1]

[1] Marcuse, Herbert., "Repressive Tolerance" in Wolff, R; Moore, B and Marcuse, H., *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

Gabriel Piterberg
An Ottoman Tragedy; History and Historiography at Play
Los Angeles and Berkeley, 2003

Reviewed by Jens Hanssen*

> *Turkey brought to life and exemplified what the political thought of the Renaissance had always been striving after: an artificial construction which had been consciously and purposely built up, a state mechanism which was arranged like a cloak [sic], and which made use of the various species and strengths and qualities of men as its springs and wheels.*
> Trojano Boccalini (1556-1613)

An Ottoman Tragedy invites us to reconsider the writing of Ottoman history and offers a new toolkit to study state/society relations in the early modern period and beyond. This review, then, is less of a knit-picky rebuttal – Gottfried Hagen's recent discussion of the book on H-Turk stands out as a

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magnificent defense of the discipline – but rather I intend to accept Piterberg's invitation and situate his study intellectually.[1]

Boccalini's above lines on the virtues of the Ottoman state – which have been transmitted to us by Friedrich Meinecke – appear unlikely praise from a Roman Renaissance man living in exile in Venice at the end of a long life of political commentatorship. Perhaps irony, or an oblique critique of Renaissance ideals by a conservative thinker; the German historicist Meinecke thinks not: Following the rapid unraveling of the Renaissance's cultural effervescence and Machiavelli's secular political theories, Boccalini and many of his contemporaries were disillusioned with the waning of realistic reason of state among European states during their times and the emergence of religious fanaticism in the decades before the Thirty Year War.[2]

In this context of violent counter-reformation, the image of the Ottoman state served Boccalini who was hardly writing in a pro-Ottoman milieu nor was he a recognized Islamophile, as a rhetorical "mirror" – an ideal case for the cruel but 'worldly' art of government as the politics of the possible. Meinecke's Boccalini commended the Turks – "in astonishment" – for their "wonderful inner structures" and as the "perfect politicians [who have] the finest understanding how the world may be governed and how to manipulate the supreme *ragion di stato*." His predecessors, such as the prolific Botero, had predicted that Ottoman factionalism and fratricide were sure signs of imminent Ottoman demise.[3] But the contemporary Ottoman system of government in Boccalini's eyes consisted of a delicate balance of power in which the sovereign ruled supreme but the strength of the state was not tied to him alone. Unlike European rulers, the Ottoman sultan could rely on the political consensus of the survival of his dynasty, on the common religious good, and on the reason of state. But he depended on skilful, if not ruthless, management of the imperial army, provincial notables and governors, the clergy and his own royal court. All of this together constituted a purpose-driven art of government that – according to Meinecke – Boccalini wished Italy still possessed.

Be this *Wahl*-Venetian's representation of the Ottoman state as it may, what is significant is that he holds an important place in Meinecke's study of the development of the reason of state in Europe from Machiavelli to Hegel and Ranke. The intellectual struggle over the legacy of Machiavelli lent itself quite naturally to Meinecke's challenge to the dominant German schools of history: Rankean fact- and institution-centred empiricism and Hegelian spirit-driven idealism of state development. Meinecke's *Quellenkritik* in *Machiavellism* shows how closely-interwoven literary texts generate knowledge and meaning as historical documents at each turn of events. In other words, ideas are molded by their 'concrete temporal-spatiality' and a past reference system.[4] It is against the legacy of this intellectual background that we can situate Gabriel Piterberg's study.

The anvil in Piterberg's "workshop" is the short reign of Sultan Osman II, the adolescent Ottoman sultan who was deposed and assassinated by disgruntled officers and *ulema* in 1622 on account of jeopardizing the house of Osman and its state. A disastrous military campaign which – contrary to over a century of sultanic practice – he personally led, brought about the hostility between ruler and army. At home, as Leslie Pierce has shown, the sultan was isolated in his own palace without female family protection. Add to that the rumours that Osman wanted to "march east" and, even worse, move the Ottoman capital itself, made him an enemy of most subjects, soldiers and historians in

Istanbul at the time of his death. The perception of Osman II was one of an untimely sultan who took a number of 'nonconformist' decisions that were considered *passé* and therefore intensely unpopular in Istanbul. His efforts to revive the image of the ghazi-sultan including his marriage to a daughter of the Sheyh ül-Islam and the return to fratricide, shocked and alienated the consolidated political and religious elites and may have planted the seeds of the regicide. (pp. 17-21)

In rejecting what they saw as the dismantling of – to borrow from Boccalini – the "artificial construction" of the existing Ottoman "state mechanism", the hatchers of the assassination plot acted not just out of self-preservation but also with a keen sense of history: turning the clock back to political practices of the classical period was a danger so great that it legitimized the crime committed. No-one, not even the sultan was above the reason of state. Their intervention was necessary to protect the dynasty from its own feeble progeny.

Piterberg judiciously synthesizes Cemal Kafadar's work on the emergence of "bureaucratic consciousness" in late classical Ottoman historiography; Leslie Pierce's work on the position of the *velide* sultan in the royal household and Rhodes Murphy's work on the Ottoman military in the 17th century. Piterberg is not interested in 'who-dunnits?' or 'whys?', but in how the material of this tragedy was arranged by Ottoman eye-witness historians and chroniclers, and how the resultant narratives affected the direction of subsequent Ottoman policies and the very nature of the state. In other words, Piterberg treats the affair as a discursive vanishing point to assess the process in which the Ottoman state self-refashioned itself. He does so by an intertextual analysis of the literary genre of the *Tarih-i Al-i Osman* as "one of the chief sites where the bureaucrat-historian, through the representation of concrete events and protagonists, waged a battle over the definition of the state." (p. 48)

Following the reconstruction of events, part II is the technical part of the book. Piterberg compares the overlapping and conflicting narrative decisions and strategies of Tuği Çelebi (eyewitness and orator/author of the *Urtext* of the 'tragedy' who died after 1623), Hasanbeyzade (d. 1636/7), Ibrahim Peçevi (d. 1650), Katip Çelebi (d. 1657) and Mustafa Naima (d. 1714). Here the author has drawn most criticism from his field, partly philological in nature partly regarding the representativity of these chroniclers and the choice of particular manuscripts over others. What concerns us here is how the initially antithetical emplotments of Osman II's five year rule of Tuği and Hasanbeyzade on the one hand and Peçevi on the other were later leveled/cancelled out by the authoritative accounts of Katip Çelebi and Naima to produce a certain self-understanding of the Ottoman state that concealed and shut the door to earlier alternatives. This 17th century historiographical operation reified the Ottoman state as a bureaucratic system centred around Istanbul. It was culturally as well as militarily oriented towards the west, that is to say the Balkans, as opposed to the Anatolian, let alone the Arab provinces.

Piterberg's favorite historians in this operation are Tuği and Peçevi. The former represents an enticing analytical challenge. Ottoman historians from Hasanbeyzade onwards have treated his text as a chronicle. Piterberg suggests a double reading of Tuği's text: one that follows its historiographical afterlife as a conventional chronicle and one that deconstructs the narrative flow. By focusing on the Tuği's digressions and his arrangement of chronology and causality Piterberg makes a compelling case that originally Tuği's account was actually a speech addressing Ottoman soldiers. Thus Tuği emerges as a historian with a constituency who was in

the thick of the fateful action unraveling. Tuği was opposed to Osman's pilgrimage to the east but blames him specifically for his bad choice of advisers, such as the chief black Eunuch, who led the gullible young royal astray.

Peçevi's narrative allows Piterberg to unearth subjugated knowledge – to examine the road not taken – and from this vantage point see through the construction of the early modern Ottoman state. It is considerably at variance with Tuği's and Hasanbeyzade's accounts, although Peçevi clearly read them. Ostensibly about the grand viziers who served Mustafa I after the assassination of his nephew Osman II, Piterberg's close reading reveals clues for the author's position and perspective on the regicide. He defends Osman II's policies and the politics of his chief black eunuch and puts the blame squarely on the imperial army and conniving officials. Peçevi writes from the perspective of the Anatolian provinces. Where Tuği sees 'rebels' Peçevi sees savvy notables (*ümera*). Peçevi's sympathies have less to do with his Hungarian borderland origins (after all, Tuği was probably born in Belgrade and neither were easterly provinces), than with his long service in Anatolia. To him, the Anatolian leader Abaza Pasha was a loyal subject of Osman's who was dissatisfied with the *kul* army's behaviour, rather than a primitive rebel.

Why was Tûgi's narrative considered more authoritative by subsequent state historians? Did they fail to notice Tuği's partisanship, were they inferior historians or did they find his version expedient? Katip Çelebi acknowledged Peçevi as a gifted historian, but crafts his narrative largely, though not exclusively, out of Tuğis material whose chronological sequence he rearranges and whose material he correlated to metaphysical causation. Çelebi goes one step further than the latter and holds the sultan personally responsible for the 'tragedy.' Finally, with Naima, one of the earlier popularizers of the persistent empire-in-decline paradigm, the Tuği-Hasanbeyzade-Çelebi '*isnad*' was enshrined as the official state narrative. Mustafa Naima, the son of a family of military officers in Aleppo, argued that Osman II's attempt to create a new *kul*-army recruited from the Anatolian and Syrian provinces broke with Balkan-based conventions of military recruitment, and would raise the spectre of the ethnic-regional dynamics of the Ottoman state.

Piterberg concludes from his *Quellenkritik* that "the Ottoman historical texts are not unstructured collections of facts [but] constitute a narrative discourse that is judgmental and interpretive." (p. 135) In Part III, Piterberg returns to the question of how the state was given substance through the 17th century historiographical operation. Here his analysis focuses on how the Ottoman state came to be reified as an autonomous and identifiable agent by its historians right up to the present. Piterberg credits recent scholarship by *inter alia* Metin Kunt, Rifaat Abou-El-Haj, Jane Hathaway and Ariel Salzmann, asserts that state/society and centre/periphery relations were unstable, and contested. The Ottoman state historians' "historiographical operation" – the term is Michel de Certeau's – concealed roads not taken by who favoured seemless state consolidation.

Far from ordinary 'sultanology,' Piterberg presents the field of Ottoman studies with a historical laboratory of new ideas of how to study the literary construction of the state, the transformation of the dynastic household between 1550 and 1650, and the transition between the age of territorial conquest to the age of state consolidation. More obliquely it constitutes a gutsy attempt to challenge Rankean positivism that has dominated Ottoman historiography since the

Ottoman state archives were made accessible to researchers in the 1950s and 60s. The most crucial contribution of *An Ottoman Tragedy*, then, lies in its double gambit to combine a close reading of a host of Ottoman chronicles – the preserve of empiricist studies of Ottoman history – with a reconceptualization of the Ottoman state – the domain of sweeping Hegelian narratives on the emergence of modern Turkey. In fact, Piterberg replaces both philological myopia and the rise-and-decline paradigm with a complex matrix of hypotheses.

Piterberg chooses a toolkit for Ottoman history that draws on the 'poetics-of-culture' approach of the 1980s. Rather than distinguishing between facts of history and acts of recording, Piterberg argues that the two realms are neither chronologically apart, nor do they necessarily inhabit separate spaces (the battlefield versus the library). The central theoretical supposition of *An Ottoman Tragedy* is that there are neither 'raw facts' nor 'transparent documents' – that historical processes are set in motion by the instantly emplotted feedback of historiography. But Piterberg departs from Derrida, Hayden White and other representatives of postmodern literary criticism who hold that no meaning exists outside the texts. By acknowledging – with Ricoeur and Skinner– the extra-textual references that drive and limit the literary constructions of Ottoman history, Piterberg rehabilitates the possibility to retrieve an author's intention – albeit speculatively.

What does all this mean for the way we write Ottoman history? To start with, we should be careful to ascribe singularity and intentionality to the state. But how do we treat the state? What does it mean for our research to say it is discursively produced by textual reifications? Should we avoid the category 'state' altogether? At its most basic, Piterberg's study serves as another Cassandra call to be more circumspect with our sources and spend more effort on situating them. At the same time, to acknowledge that our sources are like camera lenses in what they show and what they occlude will infuse Ottoman history with new multitude and multiplicity.

For advanced undergraduates and graduate students these and other questions make Piterberg's monograph an appealing complement to the booming Ottoman history textbook industry. A glossary between text and endnotes goes someway in familiarizing the early modernists of European history with Ottoman terms. The exploratory nature of *An Ottoman Tragedy* invites students already familiar with the broad contours of Ottoman history to think critically, comparatively and creatively. It will kindle a sense of discovery in the assiduous reader thirsting for intellectual stimulation that even the most sophisticated primers are not meant to provide.

ENDNOTES

[1] Gottfried Hagen, "Osman II and the Cultural History of Ottoman Historiography," *H-Turk@h-net.msu.edu* (March 2006).
[2] Friedrich Meinecke [1907], *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and its Place in Modern History* (New York, 1965), 71-89 (esp. p. 86-7).
[3] Giovanni Botero [1589], *The Reason of State* (London, 1956), 86.
[4] See also Peter Burke's concise *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London, 1969).

Robert Dankoff

An Ottoman Mentality: The World of Evliya Çelebi. With an afterword by Gottfried Hagen,Vol. 31 of Suraiya Faroqhi and Halil Inalcik, eds., ***The Ottoman Empire and its Heritage*** Series, Brill (Leiden, Boston, 2004), xxii + 279 pages.

Reviewed by Charles Wilkins*

The *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi (1611-ca. 1684), a massive ten-volume travelogue and compendium of cultural lore, is arguably the single most-quoted primary source among specialists of early modern and modern Middle Eastern History. For decades historians of the Ottoman Empire have drawn on Evliya's observations of social and cultural life, while those focusing on specific geographical areas of the Middle East, from historians of ancient history to those of the present, have found his informative descriptions of localities (*evsaf*) indispensable. More recently, instructors have introduced undergraduate students on a large scale to the *Seyahatname* as a way to explore early modern Islamic society and culture and to encourage a historical empathy for Ottoman individuality. Professor Dankoff's synthetic and incisive portrait of Evliya answers a profound need for a monograph-length study on the cultural and intellectual outlook of this seventeenth-century traveler. The book will serve as an essential guide to the present generation of scholars as they proceed with critical editions of the *Seyahatname* in its entirety and as they write a fuller history of the early modern world.

An Ottoman Mentality is divided thematically into six chapters, with an extended afterword by Gottfried Hagen. Dankoff orders his chapters in a clear and logical way, beginning with a discussion on the organization of the *Seyahatname* and a chronology of Evliya's career and moving on to evaluations of Evliya's cultural identity, cosmopolitanism, professional and avocational interests, credibility, literary art, and relationship to his audience/readership, among other topics. There are topical overlaps among the chapters, and Dankoff frequently provides cross-references to aid the reader in assembling information on a given question. The author strikes an appropriate balance between analysis of the *Seyahatname* and quotations (always translated into English) from the same work. While never afraid to draw a conclusion, Dankoff often lets Evliya speak for himself in translations that are felicitous and highly readable. Occasionally, the translations are extended, such as when Evliya describes his early life at the imperial palace (pp. 33-44). Where there is scholarly debate or ambiguity with respect to the meaning of a given passage, Dankoff provides the Ottoman Turkish in transliteration. What follows are summary discussions and commentary on each chapter.

In Chapter One, entitled, "Man of Istanbul: The Man and the Book," Dankoff places Evliya Çelebi within the geographical and mental framework of Istanbul, the capital city of the empire. Here it was that Evliya grew up, received a privileged education and was socialized, eventually leaving his home in the Unkapanı district to work (and play) for a time in the imperial court of Sultan Murad IV. The author regales the reader with delightful translations of passages from the *Seyahatname*, reflecting the unfettered pride Evliya had for Istanbul, for his family, which he

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claimed had prestigious kinship ties to the ruling dynasty, and for his own service to the sultan. Yet Dankoff suggests that while Istanbul clearly ranked first in Evliya's mind, it was paired with Cairo in a kind of two-poled cultural and geographical mapping. If Istanbul marked life's beginning and the bestowal of promise, and the numerous cross-empire journeys the core of life experience, then Cairo marked in some ways a site of reflection, of stock-taking and of course, in a real sense, the compilation and editing of his magnum opus, the *Seyahatname*. According to Dankoff, Evliya, living his final years in Cairo, sought to give a more clearly defined structure to his massive ten-volume travelogue by making the exquisite description of Istanbul the core of his first volume, and the remarkably parallel description of Cairo that of his last. In its entirety, then, *Seyahatname* constitutes a single unidirectional journey that in a geographical (and metaphorical) sense could never have ended where it started. It would not have been consistent with Evliya's storytelling impulse.

This chapter provides an important counterpoint to the common perception of the *Seyahatname* as a repository of geographical and cultural information with no unifying or overarching narrative structure. Dankoff clearly does acknowledge that the *Seyahatname* was a sustained attempt to register and comprehend the empire spatially, as he calls the descriptions of localities (*evsaf*) "the most characteristic literary unit of the work" (p. 17). Reviewing the highly useful schematic outlines developed by Dankoff (pp. 10-17), the reader obtains a clear picture of how Evliya sought to give coherence to each of his volumes; indeed, most of the volumes II-IX are closely linked to a certain region of the empire, not only through the geographical description for which Evliya is famous, but also through the heroic narratives that Dankoff calls "sagas." Yet Dankoff wants to draw our attention to the narrative impulse that is in constant tension with the geographical. Dankoff is not judgmental of the seemingly arbitrary intermingling of these elements but rather asks the reader to evaluate the Evliya's work on its own terms and what this might reveal about the elite Ottoman mindset, or mentality, as represented by this seventeenth-century traveler.

Having outlined in Chapter One the overall structure of the *Seyahatname* and posited a connection between that structure and Evliya's worldview, Dankoff proceeds in the remaining chapters to illustrate different aspects of Evliya's personality and interests. In Chapter Two, entitled "Man of the World," the author explores the limits of Evliya's cosmopolitanism. After briefly assessing Evliya's sophistication as a critic of art and architecture and his appreciation of cultured urban refinement, Dankoff moves on to how Evliya deals with cultural difference. The author communicates some idea of the stunning breadth and sweep of the *Seyahatname*, drawing on encounters that Evliya reportedly had with peoples as far removed culturally as the Kalmuks of Circassia, the African peoples of the Funj, and the Viennese of Austria, in addition to the impressive social, ethnic, and religious diversity found within the core lands of the empire. He observes that as Evliya traveled farther away from the Ottoman center, he tended to give his imagination freer reign, hence his fanciful accounts of cannibalism among the Kalmuks and his interpretation of the discovery of the New World by the Europeans.

In one of the more valuable discussions in the book, Dankoff evaluates how tolerant Evliya, a Muslim of ethnic Turkish background, was of other peoples and social groups. Many readers of the *Seyahatname* will recall that non-Ottoman peoples are typically given disparaging epithets (e. g.,

"tricky Franks," "faithless Germans," "treacherous Persians," etc.), and when described collectively, especially in times of war, are usually stereotyped. Some groups within the empire are scarcely given lighter treatment, with Kurds characterized as "crude" and "rebellious," gypsies as "thieving" and Jews as "dirty" and "fanatical." Dankoff strives to partially offset the weight of these judgments, observing Evliya to have friendly encounters with individual Europeans, to appreciate aspects of their culture and science, and with respect to the Persians, to question the validity of some reprehensible practices then ascribed to them. The strongest case for Evliya's open-mindedness, however, is with regard to Sunni Muslim religious culture. Evliya saves some of his most biting satire for the then-influential Kadızadeli sect, whom he regarded as close-minded and fanatical, and he selects for translation these and other accounts that satirize Muslim fanaticism in general. What emerges is a portrait of a complex individual who held, in Dankoff's words, a "guarded tolerance" for people of different cultures and who was most critical of religious fanaticism of whatever religion. This chapter, with its extensive quotations of Evliya's personal experiences with other people, constitutes a poignant statement of both his urbanity and his prejudices.

Entitled "Servitor of the Sultan," Chapter Three deals with several themes relating to Evliya's service to the Ottoman state. Dankoff first illustrates Evliya's general conception of the public good, drawing on passages that emphasize the importance of public order and security, the need for the state to regulate and preserve the social hierarchy, and the close linkage between an efficient justice system and a satisfied subject population. Among the more informative sections is Dankoff's treatment of Evliya's famous description of a parade of guilds organized by Sultan Murad IV in 1638; this section usefully summarizes many of the values organizing the precedence of guilds and the likely debates that surrounded the establishment of that precedence. Proceeding from the general to the specific, the chapter then examines Evliya's special pride in the Ottoman dynasty and state, as seen through his admiration for Ottoman state institutions and infrastructure, his efforts to identify and promote new projects that can contribute to Ottoman glory, and his fervent belief in the miraculous legends (Dankoff calls these "mysteries") that undergird the legitimacy of the dynasty. Especially notable here is Evliya's boldly conceived projects of public works, including an earthworks isthmus across the Gulf of Aqaba and a Suez canal (pp. 98-100). Naturally following from Evliya's pride in the Ottoman State was his willingness to criticize the Ottoman authorities when he felt that they were not acting according to Ottoman ideals, as seen through accounts that portray Ottoman officials as bloodthirsty or greedy, or by showing the predicament of subjects punished unfairly by state authorities. Equally remarkable is Evliya's pausing on several occasions to note mournfully the contrast between a prosperous Christendom in Europe and the poor conditions of Muslims in his own empire (pp. 113-114). Like many educated Ottomans of his day, Evliya perceived the contemporary age to mark a decline from a glorious past most closely associated with the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520-1566).

The individuality of Evliya, fleshed out here and there in the chapters heretofore described, comes into much clearer focus in Chapter Four. In this chapter, entitled "Gentleman and Dervish," Dankoff sets out to identify and explore the peculiar personality traits and interests of Evliya, with some emphasis on how he sought to portray himself to his reader. To

capture different aspects of this personality, Dankoff divides the chapter into four parts, with each characterizing him according to a specific analytical category: First, his social status is that of an Ottoman gentleman ("çelebi"); second, his religious and spiritual type is that of a Muslim mystic ("dervish") who seeks to disassociate himself from worldly and family affairs and who is independent of others; third, his profession is that of a caller-to-prayer ("müezzin"), prayer leader ("imam") and boon companion ("musahib, nedim"), all providing informal service to his elite patrons; and fourth, his avocation is, not surprisingly, that of traveler.

Since Evliya uses each of these specific Ottoman Turkish terms to describe himself, and others in the *Seyahatname* use these terms to address him, the implicit goal of the chapter is to assess how closely Evliya adheres to these types (as we conceive them) and to evaluate the significance of his eccentricities. With regard to his spiritual orientation, Dankoff observes a contrast between Evliya's claims to be a practicing dervish and his own admitted pursuit of worldly things, such as employment and dependency on patrons and the care he took to preserve his wealth and possessions. Perhaps the most interesting and richest discussion treats the different ways in which Evliya interpreted his official duties. According to Dankoff, Evliya steadfastly turned down offers for official posts in the Ottoman bureaucracy; much more to his liking was service to elite patrons since it afforded him opportunity to indulge his wanderlust. Serving then as an all-purpose functionary for his patrons, Evliya undertook numerous and diverse missions that he narrates in various places throughout the *Seyahatname*. In the course of these missions, we learn that he struggles with his conscience when collecting taxes he thinks are unfair, or carrying out executions; parlays his musical skills into diplomatic instruments in times of crisis or difficulty; takes it upon himself personally to ransom Muslim captives of foreign powers whenever and wherever he can do so; plays a "Falstaffian" role in the household of his patrons, disliking violence and preferring to contribute to war in non-combative tasks; and believes in the efficacy of mediation, undertaking to serve as a go-between in various situations, and considering himself to be a tough and foresightful negotiator. In short, a rich and nuanced portrait of Evliya emerges, with many personal habits, likes and dislikes colorfully illustrated; and more generally, a clearer picture of the dynamics of an Ottoman patrimonial household appear.

Chapter Five, entitled "Raconteur," takes in hand one of the most pressing questions for readers of the *Seyahatname*: If Evliya aims to both entertain and inform, at what points is he doing the former, and at what points is doing the latter? Dankoff argues that when Evliya is engaged in objective description, he may willingly provide false information "because he wishes to be complete, or consistent, or because he does not wish to admit ignorance." Certain itineraries that Evliya claims to have followed fall into this category. But Evliya also fabricated stories, Dankoff maintains, when "he wishes to relieve monotony, or just out of fun, or to indulge in literary license." Clearly in the latter case he did not intend to deceive, but in the former case, there are examples where his purpose is ambiguous. Numbers fall into this category, and Chapter Five provides a useful discussion of Evliya's peculiar use of numbers, remarkably his tendency to use the number "60," elsewhere his whimsical hyperboles when describing ancient cities, and his apparent inability on several occasions to make simple mathematical calculations. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to instances where Evliya primarily intends entertainment and/or satire. By way of

illustration, Dankoff in detail analyzes a narrative of an apparently actual event to reveal its historical contradictions and fictional literary devices; identifies other narratives of the *Seyahatname* with striking biblical analogues; and surveys a variety of other literary genres employed by Evliya, among them jokes, tall tales, anecdotes, satires, and hoaxes. Lest the reader dismiss them as pure entertainment, the chapter draws our attention to the embedding in these genres of authentic ethno-linguistic observations and pointed social and political commentary.

If Chapter Five conveys the sense of literary freedom in which Evliya reveled, Chapter Six, entitled "Reporter and Entertainer," communicates the framework of aesthetic and evidential demands and obligations placed on him by his audiences. In one of the more fascinating parts of the book, Dankoff explores Evliya's use of evidence, stressing Evliya's strong belief in the primacy of eyewitness observation, and surveying Evliya's other methods, including his pacing of distances and dimensions (for geographical descriptions), use of a magnifying spyglass, comparison of oral and written evidence, consultation of official documents and geographical and historical works, reading of inscriptions, and, in Dankoff's words, a "primitive kind of paleontology and archaeology." Evliya clearly felt compelled to support his statements with reference to specific methods of research. Coexisting with Evliya's appeals to empiricism was his apparent belief in "marvels and wonders" and "portents and dreams," phenomena that defied rational explanation. As a Muslim, Evliya places more credence in the supernatural phenomena connected with Islam than other religions, but in some instances he may still try to explain them in rational or semi-rational terms. Dankoff provides a great service, translating the most significant dreams Evliya experienced and characterizing them, whether portentous, comforting, or in the form of counsel, and assessing their literary pretension and merit. In general, the extensive narration of marvels and dreams by Evliya suggests the strong concerns his elite patrons had in connection with the supernatural.

Dankoff's focused analysis, translation, and commentary of the *Seyahatname* in the first six chapters of the book is complemented by Gottfried Hagen's wide-ranging exploration of the broader intellectual and cultural currents of the Ottoman world in an extended afterword. Hagen covers much ground, moving nimbly from traditional Islamic and ancient Greek geography and cosmography, to innovations in and alternatives to these traditions by Ottoman thinkers, to a consideration of the religious activism of the Kadızadelis and "privatization" of religion, to final reflections on the exchange of ideas between Evliya's Ottoman peers and thinkers in Western Europe – only some of which topics can be described here. Contributing much to a more contextualized understanding of Evliya's milieu, Hagen places Evliya within the established Islamic geographical and cosmographical traditions yet notes Evliya's distinctive thirst for detail and his use of irony. Parallel with these traditions, there emerged in the seventeenth century conceptions of geography as a practical, secular science, notably advanced by Katib Çelebi and Ebu Bekir al-Dimeshki, on whom Hagen is an established authority. Thus Evliya's views can be considered to be representative of the older tradition, as yet uninfluenced, at least in any substantive way, by these emerging ideas. Also significant is Evliya's interpretation of the Ottoman dynasty as an "elected state," which suggests that he either dismissed or simply was not familiar with current debates applying Ibn Khaldunian notions of cyclical history to the Ottoman state.

In his concluding remarks, Hagen offers an explanation for the dearth of connections among Ottoman intellectuals, suggesting that the practices of writing history and geography were increasingly decentralized and "privatized," as intellectual circles formed among middling bureaucrats in relative isolation from the elite officials who in an earlier period had been the principal patrons of cultural production or who themselves had been authors. So momentous are these changes in Hagen's view that he further suggests that one motive behind Evliya's grand project, the Seyahatname, was to simply to describe for posterity a world he feared would soon disappear.

An Ottoman Mentality should find a broad audience. From historians of Ottoman localities seeking to contextualize their narrow use of the *Seyahatname*, to specialists of Ottoman intellectual and cultural life, to historians of the Islamic and Mediterranean worlds, to advanced undergraduate students, this book offers great rewards. Professor Dankoff has performed a great service to Ottoman and Islamic studies, making accessible to a broader readership a cultural and intellectual portrait of one of the great early modern Muslim travelers, storytellers, and memoirists. True, the relatively high cost of this Brill publication will limit the book's distribution; however, given that many single chapters and sections can stand alone as independent units, they should find ready use in the classroom in accordance with copyright and fair use laws.

Jane Hathaway
A Tale of Two Factions: Myth, Memory, and Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen
State University of New York Press (Albany, 2003), xvi + 295 pp.

Reviewed by Alan Mikhail*

One of the most vexed and ideologically-laden historical and historiographical puzzles of Ottoman Egypt is the nature of political and popular culture and society during the nearly four-hundred-year period of Ottoman rule. How does one study and describe such a nebulous and fleeting subject like culture? How should we as historians of the Ottoman Empire express observations about culture and society in a place like Egypt? Was it "Mamluk," "Ottoman," some sort of proto-nationalist kind of "Egyptian" culture, or a combination of these and other sorts of social and cultural formations? Is this question even worth asking and what are the stakes involved in its answer? Many historians—Michael Winter, André Raymond, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Nelly Hanna, P.M. Holt, and Ehud Toledano to name but a few—have taken on these subjects with quite disparate answers and with varying degrees of success.

In *A Tale of Two Factions*, Jane Hathaway engages with and adds much to these debates with skill, tact, and intellectual rigor to show how Egypt functioned as an integral part of the Ottoman Empire in which multiple cultural and political forces—be they considered "Mamluk," "Ottoman," "Islamic," "Egyptian," "Yemeni," "Arab," "Turkish," or what have you—combined and intertwined to produce a specific kind of multilayered Ottoman social, cultural, and political milieu. Hathaway takes as her specific subject

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the formation, discursive maintenance, and history of Egypt's two main factions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—the Faqaris and Qasimis. Instead of presenting a political narrative of the struggles between these two rival groups, Hathaway's foremost concern is to show how myth, stories, and dramatic symbolism came to inform the ways in which these two factions were conceptualized, understood, and written about in contemporary and later chronicler accounts. Throughout the book, Hathaway casts a wide net culling examples from many different temporal periods and geographical locations to prove her points that "these factions need not be studied or understood solely within an Egyptian context…and that such a narrow approach has been the primary cause of our failure to understand them properly thus far (p. 19)." Indeed, as an example of a successful historiographical experiment in the writing of history that takes seriously textual, symbolic, discursive, and metaphorical elements and that tracks down the elusive strands of collective memory and of distant historical influences and precursors, Hathaway's book is a welcome addition to the scholarship on Ottoman Egypt. The book's main contributions to our understanding of Ottoman Egypt are the connections it highlights between Egypt and Yemen and its explanations of the origins of the Faqaris and Qasimis. I will expand upon each of these two points below.

The book's introduction, in addition to outlining the work's main topics, sources, and structure, presents the reader with several key points about the nature and historiography of Ottoman Egypt. First, the *timar* system of administration was never applied in Egypt, as the territory was held as one large tax farm. Second, because of the demographic shifts caused by the Celali revolts at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Egypt became home to all sorts of peoples and cultures: Balkan and Anatolian mercenaries, peasants from other Arab provinces, Circassians, Turcoman tribesmen, and others. These new populations thus created a situation which required the cultivation of new means and forms of group solidarity. Lastly, Hathaway cogently argues against the "scheme" (p. 5) which posits decentralization as a better alternative to the decline paradigm. The artificial distinction between "the central" and "the provincial" implicit in the notion of decentralization ignores the fluid and dynamic processes by which Egypt's multiple social groups and peoples were connected to the imperial center, other Ottoman provinces, and to different cadres of personnel across and outside of the Empire.

Important also in the introduction is Hathaway's presentation of the traditional narrative of the Faqari-Qasimi rivalry and of both groups' origin myths. Briefly, the political history of these factions is as follows. The groups most likely emerged in the early decades of the seventeenth century. The Faqari faction was led jointly by the pilgrimage commander Ridvan Bey and the governor of Jirja 'Ali Bey until their deaths in the 1650s. During the period of their leadership, these two men fought off a challenge by two Qasimis in the 1640s. After their death, though, the new leader of the Faqaris, Mehmed Bey al-Faqari, attempted to rebel against the Ottoman administration and was thoroughly defeated. Soon the Qasimis, with central Ottoman support, took the upper hand in this struggle, but by the end of the seventeenth century, the Faqaris regained their dominance. The eighteenth century began with a civil war between the two factions that ended with the Qasimis on top once again. After a struggle between the leaders of the two groups, however, it was clear by 1730 that the Qasimis were essentially destroyed and that the Faqaris, under

the leadership of the Qazdağlı household, were in charge.

In Chapter One, Hathaway rejects any notion of similarity between, on the one hand, the bilateral factionalism of the Faqaris and Qasimis and, on the other, Ottoman-era households or Mamluk factions, arguing instead that these two groups "divided most, if not all, of society between them" (p. 25) in a way Egypt had never known before. Hathaway stresses that the distinguishing factor of this sort of bilateral factionalism was the very fact that there were only two factions and "no question of an independent third alternative" (p. 29). The features of this sort of bilateral factionalism included color dichotomy, fictive genealogy, origin myths about two brothers, competing symbols, and public ritual. Moreover, this sort of factionalism, Hathaway asserts, was the most important cohesive mechanism inculcating and keeping together the very different groups that made up their ranks. In short, then, "bilateral factionalism, though inherently divisive, was not fragmentary but assimilative" (p. 44).

In a similar vein, Chapter Two examines how folklore, popular epics, and the use of binary oppositions melted into the origin myths of each of the factions, aiding in the processes of acculturation and indoctrination of faction members. By the early eighteenth century, memory of the actual origins of the factions sufficiently faded to allow the mythical tales of the origins of the two groups to become ensconced as tradition. As Hathaway rightly notes, it is at this point in the life of most traditions that explanations are no longer needed; things are the way they are because they are.

In Chapter Three, Hathaway addresses the subject of the two bedouin tribal groups that carried on the rivalry of the Faqaris and the Qasimis in the Egyptian countryside and elsewhere. The Haram, which was always affiliated with the Qasimis, enjoyed a powerful position in rural Egypt long before the emergence of the Sa‘d, which was allied with the Faqaris. That these bedouin blocs—which retained ties to Yemen—carried the bilateral factionalism of the Faqaris and the Qasimis into the countryside strengthens Hathaway's assertion that this rivalry encompassed almost all sectors of Egyptian society. She further maintains that by the end of the seventeenth century the clear distinctions between these two bedouin groups in popular consciousness had largely faded into the background as the Sa‘d-Haram rivalry became simply a "byword for disorder in the countryside" (p. 78).

Chapter Four explores the extremely-understudied and often-illusive connections between Egypt and Yemen during the Ottoman period. Because of their location at the ends of the Red Sea, control of Egypt and Yemen was of great strategic and economic importance to the Ottomans and meant that "Yemen was almost symbiotically linked to Egypt for the century (1538-1636) during which the Ottomans first ruled it" (p. 79). The coffee trade and the movement of Ottoman administrative officials between the two places ensured that both the Faqaris and the Qasimis—as the dominant factions of Egypt—had a consistent link with Yemen. Hathaway's attempts to draw a connection between Yemen and the factions of Egypt raise several important points that I will discuss in more depth below.

The next four chapters return the reader to a more-detailed discussion of the particular features of this kind of bilateral factionalism in Egypt and to the ways in which these tropes and symbols acquired (or lost) meaning in the various chronicler accounts of the factions' origin myths. Chapter Five, thus, examines the function of the red-white color dichotomy maintained between the two groups. Hathaway follows the trails of other instances of such a color

dichotomy in Islamic and Ottoman history—notably, that between the Qaysi and Yemeni tribes and that between the Husaynis and Yazidis—to show how the Faqaris and the Qasimis may have participated in, deployed, and recast well-trodden traditions. The doubt about whether or not the factions indeed did utilize this color dichotomy to distinguish themselves arises from Hathaway's reading of the use of colored banners during public processions. Instead of revealing the historical reality of the public unfurling of colored banners as indicators of difference, Hathaway argues that we should read color dichotomy, especially by the beginning of the eighteenth century, as one in "a 'package' of markers of factional identity" (p. 108) that was reproduced, retold, and remembered but that might not actually have been practiced contemporaneously with the writing of chronicler accounts of such events.

In addition to a distinct color, the two factions were also identified by the standards each carried, and, indeed, by the early eighteenth century, as shown in Chapter Six, standards were the single most important distinguishing feature of the factions. The standard associated with the Faqaris was an Ottoman *tuğ*—a kind of metal ornament or knob usually in the shape of a circle or heart that was often adorned with horsetails. The Qasimi standard was known as an *'alem* and was a flat disk in the shape of a spade or shovelhead. As in her discussion of color, Hathaway uses a close reading of the Damurdashi chronicles and of al-Jabarti's work to suggest that the writers of these histories never actually saw these standards in public procession. Rather, because these descriptions are highly formulaic and schematic—"two-dimensional" (p. 121) as Hathaway puts it—it seems as though these writers used miniatures or paintings of battles and city scenes in which standards were depicted as the foundations for their narratives about these objects. Moreover, Hathaway writes that, stripped of their historical origins and genealogy and of their ideological trappings, these standards became "mere factional signatures" (p. 121)—two synonymous abbreviations for the rival groups.

Chapter Seven examines the role assigned to the Ottoman conqueror of Egypt, Sultan Selim I, in the creation of the Faqari-Qasimi rivalry. In "Ottoman collective memory" (a vague concept Hathaway repeats but never defines) and in the genre of the *Selimname*, Selim is portrayed as a figure of great prestige—a messianic leader whose military exploits redirected the fate of the Empire and forever changed the world. In accounts of the conquest of Egypt, Selim is pitted against an aging Mamluk amir named Sudun of questionable historical veracity who serves as "an embodiment of the old, defeated Mamluk order" (p. 131) and who is also taken to be the father of the sons whose fraternal strife leads to the creation of the Faqari and Qasimi factions. Selim's defeat of Sudun, therefore, symbolizes both the shift from Mamluk to Ottoman power in Egypt and the displacing by Selim of Sudun as the new adoptive father of the factional rivalry.

In the next two short chapters, Hathaway examines two further features of the factions' origin myths. First, she concentrates on the role of the mulberry tree in the origin myth of Ahmed Çelebi. With its connections to Yazidi Kurdish and Sufi traditions, the mulberry tree signified a sense of exoticism, mysticism, or foreignness in the Egyptian context. Moreover, the chopping of Qaytas Bey's mulberry tree after his defeat serves "as a harbinger of the end of the two-faction system" (p. 142) and conforms to the motif positing the destruction of a tree as a sign of future chaos and instability. Chapter Nine focuses on an alternative myth explaining the emergence of the two factions that describes the original

struggle as one between two beys and not two brothers. The most obvious lesson of the myth is that, rather than striving to build massive structures, households should endeavor to include as many mamluks and others within their collective; people, in other words, endure longer than stone. Hathaway's alternative reading of this story invites us to interpret it not as a lesson in successive household production and maintenance, but as an ethical tale cautioning against vanity and empty materialism.

The book's last two chapters distill Hathaway's previous discussions of the origin myths of the factions to present her answers to the complicated question of the actual origins of the Qasimis and Faqaris. Taking the two factions in turn, Hathaway begins Chapter Ten by first putting to rest any notion that the Qasimis most crucial leader was Qasim Bey or his mamluk Qansuh Bey. Instead, she develops an argument supporting her claim that the Qasimis formed largely as a result of the influence of one Ridvan Bey Abu'l-Shawarib, a seventeenth-century Circassian mamluk, who attempted to use his ethnic heritage as a means of securing lucrative and influential administrative posts in Egypt. To these ends, Ridvan Bey constructed a genealogy that "is best interpreted as one up-and-coming young Circassian grandee's attempt to persuade the Ottoman grand vizier to appoint him pilgrimage commander" (p. 162). In the final analysis, this attempt at bureaucratic stardom failed, but it did succeed in ensconcing Ridvan Bey Abu'l-Shawarib in Qasimi lore as the faction's key founding figure.

Turning her attention to the Faqari faction, Hathaway shows in Chapter Eleven that the group's namesake was not an individual named Dhu'l Faqar Bey, but rather derives from the magical sword of the same name belonging to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. The name of this supernatural weapon attached itself to the faction because 'Ali Bey, governor of Jirja in the 1630s and 1640s and an early leader of the faction, carried a banner depicting the sword during battle. Much of this chapter is devoted to a very interesting discussion of the history of the Dhu'l-Faqar sword and to its deployment in image, legend, and battle in Ottoman history. In addition, Hathaway proves that although important to the later history of the Faqaris, Ridvan Bey (not the same Ridvan Bey Abu'l-Shawarib of the Qasimis) did not found the Faqari faction and most probably never used the titles Faqari or Dhu'l-Faqar to identify himself.

Thus, Hathaway ends her book by offering an explanation for the emergence and founding of the two factions. As stated previously, this is one of the two main contributions of the study to the historiography of Ottoman Egypt. The other major contribution of the book, and the one I would argue is more important, is the connection Hathaway draws between Egypt and Yemen. That this relationship was robust, fervent, and indeed formative for Egypt during the Ottoman period is attested to by the numerous manuscript sources on Ottoman Yemen that survive in Egypt. More importantly, though, by exploring the interactions between different regions of the Ottoman Empire, Hathaway exemplifies the need within Ottoman studies to break "out of the nation-state straightjacket" (p. 79) in order to evaluate particular areas of the Empire in the full context of their historical existence—a context that stretched far beyond the borders of modern nations or those of Ottoman provinces. It is, therefore, inadequate "to view Egypt as hermetically sealed within its current political boundaries, sufficient unto itself" (p. 4).

This issue of drawing connections between Egypt and Yemen also strikes at the very heart of the problematic with which I opened this

review—the notion of culture. In her chapter devoted to Yemen, Hathaway writes, "Unspoken or not, Yemen was inextricably linked to Egypt, strategically, commercially, intellectually, and perhaps even culturally" (p. 82). This statement is important for two reasons. First, its expressed hesitance suggests that culture is the most sacred, crucial, sensitive, and contested domain in which struggles about the identity of Ottoman Egypt take place. Indeed, unlike Hathaway's work, many studies of Ottoman Egypt do not take seriously the notion that four hundred years of Ottoman rule affected the culture of Egypt. As if Egyptian culture and society were somehow refrigerated during the Ottoman period to be removed after the dissolution of Ottoman rule in order to continue as before, most of these studies ignore or purposefully choose not to engage with the possibility that Egyptian culture was infused with Ottoman symbols, language, traditions, and so on.

Second, this statement concedes that writing a cultural history of, in this case, Egypt that accounts for the multiple, varied, and contradictory influences that shaped Egyptian society during the Ottoman period is a much more trying endeavor than explaining the political or economic history of the region during the same period. Teasing out from often fragmentary evidence arguments about complex processes of cultural formation is a difficult, though I think thoroughly important, task that is not rendered any easier by the fact that it obliges the historian to work in both Ottoman and Arabic primary sources in both Turkish and Egyptian archives. Indeed, this goes a long way in explaining why cultural history has not been the preferred method of analysis for most historians of Ottoman Egypt. Hathaway's methodology, however, thankfully provides important clues for how these kinds of analyses could proceed, though, to be fair, this is not the intended purpose of her book.

On this point, some readers might be turned off by the sometimes inconclusive ways in which Hathaway ends some of her more complex arguments. Statements like "these are, of course, only conjectures; corroborative evidence is lacking" (p. 137), those that confess that a certain point is an "educated guess" (p. 117), or others suggesting that we should not read the "reticence" of our sources "as total silence" (pp. 92-3) are far from definitive. To my mind, though, these sorts of statements (in addition to being honest) are one of the strongest aspects of Hathaway's study. Hers is a history that takes risks—one of conjectures, suggestions, and possibilities. Her work implores her reader to prove her wrong, to take up her points and run with them, and to find other threads to follow.

Accordingly, one such path of inquiry might be to trace some of Hathaway's arguments through other kinds of sources that she did not consult for her study. For instance, accepting that "the Egyptian countryside was a veritable checkerboard of Sa'd and Haram holdings" (p. 75), in what ways would this rivalry emerge through a reading of the records of rural Egyptian courts? What more would we learn from these sources about, say, property holdings of various Faqari and Qasimi grandees? What if we did not find any relevant information about the Faqari-Qasimi rivalry in these court records? What would this silence mean?

A Tale of Two Factions is the most recent book by one of the most important historians of Ottoman Egypt working today. It adds much to our understanding of one of the most significant social phenomena of Ottoman Egypt—the Faqari-Qasimi rivalry—and traces the important connections between Egypt and Yemen. Historians of Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and all those interested in the function of myth, symbol, and lore in the writing of history should read this book carefully.

Fariba Zarinebaf, John Bennet, and Jack L. Davis (eds.)
A Historical and Economic Geography of Ottoman Greece: The Southwestern Morea in the 18th Century. Hesperia Supplement 34 (N.p.: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2005), xxxii + 328 pages, 4 Appendices, 4 Concordances, references, index, and CD-Rom.

Reviewed by Linda Darling*

The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project began in 1991 to study the complex relationship between humans and the landscape in Southwest Greece across all periods. This book represents the segment of that project dealing with the eighteenth century, in which archaeologists John Bennet and Jack Davis worked with Ottoman historian Fariba Zarinebaf to identify places described in Ottoman survey documents and to track changes in land use over time. The Byzantine and Ottoman periods are generally neglected by archaeologists, but this project shows how useful to archaeological reconstruction the early modern documentation can be. It also suggests how archaeological approaches can illuminate Ottoman documents and enrich the history written from them.

As a pioneering work of interdisciplinary collaboration between archaeologists of Greece and Ottoman historians, this book is extremely valuable. Not only does it include evidence from surface surveys, toponymic lists, and maps that is not usually used by historians, it asks questions about spatial location and material culture that historians do not usually ask and shows how historical evidence, from narratives and state documents, can be brought to bear to answer such questions. In turn it shows how archaeological evidence can help answer historians' questions about population movements and economic change.

In the first chapter, Zarinebaf presents a history of the Ottoman Morea, and within it the Pylos region, from its conquest by the Ottomans in the fifteenth century, through its occupation by Venice in 1685-1715 and its retaking by the Ottomans, down to the Greek Revolution in 1821. She describes the timar system, the classical Ottoman system of landholding and taxation, as well as its replacement by tax farming in the seventeenth century and the malikane system in the eighteenth, and analyzes the effects of administrative change and war on peasant population and agrarian production. The Ottoman documents record the destruction of fortresses and housing and a decrease in rural population and cultivation during the three decades of warfare between Ottomans and Venetians. After the reconquest, Ottoman policy encouraged resettlement and the restoration of agriculture, but the demands of export agriculture in the eighteenth century caused economic deprivation among the peasants and led to brigandage and rebellion.

The second chapter presents a translation of the Ottoman survey register for 1716 for the district of Anavarin, corresponding to the ancient district of Pylos. The chapter also includes a translation of the 1716 Ottoman lawcode for the Morea, promulgated immediately after the reconquest. The register describes each agricultural unit (village, çiftlik, or mezraa) and its boundaries, enabling the authors to map them; it lists each house within the fortress walls, locates its boundaries, and gives its dimensions and the name of its owner. Village entries include the names of taxpayers as well as their lands, animals, and crops.

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The archaeologists located the many places mentioned in the register through the examination of surface archaeological remains, interviews with villagers, Venetian documents, and a Greek place-name index. They succeeded in finding old boundary markers and even individual fields. They included in the text photographs of identified locations and discussions of the meanings of their names. The accompanying CD provides color reproductions of most of the photographs and a facsimile of the survey register plus additional documents

From the data in the 1716 register, enhanced by archaeological evidence, the authors then discuss population distribution and agricultural production. These data contradict the stereotyped picture of desolation and depopulation drawn from the writings of Western travelers, showing that the district was stable in population and well integrated into the regional economy. The Venetian and Ottoman occupations do not seem to have affected population size very much. The non-Muslim population of the district is estimated from head-tax data at 800-1000. The Muslim population, mostly tax-exempt military men, is harder to quantify, but from the number of houses within the fortresses it is estimated at about 200 families, with no clear indication of family size. Although the area as a whole was thinly populated, the Ottomans caused mountain settlements abandoned under the Venetians to be reoccupied. It was more difficult to get people to settle the lowlands, and most of the çiftliks were established there in order to induce cultivation. Throughout the period, the area was involved in local trade, the main products being olives and olive oil, grain, silk, tobacco, and goatskins. A transformation to commercial agriculture was only beginning to be seen in 1716, but changes in taxation methods removed the protections that peasants formerly enjoyed and set the stage for later exploitation.

As a result of this study, the authors question the stereotype of Greek decline under Ottoman misrule, presenting instead an image of stability or even economic expansion. They show how subtle changes in settlement patterns and economic production reflected the region's reaction to larger events in the early modern world. They have identified locations for future excavation to answer specific questions regarding the local society and economy, creating a geographical and historical overview or matrix into which such evidence may be integrated.

One of the most interesting characteristics of this book, albeit somewhat problematic for a historian, is its organization. The summary chapter comes first; subsequent chapters, rather than building on one another to reach a conclusion or solve a problem, instead expose individual aspects of the evidence on which the initial summary was constructed. The book resembles an excavation report more than a historical monograph; it is filled with information but does not tell a story, although stories are told within it. This complaint highlights one of the less noted aspects of interdisciplinarity: at issue are not only differing methods of investigation and different questions to be answered, but different vocabularies of exposition that need to be made meaningful across disciplinary boundaries.

At the same time, since it explicitly states the responsibility of the different authors for its various parts, the book exposes very clearly the nature of the collaboration between the historian and the archaeologists and models what a fruitful interdisciplinary relationship can look like. It shows how each discipline's techniques provide unexpected tools for answering questions in the other discipline, to the enrichment of both. The place-name indices and survey techniques of the

archaeologists turned up the locations of places named in the archival register; likewise, the archival register provided information about crops and activities that apparently left no material remains for archaeologists to discover. As a result, we know more about the region than we would from either discipline alone. Moreover, Bennet, Davis, and Zarinebaf have learned to communicate with each other and have shown us how it can be done. Subsequent interdisciplinary collaborations would do well to study their methodology, and we hope their work will have many imitators.

Heath W. Lowry
The Nature of the Early Ottoman State. State University of New York Press (Albany, NY, 2003), 143 pp.

Reviewed by H. Erdem Çıpa*

Heath W. Lowry's *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* represents a full front attack on Paul Wittek's "gazi thesis." As an Ottomanist who is cleary "troubled" by the impact of Wittek's *Rise of the Ottoman Empire* "has had, and continues to have, in the still fledgling field of Ottoman studies" (p. 2), Lowry sets out to provide an "alternative explanation to account for the origins and growth of the Ottoman polity" (p. 3) during its formative years. Despite his claim to the contrary, Lowry's alternative explanation that the "Ottoman juggernaut rolled through Bythinia and into the Balkans, fueled not by the zeal of a religious brotherhood, but by the greed and ambition of a predatory confederacy" (p. 54) is by no means original.

Lowry begins his study with a succinct overview of the ongoing debate on the origins and nature of the early Ottoman state with reference to the theories put forward during the first half of the 20th century by prominent figures such as Herbert Gibbons, W.L. Langer, R.P. Blake, M. Fuat Köprülü, and Paul Wittek. A primarily Byzantine administrative apparatus created by a group of Islamicized Byzantines and Turks (Gibbons), the heteredox form of Islam practiced by the early Ottomans (Langer & Blake), a conglomeration of Turkish tribal groups with their their administrative skills inherited from earlier Turkish states (Köprülü), and Muslim gazis whose primary aim was to conquer and convert Christians in the frontier regions of the early Ottoman principality (Wittek) had been suggested as the reasons of the success enjoyed by the early Ottomans. Equally dissatisfied with these explanations, Lowry then criticizes numerous later Ottomanists for agreeing with (at least certain aspects of) Wittek's "*gazi* thesis" and some for simply revisiting it. Surprisingly enough this is exactly what he does in the following two chapters entitled "Wittek Revisited: His Utilization of Ahmedi's *Iskendername*" and "Wittek Revisited: His Utilization of the 1337 Bursa Inscription."

In Chapter Two, Lowry criticizes "Wittek's attempt to construct his '*Gazi* Thesis' on a few lines from the introduction of Ahmedi's section on the Ottoman dynasty" (p. 30). Based on a close re-reading of the *Iskendername* he convincingly argues that a consideration of the full text of the work indicates that it "is more fruitful to view Ahmedi's work as a *nasihatname*" (book of advice) rather than as history (p. 30). While Lowry may be right in arguing that the *gaza* topos is a literary convention Ahmedi utilized to warn future Ottoman rulers about using their military strength against their Muslim neighbors, he does not provide enough

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evidence to prove why it is "nothing more than that" (p. 31).

In Chapter Three, Lowry attacks the second pillar of Wittek's theory by questioning his approach to, and analysis of, a mosque inscription dated 1337. Following an argument, contra late Şinasi Tekin, for the orginality of the 1337 Bursa inscription, Lowry goes on to persuasively argue that Wittek "attempted to buttress his carefully edited selection of passages from Ahmedi, with his equally edited and vetted readings and interpretations of the meanings of the 1337 inscription" (p. 43). By pointing out that the Ottomans were only one of the many ruling families in thirteenth- to fifteenth-century Anotolia to use the term *gazi* as part of their rulers' titulature, Lowry proves that the terms recorded in the 1337 inscription did not constitute "an ensemble of titles absolutely unique in the Ottoman protocol," as Wittek once argued (p. 33). The very fact that all of the ruling families in question were Islamic dynasties, however, clearly suggest that one should not be as quick as Lowry to assume that the term *gazi* was free of any religious connotations.

Though critical of the *Iskendername*'s authority as a historical source in the full sense of the term, Lowry opens Chapter Four entitled "What Could the Terms *Gaza* and *Gazi* Have Meant to the Early Ottomans?" with a couplet from that work (p. 45) to argue that the Ottomans used *gaza* and *akın* (literally: raid) synonymously in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (p. 46). It strikes the reader as somewhat curious, furthermore, that Lowry acknowledges Colin Imber for having made practically the same argument before (p. 45) while still insisting on the originality of his own approach.[1]

The core of *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* is constituted by Chapter Five entitled "Toward a New Interpretation." It is in this chapter where Lowry argues, inspired primarily, though not exclusively, by Spandugnino's *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, that Osman Beg, the eponymous founder of the Ottoman Empire, was the leader of one of three (or four) major great warrior families in Bithynia which made up a "predatory confederacy" led by Osman as *primus inter pares*. That two of these families, along with numerous early Ottoman administrators, were of Christian descent makes up the main pillar of his argument that the ruling elite of the Ottoman state was composed of a mixture of Muslims and Christians, thus discrediting Wittek's "*gazi* thesis" (p. 92). Despite his meticulous reexamination and detailed analysis of various early Ottoman and European sources, Lowry's conclusions (minus, perhaps, the term "predatory confederacy") are far from advancing the debate on the origins and nature of the early Ottoman polity beyond those reached previously by Cemal Kafadar in his study *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State* (1995).

Lowry devotes his next chapter to an exploration of "Christian Peasant Life in the Fifteenth-Century Ottoman Empire" and reaches, through a case study of cadastral surveys (*tahrir*) of the Island of Limnos dated 1490 and 1519, the same conclusions he had reached two decades ago regarding the natural continuity of population, means of production and economy, due to the almost complete absence of Turkish settlement and limited religious conversion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[2] Though never convincingly arguing as to why Limnos should be considered a representative case, Lowry manages to show that "by the late fifteenth century the expanding Ottoman juggernaut was moving with such a speed that it dictated the utilization of preexisting Byzantine manpower and defense systems to administer and safeguard even such a key strategic acquisition as the island of Limnos" (p. 101). Within the context of his struggle against Wittek's "*gazi*

thesis," this conclusion supplies Lowry with an argument as to why the Ottoman state could not have been successful had it not been for the accommodationist and syncretic practices of the early Ottomans.

Although a study on the origins and nature of the "early" Ottoman state, Lowry concludes his book with a chapter entitled "The Last Phase of Ottoman Syncretism – The Subsumption of Members of the Byzanto-Balkan Aristocracy into the Ottoman Ruling Elite." This chapter focuses on the origins of the individuals who held the title of the Grand Vizier at a later period, namely between 1453 and 1517. Meticulously tracing the channels through which high-ranking former aristocrats as well as members of the lesser nobility of Christian descent were transformed into the Ottoman ruling elite, Lowry emphasizes the need for the reevaluation of "the idea that a change of religion on the part of the ruling elite should necessarily be equated with a major fault-line" (pp. 129-130) and appears to reiterate what Kafadar meant when he discussed the issue of the "liquidity and fluidity of identities."[3]

In the concluding section of this book, Lowry expresses his awareness of the "highly speculative" nature of any historical (re)interpretation of the earliest surviving records of the Ottoman polity (p. 143). Although, as Lowry states, "the present study clearly suffers from this limitation" (p. 143), *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* deserves acclaim as an attempt toward a reinterpretation of various archival records, inscriptions, as well as narrative sources dating back to, or reporting about, the formative years of the early Ottoman state. By combining his attentive re-reading of Ottoman primary sources with his interpretation of various European narrative sources on the early Ottoman period, Lowry manages not only to uncover critical errors in the reading of some primary sources but also to suggest possible reinterpretations of some others. Despite its strengths, however, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State* fails to advance the debate on the origins and nature of the early Ottoman polity beyond the point already reached by scholars such as Rudi Paul Lindner, Colin Imber, and Cemal.

ENDNOTES

[1] Although Lowry refers to Imber's article entitled "The Legend of Osman Gazi" published in E. Zachariadou (ed.), *The Ottoman Emirate, 1300-1389* (Rethymnon, 1993)), omits to mention the latter's other article addressing the very same question: Colin Imber, "What Does Gazi Actually Mean?" in: Çiğdem Balım-Harding and Colin Imber (eds.). *The Balance of Truth, Essays in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Lewis* (Istanbul, 2000).

[2] See Anthony Bryer & Heath Lowry (eds.), *Continuity and Change in Late Byzantine and Early Ottoman Society: Papers Given at a Symposium at Dumbarton Oaks in May 1982*. The University of Birmingham Centre for Byzantine Studies; Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1986.

[3] Cemal Kafadar, *Between Two Worlds: The Construction of the Ottoman State*, (Berkeley, CA, 1995), p. 28.

Anton Minkov
Conversion to Islam in the Balkans :* Kisve Bahası *Petitions and Ottoman Social Life, 1670-1730.
Brill (Leiden, Boston, 2004), xvi + 277 pages

Reviewed by Nikolay Antov*

The history of Islam in the Balkans has long been the preserve of national historiographies of the Ottoman Empire's successor nation-states as western scholars' attention has largely been focused on Anatolia (as the Republic of Turkey was seen as the natural successor nation-state of the Empire) and the Ottoman Arab provinces. It was political developments in the Western Balkans in the 1990s that helped significantly increase the interest in the study of the history and culture of Muslim communities in the region. The end of the Cold War also brought about considerable liberalization of access to Ottoman archives as well as new opportunities for intellectual exchange between regional Balkan and Western scholarly traditions.

The book under review is to a large extent the outcome of these processes. It is a revised version of a doctoral dissertation completed by the author, a native of the Balkans, at a major Canadian university. As Minkov himself asserts, he has thus been able to combine the inspiration and "intimate familiarity with the particular historical situation" typical of a native with the "objectivity and impartiality" of an outsider (p. 2).

Strictly speaking, this is hardly a monograph, but rather, a long historiographical review of a number of issues related to conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans (pp. 9-109) and a discussion of a specific body of Ottoman documents – kisve bahası petitions as a source for the study of conversion to Islam in the region (pp. 110-192) brought together in a single volume.[1] These two big blocks are sandwiched between a very short introduction that deals with sources and methodology (pp. 1-8) and an equally short conclusion (pp. 193-198). There are also three appendices – the first (pp. 201-243) contains fifteen Ottoman documents in facsimile and English translation (all of them with a single exception being *kisve bahası* petitions), while the other two (pp. 244-252) are lists of archival units containing *kisve bahası* petitions at the National Library in Sofia, Bulgaria,[2] and the Prime Ministry's Archive in Istanbul, Turkey.

The first part of the book consists of three chapters dealing with pre-Ottoman conversion to Islam and theories of conversion, periods of conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans, and forms and factors in conversion to Islam in the Balkans, respectively. The discussion contained in the first chapter is rather poor and limited. Minkov has confined himself to presenting lengthy summaries of only two monographs dealing with conversion to Islam in early Islamic history[3] with occasional references to a few other works. Practically neglecting the huge theoretical and comparative literature on religious conversion, the author clearly sets Bulliet's quantitative model and timetable of conversion (with its overt emphasis on worldly motives for conversion to Islam) as the model to follow throughout the rest of the book. It is important to note that Bulliet's work, which employs the concept of innovation diffusion and divides the process of conversion to Islam in the medieval period into five periods -- those of innovators, early adopters, early and late majority, and laggards – is an original, bold and provocative work worthy of attention. However, it was conceived above all as food for thought, its conclusions being reliable, if at all, primarily with respect to medieval Iran

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only, due to the great limitations of his source base.[4] Many of the arguments which Bulliet makes are related to political and social developments strictly specific to the historical period and area(s) under discussion. Hence, he does not claim that his model can be easily applied in other historical contexts. In contrast, Minkov leaves the impression that he sees Bulliet's quantitative model and timetable of conversion, together with the related arguments as a framework that may be employed to explain any process of group conversion to Islam, anywhere, and at any time in history. At the end of the chapter, one finds also a brief discussion of "the stages of conversion in Asia Minor", whereby the presentation in the only well-known monograph on the subject has been adapted to fit Bulliet's timetable of conversion, notwithstanding the lack of an adequate source base that would support such arguments.

This sets the stage for what follows in the next chapter which deals with "periods of conversion to Islam in the Balkans". Not surprisingly, Minkov imposes the matrix of Bulliet's timetable and his quantitative model upon Ottoman Balkan history and discovers that it fits again. In the author's view, the first two periods of conversion, those of "innovators" and "early adopters" (using Bulliet's terminology and timetable) were completed by the 1530s, "early majority" (or 40%) was reached by the second quarter of the eighteenth century with a peak in the conversion process in the seventeenth century. After that, however, the process came to a sudden halt with conversion continuing only in some peripheral areas – a situation which, according to Minkov, was most probably the result of the rise of religious (Islamic) fundamentalism and disillusionment with Ottoman rule.

At least two objections to Minkov's approach and arguments are in place here. First, the present state of development in the field of Balkan history is such that the study of demographic change in the Ottoman period is still in its infancy and, with possibly one exception,[5] there is no single study that provides reliable figures of the total population in the Ottoman Balkans (not counting broad estimates) and the corresponding percentage of Muslims at any point in the region's history prior to the nineteenth century. The same is even more valid with respect to the percentage and number of new converts to Islam. One of the main reasons for this is that most of the preserved Ottoman taxation registers that would be the basis for reconstructing the outlines of the region's demographic history are to be found in Turkish archives and for various reasons, above all political, were not available to scholars from the Balkans, while scholars from Turkey and the West have not shown great interest in them (with a few exceptions).[6] This is especially true with respect to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whereby the Ottoman *avarız* (extraordinary tax) registers that would be the basis of demographic reconstruction have remained practically untapped. The few available studies on seventeenth and eighteenth-century Balkan demographic history rely primarily on *cizye* (non-Muslim poll-tax) registers, which, as Minkov also points out, are not a reliable source for the study of conversion and Islamization. There does not exist a sufficient number of case studies (in Balkan demographic history) to allow for the kind of generalizations Minkov makes. In fact, the author's strategy is to refer to a few case studies[7] of limited geographic scope and extend the arguments/conclusions made therein to all of the Balkans. This is methodologically unacceptable.

My other objection is related to the issue of regional variation in the processes of conversion to Islam, colonization, and migration in the Ottoman Balkans. Muslim communities

in the region formed neither evenly geographically, nor in parallel chronologically. While sizable Muslim enclaves formed in certain parts of the peninsula (e.g. Bosnia, Albania, Thrace, and the northeastern Balkans) other parts of the Balkans (e.g. modern Serbia and Western Bulgaria) never saw the formation of significant Muslim communities. Similarly, if the process of conversion in Bosnia had its peak in the sixteenth century, the same happened in Albania only in the eighteenth century. Nowhere does the author's discussion sufficiently account for this. This significant regional variation also renders Minkov's application of Bulliet's quantitative model and timetable of conversion for the Balkans as a whole quite flimsy and untenable. The dynamic relationship between Turkic colonization and conversion to Islam has not been adequately explored either.

Chapter Three provides fairly reliable coverage of some issues related to the forms, factors, and motives of conversion to Islam in the Balkans. One should note that slavery was hardly a "method of conversion to Islam," as the author put it, but rather a factor in the process, as many slaves did convert to Islam upon manumission. Similarly, the *devşirme* levy of Christian children in the early centuries of Ottoman rule in the Balkans was construed above all as a method of conscription for state service, and not of conversion to Islam; the conversion of conscripted children was more of a by-product, and not the main objective in the process. The presentation of factors of conversion, which the author divides into economic, social, and religio-cultural, is largely adequate and sensible. It would have been good to emphasize more strongly that such a classification is inevitably schematic as all these factors engaged in an intricate interplay in different ways with respect to individual identity, geographical location, historical period, etc., something that the author has hinted at, but not fully pursued.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six form the second part of the book and deal with the main characteristics of *kisve bahası* petitions as a historical source, Minkov's claim that they represented "the institutionalization of conversion", and the collective image of *kisve bahası* petitioners. Chapter Four discusses *kisve bahası* petitions as sources for conversion and presents them as "the most significant documentary source regarding conversion to Islam in the last quarter of the sixteenth and the first quarter of the eighteenth centuries" for, unlike other sources, they contain "direct statements by the converts pointing to their voluntary conversion"(p. 111). Minkov then proceeds to hint that the Bulgarian nationalist historians attempted to purposefully misinterpret these petitions because of their "potential dangers". The rest of the chapter is devoted to a detailed paleographic and diplomatic analysis of the petitions whose place should have been in a separate article and not in this book.

I would like to make it very clear that the author's statement concerning the value of this body of documents is plainly misleading. *Kisve bahası* petitions are one of the many types of sources that could and should be used for the study of conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans during the period in question. However, besides the various types of tax registers which are indispensable for the reconstruction of religio-demographic change, one cannot fail to mention registers of complaints and important affairs, Islamic court registers, legal literature (esp. *fetvas*), and among non-documentary sources, Ottoman chronicles, literary works pertaining to the activities of sufi orders, etc.

Due to their notable limitations, *kisve bahası* petitions are more interesting than important as a source. As Minkov himself points out, he used 636 petitions

issued in the name of 755 people (p. 145). Of these only 60 petitions refer to the new Muslims' ethnicity, place or country of origin, and only 40 of them point to Balkan origin (including the European part of Istanbul). Although there are reasons to suspect that the greater part of the petitions was indeed submitted by Balkan converts, there is no way to prove that; it is even less possible to determine this in the case of a specific petition in which such information is not explicitly provided. Even more importantly, the petitions can in no way be viewed as providing a representative sample of converts to Islam in the empire as a whole or any part of it. It is impossible to establish what percentage of all converts to Islam during the period in question submitted such petitions (the only thing one may surmise is that this percentage is very small). It is similarly impossible to establish what part of all petitions that were ever written has been preserved. For these reasons, *kisve bahası* petitions are plainly unfit for quantitative analysis, especially with respect to the discussion of conversion to Islam in the Balkans as a whole. This renders the quantitative analysis of the petitions that Minkov presents in Chapter Five and his attempts to link that analysis to contemporary political developments highly problematic. It is for the same reasons that the petitions cannot be used on their own as the basis of an overall discussion of conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans.

Minkov's assertion in Chapter Five that conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Empire was finally institutionalized through the *kisve bahası* procedure in the second half of the seventeenth century as it had not been so prior to that is an exaggeration. New converts to Islam were officially recognized as such by the Ottoman state as early as in the fifteenth century as they were promptly moved from the non-Muslims to the Muslims section in tax registers. This automatically meant the formal recognition of their status change as well as their enjoyment of a better taxation status. There are also documents in Turkish archival collections that attest to the giving of special rewards to new converts in the sixteenth century too, although these need to be better researched.

Minkov's claim that *kisve bahası* was an "institution of conversion" is also problematic. Strictly speaking, *kisve bahası* petitions were the beginning of a financial procedure that would result in the granting of new Muslim clothes (or the cash equivalent thereof) to the petitioner. Some converts did accept Islam in the presence of high Ottoman dignitaries, or on occasion, the sultan himself. Many others did not, but requested only new clothes and/or some other privilege. Thus, the link between the *kisve bahası* procedure and other administrative procedures or ceremonies is far from automatic or strictly established.

I would highlight two more points in Chapter Five that I find highly problematic as these are related to some of Minkov's most important arguments. First, his likening of the *devşirme*-raised ruling elite in the Ottoman Empire to the "nomenklatura" elite of the East European totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century is plainly frivolous. It is difficult to see any serious similarity between the two beyond the fact that in both cases patronage and networking played important roles, and that elite members strove to establish their own control over outsiders' entry into elite ranks. These, however, are characteristic features of elites in many other cases in history. Besides, Minkov's argument that the *kisve bahası* petitioners were "voluntary *devşirme*" recruits whereby the *kisve bahası* procedure replaced the traditional *devşirme* recruitment procedure is untenable. Only a few of the petitions suggest that the petitioners received any positions in the Ottoman elite. It is true that the seventeenth century saw the

gradual dying out of the *devşirme* system of recruitment, but what replaced the *devşirme* recruits above all were the trainees of Ottoman grandees' households who found their way to central government positions with the help of their patrons and would later repay this debt with their loyalty.[8] There is no indication that *kisve bahası* petitioners were integrated into this process.

The concluding chapter of the book presents a detailed discussion of the collective image of *kisve bahası* petitioners, which is quite meaningful as long as the reader keeps in mind that it is valid only for this group of converts. Minkov convincingly presents *kısve bahası* petitioners as "exhibiting a rather practical attitude towards conversion to Islam" although I find his claim that they also showed "exceptional determination to achieve their goals" a bit exaggerated. This is the value of this body of documents – it shows us a specific type of converts to Islam in the Ottoman Empire during the period in question who were proactive enough to explore and take advantage of the opportunities the system offered them to receive new Muslim clothes (or their cash equivalent) and possibly something on top of that (although *kisve bahası* petitions themselves do not provide any conclusive evidence to the effect that they were successful in that endeavor). This is only one aspect of the very diverse and dynamic process of conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans and for this reason *kisve bahası* petitions should be used in conjunction with or as a complement to other more diverse and comprehensive sources for the purpose of a general discussion of conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Balkans – something that Minkov has failed to do.

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[1] *Kisve bahası* petitions were petitions through which recent converts to Islam or non-Muslims declaring their readiness to accept Islam petitioned to the central government offices to receive new Muslim clothes or the cash equivalent thereof. In a number of cases petitioners presented personal motives for their conversions and asked for other favors including positions in state institutions, but with the exception of a few cases there is no indication that these additional wishes were granted. Most of the known documents of this type – close to 650 are preserved in the National Library in Sofia, and some in archives in Istanbul, most of them pertaining to the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries.

[2] About one quarter of the petitions preserved in Sofia have been published in in Bulgarian translation (with some facsimiles as well) in M. Kalicin, A. Velkov. E. Radushev, ed. *Osmanski izvori za islyamizatsionnite protsesi na Balkanite* (Ottoman Sources of the Islamization Processes in the Balkans), Sofia, 1990. Almost all of the petitions given in English translation in Appendix I are to be found in this volume too.

[3] These are D.C. Dennet, *Conversion and the Poll Tax in Early Islam*, Cambridge, 1950 and R.W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*, Cambridge, 1979

[4] See a review of Bulliet's monograph by H. Kennedy, IJMES, 13 (1981), p. 250-252.

[5] See Ö.L. Barkan, Essai sur les données statistiques des registres de recensement dans l'Empire Ottoman aux XVe et XVIe siècles", JESHO, 1 (1957), p. 9-36.

[6] One such notable exception is Dutch Ottomanist M. Kiel who has devoted numerous studies on the demographic history of the Ottoman Balkans.

[7] To give a few examples, among the case studies Minkov refers to most often are E. Radushev, "Demografski i etnoreligiozni procesi v zapadnite Rodopi prez 15-18 v. (Demographic and Ethno-religious Processes in the Western Rhodopes, 15th – 18th centuries)", *Istorichasko badeshte*, 1 (1998), pp 46-89; M. Kiel, "The Spread of Islam in Bulgarian Rural Areas in the Ottoman Period (15th - 18th centuries): Colonization and Islamization", in R. Gradeva and S. Ivanova, ed. Musulmanskata kultura po balgarskite zemi. Izsledvaniya (Islamic Culture in the Bulgarian Lands. Studies), Sofia, 1998, p. 56-126; and M. Sokoloski, "Islamizatzija u Makedoniji u XV i XVI veku (Islamization in Macedonia in the 15th and 16th Centuries)", *Istoriski Casopis*, 22 (1975), p. 75-89.

[8] The two most important works on the emergence of Ottoman grandees' households and their role in the training and promotion of future members of the Ottoman administrative and military elite are M. Kunt, *The Sultan's Servants: the Transformation of the Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550-1650*, New York, 1983, and R.A. Abou El-Haj, "The Ottoman Vezir and Pasha Households, 1683-1703: A Preliminary Report", *JAOS* 94, 4 (1974), p. 438-447.

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Essays accepted for publication will generally be published within 4-6 months of receipt and book reviews and items for the Miscellany section within 3-6 months. This schedule is somewhat flexible, however, and subject to various contingencies. If you have a particular concern about timing, please consult with the editorial staff.