AL JADID

A Review & Record of Arab Culture and Arts

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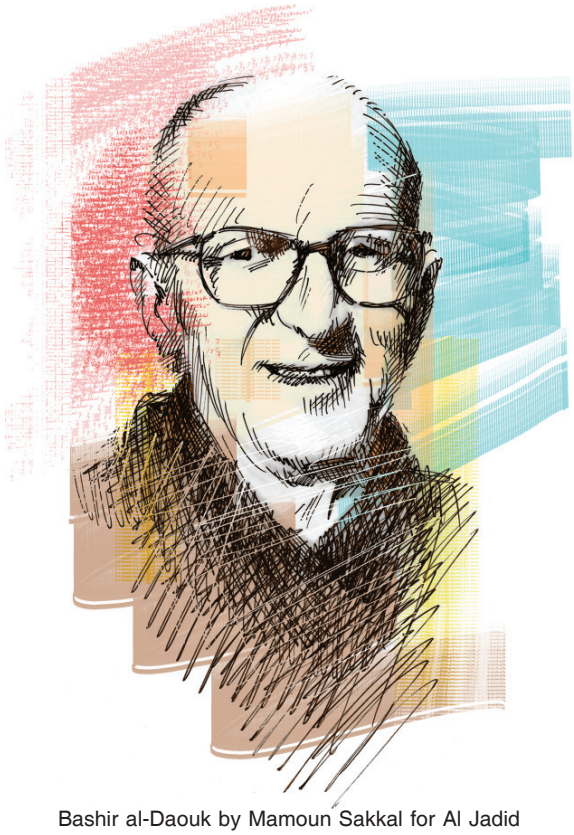
Bashir al-Daouk (1931-2007)

In Memoriam: Farewell to Publisher Hero

BY ELIE CHALALA

As happens in the West, Arab culture often celebrates authors at the expense of publishers. Also like their Western counterparts, Arab publishers tend toward commercialism and self-interest, jeopardizing the public's best interest. And, typically, they are only too ready to abandon authors of manuscripts deemed "controversial," as well as those on whose behalf they receive threats from governments or non-governmental groups. But Lebanon, and even the Arab world, prides itself on the exception that was Dr. Bashir al-Daouk, the late owner of the publishing house Dar Al Talia and the monthly magazine, Dirasaat Arabiyya.



Bashir al-Daouk by Mamoun Sakkal for Al Jadid

Daouk fought silently with exceptional courage against the extravagant commercialization of publishing, as well as state censorship and repression. He was never hesitant about taking financial, legal and political risks. One of his most celebrated authors, the noted Syrian philosopher Sadeq Jalal al-Azm, was actually imprisoned in 1969 for his book, "Criticism of Religious Thought." Sued more than once since founding Dar Al Talia in 1960, Daouk's entanglement with the Lebanese courts was still not resolved at the time of his death – he was sued for publishing Adonis al-Akra's book "When My Name Became 16," a story of the author's imprisonment during the Syrian control of Lebanon.

The list of the causes Daouk championed is long – anti-colonialism, Baathism, Arab nationalism, Palestine, social and economic justice, and women's rights, just to name a few. While the space to fully detail Daouk's political and intellectual interests is lacking, his most prominent cause, at least in my opinion, is the self-reflection and self-criticism that he encouraged following the Arab defeat in 1967. His stance was reflected in Dar Al Talia's numerous publishings on the subject, as well as in the hundreds of studies that found a home on the pages of his journal, Dirasaat Arabiyya, which he founded in 1965. These contributions were paramount in exposing the social, political, and economic conditions that led to the disastrous setback of 1967.

Living in Lebanon during these eventful years, I was privy to the self-education conducted by an entire generation of Lebanese – an education whose most refined tools were the many books and the studies put out by Dar Al Talia. I see it as a period critical to my intellectual formation, and to that of many others. The words of Lebanese poet and journalist Zahi Wehbe in Al Hayat sum up Daouk's influence best: "In our villages the only means of entertainment were the books. We had neither stadiums, clubs, nor theaters – there was nothing for entertainment except books. Some of my generation who came from villages competed with one another in terms of who could collect the most books. Daouk was the spiritual father of my generation – though I knew him only as a name in print and member of the avant-guard."

In spite or perhaps because of the turbulence of the 1960's and 1970's, Arab authors chose to stay home, having their works published in Beirut rather than London and Paris. That they could do so at all is a tribute to the willingness of publishers like Bashir Daouk, who tirelessly defended the author and stood up to the censor. Those who knew Daouk say that he was greatly saddened by the current state of affairs in the Arab world, where the author is not only pursued by the state and terrorized by extremists of all shapes and stripes, but also forced en masse into exile. He was equally grieved by the setbacks of the independent publishing movement in Lebanon, which coincided with the demise of leftist trends in the Arab world. Khalil Ahmad Khalil wrote in As Safir newspaper: "He leaves us today at a time where sectarianism is on the rise in the ruins of nationalism." Daouk's death, as put by Yassine Rifaieh in Al Hawadeth magazine, was "as if a protest of the fragmented state of Arabism and the Arab state, for he was a man who built his dreams upon unity and the rebirth of civilization."

Although his positions on a wide range of issues that dominated Arab discourse after 1967 were known to his

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Editor's Notebook/*Elie Chalala*

To Boycott or Not to Boycott: The Politics of Culture at Paris, Turin Book Fairs

The polemical issue of boycott is a longstanding one in Arab political, economic and cultural discourse. Not only has most of the Arab world long boycotted Israeli economic products, as well as cultural events that include Israeli participation, but boycotts have also targeted Western products if their producers conduct trade with Israel. Excluding a few Arab states and those states which signed peace agreements with Israel, the issue of boycott remains present today. The only noticeable change in the last two decades is that Arab states are forgiving Western companies who have done business with Israel.

No boycotts have been more attention-grabbing than world cultural activities, especially those which invite Arab and Israeli cultural figures. Arab participants often find themselves labeled by colleagues, the press and activists as being less than patriotic, or even accused of supporting Israeli policies against the Palestinians. Those who decline to participate publicly exploit their rejection in two ways. They take political advantage by presenting themselves as champions of the Arab cause, and benefit commercially through sales of their music products or books, which often skyrocket as a payoff for their uncompromising political principles.

The most recent issue in the boycott debate came with a decision by the Salon du Livre International Book Fair in Paris to give the prestigious "Pavilion of Honor" award to Israeli writers. This decision cost the Salon du Livre (which ran from March 14 to 19, 2008) some attendance and attracted unwanted controversy. At the urging of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), countries including Algeria, Morocco, Iran, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen announced their withdrawal from the event. Implying that art cannot divorce itself from politics, ISESCO issued a statement saying that "the crimes against humanity Israel is perpetrating in the Palestinian territories" make it undeserving of such an honor, especially as a "siege" is conducted against the Palestinian people.

An equally significant debate emerged after the International Book Fair in Turin, Italy (which ran from May 8 to 12, 2008) selected Israel as the guest of honor. The Italian decision ignited a debate between those who called for boycott and those who oppose linking culture to politics – and thus supported participation in Italy's largest annual gathering of publishers.

As one would expect, Israel attempted to maximize its benefits from the boycott. After a five-day state visit to France, Israeli President Shimon Peres commented, "I am against the boycott of books. Books are written to try to awaken reflection, to try to make sense of ideas."

French officials and intellectuals echoed the same sentiment. French presidential spokesperson David Martinon said at a news conference, "It is not books we should fear," and called for tranquility in the meantime. Bernard Koshner, France's foreign minister, was also dismayed by the Arabs' boycott of "ideas," commenting sarcastically that he hoped they would not also choose to boycott the "necessary peace."

"What is happening in the Middle East is very sad, but it is not linked to our event," said Christine de Mazieres, spokesperson for the French Publishers Association, the group which organized the Salon. She emphasized that Israel was not being honored for its politics, but for its writers, which included Amoz Oz, David Grossman and Sayed Kashua, an Israeli Arab who writes in Hebrew. According to de Mazieres, all of the countries that withdrew knew that Israel was being honored when they signed up. The fair's organizers also stressed that their choice to distinguish Israeli literature was unrelated to the Jewish state's 60th anniversary.

Italian leftist intellectuals and activists were at the forefront of the opposition to recognizing Israel at the Book Fair in Turin. "A prestigious event like the Book Fair can't pretend it doesn't know what's happening in that part of the Middle East," said Vincenzo Chieppa, a local leader of the Italian Communist Party, as quoted in the New York Times. Mirroring the controversy in France, Italian intellectuals battled each other on the pages of newspapers, raising "concerns about censorship" while "extolling the need to place art above politics." According to The Times, more than 30 Italian intellectuals and artists formed a counter-campaign and petitioned the Italian president, Giorgio Napolitano, to preside over the opening of the Book Fair and speak out against "any discrimination and blind intolerance towards the citizens and culture of Israel."

On the other side, pro-Palestinian protesters stormed the Book Fair's offices and demanded the withdrawal of Israel's invitation, threatening more demonstrations in the days leading up to the Book Fair.

The debate over the boycotts went beyond France and Italy, involving scholars and intellectuals worldwide. But nowhere has the debate been more heated than in the Arab world itself, where most intellectuals fall into one of three groups or schools of thought. The first promotes all-out opposition toward any contact with Israel, cultural or political. Algerian journalist Yacine Tamalali represents this group. Tamalali made his views clear in an article in the Beirut-based Al Akhbar newspaper.

In the article, Tamalali lashed out at French officials and European intellectuals, deriding their call for separating culture from politics. Culture and politics, in Tamalali's opinion, are inextricably interconnected. He challenged the European

intellectuals' hypocrisy by reminding them of the boycott policies Europeans have adopted in the past. He leveled the same charge against the United Nations, including UNESCO, which imposed boycott policies against South Africa during its former system of apartheid. Tamalali includes sports in his examples, arguing that sports were never free from politics. He reminds Westerners of the 1980 boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow – an act protesting the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Advocates of this approach assume that their audience is "back home" in the Arab world. They may be able to score points in Beirut or Cairo in favor of the boycott, but not in Paris, London or New York. Since this particular debate on boycott centers on events taking place in Paris and Turin rather than the Arab world, attempting to advance a pro-Palestinian agenda in the West in this manner is not likely to be successful.

By Rania Ghamlouch for Al Jadid

Consider the issue of legitimacy that is implied by those who favor the boycott. The advocates of boycott assume that the Arabs and Palestinians monopolize legitimacy. By participating, they would legitimize the other party: Israel. This zero-sum game logic, that "we" are the only legitimate party, misses the point that legitimacy is a dynamic concept, negotiable and debatable, and can be won in debate and discourse. One unintended consequence of this approach is that if you boycott, you allow the official Israeli position to be presented without challenge, and you are actually depriving the book fairs' audiences from the Palestinians' side of the story. Since the source of any legitimacy resides with the public – in this case the book fairs' audiences – rather than in a biblical or ideological claim, the boycott has stifled the Palestinian and Arab voice in this key discourse.

Certainly culture cannot be fully divorced from politics and the two can influence each other. However, one cannot assume that they are mutually dependent on each other, or that politics or economics exclusively determine culture. The pro-boycott sentiment appears inspired by an assumption of strong influence and would in all likelihood dismiss pro-participation (or anti-boycott) Arabs as "liberal," a label these days often confused or affiliated in the Middle East with the "neo-conservative" agenda in the West.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this viewpoint is the simplistic and even naïve understanding of the nature of the relationship between culture and politics in Western societies. Contrary to notions popularized by the pro-boycott groups, culture and politics are relatively autonomous in Western societies. Such autonomy is based on economic and constitutional foundations. This stands in contrast to the Arab world, where the cultural sector is totally dependent and employed by the state, or it is subject to monopolistic interests such as the Hariri family media enterprises in Lebanon or by some branches of the Saudi family in Saudi Arabia and London. Cultural activities in the West, be it in entertainment or in journalism, are privately funded. What this means is that no matter what the government's wishes are, the media and cultural institutions enjoy independence and can dissent from the official policies of the state. Although the government, particularly in the U.S., has expanded its political and judicial powers over civil society since September 11, it stops far short of attempting to implement any kind of state-run media.

Elias Khoury, novelist and editor of An Nahar Cultural Supplement, represents the second group, pro-participation. He opposes the boycott and believes that the Arabs and Palestinians should not fear a cultural confrontation with the Zionists because the latter has no moral superiority. As proof, he points to the support the Palestinian cause has won from a large number of intellectuals, scholars and filmmakers, including Westerners and progressive Israelis. Participation in the Book Fair could have potentially put Israel on trial for its crimes against the Palestinian people over the past 60 years, Khoury argues.

The boycott is thus an unnecessary "flight" by individuals and states alike. While Khoury has no doubt about the aggressive

nature of the Israeli state and the expansionist nature of the Zionist ideology, he wonders why the Arabs lack any answer to Israel at the Paris Book Fair other than "flight."

He imagines, and challenges others to imagine, some kind of event taking place next door to the French Book Fair, amounting to a whole cultural awareness month for Palestine, one that could have drawn the involvement of academics, intellectuals, artists, filmmakers – all with the goal of telling the story of Palestine during the past 60 years. As for the vast resources needed to realize this type of activity, Khoury posits that resources are always available one way or another, so what obstacle is left to prevent undertaking such an event? Khoury's answer is "courage," which he says is lacking in Arab culture.

Khoury further argues that rational thinking has become a liability in the Arab world. Those dominating the intellectual discourse are either extreme fundamentalists or liberals. The solution requires both courage – needed to counter Zionism and extremist viewpoints – and enlightened thought, which will express itself through progressive, humanist and secular ideas.

Although Khoury offers important observations, he seems overly optimistic about the cultural superiority of the Arab argument and claims. Even if such supremacy existed, it is not absolute; rather it is contingent on a set of conditions, one of which is interaction, or dialogue between cultures. This is where Khoury's argument is weakest. He writes, "I do not want to be misunderstood that I call for *hiwar* (dialogue) while blood is being spilled in Gaza; rather, I call for *muwajaha* (confrontation)." Khoury, of course, does not mean a violent confrontation. But if by "confrontation" he means mere presence at book fairs with panels, documentaries, artwork and photos so the world does not forget the Palestinians, that may not be enough. Perhaps Khoury feels intimidated by the fundamentalists, whose influence in Arab culture he decries, or he is taking pains to ensure he appears "patriotic," because in reality it makes little sense not to call for engaging in dialogue with those with whom one disagrees, especially given the superiority of the Arab argument.

Nahla al-Shahal, a journalist and activist, represents the third group. She accepts a political/cultural separation in some cases, but not in the Paris case, since she considers this case political. In an article she wrote for the Beirut-based Al Akhbar newspaper, she distinguishes her position from both Tamalali and Khoury. While al-Shahal does not mention either of them by name, she seems to separate the cultural from the political, a separation that is not addressed by Khoury and considered impossible by Tamalali. In her view, the Paris Book Fair, while a cultural event, is also political and thus its boycott was justified. However, she would not go so far as to diminish the overall importance of cultural activities and the role of ideas, nor would she advocate adoption of the official policy of absence and boycott practiced by the Arab states and some intellectuals.

The political nature of the Paris Book Fair is unequivocally clear to al-Shahal. She reminds her readers that this year's Salon du Livre was opened by Israel's president, Shimon Peres, rather than by one of Israel's important novelists, like Amos Oz. She also points to the use of certain vocabulary as evidence of the political nature of the book fair, especially "Israel's Sixtieth Independence Anniversary." This usage, she correctly observes, suggests that there was an Israeli state before 1948, and what took place in 1948 was a simple attainment of independence from some power. This language is certainly political and legitimizes the claim of Israeli statehood, while implying that the Arab Palestinians were merely roaming nomads.

She accuses some Arab intellectuals, without naming names, of having fallen into the trap of Zionist propaganda by joining other European intellectuals and politicians in condemning "the calls for boycotting ideas and literature." For her it is neither mere coincidence nor innocence that some Arab intellectuals were ready to talk with major French newspapers about condemning the boycott and that these newspapers were more than willing to publish their statements.

Aware that old policies of pure rejectionism do not work, al-Shahal criticizes those who opposed the Book Fair on principle, symbolic as it was. More specifically, she is critical of their fatalism that opposition will not lead the Book Fair to rescind its invitation to Israel. Al-Shahal characterizes such an attitude as the product of the dominant logic of the market, decided on the basis of profitability, which rules out the human dimension, including the importance of principles and symbolic positions.

Illustrating the importance of human action, she commended the activity of a pro-Palestinian group which rented space from French publishing house La Fiebre, a publisher known for introducing progressive Israeli writers to the French reader. The group's project, inspired by the Salon du Livre itself, was called "Sixty Years of Palestine's al-Nakba." It included artwork, photographs of confrontations between Palestinians and occupying forces, and panel discussions that included well-known authors, filmmakers and journalists. For al-Shahal, this kind of undertaking was an appropriate response, despite the fact that it did not garner much publicity.

Al-Shahal believes the role of culture can exist outside the realm of politics. Underlying her argument is the notion that there can be purely cultural or purely political activities, and thus Arabs and Palestinians have the luxury to participate in one or the other category of events. In the book fairs' cases, their invitation to Israel was clearly political in nature. This argument seems more of a rationalization for the boycott, although it is careful not to dismiss the role culture and the arts can have in influencing Western public opinion toward the Arab cause. However, it is wishful thinking on al-Shahal's viewpoint to so conveniently delineate between the spheres of culture and politics.

Those who believe politics determine culture, the anti-participation groups, are the most vocal and the most influential in the Arab world, which explains the decision by many governments, pro-Western governments included, to boycott the Paris Book Fair. Countering this group are mainstream European governments and mainstream intellectual groups who believe in a decisive separation between culture and politics; thus they wonder why Arabs make decisions based on politics

rather than the cultural merits of the activity at hand. Although it may not be grounds for boycotting either the Paris or Turin book fairs, the recognition of Israel as their guest of honor on the anniversary of its establishment cannot be claimed as an apolitical act.

In the end, however, any superiority, moral or otherwise, can only be gained in a free society through dialogue and open exchange. Participation is better than boycott, but it is just one step toward interacting, dialoguing and yes, talking to those with whom one disagrees. This is a more effective approach to cultivate support for the Palestinian cause on the 60th anniversary of Al Nakbah.**AJ**

Farewell to Publisher Hero

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friends, and even to some of the readers of Dar Al Talia publications, he was hardly a partisan publisher. Quite the opposite; Daouk was laudably open-minded, frequently publishing manuscripts with which he disagreed. And during the tumultuous and polarizing years that followed the 1967 defeat, it was an extreme rarity to find a publisher willing to do this. Despite his identification with pan-Arab Baathist ideology, Daouk's publications gave no special emphasis to any one perspective. In fact, he was a pluralist before the term gained credibility in the Arab world since the 1990's. Daouk's pluralism, which operated within the parameters of progressive and critical discourse, need not be minimized for polarization and partisanship characterized progressive politics inasmuch as politics in general. Thus Daouk's rise above the sundry political factions operating in the Arab world was something of an anomaly.

Commending such exceptionalism, especially in light of the debacle of 1967, the cultural editor of As Safir, Abbas Beydoun, writes: "His [Daouk's] publishing projects were the center for the new, the courageous, and the problematic in Arab culture. In terms of authorship and translation, all new major productions were welcomed. Dirasaat Arabiyya…became also a forum of the new, readily disseminating things avant-garde, even if they were Marxist, which Daouk himself was not. However, he didn't need to be a Marxist to welcome and encourage such discourse…" Making a similar observation is Miriam Shuqayr Abou Jawdeh in An Nahar: "Dar Al Talia was a refuge of futuristic and leftist thinking and Dirasaat Arabiyya was a forum for freedom and difference."

Despite Daouk's embrace of pan-Arab Baathist ideology, it would be unfair to analyze his legacy in terms of the policies adopted by the official Syrian and Iraqi Baathists. Ideologues should not be judged or defined in terms of the convenient interpretations, and even perversions, that their beliefs are subjected to by political regimes – in doing so, one misses the singularity of the individual, as well as the actual content of his beliefs. "Daouk silently passed away in his exile; his silence was like that of many great souls whose exile was the result of tyranny and oppression…He was a party member, though non-dogmatic, who advocated freedom, liberation, and change prior to the rise of murderous Arab regimes that would convert such ideals into titles for repression and killing. The regimes collapsed, but the ideas survived within the people, and those ideas remained with Daouk ," wrote poet Paul Shaoul in Al Mustaqbal newspaper. On the same topic, Abd al-Hameed al-Ahdab wrote in An Nahar, "Daouk was the beautiful face of Al Baath, an ideologue who gave much and took nothing in return, save the comfort derived from his strong identification with Pan-Arabism. He made his ideology beautiful at a time when ugly Arab ideologies were bringing about tribal chaos, bloody authoritarianism, and great oppression to political dissenters they subsequently termed 'infidels.'"

Daouk was never parochial in his politics; he was both a prominent economist, holding a professorship at the American University of Beirut, and an enlightened, progressive, and critical thinker, who co-founded in the mid 1970's the Center for Arab Unity Studies, where he remained a member of its board of trustees and executive committee until his death. In addition to publishing books, Daouk also put out one of the most important cultural monthlies in the Arab world, Dirasaat Arabiyya. Launched in the mid-1960's and circulating until a decade ago, this journal not only featured ideological exchanges and introductions to world literature, but also helped the Arab reader stay abreast of the latest intellectual developments in the West and the East through timely translations.

Daouk was a man of special qualities. Though very important, he was not popular. By popularity I mean that his pictures were not plastered on the pages of daily newspapers and magazines, nor were they glued to billboards like those of a political candidate, or, more notoriously, like the photos of political parties and militia leaders. Talal Salman, the publisher of As Safir newspaper, testifies to this quality of Daouk: "We find no picture of Bashir al-Daouk except in the writings of Ghada Samman. There is no picture of him in the archives of any newspaper or magazine, nor are there any audio or video recordings of him – one cannot even find his likeness captured in a family picture with his beloved wife."

A similar observation is made by Rafiq Abi-Younes in As Safir: "Daouk was rarely present in terms of positions and pictures and he rarely played a role in the Baathist fiery scenes of coups and divisions…" Writing in An Nahar, Mariam Shuqayr Abou

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Poverty

BY FARAJ BAYRAKDAR

God boasts about his Hell
How poor is he
for not having Tadmur or al-Mazzeh prisons
Not even Saydnayya prison

Saydnayya Prison, 1996
Translated from the Arabic by Elie Chalala

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poems

Contributors

Elmaz Abinader ("Claiming Memory: An Interview with Brinda Mehta," p. 20) is a writer, poet and performer from Oakland, CA. She is the author of "Children of the Roojme" and "In the Country of My Dreams." Her second memoir, "The Water Cycle," is forthcoming.

Salih J. Altoma (Translated "Waiting for the Mahdi," p. 55) is Professor Emeritus of Arabic and Comparative Literature at Indiana University.

D. W. Aossey ("New Book Examines Changing Perspectives of Arab Americans, Post 9/11," p. 53) is a novelist and writer based in Southern California.

Mohammad Ali Atassi ("Live on the Air," p. 10) is a Syrian author and critic. His articles and reviews appear regularly in An Nahar Literary Supplement.

Faraj Bayrakdar ("Poverty," p. 7; "Footnote," p. 17; "Syrian Matroshka," p. 45) is a Syrian poet and former political prisoner.

Doris Bittar ("Poetry Without Borders: Translating Darwish, A Conversation with Fady Joudah," p. 29; "Narcissism in the City," p. 41; "The Modular Elastic: The Poetry of Fady Joudah," p. 51) was featured in the Arab American National Museum's inaugural exhibition in 2005 and has been reviewed nationally and internationally in such journals as Art in America, The Los Angeles Times and Beirut's Al Hayat. Her art is housed in several museum collections.

Jenn Blair ("Family Tapestries - Across the Water," p. 44) is Ph.D candidate in Creative Writing and English literature at the University of Athens in Athens, GA.

Issa Boullata ("In Memoriam: Noel Abdulahad [1939-2007]" p. 18.) is a retired professor of Arabic literature and language, and of Qur'anic studies at the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University.

Brigitte Caland ("Covering the Holy City: Identity, Tradition and Hats," p. 34) is a Los Angeles- and Paris-based writer, translator and a contributor to this magazine. She translated Edward Said's "Out of Place" into French ("*A Contre-Voie*"), published by Le Serpent à Plumes (2002).

Elie Chalala ("In Memoriam," p. 2; To Boycott or Not to Boycott: The Politics of Culture at Paris, Turin Book Fairs, " p. 4) is the editor of Al Jadid magazine.

Charbel Dagher ("Nazik al-Malaika's Literary Influence Faded Long Before Her Death," p. 16) is a Lebanese poet, critic, academic and author of several books on Islamic art.

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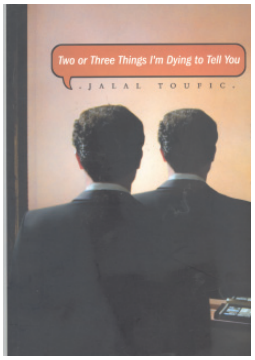
Two and Three Things I'm Dying to Tell you

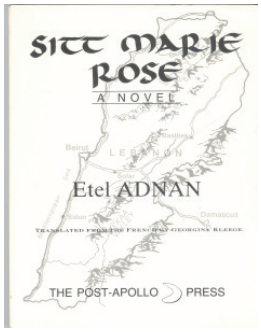
By Jalal Toufic
ISBN 0-942996-55-0
145 pages.$20.00



What was Orpheus dying to tell his wife, Eurydice? What was Judy dying to tell her beloved, Scottie, in Hitchcock's "Vertigo"? What were the previous one-night wives of King Shahrayâr dying to tell Shahrazâd? What was the Christian God "dying" to tell us? What were the faces of the candidates in the 2000 parliamentary election in Lebanon "dying" to tell voters and nonvoters alike? In his sixth volume, Jalal Toufic goes on investigating his environment with his magnifying lenses. "There is nothing else in literature like it," writes Publisher's Weekly. He is an "amazing writer" says Richard Foreman.

Sitt Marie Rose

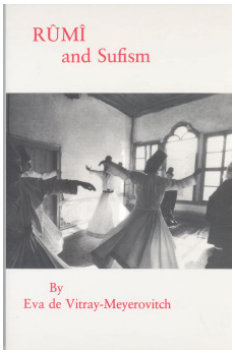
By Etel Adnan
1978, 1989 $11.00
ISBN: 0-942996-27-5



"It has become clear that maps of the Middle East and their accompanying texts have failed to account for the religious, economic, and political divisions that rage within these borders, defined in history by people who did not live there. 'Sitt Marie Rose' visualizes the struggle in Lebanon in terms of ethical borders that the West never sees, presented as we are with pictures of the 'Arab morass.' Adnan gives sterling credence to a moral and political literature, a literature that sets about to inform." –New Women's Times

Rumi & Sufism

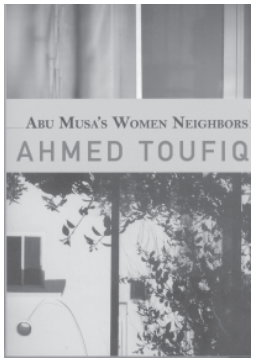
By Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch
Translated from the French by Simone Fattal
Illustrated with 45 photographs, charts, and maps; index and bibliography
1989 2nd edition, 167 pages $12.95
ISBN: 0-942996-08-9



"In this fine volume all of the arts come together in a splendid unfolding of all that is Rumi Sufism. The photographs and paintings play against vibrant prose, open all of the locked doors leading to the universality of Rumi and his teachings. The great care taken in the translation is a marvel unto itself."
– The New England Review of Books

Abu Musa's Women Neighbors

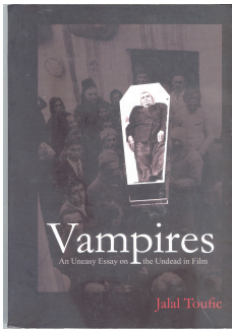
By Ahmed Toufiq
2006, 338 pages $18.00
ISBN 0-942996-56-9



"Abu Musa" is a novel translated from the Arabic by Roger Allen and is an unforgettable book. Abu Musa is a Sufi saint whose Maqam can still be found in Salé, a suburb of Rabat, Morocco. Ahmed Toufiq has recreated the times and circumstances of his life. He wrote his tale with love and care for the history and culture he depicts as well as a tender exploration of the human soul.Toufiq made it accessible to a modern and international audience. Already a motion picture in Morocco, the novel is to have a German edition soon.

Vampires: An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film

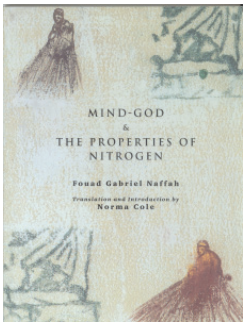
By Jalal Toufic
295 pages with color and black and white photographs.$26.00
ISBN 0942996-50-X



Jalal Toufic uses the metaphor of cinema and the character of the vampire in particular in order to read the historical period we are living in the Arab East right now. The vampire is the character that most renders the situation in Lebanon and the whole region, living "disaster surpassing disaster." Drawing on altered states of consciousness, films, psychiatric case studies and mystical reports, the author tackles many dubious yet certain characteristics of the undeath state, and analyzes the current Lebanese art and political scene through these lenses, and his encyclopedic mind joins it to the whole history of cinema. An absolute must for the readers and teachers of modern Arab cultural studies.

Mind-God and The Properties of Nitrogen

By Fouad Gabriel Naffah
Translation and Introduction by Norma Cole; Pastels by Irving Peltin
2006, 96 pages $24.00
ISBN 0-942996-53-4



Lebanese poet Fouad Gabriel Naffah's "Mind-God and The Properties of Nitrogen" charts the mind's progress through the material world to the realm of pure spirit. Crystalline and elusive, his poetry frustrates our tendency to consume form and meaning whole, without first appreciating the subtleties binding them more closely together. Fouad Gabriel Naffah is one of the great poets still unknown in the U.S. to be discovered at last, thanks to the masterful translation of Norma Cole. Cole further distills the text, disintegrating and reintegrating its spirit into English. Beautifully illustrated by Irving Petling, who contributed five pastels for the cover and inserts.

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Live on the Air

BY MOHAMMAD ALI ATASSI

The 1991 outbreak of the Gulf War introduced television viewers from around the world, for the first time, to watching warfare live on a cable news network. A CNN reporter spent the first night shooting footage from his hotel balcony in Baghdad, broadcasting the intense air bombardment to the entire globe. The clear sky over Al-Rashid transformed into fireworks, or, from the vantage of the American pilot's aircraft screen, an electronic war video game. It has since become apparent to many that the 1991 image of war was incomplete, distorted and deceptive even though broadcast live, especially when compared to the reality of war, which consists of cruelties and horrors that exist far from the lens of the camera.

Live broadcast, although reporting events in real time, remains a filter, unable to show what goes on behind and beyond the camera, regardless of the width of the lens.

We don't know if the Lebanese were fortunate or misfortunate to have had no live coverage of their 15-year civil war. Perhaps events would have unfolded differently and had different consequences had the war been broadcast live and viewed on opposing television screens. However, the events of Black Tuesday and Thursday, which exploded several months ago, clearly illustrate how, God forbid, television would cover political strife that bursts into sectarian and confessional confrontations.

The ugly crime that killed Deputy Walid Eido, his son Khalid, and many civilians reminded the Lebanese of the horrific car-bomb explosion that killed Prime Minister Rafik Hariri almost two years ago. As the Lebanese were glued to their televisions watching live coverage of this most recent assassination, with ambulances and fire trucks approaching the crime scene near Al Manara, many heard the voice of anchorwoman Sawsan Darwish of NBN News, a station owned by the speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri. Darwish, preparing to comment on the grisly photos of the car explosion, unknowingly had her microphone on. This is what viewers heard live on the air:

> S.D.: Welcome Hajj, our condolences! Why did it take so long to have him killed? (Laughing voices)
>
> Another joking voice: Let us not be cynical…
>
> S.D.: Not being cynical, but they exhausted us… I started counting. Ahmed Fatfat still remains.
>
> Another voice from the studio: Four more down and we will become the majority.

Translated from the Arabic by Joseph E. Mouallem

The Arabic version of this article appeared in the Beirut-based An Nahar Cultural Supplement.

Ironically, at the same time, a news alert scrolled along the bottom of the screen: "Speaker Berri mourns Deputy Eido… assumes role of plaintiff against criminals and conspirators." The ticker read: "Deputy Member Walid Eido was martyred along with two of his bodyguards and six civilians in an explosion near the Al Najma Club." Yet another news item stated: "Security forces have surrounded the crime scene and arrested a few people."

By Rania Ghamlouch for Al Jadid

Within hours, what happened on NBN circulated through the various news agencies and then across the pages of the daily press the following day. Unsurprisingly, competing TV stations replayed the scene in their own broadcasts. The NBN board circulated a press release: "NBN assumes full responsibility and regrets the unintentional mistake that occurred on the air. The earlier statements are not representative of this station's policy or views. NBN abides by professional and moral principles in its work. This station confirms that it has had the courage to take immediate action against those who have violated its policies and against those who were responsible for the mistake. It points out that it is unlike other Lebanese and non-Lebanese networks and media outlets, which also make mistakes, but lack the courage to enforce any measures on those responsible."

The management of the station should, at the very least, be ashamed of their deceptive press release. Within the context of its apology, the station carefully obscured whether the dialogue had merely been a technical error in the live broadcast or an intentional effort to expose what is believed but unsaid. The station's self-congratulatory remarks about its moral and professional stance and its courage for taking measures were hypocritical. The station opportunistically criticized other news stations for "not daring to impose any penalties."

Beyond the reactions focused on the station's press release, most of the commentary has focused on Sawsan Darwish's comments. Her statements unwittingly revealed the prejudice and, perhaps subconscious, beliefs among certain groups of Lebanese, and the latent antagonism that exists between the various religious sects.

Regardless of the accuracy of this analysis or the extent to how much we can generalize in such cases, this event has

revealed how live broadcast fails to convey actual events and their complexities. The significance of such an incident reminds us that what is labeled "live" or "direct" can be misleading. It takes one simple mistake to reveal some of the media's repressed agendas lurking in the shadows. Beyond this reminder, we need to take another important revelation from this event. It has reminded us of the questionable morals and lack of professionalism exhibited by some Lebanese journalists and makers of public opinion, entrenched in warring Lebanese media.**AJ**

An Arab-American Author Reflects Upon Writing

BY HANNA SAADAH

Circa thirteen and a half billion years ago, our indifferent universe began with a cosmic explosion and continues to expand at quantum speed. Planet Earth was formed four and a half billion years ago. It took the crust one billion years to cool enough for life to begin. Single life cells appeared three and a half billion years ago, followed by organisms – five hundred and seventy million years ago. Last to appear, a meager quarter of a million years ago, was humankind.

Before *Homo sapiens* wrote, nature penned her chronicles with fossils, the silent, venerable hieroglyphics of our planet. But history comes alive only when it is written. As an ephemeral millisecond tossed into a thirteen-and-a-half-billion-year-old universe, how insignificant, how lost, how miniscule would we be without our writings? Circa 5500 years ago, Sumerian cuneiform, the earliest known form of written symbols, emerged. Hammurabi set his laws in stone 4000 years ago, and soon after that the Egyptians collated the "Book of the Dead" from religious documents of the 18th dynasty. Culled from their respective oral traditions, the Greeks first set down Homer's "Iliad" and "Odyssey" in writing 2800 years ago, followed by the Hebrew Pentateuch of the Torah 200 years later.

Why do you write, inquires our ever-swelling universe*, when only you can read? When you, endangered Homo sapiens, soon become extinct, your unconcerned universe will make atoms of your books, electrons of your cyberspaces, and forever mute your megalomaniac cries. Abandon your prized alphabets, then, and learn to live in peace before you self-destruct. Writing has enthralled you – you with your minds fantasizing about heavenly after-worlds – and it has euphemized your delusions into holy beliefs, sundering you into inimical planetary tribes.*

Without letters, how can a pencil titillate the stars, or thinking fingers stroke the sky, or soaring spirits taunt infinity? How can we explore our minds, revive our heritage, dream, believe, worship, pray, make believe, pretend, and think without the written word? We **are** what we write, for to write one must feel, and to feel one must live, and to live one must discover and doubt.

But then, why write a play when one cannot best Sophocles; a poem, when one cannot top Homer; or a novel, when one cannot outdo Cervantes? Why bother to say anything when no idea under the sun is new and all that can be said has been already said many times before?

We write because we are in love with language. We covet it, hold it close to our breasts, savor its warm, naked Logos throbbing with offerings, and its Eros fecund with pleasures. We write because we like to wing expressions and release them into the seasons, knowing that they may pollinate the open minds in the human garden. We write because we like to explore our spiritual dimensions and collect our scattered identities, because we love our quiet solitudes, because we cherish the rhythmic music of our hearts, and because we resist death by leaving indelible marks on the sleepless eyes of memory.

We write because we love to hover in the skies of imagination with albatross wings. We wish to reorganize our chaotic world. We aim to redefine justice. We want to entertain, explain, complain, inflame, seduce, share, be heard. We like to array our beliefs in regal garb and our thoughts in skimpy miniskirts.

But above all, we write for joy, because in writing lurk both giving and receiving. No one has ever written who has not first received. Having humbly received, they then gladly give.

There is more love and truth in writing than in thinking or speaking. Our thoughts may delude us, our words may belie us, but our writings are the windows of our souls through which we view the world and through which we are forever viewed.

Do we write to be read, to be published, to be famous – or do we write because we need to, because we want to, and because we have to? Would we not rather recite our writings to a select few than have many read us in silence? Is not writing another form of shared love? Are not writings our artistic renditions? Our letters of gratitude to God for having endowed us with the divine gift to create something out of nothing, the passion to transform intangible thoughts into manifest beauty, and the desire to release our best feelings that they may dance to life long after our own music has ceased?

We ask who are we? What are we? Where are we? What will become of us? We ask, we reflect, we fear, we prevail, we write, and then we die. To write is to be brave – brave enough to skywalk, to suffer the fires of freedom, to insist on joy, to overcome one's autism. Brave enough to emerge from the abyss of the unsaid, from the caverns of the unwritten, from the bunkers of silence into the tempests of expression where lightning is a welcome illumination, revered rather than feared.

We write to sail beyond our small Cartesian world into mammoth worlds inhabited by giant dreams. We write because we need each other to circumvent nature's cruel cunning and life's stunning storms. We write to paddle up time's twirling torrents and surf down her tall waterfalls. We write to declare our ethos, to share our pathos, and to flaunt our egos. We write to bellow at the blaring sun:

Cogito, ergo sum. I think, therefore I am.
Amo, ergo sum. I love, therefore I am.
Scribo, ergo sum. I write, therefore I am. **AJ**

Brilliant Evidence

Mai Ghoussoub's Long Journey: From Trotskyite to Liberal-Democrat

BY LAUREN DICKEY

For a woman who spent her early years as a pro-Palestinian Trotskyite revolutionary, risking her life in the process, Mai Ghoussoub went through an extraordinary evolution to become the co-founder of a major publishing house, the London-and Beirut-based Al-Saqi Books. This publishing house has distinguished itself by publishing moderate and liberal books that breach taboos and break down culture and gender barriers. Her recent death is a significant loss for the Arab literary world. Her friend, famed Syrian poet Adonis, mourned in As Safir newspaper, "I do not cry on hearing of a death, but I cried for the death of Mai Ghoussoub. I've known her since her school days – full of life and enthusiasm." Mai Ghoussoub, publisher, artist and writer, died on February 17, 2007. She was 54 years old.

Ghoussoub was a woman of many talents, with her interests extending well beyond her publishing house. She had studied both French literature and math in Lebanon and then sculpture in England. She created her own body of artistic work, writing books, essays and plays, as well as sculpting. Interviewing her for the Beirut-based An Nahar newspaper, Ghoussoub's friend Shadi Wehbe once asked her, "Which is closest to the heart of Mai? Writing, sculpting or publishing?" She responded, "I cannot choose. They are all my languages and expressions of myself."

Ghoussoub was also a performer, often appearing in her own plays. When asked why she chose to perform when she was already involved in so many other activities, she told Al Hayat's Sayid Mahmoud that she was not content with words alone, and would always have the desire to use her hands and all her senses. Writing, for her, was a non-sensical practice that one could not touch, regardless of how powerful the expression.

Whether writing, sculpting, performing or publishing, all of Ghoussoub's endeavors revealed her commitment to social issues. Ghoussoub was an ardent human-rights activist, feminist, champion of free speech and critic of Arab political and social underdevelopment. In her Al Hayat interview, she passionately defended the individual's right to be free, and spoke openly against double standards: "I am against the imposition of anything…that represses individual freedom."

Ghoussoub's concern with women's issues is best evinced in two of her works, the 1990 "Arab Women and Masculinity," followed by the 2002 publication of "Imagined Masculinity," which she edited with Emma Sinclair Webb. Ghoussoub has been critical of the apologia of the status of the Arab woman in the Arab world. In the Al Hayat interview, she was critical of those who claim that women have achieved equality. She was equally critical of those who attribute the advocacy of women's equality to Western influence, and ridiculed those who speak of "equality" and the "empowerment" of women in the Arab world. Such views, Ghoussoub told Al Hayat, "are merely romantic and artificial, with no real basis on the ground."

"Post Modernism: The Arabs in a Video Clip" showed Ghoussoub's personal fascination with Western post-modernist thinkers, and her dismay over the failure of the Arab world to embrace post-modernist principles. (Ghoussoub personally completed Arabic translations of many post-modernist works to make them more accessible to Arab audiences.) "Post Modernism" contains her highly critical analysis of the Arab resistance to modernization, and she contends that Arab "backwardness" can only be addressed by embracing Western thought. Open-mindedness and tolerance were some of Ghoussoub's attributes, and it is no wonder that the Lebanese poet Paul Shaoul found her free from rigidity and monotheism in vision and ideology; these characteristics manifest themselves in most of her activities, whether writing, publishing or the visual arts.

As a playwright, Ghoussoub received acclaim in 2006 for "Bookkillers," a performance drawn from her own experiences during the Lebanese Civil War, during a time when militia men occupied civilian houses and burned books. It was a multimedia performance combining digital images, dance and drama, that served as a testament to her belief in the importance of freedom of expression. The play examined the effect of literature on the mind and whether it is capable of changing an individual's behavior. The final scene of the play concludes with the lines, "Words do not kill people. People kill people." One critic reviewing the play called it "A tragic nightmare, not of the civil war that passed, but of the civil war to come."

Ghoussoub is most widely recognized for her 1998 memoir, "Leaving Beirut." (See Al Jadid, Vol. 4, no. 24, Summer 1998.) Born to an upper middle-class Christian Maronite family, from a young age Ghoussoub chose to distance herself from the long-established politics of her community and began going against the expectations that she would embrace traditional values, a move that belied her upbringing.

The early years of Ghoussoub's life were punctuated by civil war, and her activism during those trying periods left an indelible mark on her personality. In 1975, during the first wave of the Lebanese Civil War, she was a member of a Trotskyite group that involved itself in humanitarian, rather than military, activities. In the Beirut-based As Safir newspaper, Adonis remembers Ghoussoub's personal reasons for involvement in the war: "She joined the civil war for one major purpose: to fight the war itself." At one point, Ghoussoub and her group were kidnapped and arrested by Fatah, the PLO's main military

organization. They were brought before the late Yassir Arafat, who was angry about the group's publication of pamphlets criticizing his corruption. Luckily, they were released when it was discovered that one of the group's members had an influential father.

Despite Ghoussoub's growing disillusionment, she continued her humanitarian activities. She took part in negotiations between warring factions to secure the release of hostages and defended Palestinian refugees who, at the time, were being massacred. She would even cross the Green Line to visit her friend Khalida Said, the wife of Adonis, who wrote in As Safir: "I used to warn her every time that all wars are blind, even to their own goals. Mai would respond, 'The war is everywhere, affecting every Lebanese. I am no more precious than any other.'"

Ghoussoub also established medical dispensaries where no one else would, collaborating with her future publishing partner, Andre Gaspard. In 1977, in the embattled and impoverished Nabaa neighborhood, a shell hit her car while she was transporting an injured man to a hospital. She suffered nearly fatal shrapnel wounds and lost sight in one eye; her injuries were so severe they forced her to seek treatment in London. At the time, she was 23 years old.

Mai Ghoussoub by Mamoun Sakkal for Al Jadid

After her recovery, rather than return to Lebanon, Ghoussoub moved to Paris where she worked as a journalist for Arab newspapers. A short time later she moved back to London, where she settled in what would become her permanent home in 1979. On Ghoussoub's return, she was dismayed to find that, unlike in Paris, there were no bookstores dedicated to Arab works in this otherwise cosmopolitan city. She extended an invitation to her childhood friend Andre Gaspard to join her in founding a bookstore; he promptly accepted. With great enthusiasm, despite the lack of money and proper visas, Ghoussoub and Gaspard embarked on establishing the Al-Saqi Bookshop. At the time, Beirut was still mired in war, and the means to export books to London were extremely limited.

Despite logistical complications, the shop soon managed to become "the heart and soul of London's Middle Eastern community," serving as an indispensable source for Arab intelligentsia by providing the most current, if sometimes contentious, opinions. Part of Saqi's success is due to Ghoussoub's dedication to working with authors whose ideas fell well beyond the boundaries of the Arab mainstream. Saqi was also an important outlet for authors of English works who could not find a publisher due to their anti-Western tone.

In addition to offering an outlet for the printed word, Saqi became a famous hub for social gatherings. In keeping with the policy of toleration, all found a warm welcome, and attendees seemed willing to leave their prejudices at the door for the pleasure of taking part in one of these famously enjoyable soirees. Well-known for her hospitality and generosity, Ghoussoub's parties were an important factor in her success.

In 1990, Ghoussoub and Gaspard opened Dar al-Saqi in Beirut, which was the Arabic-language branch of Al-Saqi. Citing the difficulties in the world of Arab publishing, Ghoussoub was dissatisfied with the state of translations in the Middle East, according to her Al Hayat interview. She also lamented the disrespect of authors' rights, intellectual piracy, as well as censorship. Today, Dar al-Saqi is one of the most prominent publishing houses in the Middle East. One journalist friend noted that establishing a branch in Beirut was due in large part to Ghoussoub's strong commitment to the idea of a peaceful Lebanon, and her belief that "coexistence" within the city was possible.

In 1991, Ghoussoub married fellow Lebanese writer, Hazim Saghie, a prominent journalist for the London-based Al Hayat newspaper, well-known for his commentary on the Middle East. According to many reports, Ghoussoub and Saghie had a loving and close relationship although they frequently engaged in heated political debates.

One issue Ghoussoub and Saghie always agreed on was their commitment to non-violent resolution of conflict, something which Ghoussoub desperately wished to see happen in her beloved Beirut. Two weeks before she died, Ghoussoub and Saghie visited Beirut again with journalist Neal Belton. Belton recalls the image of the city that Ghoussoub preferred to remember, an "ideal of civilized living, a city of hedonism, sunlight and the free exchange of ideas, a place where boundaries were made to be crossed." Although she retained a loyalty to Beirut until she died, Ghoussoub's last visit left her feeling depressed for the first time about the future of her country. According to An Nahar, Rozan Saad Khalaf, a Lebanese academic, quoted Ghoussoub, who spoke softly: "I do not necessarily believe in Lebanon, but I always believed in Beirut."

Ghoussoub's dynamic personality, keen intelligence, warmth and compassion will be remembered along with her many career achievements. Her friend and colleague, Jo Glanville, said to The Guardian about Ghoussoub's passing: "She was one of those rare people whose death leaves a hole, not just in the lives of family and close friends, but in that of a wider community. Her influence will remain, but her input is still needed: at a time of conflict, polarization and very few laughs, her culture and humanity were evidence of just how much brilliance the Middle East can produce." **AJ**

Nazik al-Malaika (1923-2007)

Iraqi Woman's Journey Changes Map of Arabic Poetry

BY SIMONE STEVENS

Nazik al-Malaika, one of Iraq's most famous poets, died June 20, 2007, at the age of 83. Al-Malaika was best known for her role as a pioneer of the free verse movement, making a sharp departure from the classical rhyme form that had dominated Arabic poetry for centuries.

Al-Malaika was an anomaly in her society, and her legacy as a poet resulted from her breaking away from many traditions. The leap from classical poetry to free verse was very controversial, and she faced intense criticism from not only traditionalists, but also her own family. She was highly educated, fluent in four languages, and gave impassioned speeches on women's role in Arab society – urging them to have more of a voice and challenging the deeply entrenched patriarchal system. She achieved financial independence, which was highly unusual at that time. In her writings and speeches she shared intensely personal revelations, yet preferred to remain physically secluded from the outside world.

Nazik al-Malaika was born in Baghdad on August 23, 1923, the oldest of four children. She was named after Nazik Alabed, a hero who had led a series of revolutions against the French occupying army in Syria in 1923. Her father, a poet and language instructor, encouraged her to read. Her mother, also a poet, had published her own work under the pseudonym Oum Nizar al-Malaika, a common practice at that time for women authors, and a tradition that her daughter would later change. Nazik al-Malaika graduated from Baghdad University in 1944 and later completed her masters in comparative literature at the University of Wisconsin.

With both of her parents as poets, it is no surprise that she wrote her first poem at the age of 10. She later co-wrote a poem with her mother and uncle titled "Between My Soul and the World." Al-Malaika's first collection of poems, "Night's Lover," was published in 1947. These poems were written in classical form, and were influenced by her love of traditional music and the beauty of her home. Al-Malaika had studied the *oud* under esteemed composers and would often play alone in her garden for hours. "Night's Lover" seems to revel in quiet reflection and a private relationship to the natural world, a departure from Arab poetry's more common theme of passion and unbridled ardor. According to Dani Ghali in An-Nahar newspaper, critics at the time did not approve of al-Malaika's difference in tone, saying she lacked her male contemporaries' emotional electricity.

That same year, al-Malaika published her groundbreaking poem, "Cholera." Inspired by the devastating radio announcements of the disease's rising death toll in Egypt, al-Malaika put pen to paper. In her autobiography, excerpts of which were published in the electronic newspaper Elaph, she writes of the poem's creation: "Within one hour I had finished the poem and ran down to my sister Ihssan's house. I told her I had written a poem that was very strange in form and that it would cause controversy. As soon as Ihssan read the poem she became very supportive. But my mother received it coldly and asked me, 'What kind of rhyme is this? It lacks musicality.'" Al-Malaika's father was also critical; she says he mocked her efforts and predicted its failure, yet she stood by it, stating simply, "Say whatever you wish to say. I am confident that my poem will change the map of Arab poetry."

Both of al-Malaika's predictions were correct. Although modern free verse would ultimately become very popular, in large part because of her poem, it wasn't readily accepted at first. Al-Malaika grew up in a literary world that was tied to the old ways and viewed experimentation as the antithesis of tradition, an unwanted guest. Conservatism was hard to break away from and the beginning of free verse was fraught with understandable trepidation, according to Abed Alqadar Aljanabi, in Elaph. Al-Malaika was faced with a double edged sword – though the intellectual environment opened doors to innovation, the conservative character of society suppressed tendencies toward modernism.

In addition, there is an ongoing debate over whether "Cholera" was really the first Arabic poem to be written in free verse, and thus whether al-Malaika was its creator. Some say the poem was the result of a movement al-Malaika was at the forefront of, but maintain that she was not its sole leader. According to media accounts, there was a battle between Badr Shakir al-Sayyab and al-Malaika. His first free verse poem, "Was There a Love?" (from his collection "When the Flowers Decay") was published on November 29, 1946, a year before "Cholera." Later on, al-Malaika herself acknowledged several poetic attempts done in free verse circa 1932 by Ali Ahmad Bakatheer. And in her influential 1962 book, "Issues of Contemporary Poetry," al-Malaika writes about Mahmoud Matloub, who published a poem called "Free Composition" in 1921.

The debate over the first innovator of free verse is one that remains to this day. However, at the time she perceived the challenge to her accomplishment as an insult, and it ignited in al-Malaika a desire to retreat from public literary life. According to Salah Hassan in An Nahar newspaper, "She closed the door behind her forever after the whole world ignored her and failed to acknowledge her as the true pioneer she was."

Ironically, 20 years later, al-Malaika "launched a counter-revolution against free verse in 1967, claiming everyone would turn back to the classical form," according to Saadia Mufrah in Al Hayat newspaper. In doing so, she both disappointed and ostracized herself from certain peers and literary bodies. According to Fakhri Saleh in Al Mustaqbal newspaper, al-

Al Jadid editors contributed research, translation and editing to this article.

Malaika never intended for modernism to go as far as it did, a position which garnered her reprimands from the influential modern poetry magazine Shir. Despite these changes in sentiment, most of her work remains an amalgamation of past and present, of free verse and the classical form.

Despite her change of heart, al-Malaika's fame in the modernist movement gave her a unique opportunity: it allowed her to become a true inspiration for women. She was an independent thinker, a respected scholar and a prolific writer who expressed herself eloquently. She managed to excel in a world that was male-dominated, and it was especially significant that she excelled in the literary arena. What women experienced in Arab society at the time was the impulse to suppress, not express, their emotions and inner life. In a way, she became a voice for those who felt unable, or not allowed, to use their own voice. Shawqi Bzai wrote in Al Mustaqbal newspaper, "She contributed significantly to Arab women proving they have a role in language. She came to feminize modernism, breaking the barriers between male and female writers, and she paved the way for future poets."

Nazik al-Malaika by Mamoun Sakkal for Al Jadid

In 1953, al-Malaika delivered a lecture in the Women's Union Club with the title "Women between Two Poles: Negativity and Morals," in which she called for women to be emancipated from the stagnation and negativity found in Arab society. In her essay, "Women Between the Extremes of Passivity and Choice," she challenged the patriarchal system of her native land and became a formidable voice capable of constructively dissecting social structure. One of her most famous poems, "To Wash Disgrace," tackled a daring topic at the time – honor killings – and caught the attention of the international media. Al-Malaika also formed an association for women who opposed marriage, offering a safe haven to those who refused to embrace the traditional role of wife and mother. The association disbanded eventually; in the assessment of Karim Mreuh in Al Hayyat, they opted for the traditional role in the end, al-Malaika included. In 1961, she married a colleague, Abd Alhadi Mahouba.

Although al-Malaika opted for a traditional role as wife, she continued her writing about non-traditional subject matter. She began to write more and more about the Self. Her work was infused with the romance of individualism. Akl al-Awit, in An Nahar Cultural Supplement, describes her as a "pioneer through her romantic courage and individualism, which elevated the self over the tribal, religious, collective." However, it wasn't just the Self that she celebrated in its liberation from cultural or spiritual confines.

The makeup of al-Malaika's mind has been a major topic of discussion in the literary world. The poet was highly self-aware of her personal psychology, and did not shy away from attempting to explore all of its dark recesses. Arab women rarely made such an attempt at the time. She wrote of her well-known struggle with depression in her autobiography: "In my memoir, I delved into deep psychological analysis. I discovered I was not expressing my own ideas and emotions like other people around me were doing. I used to withdraw and be shy. I made the decision to move away from this negative way of living. My memoir witnessed this great struggle with myself in the hope of accomplishing this goal. Whenever I made one step forward, I took ten steps backward, which meant a complete change took me many long years. Today I realize that changing psychological habits are the most difficult."

Some sources say she suffered from a depression so deep she eventually would no longer even see family members, much less a stranger. Her husband, and later her son, protected her and acted as a barrier to the outside world. According to a longtime friend, Hyat Sharara, as cited by Karim Mreuh, sadness did not just suddenly appear as an adult, but had been her companion since childhood. In her autobiography, al-Malaika attributes the origin of her melancholy to the death of her mother, who had been a close friend and fellow poet throughout her life. After the 1953 death of her mother, al-Malaika recalls that she cried night and day, until sadness became an illness that overtook her.

It is hard to imagine such an unconventional woman retreating from the world she challenged and understood so well. She had left Iraq for Kuwait in 1970, two years after Saddam Hussein came to power, and left Kuwait for Cairo after the invasion in 1990. As the years passed, she became more and more solitary. Perhaps as a defense mechanism against speculations of her surrender to depression, Samer Abu Hawash, in Al Mustaqbal newspaper, observed that al-Malaika romanticized isolation as something to be cherished, and that she felt she had lost many years while attempting to be social. But according to Khayri Mansour in the London-based Al Quds Al Arabi, "Her isolation had a tragic impact on the amount of

work she produced. If illness and exile had not befallen her, we would have a lot more to remember her by."

Nevertheless, al-Malaika leaves behind some of Iraq's most cherished poetry, including such collections as "Night's Lover" (1947), "Sparks and Ashes" (1949), "Bottom of the Wave" (1957), "For Prayer and Revolution" (1973) and "When the Sea Changes Colors" (1974). Short stories include "Jasmine" and "The Sun Beyond the Mountain Top." In 1970 she wrote a long poem titled "The Tragedy of Life and a Song for Man," building on her 1952 "Lament of a Worthless Woman." Her last poem, "I Am Alone," was written as a eulogy to her husband. Her role as one of the innovators of free verse changed the face of Arabic poetry, and her outspoken comments on traditional, and particularly male-dominated, society have secured her a genuine legacy as a pioneering woman. **AJ**

Nazik al-Malaika by Rania Ghamlouch for Al Jadid

Nazik al-Malaika's Literary Influence Faded Long Before Her Death

BY CHARBEL DAGHER

Iraqi poet Nazik al-Malaika's star fell some time ago. In fact, a London-based Arab critic mistakenly mourned her passing some time before her actual death last June. In the opinion of many writers, al-Malaika's relevance as a literary figure ended long before she ceased writing despite her earlier acclaim as a pioneer of free verse poetry.

For quite some time, literary critics accorded al-Malaika important standing. She was often considered the first author to write Arabic poetry in free verse – a radical break from the rhyme and rhythm of classical Arabic poetry. She published a number of poetry collections and volumes of literary criticism, including her most famous book, "*Qararat al-Mawja*" (The Depth of the Wave), which is considered one of the Arab world's best attempts at utilizing free verse, linking free verse with social and historical conditions.

Despite a certain amount of critical acclaim, among many of al-Malaika's colleagues she was not known as much of a trailblazer. Another of her contemporaries – Badr Shakir al-Sayyab – rivaled, and often eclipsed, her fame. Al-Sayyab was another Iraqi poet doing pioneering work. His premature death, at age 38, served to heighten his legacy, and for some time it accorded him the crown of founding father of modern Arabic poetry. Additionally, in a move that limited her prestige among her peers, al-Malaika sought to put into place a set of rules to govern the new school of experimental free verse at a time when the larger literary movement was rebelling against the confines and conventions of rigid structures. Thus, her literary circle considered her less a pioneer of free verse poetry and saw her as more of a conservative judge than a rebel. In fact, prominent Arab poet and critic Adonis wrote of al-Malaika's famous poem "Cholera": "Anyone with profound knowledge of poetry, or who possesses a sense of criticism and taste, would not only flunk this piece in the context of modern poetry, but would probably disqualify it as being poetry at all."

The world beyond her immediate peers hailed al-Malaika's free verse poetry and her rejection of the prescribed prosody of classical Arab poetry, calling it a "new phenomenon." She published her first volume, "*Ashiqat al-Layl*" (Night's Lover), which included the poem "Cholera," in 1947, a year that many consider to be the birth of modern Arabic poetry. This assessment is short-sighted in that it does not take into account earlier modernization attempts. Field studies in many Arab countries reveal even earlier appearances of new forms of prosodic variations in the works of many poets, including Ali Ahmad Baktheer, Egyptian poet Luis Awad, the members of the Apollo group in its experimental "*Majma Albuhour*" (which combined different meters in the same poem), Jordanian poet Mustafa Wahbi al-Tal (known as Arar), the experiments of Khalil Mutran and others, as well as immigrant poetry. Admittedly these artists were known only to narrow literary circles and remained largely obscure to the wider public.

It should also be remembered that prosody was only one of three dictates governing classical Arabic poetry. The other two – meaning and syntax – had been experimented with for quite some time prior to al-Malaika, or al-Sayyab for that matter. Experiments with these components should be considered part of the modernization movement along with the prosodic shift. Although they may have retained prosodies in the style of the old formula, conflicting poetic experiments existed for a long time in the Arab world. Poems that played with the traditional meanings were not uncommon as early as the middle of the 19th century. For example, the Romantic movement in the West influenced some Arab writers to incorporate these non-traditional ideals into their own poetry. Unfortunately, literary

critics of the time failed to recognize this shift as the beginning of a wider movement toward modernization, and instead dismissed these changes as unimportant and insignificant.

Scholars might take a more comprehensive approach by examining the aspects of modernization separately or discretely, viewing each aspect by itself in order to avert discounting, for example, not only prosodic changes, but the introduction of new meanings into the poem, or the changes in grammatical and structural foundations. Admittedly, complete modernization required breaking away from the traditional prosodies, at least to some extent, for prosodies had been the most conservative impediment to modernizing poetry. In this context, we can consider the prosodic shift to be the final stage of the historical modernizing process. However, modernism should not be considered without the scope of the entire movement; it is not just the final stage.

Thus, the subject deserves a complete reexamination of the modernization of classical Arabic poetry, and we should investigate the different dates when modernization "began." Certainly, we would find different dates in each Arab country, and varying degrees of modernization depending on which of the three traditional rules were broken. Such a study will lay rest to claims that Nazik al-Malaika was the true first modern poet, or the theory that 1947 was the year it all began, and it will provide a necessarily more accurate historical rendering of an art form so integral to the Arab world. **AJ**

This essay draws on an Arabic text and a phone conversation with the author. Translated from the Arabic by Elie Chalala.

Footnote

BY FARAJ BAYRAKDAR

Sad and desperate
Bleak and forlorn
With guilty conscience
And bad intentions
Blindfolded
On the brink of the abyss
Burdened by
        Shackles
        Mines
        Coffins
Forgive us O Mother of the Mothers
This is our world
And no other Christ but singing

Saydnayya Prison, 1999
Translated from the Arabic by Elie Chalala

Just Breathing

BY D. H. MELHEM

This worldwound body politic
quivers with torture–earthshock–
(Can you match the arms and legs?)
(Can you sew them back together?)
(Can you resurrect a country?)

And what were you doing across the globe,
invading those you did not know
who never invaded you?
You raged across bones and borders
as if collective guilt
caught criminals.
(What feral law is that?)
What were you doing there,
just breathing?

O breath powerful breath
baited with cash
without consequence
(you thought) to you.
Shock by trigger
by primers of hate
of anonymous enemies
whose language you do not speak
whose culture you cartoon
enemies behind each door
enemies who were not enemies
till you smashed their light and water
crushed them in their homes
tormented them.

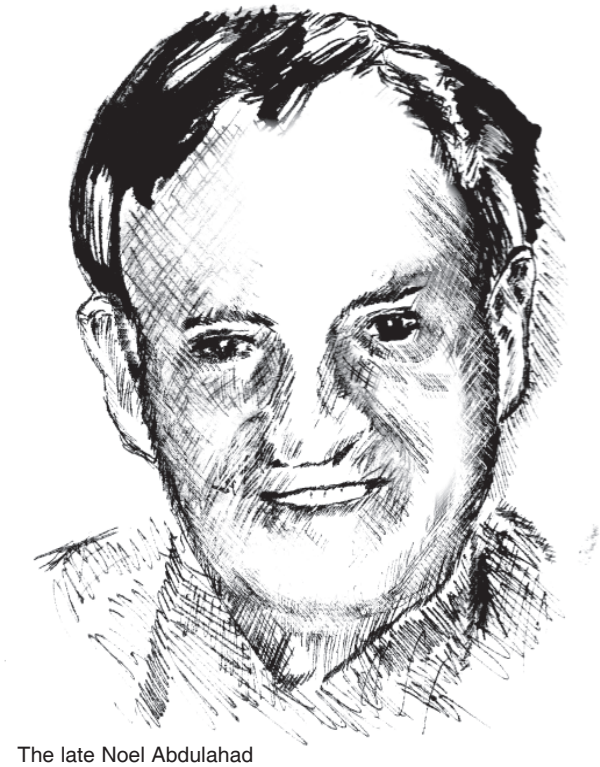
You were aware and stood there
by the door kicked in
to invade a family.
Everybody inside
was bleeding.
You were breathing.
Will this mother's child have breath
if it is born? It is not safe in the womb
in a house in a mosque a market a hospital.

Let it not be born–
world unworthy of a single birth–
until the bombing stops.
Until it stops and infants nurse
at the future.
        Meanwhile,
you and I are standing
in the daily dust and rubble,
the museum of death and dying,
just breathing.

In Memoriam: Noel Abdulahad (1939-2007)

BY ISSA BOULLATA

The Arab-American community recently lost a well-known and well-loved literary member, Noel Abdulahad, who passed away October 28, 2007, in Phoenix, Arizona, after a long struggle with cirrhosis of the liver. Born in Bethlehem in 1939, he was deeply affected by the tragic events of the 1948 *Nakhba*. A few years after Bethlehem was occupied by Israeli forces in the 1967 war, he left his homeland and moved to Damascus. There, he lived with his brother, Youssef, an accomplished writer in his own right, whose 1981 bibliographical sourcebook on Kahlil Gibran remains an excellent reference for researchers to this day. Abdulahad began what became a successful import business and, at the same time, he established relationships with Arab writers and began publishing his own literary writings in local Arabic periodicals, eventually making a name for himself in the world of literature.



The late Noel Abdulahad

Early in 1994, he immigrated to the United States. After a brief stint in Alabama, where one of his sisters lived, he moved to Arizona; another of his sisters had made her home in that state. Abdulahad remained in Phoenix, but he continued his professional relationships with Arab periodicals in the Arab world while establishing new relationships with fellow Arab-American immigrants.

The first relationship among the latter category was with Al Jadid, a quarterly review and record of Arab culture and arts. Abdulahad translated many poems from Arabic to English, including works by Ghada Samman. His last contribution to Al Jadid was a translation of a poem by the Iraqi poet Moayed al-Rawi. Other periodicals in which he took interest included Jusoor, and he participated in its special issue, "Post-Gibran: An Anthology of Arab-American Writing." In addition, he served on the advisory editorial board of the Australian bilingual literary journal Kalimat. He translated many poems from Arabic to English by several poets, including Hikmat al-Attili, Muhyi al-Din al-Ladhiqani, May Muzaffar and Fadwa Tuqan. From English to Arabic, he translated poems by Dennis Bernstein, John L. Sheppard, Glenda Fawkes and others. He also wrote several articles, including pieces on Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Butrus 'Indari. In the last year of his life, he contributed articles to Sada al-Mahjar, a biannual literary journal.

Abdulahad also contributed to periodicals in England, notably Banipal, a magazine of modern Arabic literature, and contributed to its recent special issue featuring Jordanian literature; he translated poems and introduced the Jordanian poet 'Arar. In Arabic, he wrote literary criticism for Al-Quds newspaper and others.

Perhaps Abdulahad will be best remembered for his Arabic translation of Gibran's "The Prophet." Gibran's 1923 masterpiece had been translated into Arabic as "*Al-Nabi"* by several distinguished writers. Abdulahad's 1993 Arabic translation of "The Prophet" is distinguished by its simple, lyrical language that echoes Gibran's English and maintains high fidelity to the original meaning. Abdulahad was so well known for his interest in Gibran that he was invited to become a member of the international advisory board for the first international conference on Gibran titled "Gibran Kahlil Gibran: The Poet of the Culture of Peace," held in 1999 at the University of Maryland.

Abdulahad translated other books as well, most recently a book titled "Unveiling the Mystery of Life and Death" by Dr. Sylvie Daniel Bidot, an autobiographical volume recounting the hardships that this Palestinian psychiatrist had experienced. The memoir follows how she rose from the depths of her pain and despair following the accidental death of both her son and her mother, found guidance in Gibran's writings and finally achieved a philosophical understanding of life. Abdulahad rendered it into Arabic as "*Kashf al-Niqab 'an Lughz al-Hayah wal-Mawt*."

Bidot also lives in Phoenix and was friends with Abdulahad for 14 years. She ultimately took him into her home for the last six months of his life, where she and her husband Robert cared for him until he passed away. In the final month of his life, Abdulahad transcribed conversations he had with her for later publication in "The Understanding of True Religion" and "Violence Against Women." According to Bidot, he also translated a series of love letters called "From Remo to Viola" and was in the midst of working on a book titled "The Diaries of Jesus" when he died.

I knew Abdulahad for 10 years, although we visited face-to-face only once. Our friendship was sustained for several years by correspondence, telephone conversations and the exchange of publications. We spoke on the phone at length once or twice a month, talking about literature and writers and exchanging news about the latest literary and intellectual events. We shared Palestinian memories and discussed the current state of affairs in the Middle East and the world. During our conversations, it seemed as if we were sitting together over a cup of coffee, oblivious to the passage of time. We finally met in Los Angeles in 2005, at a gathering of Arab writers, most of whom lived in California. The gathering included Issa Batarseh, Nakhleh Badr, Salah Kanakri, Salwa Al-Sa'id, Farhan Sahawneh, George Saad, Elie Chalala and Sylvie Daniel Bidot. Abdulahad and I later paid a visit to the Palestinian poet Hikmat al-Attili, who was in the hospital at the time and would die the following year. The few hours I spent with Noel in Los Angeles confirmed my earlier impression of him as a genuinely kind and loving human being who valued friendship and was always ready to help others. His knowledge of world literature was vast, and his critical views were sound, based on sophisticated literary taste and a deep sense of beauty and truth.

Abdulahad will be missed by his family, as well as his many friends with whom he shared a love of literature. I may not have mentioned every one of his writings, but more importantly, I must not leave out the fact that he was first and foremost a human being with a big heart.

I shall always cherish his memory and his friendship.**AJ**

Heavy Metal: Even 'Black Scorpions' Leave Baghdad

BY DALILA MAHDAWI

Emerging from behind the thunderous roar of electric guitars, tortured vocals and aggressive drumming, Acrassicauda is a heavy metal band born in Baghdad, a place not known for embracing Western rock, let alone heavy metal.

Firas al-Latif, Faisal Talal, Marwan Riyak and Tony Aziz met in high school and their shared love of heavy metal led to the 2001 formation of Acrassicauda, Latin for a type of black scorpion found in Iraq. During Saddam Hussein's regime, Acrassicauda and other Iraqi fans of metal music bought bootleg CDs. Tough boys clad in black T-shirts were not considered a respectable sight in Baghdad, but Acrassicauda was allowed to play a gig, albeit under the authorities' order to include a song about Hussein. Following the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, Acrassicauda shared many Iraqis' optimism that a new era of freedom had arrived, and hoped to record an album.

However, as the security situation in Iraq deteriorated, Acrassicauda had an increasingly difficult time meeting and practicing or performing. Bombs and bullets constantly

Marwan gives the Heavy Metal 'Horns' salute

threatened their lives, and security curfews, checkpoints and power cuts complicated their daily activities. Furthermore, being in a band that many saw as a Western, un-Islamic import gradually became more problematic. According to drummer Marwan, simply wearing a Western rock band T-shirt was enough to get him killed. After being threatened, he also had to fill out his goatee with a full beard.

An article in the alternative magazine Vice introduced the quartet to the West. An Internet TV series followed the article, and then the band participated in a documentary film called "Heavy Metal in Baghdad." The film illustrates the humanitarian plight of the Iraqi people through the band.

Director and co-founder of Vice magazine, Suroosh Alvi, filmed the documentary over a period of three years, working with VBS producer Eddy Moretti to retrace the band's steps from Baghdad to exile. Funded by director Spike Lee, the film captures Iraq's transition from Hussein to occupation and the band's courageous determination to stay true to their metal roots even as chaos envelops every aspect of their lives.

With Vice's support, Acrassicauda played in Baghdad in 2005. Looking back at images of the concert, Firas says in the film, "These are our fans. Most of them are either dead or out of this country: they just disappeared." With as many Iraqi fans dead as alive, Acrassicauda is a somber reflection of the nation's tragedy. "We got a threat: 'We're gonna get you one by one,'" drummer Marwan recounts in the film. When a scud missile destroyed their rehearsal space, Acrassicauda decided that life in Baghdad had become too dangerous. Like two million of their compatriots, the band members fled to Syria.

Acrassicauda found little comfort in their new host country. An article by Ben Carrozza on Canada.com quotes Suroosh Alvi: "As refugees, Iraqis are unwanted in Syria. As a band, the guys aren't even welcome in the ghettoized parts of the city – they're seen as Satan worshippers or whatever. There's no audience for them and there's nowhere for them to go because anyone with an Iraqi passport can't leave the country."

The band was denied exit visas to attend the premiere of "Heavy Metal in Baghdad" at the Toronto Film Festival in September 2007. Acrassicauda had no legal status, no work opportunities and dwindling finances. The visas they had originally been issued were set to expire on October 10, 2007, and Syrian authorities indicated they would not be renewed.

Acrassicauda Logo

According to a recent UN report, Syria is home to the largest number of Iraqi refugees in the world, which is putting a heavy strain on its resources. As a result, the Syrian government recently changed its policy towards refugees and now Iraqis must return home for a month in order to renew their visas. For Acrassicauda, return was simply not an option.

Acrassicauda eventually travelled to Turkey, selling their instruments to pay their fares. In Turkey, the band feels no more secure than in Syria, but as no other country will take them as refugees, they have nowhere else to turn. Turkey is the only country which gives Iraqis tourist visas. Acrassicauda members have settled in Istanbul, registered with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and hope to obtain refugee status. They are broke and unable to speak Turkish; life is not easy. Someone even robbed their small apartment, depriving them of their last few personal belongings. However, the Turkish music scene has been supportive, and the band has been lent a fully-equipped studio where they can write and rehearse. Turkey has a much larger metal music scene than most Arab countries, and in December 2007, the band played a successful gig at one of Istanbul's most popular rock bars, Kemancy.

Song titles like "Massacre," "Beginning of the End," "Between the Ashes" or "The Orphan Child" are typical sinister heavy metal song titles, but also reflect the band's collective trauma. As Marwan explained to Reuters journalist Mike Colletti-White, "There is a lot of weird stuff that is so dark and gets kind of miserable, full of rage, anger, and different from the stuff I used to write back in Baghdad. I grew 20 years older in the last two years." But there is one good thing about being in Turkey: the band can wear their hair and beards long.

Despite returning their flak jackets and cameras to storage, Alvi and Moretti remain intimately involved with the band, communicating with them regularly. They have set up a blog and donation fund on the band's behalf, both of which can be found on the film's website. A Vice-sponsored fundraiser held in Montreal in October 2007 helped secure additional funds.

What lies in store for Firas, Faisal, Tony and Marwan is unknown. The future of Iraq itself hangs by a fine thread. But the band wants to return home someday. As lead guitarist Tony told Al Jazeera, "We hope the situation will improve and that we'll be able to go back there. We have our fans there, our families. Everything we have is there. But this is not up to me, it's up to God." **AJ**

Claiming Memory: An Interview with Brinda Mehta

BY ELMAZ ABINADER

Brinda Mehta, author of the new work "Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing," examines the fiction of seven women writers in the Arab world and the Arab diaspora. Their works of fiction, she asserts, present an alternative memory,

Brinda Mehta

an opportunity to reinvent history and redefine the present through consciousness raising and literary activism: "I am very interested in the positioning of women as cultural guerillas who use culture as a non-violent 'weapon' to create peace and engage in non-combative warfare, while claiming their authority as cultural scribes in the national imagination."

Mehta, a professor of French and Francophone studies at Mills College in Oakland, CA, was born in Bombay, India. She won the 2007 Frantz Fanon Prize for Outstanding Work in Caribbean Thought for her book, "Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the 'Kala Pani,'" and finds that her personal relationship with diaspora drew her to the works of these Arab women writers and the common transnational vocabulary they have to frame their specific consciousness.

She says that the connections between memory and otherness are an obsession for her. "Rituals of Memory" is

garnering similar recognition by being nominated for the MLA's Aldo and Jeanne Scaglioni Prize for Comparative Literature Studies (2008) and the American Comparative Literature Association's Harry Levin Prize (2009).

Mehta lives with her husband, poet Arturo Dàvila-Sanchez, and her mother. She has recently completed a new text, "Framing Diaspora in Francophone Caribbean Women's Writing: Dougla Textuality, The Violence of Memory and Sycorax Historicity," and is working on "Negotiating Arab-Muslim Identity and Gender Ideologies in the Parisian Housing Projects."

Studying these writers was not your intention in the beginning. What brought you to this project and how did you choose the writers?

This book was inspired by a very moving presentation made by the Palestinian author Liana Badr. Badr lamented the destruction of 30,000 olive trees in her village by Israeli occupying forces – how this destruction had completely destroyed a vital means of livelihood for the village women in particular, while robbing an entire community of its ancestral memory symbolized by the ancient trees. I was originally writing a book on Algerian writers in France. However, Badr completely changed my perspective both in terms of subject matter and geographical scope. "Rituals of Memory" was entirely conceived during her talk, with a vision of highlighting the urgency of memory and re-membering for communities under siege. I began looking for other novels focusing on rites of memory in embattled circumstances (occupation, war, national amnesia, contested identity) and found a wealth of resources. It was very hard to make the final selection because I didn't want to exclude anyone. So, the novels were chosen both thematically and in terms of specific political events such as the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon, the Lebanese Civil War and the Algerian War of Independence.

All the writers in this book explore common themes that unite them across linguistic, geographical, aesthetic and generational boundaries through the polyphonic rhythms of memory. For writers such as Assia Djebar (Algeria/France/USA), Hanan al-Shaykh (Lebanon/U.K.), Nawal El Saadawi (Egypt), Liana Badr (Palestine), Malika Mokeddem (Algeria/France), Fatima Mernissi (Morocco), Nuha al-Radi (Iraq/Lebanon) and Diana Abu-Jaber (USA), memory is the key to recovering loss: loss of homeland, family, identity, mother tongue, maternal heritage et cetera.

Many women, including Arab women, don't want to emphasize the traditional rituals associated with them because they signify the more oppressive image of women – baking, dance, arts. However, you place them centrally as vital connectors in the ideas of memory.

I position women as dynamic and active agents of cultural production and not as passive objects or symbols of culture. While the book also highlights the commoditization of women within patriarchal and capitalist systems of culture, the focus of my study remains the creative contributions of women as cultural artists. I demonstrate how women also make a political statement through cultural praxis. For example, in Liana Badr's "The Eye of the Mirror," baking bread becomes a political act representing women's non-violent, yet active, contributions to the resistance efforts of the armed Palestinian freedom fighters in Lebanon. In other novels such as Malika Mokeddem's "The Century of Locusts," the preservation of cultural rituals is an act of resistance against globalization and the postmodern decimation of nomadic communities. The Bedouin women in the novel weave their stories through intricate tapestries to preserve their history from annihilation. Nuha al-Radi's "Embargo Art" makes a powerful statement about the rampant destruction of the ancient city of Baghdad, where libraries, archives, museums have been bombed in an attempt to obliterate a country's ancestral past.

Memory is always disputable and yet it is used as something that is not – a kind of truth that guides history. How does your perspective in this book address it as factual, or not?

In postcolonial Arab feminist writing, memory does not lay claim to cultural and historical "authenticity." Memory "frames" personal experience by addressing the gaps and omissions found in the textual literalism of master narratives. In these writings, memory as narrative device is not used as an instrument of testimonial recovery but as the expression of mnemonic creativity. These writers also inscribe memory within historical reality. For example, in "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment," Djebar's characters are engaged in a war against forgetting. These female veterans of the Algerian revolution remember their violation at the hands of the French. Djebar uses the trope of memory to highlight the factual experience of women's torture in the form of rape and other physical violations inscribed on the female body, and the postcolonial efforts to discredit these women by negating their contributions. Fiction becomes the conduit to expose historical truths and the gendered reality of women under siege.

How do you hope this book works for readers?

I hope this book provides readers with a more nuanced understanding of Arab-Muslim women's lives through literature. Stereotypical representations of Arab women, as portrayed by many Western feminists and the media, have confined Arab women to the limited roles of helpless victim or exotic belly-dancing vixen. There is so much ignorance about the Arab-Muslim world, particularly in the U.S. My objective in writing this book is to provide readers with one author's perspective on the humanity of Arab-Muslim women as portrayed in literature, their daily struggles for subjectivity, and their faith in a more tolerant and progressive future. This book is open to anyone who is willing to celebrate these time- honored rituals of memory representing songs of freedom and narratives of hope. **AJ**

Three Iraqi Musicians, Novelist and Playwright Share Their Views on Iraqi Culture and Arts

BY REBECCA JOUBIN

Damascus-based American academic Rebecca Joubin prepared this section on Iraqi culture and arts which includes one of the last interviews novelist Fouad Takerli gave before his death on February 12, 2008. Joubin's interviews, all conducted in Damascus, also include former National Symphony director Abdel Razeq al-Azawi, playwright and director Adel Taher, and musicians Saadun Jaber and Taleb al-Gharagoli. Award-winning Iraqi novelist, Fouad Takarli, reconciles his preordained life as a judge to his evolution as a writer in a country whose cultural fabric has been shredded. Saadun Jaber describes his progression and survival as a musician under a menacing Iraqi political regime, as well as his relationship with an uncharacteristically solicitous Saddam Hussein. Famed musician Taleb al-Gharagoli cites the crucial relationship between freedom/security and artistic innovation, while mourning the death of music and culture in a now mutilated Iraq. Iraq's former National Symphony director, Abdel Razeq al-Azawi, sets the joys of being a musical composer against the relentless backdrop of loss and sorrow that was the perpetual theme of his life in Iraq. Iraq's most prominent playwright and director, Abdel Taher, describes his country's rich cultural traditions, detailing their suppression under Saddam and later strangulation by the militias.

– The Editors

Saadun Jaber

Saadun Jaber on Navigating Through Saddam's Regime

You have performed approximately 400 songs before audiences, and you are one of Iraq's most renowned musicians. Tell us about your childhood and your first memories of music.

I grew up in Baghdad in a very simple family. At age 10, I was already doing construction work to pay for my schooling. We did not have the means to buy musical instruments, so the first music that I experienced was the Islamic call to prayer and Quranic readings I would hear at the mosque. I even remember participating in the Ashura events so that I could hear the music and see the colorful theatrical productions. Like everyone else, I banged on my chest with emotion. I have one very vivid memory of Ashura when I was about 12 years old. I heard the local sheikh chanting in honor of Imam Husayn. I stopped, electrified, my body shaking like a branch in the wind. Imbued with a newfound passion, I entered the performance hall. There was a thick crowd and as I inched closer to the singing sheikh, everyone pushed and shoved around me. By the time I reached my destination, all the buttons on my shirt had been ripped off.

My childhood love of music developed into something more professional when I grew older. After high school, I studied education and music at a small institute, and when I graduated I became a secondary school music teacher. In 1972, I made my début on Baghdad TV with a song called "The Flying Bird," which was considered a masterpiece in Iraq and the entire Arab world.

It has been said that musicians had to praise Saddam to be "in." What was your personal experience with Saddam's regime?

When Saddam had just come to power in the late 1970's, many of us musicians thought he would bring something new and progressive to our country. In the beginning, many musicians, me included, willingly sang in praise of our new leader. Soon, however, as reality set in, with wars, the murder of communists, imprisonments and killings, we became disillusioned and detached ourselves. The government increasingly made life uncomfortable for us since Saddam deemed that our main responsibility was to applaud him. Those who refused were either killed like Ala al-Hadad and Sabah al-Saher, or, like Kawkab Hamza, forced to leave the country.

I was adamant against singing in honor of the regime. The regime wanted to force me to sing war songs against Iran, Kuwait, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. But I could not do it – the inhabitants of these countries were my adoring fans; how could I sing against

them? And so, I was sent to prison three times, once in 1981 and then again in 1986 and 1988. In 1990, the Ministry of Information threatened to send me to Abu Ghraib prison, known as the worst prison in Iraq, if I did not sing a war song against Kuwait and curse certain Arab leaders. When I remained adamant against this, I was jailed for three days. When I was set free, oud in hand, I left the country.

Why did they let you out?

I wrote a letter to Saddam Hussein informing him that the Ministry of Information asked me to sing against such figures as King Fahd and Hosni Mubarak. I asked him whether he would agree that I (should) stoop to this level. He agreed with my position and wrote to the Ministry of Information demanding that they immediately set me free and allow me to travel to Cairo, where I was planning to complete my doctoral thesis. Saddam even offered to pay for my education, but I refused.

Did Saddam have a personal relationship with you?

I never praised him and refused to write songs for him, but he loved my voice and persona. Several times, I received a phone call from him and he begged me to sing to him for hours on the phone. He often invited me to the presidential palace to sing for his wife, children and other government figures. Usually when a musician sang at the palace, a curtain separated the girls from the singer, but he let me sing directly to them. He always offered to buy me a house, car, et cetera, but I refused and he seemed to respect me.

What is the cultural scene now after the fall of Saddam?

Since 1995, I have been living in Damascus with my wife and child. After the fall of Baghdad, Muzzafar al-Nawwab and I prepared our suitcases in anticipation of returning to our homeland. Within days, however, the fighting and bloodshed commenced. Rather than returning to Iraq, most artists, musicians and intellectuals have fled Iraq. Currently there is no life left in Iraq, just killings and explosions. We live in the hope of returning there and in my heart I believe it will happen soon.

What is the relationship between those musicians who remained within Iraq all these years and those who have recently fled?

I feel that the musicians who stayed in Iraq all these years are nevertheless without roots, without an understanding of their own land. Ironically, those of us who have lived in exile all these years have preserved our roots and feel a deep affinity for our traditions, culture, and history. The new singers do not know our long history of music, nor do they know about the deep-rooted tradition of music dating back thousands of years before Christ. Thus, while we try to respect each other, there is no real professional or personal relationship between us. **AJ**

Iraq's Most Beloved Novelist, Fuad Takerli, Describes His Fine Balancing Act

You are considered one of Iraq's most beloved novelists and your career spans more than half a century. At the same time, you served as a judge for 37 years. How exactly did you balance these two fundamentally different experiences?

I was born into a family of lawyers, and from early childhood I understood that I was expected to follow in this tradition. Yet,

Fuad Takerli

as a child I read novels constantly, primarily books from the Western canon of literature that were available in translation in Iraq. By the time I was 15, I was already writing short stories for myself, albeit in secret. When it came time to enter university, I entered law school to appease my family, but I continued to write short stories and novels. In 1949, during law school, I wrote my first short novel, which was never published. Although my stories were first published soon after that, I was never satisfied with anything I wrote. In fact, I despised my writing. To overcome this, I began reading books with a wholly critical eye, identifying both their positive and negative aspects, and this helped ease myself into accepting my own work. In 1950, I wrote "Green Eyes," a short story about a prostitute, which took three years to get published. Though it was not the first work I published, it was the first in which I felt I had succeeded in terms of literary technique. When I completed law school, I worked in the civil court, and in 1956 I became a judge, all the while writing stories.

You ask how I could balance such fundamentally different professions, but I must admit that my position as a judge actually enhanced my writing. I was from a bourgeois family and had little exposure to the outside world. My job as a judge, for the

first time, enabled me to enter the very depths of Iraqi society. I learned about the poor and their problems; they try to solve one problem, then become embroiled in more complex predicaments. Provided with such rich material about my society, I wrote profusely, despite the heavy criticism I received for balancing these two positions. But I continued to write, and practiced law, without the faintest interest in what people thought.

The visual reigns in your stories, and it is often said that you introduced this cinematic technique to Iraqi literature. I can still remember certain scenes in "The Faraway Man" that were so incredibly colorful and realistic. Tell us about your literary technique and experience creating "The Faraway Man."

In addition to reading profusely from early childhood, I was always drawn toward cinema. Fellini and Bergman were among my favorite directors. To me, their films were visual poetry and I sought to follow their example. Thus my novels are filled with profound descriptions as I try to engage the reader. My goal is to formulate the image in the mind of my reader, and allow him or her to relive the moment in all its intensity. No boundary may exist between the text and reader. Despite the pervasive detail, my language is simple and direct, without the faintest trace of exaggeration.

In general, when a story idea comes to me, I am not able to function or do anything at all. I go through a depression and everything else in my life seems secondary. From 1963-66, I was heavily immersed in dealing with the technique of the story which would turn into "The Faraway Man." Ideas were stirring haphazardly in my head, but they only came together when a friend told me the story of his aunt who had been raped. Now my main concern was applying this idea within the context of the Iraqi society with which I was familiar. The technique of multiple perspectives, such as that of Hussein, the drunkard, and Sana, the young innocent child – brought an enormous challenge to the writing process. It was not until 1979 that I would finally lay my pen to rest and sought to see my new novel through to publication.

But publication did not come easily. In Iraq, the censorship committee refused it since the character Adnan, a Baathist figure, seemed to be the one who had raped the aunt. To the authorities, this was a direct assault on the regime and they demanded that I remove this part of the story. They also were angered that I dared talk about serious matters such as Iraqi politics in the national dialect.

Because I could not appease them, I attempted to publish it in Beirut. The civil war raged in Lebanon, so I met with a Lebanese publisher in Damascus. Three months later, I had still not heard anything and figured his publishing house was not interested. Although I understood that it would be hard to publish anything written in the Iraqi dialect in Beirut, I still pursued publication. In 1980, despite the dangers involved, I set out to Beirut for a meeting with the Ibn Rushd publishing house. To my utter bewilderment, our meeting in the evening turned into a sort of party. Those responsible for determining the fate of my novel were drunk by the end of the evening, and still not one word had been mentioned about my book. Just as I figured the night had ended in futility, the publisher approached me and said he would be honored to publish my novel.

You wrote for quite a while before Saddam Hussein and you have written since his time. Did his presence have an effect on your literature?

In general, during Saddam's time I wanted to continue writing, and thus I was careful not to arouse his antagonism. I never paid him compliments, but neither was I antagonistic or hostile toward him. I did not scream or curse, and in general, since my criticism was not considered direct or impolite, the authorities left me alone. Even when "The Faraway Man" was published in Beirut, and in 1980 distributed successfully in Iraq, the authorities left me alone. Because the story was highly critical of the Baath Party, people often wondered how I had not been imprisoned. Indeed, there were Baath members who reprobated my work, but there were also others who were so mesmerized by this novel that seemed to touch people's hearts that they did not interfere in its distribution. In the end, I think the reality was that those in authority did not really understand it.

During the early 1980's, I was drawn to Paris, since "The Faraway Man" was being translated there by a Tunisian writer. During the (translation) process we had fallen in love, and I wanted to find a way to join her. But at that time, it was extremely difficult to leave the country. Faced with no other option, I wrote a letter to Saddam informing him that my book was being translated into French, but that the Tunisian writer was having a hard time deciphering the Iraqi dialect. Thus, for the success of the project it would be necessary for me to work with her in Paris. He was convinced and agreed to allow me to travel for a stint in Paris. After 37 years of service I retired as a judge in 1983, and set off to Paris where I could begin to focus solely on my writing. I married my translator, and we remained in Paris from 1983 until 1986, and then returned to Iraq, where I was never really considered "in," and always struggled to survive economically. I still felt lucky since I was allowed to write unhindered.

But something happened in 1989 which made me feel the tide of acceptance was turning against me. I was nominated for a Saddam Hussein culture prize and was on the verge of winning. However, without telling me why, the jury disqualified me. Rumor had it that Saddam had interfered in the process and said he preferred his prize be granted to an Egyptian writer. Those around me told me not to start asking questions about this matter, so as not to agitate Saddam.

Every time there was a knock on the door, though, my wife was scared the authorities had come to pick me up. Rather than live in fear, in 1990 we decided to pack our bags and set off for Tunis. While residing in Tunis, however, I was often invited back to Iraq for conferences and thus I traveled back and forth.

Have you visited Iraq since Saddam's fall?

In 2004, the Cultural Ministry invited many exiled Iraqi intellectuals to attend a conference. On this occasion I travelled to Baghdad, which I found desolate; violence had taken over. It was such a heartbreaking experience that I only stayed 10 days and then decided never to return.

In your opinion, is there a cultural scene now in Iraq?

There is nothing left in Iraq but death and violence. Who wants to attend a gallery exhibition and risk being killed on the way home? A few months ago they even bombed al-Mutanabi Street, the last remnant of culture in Iraq. In fact, they are not just attacking intellectuals and figures on the cultural scene. The militias also murder those in professions such as medicine, engineering, law and academics. It seems there are those who want to murder the very heart of Iraqi society so that the people will live in constant fear. It is disheartening for me to acknowledge that Iraq is all but destroyed and still not the faintest hint of a solution flutters before us. **AJ**

Iraqi Musician Taleb al-Gharagoli Deplores Lack of Freedom and Security

You are considered one of the most important Iraqi musicians of our time. Tell us about your childhood and how you were introduced to music.

I was born in Nasriya, an extremely poor village known for its abundant palm trees. Most Iraqi artists, musicians and writers come from this village. Indeed, in Nasriya there was a saying: "All the inhabitants of this village sing and make music," and I am convinced that this artistic trend is due to poverty. The poor search for different ways to express themselves, and art, music and literature provide such a venue.

As a child I occupied myself by singing songs of famous Iraqi musicians such as Nasir al-Hakim. I not only listened to his music, but I studied his tragic tunes. I searched for the roots of his tragedy, and made a connection between his music and his impoverished existence.

You were a music teacher before you became a musician.

In 1957, I graduated from university and began teaching music in elementary school. I directed after-school music activities in one elementary school and then went on to coordinate music activities in the entire school system in Nasriya. Despite my success as a teacher, I did not feel completely fulfilled by what my village could offer, and I dreamed of heading off to Baghdad. When I arrived in Baghdad in 1968, I continued teaching music in schools but also began to play music on television. You could say I started with great force, and right away I was well-received. I remained in Baghdad all those years, with the exception of 1975-78, when I traveled to the Emirates.

Taleb al-Gharagoli

You are known for transforming Iraqi music from classical to modern during the 1970's. Could you elaborate on that experience?

Along with some other musicians of my generation, I modernized Iraqi music. Previously, Iraqi music was simple, part of the civil society of the city of Baghdad. The words and melodies were naïve. And so, along with others, I introduced new colors and tunes. We relied on elements from our own culture and nature and were also influenced by Egyptian musicians such as Um Kulthum, Abdel Wahab and Farid al-Atrash. We studied their music and adapted their work to our own tradition.

I always tried to challenge myself with difficult texts. Unlike some other musicians, I did not seek to depend on the Iraqi canon or tradition, but rather I hoped to bring new elements and ideas to my music. I am most proud of my music that is based on the poetry of Muzzafar al-Nuwwab. I do not merely sing the words, but I seek the meaning itself.

You served as music director in the Cultural and Information Ministry, and thus you were employed by Saddam's regime. What was your relationship with the regime?

You knew what the system stood for and what was expected of you. There was no uncertainty. During the Iran-Iraq war I sang nationalist tunes for our soldiers. Despite performing music for the Iraqi fighters, I felt our system was embroiling the country in wars it did not wish for. It seemed that almost every day, the regime was creating a new enemy, and our citizens had to pay with their lives to defend their country. Still, I never had problems with the regime. I was a part of the regime, not against it. And I do believe that during Saddam's time culture was propagated; he had a clear culture and art agenda, and there was fundamental progress in this domain.

How do you see the current cultural scene in Iraq? Is the newfound freedom after Saddam's fall successful in propagating the arts?

Currently, because of the violence, there exists very little artistic and musical activity. In fact, I believe that the current government makes sure that the arts do not emerge. In any case, what cultural activity can exist when approximately 95 percent of Iraqi artists, writers and musicians now reside in Jordan, Syria or the Emirates? Those musicians and artists remaining in Iraq are too distracted by the lack of security to embark on any real creative project. I myself reside in Damascus for the time being, and have absolutely no intention of returning to Iraq, which is currently controlled by dirty hands. Perhaps later when there is security I will return as an ordinary citizen.

Despite the current chaos, I still harbor deep hope for the future. Iraq has a longstanding tradition in music dating back to ancient Sumeria. The Sumerian guitar, stolen from our National Museum after the fall of Baghdad, is proof of this long tradition. The Legend of Gilgamesh is all about music and song. My country is filled with invaluable cultural treasures. However, currently there is no freedom or security, which is necessary to tap into our fundamental creative resource and promote music and the arts. What is freedom? How can you feel free when you don't even feel secure to leave your house?

This fear and phobia is inculcated in all of us Iraqis now, wherever we live. Just listen to what happened to me before a recent television interview. I was led into the gallery where my interview was to take place and sat by myself surrounded by television apparatus. I grew anxious as I heard my own breathing, and when the lights on the veranda in front of the gallery began to turn on and off I literally feared a kidnapping. It seemed to me that the flash of the lights was a signal for my kidnappers to retrieve me. I escaped inside the house behind the gallery, only to find the gallery owner in his shorts. I began to scream at him and asked what was happening to me. He smiled and said he was changing into something more formal, since he did not want to greet such a known musical figure in his shorts. It turned out that the veranda in front of the gallery had a sensor, and whenever anyone passes or approaches, the light suddenly flickers on and then off. It was that which I had interpreted as my kidnapper's signal. If I live with this fear and I am outside Iraq, how do you think those in Iraq currently feel? And then I ask you again, how, under these circumstances, can anyone possibly think about music, art or any other form of culture for that matter? **AJ**

Iraq's Former National Symphony Director Abdel Razeq al-Azawi: Learning to Live in Absence

You served as Iraq's National Symphony director from 1991 until just recently, when you left Iraq. How were you drawn to music, and how did you go on to hold high-ranking positions in your country?

Abdel Razeq al-Azawi

I was born in Babylon in 1942 to a very simple family. Both my parents were illiterate. However, my father, who owned a café, was interested in music and would travel to Baghdad to play the oud under the guidance of a Jewish musician. Also, my older brother was an actor in Hila, the capital of Babylon province, and thus art had a direct presence in our household. Books, magazines, photographs and musical instruments filled our living room.

During primary school in the late 1940's, I spent my days sketching in my notebook. One day a teacher saw one of my drawings and was so astonished that he showed it to the principal and all the other teachers. The principal was so impressed that he awarded me with a picture of King Faisal.

Despite my passion for drawing, I fell in love with music and even began acting in school musicals during secondary school. I attended the Fine Arts School in Baghdad to study music, specifically the clarinet. Three years later, I joined the music department in the army, and then I traveled to England and studied in the Royal Military School of Music. When I returned to Baghdad, I served as an officer in military music, and then in 1988 went on to direct all military music in Iraq. When I retired from the military in 1991, I became director of the National Symphony Orchestra. Currently, I am the chairman of the Iraqi Music Union.

What was it like to compose music and serve as symphony director during the time of Saddam Hussein?

To be famous and earn money you had to do what the system asked of you. For example, if you wrote a song in honor of

Saddam Hussein you were "in." But while holding the official torch, we musicians worked together to develop music. We were lucky since the regime did not have the faintest understanding about the culture of music, and as long as our music was not overtly political, the officials left us alone. Indeed, even when we went so far as to play Western patriotic songs, the regime had no clue.

Of course, despite our attempts at subterfuge, there was a limit to how much you could progress. If you got an invitation to perform outside the country, you were suddenly bombarded with a series of questions: Who has invited you? Why? Where did you meet? and so on. The more you became known to the outside world, the more your life became a living hell in Iraq. For example, when I was in the army, I had to be careful not to talk to any foreigners. If I talked to one for even a few minutes, or God forbid, invited him to our house, I could feel I was being monitored. Worse yet was a visit from a journalist. Immediately I would be called in for questioning. During the time I was in the army, I was sent to Egypt, Jordan, France and China to examine the music industry in the outside world, but not one official showed any interest in my findings. Still, these small stints provided a window of learning about the world around me. Unfortunately, I had no such opportunities during the time I directed the National Symphony Orchestra.

What was life like as the director of the National Symphony Orchestra after the fall of Saddam Hussein?

During the first few months after the fall, there was a period of euphoria. Art and music seemed as if they would flourish with the newfound freedom. During this time, I gave a concert in one of the presidential palaces. We performed a patriotic Iraqi song, from the time of King Ghazi. Paul Bremer (former head of the Coalition Provisional Authority [CPA] in Iraq) asked why the masses were crying and I replied that it was an old song that had sentimental value for the people. Bremer, who was suspicious that the song descended from the time of Saddam, asked how old the song was. When I told him it was from King Ghazi's time, he seemed relieved. Unfortunately, the initial euphoria died when bloodshed and violence became the norm in our country and shattered all our aspirations.

What about the current cultural scene?

How can we talk about the current cultural scene? After those few months of hope, the bloodbath, which continues today, emerged, and it has stifled all forms of culture. All that now exists is the culture of death. The lives of most artists, musicians and writers have been threatened, and they have fled the country. As a result, the cultural scene there is a mess, like a ball of yarn all tangled together. The only musicians that are left in Iraq are fakes – imposters – who have come to fill the vacuum left by the talented ones who have vanished.

You remained in Iraq for a while after the fall of the regime. What was it that made you leave Iraq and settle in Syria?

Bremer, pleased with our national symphony, invited us to come to America to perform at Carnegie Hall. A few members of the symphony, however, conspired against me and stole my passport. In the end, the whole national symphony went without me. Can you imagine a national symphony performing without its conductor? That was a horrible experience, and one of the reasons I grew disillusioned and left Iraq.

Actually, the main reason I left was the constant suffering of life there. And this goes back way before the fall of Saddam Hussein. During the Iran-Iraq war – on the 19th of March, 1985 – a missile hit our house and destroyed my life. My two children, a son and daughter, were both killed, and my wife and I were left heartbroken. I have to say that even without this horrible tragedy, life was always miserable in Iraq. After the eight-year war with Iran, we embarked on two years of war with Kuwait, 12 years of economic sanctions, and now we live with the catastrophic terrorism that pervades daily life. How can an artist work under these circumstances?

Despite the harshness of life and my own personal suffering, I always harbored hope for the future. My music was not tragic, but rather happy. I lost my own happiness, but I sought to bring joy to others through my music.

What is it like living in Damascus?

My wife and I have now been in Damascus for 11 months. I feel I am now living in absence, in a tight glass, with constant worry. I am just another number among the millions of Iraqis who have fled here and are currently held up as scapegoats for the poor economy and lack of security in Syria. Just a few days ago I broke my professional silence, and started to compose a new song called: "Fed Up."**AJ**

Adel Taher, Iraq's Foremost Playwright and Director, Laments Death of Culture in Iraq

You had already written and directed for quite a while before the rise of Saddam. Can you tell us about your early experiences with television and theater?

My earliest memories relate to writing and directing, since as a child I was already acting on television and in the theater in Baghdad. The first television came to Iraq in 1956, making Iraq the first country in the Middle East to have television. With television newly inaugurated, at age 13, I wrote my first serial about a lazy student who enters the military and matures to become a responsible man. This piece, which was directed by famous director Khalil Chawki, was broadcast live on Iraqi television, and I even played a role.

I entered the Academy of Fine Arts, and alongside my studies I continued to write and direct television serials. In addition, I

worked in the theater. In 1964, along with a few other directors, I founded the University Theater Association in Baghdad. This association permitted us to present many productions and I wrote, directed and acted. Despite everything on my plate already, I had an extra reserve of energy for the arts, and joined the National Group of Iraqi Theater in 1968. It goes without saying that Iraqi theater is the oldest and best known, not just in the Arab world but in the entire world. Nevertheless, in the 1970's I left the theater and began to focus on television serials. During the 1970's and early 1980's, television drama became more and more sophisticated, even reaching the level of Egyptian drama. But, with the rise of Saddam Hussein in 1979, and Iraq's embroilment in the Iran-Iraq war, television drama went downhill.

What was it like writing and directing under Saddam Hussein?

As with those in the other arts, we were expected to use our television serials as vehicles to eulogize Saddam. The more you hailed him, the further you could go. However, I was known as the director of the forbidden. It was actually quite a heartbreaking experience. There were several steps to get approval to air a television series. First, you wrote the script and presented it to a censorship committee, who read and evaluated it. They either approved or disapproved. Then, if you were lucky enough to gain approval, you worked on the piece. When it was ready to be aired, you once again had to present it before the committee. Of course, this time you had much more at stake since by now you had spent large sums of money and put your soul into the piece. When they rejected your piece it was absolutely devastating. But during my youth I was very bold. I wrote and directed what I wanted, and did not give a damn about the reaction of the authority figures. If one work was rejected I merely went on to another one. Of course, when I married and had children, I was much more careful so as to protect my family.

Can you give any examples of the regime's interference in your work?

In 1989, Michel Aflaq, the founder of the Baath party, died. He was Christian, but upon his death, Saddam Hussein claimed that Michel Aflaq had come to him prior to his death and confided that he had converted to Islam. Apparently, he asked Saddam to disclose this information only upon his death. And so now Saddam expected all the funeral processions to be Muslim. I was asked to direct the filming of all the events related to the funeral procession to the mosque. Of course, as I was filming the events, the *mukhabarat* were also there taping. Two of Aflaq's children were present, and we saw them making the sign of the cross. I knew if this was broadcast, it would contradict Saddam's announcement so I asked the editors to remove this scene. Unfortunately, they forgot to take out the scene and, as director, I was deemed responsible for this mishap.

The *mukhabarat* approached me. They demanded my resignation and threatened that I would face trouble with the security officers if I did not obey. But I refused, pleading my innocence and insisting that I should not be punished this way. They left angrily and threatened to return in three days with the security forces. When they reappeared, I had a plan. I reminded them that it was currently the year 1989, which meant that I had been affiliated with the government-run television and broadcasting programs for 33 years now. I had thus paid my dues during a long career of public service. Rather than resigning, I asked for an early retirement plan along with its benefits. They were convinced and I was granted early retirement. However, after this I was forbidden to do anything on television.

Adel Taher

First, I went to Kuwait to direct television programs, but I had forgotten certain documents in Iraq and wished to travel home in search of them. Within days after my return to Baghdad, however, the invasion of Kuwait began, and I was stranded in Iraq. I lost my opportunity in Kuwait, and my family and I lived through years of hardship resulting from the economic sanctions against our country. I was forbidden during this time to do anything on public television, but I worked with small non-governmental companies. Despite the fact that I was not outspoken against the authorities, they still caused me grief and made every effort to block my progress.

How did Saddam's fall affect your work as a playwright and director?

I certainly did not welcome America's colonial presence. I was against Saddam, but did not seek a new dictator. From 2003 to 2006, I abandoned writing and directing, and participated full time in the Iraqi national movement to free our country from foreign presence. However, the religious elements soon took over. In the end, I chose to disentangle myself from politics since I found the presence of religious sectarianism shameful. And, of course, the killing and violence was unacceptable. After I dissociated myself from politics, I once again dedicated myself to screenwriting.

After the fall, Iraqi culture died. The problem was that America had no plan for after the war, and thus Iraq was left with

no government or rule of law. This allowed for the militias and guerillas to take over. Now they rule our culture. We have lost our Iraqiness, and all that now exists are Iraqi religious sects. In 2007, "they" even bombed al-Mutanabi Street, our historically-known culture street. Who knows who did it? In Iraq now, as Sunni and Shiite militias have taken over the country, you have no idea who it is who threatens you, kills, steals.

When I say militias have taken over the country, I mean militias from all over the world, namely the Iranians. Iranians have proved to be criminals in Iraq even more than the Americans. I always say it was America who hit Iraq, but Iran who has colonized it.

Why are the militias focusing on threatening intellectuals and important figures in the cultural scene?

It was written in the famous Gilgamesh legend that he who controls Iraq will gain control over the four corners of the world. Clearly, Bush followed this doctrine. Iraq is home to one of the oldest and most sophisticated cultures in the world. Science, philosophy, literature – since ancient Sumeria and Babylon – all descend from Iraq. The majority of schools of Arabic and Islamic science descend from Basra, Kufa and Baghdad. Thus, the militias attack culture, since Iraqi culture is the source of world culture. Certain countries wish to destroy this power, and that is why you have all the death threats against leading intellectuals. While these threats come from the outside, they have rallied Iraqis to participate with them in the murder of our culture.

It has just been a few days since you and your family came to Damascus. How did it happen that you finally decided to leave Iraq?

We left our homeland once death knocked on our door. You know, for one entire year I stayed in the house and did not even go into the garden, since my life was threatened. And then they took away our home, car and life, and we rented another place. And so, with 10 family members I fled to Syria. Now in Damascus, I can finally sleep, eat and feel safe again. We can even count on electricity here. It is indeed ironic that Iraq possesses the richest petrol reserves in the whole world, and yet we suffer from the most horrendous electricity problems. **AJ**

We Mourn
Noel Abdulahad
(1939-2007)
author, translator, friend and contributor to this magazine

Poetry Without Borders: Translating Darwish

A Conversation with Fady Joudah

BY DORIS BITTAR

Houston-based physician Fady Joudah is also a noted poet and translator of Mahmoud Darwish's poetry. In a recent conversation, we discussed how his experiences as a doctor have infused his poetry and writing.

Fady Joudah

You've had two powerful experiences while volunteering for Doctors Without Borders in Zambia and in Darfur. You were the only doctor for tens of thousands of people caught between war and poverty. How does that affect or inform your work with your patients in the non-war zone of Houston, Texas?

I work at the Veterans Hospital in Houston, so that is a war zone. Granted, it is not a "field" war zone, but the effects of the political stage and war are easily palpable there. However, being a doctor in any environment I realize how much power I have. The sum of my actions at times transports me to (Joseph) Conrad's "Heart of Darkness." Yet, admitting that carries with it some narcissism, no doubt. To try to balance my rights and humanity as a physician with – or is it against? – that of the patients can be confusing. A patient is first and foremost a patient – in a position of vulnerability. Even this notion of being a doctor for tens of thousands of people is a misrepresentation.

Your role in Darfur and in Houston was/is among people who may not appreciate the fact that you are an Arab, a Palestinian. How do you view your role as an activist, constantly fighting against the tide, doing work that you know may make little difference?

Within Doctors Without Borders, there was hope versus absurd hope, action versus inaction, while the dead or the immeasurable suffering of others piles up. That's really it – the word "immeasurable." Triaging patients is not the same as triaging people and nations, which is exactly what occurs at the level of international law and politics. Somehow, poetry can participate in restoring the humanity of others despite the language of the day. Similarly, poetry should revel in its lack of significant effect on anything global, much like humanitarian medicine, and not shy away from speaking truth to those with power about the inevitability of being complicit with the world.

I cannot help but think of William Carlos Williams, also a doctor, when I compare your life and work with his. Your work has woven into it a self-deprecating voice similar to Williams'. Like him, you wonder about your role as savior and you see both the banal and abject in a wondrous light. I am thinking specifically of Williams' "Patterson." But the form and minimalist strategies you employ are more like Wallace Stevens – Stevens with a conscience.

Well, Stevens was interested in the phenomenon of humanism as the god of the new age, so to speak. Williams fashioned, among other things, the poetic colloquial and thus heralded – I guess I can say that – the "democratic" voice we see today in American poetic diction.

I find that your poetry navigates between various modes of voice and syntax, and in addition to your own poetry, you are a translator of Darwish's poetry. As a child of immigrants who has an ear for both Arabic and English, do you find yourself slipping into states of entangled translations?

Most of "The Earth in the Attic" was completed before I started the Darwish translation, "The Butterfly's Burden." Yet I think I am naturally drawn to Darwish's art of sequence. That aside, I generally infuse Arabic expressions and proverbs in my poems as they come to me through a predominantly American existence. Much of what I have experienced is through the process of seeing the Other: my mom or dad tells a story and I am left with that story in Arabic. Similarly, events did not occur in English in Darfur or Zambia. Translation was an immediate necessity and a limitation. Combine this with the immensity of the situation there, and then English is born. Why not? Writing then becomes a testament to the beautiful unity of the human mind, where language originated equally for all of us.

Then there is the magic of syntax – where English and Arabic meet or part becomes thinner for me the more I read poets like George Oppen and Michael Palmer. I believe in such unities. In translating Darwish, I attempted to duplicate cadence through an overflow of syntactical flexibility. I was warned about this, that it may sound "unnatural" in English or "archaic" even, but I find these arguments to be steeped in dogma about what separates: individuation as godliness. This is dangerous – a self-imposed solitary confinement.

I do think that all poetry is an act of translation, even for the monoglot: to make the private public through a process of language. **AJ**

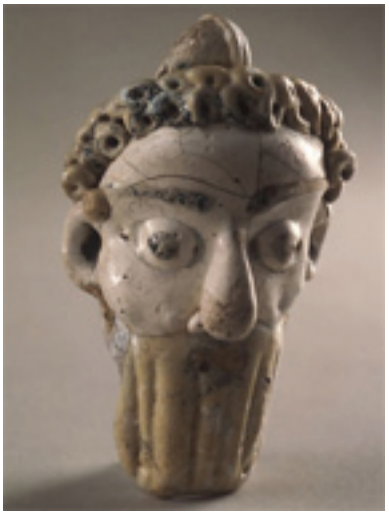
A Treasured Mystery

The Mediterranean of the Phoenicians: From Carthage to Tyre
November 6, 2007 - April 20, 2008
Institut du Monde Arabe

BY SIMONE FATTAL

Phoenician history and art are the dual subjects of an exhibit that took place a year ago in Paris at the Institut du Monde Arabe starting in November 2007. A two-day symposium organized by the UNESCO Foundation for the Safekeeping of Tyre and the Institut du Monde Arabe preceded the exhibit's opening.

During the symposium, Leila Badr, head of the American University of Beirut's Archaeological Museum, entreated the audience, scholars and politicians alike to restart professional digs in Tyre. More often than not, because of the chaos prompted by the many wars in the region, digs are done for individual profit and then the re-discovered objects are privately sold. The objects are lost to science, and the digs leave environmental destruction in their wake. This call must have been heard for a new symposium was to take place this November in Beirut from November 5 to November 9 , 2008. It is the first ever symposium of that importance to take place in Lebanon. Forty-two scholars from the U.S., Lebanon, Cyprus, and Europe will give papers on the interrelations in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Bronze and Iron Ages. A book will be published: "Networking Patterns of the Bronze and Iron Age Levant," edited by Claude Doumit Serhal, herself an archeologist digging with a British team in Sidon.



Tête barbue, Tyre, 3rd century. From "The Mediterranean of the Phoenicians."

The world of the Phoenicians can be found throughout the Mediterranean, and many of their treasures are rediscovered in places other than their country of origin. Sardinia, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, Tunisia are all cities they founded or utilized as commercial outposts, stops along the Phoenicians' expansive sea routes.

Who were the Phoenicians? Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, head researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) and the Collège de France proposes the following answer: "Phoenician" is a Greek appellation for the people who came from today's Syria and Palestine, and who were the Canaanites.

The origin of the word is uncertain. One theory proposes that the Phoenicians were named for their famous purple dye of Murex – a color of utmost importance since it was the color of royalty (and royalty alone in the later Roman and Byzantium Empires). Another theory posits that the name is derived from *phenikias*, which means "palm tree" in Greek, a tree that flourished throughout the region. What we do know is that these Canaanites referred to themselves as inhabitants of their cities, i.e. as Tyrians, or Sidonians. They ruled a string of important, wealthy and independent city-states along the coast which were loosely related by trade, religion, culture and language, but not united in a single political entity.

According to the classical historian Herodotus, their region spread from the gulf of Alexandria (Iskenderoun) to Al 'Arish on the Sinai peninsula. The Phoenicians worked in Egypt and widely exported their goods: jewelry, ivory, glass, metal vessels. They were masters of maritime commerce in the Mediterranean – intrepid navigators, successful merchants, always opening new outposts for commerce, but not in an attempt to build empires.

Medallion-shaped stele, Carthage, circa 7th century. From "The Mediterranean of the Phoenicians."

Homer's "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" celebrated their skills as artisans. For example, when King Menelaus wants to offer a noble visitor the most precious gift in his kingdom, he presents to him a silver vessel from Sidon, exquisitely crafted and embossed with intricate motifs. French scholar Victor Bérard devoted two volumes of work to the sole subject of the instances in which the word "Sidon" appears in the Homeric poems. Phoenician amphorae carried oil, grain, wheat, spices such as cumin and saffron, dried grapes, dried grape seeds, purple dye, incense and myrrh to Greece and Italy. Some say they traveled as far as England and Scotland and even to Argentina. In the exhibit at L'Institut du Monde Arabe, an exquisite clay statuette of a young man holds an amphora on his shoulder as though a wing.

The Phoenicians' greatest achievement, however, was the invention of the alphabet. While this creation went through a long process of transmission, we know the first alphabet appeared in Ugarit (Ras Shamra, Syria) in the 13th century B.C. A piece of

clay dating from that time lists the letters of the alphabet. Beginning as an alphabetical cuneiform, it transformed over time into a linear writing, one that went from right to left, as would the various languages of the region: Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, etc. That first alphabet disappeared, to reappear in Byblos two centuries later.

This later text, inscribed on bronze, refers to the property of a certain Zaccour (a family name still existing in present-day Lebanon) living in the Bekaa. Other texts have also been found, mainly correspondence from Amarna (Egypt) or Mesopotamia concerning commerce. Scholars have found the only literary texts in the archives of Ugarit. The Phoenician language was also the precursor to the Greek alphabet and to the ancient language of Crete.

Cippus with Greek and Phoenician alphabet, Malta, 2nd century. From "The Mediterranean of the Phoenicians."

Classical mythology tells us that it is Cadmos, King of Sidon, who brought the alphabet to the Greeks while searching for his sister Europa, who had been abducted by Zeus. It also traveled by land through the Phrygians, the inhabitants of a region in present-day Turkey between Greece and the Levantine coast. The golden age of Phoenicia occurred between 1100 B.C. and 332 B.C., when Alexander's conquest destroyed Tyre.

Almost two millennia later, an archeological find on Malta helped modern-era scholars to decipher the Phoenician language. Abbot Barthelemy, a Frenchman, found a column of marble in 1792 inscribed with both Greek and Phoenician wordings. This marble cippus, appearing to rise out of an acanthus flower, is the first treasure that meets us in the exhibit. In 1855, almost a century after this revelatory discovery, the first sarcophagi of a king of Sidon, Eshmunazar, was uncovered (perhaps the namesake of the village of Ishmoun in Lebanon's Chouf Mountains?). Shortly thereafter, Napoleon the III sent explorer Ernest Renan to Syria with the purpose of searching that coast. Renan opened four dig sites at Arwad, Gebeil, Sidon and Tyre.

The art of the Phoenicians is composite, heavily influenced by the Egyptians, with additional elements added. The artisans were so skilled that they themselves were exported for their work: creating dyes, weavings, glass, pottery and jewelry and "trinkets," beads made of clay or glass.

The many artifacts on view at the exhibit include the stunning anthropomorphic sarcophagi made of marble imported from the Greek island of Pharos. Those on display represent various regions of the Phoenician world. The viewer can also admire the famous Punic statuettes of bronze and gold from the Museum of Beirut, or gold necklaces and diadems on loan from the Museum of Rome.

Visitors will find many intriguing objects, such as the painted and incised shells which likely contained cosmetic powders – created in such a way to make them easy for travel. Other objects of interest include innumerable seals, vessels, coins, masks, women deities in their sanctuaries, amphorae, etc.

One disquieting find has been the infant cemeteries near Carthage. Pictures of these tombs, found in Tunisia, are displayed upon the walls. One cannot help but wonder who these children were. Human sacrifices? Simply stillborn children? Archaeology has not yet revealed an answer.

Considering that Lebanon is the home of the most fabled of the Phoenician cities, Byblos, Tyre, and Sidon, one found himself drawn to the history of modern-day Lebanon. We hope that their troubled history is something of the past and they are entering a new phase of reconciliation and prosperity. **AJ**

The Suspended Moment

Between Two Notes

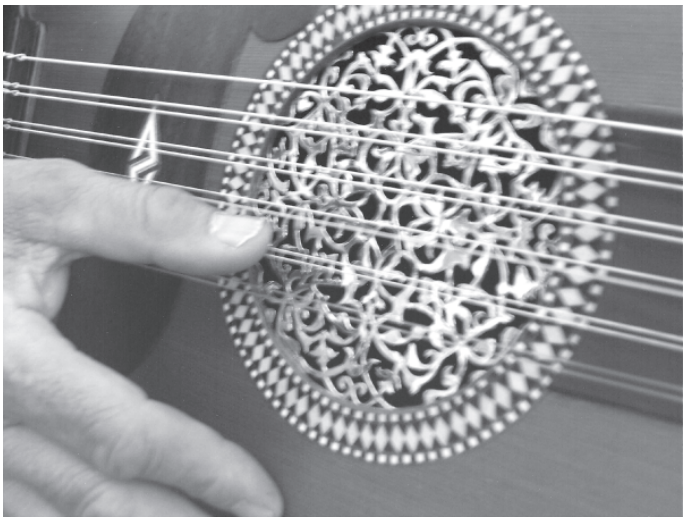
Directed by Florence Strauss
National Film Board of Canada, 2006

BY PAMELA NICE

"Between Two Notes" is a unique documentary that captures an array of Arab classical music, played in different locales, with various *takhts* (Arab music ensembles) from the early 20th century to the present. The music is enhanced by Laurent Brunet's stunning cinematography. The film's opening sequence finds the camera lingering on singers and musicians, with close-ups of faces, playing fingers and instruments, and then the beauty of an Arab countryside, water bubbling in a shallow stream, the stems of long green grasses. The camera soaks in the bucolic scene while we listen to a song, which the singer later reveals is about the Garden of Eden, long a favorite setting for Arab love songs. The film's pace and the high quality of both its camera work and soundtrack bring the beauty – and the essence – of Arab song to even a musically untutored ear.

Throughout the film, the lovingly presented visual images seem analogous to the *tarab* a listener ideally experiences in an Arab musical performance. *Tarab* is a sort of ecstasy brought forth through the interaction of listener and performer – both suspended and lost in the musical moment. When the camera moves slowly toward its subject, whether nature or performer, we viewers have the same intense experience of being lost in the image.

These sequences of music interwoven with image are the film's unifying thread. Filmmaker Florence Strauss has given the lover of Arab music samples to delight; to the uninitiated



Courtesy of the National Film Board of Canada

she offers up a taste of the charm and flavor of this music. We see old Israeli Arabs from Iraq play an Iraqi song; witness a *dhikr* ritual in Egypt; watch Sufi singers in Syria and see clips of Abdel Wahad and Umm Kalthum, the Egyptian stars of Arab song, performing on film and in concert halls.

We also hear samplings of the lyrics which make Arab love-songs so compelling. "Arab song is a tribute to absence," says singer Abed Azrié. Sings Umm Kalthum:

"When in the night
The passion of love infuses me
I shed bitter tears—
This fire inside me. . .
Stoked by desire and thoughts. . ."

The crucial difference between Western and Arab music is the quarter-tone, which exists between the two half-tones of a Western scale. It is illustrated by a Lebanese trumpeter, who adds a quarter-tone valve to his trumpet so he can play the songs of his homeland. He speaks of the importance of the quarter-tone as the distinguishing feature which brings power and profound feeling to Arab music (a segment unfortunately not translated from the French in the film).

There are further symbolisms "between two notes" that Strauss touches on: the East/West binary, the Israeli Arab/Jew, the Tigris/Euphrates river valley (supposedly the site of the Garden of Eden – well before our fall into binaries). We encounter many languages and cultures in the film: French, Arabic, Hebrew, English. The documentary displays a variety of Arab landscapes, and we see the filmmaker traveling between various Middle Eastern cities while Arab music plays. Arab music ties all of these places, cultures and languages together.

Strauss alludes to an idealized Al Andalus as a place of love, peace and harmony between cultures, where the classical Arab *muwashahat* songs flourished. We also see Israeli Jewish musicians performing with Arabs in Tel Aviv today. Strauss seems to be implying that if Arab music could unite and transcend cultures in the past, it might be able to do so in our politically ruptured world of today.

For those well-acquainted with Arab music, this film is a wonderful feast of memories. For those unfamiliar with the differences between Western and Arab music, the film may be somewhat confusing, as it assumes the viewer already has this knowledge. But in the end, few will be able to resist the sensual power of this visual Arab song.**AJ**

Contributors

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Lauren Dickey ("Brilliant Evidence Mai Ghoussoub's Long Journey: From Trotskyite to Liberal-Democrat," p. 12) is a Los Angeles-based writer.

Simone Fattal ("A Treasured Mystery," p. 31, and "The Art of Islam," p. 56) is an artist, critic, translator and the owner of the Post-Apollo Press.

Hilary Hesse ("Après Le Deluge: Into the Abyss of Poverty," p. 48) is a Los Angeles based-writer.

Arlen Jones ("What is the Reel Truth?" p. 39) is a Los Angeles-based writer.

Rebecca Joubin ("Interviews Three Iraqi Musicians, a Novelist, and a Playwright—Saadun Jabber, Taleb al-Gharagoli, Abdel Razeq al-Azawi, Fuad Takerli, and Adel Taher," p. 22) has lived in Damascus since 2004. She regularly contributes articles on film for Al-Hayat al-Cinemaiyyah, and is currently completing a Syria memoir.

Dalila Mahdawi ("Heavy Metal: Even 'Black Scorpions' Leave Baghdad," p. 19) is a journalist with The Daily Star, based in Beirut, Lebanon.

Azar Mahloujian ("A Satanic Comedy from Prisons of Syria's Security Police," p. 46) is a Swedish-Iranian author and journalist who writes frequently on the Middle East.

D. H. Melhem ("Just Breathing," p. 17). D. H. Melhem's most recent works are her seventh collection, "New York Poems" (2005) and two short novels, "Stigma & The Cave" (2007), completing a trilogy. Both books are published by Syracuse University Press.

Pamela Nice ("The Suspended Moment," p. 32; "The Keys to Paradise," p. 35; "It Could Have Been Done Differently," p. 36; "The Backstory on Documentary Making: 'Shadya' and 'Nadia's Journey,'" p. 38; "Sexual Identity and Practice: West versus East?" p. 47) is a documentary filmmaker, theater director, and teacher of Arab film and literature. Her most recent film,

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Covering the Holy City: Identity, Tradition and Hats

Hats of Jerusalem
Directed by Nati Adler
First Run/Icarus Films, 2005

BY BRIGITTE CALAND

Courtesy of First Run/Icarus Films

"Hats of Jerusalem," a 2005 documentary directed by Nati Adler, wanders the labyrinthine streets of the Old City, attempting to uncover the history and symbolism behind each hat. The director quotes his grandfather's remembrance that the men of his generation wore hats because since "every pot had its lid, everyone needed a hat." But today, except in Jerusalem and on special occasions, most men have stopped wearing hats. Adler wonders whether things would be "better" if men had carried on this tradition.

In a stroll through the Old City's Jewish quarter, Adler notices most heads are covered – many with prominent or eye-catching head wear. The owner of the one hat-making shop opines that is because wearing a hat "is not the past, but is today's 'standard' (tradition)." Almost every man can be identified by his hat; each ethnic or religious community boasts its own. The Belz Hasidim wear *vishnitz* with a bow on the left. The Satmar Hasidim wear hats called "supers." Perhaps the most striking example of these many hats is the *shtreimel* – a large, circular hat made of fur, worn in the same style for centuries. Why would these contemporary men continue to don the hats of their great-grandfathers?

Adler takes a look at the Jews' long and painful history involving these hats. Most of the *shtreimel* makers and wearers refuse to talk to the filmmaker. However, one rabbi is proud to display his, removing it reverently from its carrying case and talking about its significance. There is some uncertainty about the *shtreimel*'s specific origin; mention of the hat can be found in Ukraine, Poland and Holland as far back as several hundred years. As a common thread in all of these accounts, a royal or religious decree forced Jews to identify themselves by wearing a foxtail. The foxtail was a sign of outcast status, and others including disabled persons or lepers were also forced to wear the *shtreimel*. Now, the *shtreimel* is considered a holy hat, and a sign of one's religious devotion.

The Jewish quarter is not the only place where Adler finds a prevalence of hats. They are ubiquitous in the other quarters as well. Christian monks are required to wear hats, and each order had their own. The Armenian monk's pointed hood represents Mount Ararat, where Noah's ark was said to have landed – a link to their ancestral homeland and their painful history. The Syriac wears a hat which has a seam running down the middle. This is symbolic of the community's first monk, St. Antonius, who lived during the 3rd century AD, and whose hat was torn in two during his battle with the devil. A Greek Orthodox monk says he wears a *skopia* to indicate his commitment to a religious and chaste way of life. The Ethiopian wears a tightly fitted black "crown" hat as a reminder of Jesus' crown of thorns. The black color absorbs the sunlight and punishes the body. The Russian Orthodox bishop wears a ceremonial head-piece – a richly decorated, hand-sewn *mitre*.

Courtesy of First Run/Icarus Films

Adler's impressionistic close-ups of the play of light on hats are roughly interrupted by a scene in which two policemen brutally arrest and carry off a young Arab. The officers wear their military uniform hats. Adler recalls how the first Jewish settlers used to wear the *keffiyeh*, perhaps to fool others into believing they were Bedouins. The *keffiyeh*'s long history is noted by Biblical illustrations of Abraham portrayed as a wise man with kind eyes, *keffiyeh* atop his head. Today, Arab men wear it to hide their baldness, as well as for protection. It only became the symbol of Palestinian resistance when Arafat began to wear it after first sporting a Fidel Castro-style beret that many military men also used to wear.

In Jerusalem the women too wear hats. Maria, a Russian Orthodox nun, wanted to talk to the filmmaker about her head covering, but her bishop did not grant her permission. Muslim women adopt the *hijab* when they reach the age of 12 or 13, and many believe that close observance of the rules of Islam allows them more freedom. Jewish women also cover their hair as a sign of modesty. They are required to wear a *halasha* as soon as they marry. Some choose to wear wigs instead; the camera watches as one young wife tries on several wigs in front of her husband. She is stunning; her beauty draws attention whether she wears a

black wig or a blond one. Adler wonders whether this undermines the goal.

He also questions where the religious rule of women covering their hair originated. The husband seems undisturbed by these ponderances. He says, "There are laws that have no explanations. That's just the way it is." Through research, Adler discovers that according to one early rabbi's explanation, the tradition derives from the story of the Garden of Eden, where Eve tricked Adam into eating the forbidden fruit, resulting in mankind's expulsion from the garden forever. Because of their role in committing the original sin, women must cover their hair to acknowledge this offense.

Throughout his journey and interviews, Adler comes to realize that people wear hats as a visible and recognizable form of identity, a link to history and a sign they belong to a larger community. Considering the current strife among these very communities, Adler wonders if this may be a double-edged sword; for one moment, he wishes a strong gust of wind would blow away all the hats away – then no one will know who belongs to which community. Yet the documentary ends with a bit of Adler's dark humor: "Perhaps because many believe Jerusalem is the closest city to Eden, people are better off wearing hats as protection from God." **AJ**

The Keys to Paradise

Shirin Ebadi: A Simple Lawyer
Directed by Bani Koshnoudi
First Run/Icarus Films, 2004

BY PAMELA NICE

This straightforward film by Bani Koshnoudi profiles Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi, who champions women's and children's rights in Iran. The filmmaker's own interview with Ebadi is spliced with excerpts from public speeches that Ebadi made around the world after receiving the Nobel. We follow this international public scholar around the globe, traveling from Tehran to Paris to Bogotá, addressing UNESCO, participating in human rights conferences, lecturing at universities and giving photo ops. In the interview segments and public speeches, we glimpse Ebadi's perspective on the state of civil society and human rights in Iran. She criticizes the Islamic Republic's misuse of Islam and believes women's rights have regressed since the time of the Shah.

Yet she is heartened by the increasing number of women in higher education (in 2004, 63 percent of college students were female), a trend that will lead to a more enlightened populace.

Time and again she emphasizes the need for the people of Iran – not their government – to believe in women's rights. She believes that only then will a deeper change occur, a change rooted in the wishes of the people. She resists Iranians' cries for her to become their spokesperson to the world. She strongly criticizes the Iranian justice system, with its Religious and

Courtesy of First Run/Icarus Films

Revolutionary Courts, juries stacked with government officials and judges and lawyers too closely tied to the government. However, she refuses to accept the role of "hero" to the Iranian people, championing their causes to the international community. "I am against the cult of personality," she states. "I refuse to speak for anyone else. I am just myself, a lawyer, fighting for human rights."

Instead, she advocates the formation of an international movement of moderate Muslims. The group would represent "the spirit of each thinking Muslim, fighting for democracy while respecting his religion and refusing injustice. Muslims must open their eyes and see that the keys to Paradise are not in the hands of repressive governments." **AJ**

Contributors

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"Dreaming in Morocco," was chosen for this year's MNTV series on public television and will be seen at MESA's film festival.

Theri Alyce Pickens ("Power of the Jinn," p. 54) is working on her PhD in Comparative Literature at UCLA, with an emphasis on Arab-American and African-American literatures.

Lynne Rogers ("Canadian Chronicles," p. 37; "The Endurance of Arab Folktales," p. 42; "A Humble Vow to Truth," p. 50) is a professor and author of many articles on the Palestine question which have appeared in professional journals and books.

Hanna Saadah ("An Arab-American Author Reflects Upon Writing," p. 11) is an Oklahoma-based physician, author of the "The Mighty Weight of Love" (2005), and four books of poetry.

Therese Saliba ("Literary Works Traverse Landscapes of Reclaimed Identity," p. 49) is a faculty of international feminism at The Evergreen State College, Washington, and co-editor of two collections, "Intersections: Gender, Nation and Community in Arab Women's Novels" and "Gender, Politics and Islam."

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It Could Have Been Done Differently

Zero Degrees of Separation
Directed by Elle Flanders
National Film Board of Canada

BY PAMELA NICE

"Zero Degrees of Separation," a documentary by Canadian Elle Flanders, portrays the interconnectedness of violence, discrimination and stereotyping in apartheid Israel through the lens of two gay couples – one male and one female. Both couples are mixed Israeli/Palestinian relationships, which illustrate how inescapable systems of oppression are, even at the most personal level. Flanders frames the couples' stories by her own family history: her grandparents were influential in the Zionist movement of the 1940's and 1950's, helping European refugees settle in the new state of Israel. This personal film archive serves as an additional connection point between the filmmaker and her subjects, driving home the "zero degrees" of the title.

Courtesy National Film Board of Canada

A related theme is that of ethnic cleansing. She presents it as a deliberate Israeli policy, and she visually underscores her point by splicing facts about the 20th century Palestinian diaspora and demographic changes in Israel with footage of present-day roadblocks and checkpoints. Her message is that this cleansing is not a thing of the past; rather, Israel clearly designed the present-day policies in an attempt to increase Palestinian frustration and/or flight.

Each partner in her two couples has a distinctive cultural history, socio-economic situation and set of challenges brought on by the discrimination facing Arabs in Israeli society. Ezra and Salim contend with laws preventing Palestinians from living in Jerusalem if their identity cards don't state Jerusalem as their residence. (The Israeli government usually denies requests for such permits.) Salim's card states that he lives in Ramallah due to a bureaucratic bungle – half his family have Jerusalem listed as their residence, while the other half have Ramallah. He has been arrested several times since he has been living and working with his partner, Ezra, in Jerusalem. As an added layer of complexity, Ezra is Mizrachim, an Arab Jew, so he himself faces discrimination from the Ashkenazy, or Western European, Jews. Eventually, Salim is arrested in Jerusalem one too many times, and placed under house arrest. He appeals his case, loses, and is subsequently deported to the West Bank. The geographical separation splits the couple physically and emotionally, and the relationship ends shortly thereafter.

Of the film participants, Ezra is the most outspoken against Israeli oppression. He points out the connection between the deliberate obstruction of access through the use of roadblocks and the racism of Israeli society. Several times in the film, he confronts young Israeli soldiers at checkpoints asking them why they do it. Chilling and ironic, their inevitable response, "We're just following orders," echoes their former German oppressors.

The female couple presents the more internal struggles of apartheid. Israeli Edit's family escaped Argentina in the 1970's to create their new home in Israel. Her parents, like Flanders' grandparents, found an ideal Israel that provided a safe and just haven from the persecution of the Jewish diaspora. But Edit does not see her parents' Israel today. As a social worker, she is well aware of the violence against women and the high rates of spousal murder among Israelis. She sees this family violence as a reflection of the violence of the state – its systematic oppression of Arabs and its militaristic view of survival. "I'm always amazed that people continue to deny the connection between Israel's internal violence and its conflict with the Arabs," she says. She feels guilty for being part of the oppressing group, but proud that Israel existed to protect her family. In Edit, we see how the history of Jewish persecution has led to the type of state that Israel has become, and the internal conflict this causes in Jews who both identify with and reject aspects of Israel's Zionism.

Edit's partner Samira is a proud Palestinian who speaks for many when she says, "My existence in this land is very present. I am here – I am not anyone's guest… Just as they accept that this sea is the Mediterranean Sea, they should accept my existence here." On Israel's Independence Day, Edit celebrates with her Jewish friends while Samira commemorates the *Nakba* (catastrophe) with her Palestinian friends. Perhaps unsurprisingly, their relationship does not survive the period of the filming.

Interestingly, the documentary does not mention homosexuality as a cause of discrimination toward any of the partners, at least as portrayed by Flanders. It is, as Samira says, just "present." Does this mean there is little homophobia in Israel? Obviously, Flanders focused on answering other questions. In fact, it is quite possible that heterosexual partners would confront the same issues as do the gay couples. The issue is whether one is or is not a Jew. Arabs in Israel and the Occupied Territories are not wanted as part of the Israeli state; they are a continuing and present threat to its Jewish identity. As Edit says, "I have no problem saying that we are to blame. Zionism did not take into account that there was another nation here. It could have been done differently, but it was not done differently." **AJ**

Canadian Chronicles

Reema, There and Back
Directed by Paul Émile d'Entremont
National Film Board of Canada Production, 2006

Afghan Chronicles
Directed by Dominic Morissette
InformAction Films Inc., 2007

BY LYNNE ROGERS

Reema al-Khoja, Courtesy National Film Board of Canada

Central Kabul, Courtesy National Film Board of Canada

Two Canadian documentary filmmakers left their homeland to practice their art and returned with strikingly different and thought-provoking documentaries. One witnesses a young girl trying to make sense of her Iraqi heritage, while the second pays tribute to the many persevering individuals in the emerging media in Afghanistan.

In "Reema, There and Back," filmmaker Paul Émile d'Entremont follows the teenage Reema as she treks back and forth from Nova Scotia to reunite with her Iraqi father and sister. In his documentary, which reminds viewers of both Disney's film "The Parent Trap" and the melodrama "Not Without My Daughter," Entremont's subjects share their human pain, misdirected good intentions, justifiable anger and acknowledged self-interest.

The family's story begins when the congenial and quick-to-laugh Elizabeth meets Ali, a cute, self-admitted liar, in Yugoslavia. She agrees to marry him to get him into Canada in exchange for him agreeing to pay for her education. Instead, the adventurous and attractive Elizabeth finds herself in Iraq with two daughters, unable to live as a "submissive Muslim wife." As a last resort, she leaves her eldest daughter with the girl's grandmother and father in Iraq, and she and the younger daughter return to Canada.

The film itself begins 16 years later when Ali contacts his ex-wife in Canada to suggest a family reunion. After an emotional rendezvous at the airport, the four set off for a family vacation in Egypt; they soon discover the difficulties of becoming reacquainted. Both Elizabeth and Reema lament their language limitations as they have conversations with Tamara, the elder daughter previously left in Iraq, and reluctantly admit that they feel "bad" for her. However, from the viewer's perspective, Tamara, shown attending a coed English class, appears to have been spared the angst of Western teenage girls. Unlike Reema, who does not know what she wants to do and does not feel "pretty," the shy yet self-possessed Tamara wants to become a journalist to inform the world of Iraq's desire for peace. She innocently confesses to the camera that she does not feel that she has "missed out." Although Reema praises her upbringing with her mother, upon high school graduation she decides to return to her father in Amman, arriving with all her adolescent baggage in tow.

Ali, who now sincerely wants to be part of his daughter's life, feels fortunate to have a lucrative job with an American contractor in Iraq, and he welcomes her. Later, after a long day of shopping, Reema and Ali take his Jaguar to look at his real estate investments (American tax dollars at work?). Ali shows no concern for the Bedouins currently living on the land because they will either move or be moved by the police. Reema herself asks, "If he [Ali] can make money off the Americans, why not? I got a computer out of it." While Ali's scheming and his dismissal of the sympathetic Elizabeth paint him as aloof and calculating, we see that he differs little from Western fathers in his sentiments for his daughter. In dealing with an excitable teenager, he waits until the right moment, then urges Reema "to have morals, get an education, a decent job and a good husband." However, Reema is still dealing with her emotional scarring and, once back in Nova Scotia, cries to her mother about "the son of a bitch." Despite her inner conflicts, Reema enrolls in an Arabic class at a university, making her mother proud and suggesting some reconciliation with her Iraqi heritage.

In "Afghan Chronicles," a Canadian journalist travels to Afghanistan to cover its first election. When the reporter first arrives, Afghanistan is colored by dreams of reconstruction. Six months later, the same reporter returns to a disillusioned Afghanistan and, here, the documentary begins to record the

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The Backstory on Documentary Making: 'Shadya' and 'Nadia's Journey'

Shadya
Directed by Roy Westler
National Film Board of Canada, 2007

Nadia's Journey
Directed by Carmen Garcia and Nadia Zouaoui
National Film Board of Canada, 2006

BY PAMELA NICE

Courtesy National Film Board of Canada

Courtesy National Film Board of Canada

Two recent films – "Shadya" and "Nadia's Journey" – indict the Arab patriarchal systems that stunt the potential of Arab females, but they accomplish this goal with very different documentary approaches.

Both are non-Arab television productions – unsurprisingly, given the strong social critique they pursue. Both look at the family as the guardian and perpetuator of patriarchal systems, wherein the movement, freedom and development of females is controlled by men. But here the similarities end. "Nadia's Journey" is a story told from within the system; "Shadya," an incursion from the outside. "Nadia's Journey" is a personal, openly subjective self-reflection by an Algerian-Canadian woman. "Shadya" is a film produced, written and directed by non-Arab (in fact, Israeli) males who have gained access to the subject and her Arab Muslim family. Issues of cross-cultural film production raise questions about filmmaking as an act of female agency or as an act of power, shaping a narrative of the Other.

"Shadya" is an example of a shaped narrative that hides its editing and production choices for the sake of a dramatic story. The filmmakers present the story of a 17-year-old Arab Muslim Israeli woman, a national karate champion who seems to lose her life and dreams when she marries. Though her father is always strongly supportive of her – and, in fact, crucial to her independence and success – we witness the hatred of her brothers, who express it openly to the camera, because of her non-traditional pursuit of a public sport. Her mother, we learn, is also unsupportive. Her younger sister, though a karate champion herself, wants Shadya to stop once she marries. Even Shadya's new husband, who earlier had promised that she could continue her sport, reneges on his word as soon as they are married. Shadya is pregnant in the last clip; the story of the patriarchal snare is complete. Shadya is caught in a system of Arab Muslim tradition that will squelch all her dreams of freedom and personal achievement.

The story is carefully crafted: a moving musical score guides the viewer's emotional response to the twists and turns in Shadya's story. Scenes are obviously set up without an acknowledgement of that fact, as though the filmmaker wants us to believe we are watching a documentary in which a hidden camera records spontaneous events, when this is obviously not the case. The lack of a contextualizing voice-over or text contributes to this sense of hands-off observation and also adds some confusion as to whether the action was staged or not.

When one reads on the film's website that Shadya's life has taken a turn for the better – that her husband is now a big supporter of her career, and her independence has emerged undimmed – some nagging questions persist. Yes, all films must end while the lives on which they are based continue. But we are presented with a story about Shadya's repression and destruction, when in fact her life is something different. This raises the issue of the contract between the filmmaker and the audience that is part of all documentary filmmaking. There is an unwritten pledge that the filmmaker will present the truth as far as s/he knows it. So what about the people who weren't interviewed, and the thoughts that found themselves on the cutting room floor? Since Shadya's story didn't evolve the way we were led to believe it would, we could easily wonder if the

filmmaker omitted crucial information. Did the filmmaker lead us to believe that the stereotype was true, that Shadya's life was destroyed by an Arab-Muslim tradition that refused to allow her to pursue her dreams?

And what about the process of making this film? We are not told of the relationship between the filmmaker and his subject or her family. Did her family welcome the intrusion of the camera into their lives, especially since they seem to have a strong sense of public versus private spheres? If they did perceive the filmmaking as an intrusion, might not that affect how they talk to the filmmaker and express their feelings about Shadya's public life? What about the fact that Arab males are speaking to a non-Arab Israeli male, who is in their home making a documentary about their lives for Israeli television? We are left to ponder these questions on our own.

"Nadia's Journey" represents a much more straightforward documentary process. It is an intensely personal revelation, a piece of research into the filmmaker's own past growing up in a small town in Algeria. Nadia Zouaoui's process of making the film is transparent: early on, she asks her parents how they feel about exposing their lives in a film; she also asks several family friends how they react to the process of exposing the patriarchal systems at work in their lives – including some males, who offer frank opinions about being caught up in a system that gives them such power. The film follows her, walking around the town, visiting homes of friends. She makes no pretences about objectivity.

As a film, "Nadia's Journey" is both beautiful and depressing. Born of the filmmaker's struggle to free herself from the internalized oppression instilled by her past, its beauty lies in the strength and honesty of her statement, which grows more depressing as she drives its message home. Zouaoui left her hometown of Tazmalt 19 years ago to marry an Algerian in Montreal. She didn't know her intended husband because it was an arranged marriage; it was a disaster and ended in divorce after 12 years. This film seems to be her attempt to make sense of this trauma, to understand what she calls her "stolen youth." She returns to the scene of this "crime" to interview her mother, female friends of the family, and even children at a wedding, asking them why they participate in a system that robs them of their freedom in the name of honor. Zouaoui's tone and diction are harsh. Even as the landscape dances with color, women animatedly talk of confinement and beatings by their fathers, brothers and husbands. Zouaoui ties together these interviews with a voice-over that reiterates her belief that "women are lugged around like merchandise . . . in the name of Allah and religion." As a matter of course, parents arranged the marriages of women of Zouaoui's generation and older, often when the girls were as young as 12. Brides seldom knew their grooms and were subjected to a wedding night she describes as "institutionalized rape . . . from which you never recover." Male children are still favored over female, and a woman dare not divorce, even though it is now allowed in the courts, because of the shame it brings on her family.

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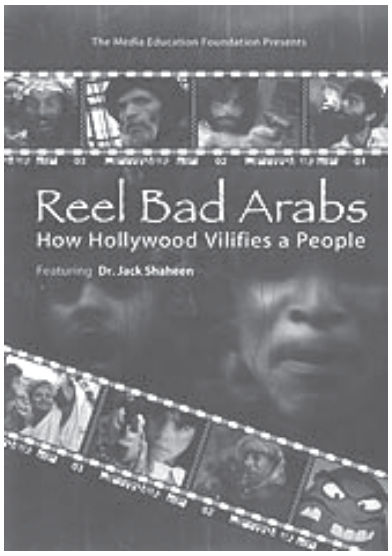
What is the Reel Truth?

Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People
Directed by Sut Jhally
Media Education Foundation, 2007

BY ARLEN JONES

"Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People" is the documentary adaptation of Jack Shaheen's 2001 book of the same name. It's a titanic exposé of the unchecked racial stereotyping and hate-mongering towards Arabs that defines the 100-year history of Western filmmaking. Sut Jhally, the director, is an oft-unsung workhorse-extraordinaire of the Media Education Foundation and the man who brought us "Edward Said: On Orientalism," "Peace, Propaganda, and the Promised Land" and "Advertising and the End of the World," to name a few. The film is a clear-eyed, well-informed appeal to reason. It covers a broad spectrum of cultural and historical ground while remaining accessible and engrossing.



Jack Shaheen, who narrates the film, opens with: "Arabs are the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood. They're portrayed, basically, as sub-humans, *undermenschen* – the term used by Nazis to vilify gypsies and Jews. These images have been with us for over a century." From there, he fades into a series of all too familiar scenes: a smirking sheikh from the deserts of Araby, *keffiyeh*-clad mobs chanting and raging towards the camera, shot after shot of men with guns, shaven and unshaven, burnoosed and un-burnoosed, screaming and solemn. This time, however, with a dirge-like score swelling, these threatening images reveal a more dangerous reality. Not the reality of fanatics, tyrants or murderers, but of a grand, repeating lie that relies on these images to dehumanize an entire people.

The film discusses what Shaheen calls "Arabland," which is today's incarnation of the European Orient. Like Arabia or Araby, "Arabland" is a timeless universe where barely civilized emirs, haughty pashas and Bedouin raiders live incomprehensibly decadent and brutish lives in a harsh, sandstorm-prone, capital-D Desert. It is only mitigated by token oases, harems and naïve blond women, who create many a film premise by stumbling into or being tricked into the clutches of lecherous sheikhs. Shaheen advises us: "Always be aware of the

'instant Ali Baba kit'" – the belly-dancing outfits, oversized scimitars, flying carpets and turbaned snake-charmers.

"Reel Bad Arabs" explains the reasons for the vast transformation of the Arab image following World War II. Particularly in the 1970's, we witness how Hollywood portrayed Arabs as economic parasites, usurping American capital, closing American businesses and plunging Americans into financial ruin faster than you can say "embargo." In a particularly deft move, we watch the final scenes of the film "Network," where, in the face of the impending Arab buyout of America, citizens run to their balcony and yell, "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore!" Fade into footage of Good Germans cheering on the march of the Third Reich; the economic threat they pose is simply a reformulation of Nazi propaganda against the Jews.

Rather than portray Arab women as excelling in all walks of life in many countries, including but not limited to forming a strong majority of college graduates in the Middle East, Hollywood simply regurgitates the highly sexualized belly-dancer, or what Shaheen calls "bundles in black," or, in recent years, Arab women as exotic yet cold-blooded terrorists.

We see Palestinians presented as inimical to the interests of democracy (read Israel), and filmmakers portray Arabs as a whole as an amorphous vector for international terror. We perceive U.S. policy as it is reflected in characters charged with anti-Semitic rage or cool-headedly orchestrating civilian mass murder to further their "cause." Notably absent from the deluge of maniacal Palestinian murder is any discussion, let alone portrayal, of life under Israeli occupation.

Furthermore, as Shaheen points out, "Islamophobia now is a part of our psyche." Both before and after 9/11, in the eyes of a large portion of the American public, a few dozen terrorists' actions represent the behavior of 1.3 billion human beings. Shows like "Sleeper Cell" and "24" suggest that even hard-working Arab Americans may still secretly sow the seeds of America's downfall. With this cursory depiction of Arabs comes the inevitable absence of their humanity, their worth, and their right to live.

A segment of the film titled "The Only Good Arab…" shows how gratuitously Arabs are slaughtered at every turn, how maimed corpses and body counts equal catharsis in big-action Hollywood blockbusters. Equally chilling is the montage of bullet-ridden Arabs in scenes culled from films that were funded by the U.S. Department of Defense. Of particular infamy is "Rules of Engagement." While demurring from calling this outright propaganda, the documentary makes it clear early on: "Politics and Hollywood's images are linked; they reinforce one another: policy enforces mythical images, mythical images help enforce policy."

Far from just lobbing a well-formulated *j'accuse!* at Hollywood, "Reel Bad Arabs" is sensible and makes careful note of films that have bucked the trend. We see examples of films that portray Arabs in all their complexity, as full characters, full humans. Jack Shaheen's avuncular presence on screen makes his commonsense exposure of commonly held myths all the more compelling. We aren't made to feel guilty for enjoying "True Lies," "Back to the Future," or "Network" so much as shocked that such fervent racism is embedded in our cinematic culture. For that reason, this film is exceptional, although it is by no means the only reason. Remaining oblivious to the images we consume and the values they reflect is not a luxury we can afford. "Real Bad Arabs" may serve a vital tool in deconstructing an institution of racism in our culture and examining some of the vicious assumptions it sustains itself on. **AJ**

Canadian Chronicles

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fledgling Afghan media from the conscientious and brave journalists and radio superstars to the impoverished street peddlers.

At Killid, working only with the bare necessities, the staff of the media company produces two magazines and a radio show covering a range of social and health issues. Mursal, the popular women's magazine, uses pictures to reach the illiterate village women who have no access to television, and addresses controversial topics such as male infertility and interfamilial marriages alongside recipes and makeup tips. As we watch the documentary, we see disturbing trends in Afghanistan: violence against women increases, international aid vanishes into the military machine, and more than 200 schools burn in one year alone. All those involved with the media stoically hold firm, despite receiving threats of physical violence. Civilians, armed with a printing press and hard-earned respect for freedom, volunteer to help rebuild their country through the written word. Their optimism and sense of civic duty make "Afghan Chronicles" an inspiring documentary for any journalism or human rights class. **AJ**

'Shadya' and 'Nadia's Journey'

Continued from page 39

The most affecting interviews are of the older women, who led the bleakest lives. It is hard to imagine their energy and emotion confined by vigilant, jealous males. Even one of Zouaoui's friends, a woman in her 30's, isn't free to leave her home to shop. Males and females alike still strongly believe in and uphold the code of honor which focuses on the behavior of the women. Young women who have made it to the university in Algiers find relief there but realize that home will be harder to change. Tradition has a stranglehold on these women.

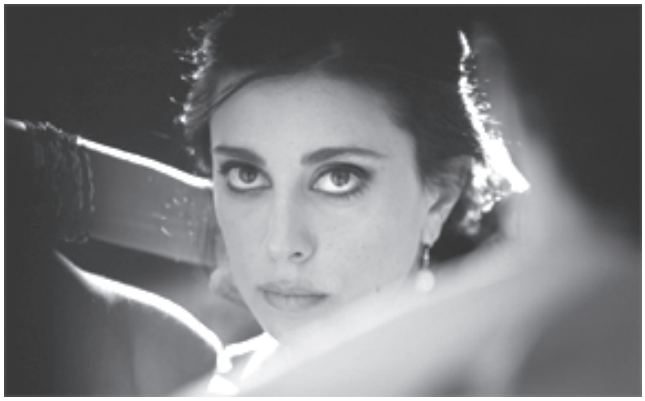
There is not much new information in this film. What Zouaoui has done is put faces on a sociological critique and give voice to her own pain. Her condemnation of traditional Algerian culture as she has defined it is unforgiving – and understandably so. One can only admire her courage in making such a film, risking the ostracism of the community whose judgment she defies.

Considering the price she evidently paid to make the film, so Zouaoui's camera no doubt revealed, more than created, its story.**AJ**

Narcissism in the City

Caramel
Directed by Nadine Labaki
Produced by Les Films des Tournelles
Distributed byRoissy Films 2007, 96 minutes

Don't Mess with the Zohan
Directed by Denise Dugan
Produced by Happy Madison Productions
Distributed by Columbia Pictures 2008, 117 minutes


From "Caramel"

BY DORIS BITTAR

On a weekend this summer I viewed "Caramel" on Friday and "Don't Mess with the Zohan" on Saturday. Both films, in simplistic terms, involve beauty salon shops operated by Arabs, one in Beirut and the other in Brooklyn. The salons are segues into narratives that cross sociopolitical barriers. This review could continue as a campy cataloging of the similarities between the two films, or it could probe the varying degrees of individual and societal narcissism that both exemplify, albeit in divergent ways.

"Caramel" is the first major film by Nadine Labaki. It follows several women who work in a beauty salon, their clients, and those who live and work in the neighborhood. In the salon, we enter the world of *sukar* or caramel, a stretchy candy widely used in the Arab world for hair removal.

"Caramel" initially seems to be a fluffy movie: beautiful and light. However, its quaintness is paired with the codes of Lebanese social constraints and familial expectations. Beirut is variously beautiful but coupled with stark reminders of the war's wastelands. These backdrops are interlaced with human interactions and secretive liaisons. At its core this film profoundly captures Beirut's unique love of itself. "Caramel" navigates between narcissism and a definition of community versus family. The cinematography ranges from abstract fragmentation and sculpted montage to surreal color pastiches with varied lighting. The acting is understated and economically highlights the idiosyncrasies of the characters. Given the soft and muted cinematic color, the minimal acting follows a parable–like script where actions speak louder than scripted dialogue.

"Caramel's" success lays in its open framework that holds together the complex sub-narratives. It is a structure that allows taboos such as extramarital affairs, homosexuality, premarital sex, care of the mentally ill and Muslim-Christian relations to be examined briefly, albeit intensely and poetically. Its depths lay in what can be imagined but not realized, and how cultural constraints anchor communities. This is a quiet film and worth seeing more than once.

Adam Sandler's latest movie, "Don't Mess with the Zohan," is a funny slapstick comedy done in extremely poor taste. Zohan, played by Sandler, is an over-sexed hummus-loving super commando who wants to become a hairdresser specializing in 1970's dry-look hairstyles. Zohan has super-heroic physical prowess, and is absolutely and unapologetically in love with himself. He is clearly a spoiled child raised by rough and tumble parents. A particularly resonant and hilariously cruel scene is when Zohan tells his parents about his desire to become a hairdresser. Upon hearing his son's wish, his father and mother sport a gay affectation and call him a "Fagalla." As they converse, his father casually dips his glasses into the hummus and eats it as though it was the most natural thing to do. The ease with which the characters interact and tease each other seems self-indulgently normal.

It is rare that Palestinians are ever mentioned as specifically as they are in this movie. The Palestinian characters are not developed, yet Sandler clearly avoids the tired stereotypes. In fact, he narrows the chasm of misunderstanding by showing how insufferable the Israelis can be. The contrast between the two enemies is based on an overdeveloped narcissism embodied by the Israelis. The Arab characters are negotiated personas situated somewhere between gentle Italian types and mysterious Zorro types. John Turturro fits that description and so by default the other Palestinians end up with the same temperament. Not surprisingly, Turturro plays the evil but lovable terrorist.

The aggressive Israeli stereotypes get the lion's share of attention, and it may be that in "Zohan," Sandler has created the most definitive prototype yet seen for the militaristic Israeli caricature. Coming in from the backdoor, Sandler's "Zohan" oddly breaks taboos and lays the foundation for humor in the anguished political landscape of Israel-Palestine.

The use of beauty salons lends itself to narcissism as clients must look at themselves in the mirror and romance their surroundings. Perhaps we are sucked into these two films because beauty parlors, after all, are about creating a hyper-focused self-indulgence.**AJ**

Farewell to Publisher Hero

Continued from page 7

Jawdeh captured one side of Daouk: "Behind Daouk's silence there was wisdom; and behind his calmness there was dignity."

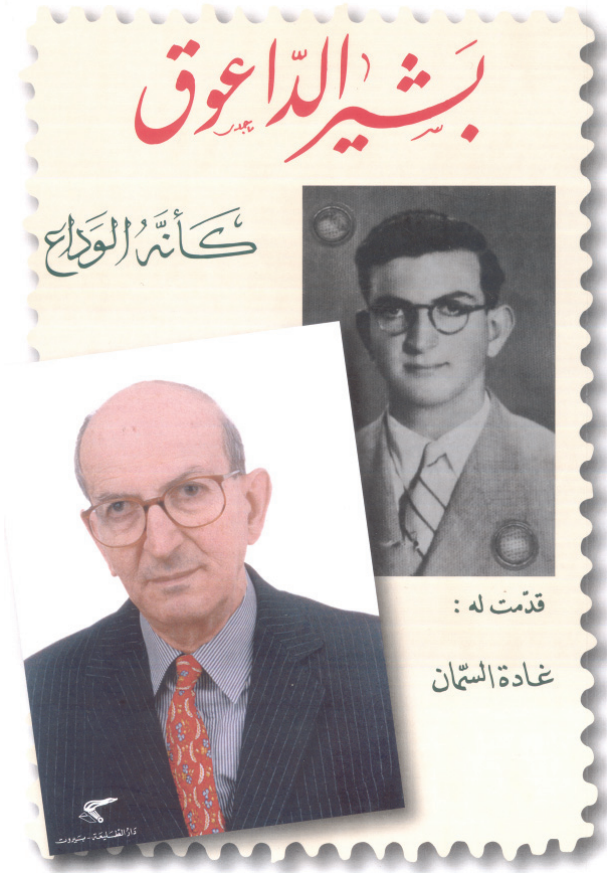
That tendency to shun the limelight was deliberate and genuine, for he was interested more in others than in himself. Friends who remembered him after his death revealed many things about Daouk that had been previously unknown. They wrote of his generosity, many charitable activities, and publishing investments that brought little financial return. A great philanthropist who funded numerous surgeries for Lebanese patients in Paris, as well as providing assistance for needy students, Daouk's only condition was that his name should be withheld, wrote Abd al-Hameed al-Ahdab in An Nahar.

His generosity in the realm of politics was especially noticeable. "His intellectual output exceeded that of most countries, and his financial sacrifices were greater than those of most political parties and movements," wrote Naji Aloush, who worked closely with Daouk both in Dirasaat Arabiyya and Dar Al Talia. "Daouk is considered the unsung soldier of Arab culture," wrote the Syrian journalist Bahnan Yamin in the Los Angeles-based Al Arab newspaper.

We frequently speak of legacies in terms of authors and books, with the idea that authors' legacies are established through one or more of their written works. In other words, the death of an author or publisher becomes physical not intellectual. This is also true for Bashir Daouk, although defining his legacy is not quite so simple. Although he was the author of only two books – "Socialism of the Baath and its Economic Method," and "The Taxation System of Lebanon" – he will be remembered for the thousands of books and articles his publishing house churned out. Also part of that legacy is that Daouk's contributions as a publisher and editor of Dirasaat Arabiyya will continue to furnish understanding of the debates that followed the 1967 defeat.

Daouk's patriotism, or his love for Lebanon, was not lost to many of his friends. "Although he lived in Paris for more than 25 years, he refused French citizenship because it violated his beliefs. He refused to carry any citizenship other than his Lebanese citizenship," wrote Abd al-Hameed al-Ahdab in An Nahar. Another observer of Daouk's nationalism and patriotism, is poet Paul Shaoul of Al Mustaqbal newspaper: "His being away from his beloved Beirut and Lebanon didn't shake his resolve nor did it distort his sense of belonging to Arabist and nationalist projects that were characterized, above all, by their democratic values and progressive values."

The term feminist has been widely misused and abused, both in the Arab world and the West. Thus I am reluctant to call Bashir Daouk feminist, lest I add to the confusion surrounding this term. What can be clearly and unambiguously stated is that Bashir Daouk was a foremost champion of women's rights. The supporting evidence is abundant and compelling, and comes both from his publishing house and journal, as well as his beloved wife, the noted Syrian-Lebanese novelist Ghada Samman. Gender issues made their presence noticeable in scores of titles



"Bashir Daouk: As if it's Farewell," a book that came out after his death and edited by Ghada Samman

published by Dar Al Talia and in studies that appeared in his monthly magazine. The selections represent both original works by Arab authors and translations of books by non-Arabs.

Courageous, outspoken, and yes, a feminist novelist in her own right, Ghada Samman has shared some of her stories and encounters with Bashir Daouk that took place both before and after she married him. In all of her stories or anecdotes, the image that emerges of Bashir Daouk is a man who showed great sensitivity toward women. When she met him in Beirut during the summer of 1969, she was working as a journalist for Al Hawadeth, a Lebanese weekly. Her subject at the time was the duality of Arab revolutionaries in their reactionary behavior toward women. Samman wanted to understand the gap between their ideological rhetoric about supporting woman's liberation and their actual reactionary behavior. She was given a list of activists to interview which included Bashir Daouk. She met Bashir Daouk and the two were married within two months. Daouk meant what he said, no inconsistency between words and deeds, Samman wrote in "Bashir Daouk: As if it's Farewell," a book that came out after his death and which included an introduction by Samman, as well as other articles about him by Arab intellectuals and friends.

After spending 40 years together, their union was severed not by the cancer that Daouk had battled for two years, but, rather, by the heart attack that took him in the American Hospital in Paris in mid-October of 2007.**AJ**

Contributors

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Muhammad Ali Shams al-Din ("Waiting for the Mahdi," p. 55) is one of the most important Lebanese poets and author of more than 20 volumes of poetry and prose.

Zaid Shlah ("Darwish in Orbit: A Celebration of Longing," p. 52) teaches English literature and composition at Solano Community College. His poetry has appeared in literary magazines, journals and anthologies in both Canada and the U.S. His first book of poetry, "Taqsim" (2005), is currently in its second printing (Frontenac House, 2006).

Simone Stevens ("Nazik al-Malaika, 1923-2007: Pioneering Iraqi Woman's Journey Changes Map of Arabic Poetry," p. 14.) is a California-based writer.

Pauline Homsi Vinson ("From Documentary to Fiction - Stories of Lebanese Immigrant Women," p. 44, and "An Arab-American Coming of Age," p. 45) is an adjunct assistant professor in the Women's Studies Department at USF Sarasota-Manatee. Her publications include articles on Arab women writers and translations from Arabic to English. A native of Lebanon, she is also a contributing editor to Al Jadid.

Here Lies Freedom

BY ADONIS

1
I question, seek out, anticipate,
I do not see anyone who believes in resurrection.

2
If I had a home it would be love,
If I had a homeland to call my own it would be poetry.

3
The narcissist remains at peace:
He is the envy of no one,
No one's competition.

4
Does it happen that the interpreter of a text
Is more important than the writer of it?
Yes. This happened in Arab culture,
And in many others as well.

These are excerpts from a longer essay published in Al Hayat newspaper.

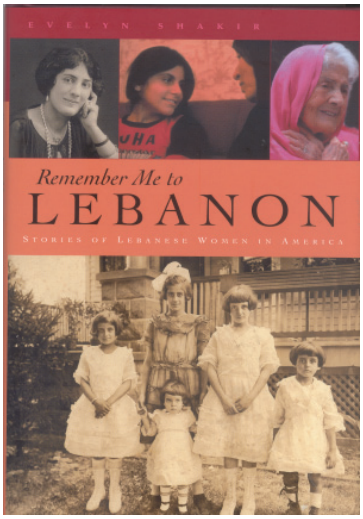
Translated from the Arabic by Rewa Zeinati

From Documentary to Fiction – Stories of Lebanese Immigrant Women

Remember Me to Lebanon: Stories of Lebanese Women in America
By Evelyn Shakir
Syracuse University Press, 2007

BY PAULINE HOMSI VINSON

Those who know of Evelyn Shakir's writing from her seminal 1997 book, *"Bint* Arab: Arab and Arab-American Women in the United States," know her to be a skilled chronicler of the lives of Arab women immigrants and their daughters in America. By recording the words of various women across three generations, beginning with the 19th century, Shakir has given public visibility to the presence of strong, active and well-defined communities of Arab women in America.



The title of Shakir's new book, "Remember Me to Lebanon: Stories of Lebanese Women in America," may at first glance suggest a similar effort, with the main difference being an exclusive concentration on women of Lebanese origin living in the United States. While such a book might be interesting, what Shakir presents is even better, as it reveals her ability to carry her documentary skills into the realm of highly dramatic and delightfully nuanced fictional storytelling.

As in *"Bint* Arab," so, too, in "Remember Me to Lebanon": Shakir presents a variegated picture of women of Arab origin and different religious backgrounds living in America in various times and places. Also like "*Bint* Arab," "Remember Me to Lebanon" addresses intergenerational conflicts between Lebanese immigrant parents and American-born daughters, as well as cross-cultural tensions between Lebanese immigrants and "mainstream" Americans.

Unlike "*Bint* Arab," however, "Remember Me to Lebanon" moves away from strict documentary into the realm of fiction. This shift allows Shakir greater freedom to draw memorable portraits of idiosyncratic, highly animated characters in a series of pithy vignettes.

Throughout this collection, Shakir presents different scenes that focus on the ways in which various women living in America come to grips with their Lebanese origins. Only one story of the 10 speaks from a non-Lebanese point of view. Aptly titled "I Got My Eye on You," the story deals with the ethnophobia that was exacerbated by the September 11th attacks on the United States. In this story, a non-Lebanese American spies on her Muslim-Lebanese neighbors with growing paranoia about the threat that she imagines to be posed by "the boys with scary eyes."

Even more impressive than Shakir's handling of her thematic material is her easy rendering of realistic, flowing dialogue that moves easily between the urban jargon of east coast American cities of the 20's, to the youthful American speech of the 80's, and the imported Arabic expressions of Lebanese immigrants and their children.

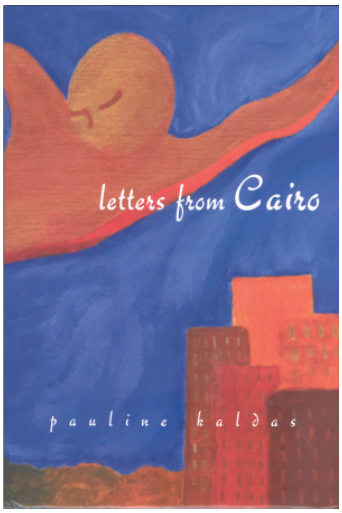
"Remember Me to Lebanon" is an insightful collection that not only expresses the fullness and complexity of the Lebanese immigrant experience in the United States, but also evokes memorable characters whose very fictional status allows them to emerge in more vibrant and vivid detail than might have been possible in a strictly documentary-style of writing. Having established herself as a capable chronicler of the lives of Arab women in America in "*Bint* Arab," Shakir now demonstrates her talent as a skillful storyteller, whose narratives – to use Horace's oft-repeated dictum – both instruct and delight. **AJ**

Family Tapestries – Across the Water

Letters from Cairo
By Pauline Kaldas
Syracuse University Press, 2007

BY JENN BLAIR

Part of Syracuse University's series of Arab-American writing, Pauline Kaldas' "Letters from Cairo" offers readers a unique account of the six months she and her family spent living in Egypt following her husband's acceptance of a Fulbright grant to teach American literature at Cairo University.



Kaldas was born in Egypt, but immigrated to the United States in 1969 when she was 8 years old, a year so pivotal to her formation that she remarks, "sometimes I mistakenly put it down as my birth date." As well as introducing her own thought-provoking meditations on attempting to return to a

familiar yet unfamiliar place, Kaldas' work also presents life in Cairo from the perspective of her two daughters, Yasmine and Celine. She features their e-mails to relatives, poems and reproduced color drawings by her youngest daughter Celine. A February e-mail from Yasmine reads, "Dear Syreeta, I am remembering my manners, but Celine is getting a little crazy." Another one by Yasmine announces the following: "Dear President Bush, I'm an American Egyptian. I'm 8 years old. I don't think you're acting well in what's going on with Israel and Palestine."

As she tries to negotiate her own way through daily life, Kaldas finds herself both integral to the culture, yet suspended on the periphery: "People know I'm Egyptian, but they sense that something isn't quite right by the way that I speak and move. So I feel far more American here than I do in the States. I'm beginning to think that I can only belong on a plane between both countries, suspended in flight." Arriving a few months after September 11, 2001, Kaldas is acutely aware of the unease. She remarks that in the classroom "teaching about colonialism, I stumbled over my pronouns: we… they… us… them. I found myself tumbling over, losing my footing. In this case, I learned to embrace my shifting pronouns." Through this complexity, Kaldas and her family provide a stark counterpoint to notions gleaned from a homogenized American media that often implies all Americans are white or rich. Her husband T.J. (of African-American descent) has a hard time "proving his American identity" and convincing others that he himself is not Egyptian.

In addition to discussing the concept of nationality, Kaldas' book also provides readers with a distinct awareness of existing class structures. When the family moves to the island of Zamalek, she notes that the place "still retains the aura of its past because it is predominantly the upper middle class who live there." Class differences also emerge when the family goes to lunch at the Marriott Hotel. Sadly, since her last visit, "The discrepancy between rich and poor, with the rich marked by Western modernism, has become even more striking." Coming from a Coptic family, she comments on their own particular struggle: "As Egypt's population increases and the economy worsens, it seems that opportunities for Copts continue only to decrease. I am still amazed at their courage as they consider packing their belongings in a few suitcases and leaving everything that is familiar to take the risk of beginning their lives yet again." Despite this image of upheaval, Kaldas' meditations explore how family remains constant, despite geographical moves and time leaps. Noting that it has been 14 years since her parents last came to Egypt, and six since she and her husband T.J. were there, she remarks, "It's like a fast-paced novel: jump to the future, and people are older, marriages extend the family, and children stretch the bonds of who we are. We're a family woven by past histories, yet the future tugs persistently." The entries that chronicle her visit to her family in Old Cairo are particularly poignant. As her daughters play on the floor with their cousins and her aunt fries potatoes, her mind jumps back to her grandmother cooking; she then remembers she and her own cousins playing in much the same way, forming "a continuous cycle of generations that eludes death."

Kaldas' letters to family and friends back home, her husband's observations on introducing students to a broader range of literature, beyond the still-dominant British curriculum, Yasmine's e-mails, Celine's bright drawings, poetry, journal entries and even recipes make up "Letters from Cairo," resulting in a rich account described by Kaldas as "the collage of our journey."**AJ**

Syrian Matroshka

BY FARAJ BAYRAKDAR

Heaven is a tent
Earth is a tent
Homeland is a tent
Poem is a tent
I am a tent
So how could I see God
And how could God see me?

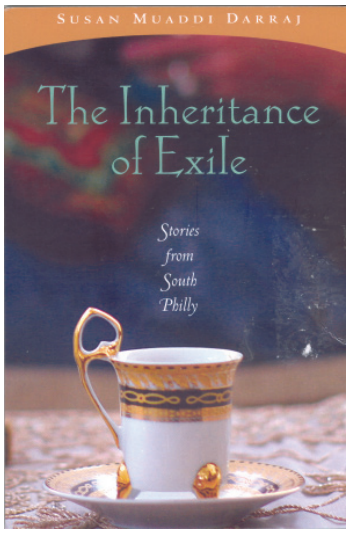
Saydnayya Prison, 1997
Translated from the Arabic by Elie Chalala

An Arab American Coming of Age

The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly
By Susan Muaddi Darraj
University of Notre Dame Press, 2007

BY PAULINE HOMSI VINSON

Aptly titled "The Inheritance of Exile: Stories from South Philly," Susan Muaddi Darraj's book presents a series of interwoven stories about four young women of Palestinian origin who grow up together in an immigrant working-class neighborhood in South Philadelphia. Nadia, Aliyah, Hanan and Reema are first generation Arab Americans whose coming-of-age narratives are entwined with their attempts to negotiate between their lives in America and their parents' sense of loss and exile from their native Palestine.



Refreshingly, these stories present the Arab-American female characters realistically and unapologetically. Mixing Arabic words of endearment such

as *habibati* and *albi* with American colloquialisms such as "What's up?," the characters express the reality of the Arab-American linguistic experience, seamlessly switching between Arabic and American cultural codes and emotive registers.

Darraj's deft use of language as a tool for character development is also evident in the speech patterns she reveals amongst the immigrant parents, especially the mothers. When the mothers speak to fellow Arabs, Darraj signals their speech with tags such as, "She said in Arabic," then expresses their speech in smooth, flowing English. In contrast, when the mothers speak in English, Darraj presents their speech in broken, stilted patterns. By semantically reproducing the contrast between the immigrant mothers' articulate use of their native language and their inarticulate use of their adopted language, Darraj successfully conveys the ways in which her characters' mother-daughter relationships are entwined with questions of exile, estrangement and loss.

It is tempting to compare this book of fused stories of Palestinian immigrant parents and American-born daughters to Amy Tan's depiction of Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters in "The Joy Luck Club." Like Tan, Darraj poignantly addresses the questions of immigration, cultural integration and mother-daughter relationships. Diana Abu-Jaber's "Arabian Jazz," arguably the first novel distributed by a major American publisher to highlight the relationship between immigrant Arabs and their American-born daughters, also tempts us to draw comparisons with Darraj's book.

However, unlike Tan and Abu-Jaber, both of whom have been accused of perpetuating Orientalist representations that relegate their characters' countries of origin to the realm of a mythical, ancient, and alien "East," Darraj seems particularly intent on confronting and dismantling Orientalist associations. This is evident in her depiction of an encounter between one of her main characters, Hanan, and her Palestinian-Jordanian cousin, Rola, whose visit to the U.S. not only turns the stereotypes of Arab and American women on their heads, but also opens the possibility for female solidarity and support across cultural and geographical distances.

Like many works by emerging Arab-American writers, Darraj's work occasionally suffers from a dry narrative that stands in contrast to the fluid dialogue voiced by her characters. We see this, for example, in a chapter where one of Darraj's characters first uses terms that might have been lifted from an instructional manual to describe how her mother wove traditional baskets, then employs realistic dialogue to mimic the patterns of her mother's speech: "First, she built a foundation, then the sides, and finally she weaved in other strips as a decorative pattern. 'In the camp, a UNRWA program come and tell us, do this and we give you money,' she [the mother] said, 'so we do it.'"

If such stylistic choices may seem awkward to some readers, they can easily be overlooked when considered in the context of the admirable complexity with which Susan Muaddi Darraj builds her characters and the sensitivity with which she conveys her subject matter.

"The Inheritance of Exile" is a welcome addition to the growing body of work by Arab-American writers whose stories are beginning to forge a space for the expression of Arab-American experiences within the cultural and literary landscape of the United States.**AJ**

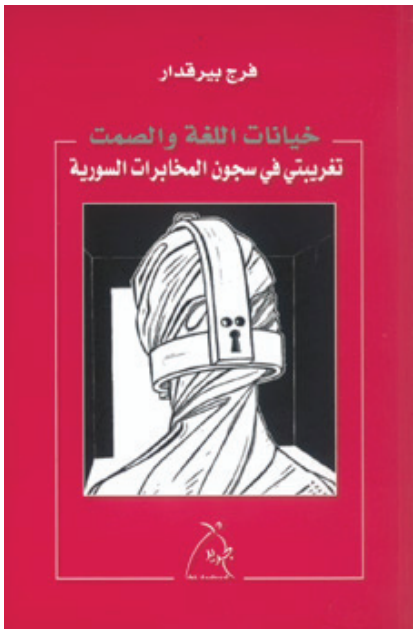
A Satanic Comedy from Prisons of Syria's Security Police

The Countless Treachery of Language and Silence (In Arabic)
By Faraj Bayrakdar
Dar Al Jadid, Beirut 2006

BY AZAR MAHLOUJIAN

You who live safe
In your warm houses
You who find, returning in the evening
Hot food and friendly faces
...
Meditate that this came about
I commend these words to you

So begins the book "If This Is a Man," considered to be one of the most important books of the 20th century. During the Second World War, chemist Primo Levi was deported from his home in Turin, Italy, to Auschwitz. After liberation, he wrote about the horrors of the concentration camps. I read Primo Levi at the beginning of the 1990's when I worked for three years as an interpreter at the Red Cross Center for Tortured Refugees in Stockholm. I wanted to prepare myself for my meetings with the victims of torture and their wounded souls. I discovered the book was not only about the evil deeds of the Nazis, but consisted also of Primo Levi's reflections on the moral problems which human beings struggle with, whether "inside" the concentration camps or "outside" in



freedom. "The story of death camps should be understood by everyone as a sinister alarm-signal," Levi writes in the preface to the book.

Now I have read another book of importance, "The Countless Treachery of Language and Silence," by Syrian writer Faraj Bayrakdar. After being imprisoned by Syria's security police for 14 years, he was released in 2000. Thanks to international attention following Bayrakdar's speech before the High Court for the Security of the State, his most recent book has been published abroad.

As I begin to read Faraj Bayrakdar, I feel what he describes inside of me. My eyes darken as I read about a chair that sits on a human being, not the other way around. I feel ill as I imagine a dead rat placed in the throat of a prisoner. I feel like I am suffocating. No, I do not want to be part of this humiliation, it is too laborious, demands too much of me. I say to myself, "I'm not a masochist, so why should I read about this world of humiliation?" and I put the book aside.

But after a few days my thoughts go to what Primo Levi called "the brutal indifference," that which gave him nightmares in Auschwitz. Primo Levi says that in his restless sleep, in a bunk he shared with a fellow prisoner, he dreamed. In the dream, he was released and wanted to tell about what he had gone through, but he noticed that his audience was not attentive; they were completely uninterested. "They talk in a confused way with each other about something else, as if I am not there. My sister looks at me, stands up and goes her way without uttering a word. Then I am gripped with terrible pain… sorrow in pure form…the kind of sorrow which makes a child cry."

This is how Primo Levi describes fortunate people's indifference to others' misfortune.

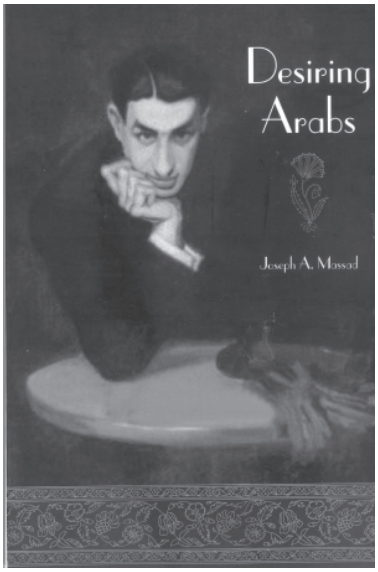
With a lump in my throat I take Faraj Bayrakdar's book from the shelf and begin to turn the pages. I know that he will again take me to the place he calls "halfway to the kingdom of the dead," but this time I have decided not to betray him. And then something happens – as I read further, I feel better, I am more at ease, it is easier to breathe. Bayrakdar is guiding me through the labyrinth of evil, he lets me "go barefoot through the fire of reality." But, knowing I may not be able to bear it, he rewards me with his beautiful poetic language. He tells me the stories of prison, like in "A Thousand and One Nights." I meet people who do not let themselves be crushed, who fight to keep their dignity, who are able to make their tormentors feel helpless, defeated. Bayrakdar has written this memoir, which he calls the "Satanic Comedy," on cigarette paper that he later smuggled out of the prison. He did that for our sake, so that we should know what happens behind the prison walls.**AJ**

Sexual Identity and Practice: West versus East?

Desiring Arabs
By Joseph Massad
The University of Chicago Press, 2007

BY PAMELA NICE

In this comprehensive tome, author Joseph Massad endeavors to compile an archival study of Arab writings since the late 19th century on the theme of "sexual deviance." The writers he examines include sociologists, political scientists, novelists, literary critics and journalists. More specifically, Massad seeks to determine how Orientalist representations of Arab sexuality influenced the Arab writers themselves. One of his main arguments contends that Western ideas of homosexuality would "define in the 1980's not only Arab nationalist responses, but also and especially Islamist ones…" In addition, in his detailed analysis of 20th century Arab novels and plays, he asserts that "allegories of sexual deviance" reflect the sociopolitical realities of their societies, and therefore the hegemony of Western ideas of homosexuality influences the broader Arab population.



Despite Massad's intended breadth and depth, the text encompasses an overwhelming amount of material, and the book sacrifices focus for detail. Though scholars could contest several of Massad's assertions, one can only admire the dedication and ambition permeating his work. Massad's basic premise, if one were to assert a single focus of this book, is that sexual practices– particularly those that Westerners would call homosexual – are different from sexual identity, such as perceiving oneself as a homosexual. He resists what he calls an essentialist definition of homosexuality (what others might term a biological or genetic one) because he considers it a Western epistemological construct.

In his examination of Arab writings on sexuality since the late 19th century, Massad notes that the definition of sexual deviance has changed from a broader to a narrower one. Earlier writers considered homosexual behavior to be but one among

many in a category of sexual behaviors considered immoral or debauched, including masturbation and extramarital sex. Alternately, homosexual behavior might be seen as the inevitable result of gender segregation in traditional Arab societies. Nineteenth-century critics of the medieval poet Abu Nuwas would likely see him as a hedonist, but not a pederast, even though he wrote love poems to boys (and reportedly acted on his desires). It was only in the latter half of the 20th century that sexual deviance came to specifically mean homosexuality.

The book also explores at length the idea of the "passive deviant" (the passive male in a same-sex encounter) as a symbol since the 1970's of "political and national defeat, in addition to its literal reference as a defeat of manhood itself." Massad offers particularly interesting analyses of Gamal al-Ghitany's "The Evils of Za'afarani Street," Sonallah Ibrahim's "Honor" and Ala' al-Aswani's "The Yacoubian Building;" he sees the latter as using homosexual "degradation" as the ultimate symbol of a decadent and nonreproductive society.

Since the Islamist revival, however, Massad charts a change in how same-sex attraction and behavior is described and judged. He credits "the Gay International" with influencing Islamist writers to focus their Puritanism on homosexuals.

One can see the value in Massad's examination of the social construction of homosexual identity. However, most experts (albeit Western) would assert that biology plays a significant role as well. Massad does not directly challenge this biological perspective, and tenders little discussion, so it is unclear where he stands on the nature/nurture question. Instead, the author seems to imply that Arabs have traditionally accepted homosexual behavior without assuming that those who practice it self-identify as homosexuals. Is he claiming that Arabs who practice homosexual behaviors don't see themselves as intrinsically different from those who practice heterosexual sex? Certainly this might be possible if one is bisexual. What about sexual attraction? Does it not matter to which gender the passive partner belongs?

It also seems a bit far-fetched to see "the Gay International" as solely responsible for repression – Islamist and otherwise – in Arab societies. Such a view seems a throwback to a simplistic binary paradigm in cultural analysis. His own analysis demonstrates 19th century Arab writers' categorization of same-sex behavior as "deviant" and debauched, and he ignores the role of patriarchal systems in accepting and protecting male sexual behavior publicly deemed immoral. As these systems have been challenged in Arab societies, previously private behavior has been exposed and condemned. The interaction of cultures and the development of social mores are more complicated than Massad would have us think. For example, one can see a parallel process in the area of women's rights. Should we assume that Arab women only felt oppressed when Western feminists pointed it out? Such a position is hardly tenable.

Massad's study raises other questions. He claims that the novelists and playwrights he analyzes represent the dominant views in their societies, "which is precisely what makes a work of fiction intelligible." On what does he base this claim? Considering the high rates of illiteracy in most Arab countries, who is reading these works of fiction? How can he be certain that it is not just the elites exchanging their views with one another through their writings? Most Arab writers bemoan the fact that even educated Arabs don't read fiction. It's true, the Egyptian police did imprison what they termed "homosexuals" when Cairo clubs were raided, but do most Egyptians who practice homosexual behavior go to clubs? It's not that Massad doesn't make intriguing points about his subject, but some of his claims seem far-reaching and appear to be without evidence.

This provocative book warrants further commentary. It clearly achieves Massad's goal of creating an archival work of Arab writings on sexual deviance. The assertion that same-sex behavior has not implied, and does not imply, homosexual identity in the Arab world merits further discussion. And he raises interesting questions in his analysis of allegories of sexual deviance in modern Arab fiction. But it is Massad's conclusion about the West's responsibility for this state of affairs that is sure to generate the most controversy.**AJ**

Après Le Deluge: Into the Abyss of Poverty

Poor
By Idris Ali
Translated by Elliot Colla
The American University in Cairo Press, 2007

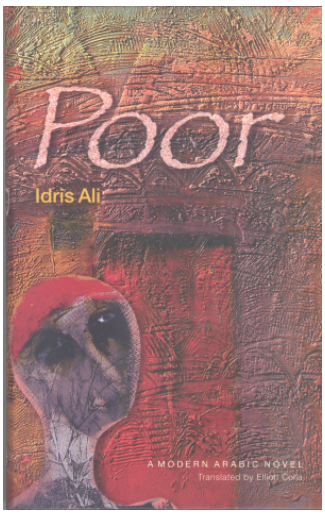
BY HILARY HESSE

Part autobiography, part fiction, Idris Ali's deceptively simple novel "Poor" tells the story of a desperate young Nubian man. He sneaks away from his deeply impoverished village in the wake of flooding caused by the Aswan Dam and makes his way to Cairo. Beginning with the second chapter, Ali chronologically describes the events that have composed and shaped his life, beginning with the dam's destruction of farmland in Northern Nubia. He then narrates his journey to the city and subsequent adventures amid the urban squalor of Cairo, using language as bleak as the life it presents.

True to its title, the book's major theme is the crushing thoroughness of poverty, which strips away the individual's sense of dignity and purpose until he is left ineffectual. Referencing the impotence brought on by his poverty-frayed psyche, the narrator affirms that "it's a thousand times easier to manage a society of limp men than to deal with men whose complete sexual capacities are intact."

Yet the book's frank chronicling of events belies its viability as a novel. Told in second person, the story is preceded by a short disclaimer stating that the author "lost control of the

narrator of this story." Consequently, the narrator's credibility is suspect from the start, requiring that the reader proceed skeptically. Ali sprinkles literary allusions throughout the work, establishing the protagonist's desire to be a writer as well as his own status as a novelist. Ali also uses the Nile as a character in the story: first as a giver of subsistence and life, later as a rescuer and, ultimately, as a great devourer.



On yet another level, one can read "Poor" as a unique historical/sociological exploration of the lives of a people notoriously under-represented in Egypt. Because history is usually written by and about the victors, insights into the experiences of marginalized peoples must often be gleaned through firsthand accounts, which "Poor" offers. We get not only the author's personal history, but also a sense of the issues and hardships afflicting an entire community. The novel is perhaps most disconcerting because Ali offers neither solutions nor hope.

A dynamic novel in that one can read it in several different ways, "Poor" offers a stimulating read for a student of Middle East history, or anyone with the stamina to delve into the deep abyss of poverty.**AJ**

Cover Artist

Paul Batou ("Along the Tigris" and "Old houses in Baghdad") is a native Iraqi artist. A 1982 pharmaceutical graduate of the University of Baghdad, Batou's most enduring interest remained the world of art. While in school, Batou was inspired by many teachers and artists. His first show was in Baghdad in 1980, opening a door that would lead to his work being featured in several galleries. Later he was forced by the government to work as a pharmacist and medic during the Iran-Iraq war. When it ended in 1989, he left Iraq with his family and moved to Los Angeles. Batou continues to create art and write poetry. In his recently- published first book of poetry, "My Last Thoughts about Iraq," he shares his ideas and feelings about the people of his native Mesopotamia. Regarding his art, he wrote: "I am one artist among many. My colors are united in one piece of art, reflecting the tone of the earth, the language of the universe, the cry and pain of the oppressed people. On my canvas, the black, red and white are in harmony just like my soul. I would love all people to achieve that kind of unity."

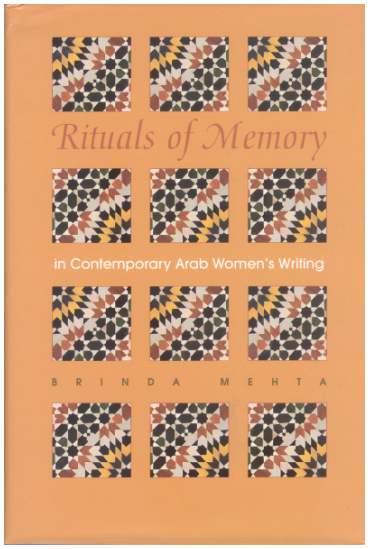
Literary Works Traverse Landscapes of Reclaimed Identity

Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing

By Brinda Mehta
Syracuse University Press, 2007

BY THERESE SALIBA

Brinda Mehta's "Rituals of Memory in Contemporary Arab Women's Writing" offers a vibrant analysis of Arab women's literature from the Middle East, North Africa and the diaspora. In a post-9/11 context dominated by stereotypical readings of Arab-Muslim women's lives, Mehta describes Arab feminist writings as "discursive insurrections" to the violence of war, occupation, colonial fragmentation and diasporic displacement. Her focus on rituals as embodied acts of memory that enable survival, healing and creativity expands the study of Arab women's contemporary literature through the theoretical prisms of feminism, psychoanalysis, geography, postmodernism and postcolonialism.



Mehta shows how rituals, such as cooking, bread-baking, the *hammam,* and diary and letter writing "connect women to their past as they reclaim their subjectivity and agency denied by the intersecting forces of Orientalist discourse, colonialism, imperialism, masculinist wars, and 'petro-dollar engineered Islam.'" Mehta generally avoids the pitfalls of essentializing "women's rituals," with attention to the authors' engagement with gender, race, class, religion, sexuality, nationhood and culture. The literary works she examines traverse diverse "landscapes of memory" – kitchen and hearth, refugee camps, desertscapes, labyrinthine medinas and war-shattered cities – in a style that is often poetically absorbing.

Mehta, a scholar of Francophone studies, offers particularly insightful analysis of works by North African writers. Chapter two examines the importance of the desert and Bedouin history in Malika Mokeddam's "The Men Who Walk" and "Century of Locusts." Mehta's depictions of the desert and the movement of

pilgrimage are beautifully drawn, capturing women's nomadic consciousness, labor and spatial mobility within a feminist geography that contrasts to the confines of the colonial city.

Similarly, Chapter three offers a wonderful explanation of the significance of water and purification in Islam, and the implications for "the politics of the female body." This purification ritual, played out in the women's space of the *hammam* in Assia Djebar's "Women of Algiers in Their Apartment" and Fatima Mernissi's "Dreams of Trespass," releases repressed stories and lays bare the women's painful past. Mehta includes sharp analysis of Djebar's depiction of Algerian women fighters and of lower-class women laborers, such as the masseuse, in these articulations of colonized female bodies. Mernissi's autobiography also depicts the *hammam* as a sacred space where traditional beauty and purification rituals are enacted, often in resistance to Western colonialist capitalism and its cosmetic industry. This chapter is a sensual, often luxurious read, a literary balm to the wounds of war and colonization that scar women's bodies and memories.

Mehta further analyzes "the politics of survival" in the context of war and occupation. Liana Badr's "Eye of the Mirror," she argues, depicts women as "cultural and political guerrillas" in the Palestinian Resistance Movement in Tel al-Zataar, Lebanon (1975-76). Aisha, the main character, suffers from alleged madness, symptomatic of national trauma and patriarchal dominance of women's selfhood and sexuality. Mehta shows how Aisha's recovery is inspired by the tenacity of women's resistance in the camp and their everyday acts, such as storytelling and bread-baking, which offer communal sustenance and take on political meaning in the struggle for Palestinian survival.

In another chapter, Mehta turns to Hanan al-Shaykh's "Beirut Blues" and Nuha al-Radi's "Baghdad Diaries" to examine their "poetics of peace" and survival as they testify to the destructive power of war and memorialize two cities under siege. Mehta highlights the authors' attention to various art forms – love letters, blues songs, diaries and even recycled "embargo art" – to show how these writers intervene in the "authoritarian language of domination" to capture the survival of their beloved cities as the center of familial, cultural and communal identity and resistance.

In her treatment of Nawal El Saadawi's work, Mehta explores the "creative dissidence and religious contentions" in her reclamation of a pre-Islamic feminine past. In "Love in the Kingdom of Oil," Mehta shows how the archaeologist/protagonist's excavation of the divine feminine resonates with Saadawi's own statements on the divine as rooted in notions of justice, the collective power of people and creative power, thereby challenging the distortions of institutionalized Islam and its suppression of women. This reclamation of women's history and spiritual agency runs counter to the dictates of the Kingdom of Oil, dominated by the intersecting forces of "global capitalism, neo-colonialism, patriarchy and religious oppression" that Saadawi incisively critiques.

Mehta's final chapter examines Diana Abu-Jaber's "Crescent" as a commentary on communal and cultural sustenance in the diaspora. With wonderful descriptions of food and culinary arts as an entrée to cultural memory, Mehta offers up a sensuous, incisive reading of Abu-Jaber's portrayal of Arab cuisine as divinely inspired, drawing on the author's comparison between cooking and prayer. For the character Sirine, food becomes the retreat where she processes familial memories and reclaims selfhood through experimentation. Mehta argues that the novel politicizes the kitchen; however, she also offers a sharp critique of cross-ethnic eating as a form of appropriation that can create a bland, neo-liberal multiculturalism that consumes the "other."

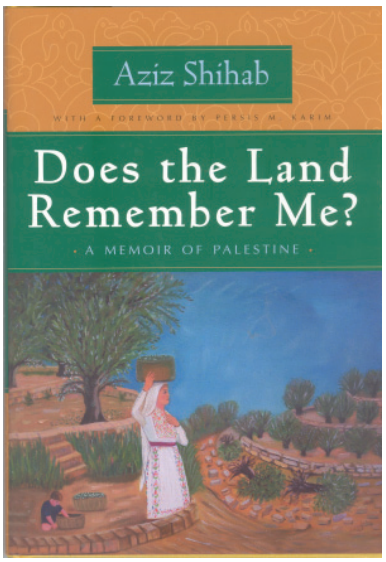
With energetic insight, Mehta's "Rituals of Memory" captures the rich diversity of Arab women's contemporary writing– itself a ritual of memory and a site of transnational feminist resistance. The book's theoretical complexity gestures to a more academic audience of literary scholars and postcolonial feminist critics, but it will also reward a more general audience with its nuanced readings of several recent texts.**AJ**

A Humble Vow to Truth

Does the Land Remember Me? A Memoir of Palestine
By Aziz Shihab
Forward by Persis M. Karim
Syracuse University Press, 2007

BY LYNNE ROGERS

Palestinian-American journalist Aziz Shihab opens his touching and brief memoir, "Does the Land Remember Me? A Memoir of Palestine," with a poem on Jerusalem written by his celebrated daughter, Naomi Shihab Nye. Although the author's remembrances focus on his return visit to his Palestine, Shihab, a refugee who immigrated to the United States, humbly states, "Coming to the United States was the greatest gift from God." His memoir reflects a continuous desire for peace and dialogue, as well as his criticisms of his homeland and indignation over the injustice of its occupation. With the honesty of age, Shihab's commendable memoir draws attention to issues seldom discussed in the United States or the Middle East.



During the early euphoria after the hopeful signing of the Oslo Accords, Shihab left his office in Dallas to visit his dying

106-year-old mother in Palestine and "witness the rebirth of my homeland." Shihab travelled through Britain and Jordan, and he takes the opportunity to give the reader a brief autobiography and historical introduction to the area. Jordan's role is a facet of history not well known in the United States, and Shihab spares no criticism for Jordan nor the Jordanian Palestinians who "sought positions in the government of Jordan, collaborated with the Hashemite family for their own selfish motives, and are still collaborating to this day. These are the *khawaneh,* the traitors, those who were part of the corrupt and defeated people of Palestine and who still crowd the streets of Jordan and Palestine."

At the Israel-Jordan checkpoint, despite the humiliating search and interrogation, Shihab, ever the journalist, befriended an Israeli soldier – an Iraqi Jew. Later, in a personal effort at mutual understanding, they exchanged home visits. In one touching and startling scene, the soldier's father confessed to Shihab that he wishes he had never left Iraq. Recounting his immigration to Israel, the soldier shared his disillusionment upon discovering that "it had been Israeli agents, and the Mossad and some Israeli supporters from Europe, who planted the bombs in our Iraqi neighborhoods, and threw rocks into our windows and harassed us. Yes sir, they were the Jews who were scaring the Jews to leave Iraq. Israel wanted more Jews to come at the time."

From the engaging panorama of Palestinians that he met, Shihab quickly learned that the Israelis are not the only ones who coveted his land. Upon hearing Shihab was an Arab American, one Bedouin boy wonders, "I thought an Arab is always an Arab. I never knew anyone who is half and half." Soon after his arrival, family politics required Shihab's diplomatic skills – from his humorous impromptu settling of wedding disputes to the fate of his own plot of land. Shihab concluded his visit with a vow "to spread the truth." He also decided not to sell his property when an elderly relative assures him that the land "remembers you because your mother never let it forget you and she cared for it better than a man would." Sharing his story and photographs with readers, Shihab both memorializes his homeland and pays tribute to his adopted land. **AJ**

Conference on "Arab-American Women," March 12-15, 2009

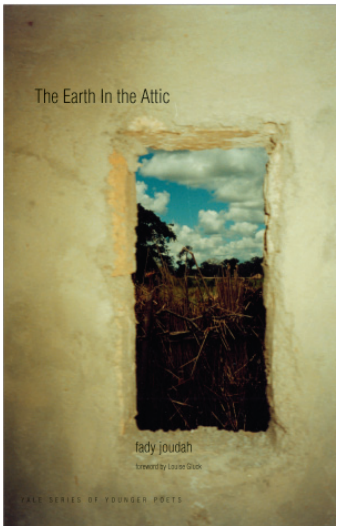
12-15 March—Conference on "Arab-American Women." Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS. Inviting papers dealing with different issues of Arab-American Women's lives, including immigration, history (especially the early history of Arab-American women), settlement, organizations, professions, gender issues, marriage and family, health, religion, involvement in society and politics, status within the Arab-American community and the larger American society, successes and failures, general accomplishments, etc. Papers which analyze Arab-American literature, music and the arts are also invited. Abstracts, not to exceed one page, should be submitted to suleiman@ksu.edu. Call for papers deadline: August 31, 2008. Final drafts should be ready and submitted by January 15, 2009.

The Modular Elastic: The Poetry of Fady Joudah

The Earth in the Attic
By Fady Joudah
Yale University Press, 2008

BY DORIS BITTAR

Imagine bouncing a poem as though it were a ball, wrestling it to the ground, stretching it flat and dissecting it. Fady Joudah's resilient poetry passes this "stress" test and returns to its original state further transformed. Moreover, it transforms us in the process. The slim and animated verses resemble ladders as they sit tentatively on the page. We may climb down or float up. We can slide or jump from the top. We are especially welcome to slip and drift between the stanzas, the lines and words. Joudah's poems are minimal, malleable and modular, ready to challenge our notions of what it is to be human in an unforgiving and fragile world.



Fady Joudah's first book of poems, "The Earth in the Attic," is this year's winner of the Yale Series of Younger Poets, the oldest literary prize in American poetry. Poet Louise Gluck selected the book and wrote the forward. Gluck states that Joudah's poems "resemble scientific proofs, but proofs written in an utterly direct and human language; in their implicit drivenness, their wish to change the reader as the poet has been changed…" Joudah, a Palestinian, is a physician who works for Doctors Without Borders. Those experiences, particularly his tours in Darfur and Zambia, add layers that inform the discourse on identity and power.

Joudah's poems lure us into being complicit readers as we consider the depravities of war and the suspended anxiety of exile. We enter realms of cataclysmic misfortunes viewed from both a voyeuristic perch and the heart of the trenches. The enjoyment of sweet language and humorous incidents is coupled

with the horror of human misery. The poems question our need to seek epiphany in skeletal humans and ascetic landscapes played against national/tribal loyalties.

"Pulse" is a poem in 15 parts and is an epic anchor of the book, along with "Moon Grass Rain." Both describe inhabitants of villages in Zambia/Darfur/Palestine/anywhere during war. The references are ambiguous and layered enough to be transferred to any location.

When Joudah's voice shifts, there are noticeable small leaps between the incantations of stretchy threads that emerge and submerge between real or imagined ellipses, real or morphed realms. It is precisely at these junctions and drifting gaps of cinematic flow where we find the freeing impulse to test our will on the verses, to further probe the layers. Reading the lines or stanzas in an unorthodox way, perhaps backwards, illuminates the shifting voices and the rich visual renderings; Gluck aptly points out that they exist in the expansive realm of the psychic rather than political dogma. In the segment "Pulse" stanza 2, Joudah coaxes us, consciously or subconsciously, to micro-shift within the lines and stanzas. It begins:

> Nothing holds ground in a poem.
> I was with a crane building its nest
> When a man from a grass-shrapnel village
> Handed me a note that a soldier
> Lay in my bed with a bullet
> In his thigh . . . I was in the middle…

The first two lines situate us with the doctor. "Nothing holds ground in a poem" could be a concluding phrase, or a punch line, or it could be a hypothesis or a preamble. We may find ourselves going back to it as we read the parable/proofs that follow.

When interpreting a dream, each character, each segment is a facet of the dreamer. In Joudah's poetry, and perhaps most poetry, the reader makes the natural and desirable choice to view the poem from various angles. Moreover, Joudah's textured and elastic verses are parsed and sequenced to allow for sticky entanglements as well as smooth transitions. In "Pulse" stanza 11, Joudah begins with "This child / Wears its skin like spandex on the bone." With the simple phrase "This child," spoken as a parent might speak, Joudah suggests that we take ownership: is it his child or is it our child? These raw lines stick to our own skin for weeks. After this introduction several voices follow: one pontificates upon and another elucidates "this" compounded human tragedy.

Fady Joudah's voice(s) exists in layered dualities that are in a perpetual state of translation and mistranslation. The "translations/mistranslations" create intimacy with alien characters whether they are from the American South, a Zambian refugee camp, his father's memories of Palestine, or a spider, an observer of humans.

In "Along Came a Spider," from which this book obtained its title, Joudah playfully compares the mission of a spider with that of a prophet. The spider lightly resonates, suspended in planes of historical and biblical references. To contrast a spider with a prophet teaches us that to be human is inescapably corrupting, perhaps only to be sparingly rescued by small epiphanies and delicate humor.

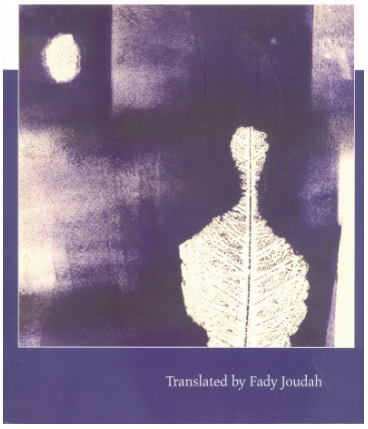
Taken as a whole, "The Earth in the Attic" is a translucent parchment that maps our culpability in the world. Joudah's verbal and sequencing choices create an urge to enter a pact that deliberately instructs us to question our roles as witnesses. Our scrambled readings of the poems end, and the poems are restored to their original elegance and place. However, we have become ineluctably transformed by the experience.**AJ**

Darwish in Orbit: A Celebration of Longing

The Butterfly's Burden
By Mahmoud Darwish
Translated by Fady Joudah
Copper Canyon Press, 2007

BY ZAID SHLAH

The poetry of Mahmoud Darwish is as fundamental a gift to the Arab world as Wole Soyinka's work is to Nigeria or Derek Walcott's poems are to the West Indies. However, Darwish is not as well known in the U.S. as they are, which makes Fady Joudah's translation of "The Butterfly's Burden" all the more important. It acts as a conduit, inviting the reader of English to take a journey into the consciousness and history of the Arab and Palestinian people.



The poetry is offered up as mirror to humanity, a reflection that refutes the intransigent realities of myth, identity, exile, love, loss and language that are all too often passively accepted. This particular mirror resists, for example, the West's conjecture about Syria, and instead reveals it as "…Damascus: / [where] speech returns to its origins." Though Darwish made this offering, Joudah brought it to us, and history demands we take it in. The reader's rewards, as one might expect with a major poet, are not merely those of an innovative aesthetic, an evocative line, or even a few sage bits of wisdom. The language itself is a force for shifting paradigms.

One is welcome to take pleasure from the raw canvas: "…she lifts her dress off her calf cloud by cloud," or delight in the surprise of language from the poem "Like a Mysterious Incident": "When poetry is obstinate I sketch / a few traps on the rocks to hunt the grouse," or even become startled by the self-deprecating tone from "A State of Siege":

> This rhyme was not
> necessary, not for melody
> or for the economy of pain
> it is additional
> like flies at the dining table

However, surely the poet is there to light the way to something beyond the force of his craft. His lexicon is large; it contains, for example, the brilliance of "anemones," "lapis," "Jahili poetry." The observant reader will marvel at the subtle execution of tropes: conceit, absence, persona and metonymy, as well as a dialectic about myth, war, identity, language and love. Getting one's head around the scope of Darwish's work is its own odyssey, but Joudah's translation is diligent enough for the reader to get more than just an approximation; rather, the reader gains the ability to discern the natural progression of Darwish's poetry and "The Butterfly Burden" 's place within it.

The poet's rich metaphors, the use of enjambment and the fluidity of his style would ostensibly make it difficult to translate from the Arabic. So it is testament to Darwish and Joudah that the "twinning" of metaphor and cadence, of "prose and poetry," of "experience and exile" are consistently and accurately presented throughout the three volumes of this work. This way the reader can trace the newly rendered English lexicon backwards and forwards along its cyclical path. The reader also has the benefit of comparing the physical structure of the translations in their original Arabic in side-by-side translation.

In these three translated volumes, and in particular "Don't Apologize for What You've Done," Darwish's themes are presented from slightly different positions in a more discursive line, and as an aggregation of specific treatments where the reader is asked to intuit the whole. Though discrepancies in diction and rhythm might occur, this is the nature of translation. Joudah must be commended because, with the aid of his poet's ear, he has not yielded to caprice, but rather been sincere in his effort to understand Darwish's lexicon completely.

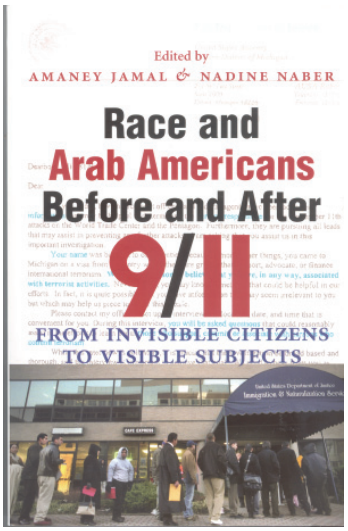
Regretfully, this reviewer must stop short before adequately delving into any one of Darwish's poems, but the journey remains: to Syria or Andalus, Egypt or Tunisia, in discussion with a poet, a soldier or a lover, from "your 'I' to your else / and your vision to your steps" – a place that beckons the necessary imagination. No matter where these poems begin or end, they are also a celebration of longing – "that inexplicable longing / that makes a thing into a specter, and / makes a specter into a thing." **AJ**

New Book Examines Changing Perspectives of Arab Americans, Post 9/11

BY D. W. AOSSEY

Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11, From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects
Edited by Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber
Syracuse University Press, 2007

Seven years after the events of September 11th, 2001, the term "9/11" has come to mean many things to many people. To some it represents an affront to America's former hegemony and superpower status. To others "9/11" is the altar upon which constitutional rights have been sacrificed in favor of FISA, the Patriot Act, and executive orders that bypass the law with impunity. To the Arab - American community, however, the meaning of 9/11 goes beyond conceptual boundaries and assumes a personal character – one defined not only by how this group views its roles in American society but, moreover, by how it is perceived within the broader social context.



"Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11," edited by Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, does a truly excellent job of examining these issues within the framework of race and race relations in America. Subtitled "From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects," the theme of this thorough and intelligent collection of essays and reports is clear – that while 9/11 was a watershed event which further stigmatized Arabs and the Arab-American community, the concept of "Otherness" as applied to Arabs and Americans of Arab descent has further worked to marginalize and vilify that community, alienating it from the American mainstream. One is left wondering: How has this alienation process occurred, how has it affected those implicated, and what can be done about it.

Addressing these questions, the contributors – comprised of more than a dozen highly regarded academics – examine the "racialization" and legal plight of Arab Americans in various urban settings including Chicago, Detroit and San Francisco,

both before and after 9/11. Looking at how Arabs have been typecast both by the Western media and the U.S. government, these writers assess how racial "Otherness" – a classification which afforded early Arab immigrants a semi-privileged association with white America but which in the aftermath of 9/11 has proven to be a double-edged sword – has been detrimental to Arab Americans. And finally, searching for answers to this shared crisis that confronts everyone of Arab ancestry, light is shed on ways forward.

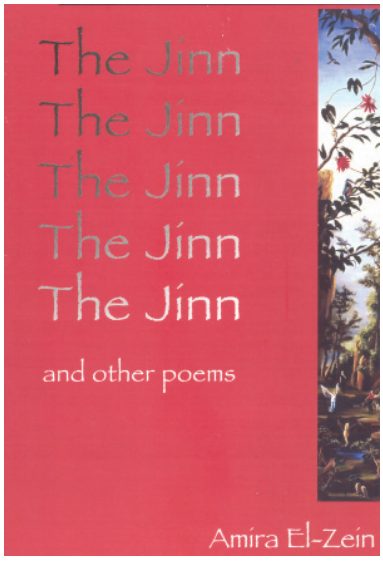
Sophisticated in its approach with a long list of references and a thorough use of footnotes, "Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11" nevertheless supports a down-to-earth literary texture that transcends the typical academic journal, making this important work an invaluable resource for all. And while doubts and questions ultimately remain regarding the social predicament confronting the Arab-American community in the post 9/11 era, "Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11" certainly helps one visualize a path toward understanding – and enlightenment.**AJ**

Power of the Jinn

The Jinn and Other Poems
By Amira El-Zein
Arrowsmith n.p.

BY THERI ALYCE PICKENS

In the short biography at the back of the book, the text says that Amira El-Zein's interests lie in medieval and modern Arabic thought, Francophone literature, comparative mysticism and comparative folklore. This collection brings these interests together in the space of five poems. "The Jinn and Other Poems," far from being didactic or heavy - handed, juxtaposes these subjects with one another without sacrificing their complexity or rendering them impotent.



The title image in particular has such a precarious nature: On one hand, it has explosive poetic potential and, on the other hand, it can become quite trite and simple. In El-Zein's collection, the jinn doesn't lose its loveliness, spirituality or mischievous nature. When it appears, always as part of a collective, it upsets the landscape and simultaneously creates calm. In "The Jinn" she writes, "They come to me/wearing horses' hooves, ready to jump over hurdles" and "They come to me and rain stops repeating itself/pulses beat a duet." In these lines and in "About Time," the jinn remains a fecund image, usually at the brink of performance and wrestling with kinetic energy.

The jinn's energy points to a principal concern within each of the poems: the fertility and finality of creation. That is, this energy – with its potential for both beauty and destruction – folds back upon itself within these poems. It is never wholly truculent or its opposite. In "I Hear My Ink Spill," the speaker descends into what might be madness or hell before beginning to write. The poem makes the act of writing more capacious in that this writer creates herself, but it also points to the ways that the act of writing can be violent, deadly. The rest of the collection, particularly "The Returning Spirits," appears to underscore this paradox with images that embody duality: "We are that sense of recoil that tightens your gut/when something you glimpsed in your childhood/springs back unexpectedly."

In the last poem, "Square is Jerusalem," El-Zein shifts to more eschatological concerns, mobilizing the very contested geographical space of Jerusalem. When she writes, "Square is Jerusalem;/Round is my soul for you," she seems to point to the way in which the city itself is divided into quarters and her declaration attempts to transcend these quarters. Given the apocalyptic imagery, "Square is Jerusalem" also illuminates the destructive potential of creation as well; she implores, "Let warfare rage/and the writings of nations/be erased."

El-Zein's collection seems to be like the jinn itself, both lovely and daunting. The poems' exploration of complex themes forces you to engage your thoughts; the lyricism and imagery forces you to engage your senses. Do not let the brevity deceive you: "The Jinn and Other Poems" deserves a spot on every bookshelf.**AJ**

The Art of Islam

Continued from page 56

Grand robes for the sultan and his horse, as well as flags and banners, were woven from magnificent velvets and silks. One imagines that this costumery might have filled the heart of the enemy with awe, fear and admiration. Documents chronicling the reception of foreign ambassadors, whether in the courts of 10th century Baghdad or the court of the infamous Timur Leng, all record impressive pomp and circumstance.

The range of objects on display illustrates the evolution in the style of these arms and denotes the reigns of the various rulers. Many of the swords are dated, inscribed with the name of their owner, and the viewer can easily imagine them being bestowed upon some faithful servant. A rare broad sword dated 1761 belonged to a master butcher and was signed by Ashraf Isfahânî. Another object, this one on loan from the Louvre, is a metal meat hook from the Mamluk period, silver-plated and inscribed with gold lettering, "Umar, the Butcher." Were these objects offered in the same way as the robes, as precious gifts to faithful servants or special honorees?

The exhibit also displayed beautiful archers' rings, jewelry usually worn on the thumb for protection and decorated with precious stones. Gourds, once hung from the sides of horses, were specially crafted for people of high rank. One such gourd, made by Murad III and presented to Emperor Rodolphe II of Hapsburg in 1580, is in the shape of an elaborate crystal animal, inlaid rubies serving as its eyes. Were these gourds, tents and draperies of red silk and velvet the spoils of war seized on a long ago battlefield, hence their presence in a European museum?

Wicker shield, Turkey, Late 16th - 17th century

Carved ivory horn, India, 17th - 18th century
Furusiyya Art Foundation

While the artifacts on display demonstrate a remarkable consistency in style over the centuries, one can also distinguish regional differences. The Arab style is noticeably more austere than the Mamluk, Ottoman or Mogul styles, in which fragile materials attest to the skill of the artisans who favored working with jade, ivory, and precious stones.

The perfection of these objects and the masterful artistry of their creators leave us nostalgic for a time of extraordinary coherence. Islamic arts and crafts were created on the same design principles evident in other Islamic mediums such as architecture and calligraphy. Seldom have civilizations achieved such a completeness. **AJ**

Waiting for the Mahdi*

BY MUHAMMAD ALI SHAMS AL-DIN

We have been waiting too long for the Mahdi,
Until he came
But the names in some of their renderings deceived us

The people said:
Al-Abbas is the Mahdi
We looked:
Al-Abbas was like a prophet
Captivating like a legend
Tall, taller than our dreams
Handsome
He walked
And we followed him
As the river follows its course
We were poor,
Repentant,
And mixtures of Zanj and vanquished peoples
But the poets
-who were the first to believe this miracle-
half-way in the desert noted a certain thing
Ambiguous between fire and water,
Between the great miracle and the egregious lie
So they hid behind their tears
And waited for another Mahdi
To come out from another cave.

Beirut, February 26, 1991.

(*)According to the majority of the Shi'ites, al-Mahdi the 12th and last Imam has been concealed by God since his disappearance in 878. He is expected to reappear to deliver mankind from injustice and tyranny.

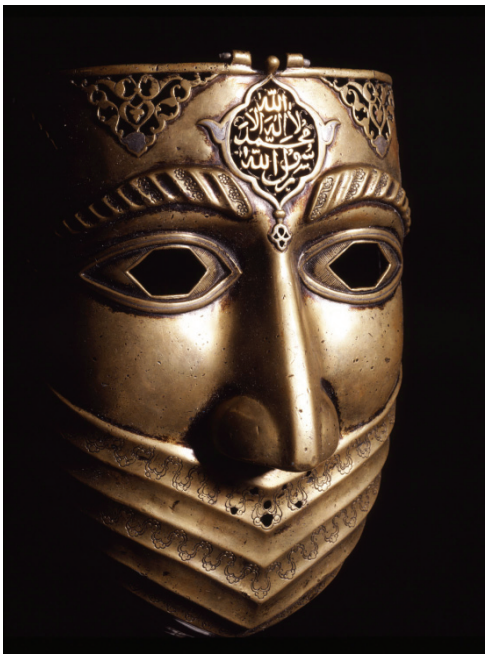
The Art of Islam

Knights in the Islamic World:
Collection from the Furûssiya Art Foundation
June 26 – October 21, 2007
Institut du Monde Arabe

BY SIMONE FATTAL

The Al Furûssiyya exhibit took place in the summer and fall of 2007 at Paris's Institut du Monde Arabe. This first-of-its-kind exhibit, from the private collection of the Furûsiyya Art Foundation, focused on an important but often overlooked feature of Islamic art – namely aspects of knighthood, including archery, horsemanship, tournaments and war.

Dagger and scabbard, N. India, 17th century, Furusiyya Art Foundation



War mask, Iran, 16th century. Furusiyya Art Foundation.

The collection has been meticulously gathered over the years. The exhibit spans a millennium, from the first centuries of the Islamic Empire to the 18th century. The pieces from the latter end of the period refute the claim that chivalry died with the introduction of firearms.

An extraordinary collection of swords are on display, each featuring a different curve, many intricately decorated with inlaid calligraphy of silver or gold. The accompanying sheaths are similarly varied, some simple and others ornate. The masterfully carved arcs of the swords are as artistic as the calligraphy they bear. Calligraphers inscribed verses from the Koran upon each of the blades, typically choosing the *surah*s known to provide protection. One of these swords was a *zhu al fikar* – a single blade which divides into two heads, similar to the famous sword that the Prophet Mohammad bore. Tradition holds that the Prophet seized it as his share of the spoils after the crucial battle of Badr and later presented it to Ali following the battle of Uhud, intoning "there is no knight (*fata*) except Ali and no sword except *zhu al fikar*." It is not surprising, therefore, to see that a great number of Arab rulers possessed imitations.

Visitors to the exhibit marveled at all the necessary accoutrements for the cavalier and his steed: coats of mail, helmets, metal armor for hands or feet, legs, and heads of horses and riders alike. The shields consist mostly of metal, but occasionally one is crafted of straw and fitted with a metal center, usually exquisitely decorated with any variety of colored flowers. Robes that once draped the horses were embroidered with gold and silver thread, helmets sometimes featured long feathers. Brass face shields offered another kind of protection. Despite all of this equipment, the Arab cavalier was much lighter than his European foe, which often accounted for his success in battle. Beneath this armor, the knights wore a simple shirt for spiritual protection, one inscribed with Koranic verses invoking God's protection and proving the spiritual aspect of the duties the knight had toward his community.

Archer's ring, India, late 17th century Furussiyya Art Foundation

Weapons of this era include maces, heavy mortars, bows and arrows, all in abundance. Quivers, many of them from the time of the Ottoman Empire, were crafted from leather and decorated with flower motifs embroidered with silver thread and made more comfortable with plush velvet linings. Of note is an especially intriguing detail – the handle of one hatchet features the image of a deer sticking out its tongue, perhaps adding insult to injury for any enemy unlucky enough to be on its receiving end. Visitors notice the infinite care that craftsmen took as they manufactured each of these objects, considered necessary for the protection of the community and lending to the magnificence of the ruler.

Over time, the sultan began wearing bejeweled swords and daggers as ornamentation for pleasure rather than defense.

Continued on page 55