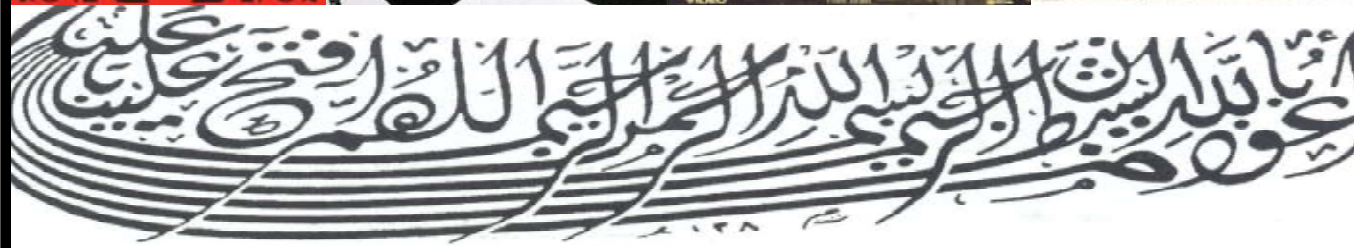
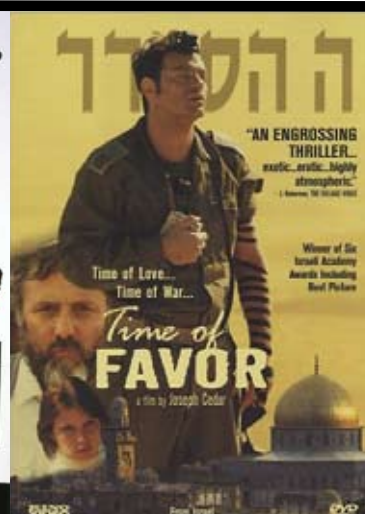
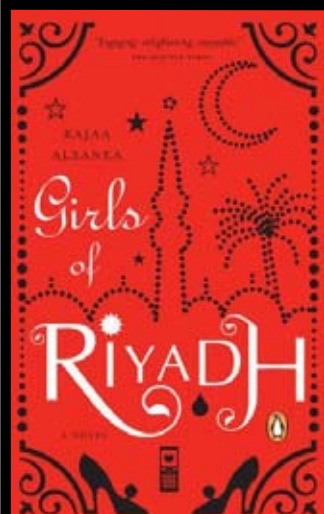




Viewpoints Special Edition

# The State of the Arts in the Middle East

The Middle East Institute  
Washington, DC





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***Viewpoints* Special Edition**

# **The State of the Arts in the Middle East**

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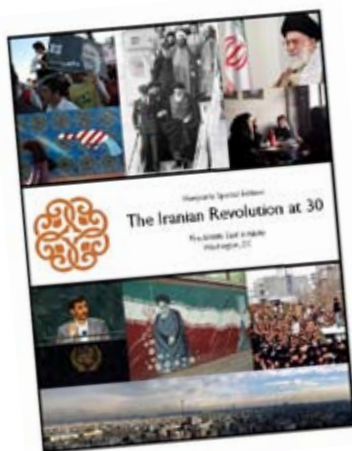
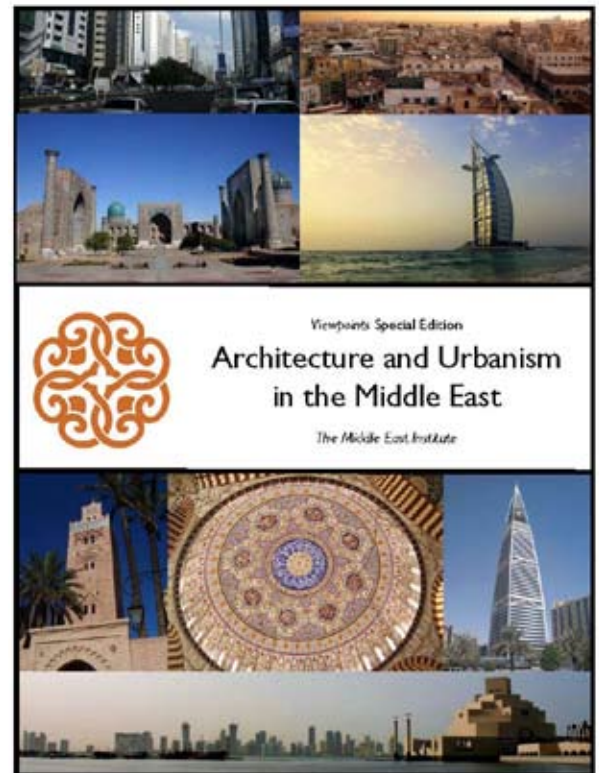
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# Introduction

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Art unlocks the imagination, compels us to think, and reveals and emphasizes non-negotiable as well as inconvenient truths. Works of art are acts of individual creative self-exploration and self-expression. They offer escape. They furnish entertainment. They speak to our passions and deepest yearnings. In addition, they convey a society's shared experiences. They also reaffirm, often question, and sometimes repudiate its core values, beliefs, and practices. They at once record and seek to produce social change. The importance of the arts thus goes far beyond aesthetics.

The Middle East and North Africa are bursting with artistic production in literature and the visual and performing arts. At a time when so much of the news about the region is focused on instability and violence, this special edition of the Middle East Institute's (MEI) *Viewpoints* series on "The State of the Arts in the Middle East" surveys the landscape of creative artistic endeavors. The 17 short essays comprising this volume are intended as a sampling of the rich and diverse menu of artists and artistic products in the contemporary Middle East.

The arts of the Middle East are "alive" — with new artists, genres, and themes continuously being grafted onto old ones, adding shades and texture. While some of these are represented in this volume, many more are not. In the interest of providing a fuller picture of the state of the arts in the region, MEI welcomes additional essays from young and established scholars. These essays (1,000-1,200 words) must be accessible to non-specialists and aim to shed light on the importance of a specific artist, body of work, theme, or genre. Topic proposals will be accepted on a rolling, ongoing basis. Essays accepted for publication will be periodically added to the current collection and published in electronic format. Please submit topic proposals in the form of a 100-word abstract (including full name, title, and affiliation) to Dr. John Calabrese at [jcalabrese@mei.edu](mailto:jcalabrese@mei.edu).

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# I. Language and Literature



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# Fiction and Publics: The Emergence of the “Arabic Best-Seller”

Roger Allen

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While I was attending a conference on Arabic fiction in the Emirate of Sharjah in May 2008, a newspaper correspondent asked me during the course of an interview for my opinion of a novel published relatively recently, namely *Banat al-Riyad* by Raja' al-Sani.<sup>1</sup> Before answering the question, I asked him why he had singled out that particular work. He replied that he was one among many literary critics with a continuing interest in trends in contemporary Arabic fiction who were perplexed as to why a novel written by a 23-year-old Saudi female dentist in the form of e-mail messages exchanged between four girls living in the Saudi capital should have been deemed worthy of translation and publication in English (and by Penguin Books, no less). I responded that this novel seemed to be symptomatic of the “lid-off” category of writing by Middle Eastern women (i.e., a novel that Western publishers seem eager to snap up in order to cater to a market that is particularly interested in such apparent “insights” into what is widely viewed as a closed world).

Additionally, I pointed out that *Banat al-Riyad* had been roundly criticized by the British press as a contribution to fiction,<sup>2</sup> and that this work seemed to be part of a wider phenomenon in publishing, one that poses interesting challenges to existing norms of evaluation, particularly in the inter-cultural realm of translation and its publication. Furthermore, I suggested, two other works — *Dhakirat al-Jasad* by the Algerian writer, Ahlam Mustaghanimi, and *Imarat Ya'qubiyān* by the Egyptian writer (and also dentist!) 'Ala' al-Aswani — in their different ways raise similar issues.<sup>3</sup> Just one month after this



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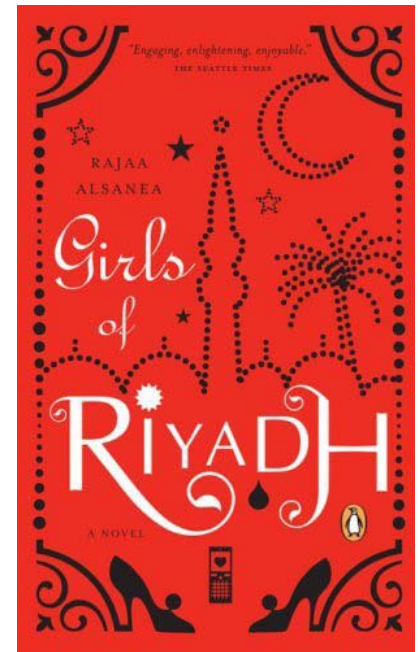
1. Raja' al-Sani' [Rajaa Alsanea], *Banāt al-Riyād* (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2006); English translation by Marilyn Booth; *Girls of Riyadh* (London, UK and New York: Penguin Books, 2007).

2. A convenient montage of such criticism can be found at: <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/arab/alsanea.htm>. In the context of the issues raised by this short article, particular attention needs to be paid to the contents of the letter that Marilyn Booth, the novel's translator, felt compelled to send to the *Times Literary Supplement* (September 28, 2007) concerning her role in the process leading to the publication of the English version of the text.

3. Ahlam Mustaghanimi, *Dhakirat al-jasad* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1993); English translation by Baria Ahmar Sreih [Ahlem Mosteghanemi], *Memory in the Flesh* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003); 'Ala' al-Aswani, *Imarat Ya'qubiyān* (Cairo: Merit, 2002); English translation by Humphrey Davies, *The Yacoubian Building* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004). Mustaghanimi has written two other novels, *Fawda al-Hawass* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1998); English translation by Baria Ahmar Sreih [Ahlem Mosteghanemi], *Chaos of the Senses* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2004) and *Abir Sarir* [Bed-passer] (Beirut: Manshurat Ahlam Mustaghanimi, 2003). Al-Aswani has written *Shikagu* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2007); English translation by Farouk Abdel Wahab, *Chicago* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008). In what must be considered an exceptional gesture, al-Aswani was the subject of an article in the Sunday magazine section

conversation in Sharjah, Dr. Tetz Rooke of Goteborg University used the same triad of novels in broaching the topic of “the Arabic best-seller” in a paper presented at the conference of the European Meeting of Teachers of Modern Arabic Literature [EURAMAL] in Uppsala, Sweden.

Here then we find ourselves confronting a situation in which three novels from differing regions of the Arabic-speaking world have met decidedly mixed evaluative receptions from their local critical communities, and yet, in spite of that, have sold unusually large numbers of copies.<sup>4</sup> Beyond that, their translated versions have also sold extremely well in Western markets. In the paragraphs that follow, I would like to examine this situation in more detail. In so doing, space does not allow me to add further opinion to the supply of evaluations that have already appeared. Instead I will consider some of the implications of a situation in which general reading publics, of both the original and translated versions of these novels, seem in reaching evaluative conclusions to be applying criteria that are considerably different from those of the community of critics, whether functioning within the public domain or in the academic realm.



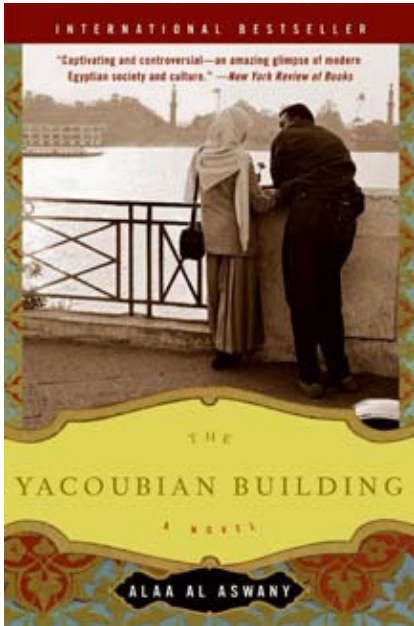
In a more theoretical approach to the issues involved, I am reminded that, at the Uppsala conference mentioned above, Dr. Stephan Guth (University of Oslo) drew attention to a new project on “Post-Postmodernism.”<sup>5</sup> Within the context of Arabic fiction, he notes “a ‘return’ to ‘traditional,’ pre-(post)modernist modes of writing critical realism, simple chronologies, non-fragmentation, omniscient narrators.” While, as I noted above, the three novelists whom I have identified come from different regions of the Arabic-speaking world and adopt very different narrative approaches, they are united in their avoidance of the ambiguity, uncertainty, and stylistic and generic complexity that is characteristic of much recent novelistic production in Arabic, and at the hands of writers as varied as Ilyas Khuri, Ibrahim Nasrallah, and Ibrahim al-Kuni (to name just a few).

During the 1980s the Egyptian novelist, Idwar al-Kharrat, identified another aspect to the critical discussions of the nature of modernism, in his coinage of the term “*al-hassasiyyah al-jadidah*” (new sensitivity) to describe recent trends in novel-writing, prime amongst which were a resort to trans-generic writing and a deliberate stylistic complexity (offering several examples in his own fictional production). In such a context the three novels discussed above do indeed seem of *The New York Times*: Pankaj Mishra, “Where Alaa Al Aswany is writing from,” *The New York Times*, April 27, 2008.

4. While, as noted above, I am not concerned here with the evaluation of these novels, it is important to mention that of these three “best-selling” novels, Mustaghanimi’s has received by far the most positive reception from certain members of the community of critics, at least in discussions of its content. See, for example, Aida Bamia in *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 28, No. 3 (Fall 1997), pp. 85-93; and Ellen McLarney in the *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2003), pp. 24-44. *Memory in the Flesh* was the winner of the Naguib Mahfouz Prize in Fiction in 1998 (awarded annually in December at the American University in Cairo). However, in spite of these plaudits, this novel has not earned the respect of those critics concerned with the development of Arabic fictional genres, although I will be the first to admit that such opinions as I have heard have not appeared in printed form, at least thus far (Summer 2008).

5. A description of the project can be found at <http://www-conference.slu.se/euramal>.

to indicate “a return to the traditional” (to cite Guth’s phrase), a turning away from the ambiguities and complexities of post-modernist fiction, and, one might suggest, an abandonment of the “dialogic” approach to the role of narration and narrator in fiction (to invoke Mikhail Bakhtin’s famous terms) in favor of a more “monologic” approach.<sup>6</sup> While some of these novels may use the narrative to describe the presence of more than one voice, the reader is invited to sit back and allow the narrator to “tell” rather than to “show.”



Still within the more theoretical realm, a number of issues arise concerning the translations of these novels, the reasons for their selection, and the translation process itself. Here I am reminded of the famous article on translation method by the German philosopher, Friedrich Schleiermacher, who posits one of two possibilities:

Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him, or he leaves the reader in peace and moves the writer towards him.<sup>7</sup>

Lawrence Venuti, the well-known scholar of translation, points out that a less than desirable aspect of current trends in economic “globalization” is that, within the world of language-usage, there is an increasing tendency towards monolingualism in a number of social and cultural sectors and that, in the world of translation, it leads to what he terms a “domesticating” approach, most especially in the anglophone publication world — clearly a reflection of the second of Schleiermacher’s two possibilities. That process of “leaving the reader in peace” certainly would appear to be the case — albeit to different degrees — with these three Arabic novels. It is particularly true in the case of *Girls of Riyadh* because, as Marilyn Booth, the would-be translator of the work into English, notes in her letter of protest to the *Times Literary Supplement* (see note 2 above), “the resulting text, with its clichéd language, erasures of Arabic idioms I had translated, and unnecessary footnotes, does not reflect the care that I took to produce a lively, idiomatic translation conveying the novel’s tone and language.”

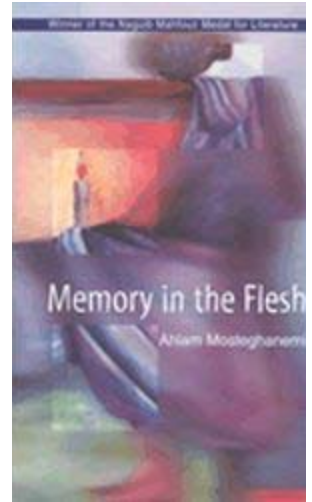
On a more practical level but still within this same context of translation and its reception, it is frequently mentioned that the kind of writing reflected in these novels is “courageous,” in that the novelists take on a number of pressing social and political issues and write about them within societies where the existence and application of the concept of “freedom of expression” is at best ambiguous and subject to a number of generally unfavorable local pressures. It is, of course, this very aspect that initially draws the attention of Western publishers (and their implied readerships) to these works. Whether we are talking about Mustaghanimi’s Algeria, al-Aswani’s Egypt, or al-Sani’s Saudi Arabia and whether the topic is politics, corruption, or sex, these works find a ready readership for what they purport to reveal in fictional form. Even though such novels in translation are entitled to the privileges of fiction and ironic reading, they are clearly

6. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed.. Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981).

7. See Larence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader* (London, UK and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 49.

read all too often as “exposés.” One wonders, for example, how many readers of *Girls of Riyadh* have also read or will be persuaded to read the works of Hanan al-Shaykh, Huda Barakat, Sahar Khalifah, Radwa ‘Ashur, or Layla Abu Zayd, to name just a few other female novelists from across the region. All of which again raises the issues of aesthetic principles, who is to apply them, and on what basis.

These three novels then have found their publics in a world in which globalization is increasingly monolingual, the visual is tending to supplant the (printed) textual, and translations demand domestication, in all cases involving the English language and the cultural and intellectual norms of its readerships. Schleiermacher’s clear preference for “foreignization” of translations clearly encounters considerable difficulties when publication decisions are based primarily on marketing (i.e. economic) factors that are founded on the above “norms.” In the realm of Arabic fiction, its translation and study, I have for some time been suggesting that, just as history needs constantly to be rewritten (as Oscar Wilde reminds us), so does that subset of it that is literary-history.<sup>8</sup> My emphasis thus far has been on the beginnings of the tradition in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the examples represented by these three novels clearly demand, as Stephan Guth’s project and Tetz Rooke’s essay suggest, another look at the parameters whereby more recent trends are to be evaluated and integrated into an updated history of Arabic fictional genres.



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8. See Roger Allen, “Literary History and the Arabic Novel,” *World Literature Today* (Spring 2001), pp. 205-13, and “Rewriting Literary History: the case of the Arabic novel,” Festschrift for Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2007), pp. 247-60.



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# An Introduction to Arabic Calligraphy

Mahdi Alish and Muhammad Ali Aziz

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It is widely known that the earliest legal authority which contributed to the later development of Arabic script dates back to the Umayyad Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan (r. 685-705), who was the first to order its usage in all official registers from his capital, Damascus. When the Abbasids came to power, the Arabic script developed gradually and slowly until it reached its zenith at the hands of Ibn Muqla (d. 940), the Abbasid vizier who created concrete rules for the script which eventually became the standard. It was said that the six famous types of Arabic script *Kufi*, *Thuluth* (or *Thulth*), *Naskh*, *Ruqa*, *Diwani*, and *Ta’liq* are attributed to him. These scripts were modified later by Ibn al-Bawwab (d. 1022), and some of these styles, particularly the *Thulth*, were divided into several sub-categories. There are hundreds of Arabic scribes with a variety of styles; however, for our purpose here, we shall focus only on the predominant ones.

First, the *Diwani* script which was known during the reign of Sultan Muhammad al-Fatih (d. 1453): This type of script was famous for its slimness and was used to conduct the Sultan’s communications. Its main sub-branches are the *Jaliy*, *Diwani*, and *Sunbuli*. Representative of the *Diwani* script is the famous first line of the panegyric poem of the *Burda* of Ka’b ibn Zuhair, which began with love poetry (*ghazal*), as was the tradition, and ended with a praise of the Prophet:<sup>1</sup> The first line can be rendered as follows: “Su’ad is separated, so my heart is consumed, enslaved by her separation, chained and unreleased.”

سعد فراقى اليوم متبوع متبع لارواح يغربكوه

Another type of *Diwani* script is known as the “Pure *Diwani*” (*al-Diwani al-Jaliy*), which often has a variety of shapes; the most prominent one is the shape of a boat. This sample reads: “I seek refuge with God from the cursed Satan. In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Oh God, grant us success.”



Dr. Alish is Professor of Arabic and Applied Linguistics and Associate Dean at the United States Military Academy. He has authored several articles, books, and textbooks.



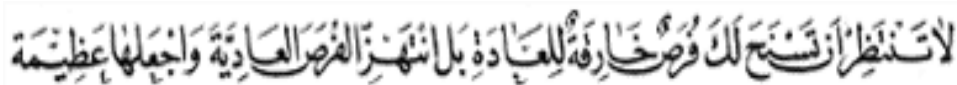
Muhammad Ali Aziz is currently a lector of Arabic at Yale University and previously was at Princeton. He earned his MA and PhD from the University of Michigan, where he also taught Arabic.

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1. All of the Arabic scripts shown in this article, with the exception of those cited from other sources, are taken from Kamil Salman al-Jubouri, *Usul al-Khatt al-Arabi: nash'atuh, anwauh, tatawwuruh, namadhijuh* (Beirut: Dar wa-Maktabat al-Hilal, 2000) with some adjustments and size modifications to fit this article.



Second is the *Naskh* script, which was probably developed in the tenth century and was refined and polished at the hands of Turkish calligraphers. It is characterized by thin lines and rounded letters, which are used in writing, printing, and correspondence. It evolved into innumerable styles, including the *Ruq'a*, the *Farsi* (or *Ta'liq*), the *Thuluth*, and the *Diwani*. Indeed, the *Naskh* script became the founding father of modern Arabic writing. An example of this script is the following proverb, which translates as: "Do not wait for extraordinary opportunities, rather seize the ordinary ones and make them great."<sup>2</sup>



Other examples of *Naskh* are the following two decorative representations of Qur'anic verses. The one on the left is the first verse in the opening chapter (*sura*) of the Qur'an, which is rendered as "Praise belongs to God, the Lord of all Being." The other is the first verse of every chapter in the Qur'an, excluding one. It can be rendered: "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate."<sup>3</sup>



Third, the *Thuluth* script (or *Thulth*) has developed out of the *Naskh* script. It is used for writing on large spaces. The following saying translates as: "No person will fail if he passes just judgment, feeds others from his own food, and does good deeds in worldly life to prepare for the hereafter. Accept for people what you accept for yourself, and do to people what you would like to be done to you."



2. See <http://www.ArabicCalligraphy.com>

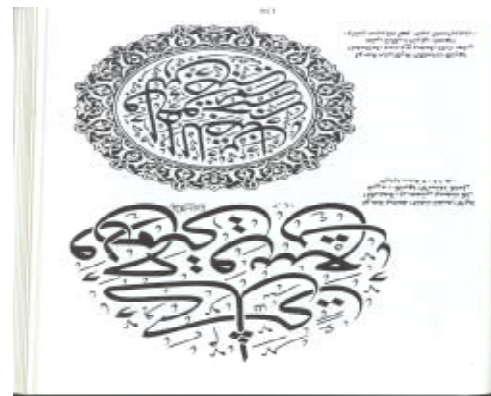
3. The Arabic calligraphy for these two verses is borrowed from <http://www.islamicart.com>.



The following verses are from the Qur'an. The middle image represents the opening phrase of every chapter in the Qur'an — the *Shahada* — and is rendered in the shape of a bird. To its right is the proclamation of the Islamic faith, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." The *Naskh* and *Thuluth* scripts are normally used to decorate the black velvet cover of the *Ka'ba*, the holy cubic structure in the middle of Mecca.



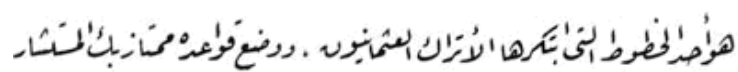
In addition to this type of *Thuluth*, there is what is known as the stratified *Thuluth*. The calligraphy on the left has in the middle of it a short Qur'anic chapter, which is written in a circular fashion with two other verses on either side. The image on the right has two verses from the Qur'an.



The *Kufi* or Kufic script derives its name from the city of Kufa in southern Iraq. It has numerous styles. The following type was developed during the Ayyubid rule of Egypt in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It renders the opening phrase of the Qur'an.



The *Ruq'a* script is the simple style that people use for their daily writing. It is popular in both Arabic and early Turkish writing. The following image is an example.



Use of the *Tughra* script was limited to the Ottoman sultan's seals and signatures. It consists of letters that are interwo-



ven and stratified closely in such a way that it is impossible to imitate. An example is the name of Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid Khan as shown above.

وانك لعل خلق عظيم



*Al-Ta’liq* script or *Nasta’liq* is an Iranian invention, which developed in the tenth century. It is also known as *Farsi*. An example is the following verse: “Surely, you are of high morals.”

This brief overview does not do justice to Arabic calligraphy in its entirety. There exist many other significant styles, such as the *Maghribi* script. Moreover, it is important to mention that Arabic calligraphy as a whole, which is the most revered form of Islamic art, has great historical and cultural significance. The styles presented in this essay are not only incorporated in a multitude of artistic and architectural works that span the Islamic world and help to bind societies together and connect them to the past, but also offer limitless possibilities to the contemporary artist.

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# Turkey through the Looking Glass: Modern Fiction

Robert Finn

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Turkey's unique position between East and West, captured in the Turkish concept of *ara*, or "betweenness," has led to an incredibly rich and prolific expression of the arts, particularly in the last quarter century. From Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk to seemingly every-other-prize winning Turkish-German cinematographer Fatih Akin, Turks hold a high profile in the arts world. Contemporary Turkish art is auctioned off at Sotheby's in London, many Turkish films appear on *The New York Times* Summer Films list, and Turkish classical musicians such as Fazil Say fill houses around the world. Millions in the Middle East ignore prohibitive *fatwas* to watch hot Turkish television dramas, and 20 million tourists visit to see Turkey for themselves.

Still shrouded by the veil of Orientalism, particularly for Americans, Turkey is in fact a lively, colorful, contentious society going in many different directions simultaneously, with Islamic pop best-sellers topping the literary sales lists even as quality works step across the boundaries of language and culture and bring a new focus, a new awareness to the essential questions of who and why we are. Turkish authors treat profound subjects with whimsy and reflection, sociological analysis, and proletarian frankness. Caught in the billowing curtains that both shield and expose East and West, Turkish authors reveal each to the other, following Pound's dictum to "make it new." In the process, they sometimes irritate even as they illuminate.

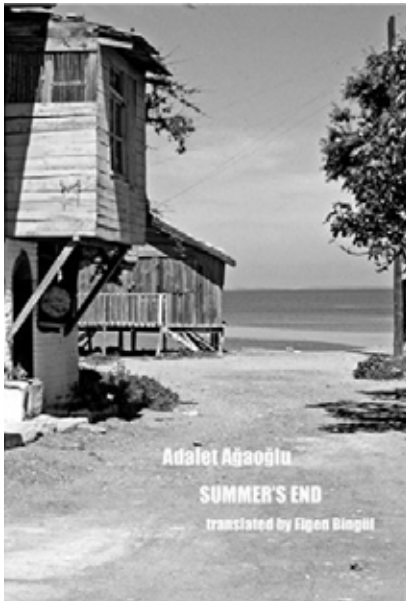
Orhan Pamuk is a case in point. His works reveal Turkey to Westerners in ways that they can both appreciate and distance themselves from. As a writer who is quintessentially part of both Europe and Turkey, and educated in an American school, he contains elements of the West in his approach and thinking that help make his works approachable to Western readers. These same qualities, however, lead to an ill-defined exasperation with him from many Turkish readers, who find his dissection of Turkish society a bit alien and almost indiscrete. Behind the backdrop of his works such as *The Black Book* (1990) stands a complex metaphysic that combines elements of both East and West, with references, as Turkish critics have pointed out, to Şeykh Galip's *Hüsnü Aşk*, the last great expression of the Ottoman divan literary tradition. Similarly, his novel *My Name is Red* (1998), a detective novel set in the world of miniature painting which was immensely popular worldwide, dealt with the changes in psychology caused by the intrusion of Western ideas of individualism into the Islamic aesthetic. Pamuk's *White Castle* (1990) openly treats the case of duality and transference of identity between an Ottoman aristocrat and his Italian slave. Pamuk's balletic orchestration of identity is further



Ambassador Finn is currently Senior Research Associate at the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination and Lecturer in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. He served as the first US Ambassador to Afghanistan in more than 20 years, from March 2002 until August 2003. He also served as US Ambassador to Tajikistan from 1998-2001. He opened the US Embassy in Azerbaijan in 1992. Ambassador Finn is the author of the book *The Early Turkish Novel*, which has been published both in English and Turkish. His poems and translations have appeared in the United States, Turkey, France and Pakistan.

developed in his latest novel *The Museum of Innocence* (forthcoming in English), where the protagonist moves among three worlds which depict different moral and metaphysical stages. Near the end he encounters his former fiancé with her child in an Italian street in a scene that blends elements of the Islamic love tale *Leyla and Mejnun* with a subtle reference to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1925), not unsurprising in an author whose first work *Cevdet Bey and His Sons* (1982) often has been likened to Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, and whose works contain myriad such playful references. In this latest novel, for example, the whole impoverished Pamuk family appears at the protagonist's engagement party at the Istanbul Hilton.

Pamuk is only one of a number of Turkish novelists who provide windows onto another world. Yaşar Kemal, long thought to be Turkey's most likely first Nobel Prize winner in literature, has produced works for half a century that depict the life of rural Turkey: lovers and mountain brigands, landlords and police. Starting with *Mehmed My Hawk* (1955), his numerous works have portrayed the (often Kurdish) villager as both victim and victor in the struggle for existence in a style that prefigured magic realism. His work illuminates, in a primal and sometimes almost mythological way, basic human qualities. Kemal's works are the stuff of epics; their universal appeal has led to their translation into many languages.



Another Kemal well known in Turkey is Orhan Kemal, one of Turkey's first socialist realists. His prolific works deal with the poor, the underdog, and the proletariat in rough works that have been consistently popular with Turkish readers. His *The Idle Years* (1949), *The Prisoners* (1954), and *Gemile* (1952) are now available in English.

Turkey has had many important female writers since the first novels appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Among Turkey's most important novelists today, a number are women, including Adalet Ağaoğlu, Latife Tekin, Nazlı Eray, Elif Shafak, Buket Uzuner, and Perihan Magden. All of these have had at least some of their works translated into English, and Elif Shafak writes in both English and Turkish.

Ağaoğlu is one of the most important of the Turkish novelists. Her works deal with Turkey's changing sociology, gender issues, politics, and personal expression against the backdrop of its landscape and Ottoman past. Her works, rich in reference and penetrating in their clear, and sometimes very cleverly targeted descriptions of society, are informed both by their milieu and events and stand as lasting, provocative essays on change and continuity. Among her many works, *Lie Down to Die* (1979) and *A Wedding Night* (1979) capture Turkey at a time of transition. Her later works, *Curfew* (1984) and *Summer's End* (2008), both of which are available in English, carry the analysis further and predict the Turkey of today.

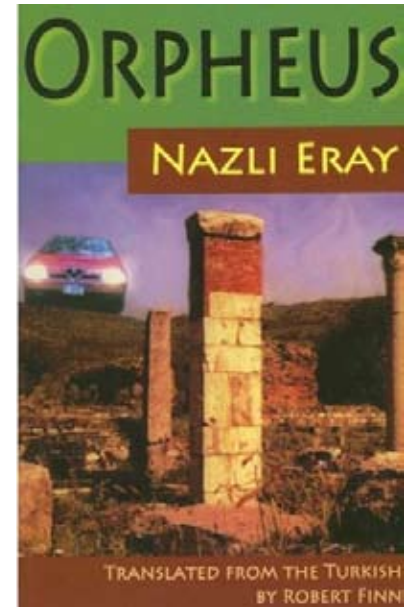
Latife Tekin's works dissect social changes in a literary context, using literary technique as a metaphor to illustrate social realities. Nazlı Eray is a fantasist, like Portugal's Saramago, an upbeat Kafka whose works transcend time and place to



give trenchant lessons about life. Her *Orpheus* has been translated into English. The late Tomris Uyar was highly popular for her short stories.

Murathan Mungan is cutting-edge and popular as both poet and novelist, as was the writer Attila İlhan. Selim Ileri continues to produce beautifully written works in the romantic tradition. Other writers of note are Vedat Türkali, Nedim Gürsel, Bilge Karasu, Demir Özlü, Çetin Altan and the late Oğuz Atay, whose novel *The Disconnected* (1972) was highly controversial and influential.

Turkish writers now transcend both time and place in their works but, placed as they are with twin valences of comprehension, provide us with a looking glass that enables us to see and be seen in a unique way. Their growing popularity and availability will help us as we deal with the issues of identity and commonality that Turks have faced for over a century.



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# Resistance in Writing: Ghassan Kanafani and the “Question of Palestine”

Barbara Harlow

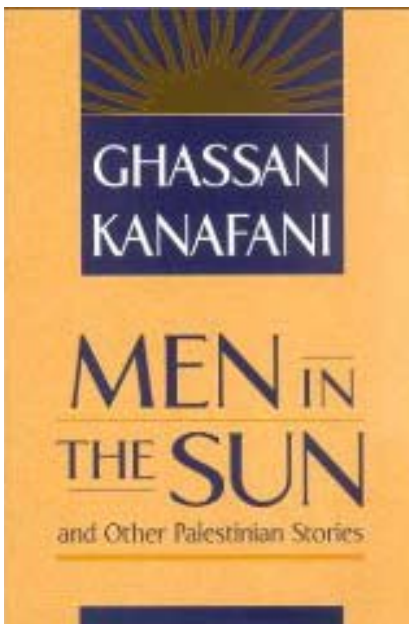
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“Why didn’t they knock on the sides of the tank?” The question asked by Abul Khazuran, the hired driver of the wealthy Gulf Arab’s truck in whose empty water tank the three Palestinian refugees cum economic migrants suffocated to death on the Iraq-Kuwait border, is more than rhetorical. Marwan, Abu Qais, and Assad, the three dead men whose bodies are left by the truck driver on a refuse heap in Kuwait, are the protagonists in Ghassan Kanafani’s 1963 novella, *Men in the Sun* [*Rijal fi al-shams*]. Refugees from the 1948 War that followed the establishment of the state of Israel, deterritorialized, disempowered, and disenfranchised, the three are seeking livelihoods and remittances to send home in the oil-rich state of Kuwait. Their hapless driver is himself a remnant of the 1948 conflict, a now emasculated erstwhile leader of the Palestinian/Arab resistance to Israel’s instantiation, itself remembered as the *nakba* (or “catastrophe”). Thus, the question, “Why didn’t they knock on the sides of the tank?” rings as historical as it once sounded rhetorical.



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When the Egyptian cinema director Tawfiq Salah critically rendered Kanafani’s novella as film in 1972, titled *Al-Makhdu’un* [*The Duped*], he didn’t change the all-important question, but he did dramatically alter the eventual ending of Kanafani’s story. In the barren courtyard of the Kuwaiti border post, the sound of banging resounds from the interior of the tank. Just maybe Marwan, Abu Qais, and Assad also had been long since banging in the novel; in any case, in either the 1963 story nor the 1972 film, was anyone there to hear them?

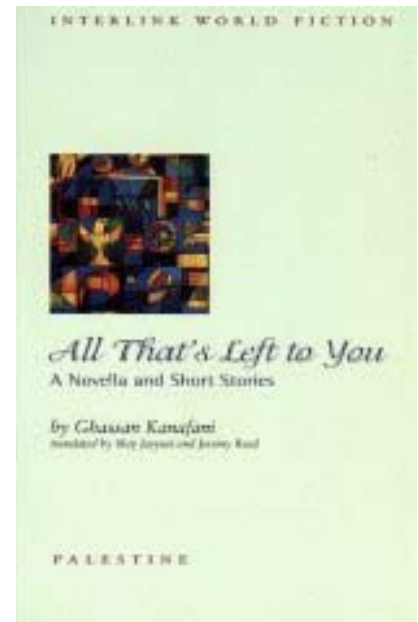


In July 1972, nearly a decade after the publication of *Men in the Sun* and in the same year that the novella’s film version appeared, Ghassan Kanafani was assassinated by the Israeli Mossad in a car-bomb explosion in Beirut that also killed his young niece Lamees. Shortly before he was killed, however, Kanafani had seen Salah’s film and — despite the popular controversy over the radically altered ending — found the Egyptian film-maker’s version accountable to the longer historical narrative, a narrative that had since witnessed the emergence of an organized Palestinian resistance movement in conflicted response to the changed circumstanc-



es of struggle, especially following the June 1967 War (the *naksa*, or “setback”). In the meantime, however, Kanafani had published two major critical literary works on the “literature of resistance in occupied Palestine,” perhaps the first public acknowledgements of the continued work of Palestinian writers inside post-*nakba* Palestine. These writers, such as Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qassim, developed international reputations, both in the Arab world and beyond, which vindicated the opprobrium that Kanafani had incurred at the time for his recognition of the vibrancy of Palestinian literary expression under an unrelenting Israeli military occupation.

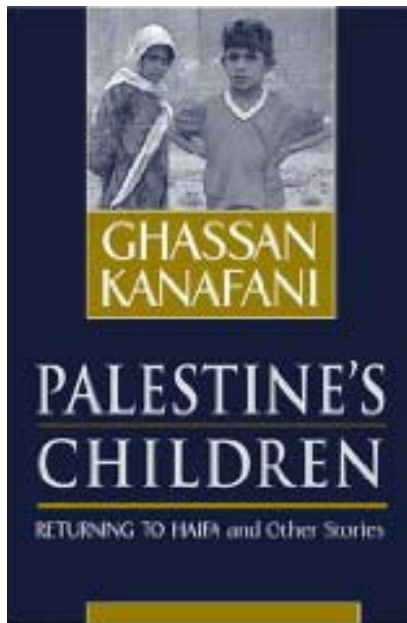
Like the characters in “men in the sun,” Kanafani was born in Akka (Acre), Palestine, on April 9, 1936, and left with his family along with hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who were also turned into refugees during the fighting. From Acre, he moved with his family to Syria, where he eventually worked as a schoolteacher in United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools, and then on to Kuwait — again not unlike Marwan, Abu Qais, and Assad, except that Ghassan survived and lived to relocate to Beirut in 1960. In the Lebanese capital, the teacher and writer — his early short stories were already being published — engaged with George Habash and the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) and eventually became editor of *al-Hadaf*, the journal of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). More than editor, however, Kanafani was also a prolific — if presciently critical — contributor to the political philosophy of Palestinian resistance and, in particular, its consequences for the then-ongoing debates on national liberation, international solidarity, and, in the Palestinian context, a democratic secular state in all of Palestine.



The 1960s-70s define a critical moment in the epochal era of global decolonization, and the Palestinian national resistance movement, given even its variously contested internal formations, deformations, and factions, was integral to that grander international historical trajectory. Kanafani’s own critical contributions were significant to informing that narrative, such as, for example, his 1968 lecture/essay, “Thoughts on Change and the ‘Blind Language.’” The essay’s projective itinerary, which seeks to look past the 1967 defeat toward a still imminent renewal, can be further located within the larger political debates of the period, which was perhaps the apogee of the national liberation struggle throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America, as well as the Middle East, struggles that sought to mark the end of territorial imperialism. Self-criticism (*naqd al-dhati*), the need for an adequate assessment of the material and political strengths of the “enemy,” was likewise critical to the resistance agendas of other “third world” intellectuals such as Amilcar Cabral of Guinea-Bissau and Frantz Fanon, as was the debate between vanguardism and popular struggle from Nicaragua and El Salvador to the Philippines and Vietnam. But Kanafani’s “thoughts on change” were also focused on the “younger generations” in the Arab world and the possibilities for social and political renewal — the “critical spirit” that these cohorts represented.

That “younger generation” (*al-ʿanasir al-shabba*), which, according to Kanafani, “goes well beyond such a delimited identification [of birth certificates, for example] to include the intellectual character of the younger generation or the

youthful mentality in keeping with the times,” features prominently — and crucially — in other of Kanafani’s stories



and novellas. Mansur, for example, “takes up his uncle’s gun and goes east to Safad” in the four Mansur stories of the 1948 struggle, included in the collection *On Men and Guns* (*‘An Rijal wa al-Banadiq*, 1968). Khalid, in turn, the forsaken but not forgotten infant left behind by his parents as they fled Haifa in the tumult of 1948 and who has been renamed Dov by his adoptive Jewish parents in *Returning to Haifa* (1969) [*A’id ila Haifa*] is rediscovered by his biological parents across the post-1967 reopening of the borders between Israel and what became the “occupied territories.” Kanafani, who also wrote and illustrated children’s books, and until his untimely violent death, maintained in his stories as in his polemics, both an active endorsement of the armed struggle and an equally unrelenting challenge to the sectarianism of both Palestinian and, especially, Israeli agendas and their concomitant implementations. The historical narrative was crucial.

Mansur, who in 1948 shouldered his uncle’s “ancient Turkish gun,” and Khalid/Dov, who, 20 years later, soldiered on as a recruit in the Israeli army, each identify — in their respective ways and according to a historically differentiated contextualization of their intersecting stories — perhaps exemplify the continuing legacy of Ghassan Kanafani. That legacy, at once posthumous and disputed, remains nonetheless vital to what is left of possible resolutions to the apparently intractable “question of Palestine.” What about “child soldiers,” for example? And how about a “democratic secular state?” Mansur and Khalid/Dov, like the “men in the sun,” did — still do, it seems — “knock on the sides of the tank.”

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# Illustrating Independence: The Algerian War Comic of the 1980s

Jennifer Howell

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Algeria gained its independence on July 3, 1962, ending 132 years of French colonial rule. Yet the newly formed republic would have to wait almost a quarter of a century before inaugurating a democratic multiparty system. The National Liberation Front (FLN) claimed responsibility for the direction and outcome of the revolution, legitimizing the party's seizure of power. In an attempt to maintain its dominance, the FLN purged political opposition. As sole heir to the revolution, the FLN used nationalistic, socialist, and Islamic ideologies to cement its political self-legitimization. The party placed special emphasis on its role in decolonization and the overthrow of France's colonial empire as well as the unification and mobilization of Algerian Muslims through the awakening of a national Islamic consciousness.



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Self-perceived as the only political organization capable of ruling the Algerian people, the FLN advocated the *pensée unique*, eliminating discrepancies among political opinions. Hence the need for government-controlled publishing agencies such as the *Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion* (SNED) whose mission was to reproduce and disseminate official discourses while censoring critiques. Later reorganized as the *Entreprise nationale du livre* (ENAL) in 1983, SNED encouraged politically-engaged works written by FLN militants promoting party ideology. Consequently, numerous publications, including comic books, commemorating the Algerian War of Independence appeared throughout the single-party period. These include Mustapha Tenani's *De nos montagnes* (SNED, 1981) and *Les Hommes du Djebel* (ENAL, 1985), Benattou Masmoudi's *Le Village oublié* (ENAL, 1983), and Brahim Guerroui's *Les Enfants de la liberté* (ENAL, 1986).

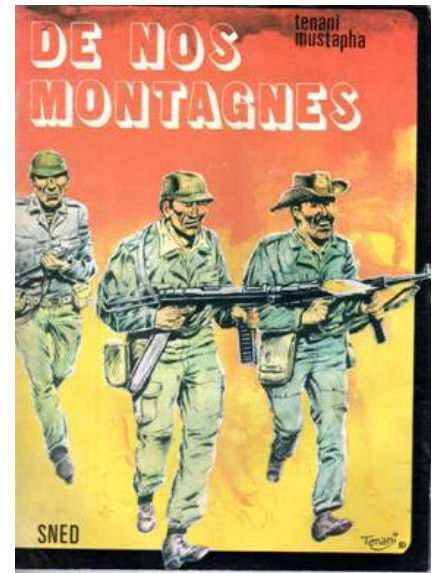
Despite the FLN's Arabization policy, most early publications appeared in French. One explanation is the higher literacy rate in French as compared with Arabic during the early years of the Algerian Republic. Arabization was to proceed progressively beginning in 1962 with primary schools and administrative offices and ending with institutions of higher education. Nationwide Arabization, however, did not take effect until July 5, 1998. From 1980 until 1987, national literacy rates in Algeria averaged 65%.<sup>1</sup> Although these data do not specify language of literacy, they partly explain the frequency with which comic books were used to disseminate representations of both the war and the Algerian resistance.

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1. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Literacy Rates, Aged 15-24, <http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=UNESCO&f=srID%3A29999>.

And representation is key. As a self-conscious medium, comics call attention to the line separating fact from fiction. The medium's visual dimension reminds the reader that what they are seeing is representation. Comics can explore the gap between reality and representation because they operate as icons and depend on the commonality of human experience. The reader can only understand an image if it evokes a common life experience shared by both reader and author/illustrator. The commonality of experience may take the form of how we perceive simple actions or complex historical events. Given that comics function on a different level of iconicity than realism, they can focus on specific details and eliminate others, thus amplify meaning in a way that realistic representations cannot.<sup>2</sup>

Tenani, for example, uses comic books to accentuate the physical trials of insurgents who must overcome hunger, thirst, and fatigue in harsh climatic conditions in order to defeat the French army and liberate the Algerian people. The figure of the combatant becomes mythical in his fight for personal and national survival. In "*La Gourde*" (*De nos montagnes*) an Algerian combatant engages in a battle of wills against a French soldier. Both are dangerously dehydrated and eager to drink from the flask that has fallen between them. While the French soldier offers to share the water, the Algerian refuses and waits until his opponent succumbs to thirst. Equally frequent are representations of individuals who must sacrifice themselves for the greater good. "*L'Eclaireur*" (*De nos montagnes*) depicts the determination of an Algerian scout who must ensure the safe passage of fellow combatants while transporting medical supplies. And in "*Aube brumeuse*" from Guerroui's *Les Enfants de la liberté*, a mother must put maternal sentiment aside, heed God's will, and sacrifice her son to the Algerian cause.



From Tenani's "La Gourde."

Algerian war comics published during this period also evoke French racial prejudices. One episode in *Les Enfants de la liberté* entitled "*Le Révolté*" tells of an Algerian fishmonger whose stand is decimated by a *pied noir* (Algerian of European descent). Humiliated and angry, the Algerian strikes the *pied noir* and battles French soldiers in his attempt to escape. He dies courageously during this metaphorical fight for independence. The French are not the only community negatively depicted in Algerian comic books. The *harkis* (Algerian Muslims enlisted as supplementary forces to the French army) are also targeted. Due to the *harkis*' perceived commitment to the French, the FLN singled them out for retribution after the war. Mas-moudi Ben Attou's *Le Village oublié* provides a good example of FLN discourse vis-à-vis this population. Belaïd, a *harki*, is shown robbing women and children of their food rations, beating women whose sons have joined the FLN, and living comfortably despite the hardships of wartime. Belaïd's wife, Mahdjouba, betrays an

2. See Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (Tamarac: Poorhouse Press, 1985) and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Paradox Press, 2000).



FLN combatant inquiring about the well-being of another combatant's mother and sister, two of Belaïd's victims. This categorical representation ignores the fact that many *harkis* came from poor families for whom recruitment by the French guaranteed food, a regular income, and social status.



From Tenani's "L'Eclaireur."

The discourses transcribed in the aforementioned albums and, ultimately, in FLN political legitimacy depend on Manichean dichotomies valorizing the religious, social, and anti-colonialist ideologies in force even if the *harki* reality challenges such binaries. During the late 1980s, the country found itself in the middle of a major economic crisis partially due to President Bendjedid's liberalization policies. Rising unemployment and inflation resulted in strikes, walkouts, and violent demonstrations. In 1988 Bendjedid responded by lifting the ban on political parties, inaugurating Algeria's multiparty system, and depriving the FLN of its privileged status. The country's political pluralism engendered the emergence of private publishing houses, breaking ENAL's monopoly and ending the articulation of FLN discourse in comics and other publications. Algeria would soon move beyond the euphoria of independence and collapse into civil war.

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# The Iraqi Tragedy, Scheherazade, and Her Granddaughters

*Ikram Masmoudi*

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Inaam Kachachi, an Iraqi writer and journalist living in Paris, writes in her recent book *Iraqi Women Speak: The Iraqi Tragedy in Women's Writing* (*Paroles d'Irakiennes, le drame Irakien écrit par des femmes*)<sup>1</sup>

The legend says that in the Baghdad of the *Thousand and One Nights*, Scheherazade deceived death with the narrative; in the evening she would start a tale and she would stop just before dawn the consent words. Today her granddaughters use almost the same trick: they deceive fate with their narratives and writings which speak more truth than all the bulletins of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Kachachi refers here to recent Iraqi fiction written by women on the troubled realities of a war-torn Iraq and the consequences of war on the fabric of Iraqi society and the individual. This literature is written by authors in Iraq and others abroad such as Lotfiya al-Dulaymi, Haifa Zangana, Betool Khedairi, Hadiya Hussein, and Iqbal al-Qazwini, who were forced out of the country in the 1980s and 1990s. These Iraqi women's voices, whose ancestry goes back well beyond Scheherazade and her Baghdadi tales and find roots in ancient Sumer. Mesopotamian chronicles carry the term *Lisani Saliti*,<sup>3</sup> which literally means a "sharp tongue" and used to refer to a certain language used by women in their assembly. Today these Iraqi women are creating art in times of war, economic sanctions, and barbarism — writing and documenting their homeland from their exile and places of refuge. Their fiction is an integral part of what George Steiner calls "extraterritorial"<sup>4</sup> literature — a literature by and about exiles.

This invocation of Scheherazade and the comparison of present-day Iraqi women writers with their story-teller ancestor is no surprise, especially when it comes from another female Iraqi writer. Indeed, the narrator of the *Thousand and One Nights* achieved an unprecedented vogue in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> However, the quotation above gives these women not only legendary filiations, strengthening their positions as



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1. Inaam Kachachi, *Paroles d'irakiennes: Le drame irakien 'écrit par des femmes* (Paris: Le Serpent à Plumes, 2003), translated from the Arabic by Mohammed Al-Saadi.

2. Kachachi, *Avant propos*.

3. Kachachi, p. 13

4. Quoted in Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 174

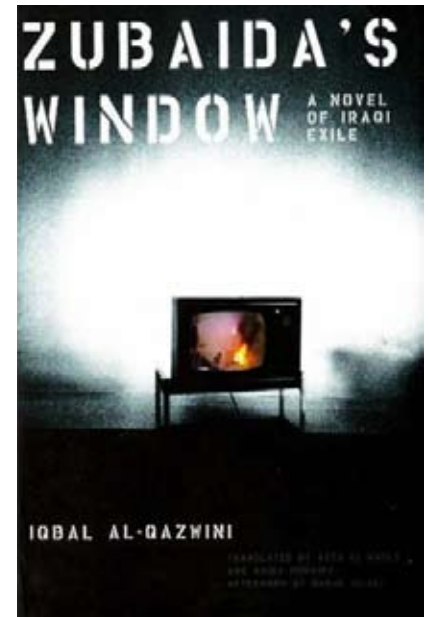
5. See "Writing Scheherazade Now," in Muhsin al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).



powerful writers, but it also places them before the predicament of death that Scheherazade faced manifested in our modern times in the horrors of wars, privation, and atrocities. This comparison places the granddaughters of Iraqi literature in front of a challenge and, somehow, obliquely predicts a triumphant outcome for them. But most of this recent fiction reflecting this challenge is imbued with a sense of loss and perdition. Will these women writers be able to really deceive fate and outwit death with their narratives? How does this literature resist the arbitrariness and the absurdity of such a fate?

To answer these questions, I chose to look at two recent novels: *Zubaida's Window, a Novel of Iraqi Exile*<sup>6</sup> by Iqbal al-Qazwini and *Women on a Journey between Baghdad and London*<sup>7</sup> by Hayfa Zangana. Al-Qazwini has lived in Berlin since 1978, and Zangana moved to London in 1976.

*Zubaida's Window* is Iqbal al-Qazwini's first novel, and it is perhaps one of the first works of fiction about the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, both relating the war and capturing the alienation of Iraqi exiles during the invasion. Zubaida, an Iraqi exile in Berlin, is the only character of the novel. Similar to other Iraqi fictional accounts of war,<sup>8</sup> the live images of war that unfold on the television set can be considered a central character of the novel, reducing Zubaida to the status of a voyeur in her apartment watching the unreal, yet deadly images of the destruction befalling her country. Through the metal wires of a satellite dish installed on her balcony, images from American media contrast with images from Iraqi television. Her feelings of loneliness in the cold city of Berlin are multiplied by her anxiety as she helplessly witnesses the burning and fragmentation of her homeland. In the midst of these acute feelings of loneliness she finds herself looking at the past 50 years of Iraqi history, enticing her memory to recollect and piece together her broken homeland. She engages in this powerful exercise as to counteract the destruction. Live images of the fall of Baghdad alternate with still images from her living memory.



In 2003, displaced Iraqis throughout the world watched the destruction of their country from afar; al-Qazwini's novel captures their alienation and paralysis while watching this war through her protagonist Zubaida. But both in style and in content, *Zubaida's Window* depicts exile as a closed circle with no possible opening, no horizons, turns, or exit signs, and where the protagonist is entrapped until she falls and gives up out of exhaustion and dizziness. The only opening in the exile Zubaida's world is her apartment's balcony (thus the title of the English translation is perfectly chosen), showing her with destruction through the wires of the satellite dish. The story rolls around in the present tense, weaving its

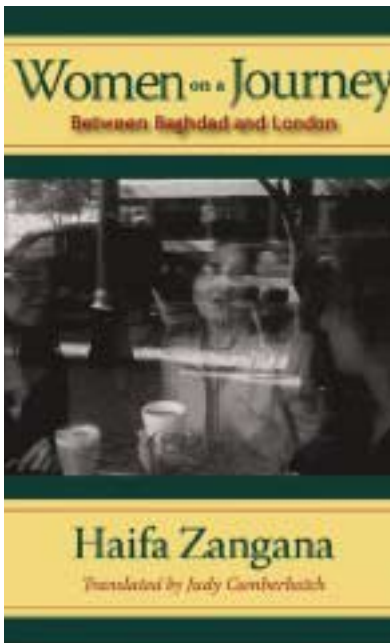
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6. *Mamarrat al-Sukun* (Amman: Azminah, 2005), translated from the Arabic as *Zubaida's Window* by Azza el-Kholy and Amira Nowaira (New York: The Feminist Press, 2008).

7. *Nisa' ala Safar* (London: Dar al-Hikmah, 2001), translated as *Women On a Journey Between Baghdad and London* by Judy Cumberbatch (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

8. Betool Khedairi, *A Sky So Close* (New York: Anchor, 2002).

web in the never-ceasing now of the destruction which risks imprisoning the narrative and its main character, making it impossible to seek a development other than by turning into the past, which is overwhelmingly present in the head of Zubaida. The novel doesn't seem to have a center, as the character is excised of a temporal progression and of any mobility except that which takes her back to the fragmented past. The fall of Baghdad as related at the end of the novel — partly documented and partly fictionalized — is echoed by Zubaida's fall, bringing her static identity into a deep sleep.



The loneliness of Zubaida paralyzed in her Berlin apartment by the loss of her country is in contrast with the gallery of Iraqi women displayed in *Women on a Journey*. In her novel, Hayfa Zangana posits a panorama of female characters displaced in London, a more common place of exile for Iraqis. She weaves the threads of her exile novel to connect the lives of five Iraqi women who carry in their ethnic, political, age, class, and language differences the complexity and richness of Iraq. Side by side, we find the widow of the former Ba'th party official, the former political dissident tortured under Saddam Husayn's regime who is now a volunteer for the refugee council, the Kurdish refugee who fled her home for political asylum, the single mother whose family in Iraq is suffering the effects of Western economic sanctions and whose Westernized lifestyle in London shocks her more traditional friends, and finally the wife of a Communist politician struggling with his disillusionment. It is noteworthy that the only male figure in this panorama is the Communist politician who is coming to terms with a dying ideology and his isolation during his last days in

exile. Beyond all differences, feelings of uprootedness and the collective angst of exile make the women bond together while coming to terms with their tormented pasts.

In *Women on a Journey*, exile manifests itself in a peculiar form. Constantly on the move, the women decide to meet once a month to support one another and to strengthen their bonds. They meet outside their homes in public places, thus pushing themselves out of their apartments and beyond the confines of their domestic occupations. It is not an accident that Zangana chooses the locations of her characters in London near or close to Underground stations, bus stops, and shops, for example dragging the character of Adiba from one place to another — from the shops to the office of her psychotherapist, to her job at the refugee council using a stick as her third foot. The Kurdish Um Muhammad, a woman over 60 entitled to free transport all over London, cannot believe that she is in London since the streets are full of Arabs. Sahira is also always taking buses or walking to shopping areas, while the young single mother Iqbal is always late, hurrying every morning to her job. From one platform to another, slowly and cautiously, the women never cease their movement. They are also always concerned about their bags and their safety in the Underground stations and in the streets of London. Their wanderings in the exilic space of London are synchronized with their constant flashbacks, unearthing painful memories of Baghdad.

Unable to settle, the five exiled women cannot return to Baghdad. As a result they find themselves on a threshold, roam-

ing London's Underground networks, exposed, vulnerable, and targeted. On Christmas Eve, Adiba finds death at the hand of a mugger in the deserted streets. The absurdity of this fate is only too reminiscent, albeit on a small scale, of the absurdity and arbitrariness of the fate that has befallen Iraqi people since the first Gulf War.

Through their characters these narratives tell us that it is not really easy to deceive such torturous fates as one of the voices in yet another Iraqi novel declares: "Scheherazade herself would have died under the successive wars and the economic blockade. She would have died while trying to meet her basic needs and she would have lost her eloquence and imagination and become an ordinary woman thinking only of satisfying her daily needs."<sup>9</sup> But in such circumstances, Iraqi women writers are no ordinary women; rather, they are survivors of wars and exile, outwitting the threat of death with constantly renewed and resourceful imaginations.

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9. Hayat Charara, *Lorsque les jours deviennent crepuscule*. Quoted in *Paroles d'irakiennes*, p. 30.

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## II. Performing Arts

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# Flourishing Arts in the Arabian Peninsula

Steven Caton

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The Arabian Peninsula has been rich in vernacular art forms — poetic, musical, architectural, and handcraft — some of which have been in existence for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. One forgets this if one thinks of the Peninsula as a place that was materially impoverished until the relatively recent discovery of oil under its surface. Of late some “modern” art has gained a significant foothold in the Peninsula as well. One might overlook this trend if one does not remember that material wealth has almost always been converted into “cultural capital” for one reason or another since the times of the most ancient civilizations in the Middle East.

Verbal art, especially oral vernacular poetry, has been important in the Arabian Peninsula since pre-Islamic times. What has survived from that period are a few anthologies of some of the most beautiful poetry ever composed in Arabic, seven odes of which hang in the Ka’aba in Mecca, as well as a few epigraphic inscriptions of shorter pieces in South Arabic to be found in Yemen. Today oral poetry is still a vigorous art form in only a few pockets of the Peninsula. In Saudi Arabia, a form of poetry known as *Nabati*, which was chanted along with the bowing of a simple-stringed instrument called the *rabaabah*, thrived in the deserts until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but survives for the most part only in reprinted anthologies. In the Gulf, there is a wildly popular television show in which young poets compete for the best poem, though it is difficult to say whether such compositions survive beyond the media event in which they are created. In Yemen, orally composed poetry is still performed by tribes in dispute, mediations, many social rituals including weddings and religious festivals, and often in the course of agricultural work as well. Women as well as men are vigorous practitioners of these art forms. In the coastal areas (the Tihama) there is also a distinctive kind of sung poetry. *Humayni* verse, written in dialect by educated and highly literate Yemenis living and working either abroad or far from their homes inside the country, is set to music and sung by highly trained and accomplished musicians. While it was most popular in pre-modern times, it has made a comeback in recent years, and tape recordings of it are popular in local “stereo stores.”

Traditional music was almost always sung with instrumental accompaniment (the *oud*, which resembles a lute and various kinds of drums played by hand), but it was heavily frowned upon in Wahhabi areas of the Peninsula following the movement’s rise in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and became a significant art form only in the southern region. Out of this tradition have come some of the most popular singers in the Gulf, including Abu Bakr



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Ba Faqih, allegedly born and raised in Hadhramawt though presently no longer residing there. Now, however, singers are more likely to be accompanied by orchestras mixing Arab and Western classical musical instruments and the melodies, if not the words, have a more global “pop” sound.

Handcrafts, particularly silverwork in women’s jewelry, were more significant in the past than they are today, which is perhaps unsurprising. Still, exquisite examples of this artwork may be occasionally found in some older *souqs* of Arabia, particularly in the southern portion of the Peninsula, and of course in some museum collections. This skilled work was mainly done by Jews. When most of them emigrated to Israel, this art was lost, there being little demand for it except from tourists. As far as this author knows, little, if anything, is being done by the governments of these countries to foster native arts, perhaps because tourism to the Peninsula is underdeveloped. Indeed, most Yemenis today buy gold jewelry made in Asia.

When most people who have not been to Arabia imagine what it looks like, they probably think of deserts and oases where the dwellings are nondescript woolen tents or simple mudbrick houses, but in southern Arabia — again, particularly in Yemen — one can see a highly distinctive and very beautiful architecture that dates back hundreds of years. The old city of Sana’a (the capital of the Republic of Yemen), a UNESCO World Heritage City, is a brilliant example of such architecture — its houses are often seven or more stories in height, built on stone foundations to support decorated mudbrick walls with colored glass or translucent alabaster windows. To get a feel for the beauty of the city



Buildings in Sana’a, Yemen. Photo by Flickr user Charles-Fred.

watch the movie *A New Day in Old Sana’a* (2004), directed by an Anglo-Yemeni, Ben Hirsi. Very different in style but no less spectacular architecturally are the World Heritage cities of southern Yemen (Shibam, Seyoun, and Tarim), sometimes called “skyscraper cities” because of their tall and tightly clustered mudbrick buildings. Their facades are far less ornate than the almost Baroque exuberance of Sana’ani houses, but their straight lines and sleek surfaces convey a “modern” impression to many onlookers, which is perhaps why Shibam, for example, has been dubbed the “Manhattan” of southern Arabia. There are also some examples of beautiful historic architecture that have been carefully restored and preserved in Yemen, including one of the earliest mosques to have been built on the Peninsula and a jewel of medieval architecture, a school-and-mosque complex. In Saudi Arabia, the old al-Zubayda pilgrimage route to Mecca, so named after the queen of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid, has also been restored, with its way-stations and paved thoroughfares.

In all Arabian Peninsula countries, the modern or more contemporary arts are also significant. For example, the modern novel is flourishing in Saudi Arabia, many of whose most interesting authors are women exploring themes of sexuality, marital problems, substance abuse, and other controversial subjects. An effort is being made to create a local film industry in Dubai (the worthy supposition being that Arab filmmakers should be trained to represent Arab subjects), which



is also host to important international art fairs. Dubai also has some of the most dazzling examples of “high modern” architecture in the world today, such as the Burj al-Arab, a seven-star hotel whose exterior looks like a sail of a *dhow* (a traditional Gulf boat). Doha, the capital of Qatar, is home to several modern art museums housing important Islamic collections from all over the Muslim world as well as collections of Western art on loan from the Louvre and other distinguished art museums. It is also the home of a classical symphony orchestra made up of highly trained musicians from conservatories and orchestras from all over the world. Arab composers are being commissioned to create new pieces, many of which combine modern and traditional as well as Western and Arab styles in innovative ways. It needs to be said that there is some local modern painting as well by young artists who have been trained for the most part in Western art academies or in Cairo.



Dubai's Burj al-Arab. Photo by Flickr user Andrey.

While it is good to see the modern arts beginning to flourish in the Arabian Peninsula, it is disconcerting, if not alarming, to realize that older, vernacular forms like tribal poetry are in danger of disappearing. Aside from preserving them in museum collections or through scholarly recording and study, their fate seems uncertain unless they can be maintained as living traditions embodied by contemporary practitioners. One can only hope that will be the case.

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# Flowers in the Desert

Mark LeVine

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“We play Heavy Metal because our lives are heavy metal.”

With these words, Reda Zine, a founder of the Moroccan metal scene, captured the feelings of hundreds of thousands of metal fans, hip-hoppers, punkers, and fans of other forms of hard rock across the Middle East and North Africa. Hardcore forms of rock and pop music have become popular in this region for the same reasons it did a generation ago in the West: They offer some of the most powerful cultural tools available for its fans to criticize the *status quo*, and equally as important, to imagine a different, more positive future.

Perhaps to the surprise of many, the anger and violence laden music of extreme metal, gangsta rap, and other hardcore forms of rock have become powerfully life-affirming across the Middle East. As one of the founders of the Iranian metal scene described it, the musical genres' arrival in the region was like “a flower appearing in the desert” for societies deprived of freedom and the hope for a better future in the midst of the devastation of war. Music can heal the deepest wounds; its power to bring people together across the boundaries of gender, nation, religion, ethnicity, or class make it “the weapon of the future,” as the legendary Afrobeat star Fela Kuti famously described it.

In so doing, extreme music in the Middle East carries on a tradition that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when working class and often marginalized young people in the United Kingdom and United States created new genres of music, such as heavy metal, hip-hop, and punk, as a means of fighting back against economic and political systems that had little room for them.

These movements began to lose their critical edge with increased commercialization in the 1980s. But it was at this time that they began to spread virally across the globe with their political and musical power intact — first to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and soon after to the Arab and Muslim worlds. In particular, the metal aesthetic quickly became a potent symbol for young people who were no longer willing to accept the political and cultural *status quo*.

In countries with little freedom of association, rock musicians and fans have risked a great deal to organize concerts in dilapidated desert villas outside Cairo and basements in north Tehran. “Satanic metal affairs” have rocked many scenes in the last decade, with



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scores of fans and musicians arrested and even threatened with execution just for being metalheads. Rappers have fared somewhat better, although they face threats ranging from arrest to murder in countries such as Palestine and Iran.

Yet despite attempts by political and religious leaders to censor the music, rock, metal, and hip-hop have become the “al-Jazeera of the street” across the Middle East. At their best, these scenes signal the potential for the mass of young people across the region (who make up the largest percentage of their societies by far) to refuse to tolerate oppression and corruption any longer. The best example is Morocco, where metalheads organized unprecedented mass protests and concerts to overturn guilty verdicts against 14 musicians and fans in 2003. With that rare victory, their popularity exploded across Morocco, as it did throughout the region. Today, festivals from Morocco to Istanbul and Dubai bring together hundreds of thousands of rock, metal, and rap fans to celebrate freedom and offer the world a very different view of their cultures than that which most Americans or Europeans are used to seeing.



Rapper Clotaire K, born in France to a Lebanese mother and Egyptian father, raps in Arabic, French, and English in concert. Photo by Flickr user cactusbones.

The diverse forms of hard rock and rap music in the region are a testament to the rich legacy of Western pop music across the globe. But they are also much more. The artists have not merely copied the sounds and styles of their American or European idols; instead, they have powerfully reshaped the musical landscape of these forms of music, taking these styles in new directions.

In some ways, they are merely completing a circle that began when Western artists began to travel across the Muslim world in the late 1960s, “discovering” artists such as the Master Musicians of Joujouka and incorporating Middle Eastern scales and textures into their music. Indeed, the circle had formed a millennium earlier, when Muslim, Jewish, and Christian artists worked and played together in Andalusian Spain, creating strands of music whose influence spread outwards throughout Europe, Africa, and ultimately the Americas — particularly through the Islamically inspired melodies and rhythms of the African slaves of the American South, who gave birth to most of America’s popular forms of music, including the blues, and through it, rock ‘n roll.

Just as important, the fact that so many of these artists see no contradiction between being a Muslim and a metalhead, and are willing to mix together seemingly incompatible musicians, styles, religions, and nationalities (e.g. metal and traditional Arab music, Iranian with American and British musicians), reminds us that the situation in the region is far more complex than most of us imagine. Indeed, the fact that two of the most popular metal and rap groups in the Middle East — Orphaned Land and DAM — are Israeli, is a testament to the enduring power of music to cross even the deepest cultural and religious divides.

Regardless of their origin, the artists across the region offer glimpses of a future where the youth of the world are tied together by solidarities and sympathies that are redefining Muslim identities — and, at least potentially, those in the West as well. More specifically, they are pushing the boundaries of what can be defined as religious behavior and experience. Building on the groundbreaking examinations of the boundaries between religious and secular phenomena by Paul Tillich, Talal Asad, and others, my experience of the metal scenes across the Muslim world reveals them as sites of religious performance. A young Iraqi Shi'ite Shaykh explained it: "I don't like heavy metal, but when we get together and beat our chests, pump our fists, chant, and beat the drums loudly, we're doing metal too." Similarly, one can compare the "headbanging" and heavy drumming, not to mention the sexual undertones of many *zar* ceremonies, with the sonic, and even spiritual, power of hard rock and metal.

The son of Egypt's main opposition leader, Ayman Nur, who is one of the country's rising rock artists, put it this way: "I love Fridays because I can spend three hours at the mosque in the afternoon and then four hours playing black metal in the evening." More broadly, it is not surprising that extreme metal attracts many of the same young people as does extreme Islam. As one of Pakistan's foremost rock musicians, and a well-known Sufi, Salman Ahmed, put it to me in describing the hostility of the country's mullahs to his music, "Of course they don't like us; we're their competition for the hearts and allegiance of young people."



The Israeli band Orphaned Land performs. Photo by Flickr user [niv].

What is clear is that music, and metal in particular, constitutes an important and as yet unexplored example of how non-traditional public spheres have emerged across the Muslim world in the last two decades. The seminal work of Jürgen Habermas demonstrated the importance of the public sphere for shaping the possibility of democratic politics in societies across the world. Building on his work on its bourgeois experience, more recent scholarship has explored the experience of a plethora of "counter-" or "alternative" public spheres.

These public spheres act simultaneously as communication networks and infrastructure, and as social spaces for disseminating and discussing points of view that are often unsanctioned and potentially opposed to those of the state or hegemonic groups. These public spheres, which both overlap and compete with each other, can be part of the construction of either positive "project identities," or of more closed and hostile "resistance identities" that potentially lead to violent opposition to existing orders. Heavy metal and other forms of alternative cultural production are clear but as yet under-theorized examples of such public spheres and how they function as a space of communication and connectivity.

Focusing on music demonstrates the public sphere to be an "ensemble" of various forces attempting to influence the normative conception of the common good, including not only political voices but those involved in the production

and circulation of culture as well. Indeed, a principal aim of the research is to determine how popular cultural production is aesthetically embedded within and thus helps to shape the larger public sphere. As Aryn Sajoo rightly points out, these forces are not structured or even predictable; rather, they interact much like the members of jazz — or more relevant to the overwhelmingly young populations of the region, heavy metal or hip-hop — ensembles, in which the riffs and rhythms of individual improvisation are essential to the overall shaping of the sphere.

Listening to these riffs, raps, growls, blast beats, and myriad other sonic components of the extreme music experience across the Muslim world offers an important antidote to the much less palatable sounds of AK-47s, IEDs, drones, missiles, bombs, and other forms of violence that dominate the Western understanding of the sonic landscape of the region. Most importantly, it reminds people on both sides of the civilizational divide that Muslim and Western cultures are much more alike than most Americans, and Muslims, might imagine.



The Moroccan group Hoba Hoba Spirit at a show in 2007. Photo by Flickr user han Soete.



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# The Palestinian Cultural Scene: Narrating the *Nakba*

Hala Khamis Nassar

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To discuss contemporary Palestinian cultural production, one cannot avoid mentioning the Israeli occupation, which has greatly hindered Palestinian cultural development — in theater, art, literature, and cinema. The political situation also is the driving force and the medium that insistently has provided the backdrop for the stage, the landscape, the content, the chisel, and the brush. These mediums are where collective memory, trauma, exile, refugees, and the struggle for recognition and independence are the dominant cultural themes.



A few Palestinian poets have sought to break out of this mold. Foremost among them is the late Mahmoud Darwish, the Palestinian National Poet of Resistance, whose audience continues to recite and sing his earlier lyrics on Palestine. Other prominent poets such as Samih al-Qassam and 'Ali Taha depict Palestinian landscapes and cities, as well as memories of lost villages, and nostalgia for a time before the catastrophic events of 1948. A quick scan of contemporary Palestinian poetry in journals, newspapers, magazines, and other media outlets reveals that the “question of Palestine” is still the paramount poetic voice.

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Similarly, the “question of Palestine” pervades the Palestinian novel — which developed later — particularly with the publication of Ghassan Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun* in 1963. Subsequent Palestinian novels, especially those written by Sahar Khalifa, deal with life under the dire political situation, with issues of gender and nationalism also standing at the forefront. Palestinian novelists and short story writers from Palestine or in the Diaspora all express a yearning for their lost land. This is currently manifested in Palestinian writing about the daily suffering of the people due to the “security wall” and checkpoints, the separation of communities, rampant unemployment, and frustrated national aspirations. Thus politics and nationalism — continuously configured to re-define resistance strategies to achieve national aspirations — are central to the current thematic structure of the novel.

Next to literary output, the Palestinian cultural scene always had been dominated by the theater. In fact, this dates back to the 1800s. Theatrical productions in Palestinian cities such as Jerusalem and the coastal cities of Haifa and Jaffa were very much in tune with the neighboring cultural centers of Cairo and Beirut. The Palestinian cultural awakening, mirroring the general budding cultural scene in the Levant, was influenced by visiting Egyptian troupes and the presence of missionary schools. One can see distinctive evidence of cultural consciousness and an appreciation of drama and world literature, even if at the time these trends may not have been strong enough to reflect political consciousness to the degree later literary production would. Local theatrical activities are continuously at

the mercy of the political situation. In times of relative tranquility, the theater has flourished; however, when the political situation has deteriorated, theater has hibernated. Currently, theatrical activities are sparse and restricted to certain geographical areas due to the Israeli “Wall,” thus further fragmenting the Palestinian community and hindering its development. In Jerusalem, the Palestinian National Theater, formerly known as al-Hakwati, is the only local theater remaining in the Holy City. Ramallah is home to both the al-Qasaba and Ashtar theaters. In the Nablus-Jenin area, there is the “Freedom Theatre,” located in the heart of the Jenin refugee camp. As for the area south of Jerusalem, the sporadic community-based theaters such as the al-Harah Theatre in Bayt Jala and the al-Rowad Theater in the Aida refugee camp demonstrate the isolation of professional theatrical groups. Whether professionals or amateurs, the troupes repeatedly re-enact the events of 1948 and subsequent political events in the Palestinian experience, ranging from the current suspension of peace negotiations to the difficult and fragmented life under occupation.

Narrating Palestine is also ever present in contemporary Palestinian cinema. Since the first film to put Palestine in the international cinematic lens, Michelle Khalifeh’s *The Fertile Memory* (1980), Palestinian cinema has continuously narrated the *Nakba*. Khalifeh opened the gates through which other film directors have passed, including Rashid Masharawi, ‘Ali Nassar, and Elia Suleiman. Currently, many Palestinians are using film production as a medium of national resistance. Highlighted in these movies are the limitations of space, the constraints of borders, and the role of memory. Whether made by Palestinians in Palestine, Israel, or the diaspora, today’s Palestinian films portray the memory of a lost landscape, document the destruction of lives, or deal with the current political situation. The latest blockbusters — Hani Abu Assad’s *Paradise Now* (2005) and Annemarie Jacir’s *Salt of the Sea* (2008) — are but two examples.

Palestinian art, paintings, and conceptual installations are leaving an impressive mark on the Palestinian and international cultural canvas. Nowadays Palestinian artists are not taking the brush to paint the Palestinian landscape from memory or to symbolize the struggle for recognition, as did the late Isamil Shamout and Kamal Bullatah; rather, they are using installations as a medium to narrate their experience of the *Nakba*. For instance, the conceptual installations/performances *material for a film 2004* and *material for a film (performance)* by Emily Jacir at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City in the spring of 2009 are designed to draw attention to the plight of the Palestinian people. Jacir, like her counterparts, strives to highlight the systematic effacement of Palestinian collective memory and loss.

Palestinian cultural production in all of its forms is inherently political, drawing attention to the broader battle against the Israeli occupation. Ultimately tracing the struggle for Palestinian sovereignty through different cultural representations of space, time, identity, and memory throughout the history of the conflict emphatically corresponds with the major political events that have characterized and defined the occupation and the Palestinian culture under it.



Al-Harah Theater website.

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# The Hilarity of Evil: The Terrorist Drama in Israeli and Palestinian Films

Yaron Shemer

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Studies in the social sciences, humanities, and the arts have attempted over the years to fathom the indiscriminate killing of civilians by terrorist acts. Clearly the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath brought scholarship on terrorism to the fore. Of the various perspectives the study of terrorism has taken in recent years, two binary interpretive models of the relations between terrorism and its depiction on the screen are worth mentioning here. On the one hand, as implied in Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden's Introduction to *Transnational Cinema, The Reader*<sup>1</sup> and in Ra'aya Morag's study "The Living Body and the Corpse: Israeli Documentary Cinema and the Intifadah,"<sup>2</sup> terrorism is such an extraordinary act that it can be used as a limit case, a rarity where the real or, to employ Kriesteve's coinage, the abject burst through onto the screen. Consequently, the event and its representation are likely to be understood as an enactment of the "politics of interruption;" a break away from "politics as usual." Conversely, *à la* Jean Baudrillard,<sup>3</sup> terrorism is the pure symbolic event that feeds back into the inane slew of recycled postmodern imagery — the simulacrum — and can't offer a true political alternative, or, in Adorno's terms, negativity. Situating my analysis here along this axis will not only allow us to assess the value of these models but will provide the opportunity to reflect on the relations between narrative cinema, its unique reality, and political potency. This study examines three recent Palestinian and Israeli narrative films on Jewish or Islamic terrorism<sup>4</sup> — *Paradise Now*, *Time of Favor*, and *The Bubble* — to conceptualize these relations.



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## **PARADISE NOW** (AL'JANNA AL'AN, PALESTINE, HANY ABU-ASSAD, 2005)

In this internationally acclaimed Palestinian film, West Bankers Khaled and Said are recruited to carry out a suicide bombing mission inside Israel. The original plan goes awry and, at the end, only Said climbs into an Israeli bus with an explosives belt strapped to his body.

For the most part the film's narrative is told in a highly realistic fashion; the story unfolds linearly, the characters are believable, and almost all camera movements are natural, corresponding to our eye and body movements. Conversely, in the two final shots,

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1. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, eds., *Transnational Cinema, The Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 10.

2. *Journal of Film and Video*, Vol. 60, Nos. 3-4 (Fall/Winter 2008), pp. 3-24.

3. Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 3-4.

4. I am avoiding here any attempt to define terrorism. My address of terrorism is limited to what transpires within the films' narratives as acts of terrorism.

we find distinctively cinematic elements; in the penultimate shot where Said takes his seat amongst Israeli soldiers and civilians, there is a prolonged zoom in to Said's eyes and the camera then lingers on an extreme close up of his eyes. In the film's final shot, all we see is a white screen. The zoom, a photographic device unique to optical apparatuses, the body fragmentation, and the white screen which are employed precisely at the moment of the "terrorist event," are all allusions to the medium itself and not to a reality beyond the narrative.

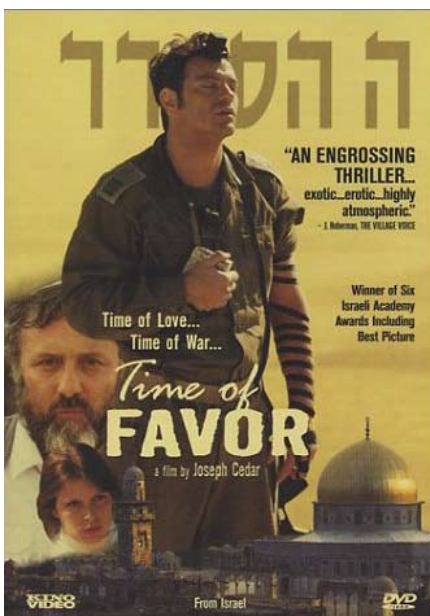
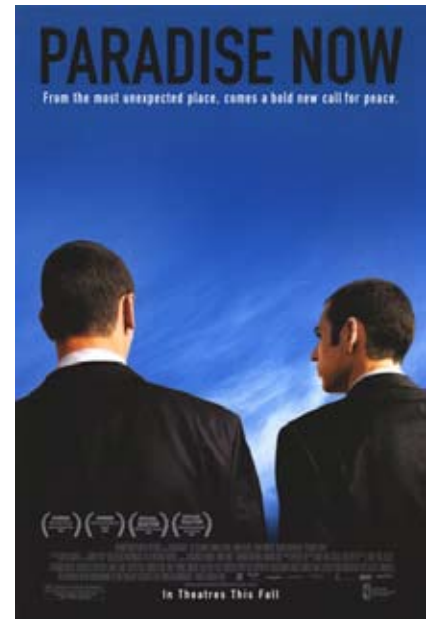
*The Hilarity of Evil* probes into the mechanism whereby *Paradise Now*, *Time of Favor*, and *The Bubble* discussed here circumscribe the political, national, or religious excess/object by imposing a particular aesthetic economy. In other words, this essay seeks to understand the white screen.

**TIME OF FAVOR** (HA'HESDER, ISRAEL, JOSEPH CEDAR, 2000)

*Time of Favor* stands out as the only Israeli narrative film which deals with the dilemma of post-1948 Jewish-Israeli terrorism, or specifically, of Jewish zealots who seek to destroy the Muslim holy sites on The Temple Mount. Menahem, a religious commander in the Israeli army, is given permission to lead the first ever military company consisting only of Yeshiva (religious Jewish seminary) students. The respected Rabbi of the Yeshiva betrothes his daughter to Menahem's friend, Pini, a Yeshiva student who cannot join this new elite unit for medical reasons. But Michal, the Rabbi's daughter, is interested in Menahem and keeps Pini at bay. Meanwhile, suspicions about this newly formed unit run high. Officers at the Israeli Secret Service and other highly ranked military officers fear that members of this unit might use their weapons to attack the Muslim holy sites of the Temple Mount. Indeed, with the help of Itamar, a soldier in Menahem's unit, Pini conspires to undertake precisely such a mission. The plan is to use underground tunnels leading to the Mount

Temple to blow up the whole area. In the film's climactic scene, Menahem foils this terrorist scheme.

In its highlighting of Jewish terrorism, this film begs us to wonder about the perpetrators' motivation behind this momentous operation: is it nationalistic, religious, or political? The following sequence of events leading up to Pini's decision to carry out this operation may suggest that the answer lies elsewhere: First, Menahem comes over to tell Pini that he loves Michal and is planning on quitting the military in order to live with her. Second, Pini pays his last visit to Michal who, he now fully understands, has no place in her heart for him. His speech eerily conjures up farewell addresses to the camera by Islamic fundamentalist suicide bombers before they embark on their mission. He tells Michal, "I came to say goodbye. There is something calming in it. Kind of freedom." Finally, Pini





calls Itamar to reaffirm and finalize the execution of the plan.

We may suggest then that in this film the issue of Jewish terrorism and, specifically, the fervor with which some radical, Messianic Jews might seek to blow up the Muslim holy sites in order to clear the way to build the Third Temple over their ruins, are parried away. Indeed, it is Pini's disappointment and frustration that are construed as the motives for planning the deranged act of terrorism. The film strategically trivializes and contains the actual incendiary threat of Jewish terrorism by transposing it from the political arena to the private realm of one's frustration over unrequited love.

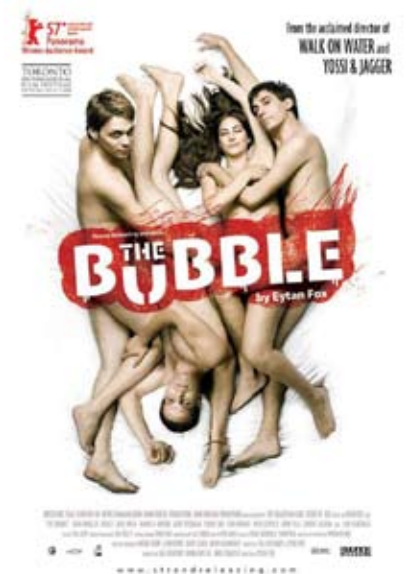
Whereas *Time of Favor* intimates that Pini's planned action is predicated on the transmutation of the feelings of desperation and loss into a vengeful reunion where the perpetrator will ever be etched in the memory of the woman he loved, in *The Bubble* the terrorist act is meant to sanctify a union between two willing lovers.

**THE BUBBLE** (HA'BU'AA, ISRAEL, EYTAN FOX, 2006)

In *The Bubble*, the love affair between the Israeli Noam and his Palestinian boyfriend Ashraf is doomed to fail not because of a lack of reciprocity, but because of the societal pressure to which Ashraf is subjected. The film is set mostly in Sheinkin — a yuppie neighborhood of Tel Aviv where Noam lives and works. In Tel Aviv, the romantic relationship between Noam and Ashraf does not raise many qualms. However, when Noam travels to visit Ashraf in his hometown of Nablus, they can kiss each other only clandestinely. Jihad, Ashraf's soon to be brother-in-law who is also the local Hamas leader in the city, catches a glimpse of their affair. The noose around Ashraf's neck is now tightened — Jihad promises not to divulge Ashraf's secret on the condition that he marries Jihad's cousin.

The morning after Ashraf's sister's wedding, she is inadvertently killed by Israeli fire, making Jihad ready to avenge her death by undertaking a suicide bombing mission. But Ashraf volunteers to take Jihad's place as a *shahid* (martyr) and, with the explosives belt strapped to his body, he lands in Sheikin where he knows he can find his boyfriend. Ashraf approaches the restaurant where Noam works and when Noam notices him and the detonator in his hand he turns around from the restaurant. As Noam rushes outside to join him, Ashraf uses a gesture familiar to the two of them to signal "I love you." He turns to face Noam and then suddenly the screen turns bright white and the camera rotates ecstatically around the two characters, who are now united in the middle of the road. The terrorist act has been carried out impeccably; apparently, the only victims are the two lovers who now lie covered, side by side.

This highly aestheticized scene in *The Bubble* shifts the focus away from terrorism as a political act into the private fantasies of the sweet hereafter. Much more than in the other two films discussed here, *The Bubble* constructs the death inflicted on the self and the other/enemy as a climactic, and even orgasmic consummation of the individual's desire. As





in *Paradise Now*, *The Bubble*'s climactic scene diverts our attention from what the camera sees and into the blind spot/white screen of the cinematic apparatus.

The films discussed here resort to the aesthetic economy of death to provide not a reflection on socio-political disorder manifested by the abhorrence of terrorism, but an exploitation of cinematic order to reflect on cinema itself and the white screen onto which we can project our fantasies. Terrorism then enters the playful reality of the simulacrum where "the image consumes the event...it absorbs it and offers it for consumption."<sup>5</sup>

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5. Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p. 27.

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# Two Icons of Hollywood on the Nile's Unlikely Golden Age

Christopher Stone

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Ask any Egyptian about the golden age of Egyptian cinema and the images that will come to their mind will be in black and white; the faces they conjure up will be those of legendary figures from the 1940s, 50s, and 60s — actors such as Layla Murad, Anwar Wagdi, Farid al-Atrash, Omar Sharif, and Fatin Hamama; or directors such as Hanri Barakat, Salah Abu Sayf, or Ahmad Badrakhan. Those were the days when “Hollywood on the Nile,” historically the world’s third most prolific film industry after Bollywood and Holly-



wood, would turn out 40 to 60 films a year to compete with American and Indian films in regional markets. Adding to the belief that these black and white films constitute a golden age is the nostalgia that they produce in their viewers today, many of whom are too young to have seen them when originally released. To Egyptian viewers these films represent a time when life was simpler, when the streets were less dirty and crowded, and when the moral code was clear.



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The farthest period from the mind of anyone thinking about cinematic golden ages would be the post-Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser period. President Anwar Sadat’s *laissez-faire* policies (*Infatih*) led to the re-commercialization of Egyptian cinema and with it the deterioration of the state-run studios. This period coincided with the advent of the VHS and of petrodollar-funded films, films with washed out color and barely decipherable dialogue, films with unintended echoes and awkward editing. Surprisingly, it is from this period that one finds some cinematic gems. I am referring here to the films of the New Realism movement of the 1980s, a time when young directors like Atif al-Tayyib, Khairi Bishara, and Daoud ‘Abd al-Sayyid abandoned the decrepit state-run studios and, to a certain extent, the budget-crippling star system and employed new young actors like Nur al-Sharif, Nagla Fathi, and Mahmoud ‘Abd al-Aziz. No two faces better represent this period than the director Muhammad Khan (b 1942) and the actor Ahmad Zaki (1949-2005), who teamed up to make four of the decade’s most important films: *A Bird on the Road* (*Tair ‘ala al-tariq*, 1981), *Dinner Date*





(*Mawid 'ala al-asha*, 1982), *The Wife of an Important Man* (*Zawjat rajul muhimm*, 1987), and *The Dreams of Hind and Kamilya* (*Ahlam Hind wa Kamilya*, 1988).

Although he had been acting since the early 1970s, Ahmad Zaki made his mark working with the young New Realism directors in the 1980s, particularly Muhammad Khan. Zaki was born poor in the Nile Delta city of Zaqaзиq. Having shown promise in school theatrical productions, he went on to graduate from the Cairo High Institute for Drama

Studies in 1974. Before graduating, he performed in several plays that have become classics of popular theater, such as the *School of Troublemakers* (1972), an icon of post-1967 cultural production. It was in his films with New Realism's young directors in the 1980s, however, that he became a *bona fide* star. It was with Muhammad Khan specifically that he burst onto the scene with the films *Bird* and *Date*, in 1981 and 1982 respectively. In these and other films he gained the reputation as an actor who plays the downtrodden underdog — characters who resonated with movie-goers.



Muhammad Khan was born in Cairo to an Indian father and a Cairo-raised Italian mother. As of 2009, he has made 22 feature films in Egypt and is a key figure in the New Realism movement. He considers his first film with Ahmad Zaki — *Bird* — to be the true start of his career despite it being his fourth film. In this film he not only frees himself from the confines of the studio but also distances himself from the traditional dialogue-focused Egyptian film, aided in this by the most prominent screenwriter of the movement, Bashir al-Dik. The films of the New Realism movement are understood to have been in response to the widening gap between the rich and poor and to the increased corruption under Sadat.

That said, *Bird* is a reminder that not all of this school's films tackle these issues directly. The film is about a taxi driver who falls in love with a woman he cannot have. Faris is convincingly played with great subtlety by Zaki, who excelled



in these working-class roles in his youth. With his dark complexion and tightly curled hair, Zaki offered these young directors a leading man with looks both striking and strikingly different from Egyptian cinema's traditional European-featured leading actors. Khan, in fact, would team Zaki with just such actors in his next film — *Date*.

This 1982 film — starring the already established and fair skinned Suad Husni and Husayn Fahmi opposite Ahmad Zaki — is a more directly anti-*Infatah* film than *Bird*. On one level, it is about a poor



hairdresser named Shukri (Zaki) who pays with his life for marrying “up.” However, it is perhaps more centrally about constraints on women’s freedom in modern Egypt. Even though Nawal (Husni) manages to divorce her autocratic and abusive husband, as soon as she remarries he does everything in his power — including having her new husband killed — to take her back as if she were a thing to be possessed.

In his next film with Khan — 1987’s *Wife* — it is Ahmad Zaki who would play the role of abusive husband, a role that predicts the stock characters he would embody in the 1990s and beyond. In *Wife*, Zaki plays a masochistic secret police office named Hisham. After the brutal crackdown on the participants in the 1977 bread riots, Hisham is retired as a signal that the police are going to reform their ways. He refuses to accept his status and continues to act as if he is still employed by the police. His wife, played by Mirfat Amin, is the last to know about his firing. When he loses the ability to practice his authority outside of the house he becomes even more of a tyrant inside it. After killing his wife’s father for interfering in their affairs, he kills himself.

The fourth and final film that brought Zaki and Khan together in the 1980s — *Dreams* — is the only film of the four in which the character played by Zaki does not perish. In this 1988 film Zaki plays the petty criminal Eid. This film — quintessential for this movement in its focus on and filming in the popular neighborhoods of Cairo — follows the fate of two housekeepers (Nagla Fathi and Aida Riyad) as they struggle with abusive and exploitative clients, husbands, and lovers. Zaki’s Eid is a thief in love with one of the house cleaners. He struggles to do the right thing by her, and this internal conflict results in some of the best acting in his career.



These and other films represent an oasis of quality film making and acting in a larger period that is seen as one of decline. Though critics adore these films, they did not tend to succeed at the box office, which may help explain why both Khan and Zaki moved in different directions in the 1990s and beyond, though they would collaborate a few more times, such as in the record-setting *Sadat* in 2001. Despite eventually finding commercial success to match the critical acclaim received in the 1980s, later in their careers both artists were drawn to the black and white period of Egyptian cinema. Khan’s most recent film — his 2007 *In the Helipolis Flat (Fi shaqqa Masr al-Gadida)* — is a nostalgic romance dedicated to Layla Murad, a star of the 1940s. Zaki’s last project, made while he was dying of lung cancer in 2005, is a biopic about the 1960s heartthrob ‘Abd al-Halim Hafiz. The fact that both of these films are evocative of an earlier period in Egyptian cinema history indicates not only a willingness to traffic in nostalgia, but perhaps the inevitability of succumbing to it.



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## III. Visual Arts

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# Art and Revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Shiva Balaghi

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The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was a highly visual political movement. Inspired by the French student movement of 1968, some of Iran's leading artists, like Morteza Momayez and Nicky Nodjoumi, opened a poster workshop at the University of Tehran. They helped train amateur artists from various political factions to make posters conveying their political messages using stark yet gripping graphic design. These posters appeared on the walls of Iran's cities, in schools and universities, and were carried by demonstrators in their marches against the Shah's regime. The posters helped create a unified revolutionary message, bringing together the disparate aims and messages of various political groups, and often suffusing them with Islamic motifs. In their graphic designs, issues like labor rights, women's rights, freedom of expression, and national independence merged with Islamic messages. So, for example, a poster by Momayez combines the red tulip, a symbol of the leftists in Iran, with the raised fist of the civil rights movement that was often used by the secular intellectuals, artists, and student groups participating in the revolution. Notions of heroic martyrdom are infused into the poster through word and image.<sup>1</sup> [See Figure 1.]



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The revolutionary role of the cultural sphere, however, was hardly limited to the street art that became prevalent with the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had long called for the construction of a good and pure Islamic culture in Iranian society and pointed to it as a central aim of his opposition to the Shah. Speaking from the 'Azam mosque in Qom in September 1964, Khomeini said, "If culture is rehabilitated, then the country will be reformed. This is because the [government] ministries emanate from culture, the parliament emanates from culture, the worker is rehabilitated through culture. You should create an independent culture or let us do so ... Give us control over culture."<sup>2</sup> In Khomeini's ideological paradigm, culture had been a main instrument for Western colonial hegemony in Iran. The rehabilitation of a tarnished and defiled cultural sphere was a key for reforming the government and creating national independence. It became a central ambition of the revolutionary movement Khomeini helped foment and the subsequent state he helped shape.

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1. For more on revolution and art in Iran, see Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert, eds. *Picturing Iran: Art, Society, and Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002) and Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

2. Ruhollah Khomeini, in *Dar Justiju-yi Rah az Kalam-i Imam [In Search of the Path in the Discourse of the Imam]*, Vol. 16 (Tehran: Amir Kabir Press, 1363/1984-5), p. 435.

Culture figured prominently in the constitution of the Islamic Republic. Article 2 states, “The Islamic Republic is a system based on belief in ... culture independence.” This clause goes on to exalt the “sciences and arts [as] the most advanced results of human experience.” The very next article of the charter calls for “a favorable environment for the growth of moral virtues based on faith and piety and the struggle against all forms of vice and corruption.” Key to this endeavor is the need to raise “public awareness in all areas, through the proper use of the press, mass media and other means” and to strengthen “the spirit of inquiry, investigation and innovation in all areas of science, technology and culture.” The tension between “cultural independence” and the call to use culture as a means of asserting “moral virtues” in the Islamic Republic’s founding document has played itself out in fascinating ways in the three decades since the 1979 revolution.

Within months of the fall of the Shah, the revolutionary state took control of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA). Opened in October 1977, it contained one of the leading collections of modern Western art housed outside of Europe and America. According to an article in *Art in America*, it had become “a blatant symbol of Iran’s prerevolutionary adoption of foreign cultural standards.” The museum was reopened by the revolutionary state in October 1979 with a red banner hanging above its entrance reading, “This belongs to the people, and we represent the culture of the people.” In the subsequent year, TMOCA screened 184 films and mounted 16 exhibitions, including shows of works by Iranian-Armenians and Palestinian resistance art.<sup>3</sup>

For much of the 1980s and early 1990s, Iran’s official museums displayed revolutionary art that propagated the state’s views of an Islamic culture and supported the “Sacred Defense” — the mobilization efforts of the Iran-Iraq War. Martyrdom was glorified, women were veiled, and revolutionary leaders were extolled. The election of President Muhammad Khatami in 1997 held a certain promise that government controls over the public sphere in general and the arts in particular would relax. In his inaugural address, Khatami called on “political institutions and organizations, associations, the media, scholars and researchers, academicians and educators, experts and specialists, all men and women of science, letters, culture, and art, and all citizens in all walks of life to help us with their continued supervision and candid presentation of their views and demands.”<sup>4</sup>

Khatami, who had served as the Minister of Islamic Guidance and Culture, appointed a new director of TMOCA, Dr. Sami Azar, who held a PhD in architecture from the University of Birmingham. “Artists and artistic activities have been given great encouragement since Khatami came to power in 1997,” he explained. “We are being advised to be active in



Figure 1: Revolutionary poster, c. 1978–79, Morteza Momayez, “Tulips have bloomed from the blood of the nation’s youth.”

3. Sarah McFadden, “Teheran Report: The Museum and the Revolution,” *Art in America* (October 1981), pp. 9-16.

4. Mohammad Khatami, in *Islam, Liberty and Development* (Binghamton, NY: Institute of Global Studies, SUNY Binghamton, 1998), pp. 141-2.

the cultural scene, to end Iran's political isolation. The doors were closed for two decades after the Revolution, but now we are opening up and we are facing a generation that longs to know more about recent art movements.”<sup>5</sup> The Iranian art scene, which had been individualistic and fragmented, began to operate more collectively. Artists established societies of painters, graphic designers, photographers, and sculptors. Artist collectives such as 30+, Whitewall, Sun, and Rope were formed to help artists tackle common problems as a group. An art center named *Khane-yi Hunarmandan* [The House of Artists] organized film screenings, a lecture series, and exhibitions; it became a gathering place for Iranian artists. Tehran boasted a thriving gallery scene. Art journals like the biweekly magazine *Tandis* and the web-zines *Tavoos* and *Tehran Avenue* began publication. TMOCA began exhibiting Western art, and some of its exhibitions featured Iranian exile artists like Shirin Neshat, Siah Armajani, and Parviz Tanavoli. The museum hosted symposia that featured talks by international art scholars. *The Art Newspaper* dubbed the historical moment “Iran’s glasnost.”

With the election of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2005, the fate of Iran’s cultural institutions remained in question. As President, Ahmadinejad promised to promote a “culture of spirituality.” In August 2005, he argued, “We should expand a culture that promotes virtue and prohibits vice, and also favorable to Islamic traditions ... and we should fortify education, universities, mosques, seminaries and genuine cultural groups.”<sup>6</sup> The linkage of Islam and culture remain enduring themes in Ahmadinejad’s public statements. “Today, humanity thirsts for the culture ingrained in pure Islam. Muslims and Shiites, in particular, shoulder a heavy responsibility of promoting this culture,” he said.<sup>7</sup>

There were signs, even within Ahmadinejad’s government, of a range of views on the relationship between the Islamic state and the Iranian cultural sphere. As he took office, TMOCA hosted a major exhibition of its Western art collection which opened in September 2005. “Modern Art Movement” featured works by Francis Bacon, Andy Warhol, and Jackson Pollock; an estimated 2,000 visitors a day viewed the exhibition. Even as much of the Western press focused on Ahmadinejad’s comments on Israel and the Holocaust, in May 2006, the Niavaran Artistic Creations Foundation, a state museum housed in the former palace of the Shah, held a small exhibition of paintings by Marc Chagall. [See Figure 2.] And despite concerns of a return to the closed atmosphere of the 1980s, Iran’s cultural sphere continues to be active. Though TMOCA’s website has been dismantled and its exhibitions have focused for the most part on Iranian art, the scope of its exhibitions remains diverse, and it continues to host important scholarly events. In February 2009, it organized the First Fajr International Visual



Figure 2: Poster of Chagall exhibition

5. Quoted in Anna Somers Cocks, “Iran’s Glasnost,” *The Art Newspaper*, June 7, 2002.

6. “Ahmadinejad Lashes out at West, Liberalism,” August 22, 2005, <http://www.aljazeera.info>.

7. The statement was made during a visit to Damascus. “President Says Kindness Key to Spreading Pure Islamic Culture,” IRNA, January 21, 2006.

Art Festival.

Three decades since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the tension between constitutional edicts that assured the people's authorship over their cultural destiny and those that called for the use of culture to promote an Islamic morality remain unresolved. Though the revolutionary state has created a broad infrastructure for cultural production, the form and content of Iranian art remains flexible and heterogeneous. Iran's artists and art administrator, however, have assumed a leading role as public intellectuals in the state and Iranian art is highly celebrated on the international art scene, winning awards and fetching high prices at major art auctions. It remains to be seen what effect the economic pull of the global art market will ultimately have on the relationship between revolution, art, and society in contemporary Iran.



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# Hosay: A Shi'i Ritual Transformed

Peter J. Chelkowski

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Over the centuries, Muharram observances have traveled far from their origins at Karbala, a windswept desert plain that is now a town in present day Iraq where Husayn, the beloved grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was brutally put to death together with 72 (according to tradition) of his male companions. For the Shi'is, Husayn's passion and death are considered the ultimate example of sacrifice, and scores of rituals devoted to Muharram have developed during the last 13 centuries, especially in Iran, where Twelver Shi'ism became the state religion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these rituals were exported to other lands. The transformation and transmission of these observances to their present day forms in the Caribbean basin are the results of the intersection of multiple races, religions, and artistic traditions.



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The proximity of Iran to Karbala allowed the Iranian Shi'is to perform pilgrimages (*ziyarat*) to the tomb of Husayn. It also enabled the Shi'is to bring their dead for burial to Karbala: Karbala's cemetery is one of the largest in the world, as the majority of Shi'is wish to be buried near the tomb of Husayn. The Shi'is of India did not enjoy such an advantage. The great travel distances involved rarely made it possible for Indian Shi'is to make pilgrimages to Karbala, and transporting their dead to the cemetery there was nearly impossible. To surmount these obstacles, Indian Shi'is established local karbalas on the subcontinent by bringing soil from Karbala and sprinkling it on lots designated as future cemeteries. Once the karbalas were established on the subcontinent, the next step was to bring Husayn's tomb-shrine to India. This was accomplished by building replicas

of Husayn's mausoleum — called *ta'ziyeh* — to be carried in Muharram processions.



*A nakhl in Mehriz, central Iran, 1974.  
Photo by Judith L. Goldstein*

In Iran, the performance of the passion play is called *ta'ziyeh*. The word "replica" is a misnomer since even today when the builders of *ta'ziyeh* have photographs and films featuring Husayn's mausoleum at their disposal, they create extraordinary structures that have no resemblance whatsoever to the actual tomb-shrine of Husayn. Their artistic creation is considered as an act of devotion to Husayn. The structures that are built vary in size from small to huge edifices. The *ta'ziyeh* must be light in order to be carried or wheeled in processions; therefore,

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the frames are made of bamboo and covered with tinsel, colorful papers, and *papier maché*. Contemporary *ta'ziyehs* are built with plastic and styrotex.



*Ta'zias* (models of imaginary representations of Hussein's shrine tomb) in Delhi, India, at the local Karbala to be buried. Photo by Ebba Koch.

The *nakhl*, an artistic representation of the bier on which Imam Husayn's body was borne from the battlefield to its final resting place, is the source and inspiration for the Caribbean *tadja*, another artistic representation of the mausoleum of Imam Husayn. In English, *nakhl* means "date palm." Since the date palm tree has a tall, slender trunk, the word *nakhl* is used metaphorically in Arabic and Persian literature to express a well-proportioned figure. As ritual objects for the 'Ashura day, *nakhls* are built from wood and come in various sizes; from simple creations that can be carried by two persons to gigantic three-story-high construc-

tions supported by hundreds of men. Although it is called *nakhl* (date palm), the shape of the lattice more closely resembles the cypress tree. In the dedication plaque to the Amir Chaqmaq *nakhl* in Yazd, the structure itself is likened to the beautiful corpse of the "Sultan of Karbala," that is, Husayn. In addition to its religious and ritual connotations, a *nakhl* functions as a symbol of social unity for a town, village, or district.

It seems that the Shi'is of India transformed the processional bier that is *nakhl* into a representation of Husayn's mausoleum. This structure then came to represent both the bier and the tomb. In India, the participation in the procession with the *ta'ziyeh* is at once a pilgrimage to Husayn's tomb and a re-enactment of his funeral.

Hindu rituals and festivals have had a great impact on Muharram observances. For example, the immersion of the *ta'ziyeh* into water at the end of the Muharram procession is like the immersion of the *pandal* — a temporary structure set up to venerate the goddess Durga — during the Durga *puja*, which, like Muharram, takes place over a ten-day period. In India thousands of *ta'ziyehs* in various sizes and shapes are fashioned every year for the months of mourning of Muharram and Safar, and are carried or wheeled in procession. They are displayed in private and public *imambaras* and some of them are eventually buried in the local karbalas.



*Tadjahs* in procession on the eve of Ashura in Southern Trinidad, 1991. Photo by Peter Chelkowski.

Halfway around the world from India, sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean basin were the economic lifelines of an entire region — cane sugar fetched a high price in world markets until sugar beets began to be farmed on a commercial scale. These plantations were tended by black African slaves until 1834, when the British emancipated their slaves throughout the Caribbean. The freed slaves were offered paying jobs on the plantations, but most equated this work

with their former slavery and abandoned the countryside for town life. The plantation owners found themselves facing financial hardship, and possibly ruin. To avert financial crisis, the British, who by that time were well entrenched in India, brought Indians to the Caribbean basin as indentured laborers. During the years 1845-1917, Indians came to the Caribbean in the thousands. By the time the Indians arrived in the Caribbean, black Africans and Creoles had hijacked the famous observances of Carnival. They infused it with African traditions and made it the main annual Creole event. In order to counterbalance the spectacular parades of Carnival, the Indians introduced the Muharram processions, known as *Hosay*. It is indeed extraordinary that a Shi'a Muslim mourning ritual was transformed into the annual demonstration of pan-Indian national unity in the Caribbean. Although Hindus and Sunnis already participated in the Muharram rituals in India, making Hosay a symbol of Indian unity was a simply phenomenal metamorphosis.

Under colonial rule, Hosay was not only a symbol of pan-Indian unity, but of community. Each plantation engaged in Hosay preparation. The main preparation of Hosay observances was and is the construction of the *ta'ziyeh*, which in Trinidad and other Caribbean countries is called *tadjah* (thanks to a phonetic transformation). The *tadjah*, in turn, became a symbol of defiance by the plantation laborers directed towards their British employers. This was particularly visible in British Guyana.

The *tadjah* display and parade lasted only 24 hours. Since the indentured laborers were constantly needed for farming activities and had little time off, the main Hosay rituals took place during the night on the eve of 'Ashura. At sundown on 'Ashura itself, the *tadjahs* were immersed in the ocean. The passionate expression of artistic, cultural, and patriotic heritage, which came to fruition after a 40-day period of unstinting work and creativity, was on view for only 24 hours and then submerged forever in the waters of the sea. This cycle is repeated every year.

Trinidad is the only place in the Caribbean where Hosay is still observed annually in the lunar months of Muharram. There are two centers of Hosay observances on the island of Trinidad: St. James in the north, which is a suburb of Port of Spain, the capital, and the Cedros District in the southwest. In the north the camps are predominantly manned by Muslims. The distinction between Sunni and Shi'i Muslims in Trinidad is blurred, to say the least. In the south, the number of Muslims is very small and the *tadjah* camps, also known as yards and *imambaras*, are predominantly run by Hindus and Christians. This is an old tradition in that part of the country and an excellent example of cultural and religious syncretism.

Sunset on the 'Ashura day finds the *tadjahs* on the sands of the beach in preparation for the last leg of their journey. Following a brief prayer and a sung eulogy (*marsiyyeh*), a phalanx of men hoists the *tadjahs* onto their shoulders and bears them into the sea. Bobbing for a short time amidst the waves, the *tadjahs* soon sink from view, along with the sun. The cycle will be repeated next year and the year after that in a timeless, unbroken chain of commemoration reaching from the waters of the Caribbean all the way back to the Karbala desert.



Tadjah sinking into the sea at sunset on Ashura, Southern Trinidad, 1991. Photo by Peter Chelkowski.

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# Mapping Modernity in Arab Art

Nuha N.N. Khoury

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The Louvre-Abu Dhabi and Christie's-Dubai are but two examples of the extension of the global hyphen to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, currently a major location for the production and consumption of culture.<sup>1</sup> This extension heralds a new era for art in the Arab world, which is witnessing a lively intensity in collecting, exhibiting, and talking about art which have coalesced around the by-word "smart collecting."<sup>2</sup> Paradigmatic of the new art economy, "smart collecting" signals a longstanding partnership between education and marketing (whether of commodities or ideas) that threatens to reduce art to its pecuniary and commodity value and so to erase — or at least elide — its historical and social contents. None of these phenomena is entirely new to the Arab world. However, their current scale and acceleration, coupled with the GCC's increasing dominance of the Middle Eastern media market, are particularly significant for modern Arab art, whose reception around the world is colored by its recent entry into global circulation and by its propensity to be easily hijacked into the discourses and identity politics of the West, which often circulates them back into the Arab world.



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In this context, it is especially propitious that we also are witnessing a steady increase in the number of critical studies on modern art in and from the Arab world that are specifically addressed to Western reading publics. These studies have the great merit of bringing a new arena of artistic creativity to new constituencies and into the institutionalized discourses of Western art history. On the other hand, their temporal proximity to their subject matter, much of which is positioned in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, posits a number of problems and interpretive paradoxes that, if left unchecked, will quickly become entrenched in our knowledge of both art and modernity in the Arab world. Among these are issues of definition and historical mapping that raise questions of what is and is not art, where Arab-ness begins and ends, and what constitutes modernity.

Whether they provide country-specific surveys or handle particular artistic phenomena, most studies of modern Arab art deploy a framework in which modernity in art merges with the adoption of easel painting and the application of oil paint to canvas. The resultant definition performs a double move in which modernity is trapped within Western modes of (artistic) production (through the importation of medium and technique), while forms of art that do not conform to the definition are relegated to "craft"

1. The Louvre-Abu Dhabi is projected to open in 2012. Christie's opened its Dubai offices in 2005.

2. "Smart collecting" is the theme of seminars and programs sponsored partially by Christie's and *Canvas* magazine, the flagship of Mixed Media Publishing in Dubai.



status or historicized as “Islamic” — a categorization that is itself decidedly modern. The ensuing tension between history (construed as Islamic) and modernity (construed as Arab) belongs to a particular moment within the nationalist discourse of the post-colonial era and signals the ways in which artists re-presented their pasts in the service of their present as they searched for new languages of self identification, thereby enabling the production of “Arab” as a site of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Replaying this definition of modern Arab art then amounts to assimilating the unreconstructed narratives that gave rise to it in the first place. Alternatively, deconstructing the same narratives leads to an understanding of “Arab art” itself as framing a special moment in history, one that may continue to resonate today but whose impact and primary content belong to the (admittedly recent) past.

Like other nationalisms, Arab nationalism of the post-independence period is a historical construct that is based as much on what is remembered as on what is forgotten. Consequently, the absorption of the definition of modern Arab art as the scion of Western technology and Arab invention induces a historical erasure that is also constituent of 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalist narratives. This erasure pertains to late Ottoman history and, especially, to the 19<sup>th</sup> century *Tanzimat*



Model of the Louvre-Abu Dhabi.

period, which is the backdrop of Arab modernity. The Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms produced new political and public spheres, discourses, and aesthetic genres, and brought about the modernization, secularization, and dissemination (through a variety of new print media) of the Arabic language, which was the conduit of new forms of civility, and continues to bind Arab political identities.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the adoption of European art forms and techniques, and the transformation of earlier modes and media of representation, were part of a broader modernizing regime that gave rise to an Arabism that was not at odds with — and indeed saw itself as part of — Ottomanism. The consistent elision of this history in accounts of modern art of the Arab world (or its repeated encapsulation in the phrase “a weak and oppressive Ottoman rule”) reproduces a later mapping of Arab modernity, one that, in the wake of independence, was intent on forgetting its Ottoman modernity and forging new nationalist histories.<sup>5</sup> This mapping process (which also was affected by the colonial production of knowledge in the region) coalesces with the invention of “Islamic art” and “Arab art” as oppositional nodes of modernity. How then to recover the lost modulations of Arab art history?

In contrast to these re-presentations, Turkish art history (itself born out of a nationalism that is equally a product of Ottoman reforms of the pre-Kemalist era) has been able to raise a variety of questions ranging from the depiction of space

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3. For the pan-Arabist moment in art see Nada M. Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007).

4. See Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Nationalism and the Arabs,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 17, Nos. 1, 2 (Winter, Spring 1995), pp. 1-17.

5. The exception is Egypt where the figure of Muhammad Ali and his modernizing reforms (as well as those of his successors) could not be ignored even in works that uphold the representation of Ottoman history as a time of tyranny. On modern art in Egypt, see Liliane Karnouk, *Modern Egyptian Art: 1910-2003* (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2005).



to the shifting locales of art-use and display that have forged connections between Ottoman art and its early Republican successors — even when the answers to these questions served to highlight differences between the two.<sup>6</sup> It also has recovered transformative types and genres, including landscapes and, especially, topographical representations whose modern forms were initially the result of art training at the Imperial Military Academies of the late Ottoman Empire. The colonization and later history of the Arab provinces was not as conducive to the preservation of similar records in art. And yet, even Lebanon (always the exception that proves the rule) has preserved the memory and work of at least one late Ottoman artist, Ibrahim Sarabiyye, trained at the Imperial Academy and known for his topographical depictions of Beirut.<sup>7</sup> The generation of Lebanese modern art pioneers active in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century is equally a generation of late Ottoman artists who trained and taught within the *Tanzimat* system.<sup>8</sup> The repositioning of these and other Arab artists within the history of Arab modernity in art will not only remedy the myths of later nationalism (including that of Lebanese Christianity's affiliation with, and hence openness to, Western practices). It also will reveal to the fullest the creative force and innovations of later Arab modern art.

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6. For example in Günsel Renda *et al.*, *A History of Turkish Painting* (Seattle and London: Palasar SA. in association with University of Washington Press, second edition 1988). For the shared background of Arab and Turkish nationalism see Al-Azmeh, "Nationalism."

7. For Sarabiyye see Joseph Abu Rizq *et al.*, *Al-Fann al-Tashkili fi Lubnan [Visual Art in Lebanon]* (Beirut: Al-Munazzama al-Arabiyya li al-Tarbiya wa al-Thaqafa wa al-Ulum, 2004), p. 7; Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (Gainesville, FL: The University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 36 mentions Sarabiyye and other artists active in Lebanon during this period.

8. Among these, Habib Srour (1860-1938) taught at the Ottoman Sanayeh School and trained many of the artists of the following generation. Abu Rizq *et al.*, *Al-Fann al-Tashkili fi Lubnan*, p. 12.

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# *L'appartement 22: Creating Space for Art and Social Discourse in Morocco*

Katarzyna Pieprzak

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One of the most exciting new spaces for the exhibition, research, and production of contemporary art in Morocco today is *L'appartement 22* [Apartment 22] founded by Abdellah Karroum in 2002. While its primary exhibit space is an apartment located in central Rabat, Apartment 22 exists in multiple physical, virtual, and sonic incarnations and sees itself primarily as a site of diffusion. Through exhibits, nomadic art projects, and multilingual Internet radio, Apartment 22 has created a new public space for art and social discourse in Morocco.



Since the beginning of the modern art movement in Morocco in the 1950s and 60s, artists have been frustrated with the lack of institutional infrastructure for contemporary art in Morocco. In national newspapers as well as cultural journals such as *Souffles*, *La-malif*, and *Integral*, artists and intellectuals pushed for exhibit spaces, museums, and art education that would promote a dynamic contemporary art world in Morocco. These artists viewed contemporary art as a valuable means of social critique and engagement, and through art and its display, sought to open a larger conversation on the direction of Moroccan culture and society in the post-colonial period. In the late 1960s, a group of painters known as the Casablanca School organized a series of exhibits in local schools and in the streets to this end; the most well known was the 1969 *Jemaa al-Fna* exhibition in Marrakech in which artists talked to market-goers about their paintings on display.

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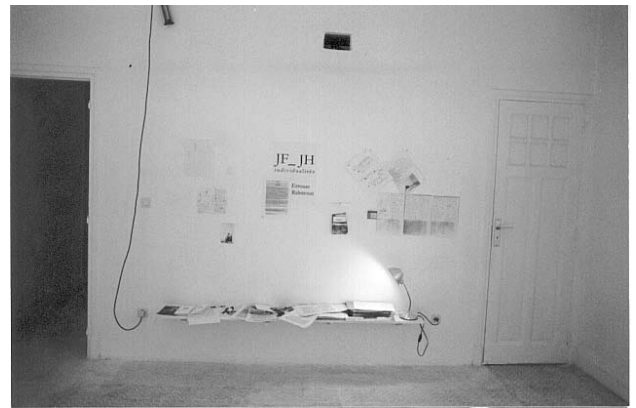
Other art collectives have followed in the Casablanca School's footsteps, seeking to engage the general public more intimately in artistic production and social discourse. Started in 1995 by Hassan Darsi, Rachid L'Moudenne, Mohamed Fariji, and Florence Renault, the art collective, *Ain Sebaa / La Source du lion* [The Lion's Spring], is one of the most dynamic. Based in Casablanca, the collective has lead important communal art projects that concern the physical space of the city and how it is inhabited and shared. The long-term renovation of an abandoned neighborhood park by artists and neighborhood groups is perhaps their most famous project to date.<sup>1</sup> Apartment 22 shares this commitment to urban life in Morocco. At the same time, it seeks to expand the concept of public space for discourse beyond city limits and configurations.

When Abdellah Karroum returned to Morocco after finishing his PhD in Art History in France, like others, he was frustrated to find that there was no institutional space from which he could curate and research contemporary art. And so, he created his own. In

1. For more information on the collective, see <http://www.lasourcedulion.org>.

2002, he founded Apartment 22 as a space where, through art, he could practice an “activism beyond frontiers,”<sup>2</sup> whether those frontiers were national, international, social, or political. The apartment is located on the main avenue in Rabat, Avenue Mohammed V, just a few steps away from two lively sites of discourse: the terrace of the Hotel Balima and across the street from the Moroccan Parliament building. As Karroum likes to say, my apartment is “my permanent seat in front of the parliament.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the first projects that Karroum curated at Apartment 22 was the “JF\_JH (Individualités)” [Young Woman \_ Young Man (Individualities)] exhibition where artists Younès Rahmoun and Safaa Erruas lived together in the apartment from October 10, 2002 to November 27, 2002 and created art works in the presence of each other. For the opening, Karroum used a live-feed to project the street into the stairway and corridors of the apartment building in a reconfiguration and opening of social space. Karroum described it in the following terms: “The live video pro-



JF\_JH individualités.

jection of images from the street into the site of exhibition shows that the artist is not disconnected from his society. The artist looks at and listens to the world. There is in this collective proposition a will to re-connect the work of art to the rest of the city, in a co-presence.”<sup>4</sup>

The act of two unrelated and unmarried people of the opposite sex living alone in a small apartment for a month went against moral conventions in Morocco. As Karroum explained, “the point was to ask how one can construct something together and to show that two people of the opposite sex alone in an apartment create more than just “immoral” acts of crime, but rather works of art.”<sup>5</sup> Through this exhibit, Karroum sought to fundamentally redefine the conventions of public space, blurring their boundaries and creating new spheres of discourse. The pieces of art that Rahmoun and Erruas created spoke of intimacy, danger, violence, and resistance; one installation took the shape of a child and another consisted of razor blades attached to the wall of the room. From the very idea of the exhibit to the individual pieces that were displayed, JF\_JH succeeded to create multiple detours from conventional societal discourse on sexual taboos to deepen reflections and discussions of intimacy and individuality within Moroccan society.

In addition to supporting exhibits and residencies for Moroccan and non-Moroccan artists in its physical locale, Apartment 22 also works to displace art far from its usual spaces of production and display. In his curatorial project, *Multiplayistes* [Multiple Paths], Karroum invites artists to travel with him to rural marketplaces to discuss art, work, and life with

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2. Abdellah Karroum, “Allers/Retours: L'exposition comme déplacement vers les contextes,” *L'appartement 22*, May 14, 2007, <http://www.appartement22.com/spip.php?article9>.

3. Abdellah Karroum, interview with author, Williamstown, MA, May 24, 2008.

4. Abdellah Karroum, “La coprésence fondement de la rencontre,” *L'appartement 22*, August 6, 2006, <http://www.appartement22.com/spip.php?article16>.

5. Abdellah Karroum, interview with author, Williamstown, MA, May 24, 2008.

local inhabitants. The idea is not to educate the local public about art, but rather to open up conversations about art and its role in society, and most importantly, exchange multiple points of view on life.

Another example of this physical displacement is taking art to the radio. In 2007, Karroum launched the first cultural radio station in Morocco: Radio 22, an Internet radio site, is broadcast in a variety of languages: Moroccan Arabic, Tamazight (Berber), French, and English — to name the most dominant. In line with Karroum's idea that discourse is the newest media in art, the broadcasts range from interviews with artists, live recordings from art projects that capture spectator voices, academic conferences that Karroum has participated in, as well as artist interviews from Karroum's curatorial role in various international *biennales*.

Rather than serving as a closed private space of art, Apartment 22 aims to tear down walls and barriers separating the Moroccan public from contemporary art. For this to happen there is still a long way to go. However, through exhibits, residencies, traveling projects, and radio broadcasts, Apartment 22 has opened new and significant spaces for both contemporary art and social discourse in Morocco today.



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# Iraqi Art: *Dafatir*

Nada Shabout

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The evolution of modern art in Iraq during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was initiated and remained connected to the country's political path. During the first half of the century, modernist art movements created a discourse that determined the future development of Iraqi art. Centered on the notion of identity negotiations, the discourse materialized into a distinct local visual style achieved through deconstructing history, heritage, and modern innovations. Ultimately, Iraqi modern artists established a visual national narration that not only paralleled the creation of the modern state of Iraq, but also expressed the triumph of Arabism over pan-Islamism.



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The “internationalism and cosmopolitanism” of the early period, however, was not replaced with globalism towards the end of the century as happened elsewhere. In Iraq, it was replaced with debilitating isolation caused by sanctions and wars that followed a number of disruptive and destructive interruptions. In the period after the US-led invasion of 2003, the mass displacement of artists and dislocation of Iraq's art center charted several paths. Large numbers of Iraqi artists, some staying temporarily in the region while awaiting permanent resettlement to different parts of the world, started art communities outside of Iraq.

The unevenness of Iraqi art today is manifest in the complexity of local and global productions. A number of young diaspora Iraqi artists have found their places in the global art scene. The majority, however, remain isolated and marginalized even when outside of Iraq. Interestingly, a unique art trend, which had started on the periphery of official art production in Iraq, became representative of Iraqi unofficial art, yet remains marginalized both locally and globally. *Dafatir* (singular *daftar*; Arabic for notebook) is a contemporary visual expression in the form of an artist's book or art object with roots in Islamic manuscript production but given a distinct postmodern interpretation.

Explorations with the *daftar* followed many of the earlier *hurufiyya* (the use of Arabic text in modern art) experiments of the 1970s and 1980s by a number of Iraqi modernist artists.<sup>1</sup> Individual works by Dia Azzawi presented a synthesis between the various influences on his work as part of his diasporic existence. Azzawi's initial experiments with text and image after his move to London aimed at invoking an aesthetic experience and spiritual context. His *dafatir*, although not classified as such then,<sup>2</sup> were expressive

1. For details see Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2007).

2. The term became popular during the 1990s among Iraqi artists. However, it was officially

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art exercises of line, color, and form. He produced a number of original, hand-painted, one-copy books that visually articulated contemporary issues through certain selections of modern Arab poetry. His visual, poetic painted books were based on personal and historical memories and contemplations. They were evolved forms of manuscripts where words, shapes, and color were freely and harmoniously intertwined. In these books, the text is always dominated by color and form, and is never allowed to take precedence over image. By the mid-1990s Azzawi transformed his books into sculpture, as in *Sadie Yousif Poem*, 1995, where the exterior of the book became symbolic of the spirit of its content.

Nevertheless, scarcity of material and exhibition space, size, and mobility all led to the popularity, transformation, and intensification of *dafatir* as a contemporary vehicle of expression in Iraq. During the sanctions of the 1990s through the 2003 invasion and up until 2005, for many Iraqi artists they became the premier form of production. Artists improvised and adapted locally available materials, forging a new relationship with their immediate environment and strengthening their ties to their land, culture, identity, and history. Observing and internalizing the local was transmitted through



changed aesthetics and color palettes. The new *dafatir* lost the elevated status as beautiful objects of Islamic manuscripts or Azzawi's evolved forms. They are mundane spaces of personal reflection. They are rough, torn, burnt remains. As means of expression, these creative notebooks function as historical narrations as well. Moreover, they transformed a historically recognized and celebrated format of Islamic art expression into dissident art.



In Iraqi art, there is no apparent disjuncture between Modernism and Postmodernism, as occurred in the West. Rather, a smoother progression took place, following distinctly different dynamics, which cannot be situated within the Western discourse of Postmodernism. The new internal dialogue instigated by their isolation resulted in a new dynamic that reinvigorated artists' relation to Iraq's history. The conception and format of the book was pivotal in reviving creativity and expression in Iraqi art. For the modernist, the discovery of *Maqqamat al-Hariri* (c. 1225-35) was more than a source of inspiration. It provided the means to reconnect with the past while develop-

ing a modern visual language. The notion of *Istilham al-Turath* (seeking inspiration from tradition), originally proposed by the Baghdad Modern Art Group formed in 1951 under the leadership of Jawad Salim, remained at the core of art development. Symbolic of survival and continuity, in reference to various invasions of Iraq — from the Mongols in 1256 through the 2003 US-led invasion — only added to the significance and meaning of *dafatir*.

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coined with the exhibition *Dafatir: Contemporary Iraqi Book Art*, at the University of North Texas Art Gallery in October 2005. See Nada Shabout, ed., *Dafatir: Contemporary Iraqi Book Art* (Denton, TX: UNT Art Gallery, 2007).

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In their contemporary production and in a time of instability and fear, these *dafatir* allowed Iraqi artists agency and voice, performing the act of writing and representation as a personal intervention. By breaking away from the conventional forms of sculpture and painting, *dafatir* initiated a form of subversive art that gave a new space to counter the official art sanctioned by Saddam Husayn and later the new art of occupation. Their contemporaneity is articulated through the dynamics between a collective vision and personal styles. Their intimate scale was distinctly in opposition to the monumental images of government propaganda. They were equally created outside global postmodern consumerism. Individually they are private works, more like personal journals, but together and despite their size and inexpensive material, they became a strong act of defiance. Following the invasion, *dafatir* focused mostly on the horrors of war and the violent destruction of Iraq's artistic and intellectual heritage. In the context of the destruction of Iraq's museums and libraries in April 2003, their format gained much poignancy and relevance.

Many of the artists living in Iraq during the war took up the subject of destruction in their work. Kareem Risan had witnessed various forms of destruction as a soldier during the 1990 Gulf War. The experience transformed his earlier paintings of historical excavations into “testimonies” to the deterioration of daily life in Baghdad in the form of *dafatir*. Bombings, economic sanctions, burning, human fatalities, and environmental contamination were all themes for his work. Pages of his *dafatir* are scored, burnt, and torn — displaying fragments of texts, charts, and signs that evoke textures, colors, and smells of destruction. In *Baghdad Burning 2003*, Risan delineates disorientation and dislocation through the chaos of smoke and blood drowning recognizable elements of the history of Baghdad. In *al-Motanabi Street 2007*, Risan bemoans the obliteration of Iraq's intellectual history in Baghdad's historical book market.



Although far removed from the immersive space of postmodern installations, *dafatir* provide a contemplative space in which to articulate the contemporary moment through an abstraction akin to that of installation. They are, nevertheless, excluded from most spaces of contemporary exhibition and from the market.

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# Orientalist Art in Morocco

Mary Vogl

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For almost two centuries Orientalism has been a feature of art produced in Morocco. Thousands of foreign artists have been attracted to this beautiful land. Visiting in 1832, Eugène Delacroix noted, “The picturesque here is in abundance. At every step one sees ready-made pictures.”<sup>1</sup> Eighty years later Henri Matisse claimed to get his inspiration from the Orient.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary photographer Bruno Barbey agrees that Morocco “is a place where you can find the ingredients to make visual images.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed today it is considered one of the world’s most photogenic locations. Lynne Thornton’s *The Orientalists: Painter-Travelers* and especially Maurice Arama’s *Itinéraires marocains, regards de peintres* have surveyed an important locale.<sup>4</sup> Studies exist on Delacroix and Matisse and their relationship to Morocco,<sup>5</sup> and there are also monographs on Majorelle, Edy-Legrand, Cruz Herrera, Pontoy, Suréda, and Morère.<sup>6</sup>



Mary B. Vogl, an associate professor at Colorado State University, has published *Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography, Representation* (Rowman & Littlefield 2002) and articles on North African literature, art and aesthetics. She is completing a book, *Dialogues and Discourse in Contemporary Moroccan Art*.

Although Orientalist art has been considered a phenomenon of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a number of expatriate artists currently working in Morocco continue to exploit this genre. These include longtime residents Jéronimo Muniz (Spanish, b. 1938),

1. Eugène Delacroix, *Selected Letters 1813-1863*, ed. and trans. Jean Steward (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1971), p. 192

2. Henri Matisse, “The Path of Colour,” In Jack D. Flam, ed., *Matisse on Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1973), p. 116.

3. Source: [www.magnumphotos.com](http://www.magnumphotos.com)

4. *The Orientalists: Painter-Travellers, 1828-1908* (Paris, ACR Editions, 1983); *Itinéraires marocains: le regard des peintres* (Paris, Jaguar, 1991).

5. A sampling of these works include: Gaston Diehl, *Delacroix au Maroc* (Rabat: Mission universitaire et culturelle française au Maroc, 1963); Maurice Arama, *Le Maroc de Delacroix* (Paris: Editions du Jaguar, 1987); Guy Dumur, *Delacroix et le Maroc* (Paris: Herscher, 1988); Maurice Sérullaz, *Delacroix in Morocco* (Paris and New York: Institut du monde arabe: Flammarion, 1994); Odile Quirot, *Eugène et le sultan: le voyage du peintre Delacroix au Maroc* (Paris: A. Biro, 1990); Laure Beaumont-Maillet, et al., *Souvenirs d'un voyage dans le Maroc* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999); Author not indicated, *La Tanger des peintres: de Delacroix à Matisse* (Tangier: Tingis, 2003); Maurice Sérullaz, *Delacroix: Watercolours of Morocco* (Paris: F. Hazan, 1951); and Tahar Ben Jelloun, *Delacroix al Morocco* (Milan: F.M. Ricci, 2004). For Matisse, see Camille Cabana, *Le Maroc de Matisse* (Paris: Institut du monde arabe/Editions Gallimard, 1999); Jack Cowart et al, *Matisse in Morocco: The Paintings and Drawings, 1912-1913* (Washington DC: National Gallery of Art, 1990); Claudia Beltramo Ceppi Zevi, *Matisse: La revelation m'est venue de l'Orient* (Florence, Italy: Artificio, 1997); Christophe Domino, *Matisse et le Maroc* (Paris: Gallimard; Institut du monde arabe, 1999).

6. These include Félix Marcihac, *La vie et l'œuvre de Jacques Majorelle: 1886-1962* (Courbevoie, Paris: ACR Edition, 1988); Cécile Ritzenthaler, *Edy-Legrand: Visions du Maroc* (Courbevoie, Paris: ACR, 2005); José Riquelme Sánchez, *Vida y obra del pintor José Cruz Herrera* (Sevilla: Ediciones Alfar, 1987); Marion Vidal-Bué, *André Surréda: Peintre Orientaliste* (Eds. de l'Amateur, 2006) and Charlotte Monto, *Au Maroc avec Louis Morère 1885-1949* (Paris: Somogy, 2000).



Claudio Bravo (Chilean, b. 1936), Katie Gabet (French, b. 1961), and Bruno Barbey (French, b. 1941 in Morocco). While critics point out these artists' depiction of a "timeless Orient," stripped of any signs of modernity or contact with the rest of the world,<sup>7</sup> they also emphasize their profound respect for Moroccan culture and people.

Interest in colonial and contemporary Orientalist painting remains strong. Works regularly earn top dirham at auctions, often from Moroccan bidders.<sup>8</sup> Copies and forgeries of Orientalist paintings are also money makers. Galleries specializing in this genre are flourishing, including "Orientalist Art" galleries in Marrakesh and Fez, a "Delacroix Gallery" in Tangiers, and a "Matisse Art Gallery" in Marrakesh. The Lawrence-Arnott galleries in Tangier and Marrakesh also specialize in Orientalist and *naïve* painting.

Morocco is home to one of the most dynamic contemporary art scenes in Africa and the Middle East, and some of its diasporic artists are also internationally known. Some Moroccan artists continue to use many of the traditional features and motifs of Orientalist art, including street scenes, architecture, landscapes, the market, clothing, jewelry, horses, the fantasia, the *hammam*, and scenes of piety and mosques.

#### Non-Moroccan Orientalists

Eugène Delacroix (1798-1862); Alfred Dehodencq (1822-1882); José Tapiro y Bara (1830-1913); Mariano Fortuny (1838-1874); *Frederick Arthur Bridgman* (1847-1928); Rudolph Ernst (1854-1932); John Singer Sargent (1856-1925); Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer (1865-1953); Henri Matisse (1869-1954); André Suréda (1872-1930); Kees VanDongen (1877-1968); Raoul Dufy (1877-1943); George O.W. Apperley (1884-1960); Mariano Bertuchi (1884-1955); Louis Morère (1885-1949); Jacques Majorelle (1886-1962); Paul Elie Dubois (1886-1949); Henri Pontoy (1888-1968); José Cruz Herrera (1890-1972); Adam Styka (1890-1959); Odette Bruno (1891-1984); Edouard Edy-Legrand (1892-1970); Jean Besancenot (1902-1992); Antonio Fuentes (1905-1995); Jacques Azéma (1910-1979); Jean-Gaston Mantel (1914-1995); Jacqueline Brodskis (1914-2006).

According to Roger Benjamin, Delacroix's voyage to Morocco "became the archetype of the Orientalist experience," with later artists defining their praxis in relation to his.<sup>9</sup> In the decade after Morocco's independence, a group of artists and intellectuals rejected the colonial domination of the arts scene, which included "primitive" and Orientalist painting. Houcine Tallal is quoted as declaring, "I *am* a Moroccan — thus I have no need to paint a mosque or a fantasia to prove it. .... And anyway, I think that Delacroix has already painted everything about Morocco and that there is nothing else to add."<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Abdellatif Zine, a thriving artist and head of a Moroccan artists' union, asserts his right to continue a tradition of figurative representations of his country: "I've always thought that Morocco has not been sufficiently

7. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, Vintage, 1978) and Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), pp. 33-59.

8. For an analysis of this sort of phenomenon, see Roger Benjamin, "Post-Colonial Taste: Non-Western Markets for Western Art" in Benjamin et al, *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee* (Sydney: The Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997), p. 32-40.

9. Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics, Art Colonialism and French North Africa 1880-1930* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2003).

10. Zakya Daoud, "Le Monde fantastique de Tallal," *Lamalif*, No.16 (November 1967), p. 40, cited in Pieprzak.



painted since Delacroix.”<sup>11</sup>

Virtually all Moroccan artists who have been labeled “Orientalist” are still living, with notable exceptions being Amine Demnati (1942-1971), Mohammed Ben Ali R’bati (1861-1939), and Mohamed Ben Allal (1924-1995).<sup>12</sup>

While no study has yet focused on Moroccan Orientalist art exclusively, Khalil M’Rabet’s *Peinture et identité: l’expérience marocaine* and Aziz Daki’s *Venise Cadre: Soixante ans d’histoire de l’art au Maroc* have addressed the subject.

#### Living Moroccan Artists

Hassan El Glaoui (b. 1924); Meriem Mezian (b. 1930); Fquih Regragui (b. 1938); Salah-Eddine Chaoui (b. 1944); Ahmed Ben Yesséf (b. 1945); Miloudi Nouiga (b. 1947); Abdellatif Zine (b. 1950); Mohamed Krich (b. 1954); Ahmed Balili (b. 1955); Abdelaziz Bufrakech (b. 1962); Abdelkrim Belamine (b. 1964); Hassan Boukhari (b. 1965); Aziz Benja (b. 1974) and Fouzia Sekkat (b. late 1960s?).



Lalla Essaydi, “Fumée d’AmbreGris.” Image courtesy of Lalla Essaydi and Waterhouse & Dodd Gallery.

Hassan El Glaoui’s scenes of the fantasia and Meriem Mezian’s depictions of traditional rural life have earned them record breaking sales in recent auctions. The realist styles and recognizably Moroccan subject matter of many contemporary Moroccan painters attract admiration from patrons but sometimes criticism from local artists who favor abstraction or more avant-garde media.

The challenges of Orientalist representation have been taken up by a number of artists who were born in Morocco but trained and live abroad. Lalla Essaydi (b. 1956), Yasmina Alaoui and Fatima Mazmouz (b. 1974) are situated at the axis of the conflicting tendencies of de-Orientalizing and re-Orientalizing in contemporary art. Their work aims at deconstructing stereotypes of “the Muslim Woman.” They redefine the scope of Orientalist art by imbuing it with a perspective that valorizes complexity over simplicity.

Lynne Thornton described a period of waning interest in traditional Orientalist art a century ago when academicism was “ousted by the avant-garde.” “What had fallen from favour,” she wrote, “was not the Orient, it was the old manner of painting it.”<sup>13</sup> As historians David Prochaska and Edmund Burke III have recently asserted, “We are in no sense in a pos-

11. Cited in Abdelmajid Hannaoui, “Abdellatif Zine: Couleurs d’une Identité,” *MaghrebArts*, <http://www.maghrebarts.ma/artsplastiques/expo/zine.html>.

12. See Daniel Rondeau et al, *Mohammed Ben Ali R’bati: un peintre à Tanger en 1900* (Casablanca: Malika; Fondation Abderrahman Slaoui, 2000) and Jacques Azéma, *Mohamed Ben Allal* (Rabat: Mission universitaire et culturelle française au Maroc, Impr. Imframar, 1963).

13. Thornton, *The Orientalists: Painter-travelers*, p. 13.

torientalist era.”<sup>14</sup> There is abundant evidence that the Orient as subject matter still captivates audiences inside Morocco and abroad. The manners of representing it are myriad, as are the national and personal identities of the artists who depict it. Moroccan and expatriate artists reinvigorate Orientalist art on one hand through a conscious stripping of its phantasmagoric and colonial obsessions with violence and sexuality, and on the other, through a postmodern critique of these traits.

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14. David Prochaska and Edmund Burke III, *Genealogies of Orientalism: History, Theory, Politics* (University of Nebraska Press, 2008), Introduction, p. x.

Arts, Culture, and Society on the Web

The University of Chicago Library

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/mideast/artsculture.html>

SIBMAS

International Directory of Performing Arts Collections and Institutions

<http://www.sibmas.org/idpac/middle-east/index.html>

Arts on the Web

[http://www.zeroland.co.nz/art\\_middle\\_east.html](http://www.zeroland.co.nz/art_middle_east.html)

Artcylopedia

Art Museums in the Middle East

<http://www.artcylopedia.com/museums/art-museums-in-the-middle-east.html>

Literatures of the Middle East

Columbia University Libraries

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/mideast/cuvlm/literatures.html>

Arabic Literature

Cornell University Library

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/arablit.htm>

Music of the Middle East

Columbia University Libraries

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/mideast/cuvlm/music.html>

Discover Islamic Art (Images Collection)

<http://www.discoverislamicart.org/>

Darat al Funan – A Home for the Arts

The Khalid Shoman Foundation

<http://www.daratafunun.org/>

4 Arabs

<http://www.4arabs.com/links/Arts/>



Middle East Institute