# AL JADID

A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts




www.ALJADID.com VOL. 17 No. 65 ( 2011) $8.95

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# Horrors on the Syrian Coast: Sectarianism, Savagery, and Silence

BY ELIE CHALALA

After watching and reading coverage of Assad's *Shabbiha* massacre of more than 360 people in Banias, Ras al-Nabeh, and the village of Bayda, and after comments by some people who apparently enjoyed hearing the news, I felt all the more saddened. As the killers paraded and humiliated their victims before pro-Assad sympathetic crowds, their euphoric reaction displays the alarming rise in the sectarian hatred in Syrian society.

Abd al-Hamid Suleiman's distressing account of the slaughter on the Syrian coast appeared in the Lebanese electronic newspaper Al Modon on May 7, 2013. The title of Suleiman's article roughly translates to "On the Margins of the Massacre," meaning not an account of the actual massacres but rather their effect on the nearby communities. He comments on the thousands who are displaced, and the large numbers massed on the highway connecting Tartus and Latikia as families gathered to flee the massacres occurring in the southern suburbs of Banias, Bayda, Ras Al Nabeh, and other nearby places. The pro-Assad instructions to the well-protected loyalist towns were "not to allow under any condition the 'entrance of the Sunnis' from Banias to Tartus." Those allowed in were greeted by sectarian curses, while those who could not find refuge spread along the the sides of the streets without much sympathy from the neighboring Alawite villages.

by Zaria Zardasht

The Sunni residents received warning of the price they would have to pay if they joined the "battle of the coast." Suleiman ominously observed that, though some Alawite residents felt self-consciously silent, a public satisfaction with the violence seemed to be the dominant emotion. As for the Sunnis, their silence embodied an attitude perhaps betraying a "feeling of helplessness and anticipation."

The chilling post-massacre narrative began when the killers returned, hands still stained with blood from the prior day's massacre as they paraded their captives on a Friday, including women and children. Perhaps the most distressing scene was when the women in the town uttered *zaghradat* (cries of joy or cheering shouts) while watching the humiliating parade of the victims. The Alawite residents, aware of the massacre well before the massacre reached television screens, gradually altered their attitudes from a dominant feeling of "arrogance" to "silence," coupled with self-serving and "irrational" justifications such as it was "Chechnayans" who came to Banias and committed the massacres!

In the absence of strong evidence to the contrary, it is Assad and his men who organized and implemented the mass slaughter of the Sunnis in parts of Banias, Bayda and others, with one aim in mind: the necessary destruction Syrian society's social fabric in order to pave the way for a future partitioning of Syria. While many Assad "progressive" and "pan-Arabist" supporters in Lebanon shamelessly blacken out the news of the massacres in their newspapers and TV stations (unless as they used to blame the victims of being the perpetrators), they forget the demographic composition of Syria which prohibit an Alawite state without a "sectarian genocide," which could claim hundreds of thousands of Syrians, both Alawites and Sunnis as well as others.

Other commentators highlighted another troubling dimension of the massacres. Hazem al-Amin wrote of "the pandemic of the massacre," referring to its purposeless and absurdist nature. In comparison to the religious massacres and killings of the Medieval period, which arguably held theological roots, today's killings in Syria are mindless, and "cultureless." One killer, said to have come from Iskenderun (historically part of Syria but today is a district in the Turkish province of Hatay)

and whom press reports describe as secular, non-native speaker of Arabic, indifferent to Assad's regime, while other press accounts describe him as Marxist-Leninist, but still professed a willingness to kill for the Syrian leader. Al-Amin goes on to state that in the Medieval period, killers killed for a purpose, however flawed, but that today's killings are like an epidemic, where death is easy and meaningless.

To some this senseless killing has become a match to cheer on by some Lebanese. "The pictures of children's limbs burned while alive juxtaposed with the team fans hailing the killer," wrote al-Amin in the Beirut-based electronic website NOW.

Another important column hammered on the disgraceful silence. "In an idealist world, there would have been mass demonstrations in the Syrian coastal towns condemning the massacres which were committed by the Assad loyalist sectarian gangs in Bayda Village and in the city of Banias," wrote Hussam Itani in Al Hayat newspaper.

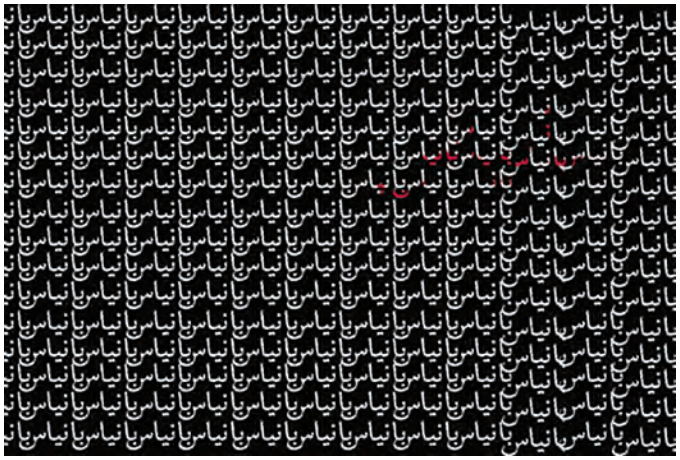
Itani's opening sentence evoked memories of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent massacres in Sabra and Shatila where the actual killers were right-wing Lebanese groups, but the Israelis controlled the entrances to the camps while occupying the Lebanese capital. Nonetheless, more than 400,000 Israeli protesters came to the streets protesting the massacres. While the Israeli protests could not resurrect the dead, they did show public dissatisfaction. While a majority of the Alawite community remains indifferent, as of yet no demonstration in the Arab world has condemned the massacres of Banias and Bayda, like what took place in Tel Aviv after Sabra and Shatila.

Itani dismisses the claim that Syria is free of sectarianism and that Bayda and Banias occurred at the hands of "terrorists." The ideas of Arab nationalism and *mumanaha* (rejectionism) further promote the myth that the Baath Party succeeded in removing sectarianism and replaced it with nationalism, which transcends parochial loyalties. After so many massacres, each one more gruesome than the other, it is time to finally acknowledge that the sectaraian question remains far from being resolved in Assad's Syria.

If there is such a "conspiracy" as claimed, it is "sectarianism." Itani makes it clear, without explicitly saying so, that the future of Syria and Lebanon will be determined by killers' knives and not by the shady analysis of the "rejectionist" media.

This point leads to another implication: accountability. Once unleashed, the beast of sectarianism will result in destructive consequences. The brutal massacres will invite an in-kind response, and the history of the region, namely Lebanon and Iraq, offers an unmistakable lesson.

The horrors on the Syrian coast sums up a tragic fact: Syria will not breakdown into a failed state, it already is. The past two years of unparalleled violence applied by a government against its own people makes this fact painfully clear and the only truly comparable government to the Assad regime is that of Nazi Germany, which targeted a segment of its own population. Hopefully, we have learned something since then.**AJ**



By Mohammed Amran

## 'The Image of the Slain Child in Banias'

Why would a child be slaughtered? What threats does he pose to the Assad regime or any tyrannical regime? Yassin al-Haj Saleh tackles these difficult questions in his article, "Image of the Slain Child in Banias," published in Al Modon, the electronic Lebanese newspaper on May 21, 2013.

The horrific image of a slaughtered child becomes transfixed in many a viewer's mind; it is a picture powerful enough to be eternally memorized.

Instinctively, we envelop childhood in a layer of innocence and playfulness; a child, full of wonder and delight, has yet to be corrupted. We are thus unable to wrap our heads around his slaughter, a "foolish and unnecessary, even more than being an absolute evil" deed, to use Saleh's words. A child's age and fragility explains why most people would dismiss slaughtering as unthinkable. When we hear of a child's death, we immediately express shock and disbelief, unconsciously attributing the incident to possible random accidents or even collateral damage of violence. But this slaughtering was deliberate, a wickedness we can't understand.

Children are soft targets. They lack the physical strength to fight adults, learning from a young age that they should find protection under the wings of their elders. On the surface their slaughter is not only a great betrayal, but madness. Both humanist and rational thinking suggest that a child is not worthy of being slaughtered morally or strategically; the killer would be better off spending his time on more valuable military tasks. But the deadly logic of genocide operates differently: the child is dangerous, not at young age, but when he grows up, in the future.

The slaughtering of children sends an important message to all of us, writes Saleh. In a world in which a child is methodically slaughtered, "none of us are safe from slaughter," regardless of age.**AJ**

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ALJADID
A Review of Arab Culture and Arts

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Vol. 17


## Cover Artist

### Etab Hreib

Etab Hreib (whose artwork "Fleeing from Death" appears on the cover) is a critically acclaimed Syrian watercolorist, who was born in Deir-Ez-Zor, Syria, and graduated from the Graphic Art Department, University of Damascus. She has exhibited in China, Germany, France, Spain, Britain and the U.S., and other countries. She is the recipient of Al-Mahros Golden Award in Tunisia, a Golden Award from the Chinese Ministry of Culture; and an award from the Ministry of Culture in Algeria. In addition to working full time as an artist, she has taught at the Fine Arts Department at Damascus University, gives painting courses for diabetic children, conducts workshops for the blind, and has worked as a set and costume designer for Syrian plays and movies




Al Jadid (ISSN 1523 - 746X) is published biannually by International Desktop Publishing, P.O. Box 805, Cypress, CA 90630, Telephone: (310) 227-6777, Fax: (310) 602-6222, E-Mail: aljadid@aljadid.com, Web site: www.aljadid.com. Subscriptions: $28.00 (individual); $40.00 (institutional). Add $10 for postage in Canada and $16 in other foreign countries.

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**D. W. Aossey** ("Understanding Ethnic Media," p. 30) is a novelist and writer based in Southern California.

**Faraj Bayrakdar** ("Tashriqa "Prayers for Homs," p. 15) is a noted Syrian poet who spent 13 years in the Assads' prisons.

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**Susan Muaddi Darraj** ("Mourid Barghouti 'Memoir': Journey Toward the Self," p. 30) is an author and editor whose essays, book reviews, and fiction have appeared in the Monthly Review. Baltimore Magazine, Al Jadid, and others.

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**Yassin al-Haj Saleh** ("Aleppo: A Tale of Three Cities," p .7) is a Syrian thinker, writer and former political prisoner who spent 16 years in the Syrian regime's prisons during the 1980s and 1990s. He is a regular contributor to various Arabic newspapers and periodicals, including a weekly column in Al-Hayat newspaper. He is the author of many books, including "Salvation boys: 16 years in Syrian prisons" which was reviewd in this magazine (Al Jadid Vol. 17, no. 64).

**Rebecca Joubin** ("Yassin Bakoush: Syria Loses Another National Treasure," p.14; "Director Haitham Haqqi: Witness to Modern Syrian Drama," p.16; "Actor Jihad Abdo Unravels the Relationship Between the Syrian Censor and the Artistic Community," p.19; "Wives in Tension," p. 22) is assistant professor of Arabic at Davidson College.

**Ghassan Kanafani** ( "Thirst," P.34) is a late prominent Palestinian novelist novelist, activist, journalist. Among his many works, "Mawt Sarie Raqam 12" (1961), "Men in the Sun" (1963), "Return to Haifa" (1970). Kanafani (1936-1972) was assassinated in Beirut on July 8, 1972.

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## Asking the Wrong Questions From and About Adonis on the Syrian Revolution

I do not know why the debate with or about Adonis's attitude toward the Syrian revolution ought to be confined to intellectual approaches. He advances what has become popularized in Arabic to be a revolution in *Alrou'ous* and not in *al-Kursi*, which roughly means a revolution ought to be in the "heads" of the people and not the "chair," meaning state or regime. I guess some critics do not go beyond such arguments due to cultural taboos – which consider mentioning that someone who is a beneficiary from privileges due to ties with the political establishment – falls under personal attack. Can one deny that Adonis might not be the only intellectual in the world to make peace with an oppressive regime out of "non-intellectual positions?" When I say we might be asking the wrong questions from and about Adonis, I am suggesting we transcend exclusively intellectual debates like those between classical and structural Marxists or those between political culture and modernization theorists, to recall just a few of the scholarly discussions we had as graduate students and academics. I wonder how could it be possible for Adonis to remain a soft critic in the face of "crimes against humanity" by the Assad regime with close to a 100,000 dead, five millions displaced and destruction of almost one-third of Syria's physical structure according to most international and human rights organizations. Yes, many expected more from Adonis! And I include myself among "those." Would Adonis want to be remembered as a mild critic or a bystander for an Arab Pol Pot like Assad's Cambodian counterpart? I ask this question as a great admirer of Adonis the critic and poet whom I have read, written about and translated for this magazine. The evidence I invoke in supporting a different line of inquiry into the political positions of Adonis toward the Syrian revolution is neither sectarian nor because of his "idealistic" approach that favors reforming "man" before the "state." In other words, Adonis' current attitudes guide me in that different direction, coupled with an incident from the past when he withdrew his name from signing a French petition demanding the release of a Syrian poet who was political prisoner, (Faraj Bayrakdar). Although he subsequently justified himself, some of those were involved in organizing the petition at the time cited what can be construed as a "security" reason more than whether or not Adonis had heard of Bayrakdar as a poet.

## Tamam Azzam: Artist from Art to Revolution

Dima Wannous, a Syrian journalist and daughter of the late noted playwright Saadallah Wannous, has been providing exceptional coverage of the Arab art and cultural scene for the newly established Lebanese electronic newspaper, Al Mudon.

"Untitled" by Nazir Nabah ("Contemporary Syrian Fine Arts," 1985)

She recently talked with Syrian artist Tamam Azzam, whom she claims remains as engaged in documenting the events of the Syrian revolution through his paintings as he was almost two years ago. As Wannous wrote, "From the map to the sniper's bullet, to the destruction of the liberty statue in one of Homs's suburbs that was transformed into piles of rubble. From the students who returned to their classrooms to find nothing but destruction, to the MiG aircraft which flies across the 'national' air space to bomb the 'enemies.' Didn't he get bored from this documentation?"

Like many critics, Wannous is concerned with 'political art': what is the future of such art when the revolution succeeds or if it were to be defeated? "Despite his continued passion in documenting the most important events of the revolution (bombing bakeries, use of chemical weapons, dire conditions in the refugee camps...), the viewer perhaps still asks: to what extent would these works continue? Does their importance stem from the moment or will they continue for many years as a witness of the revolution," wrote Wannous." Azzam offers a realistic, and even objective answer: "Undoubtedly the influence of these works will vary with time. I often try to complete the works under a dual influence, that is, of the moment on the one hand, and of artistic value on the other. I am taken by the moment and do not give much attention to the

future, for there is no past before the revolution for me."

Azzam's assessment of what art can do is evident when telling Wannous, "as time goes, I think that this is all I can do, and I do not believe that painting or writing or any other form of expression can express fully the sorrow of an old man waiting in front of a bakery, the bitter cold in the refugee camps, and the hunger of the refugees. We could not comprehend the full impact of the moment a missile hit or the sound of aircraft. Thus we borrow a little from people's fears and sorrows, just enough so that we can express our own sorrow."

But Azzam comes across as an artist moving away from "art to revolution" and even "crossing the line," when he suggests to Wannous that he would send "to the Zaatari refugee camp (in Jordan) three huge volumes of books by Adonis, some plays by Ziad al-Rahbani, films by Durayd Lahham, and poetry collections by Unsi al-Haj and Nazih al-Afash, hoping they will make a fire to warm a Syrian child." Azzam's anger with some Lebanese and Syrian intellectuals who did not stand with the revolution is overt, as they provided intellectual 'legitimacy' to a murderous regime.**AJ**

## Aleppo: A Tale of Three Cities

### BY YASSIN AL-HAJ SALEH

(Yassin al-Hajj Saleh is considered one of the most important observers of Syrian politics. He spent 16 years in Syrian prison, an experience about which he recently wrote a book. One Syrian scholar rejected the description of Yassin al-Haj Saleh as a political observer or analyst and instead he considers him the ultimate historian of the Syrian Revolution. Recently he wrote a short essay on Aleppo, a city with which he had an intimate history. With his permission, I translated his contribution about Aleppo. The title "Aleppo: A Tale of Three Cities" is mine. —Elie Chalala)

I lived in Aleppo for about seven years, in two periods separated by about 17 years; the late 1970s and the late 20th century.

The first Aleppo was a depressed city, heavily permeated by a harsh political/security presence, and a deadly impersonal system. The regime sought to establish itself as the only decisive personality in the city as a whole. The city was also suffering from overpopulation, and rapid, expansive development without balanced growth in services, all influenced by increased widespread religiosity and an intensification of conflict.

As a non-native resident of Aleppo, I had never lived in a city that was so withdrawn. At the university we formed a mixed group of students coming from different parts of the city, including its countryside, and from different religions and sects, Palestinians included.

And the city resisted the regime's infiltration. Its universities, trade unions, political activists, and religious groups were the most active in opposing the regime of Hafez al-Assad. Apart from the universities, the opposition was urban and mainly from Aleppo.

Aleppowas conquered in the spring of 1980, when all opposition groups were crushed. That era marked the end of an autonomous cultural life, the end of a relatively free debate on campus, and also of the cinema. This was the second Aleppo.

Like all Syrian cities, Aleppo was heading toward being soul-less and impersonal.

Syria's second city is as large as Damascus, but it is like all of Syria: no opinion, no culture, no policy, no public sphere in which people associate with each other, no apparent religiosity, although everything implies its religiosity.


In the first Aleppo, my nomadic college life led me to move between seven homes, all in central neighborhoods unmentioned by the satellite TVs covering the revolution. In the second Aleppo, I lived in a peripheral neighborhood, Sheikh Maksoud, inhabited by Arabs, Kurds, Muslims, and Christians.

When Hafez al-Assad died in June 2000, residents of major neighborhoods rushed to stock up on bread, canned food and vegetables, and human traffic on the streets slowed down. But none of this happened in the peripheral areas of Aleppo where the lives of the inhabitants rarely intersected with the lives of presidents and their deaths.

The third Aleppo, the one now in open revolt, started from the rural parts and from the most marginalized slums: Salahuddin, Alsakhur, Alklaseh, Bab Alhadid, Al Shaar, Al Zabadieh.... As if these neighborhoods had retained their spirit and personality while the major districts had become devoid of them, with the state having sizable presence, capital and domesticated religiosity.

When it comes to the spirit and personality of a city, the regime exhausts itself trying to eliminate them and pursue their ghosts. When it feels endangered, it kills. It has already killed Homs, Deir ez-Zor, and nothing will deter it from killing Aleppo if it could. If left alive, this wild monster will kill all of Syria.**AJ**

This is an edited translation from the Arabic by Elie Chalala. The Arabic version appeared in As Safir Cultural Supplement. Translation is by permission from the author.

# Fear Under the Assad Dictatorship Has 'Smell' and 'Color'

In analyzing all of the discourse about the Arab Spring and the Syrian revolution, the claim that seems to be most central is the breaking-down of the wall of fear. The evidence supporting this claim is overwhelming: the death of 80,000 Syrians, the disappearance and imprisonment of tens of thousands, the targeting of civilians by military aircraft, Scud missiles, cluster, phosphoric, and barrel bombs, to the displacement of close to four million people inside and outside of Syria. Of equal if not greater significance is the continued resistance against the Assad dictatorship, now two years old, and a historic event unprecedented in modern Arab history. Yet, there has not been a sizable literature, much less books in English on this subject that stand out. Thus any evidence that might enrich such literature is worthy of collection, and the interview Dima Wannous conducted with the young Syrian artist, Mohammed Amran, modest as it is, shed some light on how politically conscious Syrians saw and perceived fear under the Assads' dictatorship.

"Untitled" by Zaki Salam ("Contemproray Syrian Fine Arts," 1985)

Mohammed Amran stood with the Syrian revolution from the very beginning, utilizing his creative work as a means of support, wrote Dima Wannous in the cultural section of the Lebanon-based Mudon electronic newspaper. "He has not hesitated for a moment, as if he had been preparing for the Syrian revolution from childhood."

His harsh indictment of dictatorship in Syria aside, he does not refrain from criticizing some of the practices of the rebels, telling Wannous that "these practices started to provoke me, and we have to start to be critical."

But he was critical from the days of his youth, when he was enlisted in what then called "Baath Vanguards."' As he told Wannous, he was neither a "vanguard" nor a "Baathist."

"I used to fear Hafez al-Assad in my childhood, fearing the frame of his body, and his features which used to frighten me most. I used to see him as someone above the earth, as god, his frowned eyes were quite frightening, while his voice cannot be described. That voice comes out choked, and thin as that of an old man. His pictures were plastered on our school notebooks...Fear has a picture... and the picture is connected with him personally," Amran told Wannous.

In the end of her meeting with Amran, he told Wannous one of the many stories of continued fear which he lived in childhood, the "childhood of Baathist vanguards." Amran's story, Wannous wrote, "is one of the best stories I heard or imagined about fear. How does fear exist? Fear has a color and smell."

"There are some things accumulated in my memory. I am afraid, for example, from 1980s. I imagine a picture whose color is pale yellow, dusted. I recall my fear from TV programs

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## Call for Papers

### *Beyond the Label: Arab American Faces, Places, and Traces*

**A Conference organized by the Arab American Studies Association**

**at the Arab American National Museum, Dearborn, Michigan, April 4-6, 2014**

The label "Arab American" is imbued with layered meanings within both academic settings and public arenas. Variously embraced, sometimes contested, often redefined, Arab American identity constructions have been influenced by historical factors, discourses of self-identification, and normative processes of data collection. Foremost in promoting understanding of the changing nature of the Arab American label have been influential works by archivists and historians such as Alixa Naff. We invite papers that address Arab American formations or contestations from a variety of disciplines, and we especially welcome works that explore the impact of historical research on interdisciplinary and comparative analyses or methodological approaches to the study of Arab Americans.

At this conference, we aim to explore questions such as: How are Arab Americans constructed differently in various discourses and in different historical periods? How do familial, local, ethnic, transnational, class and/or religious affiliations influence Arab American identity formations? How are such formations shaped through sexual, ideological, or political orientations? Who is excluded and who is included in various spaces and designations, and how do such inclusions or exclusions shape various narratives about Arab American history and identity formations? How has Naff's work impacted Arab American Studies?

The Arab American Studies Association is pleased to organize this conference in recognition of the legacy of Alixa Naff, who passed away in 2013. Naff's contributions to archiving Arab American history include a collection of oral histories and artifacts that she catalogued and donated to the Archives Center, National Museum of American History in Washington DC. Her preeminent publication, *Becoming American: The Early Arab-American Experience*, remains a pioneering and influential history of Arab Americans.

Abstracts of 300 words in length, along with brief bios, should be sent as MS-Word attachments to

**conference@arabamericanstudies.org** by September 15, 2013. Papers submitted will be considered for publication after the conference. Final drafts should be ready and submitted by January 15, 2014.

# Fatima's Head

**BY ZIAD MAJED**

It is hard to imagine what happened to Fatima,* and it is hard to describe the silence that engulfed the witnesses of her death. I think the artistic works on Facebook that restored her head and depicted a rose garden or the moon or the sun have tried to compensate for that terrible silence and ease the pain of Fatima and her loved ones and all of us together.

What can be done to a Syrian child who "lost" her head?! And what can be said to a girl sprawled in her dress on the ground, arms spread wide, her small, drooping shoulders clinging to the wall directly?

"Vase with Fourteen Sunflowers"(1889) by Van Gogh

Fatima Maghlaj did not understand what happened to her; she was headless all of a sudden. In an instant she lost the ability to dream and focus. She was paralyzed. She wanted to feel the dryness of her throat and ask for water. She wanted to call mother or father, but she could not make the words with her tongue and she could not find their picture in her memory. She tried to look around her to reassure herself that she was sleeping in a safe place to wait until these strange feelings of emptiness had ended. But her eyes and eyebrows and eyelashes were out of reach, scattered in the emptiness of the cold room. She found nothing but a tuft of hair that her mother had combed in preparation for her uncle's wedding that evening.

Fatima's head flew.

It did not dislocate like the surrealist would have it do.

The head was just plucked out by a shell without even a moment to say goodbye, to apologize for the necessity of carrying with it her words and songs, her smiles and tears and somnolence. But Fatima surrendered to a state of unconsciousness, to the death of her imagination and the end of waiting for presents and a school book bag.

She knew that she did not have the ability to do or say or wish after her head departed, after her body was left parentless, resigned, waiting for the warmth of the earth.

-2-

The tyrant likes people without heads.

He likes them without voices and dreams and plans. He sees them merely as hands clapping and ready to kill for him, merely as feet walking behind him to their death.

The tyrant likes children without heads.

For within their heads ideas have no fear and words are never suicidal. Fatima's head was teeming with colors and laughter. So he tore it out.

-3-

It is necessary for those people silent before the destruction of Fatima's head to grope for their heads every day. To grope for their children's heads. To remember the maroon hair and white teeth and eyes looking for joy that melted, not letting the smooth, small body to collect them and restore its youthfulness.

Fatima is a child who epitomizes the Syrian tragedy today, and her beheading is a daily death that affects tens of Syrian men and women who suffer before the bystanders of the world, before the passive and complicit, the indecisive and impotent.

Fatima's death haunts thousands of her companions in Syria. There is no salvation for them or cure within the shadow of death other than seizing freedom for their country, reflecting their hopes and desires. There is no salvation except in toppling the tyrant's regime and in regaining some of the pending justice of Syria and in the world, which has been a helplessly watching her for decades. Only when that terrible explosion that left a little girl headless in a Syrian village becomes a distant memory with no probable tragedies like it that threaten the souls of Fatima's brothers and sisters…only when Fatima's death becomes a story that is told tenderly about a girl that redeemed the future of the children of her country with her head will Syria find salvation. **AJ**

***Fatima Maghlaj was a Syrian girl who was killed in Kafar Awid, in al-Zawia Mountain district, when it was bombed by a regime military aircraft. Pictures and videos of her body decapitated were shown online.**

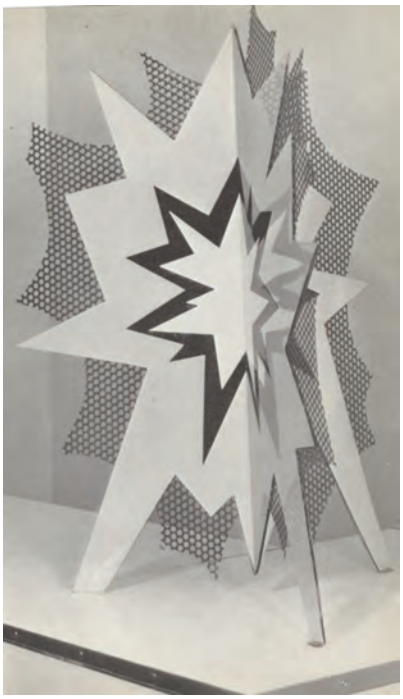
*Translated from the Arabic by Joseph Sills.*

# The Egyptian Contemporary Novel: A Survey of a Revolutionary Endeavour

**BY NADA RAMADAN**

One of the recurrent discussions in literary circles in Egypt is whether a new literary movement has started and whether we can dub it "Revolution Literature." It was on the 25th of January, 2011, that the Egyptian Revolution was hailed as successful, and why not, President Mubarak's abdication was celebrated till the early hours of dawn in the streets and squares across the country. Egyptians were caught in a frenzy of hope and euphoria, volunteers cleaned the streets, pavements were re-painted, the debt to martyrs was chanted, and everyone dreamt of a tomorrow relatively free of corruption.

One year after the 2012 presidential election, the picture has become utterly different. An alarming public debt, the prevalence of corruption, a constitution that threatened to curtail freedom and degrade the fragile position women and children had held in society, a weakening sense of security, the near collapse of various sectors in the country, especially tourism, all have merged with a rise of fanaticism and an ongoing attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood (whose political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party, held an outright majority as well as the presidency) to dominate constitutional, governmental, political, and social life, which has led many to question the nature of the revolution itself.



"Standing Explosion" (1965) by Lichenstein

Did the events taking place in Tahrir Square constitute a real revolution? Did the West manipulate the Egyptian uprising or even the Arab Spring itself? And if the uprising was genuine, did the different Islamic parties hijack it? If one cannot define what the Revolution stands for, how can one define "revolution literature?" Moreover, if the term is accepted, what will constitute such a movement? Should it be restricted by content and/or publishing date? Creativity is not always an ephemeral excitement; if an element of writing literature involves prolonged periods of observation, "revolution literature" will need ample time to evolve. Art, in general, has prospered around the revolution; street performances, graffiti, underground music bands, auto/biographies and political writings have flourished. Traces of the revolution can be tracked through books written during and after the Mubarak 30-year era. And those revolutionary strands must be explored, dividing the novels into three categories based on their publication dates: works published between 2000 and 2011, works written during the 18 days of the Revolution – from the 25th of January until the 11th of February, 2011– and works written after Mubarak's abdication.

At the turn of the 21st century, Egypt witnessed prolific writings that warned of a coming political and social change. Such writings – which could be more appropriately described as "Resistance Literature" – include the internationally acclaimed "*'Emaret Ya'koubeyan*" ("The Yacoubian Building," written in 2002 and first translated in 2004) by Alaa al-Aswany. Set in downtown Cairo in the 1990's, the novel condemns the corrupt one-party state, whose citizens either abandon the country for promising careers abroad or show no loyalty to the government and, in many cases, resort to extremism to counter the growing poverty, moral degradation and economic stagnation. In 2005, Youssef al-Kaeed highlighted the ambiguous and volatile relationship between Muslims and Christians in Egypt in "*Kesmet al-'orama*" ("Division of Adversaries"), where different characters narrate the events of a single day. It is no wonder the more conservative readers have often criticized such a sensitive subject – described by al-Kaeed as a "contrived religious crisis" and "artificial devoutness." The year 2008 saw the publication of two resistance novels: "*Yotopya*" ("Utopia"), a grim futuristic account of Egyptian society in the year 2023, by Ahmed Khaled Tawfiq, and "*al-Afandi*" ("Effendi") by Mohammed Nagui, a criticism of the middle class obsessed with chasing monetary and personal gain even at the expense of the nation and the society. In 2009, the feminist, activist, and writer Nawal al-Saadawi published "*Zeina*" (English translation published in 2011) where reality, dreams and fiction overlap to challenge the stigma of illegitimacy and confront the patriarchal oppression of the Egyptian society. Set against the backdrop of revolution in Cairo, the novel allows the reader to grasp al-Saadawi's activism in the Tahrir Square Revolution. Though published in March 2011, Hamed Abd al-Sammad's novel, "*Wada'an Ayotteha al-Sama'*" ("Farewell Sky") was written in 2010; it revolves around the Egyptians' lack of hope in the future in Egypt and their desperate attempts to emigrate. "The novel that predicted the 25th of January Revolution" is what is written on the cover of "*Ajnihat al-Farash*" ("Wings of the Butterfly"). Written by Mohamed Salmawy in January 2011, the novel is considered a foreshadowing of the uprisings in both Tunisia and Egypt months before they actually took place; though the novelist himself

admits that his intention was far from foretelling. His aim, rather, was to portray contemporary political life in Egypt. According to Salmawy, "Literature is not a photographic art that depicts reality, on the contrary, it looks to the future with all its political and social manifestations."

The second stage of revolutionary or resistance novels includes the writing built around the first 18 days of the Egyptian uprising, mainly Mona Prince's "*Ismi Thawra*" ("My Name is Revolution," 2012) and Ahdaf Soueif's "Cairo: My City, Our Revolution" (written and published in English, 2012). Both works are gender sensitive, as they highlight Egyptian women's activism during the 18 days of the Revolution. In her autobiography/novel, Soueif records the revolution using newspaper headlines, tweets, Facebook statuses and YouTube sources – elements of social media that characterize the Arab Spring – and interrupts her narrative with autobiographical extracts; she does so in the same way the reader's experience is interrupted with reality. While Soueif's style is analytical and metaphorical, Prince's style is more dramatic and humorous. "My Name is Revolution" follows the day-by-day events in a chronological order. Contradictory to other works where the role of the Egyptian woman during the uprising is marginalized, both novels by Soueif and Prince bring forth women's role in the Revolution, transcending the traditional orientalist image of Arab women. This openly contrasts other works written roughly at the same time, such as Saad al-Kersh's "*al-Thawra al-Aan . . . Yawmiyat Men Midan al-Tahrir*" ("The Revolution Now . . . Diary from the Tahrir Square") which is nearly void of women's participation in the Revolution.

The year 2012 witnessed the publication of various novels that fall under the third phase of revolutionary literature. Journalist Ibrahim Eissa started writing his novel "*Mawlana*" ("Our Sheikh") in 2009 and only finished it in March 2012. Reflecting his political battles with authority (Mubarak's regime and later Supreme Council of Armed Forces temporary rule), Eissa's work tackles the new phenomenon of the sheikhs who have become TV stars and their shady, intertwining relationships with politicians, businessmen and security institutions; he boldly exposes how religion is currently misused in Egypt. Eissa's novel is open-ended, concluding right after the church bombing which took place in real life, a few weeks before the eruption of the Revolution. Although "*Ana 'asheqt*" ("I Fell in Love") by Mohammed al-Mansi Kandeel does not directly discuss the revolution, its portrayal of the protagonist's journey from the slum areas to Cairo's posh neighbourhood and from university to an over-crowded prison, sheds light on a city on the verge of a revolution. "The novel is not a testimony of the revolution as it happened, it is a struggle with the limitations faced by individuals and writers . . . an act of unmasking society and politics in Egypt" was how Ezzedine Shoukri Fishere described his latest novel, "*Bab al-Khuruj*" ("The Exit") in which he prophesizes the future of Egyptian politics. In his novel, Fishere exposes the future restructuring of the Ministry of Interior and the government's failure to stand against street thuggery, themes that already occupy the current Egyptian political scene. "*Bab al-Khuruj*," therefore, becomes a catalogue of how Egypt will collapse if its current political, social, and economic dire situations are not addressed.

In the Eleventh International Symposium on Comparative Literature, hosted by Cairo University in November 2012, keynote speaker Bill Ashcroft argued, "creativity is important to revolution because its function is to inspire hope. The belief in future change is the fuel that drives the revolutionary spirit, and art and literature are prime movers of that belief because they reveal that a different world is possible." Literature,

*Continued on page 15*

# "Quick Bread"

**BY HASHEM SHAFIQ**

The planes bombarded the bakeries
next
the wheat was martyred
then the bread died.
What troubled person
is chasing the dough?
In what province, what country
could flour become a fugitive
attacked by bombs and rockets.
On what battlefield, could
food become a means of warfare
and a lesson in genocide?

Oh destruction slow down
while you chase our hungry mouths with rockets
in every corner and place.
The hungry displaced on the silk road
looking now for a bit of hope
displaced behind these borders
mumbling
following their destinies
in the snow passage...
to cross through the muddy tents
to reach the bread,
but the planes are attacking
the bakery and the bread
killing the wheat immediately,
slaughtering flowers
and killing the roots.

*Translated from the Arabic by Basma Botros and Aric Reviere*

The original Arabic version of poem appeared in Al Hayat newspaper.

# The Donkey Killers

**BY ELIE CHALALA**

One might wonder about the title of this article at a time when Syria is paying a heavy human cost on a daily basis. The environment of killing cultivated by the Assad regime is producing a culture of death, as many of us have witnessed via graphic images on satellite TV, Facebook and YouTube video that amounts to some a sort of terrible reality television.

It is a culture of death: otherwise how can we explain the brutal killings of scores of donkeys in Syria by Bashar al-Asaad's *Shabbiha* (thugs)? Cruelty toward animals is nothing new – in Syria or elsewhere – but few would deny that the culture of death is influencing the treatment of animals in that country. Famed Syrian director Ossama Mohammed, who has twice been interviewed by this magazine, has been commenting on the Syrian Revolution with a special sensitivity and, at times, with irony. One of his many articles on the subject, which was published in Al Hayat newspaper (September 26, 2011), was titled "The Donkeys of the Others." The article is at once moving and painful. Largely inspired by Mohammed's piece, I am calling this essay "The Donkey Killers."

*"Untitled"*,1977, by Susan Rothenberg ("M*useum of Modern Art")*

Attitudes toward animals offer insight into character, according to Muhammad. He supports this idea with an Arab proverb: *"min hamiruhum tarifunehum."* Roughly translated, this means "their characters can be recognized from the way they treat their donkeys."

The recent brutal slaughter of a group of donkeys was everywhere in the news, as well as on YouTube, Facebook, and other media venues. The Syrian director asks his readers if they witnessed the fate of the donkeys on YouTube: as one of his readers, I can affirm that I did. I watched it again and again. The scene of the donkeys being forced to assemble together did not seem all natural, except when some of them appeared seduced by the camera. Sadness was evident on the faces of some, as if they anticipated what was coming. Even though the audio is not entirely clear, I could hear their captors using the word "*A'daam*," which means "execution" in Arabic. Immediately I thought, since when are donkeys executed? Isn't this language reflective of the culture of death? I also heard one soldier offer mercy to a little donkey –a "cute" one – suggesting that it be saved. Other than that, every soldier seemed ready for the act and they immediately began shooting the assembled donkeys. The *Kalashnikov* even fired at animals that began wandering away, until every last one was on the ground – with the exception of a small one that was pulled behind and seen standing among the soldiers. Perhaps that was the "cute, little one."

The pleasure taken in killing the donkeys was evident by the way the soldiers took turns doing so, as if every one wanted to bear the badge of honor of being a donkey-killer. Perhaps wanting to savor the impending brutality, some of the soldiers asked their comrads to take their picture before the killing started.

Mohammed analyzes how and why the shooters killed the donkeys. The director imagines a scene that is a mixture of fiction and a reproduction of what happens or could happen in real life. The killers combined brutality with deception: they used mobile phones to coordinate their crime; they lured the donkeys closer. Trained to obey when humans call them, the donkeys gathered. But Mohammed also tells us that donkeys do not "lack feelings and intuition." Villagers, he says, claim that when a "young donkey reaches an edge, such as that of a well or cliff, the animal will stop before it falls in."

As for the donkeys, Mohammed writes, "they never watched the film '1900' by Bernard Bertolucci, wherein the Taaviani Brothers keep their eyes open as fascist bullets claim their lives in a wheat field.

Drawing on his background in cinema, Mohammed says that filmmaking is a painstaking job, in which, after about a month of work, the technical crew often becomes tired and resentful of the director's demands – even if they had previously liked him. But after six months of killing, he says, "you are shocked by the preparations taken to film this 'shot' of massacring the donkeys." And there are two mysterious reasons for this.

The first is the "spirit of playfulness," or fun, among Kalashnikov holders. The second is the insistence on grouping (or clustering) the donkeys into a single "bloc."

Mohammed could not understand why the technical team was in such a rush to assemble the donkeys: the deadly *Kalashnikov* could have killed the animals easily, regardless of their grouping.

Mohammed proposes that this was done for both cinematic/technical and psychological reasons. "I do not know which is the most outrageous," he writes.

Muhammad is quite right. His explanation emphasizes the human capacity for cruelty and observes that technology often abets criminality. "In the relationship between form and content, the technical discovers the psychological, and at the same time the psychological invents the technical." Speaking with technical authority, director Mohammed says the donkeys were gathered together so that their last "moment of life" could be photographed in one cadre.

The "cinematic killers" have the desire for including a "shot" of "mass murder," and thus a "mass massacre." Unsettlingly, it seems that even the fun of killing the donkeys separately or in graphic detail would not have satisfied the venom of the killers' imagination, an imagination eager to play with death like a toy.

Like humans, donkeys have character traits. They also make important contributions to rural life in the Middle East, where they are known for their loyalty to and generosity toward their "man-brother." Even the donkey-killer could not deny the essentialness of these animals to the Middle-Eastern livelihood. The donkey essentially bestows its favors – even a sense of solidarity – upon the rural poor, who tend to be isolated and are often without water, electricity, schools, and transportation. Under these circumstances, the donkey emerges as a great asset to the people, with its value sometimes equaling and even exceeding a man's. These animals are accustomed to traveling long distances from villages without wells or plumbing, returning with drinking water for young and old alike.

Life without donkeys in remote rural areas would be difficult to imagine. The animals made bread available before there were bakeries or supermarkets, as it was the donkeys that were awoken early in the morning and loaded with heavy bags of wheat to transport to far-away mills. They carried with them the scents of flour, dough, bread, and wood. In the mills, young girls and boys fall in love, and so donkeys mate with other donkeys.

Appealing to the conscience of the donkey-killer, Mohammed reminds him of the donkey's many vital contributions to community life. "It was they who carried you out on their backs toward the sunrise and sunset, to the plain fields, and to the songs. It was they who breathed their humanity to transport you to the physician's clinic in a neighboring village to relieve you from pain."

Yes, the *"min hamiruhum tarifunehum"* suggests that there are two kinds of people: those who beat and abuse donkeys and those who treat them with kindness and gratitude. Of course, all this "before riding the bicycle, bus, Mercedes and the tank."

Still, there lingers the question: why did the soldiers fire at the donkeys? Was it because the donkeys belonged to the "Others"-- those who were rebelling against the regime? Or was it because the donkeys themselves became the "Others"? which would make the killing entirely senseless and self-indulgent.

As the soldier prepared for the kill, perhaps he failed to realize the significance of the donkey's last look at him. Maybe the shooter didn't realize that the donkey remembered him as a weeping child who followed his father and mother around as they prepared to sell the young donkey at the bazaar.

It was in the home that the donkey met his killer, but the shooter did not remember.

The donkey did...remembering the child, the river, the mill, and the smell of flour baked with blood.

"Which memory were you avenging?"

Or was it a mere hour of boredom or leisure that lead you to play such callous games with life? Do you know why the donkey balked? It appears the donkey remembers, becomes sad and thus balks.**AJ**

# CONTRIBUTORS

*Continued from page 5*

**Lynne Rogers** ("Innocence Crushed," p. 24) is a professor and author whose articles have appeared in various publications.

**Hanna Saadah** ("The Eye of the Needle," p. 31) is Emeritus Clinical Professor of Medicine, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. He is also the author of several novels and books of poetry.

**Hashem Shafiq** ("Quick Bread," p. 11 ) is an Iraqi poet.

**Pauline Homsi Vinson** ("War, Trauma, and Memory in Anglophone Literature ofThe Lebanese Diaspora," p. 25," and "Marvelous Meanderings," p. 27) a scholar who teaches literature

*Continued on page 24*

## Lorca's Poetry Inspires A Syrian Town!

On June 4th of 2012, the Syrian rebels lifted up a sign in the town of Amouda in Al Hasaka Province which featured Garcia Lorca's saying: *"What's a man without freedom, O Mariana? How would I love you if I am not free? How can I offer you my heart if it isn't mine?"* This sign, which was one of thousands hoisted since the onset of the Syrian revolution, shows a deep aesthetic relationship expressed in a physical and spiritual interconnection between the rebel and the revolution. It is a relationship between a monstrous reality and a moral aesthetic that marks the true experience of the individual and the revolution...The dignified character of the revolution stands in stark contrast with the contemptible nature of the regime which is controlled by instinctive, atrocious, and corrupting forces coupled with a rage for power and money.**AJ**

*(From Ala Shayeb al-Din, An Nahar Cultural Supplement, March 16, 2013.) Edited Translation from the Arabic by Elie Chalala*

# Yassin Bakoush: Syria Loses Another National Treasure

**BY REBECCA JOUBIN**

On Sunday, February 24, 2013 Yassin Bakoush, one of Syria's most talented and adored comedians, was killed as he drove through a rebel-held check-point in the Assali neighborhood. He was on his way home to the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp in southern Damascus, an area that has witnessed unyielding combat between the regime and rebels. Not surprisingly, the regime blamed "terrorists" for his death, relying on a rhetoric that has become ever more stale, transparent, and tragic. On the other side, individuals from the Free Syrian Army zoomed in their camera on his blood-stained face, held up his passport for the world to see, and announced that Bakoush had just been murdered by the regime's rocket-propelled grenade. As both sides callously accused the other, there was no *Allah Yarhamhoo*, a simple yet necessary phrase attesting to his humanity. In truth, Bakoush was not specifically targeted, but was caught in the crossfire. He died the death of the helpless citizen in a war zone. His was the fate of countless Syrians whose names will remain lost to the world; his life and death illustrate the brutality of the regime.

Yassin Bakoush by Etab Hreib for Al Jadid

Born in Damascus in 1938, Yassin Bakoush went on to be become part of the rich assortment of characters in the burlesque, politically-centered comedies of the 1960s and 1970s that founded Syrian drama. Bakoush's character Yassin al-Ajdab, the oft browbeaten husband, played alongside the power-wielding Fattoom (Najah Hafeez), Abu Antar the muscle man (Naji Jaber), Ghawwar, the wicked, yet loveable character (Durayd Lahham), the good natured Husni Burazan (Nihad Qala'i), and Abu Sayyah, an illiterate and kindhearted strongman (Rafiq Sibai'i). Each character's role changed depending on the plot of the episode or mini-series, but generally maintained his or her personality throughout. These early political parodies – which were first filmed in a studio above the Qasioun Mountains, then moved to Beirut and back to Damascus—were imbued with transgressive political, social, and economic critiques of the Baath socialist project and failed Arab nationalist aspirations. The cycle of corruption, poverty, imprisonment, and lack of opportunity in these stories portrayed a government that intentionally failed its people in order to maintain and legitimize its position.

Bakoush's naïve character with an ingenuous smile and addictive pout touched the heart of generations of viewers not only in Syria but throughout the Arab world as well. We can remember him in *"Sahh al-Nawm"* (Good Morning, 1973) as the low-level employee in Fattoom's hotel who spends his day alongside Ghawwar searching for clients to fill the rooms. In one episode, Ghawwar stealthily slips pills in everyone's coffee to cause memory loss so that he can marry Fattoom. But an air-headed Yassin, who mistakenly serves the potent drink to the man signing the marriage contract, foils his plan. Viewers also cherished his performance in *"Milh wa Sukkar"* (Salt and Sugar, 1973) as the dull-witted husband of Fattoom. After she strikes him, he enters the police station lamenting that since marriage, he gets hit more than he eats. The scene when he finally tries to defend himself ends with him hiding under the bed to escape Fattoom's wrath. His performance in the mini-se ries *"Wayn al-Ghalat"* (Where's the Mistake?, 1979) is just as delightful. In the episode *"al-Bahth 'an al-Wazifeh"* (Searching for Employment), for example, he plays the kind-hearted friend of Ghawwar and Abu Antar, who asks a relative to help them find a job and is thrilled when he hears they are now residing in a wealthy neighborhood. When he sees them pop out of a trashcan, he is astonished;Ghawwar and Abu Antar answer him in unison, "Your nephew got us a

*wazifeh* (job) that has no *barani* (extra trips through bribes)." Through the multitude of scenes of innocence, kindness, and grace, Yassin Bakoush continues to touch the lives of his fans.

Yet despite his enormous talent and impressively long career – he continued working in the theater until the age of 75 – he had barely enough money to feed himself and resided in a poor neighborhood in Yarmouk. How can it be that after a life full of accomplishment, he lived in utter penury? This tragedy can be attributed to the corruption of a regime, which used culture to gain legitimacy. Both Hafiz al-Asad and Bashar attempted to make intellectuals dependent upon the state in order to co-opt them. This was not simply a question of attempted government co-optation by showering intellectuals with gifts and privileges. The government bestowed favors on an exclusive few to create tensions between artists, in part of their "divide and conquer" strategy. During those early political parodies, while Durayd Lahham stole the spotlight and reaped benefits from the state, Yassin Bakoush was pushed to the margins, referred to as a minor character, and relegated to the life of the destitute. While Lahham has stood by the regime and defended its actions to this day, Bakoush remained silent as he struggled to make ends meet for his family. He did not have the financial freedom to leave Syria and speak out against the regime. As Alawi actress Louise Abdel Karim said from Cairo, like countless Syrians, Bakoush died a random death at the hands of the regime that kills indiscriminately and whose victims are often poor since they have no means of escape. Even though Bakoush was quiet and never outwardly spoke his position, Karim argues that the fact he chose to remain among the poor and refused to leave his neighborhood, speaks volumes. According to her, his death symbolizes the fate of the impoverished.

Yassin Bakoush is another national treasure lost, taking with him his perpetual smile, unaffected gaze, and years of experience that should have been written down as a personal memoir for posterity. In his death, Syria is robbed of a cherished gem, one who belonged to the people.**AJ**

# The Egyptian Contemporary Novel

*Continued from page 11*

resistance, and revolution will always intertwine, for no future can be achieved unless it is first imagined.

The current political turmoil in Egypt raises a fundamental question about the future of this relatively new subgenre of literature. Morsi's government's embankment on various confrontational policies against all non-Muslim Brotherhood factions has fuelled the slogan "the Revolution goes on," pushing millions to take to the streets on the 30th of June 2013, seeking change and supported by the army. Whatever direction Egypt is pulled in, there is no doubt that a fourth phase of the new subgenre of the resistance/revolution novel will emerge and go hand in hand with the situation in the country, reflecting the turmoil during this interim phase and whatever that would come afterwards.**AJ**

# *Tashriqa*
# "Prayers for Homs"

**BY FARAJ BAYRAKDAR**

I will come to Homs shortly,
I will enter it safely,
protected by its people and
my faith in them.
For almost twenty years
of absence, obsession, and delusion.
for twenty years
abandoned at its crossroads
the guards overwhelmed me with weapons
I did not see
tore at me with weapons
I did not see,
but I will come to the city
any way she accepts me.
Wouldn't this city buy me
even for a few herbs, spices, cries of welcome?
I will come to this city even as a refugee
if the meaning of refuge has changed,
deleted from its old dictionary.
But how would I create a dictionary of Homs?
When I have no Imam whose prayers could
remove my doubt,
but I have a God
for whom I recite his verses privately
until dawn reveals the city's face,
when the dawn tells us:
You are safe of whatever you say or don't,
believers and nonbelievers,
for all those who lit up its promises
with candles in their fingers
so the city can see its tomorrow, our people.
Homs, whose mother is Syria,
is above all suspicions.
I will come to Homs alone,
I will come to her with love and affection,
It's Homs which baptized me
and Islamized me.
It is only fitting I belong to her.
A thousand loves, sorrows, and a river of memories,
for her to recover and for me to heal.

*Translated from the Arabic by Basma Botros and Paige Donnelly*
*The Arabic text appeared in the Beirut-based Nawafez magazine*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# Director Haitham Haqqi: Witness to Modern Syrian Drama

**BY REBECCA JOUBIN**

Haitham Haqqi, known as the Godfather of Syrian television drama, has directed a vast repertoire of film and drama; he has worked for 40 years as a director, screenwriter, producer, and researcher in cinema and television. Needless to say, Haqqi is very accomplished. His numerous miniseries include: "*al-Dughri"* (1991), "*Khan al-Harir"* (parts one and two, 1996, 1998), "*Sirat al-Jalali"* (1999), "*Qaws Qazah"* (2001), "*al-Shams Tahroq min Jadid"* (2005), "*Zaman al-Khawf"* (2007), "*al-Ayyam al-Mutamarrida"* (2000). He has also written scripts and directed films such as "*al-Tajali al-Akhir li-Ghiylan al-Dimashqi"* and "*al-Layl al-Tawil*." He is not only the Executive Director and owner of al-Rahba, but he was also appointed to serve as director of Reelfilms Production; both companies have produced numerous Syrian films and television series such as "*Awlad al-Qaymariyyeh"* (part one and two, 2008, 2009) "*al-Husram al-Shami"* (parts one, two, three, 2007, 2008, 2009). A firm believer in the revolution in Syria, Haqqi currently resides in Paris, where he writes for various newspapers about the future for his country.

Haitham Haqqi by Etab Hreib for Al Jadid

**The wide breadth of work in film and drama has merited you with the title "the Godfather" of Syrian drama and film. Tell us about your childhood and the path that led you to such success.**

My father, Ismail Husni Haqqi, was the first artist to study in Rome in the 1950's – he was there at the time of neorealism and loved the cinema. Perhaps he would have gone into the film industry if he had been of another generation. After he completed his studies, he returned to Syria and settled in my mother's home city of Aleppo. During my childhood, our home was always populated with artists and intellectuals from Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. The culture of our house was defined by continuous discussions of art and literature. My father was a liberal who loved freedom, but he was not a communist. When I was in high school, my father often helped with the set design for my school's theater, and I quickly followed suit. In high school I became the director of my school theater and was also asked to direct college productions.

In college, as I grew increasingly attracted to the arts, my father tried to dissuade me and encouraged me to study engineering or medicine instead. He felt that he had sacrificed much of his life to the arts, and wanted me to live a more stable life. But by that time, I had made up my mind to study cinema.

If I was going to identify something from my youth that continues to impact my art today, it would be the Palestinian tragedy. I was born in 1948 at the time of the Nakba (catastrophe). One year after the 1967 Naksa (the setback), I traveled to Moscow in 1967 to study film, and returned to Syria in 1973 during the October War. My work draws heavily on the Palestinian question because I was born from the tragedy and my education was cultivated in the wake of the war.

When I returned from my film studies in Moscow, I was set to be a film director; however, with only a couple films produced per year by the government and an abundance of film directors, I focused my attention on television *musalsalat* (miniseries), which gave me the opportunity to present my ideas in a large arena.

**Please tell us about your experience studying at the VGIK (The Russian State University of Cinematography) in Moscow. Are you still in touch with the other Syrian intellectuals that studied there? Are all of them for the revolution in Syria or is there a divide among the former friends?**

I traveled to Moscow in 1967 on a scholarship half paid by the Syrian government and half by the Soviet Union. During my six years in Moscow, I spent time with many Syrian intellectuals,

such as film director Muhammad Malas. I studied under the theorist Lev Koulechov, who was my mentor at the VGIK. At the time, all the Syrian intellectuals with whom I studied were liberal, and many of those same colleagues are with the revolution today. There is a lot of corruption and poverty in Syria; this is a revolution of the poor. Very few intellectuals support the government, yet many are silent. I have written an article on this topic – how many intellectuals in Syria are afraid of democracy. Many believe that the government is criminal, but they also believe the opposition is criminal. Thus they are against both.

**An important element of the Baath regime's grip on power has been its skill as a storyteller, which enables it to cultivate a culture of fear. In its grand narrative, it has presented itself as the last bastion of secular Arab nationalism and sole protector against imperialist threats, conspiracies, and rising Islamic fundamentalism. Accordingly, the regime downplays any losses and defeats, suppresses all counter-narratives, and twists anything that might undermine the strength of the leader. Please speak of any suppressed historical narratives that have not been documented.**

The regime's battle with the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980's became a narrative in which the state appears to protect its secular identity against the onslaught of "religious fanaticism," an image created for foreign nations in order to defend its offensive against Hama. But buried deep within this narrative is the story of the regime's suppression of liberal forces. Between 1974 and 1979, a secular democratic movement was blossoming in Syria, whose voice would later be crushed in the battle between the regime and the Muslim Brotherhood. At that time, secular intellectuals controlled the television club and theatrical movement, which presented ideas opposing the single-party Baath rule. Many important writers such as Saadallah Wanus and Mamduh Adwan wrote their views in the *Mulhaq al-Thawra Thaqafi* during the 1970's; renowned artists such as the late Fateh al-Mudaress and Youssef Abdelki stimulated the art scene. Intellectuals, who spoke out against the government's invasion of Lebanon, were jailed by the regime, which was known for reacting violently to any threat or opposition to its power. Hafiz al-Assad did not allow documentation of secular dissidence in the 1970's; instead, the grand narrative claims that Hafiz al-Assad squashed the uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood that was killing in the name of Islam, taking money from foreigners, and trying to bring American imperialism to Syria.

**Your mini-series such as "*Khan al-Harir*" (The Silk Market) and "*al-Dughri*" (The Honest One), for example, were very open in their political critique. How did you get away with this?**

In general, on the surface, we drama creators used to focus on social issues with very subtle political critique. We were allowed to critique ministers and even *mukhabarat* officers but were forbidden to touch the President. Instead, we often set our dramas

Haqqi on set of "al-Thurayya"

in different historical time periods to disguise our political critique. Yet, we also faced a continual battle with the authorities. Part One of "*Khan al-Harir*" was examined by the censorship committee for two years, and the second part was aired only after many scenes were cut. We faced constant battles with the censorship committee, but they could not ban the mini-series because of its popularity. We did the same with "*al-Dughri*," the story of the stealthy and dishonest politician, which, by the way, was a portrait of Abdel Halim Khaddam. Because it had such wide appeal, the authorities did not stop it. Also, the authorities believed these mini-series were on the margins and would not have too much of an affect – but now the authorities see how much influence we did, in fact, have.

Ultimately, I realized that if I wanted true freedom to produce words that mattered to me, I would need to start my own production company. So in 1987, I sold my house and founded al-Rahba Company. As al-Rahba's Executive Producer, I did not only produce the miniseries I had directed myself, but also was able to save and produce the work of others. Based on this success, in 2007 I was also hired as the director of Reelfilms Production Company. Before leaving Syria in 2011, I was very active in producing multiple films and mini-series per year.

**Please speak of the "Damascus Spring" at the outset of Bashar al-Assad's presidency.**

Bashar al-Assad wanted to approach the art community. He invited me to meet with him even before he became president – at that time he advocated against the status quo and claimed he would work toward change. During the "Damascus Spring" at the commencement of his presidency, we intellectuals were all euphoric that there would be change. Indeed, the President wanted us to engage in critique. For example, look at the sketch comedy "*Buq'at Daw*"" – in that mini-series, writers were encouraged to critique ministers and officers. Just to clarify, there was serious political critique before "*Buq'at Daw*"" – the difference is that it used to be forbidden, but once Bashar became president writers were instructed to engage in political critique. Yet, the "Damascus Spring" was quickly trumped by political

Hakki on set of al-Thurayya

oppression, showing that the new president would merely follow in the footsteps of his father. In short, Bashar wanted economic reform, without political reform – an impossible feat. Additionally, once the reform process had started, it began to reveal previously hidden files about the kidnapped, imprisoned, and murdered. Moreover, the more Bashar al-Assad looked to address corruption, the more regime officials were questioned. Eventually, they brought the reform process to a halt to prevent their scandals from coming further into the light. In 2004, I wrote an article: "Reform and Democracy" saying that the political order needed to push for a democracy. The authorities were not happy at all, but at the time I did not face punishment.

**The current regime narrative is that there is not a revolution, but rather movements of Salafists, Jihadists, and terrorists funded by the West. The regime claims it is the last bastion of secular nationalism that is being threatened by fundamentalist Islamic groups. Can you talk about this?**

In fact, from the 1980's, Hafez al-Assad supported *muwali* (government friendly) religious groups to counter the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood. Bashar's support of the *Qubaysiyyat* movement merely followed his father's policy of fighting religious groups threatening government control by promoting the mission of co-opted *muwali* religious groups. Bashar also engaged with Iran, Hezbollah, Jihadist groups in Iraq for his own political purpose. While many of the *muwali* religious figures such as the late Sheikh Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti have remained loyal, Jihadist groups have not. Indeed, he never envisioned that these Jihadist groups would turn on him. Bashar fell into a trap that he he himself had created.

**What do you make of the fact that today Syrian intellectuals are divided between those who support the regime and those with the revolution?**

During the reign of Hafiz al-Assad and then Bashar, we intellectuals believed we could change the system through culture. The government approached the intellectual community and offered favors. Some actors' and intellectuals' flirtations with the authorities went too far, while others simply enjoyed the company of the President and his young wife, and believed they wanted change. The late poet Mamdouh Adwan had a *Diwan* entitled "*Ya'lefunak Fanfor,*" which addressed the issue of how the Baath regime tried to tame the intellectuals it wished to use for its own purposes. He also discussed how we intellectuals struggled to escape the grasp of the regime.

At the commencement of the Arab Spring in Syria, the government forced drama creators to speak on television in support of the government. Many had to pay the regime back for previous favors. Then in July 2011, the government hand selected a group of intellectuals that it wanted to involve in the reform process. I did not attend, but made a statement; my statement, of course, was simply put in a drawer. It was the appearance of reform, but nothing more. I remained in Syria for the first three months of the revolution and then left for Paris.

In general, on the surface, we drama creators used to focus on social issues with very subtle political critique. We were allowed to critique ministers and even *mukhabarat* officers but were forbidden to touch the President. Intead, we often set our dramas in different historical time periods to disguise our political critique. Yet, we also faced a continual battle with the authorities.

With all the death and destruction there is nothing we can do or say to defend their actions, and intellectuals must take a position. Indeed as bloodshed is increasing, more and more intellectuals are speaking out against the government. And there are many who wait to publicize their true views once they have escaped to Lebanon, Egypt, Dubai, or Paris.

**What are you doing currently in Paris?**

I have been living between Damascus and Paris for many years now. Currently, I am concentrating on my writing. Many in Syrian drama have relocated to Beirut, but I prefer to write and reflect here in Paris.

**In December 2012 three films produced by the Syrian government were pulled from the Dubai and Cairo international film festivals. As we know, the majority of Syrian films are produced by the Syrian government unless film directors have outside funds. Despite the government control**

**of the film industry, Syrian films have been openly critical of politics and culture since the 1960s. Do you agree that government-produced Syrian films should be forbidden in international film festivals?**

This is a complicated question. I don't believe in censorship of films. Unfortunately, the revolution has catalyzed animosity between many members of the film community. Those who did not receive government funding in the past now take revenge on film makers such as Abdellatif Abdulhamid, who had previously received government funding. Abdellatif Abdelhamid had his film pulled from the festival because he signed a statement of support for the government in the early days of the uprising. I think Abdellatif himself realizes he made a mistake, especially because he does not need the government to produce his films, he could do it himself. While I don't believe in censorship, with all the death and destruction by the Syrian government, screening films by the Syrian government can be an extremely sensitive matter. Intellectuals need to take a stand and can't play both sides as they had in the past.**AJ**

# Actor Jihad Abdo Unravels the Relationship Between the Syrian Censor and the Artistic Community

**BY REBECCA JOUBIN**

Actor Jihad Abdo

Jihad Abdo has acted in numerous works of Syrian television drama since 1994. Most recently, he received critical acclaim for his role as Mansour, a medical doctor who stood up to an evil *mukhabrat* officer in "*al-Walada min al-Khasira*" (Born from the Loins, 2011). His vast acting repertoire includes important roles in miniseries such as "*Nihayat Rajul Shuja*" (The End of a Brave Man, 1994), "*Ikhwat al-Turab*" Part 1 and 2 (Brothers of Earth, 1995, 1996), "*Buq'at Daw*" (Spotlight) Part 1, 2, 3 (2001, 2002, 2003), "*Bab al-Hara*" (The Neighborhood Gate) Part 1, 2, 3, 4 (2006, 07, 08, 09), "*Milh al-Hayat*" (Salt of Life, 2011), "*al-Sarab*" (Mirage, 2011), "*Delila wa Zaybaq*" (2011).

**When did you begin acting?**

I studied civil engineering at the Polytechnic Institute of Cluj Napoca, Romania from 1980-87. In 1983, my third year, there was a day where students were encouraged to express our culture through the arts, and we Syrians joined to perform a show. I played Syrian songs on the violin and acted in several sketches. In the following years, I continued to channel my energies into the arts. I still remember a conversation from 1986, when the Dean of the Institute of Clujnapoca told me he thought I should give up engineering and pursue acting instead. At the time, I was shocked by the remark, but I took it to heart. In 1987, I returned to Damascus and enrolled in the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus where I studied acting for four years.

**Your first role was that of Borhan – the lead character who refuses to become co-opted by the authorities in the wake of Mufeed's arrest – in Hanna Mina's "*Nihayat Rajul Shuja*." Borhan bravely undermined Baath party rhetoric and advised his friends that the Arab army was weak and incapable of protecting Palestine. Can you talk about this first role?**

I was chosen for the role of Borhan, an intellectual affiliated with the social liberal movement of the 1950's who was eventually arrested and persecuted by the authorities. In the 1950's, the authorities tried to recruit intellectuals to spy on the people for the government; not only does Borhan refuse to be implicated in a spy network, but he goes on to reject individuals who stoop to the dirty politics in the port in which he works and voluntarily speaks to the conscience of the Arab leadership that failed to protect Palestinians. He is released and then arrested again when he stands up for justice when his friend Mufeed is wrongly arrested. In prison, the authorities try to force him to spy on his inmates, but he refuses. When he is finally released from prison, he helps Mufeed, who is now handicapped, learn to survive again and overcome those who tried to destroy him.

**Hanna Mina's novels are known for critiquing current politics by transferring readers to another historical time period. To what extent is it true that "*Nihayat Rajul Shuja*" – which begins in the French colonial period, leads to independence, and then the series of *coups* that punctured Syria – is actually a veiled critique of Syria's Baath regime?**

In our drama, writers often focus their plots on the past so members of the censorship committee cannot accuse them of overstepping their boundaries. The government does not see this past historical period as representing themselves. On the contrary, they use these kinds of historical mini-series as a platform to distinguish the governments. They proclaim, 'That is in the past. Our government is different. See how much better we are than them.'

Of course, not all writers who based their work on historical periods intend to critique the current regime. For example, Hassan M. Youssef's "*Ikhwat al-Turab*" was not an example of traveling to another time to critique the present – rather, he intended to show how Western nations intentionally exploited Syria. In "*Ikhwat al-Turab*," my role as Azzam, a Syrian officer serving the Ottoman Empire, was based on a true story. In that era, many Syrians worked for the Ottoman Empire believing that they were serving Islam. But they soon discover that Jamal Pasha was using Islam to his benefit and interest. So, like my character Azzam, they defected from the Ottoman Empire.

In truth, even in cases that the Syrian government recognizes the writer's veiled critiques, they often let it pass. Allowing critique of the government creates the allusion to other nations that Syria is a place of democracy and freedom. Also *tanfis* (venting) plays a role. The government allows *tanfis* as an outlet for critique for intellectuals so they are no longer forced to internalize discontent; subsequently, the masses understand that others share in their laments. Thus, *tanfis* was intended as a means of releasing frustration in order to prevent the population from protesting the regime.

**Speaking of political critique, please talk about your role in the *avant guarde* multi-year sarcastic political sketch comedy, "*Buqa'at Daw*" Part 1, 2, and 3 (2001, 02, 03), which was inspired by the Damascus Spring at the start of Bashar al-Asad's presidency. Some say it fizzled after the first few seasons, and you yourself exited after season three. Please speak about this experience.**

"*Buqa'at Daw*" was best in the first two seasons. I was attracted to the show's innovative, fast-paced sketches; but much like a successful music band, everyone wanted to take credit and suddenly things began to fall apart. The arrogance and entitlement shown by some of the actors prompted me to decline roles after the third season. While the writing stayed strong, because the writers stayed the same, an epidemic of arrogance affected directing and production. When Laith Hajjo was director, he was able to effectively communicate his opinions to Muhammad Hamsho's production company Suriyya al-Dawliyya and they incorporated his creative energy. Later directors just listened to the production company and did not take stand. In my opinion, the mini-series went downhill after Laith left because he was the only director capable of protecting talent and standing up to the production company.

**You made a splash with your role of Dr. Mansour in "*al-Walada min al-Khasira*" (2011). Please talk about that miniseries, which is known for its sharp political critique of the current regime. Why do you think the government let it air?**

If you recall, in this show, to counterbalance the evil officer, Ra'oof, there is also a good officer, Fayez, who works for the betterment of society. The regime was relieved that we not only showed bad officers, but also recognized that there are good officers. At the same time, it is important to note that the form that the broadcasted mini-series is very different than what Samer Radwan, the writer, originally intended. You cannot fathom how many times the censorship committee forced him to change the script. They made Samer change hundreds of details; they were even angered by the amount of slums depicted. They also wondered why the evil officer, Ra'oof, had to be of high rank. In the end, since the production company was in Abu Dhabi, the Syrian government allowed it to air. This way they can claim that there is freedom of speech in Syria. But, in my opinion, if the government really wanted to show that there is freedom of speech, they should have allowed it to be produced in Syria. After producing part one, Abu Dhabi asked for the second part to air during Ramadan 2012 since the first part was so popular, and currently they were working on the third part for Ramadan 2013.

In our drama, writers often focus their plots on the past so members of the censorship committee cannot accuse them of overstepping their boundaries. The government does not see this past

**Please talk about your acting career in Syria. Did your career face any negative repercussions since you were not an avid supporter of the government?**

I was a top 10 actor for about seven to 10 years. But the *mukhabarat* sabotage the careers of men and women who are not close with the government. They force directors to stop choosing dissidents for parts. Actors are then pressured to become close to the *mukhabarat*. Since I refused to fall into their trap, I found that my name was deleted from many casting lists. I began to be assigned supporting roles rather than leading roles.

**From the start of the uprising, the drama community has been divided in its support for the government or uprising, and many have remained silent. Please speak about this.**

At the start of the uprising in 2011, the government compelled many popular actors to voice their support on television, since they know that actors have a strong influence on society. Some drama creators voluntarily followed these orders in hopes of gaining more power and respect from the government, while others spoke out in support of the government out of fear for their lives. When I was asked, I postponed and then left Syria. Most actors had to either speak on television or flee. Many are obliged to do it as payback for previous benefits. Those who refused left for the Gulf, Egypt, and Europe. Indeed, many great actors, directors, and writers stood against the regime. They are heroes because of what they dared do. They chose human justice over political power.

**There is much talk about a Gulf State embargo against Syrian drama. What is your opinion on this?**

There is not really an embargo against the Syrian drama. The Gulf States enjoy the spontaneity of Syrian acting, the creativity of the stories, the fact that sets are in real locations like the Old City of Damascus rather than artificial ones as in Egypt. During Ramadan 2011 and 2012 many miniseries were produced by Gulf States, so we cannot really say there was an embargo. Still, I think that the Syrian entertainment industry will suffer for many years to come.

**In 2011, you had important roles in three miniseries: *"al-Walada min al-Khasira," "Milh al-Hayat,"* and *"al-Sarab."* Was it hard to leave Syria and start over again in the States?**

It is always hard to leave your home, your family, and the career you've built through long years of hard work – especially when you are thrown into an entirely different lifestyle. My wife and I are currently trying to settle down in Los Angeles and start a new life. As a Syrian, I don't think of the material things I have lost. Mostly, I am frustrated that the world silently watches my Syrian brothers and sisters struggling through such inhumane conditions.**AJ**

## On Massacre after Massacre!

After every Massacre I lose my sight,

so I don't see what I see.

I do not see what I am seeing,

I do not want to see what I want to see.

*(From Hala Mohammad's Facebook*)

# Divorce and Workplace Issues Focus of Moroccan Documentary

**Camera/ Woman**
A film by Karima Zoubir
Women Make Movies, 2012

**BY WIDED KHADRAOUI**

"Camera/Woman" is a poignant documentary set in Casablanca that touches upon the complex issue of gender in Moroccan society and focuses on a few key issues such as the lives of divorced women, the taboo of women working in certain professions, and the difficulties associated with challenging the established status quo.

Directed by Karima Zoubir, an International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) World View Winner, the film follows Khadeja, a divorcée with an 11-year old son to support, who moves back to her family's house following her marital separation. Khadeja procures gainful employment as a camerawoman at weddings and other special occasions in Casablanca, even though her family considers it a disgrace and vehemently objects.

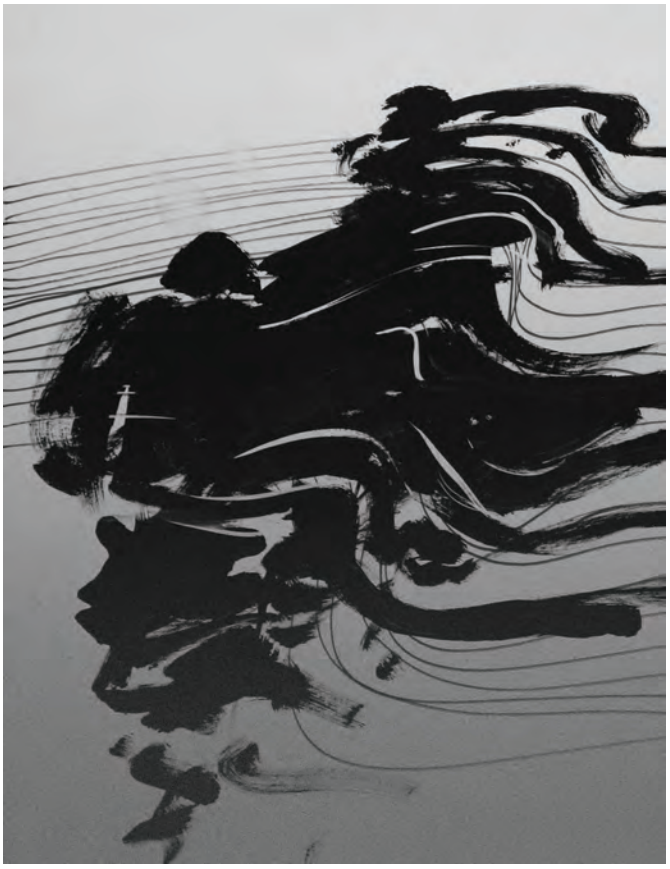
One of the opening scenes epitomizes Moroccan society's angst about women working. Khadeja, after filming a wedding late at night, attempts to find a taxi in the eerily empty streets. The camera films her as she climbs into the car and is accosted by the driver who, without invitation, immediately asks her what she was doing out so late, and whether her husband opposes her profession.

Khadeja's resilience and determination to carve out a life for herself is constantly undermined by her family's discouragement that is further fueled by the neighborhood's disapproving gossip. Touching on the hypocrisy of the society, her entire family criticizes her profession, despite the fact that she is the primary breadwinner. They even attempt to force her into another marriage in order to quell the neighbor's gossip.

Paradoxically, the rise of the conservative belief that non-familial men should not participate in special engagements directly leads to Khadeja's work and the rise of women working at social engagements. Women now shoot videos, take photographs, and play music, although these roles have never been held by women before.

The opulence and magic of the celebrations Khadeja films is juxtaposed with the reality the women featured in the film experience. The film enters the realm of fantasy by showcasing Moroccan celebratory culture in contrast to the realities of life, and especially life as a divorced woman. The film challenges societal depictions of divorced women as "useless", "unacceptable" or in more stark language "prostitutes."

Zoubir's exploratory documentary pays homage to the strength of Moroccan women who are forging a space for themselves in their society, despite everyone's condemnation.



"Storm 6" by Mamoun Sakkal

Khadeja's defiance to survive in a society that would prefer her silent is a testament to the struggle of women across the region.**AJ**

# Wives in Tension

**Women of Turkey: Between Islam and Secularism**
A film by Olga Nakkas
Turkey/Lebanon
Women Make Movies, 2006

**BY REBECCA JOUBIN**

In this exemplary documentary film, women (both veiled and unveiled, religious and secular) discuss the presence of Islam and secularism in contemporary Turkish society, where it is common for educated urban women to choose to wear the hijab. Turkish-born and Lebanese-raised filmmaker Olga Nakkas combines historical footage with interviews of Turkish women with an array of different professions. She provides an in-depth historical background of Turkey, including its foundation in 1923 by Ataturk, who went on to radically transform Turkish society. Describing how the leader broke from the Ottoman Empire to create a republic based on the twin fundamentals of nationalism and secularism, Nakkas discusses Ataturk's belief

that the political inclusion and social emancipation of women were critically important for modernizing Turkey. Nakkas features an impressive array of opinions in her film. One female interviewee states that she does not believe there is currently a clash of cultures in Turkey; she instead thinks that Turkish people, owing to their Ottoman history, are accustomed to living amidst cultural diversity. However, another woman asserts that since the Tanzimat period there has been an uneasy relationship between local culture and Islamization on the one hand, and modern, Western, secular lifestyles on the other. Yet another woman argues that Turkey provides a fine example of how to combine a secular system with people who share religious and spiritual beliefs, although in recent years there has been an increase in both extreme Westernization and Islamization. The discussion on the controversial ban on the hijab in universities and civil service is especially enlightening. One woman explains that she studied for one year without the veil, but then dropped out of school. Another woman says that the government sees Islam as a threat, and that effectively banning some girls from education through veil legislation is wrong in a democracy, since all girls have the right to an education.

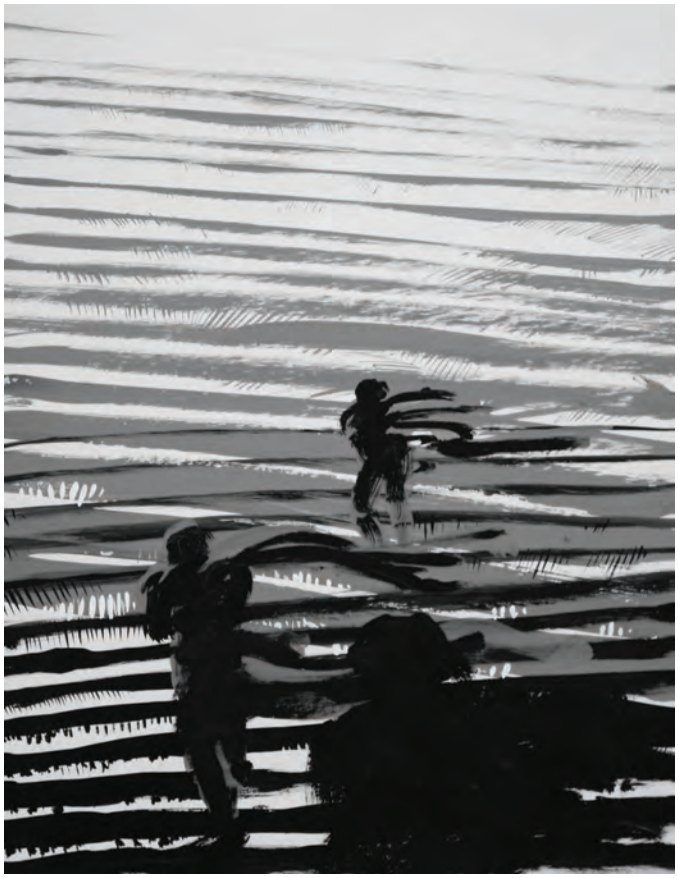
The discussion then touches on contemporary Turkish politics. One woman argues that Turkey is experiencing an identity crisis, especially since the AKP, whose central goal is that Turkey be admitted into the European Union, came to power in 2002,. Another opines that Turkey is a melting pot of East and West, and that her country can be used as a model of how to reconcile the two poles. She believes that the current focus on joining the European Union is misguided, and that some Turks seem to believe that their genetic code will magically change if their country becomes a part of Europe. An additional interviewee says that the Turks have an advantage in not being part of the US or Europe, and that they should preserve their own unique identity and thereby bridge the gaps between civilizations. These diverse viewpoints contain multifaceted perspectives on Turkish women's integration of Islamic culture and modern lifestyles. The film's balance between historical footage and live interviews make this documentary a tremendous resource for understanding modern day Turkey.**AJ**

# When 'Honor' Becomes Murder

**In the Name of the Family**
A film by Shelley Saywell
Women Make Movies, 2010, 60 minutes

**BY REBECCA JOUBIN**

Shelley Saywell's "In the Name of the Family"provides an in-depth investigation of "honor killings" of girls in Muslim immigrant families. The documentary tells the story of three North American teenagers (Aqsa Parvez along with sisters Amina and Sarah Said) and one college student (Fauzia Mohammed), who were all victims of honor killings by male members of their



"Storm 2" by Mamoun Sakkal

family. Fauzia Muhammad was the only one among them who survived.

The documentary begins with testimonials from Aqsa's friends, explaining how her father was from Pakistan and inveighed against her request to remove her hijab. Friends noted that Aqsa was torn between her new culture and that of her ancestors. One friend says: "They bring us to Canada and when we start to adapt to the culture, they get upset." The mother of one of Aqsa's friends testifies that Aqsa's father had threatened his daughter: "If you behave this way, I swear on the Quran I'll kill you." This same mother insists: "It isn't about religion. It's all about their specific culture. Her family was from a rural area. We're from the city. We're not conservative like them."

And then we are told the story of the premeditated murder of Amina and Sara Said, daughters of Patricia, an American woman, and Said, an Egyptian. As the girls grew up, their father would become violent whenever they wore tight clothing or had boyfriends. In the end, he murdered both of his daughters and fled the country. Fauzia Mohammed, the college student from Afghanistan who survived her brother's attempt to murder her, recounts how her brother stabbed her over and over again as her mother watched.

The documentary is interspersed with testimonials of people insisting that these honor killings have nothing to do with Islam, but rather stem from the families' traditional cultures. For example, we hear the testimony of one youth who claims that

after Aqsa's murder Muslims had to face the same prejudice they experienced following 9/11. And one of the local sheikhs insists: "This was a case of domestic violence, not Islam." Most testimonials focus on clashes between American life and the cultural background of Muslim immigrants, and how those lead to the killings. The documentary ends with a written statement saying that the UN estimates there are 5,000 honor killings per year.

"In the Name of the Family"makes it clear that honor killings are not sanctioned by Islam, but does not explain that these killings arise instead from ancient tribal notions of honor and family shame, which call for male members of the family to murder women when they engage in illicit sexual behavior. Further explanation would have been necessary in order to convincingly dissassociate honor killings from Islam. Additionally, the film leaves the viewer with the notion that there is something inherently violent in Eastern culture. The film explores the tension that arises when immigrants try to adapt their lifestyles to the West while still remaining culturally Eastern – and thus, to me the story was more about cultural tensions, and violent, criminal fathers, who resort to killing their daughters. Contrary to the director's intention, the film serves to "other" Islam by making it seem like this violence is somehow a part of Eastern culture.**AJ**

# Innocence Crushed

**Rachel**
By Simon Bitton,
Women Make Movies, 2009, 100 minutes
Subtitles French, Hebrew and Arabic

**BY LYNNE ROGERS**

The Israeli and French filmmaker Simone Bitton has composed yet another powerful documentary with her new film "Rachel." The story begins with Rachel's fellow activists reading excerpts from her personal journal five years after her death. Bitton's camera dexterously shifts from the accounts of Rachel's family, friends, and teachers, to those of the Palestinians living on the Egyptian border in the director's determination to tell the story of Rachel being squashed to death by an Israeli bulldozer. Rachel, a young idealistic American from Evergreen State College, had been in Gaza for three months working with the anti-violence International Solidarity Movement to stop the Israeli military's systematic demolition of Palestinian homes. Like most naïve travelers to Gaza, Rachel was shocked by the "degree of evil'' she witnessed as family homes were repeatedly harassed by nightly gunfire. Bitton also describes the lonely walk of the pharmacist Nasralleh over the ruins of his extended family's home. The Israeli major and international spokeswoman who accompany him assert that the military had two goals that ill-starred day: to clear the grounds and locate explosive devices. Unlike the activists who give their full name and current location, most of the Israeli military are only referred to by mysterious capital letters.

In what should be seen as a microcosm of the broader Palestinian situation, the Israeli military claims that the bulldozer operator could not see Rachel from inside the bulldozer despite her and her fellow activists' shouting at the bulldozer to leave. These energetic and ingenuous foreigners used a megaphone to remind the Israeli military that they were foreigners there to protect the Palestinian families. In another form of protest, the activists sat in front of these 65-ton machines, impeding their movement forward. On March 16, 2003, Rachel's friends on the ground and on-looking villagers claim they witnessed a deliberate murder as the bulldozer proceeded forward and then reversed with its blade still down, running over Rachel's body. In just another small example of Israeli military genius, the investigating military police arrived at an "erased" crime scene and thus were legally unable to interrogate the soldiers involved as part of their investigation. Bitton continues her painful dialogue as the activists, clearly still shaken, re-examine photos taken that day of a mutilated body splayed on the ground and remember the omnipresent military surveillance videos. Autopsies by both the Palestinians and the Israelis agree that her body suffered multiple fractures and bleeding from the mouth and eyes, which indicated death by asphyxiation. Throughout the film, Bitton's compassionate camera maintains a respectful distance, creating space for the expression of a subdued but intense emotional response to the death of Rachel, who paid "for her ideals with her life." With equal respect, Bitton listens to the Israelis' insistent and problematic refrains. The Israeli Commander praises his men for their "self-restraint," but one Israeli soldier confides, "We felt awful. But we had orders." **AJ**

# CONTRIBUTORS

and writing at Diablo Valley College. She has taught at a number of universities in the United States and the Middle East. Her research interests Arab women's autobiographical writing, and gender and representation in Arab and Arab-American literature. Currently, she is working on a book project that addresses the subversive potential of storytelling in Arab-American re-configurations of the 1001 Nights.

**Abduh Wazen** ("The Sword of Amin Maalouf," p.39) is a poet, novelist and the editor of the Cultural pages in Al Hayat newspaper.**AJ**

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# Marbrook's Poetry Drawn by Homeland, Loss, Alienation

**Far From Algiers**
By Djelloul Marbrook
The Kent State University Press in Ken, 2008

**BY KATE LEGRAND**

Djelloul Marbrook's first book of poetry, "Far From Algiers" is a carefully crafted work of art. As the title of his work suggests, the poems center on loneliness, alienation, relationships, and ties to the author's homeland. In many of his pieces, Marbrook analyzes the notion of being an outsider both within his home and country. In his poem, "The Price of Admission," Marbrook strongly rejects any sense of belonging. The reader comes to see that the feeling of belonging is deadly. Through strong, stark language, he pulls the audience into the poems and transforms their point of view. Marbrook's poetry, transcending page and text, gives the reader a true sense of alienation and loss. In the poem, "Familiarity," he writes of the world of anonymity in which he lives. The poem is just four lines and succinctly counters its title. Marbrook's rhythm and style give the collection a story-like aspect. He orders the poems to precisely emulate his stream of consciousness. The poems give insight not just into Marbrook's personal narrative, but also into the recent history of Algeria. Marbrook's poetry is both a provocative and eye-opening read.**AJ**

# War, Trauma, and Memory in Anglophone Literature of the Lebanese Diaspora

**Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora**
By Syrine Hout
Edinburgh University Press, 2012

**By PAULINE HOMSI VINSON**

In recent years, a number of works have presented critical analyses of literature produced by Anglophone Arab writers. Among such works one finds Layla al-Maleh's "Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature" (2009), Geoffrey Nash's "The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English" (2005), and Wail S. Hassan's "Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature" (2011). Syrine Hout's "Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora" offers a welcome addition to this growing yet still slim body of critical studies.

"The Tools" (1998) by Kardash (From Tools for the 21st Century)

Hout links the term "exile" with coherent definitions of the self and of the homeland while connecting the term "diaspora" to the idea of hybridity, globalization, and transnational migrations. Such a move enables her to argue that "Anglophone Lebanese novels embody a distinctive transculturality" that is revealed through the "processes of remembering war-related traumatic events." This claim to "transculturality," in turn, allows Hout to highlight the increasing relevance of the English language to a hitherto Francophone Arab context in Lebanon. As she maintains, "not only has English become one of Lebanon's diasporic languages but it also has come to participate in how Lebanese culture develops the capacity to structure and redefine itself."

For Hout, the increasing relevance of English to Lebanese audiences, along with the works of a particular generation of Anglophone Lebanese writers—those who were children or adolescents during the Lebanese civil war—are opening a space for exploring the relationship between memory and trauma in ways that have been suppressed within Lebanon.

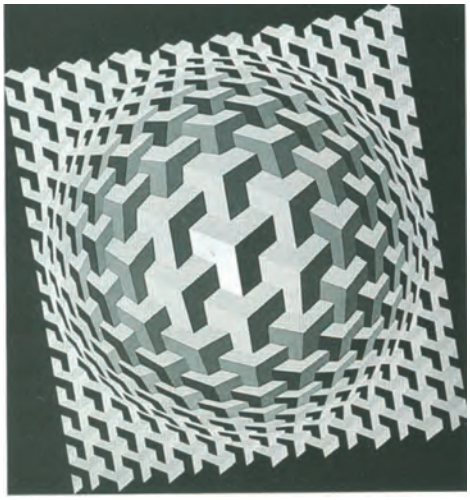
In Lebanon, Hout points out, "public discourse has been characterised by public amnesia" and "state-sponsored forgetfulness." To counter such amnesia, Hout maintains that writers and artists have taken the role of "not only chroniclers but also alchemists of historical experiences." Hout's discussion of "home matters in the diaspora" thus revolves around "a diasporic, anti-amnesiac and generation-specific testimony to the long-term effects of the Lebanese Civil War." From this perspective, her work stands in parallel to Saadi Nikro's "The Fragmenting Force of Memory: Self, Literary Style, and Civil War in Lebanon," a critical analysis that, like Hout's, was also published in 2012, but which deals with an older generation of writers than those that Hout considers.

Hout divides her text into four parts. Each part contains at least one set of paired texts for analysis. Although several works by the same author are discussed in the book, works by the same author are never paired together. This arrangement allows Hout to focus on the particular manifestation of trauma, memory, and the concept of home in the diaspora as expressed in works by different authors rather than on the evolution of any one author's treatment of such themes.

In Part I, "Homesickness and Sickness of Home," Hout discusses Rabih Alameddine's "Koolaids" and Tony Hanania's "Unreal City," focusing on how both works present "perfect examples of textual schizophrenia … of cultural and national in-betweenness." She also analyzes Alameddine's "The Perv" and Nada Awar Jarrar's "Somewhere, Home" to contrast opposing ways of using what she terms "nostalgic" and "critical" memory to "account for … difference[s] between home as place versus home as space." In Part II, "Trauma Narratives: The Scars of War," Hout focuses on Alameddine's "I, the Divine" and Patricia Sarrafian Ward's "The Bullet Collection." Such texts, Hout argues, offer "examples of characters attempting to translate traumatic memory into writing, thereby … taking part in narrative therapy." In Part III, "Playing with Fire at Home and Abroad," Hout discusses Alameddine's "The Hakawati," Nathalie Abi-Ezzi's "A Girl Made of Dust," and Rawi Hage's "De Niro's Game" and explores the effects of militarization on the young. In the last section, "Part IV: Exile versus Repatriation," Hout examines Hage's "Cockroach" and Jarrar's "A Good Land." Concerned with the way in which traumatic events shape collective memories, Hout draws distinctions between the various attitudes of the exile, the immigrant, and the diasporan in relation to the ideas of home, longing, and belonging in order to present her final point: Anglophone diasporic literature not only matters for the homeland, it also redefines it.

Hout's work offers an important contribution to narrative analyses of the relationship between war, memory, and trauma in Anglophone Lebanese literature. Unfortunately, in presenting her argument, Hout refers to the editor of this publication, Elie Chalala, in ways that do not fully do justice to his ideas. Referring to Chalala's comments on the accessibility of postmodern literature written "in exile and in different languages" to an Arabic-speaking native audience, Hout equates Chalala's words with a position that deems such writing as "particular to Western intellectualism and, therefore, fake and/or pretentious when adopted by writers of Arab origin." It is the view of this colleague and admirer of both Chalala and Hout that Chalala's view on the relationship between language, influence, and authenticity is more complex and nuanced than Hout's remarks suggest. In any event, given that both Chalala and Hout are capable of responding to each other on the pages of "Al Jadid," I will leave the particulars in their respective positions for them to elucidate on their own.

Syrine Hout's "Post-War Anglophone Lebanese Fiction: Home Matters in the Diaspora" should appeal to anyone interested in diaspora, Lebanese literature, war literature, and the related fields of trauma and memory studies. **AJ**



"Ulton", 1988 by Victor Vasarely From Christie's, Contemporary Art, London.

# *'A Tunisian Tale':* Journey into Dark Corners of Tunis, and Human Mind

**A Tunisian Tale**
By Hassouna Mosbahi
Translated by Max Weiss
The American University in Cairo Press, 2011.

**BY GHADA ALATRASH**

"A Tunisian Tale" is a succinct and skillfully written novel that takes its readers into the darkest corners of Tunis and of the human mind. The "tale" is narrated in alternating first-person monologues by a dead mother (Najma) and a son (Alaa al-Din), who awaits his impending execution in his prison cell.

Najma's narrative captures the dark reality of a woman trapped by the perverse taboos of Tunis. She hopes to escape her suffocating life in the village by accepting a loveless marriage, but only finds herself inside another prison: her new home in M Slum – a dark and wretched slum situated on the outskirts of the modern capital of Tunis. Gradually, despite her husband's disapproval and resentment, she finds freedom in work. Rebelling against cultural taboos, she ends up performing on stage as a belly dancer.

Paralleling Najma's story, Alaa al-Din, born to a mother who resents him, is a product of a cruel fate. Throughout his 21 years of life, he is deprived of his mother's love. He also feels betrayed by her as he blames her for the death of his beloved father. Eventually, his hatred drives him to burn her alive. With a disturbingly stoic and cold voice, he narrates the sequence of events that lead him to commit a most horrendous and haunting crime.

Throughout the novel, the reader is continually exposed to the evil hidden within human beings. And the most alarming part is that, as the stories of other prisoners are revealed, the

reader comes to understand why one would murder another human being.

"A Tunisian Tale" is a novel that takes its readers to places that are rarely visited by the human mind.**AJ**

## Marvelous Meanderings

**Flying Carpets**
By Hedy Habra
Greensboro, NC: March Street Press, 2012.

**By PAULINE HOMSI VINSON**

Hedy Habra's "Flying Carpets" is an enchanting collection of short stories that transports the reader from a childhood in a bygone era of Egypt to scenes set alternately in the United States, France, Lebanon, and Mexico. Each story takes the reader on a magical flight spurred on by longing, loss, and the search for the intangible yet true.

"Perols-sur-vezere, 1986" by Huguette Caland

The first story, "Al Kasdir," sets the tone for the entire collection. With a mix of nostalgia and the supernatural, the story revolves around an incident from the narrator's childhood in Egypt when she observed the reactions of her mother and aunts to the pronouncements of a fortuneteller. Only after the narrator matures does she recognize the significance of the soothsayer's words and their connection to the adult world of lost love and missed opportunity.

Most of the stories in the collection delve into the world of magical realism and the surreal, where humans take on animal shapes and ordinary scenes are transformed into forests of fog or translucent water. A few, however, break this pattern. One story juxtaposes the lost opportunities of love due to religious sectarianism in Lebanon with similarly lost opportunities due to racism in the United States. Another story brilliantly dramatizes the senseless violence and division of the Lebanese civil war from the point of view of a cat. In their variety, the stories invite readers to follow meandering paths that lead alternately to tragic loss or marvelous possibilities.

As the stories move from past to present, from Arab to European and American cities, and from stark reality to the ethereal, they probe the common human search for tenderness and eternal bonds of love. Habra's thoughtful tone, insightful imagination, and cosmopolitan grace infuse her stories with lightness tinged with gravitas, giving her narratives a mysterious quality that lingers in the reader's mind long after her stories end.**AJ**

*(A new edition of "Flying Carpets" is now published by Interlink Books, 2013 )*

## Women of Letters Key Players in Iran's Social Revolution

**Words, Not Swords**
By Farzaneh Milani
345 Pages, Syracuse University Press 2011

**BY NOAH BRICKER**

The condition of women in Iran is paradoxical. Iranian women can vote and run for elected office, but they must adhere to a strict dress code. They drive cars and even taxis, but are forbidden to operate bicycles. While Iranian women are oppressed at times by restrictive laws and customs, Farzaneh Milani is careful to point out that the popular Western "hostage narrative," which depicts Iranian women as hopeless victims, is clearly not true. Upon finishing "Words, Not Swords," the reader has no choice but to agree.

Milani's book traces the importance of women as writers and literary figures within the present social revolution that is taking Iran by storm. This revolution, not to be confused with the type of revolution we have seen in Tunisia or Egypt, is one that is transforming the role women play in society, especially in the public sphere. The author provides compelling evidence that the traditional walls and barriers that for so long relegated women to the confines of the home are collapsing under their own weight. She also suggests that the increasingly mobile and intelligent female literati of Iran are the major impetus behind not just a change in gender relations, but also a much broader social change. She argues that the freedom of movement now available to women is making it increasingly hard for Iranians to avoid difficult questions about the role women play in society.

Appropriately, Milani shows a strong appreciation for the deep history behind the Persian female literary movement and details the gradual progression of female literary figures from fictional characters like Scheherazade to influential writers like Tahirih Qurratul'Ayn and Forugh Farrokhzad. Her prose is exacting but sensitive, and Milani spends ample time analyzing the poetry and writings of famous female figures, making her book particularly appealing to aficionados of Persian verse.

Although she claims the veil is not a main barrier to change, she examines the history of the veil and other restrictive measures found in both Persian society and certain interpretations of Islam.

The final section of her book is undoubtedly the most controversial because it contains an emphatic dismissal of a number of best-selling books that claim to reveal the plight of trapped Iranian women. She dismisses Azar Nafisi's now famous "Reading Lolita in Tehran" and Ayan Hirsi Ali's "The Caged Virgin," both best sellers, with a critique as unsparing as it is fair. Milani's perspective counterbalances the narratives presented by Ali and Nafisi, which makes it a must read for all aware readers.

The book's only real flaw comes from Milani's attempt to expand her thesis beyond the contemporary circumstances of Iranian women to include the plight of women across the world. While this is an admirable goal, it feels forced, but this idealism should not distract the reader from the author's main contention – that Iranian women have, with the help of literature, outgrown the stifling aspects of tradition, and have done so in such a way that there seems to be no turning back.**AJ**

# The Historical Novel Revived

**Tree of Pearls, Queen of Egypt**
By Jurji Zaydan
Syracuse University Press, 2012

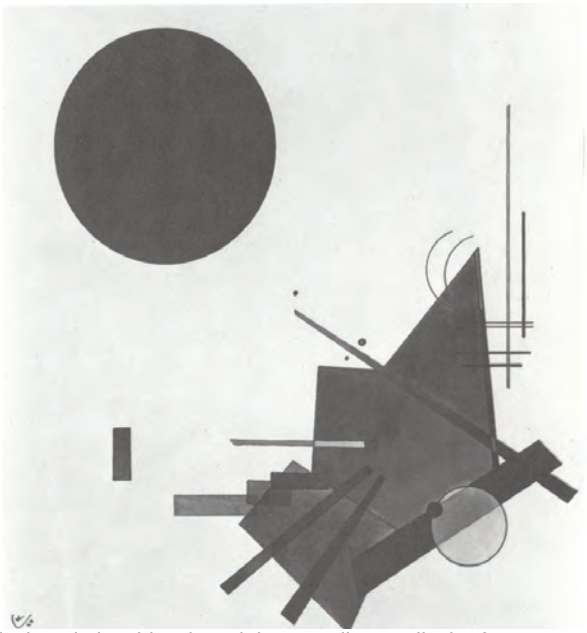
**BY WIDED KHADRAOUI**

The "Tree of Pearls, Queen of Egypt" by Jurji Zaydan was originally published in 1914 and was recently translated and released in English by Samah Selim, an assistant professor at Rutgers University. The novel follows the "Tree of Pearls," Fatma al-Malikah al-Din Um-Khalil, and her favorite slave, Shwaykar, during a period of great upheaval.

The inevitable downfall of the Ayyubids and the powerful emergence of the Mamluks form the core of the narrative. The Ayyubids were a Muslim dynasty of Kurdish origin whose rule centered in Egypt, and they ruled much of the Middle East during the 12th and 13th centuries CE. "Tree of Pearls" elevation to the throne started the Turkic origin Mamluk era into power. The Mamluk dynasty remained the most powerful political force until the Ottoman period, repelling the advances of the Mongols, and expelling the Crusaders from the Holy Land.

Zaydan's novel traces the very short reign of Egypt's first Muslim queen, and as is common in historical novels, it is full of sexual politics, lovers' betrayals, and treacheries. The Tree of Pearls' Malmuk lover Izza al-Din Aybak first helps her garner the throne, but then betrays her for the Sallafa, a powerful concubine, who then betrays him for Shwaykar's fiancé Rukn al-Din Baybars. The novel's twisted plot holds the reader's interest.

Zaydan's novel, "Tree of Pearls, Queen of Egypt," was originally published as a serial, much like the works of Alexander Dumas or Charles Dickens, and its chapters reflect the self-contained nature of their narrative style. The chapters can be read independently and largely consist of anecdotes from either 13th century Cairo or Baghdad. These autonomous chapters serve both to educate and entertain.



"Black Relationship," (1924) by Wassily Kandinsky from Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Although at times the translation renders the English an antiquated feel, Selim's recent translations of Zaydan are indicative of a larger resurgence in interest of Arab history. One of Zaydan's primary goals was to share the Arab world's collective history through an entertaining medium, such as the historical novel. His desire to perpetuate the region's historical legacy lives on in this time of regional reawakening.**AJ**

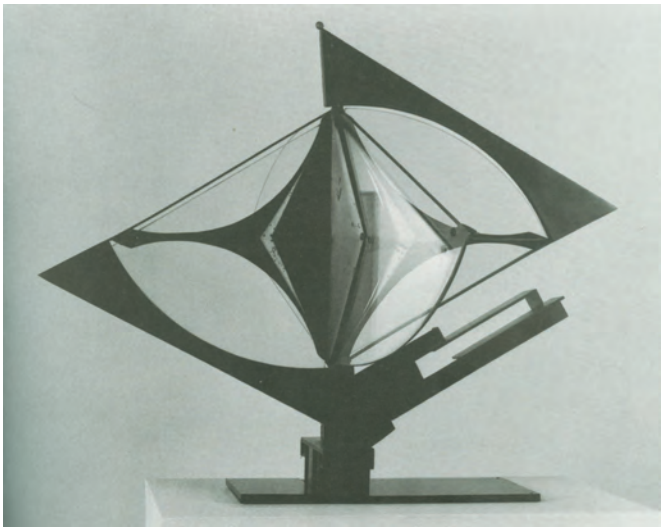
# Searching for Home

**Spared**
By Angele Ellis
Main Street Rag, 2011

**BY NOAH BRICKER**

Mother, daughter, poet, Lebanese, American, Italian, lover, and human are all identities that Angele Ellis explores in her striking collection of poetry, prose, and verse titled "Spared." Ellis' eloquently illustrates the true hardships facing immigrant children and adults who often feel pulled in different directions by their diverse backgrounds. Her struggle to find her roots is a common experience not just among American immigrants but people across the world searching for home.

To classify Ellis's work as a classic immigrant narrative does not do her work justice though her thought provoking literary style causes readers to plumb the deepest recesses of the mind as they cope with their innermost thoughts and emotions. A reader will be hard pressed to read her collection without finding a poem that appears specifically addressed to them. This unique quality grows from her ability to depict a truly diverse range of human emotions. She explores love as well as loss,



«Construction dans l' espace » (1923-25) by Antoine Pevsner (From Chefs-d'oeuvre du Musee national d'art moderne).

hope and heartbreak, certainty and ambiguity. No sentiment is forgotten in her wide-ranging work as she continues to search for what it truly means to be human above all else.

Ellis bold word choice and willingness to discuss taboo topics can make for uncomfortable reading at times but truly does open the door to her soul. Her celebration as well as disillusionment with the sexuality of the female body perfectly shows the central tenet of her work: the complex and paradoxical reality of the modern world. While her work is beautiful, it is equally disturbing as she fights against her inner demons as well as celebrates her greatest joys.

The work reaches no definitive conclusion, which might trouble some, but demonstrates her true emotions. As she most eloquently writes, "we breathed our shallow lives like fish swimming invisibly below us, blind and white." If the point of her work is to cause thought-provoking self-reflection, she undoubtedly achieves her goal.**AJ**

# "Meanderings" Through Turkey

**Meander**
By Jeremy Seal
Bloomsbury, 2012

### BY FRANCES KHIRALLAH NOBLE

"Meander" is a travel guidebook that has everything – historical background, colorful local folk, cultural perspective, captivating description, beautiful writing – and yet lacks certain expected elements; it contains no hotel rates, no shopping guides, no airline schedules, and no tips for tourists. It is a journey without frills down the Meander River in Turkey from its beginnings as an underwater spring in central Turkey to its mouth on the Aegean Sea. The Meander is so winding that it looks like a squiggle on the map; hence,the river's name denotes wandering, drifting and digression.

Jeremy Seal, the main character, travels alone on foot or by inflatable red canoe, relying for lodging on whatever accommodations are available in the villages along the river. Among those he encounters are the suspicious ironmonger who nearly refuses to sell him a trowel out of fear that he will loot the country of its archeological treasures, Mehmet, author of a local history and bored defense lawyer eager to offer advice and direction, Turgay, a parsley nibbling diabetic who generously gives him a going away gift of baklava, Ahmet, an agricultural consultant who tells him of struggles between the secularists and the Islamists, and the waiter who served him dinner, helping himself to some of it as he did, not out of boorishness, but as a deliberate insult.

Jeremy Seal's humility and humor allow him to be a keen and kind observer of the people he meets and the environment they inhabit. His open intelligence guides him through the unfamiliar; his romantic side fills a jar with water at the beginning of the trip to be carried along and poured into the Aegean at the end. Seal's journey down the Meander is an exploration of the essence of Turkey itself, of a modern country emerging out of a very old one. Chapter Notes and the Bibliography provide direction for those readers who want to know more.**AJ**

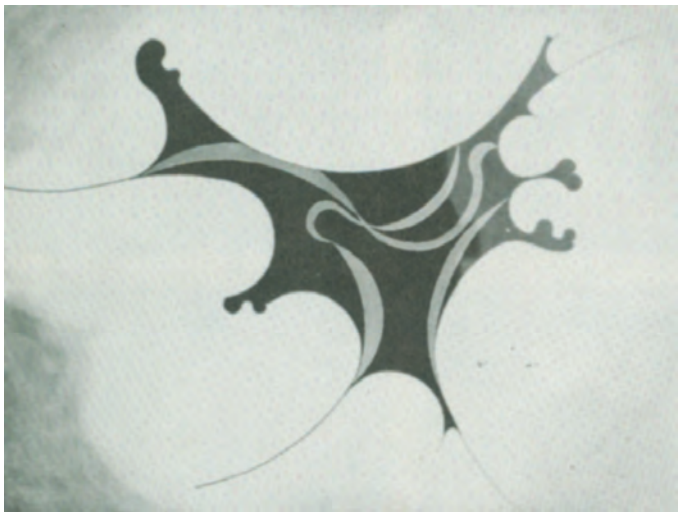
# Can Ethnic Media Correct Ethnic Bias?

**Understanding Ethnic Media**
Matthew Matsaganis, Vikki Katz, and Sandra Ball-Rokeach
Sage Publications, 2010

### BY D. W. AOSSEY

If anyone understands how American media works and is leveraged, it should be the Arab-American community. Print and broadcast media are among the most powerful social forces in the world today and the issues that impact Arab Americans are often shaped by how TV producers, newspaper editors and other information editors choose to present them. Images of Oussama bin Laden, terrorist training camps, and unrest in the Middle East, for example, are still flashed before our eyes as subliminal reminders that America remains in peril. In addition, we are surrounded by the Arab-Israeli conflict, instability in Syria, and saber rattling with Iran. It is no accident that the mass media – fine tuned to target audiences with carefully crafted messages – has assumed such a prominent place in our daily lives.

With this in mind, and with an eye on how the Arab-American community might harness the power of media, a new book entitled "Understanding Ethnic Media: Producers, Consumers, and Societies" should be of interest. The book covers issues like ethnic media as a platform for social equality and ways in which ethnic media can effectively reach out to a broader society and spread a positive message. The power of media in local, state, and federal policy-making is showcased through examples like immigration that can be positively affected by a strong ethnic



By Katiba all-Sheikh Nuri (from "Iraqi Art Today," 1972)

media presence. Case studies of successful ethnic print and broadcast operations received significant analysis. Additionally, the ways in which minority issues can be promoted through venues from small scale public access TV to large scale enterprises like Telemundo, are discussed in-depth.

"Understanding Ethnic Media" was written by university professors and is somewhat technical in nature, but it is thorough, comprehensive, and lends insight into aspects of the media that are important to Arab Americans. Unflattering and biased images in the mainstream media have, arguably, been a yoke around the neck of Arab American people, but as "Understanding Ethnic Media" makes clear, harnessing the power of ethnic media and reaching out to the public to correct these inaccurate images is a step in the right direction.**AJ**

# Mourid Barghouti Memoir: Journey Toward the Self

**I Was Born There, I Was Born Here**
By Mourid Barghouti
Translated by Humphrey Davies.
Walker & Company, New York, 2011.

**BY SUSAN MUADDI DARRAJ**

In 2003, Palestinian poet Mourid Barghouti published a memoir of his return, after an absence of 30 years, to Palestine. Indeed, "I Saw Ramallah" remains one of the most penetrating and insightful analyses of the travails of exile, as well as a perspicacious assessment – in personal tones – of the political issues that plague Palestine. His second memoir, "I Was Born There, I Was Born Here," explores these subjects in greater depth, offering more details of his personal journey as a husband, a father, and an exile. It examines the vexing paradox of the political exile who finds his or her long-dreamed-of return to be as complicated as the initial separation.

Barghouti was living in Cairo as a student when the disastrous 1967 war drew the barrier between himself and his country. He made a home and a life in Egypt, marrying novelist Radwa Ashour – the first person to whom he read his earliest attempts at poetry. They had a son, Tamim, who would become a political scientist as well as a poet in his own right. Some of Tamim's poems about Palestine and Iraq have made him one of the most well known and beloved contemporary poets writing in Arabic.

"I Was Born There, I Was Born Here" puts on full display the skill of the father. Barghouti's ability to describe individual personality traits with detail and sincerity gives this memoir the same emotional depth that no doubt earned his first memoir the Naguib Mahfouz medal for literature. Eschewing grandiose and broad generalizations, he rejects the cliché metaphors and imagery of exile and loneliness, as well as the joy of return; instead, his eye is drawn to the specific, the local, the tangible, and most of all, the inherently contradictory nature of this experience.

For example, the first chapter, entitled "The Driver Mahmoud," is devoted to a description of a young driver from al-Amari refugee camp, who escorted Barghouti and other passengers through a rough journey to the Jericho Bridge the day before the invasion of Ramallah. Mahmoud's grim tenacity during the difficult drive stands in stark contrast with his cheerful attitude. First, he announces to his passengers, "The army's on alert, the roads are closed, and there are flying checkpoints everywhere. The weather as you can see is bad but we'll definitely make it to the bridge, with God's help." In the next breath, his hospitality overshadows this dire message, as he reaches for a thermos between his feet: "Coffee? Pour a cup for everyone… Please, have some coffee." This charming opening is a most creative way of surmounting the pernicious and incessant obstacles the occupation conjures up for restricting the most basic aspects of daily life in Palestine.

Much of Barghouti's memoir follows this early vignette: the aforementioned individuals, with their almost banal means of coping with the occupation, are depicted as microcosms of resistance (as they struggle for dignity) against a greater oppression. The memoir makes a clear and unequivocal statement that Palestinians have had their history stolen from them, and so writing this history becomes a defiant act of re-appropriation : "I shall make of every feeling that ever shook my heart an historic event," he says, "and I shall write it." Later, he expands on this thought: "The cruelest degree of exile is invisibility, being forbidden to tell one's story for oneself." Barghouti's story brings together the voices of those in exile and those who remain in Palestine, slowly unweaving this veil of invisibility through his words. As a man who has been away from his homeland for decades, he often feels lost and uncertain, as well as amazed by the courage of those who never left Palestine. Their insightfulness and savvy, in contrast to the reluctance and corruption of the Palestinian Authority, are refreshing: "I think

*Continued on page 35*

# The Eye of the Needle

**BY HANNA SAADAH**

**1970:**

"Why are you blushing?" I asked, as her blue eyes gazed obliviously into the tepid afternoon.

"I'm just worried," she sighed, and said no more.

"Are you worried about the king or the paupers," I teased.

"What king and paupers? What on earth are you talking about?"

"King Hussein, of course, and the Palestinian resistance fighters, whom he has just evicted..."

"I'm not concerned about the fate of the P.L.O. right now; all I'm concerned about is my own little fate."

"Is that why you're blushing like a sunset?"

"Please, John, drive on and pay attention to the road. I may be setting but I'm not blushing."

I had just returned from Jordan, part of a medical team that was dispatched by the American University of Beirut to assess casualties in the Palestinian refugee camps around Amman. Earlier that week, at the A.U.B. Emergency Department, we had received loads of injured Palestinians who brought with them stories more horrific than their wounds. Because of that, our parents endured great worries while we were gone and welcomed us as unsung heroes when we all came back, unharmed.

My parents organized a reception for me at their home in Tripoli and invited our friends and relatives who came, toasted, and departed, leaving behind Aunt Katreen, who needed to consult my mother regarding an urgent matter. I had volunteered to drive her back to Amioun, our mountain hometown, after the consultation and from there head back to Beirut to resume my medical duties on the busy wards of the American University Medical Center. The drive from Tripoli to Amioun took half an hour, during which some seeds were sawn in a little patch of time and watered with bitter tears.

"We're almost halfway to Amioun and you're still blushing," I insisted. "Why don't you tell me what's blushing you?"

Unwiped tears began to drip down from Aunt Katreen's cheeks as she attempted to ignore my question. I handed her my handkerchief and waited. The setting sun made her look more morose and she grew more taciturn the longer I drove. In the distance, Amioun stretched like a sleeping cat atop the ridge that towered over the olive plain. *'We're almost there,'* I thought, *'and still, she hasn't said a word.'*

"Could you at least tell me why you're crying?" I pleaded.

"Because your mother slapped me smack on the face," she abruptly screamed, no longer able to compose herself.

"My mother smacked you? What on earth did you do to deserve that?"

*"College Hall, AUB,* 1894" by Franklin T. Moore (From "A History of Photography in Lebanon 1840–1944" By Michel Fani.

Aunt Katreen went silent again, darkness dropped its veil upon the valley, I turned my headlights on, and drove quietly toward the rocky ridge that held Amioun upon its crown.

"Why did my mother slap you?" I begged. "She seldom slapped us when we were growing up, even when we deserved it."

"What hurts me most is that she shamed me first and then she slapped me," came her sniffling reply.

"Shamed you? How did she shame you? What did she say that hurt your feelings so much?

"First she said that only arrogant atheists reject God's gifts and then she slapped me when I continued to beg her for an abortion."

"Abortion? You're pregnant?"

"Yes, and I am also forty years old and the mother of four little children."

"Weren't you using some form of birth control?"

"As a nurse I should have known better," she sighed, shaking her head and wiping off her tears with the handkerchief I had given her earlier. "It was too tiny a hole and I wasn't thinking. But it was obviously big enough to admit your uncle's *trouts*."

I pulled the car to the side, turned off the engine, and stared at her with livid consternation.

"What hole are you talking about?"

"The hole in my diaphragm, the diaphragm I had used for several years without incident."

I wanted to say *'why didn't you think to change your ancient diaphragm'* but I decided not to add fuel to her already fuming fire.

"When I was your mother's nurse, I was the one who used to do the sperm counts on the microscope. I should have known better but passion must have enthralled my intellect. I'm doubly ashamed, one – to have gotten pregnant and two – to have asked for an abortion."

**1971:**

Before I left to the U.S. for my medical residency I went to Amioun to bid my grandmother, my aunts, and my uncles farewell. My last stop was at Aunt Katreen's, who met me with the baby on her breast.

"I'm too old for this," she groaned, forcing a pale smile.

Her four little children rushed in, hugged me, and we began exchanging idle talk.

"Are you a real doctor now?" asked the youngest.

"How long will you be gone?" asked the oldest.

"Leave him alone and go play," ordered Aunt Katreen.

They hovered around, of course, as Aunt Katreen and I talked.

"She's a healthy girl," I reassured.

"Thank God for that but will she be smart? They say that *lateborns* grow up to be problems."

"My mother had me at forty and I'm not a problem."

"Did you like her name? The kids wanted to name her Katreen but I stood my grounds. One Katreen in the house is enough, I said, and so we named her Kate."

**1973:**

I returned from the U.S. for a visit after the Syrian-Egyptian-Israeli war had ended. Beirut and Tripoli were still in turmoil and so I stayed in Amioun with my Aunt Katreen and got to hold Kate on my lap. She had exploring eyes, a scouting personality, and an indomitable sense of independence.

"What do you think?" asked Aunt Katreen, having watched me interact with Kate for a while.

"I think she is precious."

"But is she smart?"

"I see genius behind her eyes," I replied with authority.

"I'll be content if she's just normal. Amira, our next door neighbor, had a Down's syndrome at forty."

"Has Kate seen her father yet?"

"He came from Kuwait for a visit last year and is coming back in July to spend a whole month with us."

"Have you thought about getting a new diaphragm?" I bantered.

"I had my tubes tied," she murmured with pursed lips, "and when your uncle returned from Kuwait last year and saw how exhausted I was with our five little ones, he made the mistake of asking me if he could do anything else for me before going back to his work."

She smirked when she said that and then waited while my curiosity burned.

"Is that how you got your new washer and dryer?" I snickered.

"No, my dear young doctor, that's how your uncle got his vasectomy."

**1977:**

I finished my residency and fellowship and was getting ready to return home when my father called.

"I hear you sold your car, your furniture, and bought your return tickets."

"Yes, Dad. I should be home by the end of July."

"Stay where you are for now. We have a raging civil war that's going to take a long time to resolve. At present, Lebanon is not a place to start a career or raise a family."

**1981:**

Amioun was invaded by opposing civil war factions and its evicted inhabitants all became refugees. Our extended family congregated at our large home in Tripoli and Aunt Katreen became the house manager for the duration of the exodus, which lasted nine months. When the invading armies left Amioun, the inhabitants returned to find their homes demolished and all their belongings stolen. No one had money to rebuild. In time, however, small shacks and dugouts were fashioned around or underneath the demolished homes and Amioun began to show some feeble signs of life. Very slowly, schools opened their doors, businesses returned, and rescue money from the Lebanese emigrants started to pour into the region.

When I visited Aunt Katreen that year, she, my uncle, and their five children were living in three storage rooms underneath their demolished home. Our eyes met when Kate pranced by with a bunch of books under her arm.

"Is she good in school?" I teased.

"She's bored with her classes and studies on her own."

"Is she passing?" I teased again.

"She has all As and asks the teachers questions that they cannot answer."

**1987:**

I returned for my father's funeral, two years after the invading Israeli Army had withdrawn from Lebanon.

"Will you go with us?" asked Aunt Katreen after the conclusion of our customary condolences.

"Go where?"

"Kate's graduation. She's the valedictorian."

"Your mean she is that smart?" I grinned.

"Why don't you come and see for yourself."

The graduation was held at the American Evangelical School in Tripoli. I remember most of Kate's speech:

*"We should not take credit for our beauty or our intelligence because they were given not earned. We should not take credit for our achievements for they are the products of the bows that, as Gibran says, shot us as living arrows up into the skies of life. We should not take credit for our characters for they are parts, like Tennyson said, of everything we've met. We should, instead of being concerned with our own credits, be concerned with those who are less endowed nor have credits that they can call their own and we should spend our life's labors insuring that they, the less fortunate, would have us as guardians of their welfares. And we should, for the rest of our lives, nurture an attitude of gratitude for all the gifts that we have received and should endeavor to honor these gifts by using them for the betterment of humanity. And we should be ashamed to die, when our turns come, without having won, as the Antioch College motto enjoins, some victory for humanity."*

**2000:**

I returned to find Amioun totally rebuilt. My aunt and uncle were back in their home, the storage rooms under the house were full of olives and olive oil, and the fecund garden was pregnant with vegetables and fruits.

"Where is Kate?" I asked as we sat on the large veranda, sipping Arabic coffee.

"She's in Dubai."

"Doing what?"

"She's the Managing Director of an investment company that she joined," announced Aunt Katreen with pride.

"Is she successful?" I winked.

"Who do you think rebuilt our house for us?"

"So, can we conclude then that she is both smart and successful?" I asked, rubbing it in.

"You never forget, do you?"

**2002:**

Kate came to visit us at our home in Amioun. I asked if anyone had ever told her the story of how she came to be.

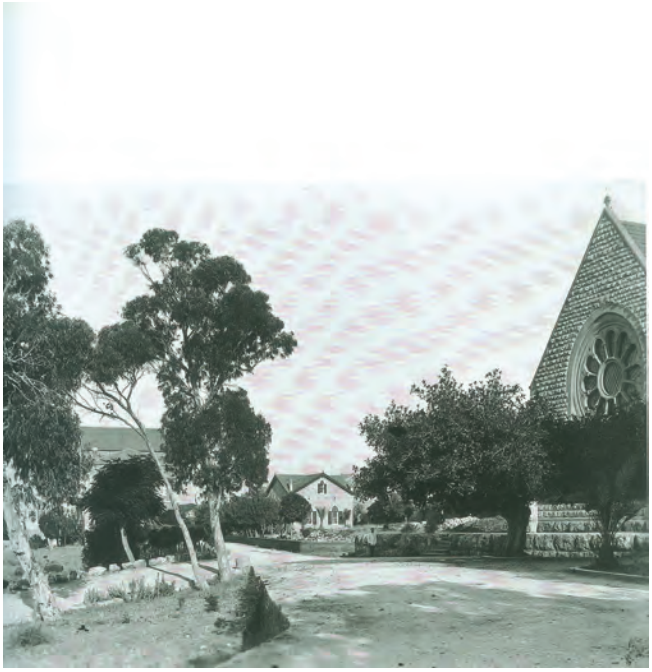
"I was an accident," she asserted.

"What kind of accident?" I pried.

"My mother was forty with four kids and I was unplanned."

I gleamed and, very cautiously, told her the entire story to the minutest detail, omitting nothing. She blushed and said, "So, it was your mother who saved my life."

"No, it was your mother who saved your life," I affirmed. "She could have gone to another gynecologist and gotten an abortion but she didn't."



*"Sonneur de cloche"* (undated) *by Louis Rouzevalle* (From "A History of Photography in Lebanon 1840–1944" By Michel Fani.)

She smiled with eyes, brimming with deep love for her mother and said, "By the way, I'm going to be on Dubai Television next week."

"Why?"

"They are interviewing me because I am considered a good role model for Arab women and a vital economic force in their society."

"How wonderful. I wish I could watch it."

"Why can't you?"

"I'll be in back in the US by then."

**2005:**

Kate is on television again, and all of Amioun is watching Al Jazeera. Aunt Katreen invited me to come watch with her and my uncle. The interviewer asked economical questions, then social questions, then educational questions, all of which were answered most eloquently by Kate, who had just started her own investment company in order to empower youth and women in the region. Then the interviewer startled us all with, "You are one of the wealthiest women in the Arab world and you are also a Christian. Prophet Muhammad, *salla llahu alaihe wasallam,** admonishes us to give a percent of our earnings to the poor. Jesus, on the other hand, says that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich individual to enter the kingdom of heaven. How do you reconcile your wealth with your faith?"

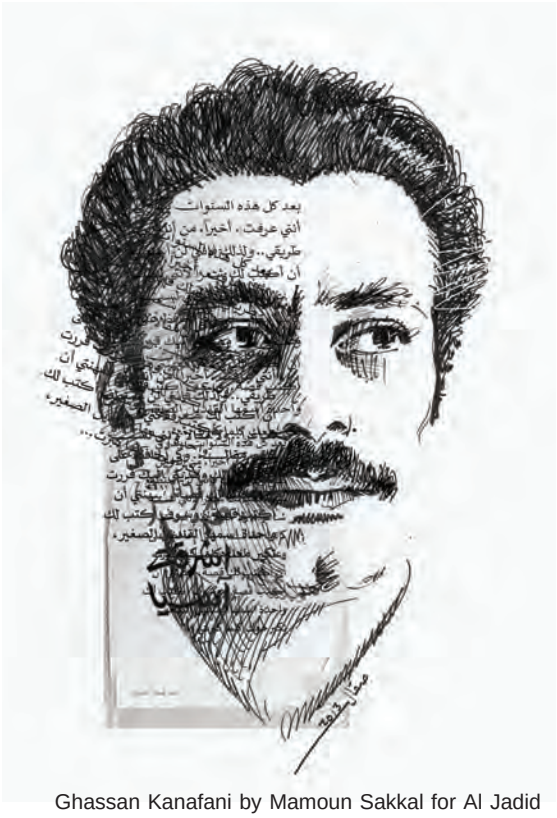
Kate flushed, and with a wink that only her mother and I could understand, replied, "I entered heaven through the eye of a needle long before I became rich."**AJ**

* *God prayed upon him and blessed.*

# Thirst

**BY GHASSAN KANAFANI**

*"Thirst" is a story from Kanafani's first published short story collection, "Mawt Sarir Raqm 12." Despite its brevity, the story – written in Beirut in 1961 – is a great example of Kanafani's unique style and tendency to address his audience (usually Palestinians, although this varies by story and according to one's interpretation) in his fiction. "Thirst" is, in many ways, the rant of a Palestinian frustrated by the lack of leadership, direction, or organization amongst Palestinians at the time. There was no organized, central Palestinian resistance yet in 1961; the PLO would form in just three years, and many other groups and movements after that. At the time Kanafani wrote this story, however, it may have seemed that Palestinians were, lost in a sense, with nothing else to do except tell others how they have been wronged. Today, though Palestinian activism is strong, the search for dignity depicted in Kanafani's "Thirst" remains as poignant as ever. While the Arab Spring led to the empowerment of the oppressed in several nearby countries, Palestinians are in virtually the same situation they have been in for the past fifty years, despite their increased activism. While various Palestinian political groups struggle for authority and power, the Palestinian people remain downtrodden. Without a legal identity or somebody to effectively represent them, Palestinians are confined to refugee camps, thirsting for the opportunity to one day return home. This thirst – the subject of Kanafani's story 52 years ago and still present in the spirit of Palestinians today – has become a part of the larger Palestinian identity, uniting Palestinians across the world. They thirst for their homeland.*



Ghassan Kanafani by Mamoun Sakkal for Al Jadid

Ah, if only the depressed man could go! Where? That's not important…. If only he were able to go…. He wandered aimlessly within the walls of the room, then fell on his bed. The crying sound from the record player no longer settled in his chest. Instead, it touches his cold skin, then turns and clings to the wall. How was he able to believe – in days past – that this sound was everything? How?

In days past! It's as if the past was for another man…. And he, oh! He has carried these four walls on his shoulders since he was born. He carries them wherever he goes. Even when he laughs, his coarse tongue runs over the walls. Since when has he carried these walls? It's not clear. Maybe before he was born. Maybe only now. He got out of bed and turned the knob on the radio. The sound now echoed throughout the room, blaring like a million downcast trumpets. But despite this, it still only touched his skin and bounced back to the walls.

Oh, dispirited man, do you recall the day when you heard this piece for the first time? How it gave you the feeling that you were thrown into a whirlpool from a rush which you did not want to leave? What happened to you? Do you remember how the grieved horn used to shake your roots and the sound of bravery would echo in the back of your throat? Don't get up! The same piece…the same delivery…the same band…the same recording company. Do you want to say that it changed? Lying is useless.

Ten cups of coffee without sugar. An entire pack of cigarettes. A thousand times you went out onto the balcony, then returned…. Do you remember how many times you turned the dial on the radio? How many times you changed the record? How many times you tried to drink the mouthful of wine hidden in the wardrobe? Why don't you just sit on the edge of the bed, put your head in your hands, and quietly confess, "I am a stranger?"

The sound of the trumpet is tragic! But despite this, it is not here…It's as if your chest is made of sheets of tin which the sound hits and then turns back to the wall like something insignificant. It's as if the trumpets play on the roof of a building to the children of angels who are busy plucking the feathers from each other's wings.Stand up, So…silence the trumpets, put out the light, and thrust your head into the dreams of your pillow! You can't? Don't you know why?

Your story began when your friend with the pockmarked face gave you a book for the first time in your life. You were a teenager. At the time, your mind wasn't preoccupied with the hero of the story, but with the author. You wanted to be like him. A beautiful thing…but how? You are a person who doesn't dare

confront himself. Your failure characterizes you and the experience stuck with you. Why did you falsify the matter? Why didn't you sit calmly that day, and admit that you had failed?

Your people are limiting your freedom? Leave them! Your friends are laughing? Abandon them! Your work isn't giving you experience? Quit! Then what? You now carry your four walls and walk as a man of plaster. Why didn't you admit from the start that the extraordinary lie was produced by your failure? You reckoned that if you acted indecently, then you would be a failure. What a lie! The cigarette butt shimmered, and the house didn't burn. And even if it did burn, it would remain above your head.

Oh, depressed man…I did not forget him! I will not tell you that he wanders around the room, like a cat imprisoned in an empty pantry. Do you know what you have forgotten? To live your own life, not the life of another.

Why does the record turn? You don't know how to listen. A thousand black wheels are turning inside your head. Light another cigarette.

You live alone now. Isn't that what you wanted? Was it necessary for the water to be cut off from your house for you to discover that you are alone?

Yesterday, the depressed man rose to get a drink. When he turned on the faucet, a deep noise rumbled and not a single drop fell. Thirst seized the man's throat with its thick, putrid fingers. How can he drink? It's absurd. But he wants to drink. Later, in the middle of the night, an even stronger thirst arose. If only there were another person in the room to whom the man could grumble, "I want to drink." It is not important for you to drink. The important thing is that you find the one whom you will tell that you want to drink. That you are thirsty… Was it necessary for this to happen for you to discover that you are a human, cast into a void?

I know you! You are a person who hates to repent. Thus, you will not tell anyone that you carry the four depressed walls with you. Tomorrow you will wake and a bitter taste will cling to your tongue. Nobody will ask you how you slept. You will take your breakfast in a wretched restaurant, and you will run, searching for someone to sit with…anyone to sit with, so you can hear a distinguished voice coming to you through the walls. I know you. Your shameful glory silences your tongue. You will be asked if you are happy and you will reply, "I like the solitude."

Oh, dispirited man…don't wear yourself out! Don't search for another record! Every record is made from dough. Has it occurred to you that your many books are leaning against each other, like girls huddled together on a cold sidewalk?

Tomorrow, my dear miserable human, you will not be happy. You will not hear a single one of the words of the person sitting with you. You search for him only so that you may say to him, as if you are telling him something in passing:

"Yesterday, the water was cut off from my house."**AJ**

*Introduced and translated from the Arabic by Alex Taylor*

## Barghouti: Journey Toward the Self

*Continued from page 30*

to myself, if only our leadership, petrified of Israel as it is, could grasp the truth of Israel's dilemma the way these passengers have." The memoir stands as a testament to Palestinian strength, as well as a vivid depiction of the ways in which occupation has forced many people to redesign their dreams, to simplify their ambitions from, say, finding a good job to getting the medication one's child requires during a curfew.

Indeed, many have marveled at how the Palestinians have managed to survive, both physically and psychologically, during the decades of loss and upheaval, and Barghouti does a marvelous job of sharing the spirit of the Palestinian people in the sad but encouraging way his characters deal with disappointment and grief. Both memoirs feature the characters complaining as they try to get a handle on their situation. For example, locals have nicknames for the grueling Qalandya checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem "Qalandahar." While Barghouti's memoir is personal, it is also a document that gives form and shape to the mood of Palestinians living under occupation, capturing the shared jokes, quickly spread gossip, and long nights spent together with friends and family over good food and wonderful conversation.

Barghouti, then, with the eye of a poet, chooses to write the specific and the personal. He ponders the reasons why the symbols of a people, of a nation, often fail to communicate the richness of the culture they purport to represent. When his friend Emile Touma died in Budapest, Barghouti draped a homemade Palestinian flag over his coffin as it was being prepared for the flight back to Nazareth. A friend gently cautioned him: "They will never let that flag into Ben Gurion Airport. Emile Touma was an Israeli citizen with Israeli nationality." As Barghouti reminds the reader repeatedly, life at the behest of such mechanized cruelty cannot be reduced or simplified, but retains a complex vibrancy that epitomizes the spirit of resistance.**AJ**

## *Editor's Notebook*

*Continued from page 8*

when the news broadcaster appears to announce the opening of a given project. While the newscaster reads the news, the screen broadcasts the pictures of the opening ceremony. The individuals appearing on the screen are crammed tightly together, resembling each other, having the same features – sideburns, moustaches, safari faded uniforms and dark sun glasses. They start silently clapping, without a sound. The newscaster reads the news, and they appear on the screen applauding but the sound of their applause cannot be heard. This soundless applauding scene used to frighten me," Amran told Wannous.**AJ**

# An Interview with Typeface Designer Mamoun Sakkal

Type design is a specialized field of creative design that combines art and technology. For a long time, it has been restricted to a limited number of practitioners and to companies that produced typesetting equipment, but in the last few decades the desktop publishing revolution opened the opportunity for more designers to create and market new fonts. Especially significant was the entry of native Arab type designers into this exclusive field. A notable example is the Syrian-born Mamoun Sakkal, a well-known calligrapher and type designer whose typeface family Shilia was recently released for the public by the German company Linotype.

Shilia is an Arabic display typeface that can also be used for text setting, especially in bilingual publications where Arabic and Latin scripts ought to work in harmony. It is useful for titles, signage, documents, and graphic projects where a contemporary, streamlined, and well-proportioned look is desired. The font is based on the simple lines of Kufic calligraphy, and the uniform, open shapes of its letters give it a structured and geometric, yet friendly and familiar feel. Featuring one of the largest Arabic typeface families on the market today, Shilia's 21 styles make it especially suitable for demanding corporate and governmental applications.

On the occasion of the typeface release, Linotype conducted this interview with Mamoun Sakkal. It is republished here with permission. You can find more information about Shilia at www.sakkal.com/type/shilia.html.

**What inspired you to design this typeface?**

The original design started in 1976 as an attempt to create an Arabic typeface that's compatible with Latin for bilingual publications.

a. b. c.

**Are you influenced by other typefaces in the design of your typeface?**

I was not influenced by specific typefaces because I was not aware of any designs during the 1970s that had the streamlined and geometric look I wanted to achieve with Shilia. However, I admired the work of the Iraqi designer Nazem Ramzi who designed a uniform typeface with square details for *Afaq Arabiyya* magazine as well as the work of the Lebanese designer Nasri Khattar, although I did not agree with his concept of dis-joined letters.

**What techniques did you use in creating your font?**

Because of the long time span between the original design and the commercial release of Shilia I used a number of techniques in its design and production. First I drew the letters with pen and ink using the drafting tools and skills I acquired in architecture school. Later, in 1985, I cut the letters in Rubylith film so they were ready for digitization, but since that did not happen I redrew the letters in digital format using Fonotgrapher and later converted to OpenType in FontLab. Finally, I had to draw the typeface one last time in order to coordinate the weights and styles with Linotype Univers, the companion Latin shipped with Shilia.

**What was the greatest challenge you faced while creating your typeface?**

The greatest challenge was to produce Arabic letter-forms that are familiar and natural while at the same time extremely simplified and uniform in proportions and shapes to conform to a geometric grid. When Shilia was first designed this range of letter-forms was not yet familiar in Arabic publications and other graphic pieces. However over time, several fonts with similar qualities were released and this type of design became more acceptable and familiar. In order to achieve my design goals I researched in-depth the history of Kufic calligraphy to identify a range of shapes that is in harmony with the traditions of Arabic calligraphy, while at the same time appealing to modern sensibilities and compatible with Latin script typography.

**Please describe the look and feel of your typeface.**

Shilia has a simple and modern feel because it was designed to work with Sans Serif Latin typefaces.

**For what applications would you recommend your typeface (posters, text, newspapers, advertisements, etc.)?**

Shilia is ideal for display applications such as posters, signs, logotypes, and advertisements because of its legible shapes and contemporary look. It will also work well where bilingual text is needed or where a wide variety of weights and width is required. A custom version of Shilia is already in use as the corporate font for the highest skyscraper in the world, Burj Khalifa in Dubai, where it is applied in information and

way-finding signs inside and outside the tower, and in print advertising, stationary, and other collateral material. Another custom version of Shilia was also designed for Armani Hotel in the same project.

**What are the unique details that you think distinguish your typeface?**

Some of the unique details that distinguish Shilia include:
(a) Vertical strokes are made thinner than horizontal strokes in accordance with traditional Arabic calligraphy. (b) Ink traps are used for sharp angles such as in letters Jeem, Fa, and Ayn. (c) The connections of the letters to the baseline are balanced between curved and squared in order to keep the traditions of Kufic calligraphy. (d) The letter Ayn has a novel shape in the middle and final positions that has never been used in Arabic typography before. It reinforces the soft and round feel of the typeface. (e) Several letters have the same shape in all positions (initial, medial, final, and isolated) without appearing contrived. Examples include Jeem, Fa, Sad, and Meem. (f) Shilia includes the "end of text" mark which is absent from other Arabic fonts, as well as the largest number of traditional ligature words and phrases in any modern style font on the market. These are all original designs compatible with the style of the typeface and fine-tuned to match each weight and width. Such feature is usually limited to high end traditional Naskh fonts. (g) Shilia has a unique set of ornaments that are carefully designed to allow the user to create an endless number of bands and decorative compositions to enhance and define page layouts.

**What was the reason for you to give the typeface its name and what is the meaning?**

In the summer of 1979 I was asked to design a logotype and stationary for a Saudi company and took this opportunity to refine and complete the font design, which I started a few years earlier. At this time I called it Shilia after the name of the company, which is derived from the name of a mountain range.

**Anything else you would like to share?**

Shilia has a comprehensive set of OpenType features that are rarely used in contemporary typefaces and never used all at once in any modern Arabic font on the market. In addition to sophisticated and contextual mark positioning and kerning, Shilia includes 19 Stylistic Sets with variations that give the user many options to control the appearance of the composed text. It also includes a large number of ligatures and a unique set of swash and overlap swash glyphs to help in line justification as well as in achieving a more artistic and unique word compositions, a clear advantage in any identity project.


**Designer Portrait of Mamoun Sakkal**

Mamoun Sakkal is founder and principal of Sakkal Design, established in Seattle and Bothell, Washington in 1984. Providing graphic design and communication solutions to major national and international corporations, Sakkal Design has received several awards for calligraphy, graphics, and type design including three awards of excellence from the Type Directors Club of New York and one from IRCICA in Istanbul. In 2001 Sakkal hired his daughter Aida Sakkal as a full time programmer and shifted the firm's focus to Arabic typography and calligraphy.

His work is widely published and he was commissioned to design the corporate Arabic typefaces for Burj Khalifa (formerly Burj Dubai) and Armani Hotel in Dubai, and Awan Newspaper in Kuwait. Sakkal Design has been the Arabic typography specialist for Microsoft Corporation since 2001 with several Arabic fonts now commonly used as Windows system fonts. Other clients include Adobe, Bitstream, Linotype, National Geographic, and TripleInk among others. He is art director for Cune Press in Seattle, and often supplies Arabic titles and graphics for books and magazines published in the US and elsewhere including Al Jadid. He designed and typeset several books and poetry anthologies with text set in both Arabic and English.

Dr. Sakkal studied art at the Plastic Arts Center in Aleppo and has degrees in architecture from the University of Aleppo and the University of Washington in Seattle, and a Ph.D. degree in Islamic art history from the University of Washington on the use of Square Kufic calligraphy in modern art and design. He has lectured on Islamic art, Arabic calligraphy, and Arabic typography at universities and conferences in the United States, England, Dubai, Syria, and Uzbekistan. www.sakkal.com.**AJ**

## Anthony Shadid's 'House of Stone'

*Continued from page 40*

Historical cinematographic shots of the ancestors' tales in their emigration to America, overlap with reports of the house's reconstruction in all its details and stages. But Anthony Shadid places them in all a personal and sensual portrait; depicting the efforts of those early immigrants who placed their lives on the palm of destiny, leaving behind them homes and relatives to an unknown future. Those were often desperate people who chose the path of emigration in search for a better life for them and their children, that Lebanon could no longer offer. Their difficult journeys are hard for us to imagine in this day and age, where distances have shortened and many of the dangers eliminated.

The search for roots, or to be more precise, for a certain home, or for the true meaning of 'dwelling' somewhere, (borrowing this concept from Martin Heidegger) characterizes Anthony Shadid's story in Marjayoun, where he encounters others lost like him, people suspended between two worlds, who could not reach a synthesis between the two. This is the case of Asaad Maatouq, a Lebanese chef who came back from Wisconsin, whose only desire was to return to the country he had left, before settling into despair and pessimism. Anthony Shadid thus described Asaad's situation:

> This is a man suspended between two places, between a place where he always felt he was a stranger, and another place to where he could no longer belong. Time and changes made him a permanent traveler, unsettled, like numbers of people who lost their homes or traveled the world, always searching for an alternate home.

Shadid adds later:

> Feeling a lack of belonging has drawn me closer to him. Like him, I have never felt a feeling of belonging here in Marjayoun, even though I desired to. After his departure, I understood that my feelings of loneliness are a legacy of families governed by unending migration. I felt that I, like Asaad, would never find the "home" that I searched for, not in Oklahoma, not in Maryland, and not in Marjayoun. It is a curse that follows this generation that always searches for the better. It is the price of greater freedom. But we continue to search, and sometimes without realizing that. I knew that I wanted access to my own concept of home, or the house, and that what drew me here in the first place.

What Anthony Shadid had attempted, was not only the recovery of a lost 'place,' but also and simultaneously, the recapturing of a past time, as so many other romantic poets and writers had done before him. His impossible mission parallels the efforts of many people today who attempt to restore the 'family house' or to purchase a similarly looking 'typical' house in one of the several new 'ideal villages' that are being promoted. These attempts are bound to lead to frustration because time cannot be rewound, and one can not recover the house of childhood nor its playgrounds. Of course, we speak here of a pre-modern time, even of the first stage of modernization, prior to the emergence of the negative effects associated with modernity such as environmental and social problems. It was a time of optimism in progress, of dreaming of the ideal balance between technology and humanity, between arts and sciences, between rationality and sensuality. Perhaps that is what Anthony Shadid was also searching for?

The story of "A House of Stone" ends with the final touches in the restoration of the ancestral home, which was just about ready to welcome its returning family. But fate had a different opinion, as if with Anthony's tragic death on the Turkish-Syrian border, it wanted to keep the story open to other possible interpretations, as an 'open-text,' and to leave the old family house in Marjayoun suspended until further notice, with an unknown destiny, between life and death. Or was this another way of portraying the condition of the country as a whole? **AJ**

**Translated from the Arabic by Lauren Khater**
The Arabic text appeared in An Nahar, July 26, 2012

## The Sword of Amin Maalouf

*Continued from page 39*

with jealousy and perhaps even envy. For France had been in their view, as Said Aql once described it, an "oasis of modernity" and the "capital of the spiritual world" and the "repository of the rational tradition." The generation of the French Mandate believed in the close ties between the Lebanese and French literary societies .Amin Maalouf knew well though that France was not as it once was and that the French language now suffers from a worldwide retreat. Additionally, he saw the Lebanese "myth" was on the verge on vanishing with its apostles dead or nearly so in the case of Said Aql as he approaches his hundredth .

When the great Algerian writer Asia Jabar entered the French Academy in 2005, Algerian intellectuals disagreed on her selection, but for most, her induction was not a noteworthy event. In fact, many attacked the Academy and accused it of harboring an imperialist spirit. Major writers like Rachid Boudjedra and Taher Wattar did not hesitate to describe this matter as a farce and argued that Asia Jabar's affiliation with the Academy would not benefit Algerian or Arab culture, but do quite the opposite.

The Lebanese , as opposed to the Algerians, celebrated the "event" not as a cultural achievement but as a political one. This is the Lebanese "myth" that shines forth in the world, from Cadmus all the way until Gibran.**AJ**

***The Arabic version of this article appeared in Al Hayat, June 18, 2012.***

*Translated from the Arabic by Joseph Sills*

# The Sword of Amin Maalouf

**BY ABDUH WAZEN**

Amin Maalouf, perhaps the most famous and popular member of the French Academy, is a best-selling author and known as an intellectual whose works "honored" the French language. Maalouf's contributions are considered an answer to the call of the Academy, whose exclusive and main concern is safeguarding the French language and preserving French culture. Perhaps none of the Academy's current members can rival Maalouf's worldwide fame, even though he follows a distinguished line of intellectuals like Eugene Ionesco, Marguerite Yourcenar, Alan Rob Gray, and of course, Levi Cluade-Strauss who bequeathed Maalouf his seat.

However, great names have passed into the Academy's *immortels* in the previous ages such as Racine and Cournet, Montesquieu, Ernest Renan, and Victor Hugo. These names elevated the status of the French language, but now many have disappeared from the Academy's membership records. Prominent members like Baudelaire, Flaubert, Rambeau and Mallarmé did not originally like the traditional ambiance of the Academy founded by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635 in the reign of Louis XIII. Of all the *immortels* in French literature, it seemed there were more outside the Academy circle than inside it. And most of these outsiders entered into the annals of history with only insignificant influence attributed to them.

Amin Maalouf by Mamoun Sakkal for Al Jadid

Amin Maalouf was ready to enter the Academy since the first and second rounds during which his name was "dropped" because of his resistance to traditional francophonism which he criticized for its unconvincing goals and rationalizations. Maalouf infuriated the *immortels* when he openly supported a famous statement signed by progressive and avant-guarde French intellectuals announcing the death of francophonism and the retreat of the French language in the world especially in regards to the rise of American-English language. But his eventual selection in the third round seemed expected and inevitable, because the *immortels* need a name like Amin Maalouf, which carries a worldwide import. He was without a doubt a great benefit to the French language, carrying it to various countries in the modern world.

Politicians recognized the position Amin Maalouf occupies in France and the francophone world well before the Academy; these politicians include the Presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy who made the author of "*Leo Africanus*" (Leo the African) accompany them in their visits to Lebanon. And how embarrassing it seemed when President Chirac, in his 1996 visit to Lebanon, introduced his "friend" Maalouf to the three presidents of Lebanon: President Elias Hrawi,Prime minister Rafiq Hariri, and House Speaker Nabih Beri. Can you imagine that scene? Lebanese top officials waiting for a French president to convene a meeting between them and a renowned Lebanese author. Perhaps these men found it strange for a novelist to accompany presidents in political missions?

The Lebanese government and media celebrated the "event" of Maalouf's selection to the Academy differently from France. Since France ceased to pay attention to the Academy, the French press did not highlight the event except in small spaces inside the papers. Yet in Lebanon, the event was mythic and treated as a legendary feat with the press devoting sizable coverage to its front pages. The Lebanese government did not delay in imprinting his picture on silver *lira* coins, and in the near future postage stamps with his picture will enter circulation. Maalouf succeeded in rising the emotions of the Lebanese when he asked for the cedar tree to be carved into the "sword," one of the Academy's symbols, with a picture of Marianne who is an icon of the French Revolution. He truly knew how to address the Lebanese people, and instilled a revival of appreciation among the Lebanese people for everything French. If people like Charles Qorm, Hector Khlat, Charles Helou and Said Aql and other alike, had been able to see this scene, they would have been struck

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# Anthony Shadid's 'House of Stone' or the Return to the Roots

BY ELIE HADDAD

**House of Stone: A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East**
By Anthony Shadid
Mariner Books, 2012

The story of Anthony Shadid may not be that different from the story of most Lebanese who left Lebanon during the civil war, or even those who were born in the diaspora to Lebanese parents. Those Lebanese – Americans whom we met during our forced immigration to America, with their old-accents and unusual Arabic expressions would reminisce, during our first encounter with them in the grocery store of the South End neighborhood of Boston, about their parents' stories of the 'good old country,' or their own struggles in their journeys to America, remembering with a tint of nostalgia a certain village that they had abandoned in the South or the Mountains of Lebanon. They preserved in their collective memory the images of these villages as they existed before the First or Second World War, interlaced with their customs and traditions that they carried with them to their new homelands. And we, the fresh and young immigrants coming to these shores, would represent to them a mirror-image of their own youth, as if we were projecting for them the movie in which they once played the starring role.

Anthony Shadid by Mamoun Sakkal for Al Jadid

But Anthony Shadid did not satisfy himself by playing the role of the son of Lebanese immigrants, who could recite a few words of the mother language, coupled with an innocent love for a country he only knew through old pictures and stories, in addition to the great appreciation for Lebanese food that survived the test of time and remained with all the new generations. Anthony Shadid wanted more. He wanted to enact an actual process of re-claiming the past, through which he could return physically back to the 'old village,' from where his grandparents left one day to settle in the plains of Oklahoma. It was as if he wanted also to play the role of the "prodigal son" – that exemplary story from the Holy Book that unquestionably impressed many migrant sons and daughters.

But the prodigal son in this case returned to a village in which none of his family or relatives were still living, and to a house in a state of ruins, somewhat like the nation itself, putting as his objective the restoration of the old family house. In this story, the story of restoring the house and perhaps indirectly attempting to restore one's own 'being,' the personal stories of Marjeyoun intermingle with political analyses, and with a historical survey that goes back to the period that preceded the Mandate era and the partition of the region that followed it. We discover, through Anthony Shadid, a different awareness of geography, that was not sharply delineated yet through the demarcation of 'national' borders, as well as another concept of the "nation" which extended to different provinces, from the Houran to Mount Hermon, to the villages of southern Lebanon. We also discover in his narrative the view of the "Other" towards the Lebanese personality in its daily affairs, and human interactions, a personality that is largely based on procrastination, lack of definition of things, as if it was reflecting the perpetual condition of instability that had always marked the 'Lebanese condition.' But Anthony Shadid, after an initial period of rebellion against this reality, finally learned to deal and coexist with it, sympathetically understanding its circumstances and causes.

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