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Title: Arabic Poetry as a possible Metalanguage for Intercultural Dialogue

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“For me the province of poetry is a private ecstasy made public, and the social role of the poet is to display moments of shared universal epiphanies capable of healing our sense of mortal estrangement—from ourselves, from each other, from our source, from our destiny, from the Divine” (Danial Abdal-Hayy, US-American poet)

Introduction

The aim of this study is to show how modern Arabic literature and poetry could help in the effort to understand modern Arab society and its problems. At the same time it will be necessary to describe the history of Arabic poetry if we want to understand how important poetry in contemporary Arab society is. This whirlwind tour through the history of Arabic poetry will be restrained to the function of the poet and the role of poetry played in general in Arabic-Islamic history. Indeed the preoccupation with works of modern writers should not only be an issue for organizations working on the improvement of intercultural dialogue. It is also of great importance that the scholarly discourse in Islamic or Middle Eastern Studies recognizes the importance of modern Arabic literature. Arabic literature could be another valuable source of information, in addition to the *Qur’ān* and *Sunnah*. If you consider the theory of theologian Hermann Gunkel about the “Sitz im Leben” (seat in life)¹ and if we question a lyrical or prose text about the formative stage, it is possible to learn much about the society from which an author is addressing his audience. Indeed we have to consider the old scripts if we want to understand societies of the Middle East but they will not be able to answer the question about how an intercultural dialogue between the Western World and the Arabic-Islamic World can be achieved. These scripts can just give us a basis of information and tools with which we are able to build a setting suitable for a dialogue.

If we talk about intercultural communication using terms of linguistics we have to concede that a metalanguage is necessary if two cultures want to establish successful communication, in much the same way as two researchers from two different countries

1 Wagner, Andreas: “Gattung und 'Sitz im Leben'. Zur Bedeutung der formgeschichtlichen Arbeit Hermann Gunkels (1862–1932) für das Verstehen der sprachlichen Größe Text”, in: *Texte – Konstitution, Verarbeitung, Typik*, ed. by Susanne Michaelis und Doris Tophinke. (Edition Linguistik 13) München / Newcastle 1996, pp.117–129.

would use English as a metalanguage to exchange their ideas. This study wants to show that poetry could also function as that metalanguage.

The first part of this study is dedicated to the role of poetry in pre-Islamic society. With the advent of Islam we have to take a look at the relation between poetry and revelation. If we talk about the role of poetry we will have also to talk about the poet himself and his role in society. 1400 years ago, and up until the present day, the poet has played an important role: His ability to put complex motifs into a text, to collect the memories and experiences of his society in a form of lyrical art makes him the personified memory of his community. His works are a possible metalanguage in the dialogue of cultures, able to transfer emotion and create an empathy that is the key for cultural understanding. Literature is a mirror of the society from which it emanates.

To use poetry as a metalanguage means to deal with the difficult issue of translating poetry, because the translation allows also the non-Arab reader to get an insight into the culture of the author. We have to admit, however, that there could never be a perfect translation of a lyrical work, particularly due to the difficulties in translating from Arabic. We can at least, however, try to risk an adaptation because every adaptation means at the same time dealing with that culture and an approach towards this culture.

If we talk about the role of the poet in Arab society then it will be necessary to give examples from modern Arabic literature where lyricists begin to claim roles, willingly or unwillingly. We will therefore mention Mahmoud Darwish, "the voice of a nation"² - in his case the Palestinian nation. As a man who lent the Arab woman his voice with his poetry, Syrian writer Nizar Qabbani will also be mentioned. We will also discuss poetry in Colloquial Arabic, its development and the strong relationship between music and poetry. Therefore we will present examples of the workers' poetry of the sixties and seventies by Salah Jaheen and Ahmad Fouad Negm. As times are changing and international terrorism and globalization are dominating the stage of world affairs, ambitious poetry in Colloquial Arabic can also take a different guise. Therefore Shabaan Abd Al-Rahim, a pop singer who often uses political messages, will also be used as an example.

This study also has a practical approach. At 10th October 2009 six young Egyptian poets³ in their twenties, writing in Standard Arabic and Colloquial Arabic, presented their poems at

2 Antoon, Sinan: "Farewell Mahmoud Darwish", in: Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 910 (14.-20. Aug. 2008).

3 Salem Al-Shahbany, Amr Hassan, Ramy Yahya, Mohamed Mansour, Ayman Massoud, Mostafa Ali Moussa,

the *Goethe-Institute* in Cairo at an event entitled *Poetry for Knowledge and Cultural Dialogue*, organized and conceived by the author of this article under the umbrella of the *Center for Cultural Dialogue and Translation*. Their poems were chosen before the event because they as sources to help us understand something about the fears, dreams and opinions of these young people representing their community. They also presented poetry of famous artists (Mahmoud Darwish, Nizar Qabbani, Ahmad Fouad Negm, Salah Jaheen and Fouad Haddad) who were, or are themselves not only influential and inspiring figures for their communities but also, even if unwillingly, participants in an intercultural dialogue. A musician presented sung poetry in Colloquial Arabic, and all texts were presented in Arabic while translations were projected on a wall. You will find the translated texts in the appendix of this work.

The poet and poetry in pre-Islamic times

The earliest sources that tell us about early Arabic poetry are from the 5th century AD. At this point in time Arabic poetry must have already been developed for some time. We know, for example, from church historian Sozmenos about Arabs who praised Queen Māwīya (d. around 350 AD) with sung verses because she defeated the East Roman emperor Flavius Valens. The holy Nilus (d. 430 AD) tells us about Arabs who sang poems every time they found a new well for water.⁴ These examples show us that Arabic poetry seems so be more connected with the voice than with the alphabet, and that it inherits an oral tradition.

The function of the poet (šā'ir) in pre-Islamic times was a religious one. Poetry was ritualized and the audience of a poet thought that he could control or affect the fate of the tribe through divine inspiration. One believed that the powers of the poet were able to affect the outcome of wars or could grant people with blessings or afflict them with curses.⁵ The poet was also the chronicler of his community. It is also known that poetry was a substitute for war. Abū Tammām tells us that a tribe with an excellent poet could easily dominate other tribes.⁶ The importance of the poet as chronicler of his tribe is shown by the following verse: "What has been said has been said, be it true or false, How can you be excused against words already spoken?"⁷

4 See Sezgin, Fuat: "Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums", Vol. II, Leiden 1975, pp. 7-8.

5 Ibid., p. 9.

6 Abū Tammām: *Dīwān*, Beirut 1889, p. 83.

7 Conveyed by Ibn al-Mu'tazz, as quoted by Arazi, A.; Moreh, S.; J.T.P. de; Haywood, J.A.; Hiskett, M.: "Shir", in: *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition (in the following text abbreviated as 'EI2'), Leiden 1954.

In pre-Islamic times the spontaneous poetry of the nomads prevailed. While early verses described nomadic life in the desert, later the major issue was life in general. In these times the poet was the speaker of his tribe, channelling voices and thoughts towards society outside the tribe, but instead of using a lyrical “I” which is more familiar to us, the pre-Islamic poet used a lyrical “We”.⁸ Adonis says that this paradox shapes and distinguishes pre-Islamic poetry from poetry of other times. Adonis states that this poetry might be individual and emotional in a way, but that the lyrical “We” or the tribe overpowered the lyrical I.⁹ In conclusion one could say that pre-Islamic poetry is the expression of a collective consciousness. Before Islam, poets were more committed to stylistic conventions in which they were seeking safety. These, through a poetical discourse, developed conventions that were a guarantor of the quality of poetry. With this discourse also came the development of a sense of harmony which was only achieved if the stylistic conventions were met by the poets.¹⁰ With this insight it is easy to understand that the western concept of a poet as a creative subject cannot be applied easily on pre-Islamic poetry.¹¹ If we see in the pre-Islamic poet a person who fulfils a function in his tribe and who is in a way exercising power through versified speech then we should also shed some light on the *kāhin* and his role in pre-Islamic society. While the word for poet (*šā‘ir*) is the active participle of the verb *sha‘ara* which could mean „to know, to have knowledge about something, to be aware of something, to apprehend, to notice something, to feel, to sense something, to compose, to verse, the word *kāhin*, also active participle, derives from *kahana* which means “to forecast, to predict”. The *kāhin* had the power to lead his tribe spiritually and to advise the tribal leader through divine inspiration, although some had seen in the *kāhin* an obsessed human. He used the power of the word as the poet did and expressed his prophecies in a mystical way. He was the high priest of his tribe and interpreted visible signs as expressions of a prophecy. He was also caretaker of sacred sites, but the more the Arabs became settled, the more the *kāhin*'s importance was diminished. The variety of spiritual and political functions attributed to the *kāhin* is documented by the many synonyms used in place of the word *kāhin*: *‘arrāf* (fortune teller), *ḥatīb* (preacher, speaker), *tabīb* (medicine man), *shā‘ir* (in his function as declarator of war). The similarities between the pre-Islamic poet and the *kāhin* are striking, regarding

8 Idem.

9 Adonis: Introduction à la poétique arabe, Paris 1985.

10 Arazī, loc.cit., p. 6.

11 See Drozdik, Ladislav: “Erotic Imagery in Classical Arabic Poetry”, in: Asian and African Studies, vol. 6, No. 1 (1997), pp. 1-2.

the style they used to address their tribes. The kâhin used a rhythmical style and an "archaic, bizarre and cabalistic vocabulary"¹². This style shared with pre-Islamic poetry its usage of rhyme although the kâhinian verses were not bound to the criteria of an Arabic measure which was still in development. While the kâhin used the saj'c, the shâ'ir used the rajaz which is, according to some Arabists, a development towards "a rhythmical disciplined saj'"¹³. Most Arabists state that the formative period of Arabic poetry ended in the lifetime of the great-grandfather (d. around 510 AD) or grandfather (d. around 578) of the prophet Mohammed.¹⁴

The relationship between poetry and Islam

Poetry in general has a difficult position in the Arab world. This has something to do with economic difficulties, but also derives from a cultural, more religious move against poetry. We know that the Arabic-Islamic world gave birth to some of the greatest poets in world history like Al-Mutanabbi, but this happened at a time when the Islamic world was not stuck in a discourse between liberal ideas and fundamentalism and dogmatism. It was possible to praise wine in form of a classical Kasida like Abu Nuwas did. He shaped the so called Khamriyât that obviously oppose against Islamic dogma and *Qur'anic* verses (Q 16:10-11, 4:43, 2:219, 5.90-91).¹⁵ And if we talk about sexual content we can point to the erotic introduction of the nasīb¹⁶ found in a classical Kasida, or to poetry that is using the graphical appearance of Arabic letters as erotic metaphors. It was also possible that poets wrote about homosexual love.¹⁷ These examples make it obvious that Islamic dogma are not sufficient to deliver us a clear picture of the Arabic-Islamic world. The "love for poetry" as stated by Annemarie Schimmel "is a characteristic of traditional Islamic culture"¹⁸. But that is a view after a transitional Islamic history in which entire peoples and cultures were integrated into the Islamic community.

The relationship between Arabic poetry and Islamic revelation is difficult to grasp and

12 Fahd, T.: "La divination arabe. études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif d'Islam", Paris 1966, p. 152.

13 Goldziher, Ignaz: "Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie", Leiden 1886, p. 76.

14 Adonis, op.cit., pp. 22-23.

15 More information about wine poetry in: Kennedy, Philip F.: "The wine song in classical Arabic poetry. Abu Nuwas and Literary Tradition", Oxford 1997.

16 The leitmotif of the nasīb deals with the nomadic tribe searching for new camp together with a lover, the memories of the lost lover combined with the description of an abandoned campsite that was previously a home for the lovers. Compare: Lichtenstädter, I.: "Das Nasib der altarabischen Qaside", in: *Islamica* 5 (1931/1932), pp. 17-96.

17 See: Boswell, John: "Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality", Chicago/London 1980.

18 See: Schimmel, Annemarie: "Die Zeichen Gottes, Die religiöse Welt des Islam", München, 1995, p. 170.

maybe the word "love-hate" could be a short-cut to describe this relation. If you ask, for example, in an Islamic bookshop in Cairo about poetry you may find that poetry and the *Qur'ān* seem to stand in opposition. This popular opposition is for many grounded in the Sura "The Poets" (al-shu'arā').

"As for the poets, they are followed only by the strayers./ Do you not see that their loyalty shifts according to the situation?/ And that they say what they do not do?
(Qur'ān 26:224-226)

From the viewpoint of pre-Islamic Arabs, poetry was always connected with revelation as we have seen for the pre-Islamic poem or *kāhin*. In the *Qur'ānic* verses cited above poetry is something that misleads people and stands in opposition to truth that is recognizable through determined acts. The *Qur'ān* approves poetry. It divides human speech from divine speech, as well as criticizes the aims of human poetical speech. If it were possible to regard the *Qur'ān* as detached from god, the *Qur'ān* itself could be regarded as poetry from a linguistic standpoint. The *Qur'ān* prevented poetry from continuing to be the language of prophecy. It subordinates human speech to divine speech and reveals that the purpose of human speech should be only an affirmation of God's creation. This attitude becomes apparent in verses 33-36 of Sura 52 of the *Qur'ān*:

Do they say, "He made it all up?" Instead, they are simply disbelievers. Let them produce a Hadith like this, if they are truthful. Were they created from nothing? Are they the creators? Did they create the heavens and the earth? Indeed, they have no certainty.

At best it would be possible to accept human speech and poetry as an illusion of creation, but the *Qur'ān* and poetry are closely related. The *Qur'ān* is not a simple text: it is not possible to understand it directly, and it does not report events in a conventional sense. It is an allusive text with many inter-textual and extra-textual references, laced with metaphorical language. For Muslims its elocution is a miracle of attestation:

Say, "If all the humans and all the jinns banded together in order to produce a *Qur'ān* like this, they could never produce anything like it, no matter how much assistance they lent one another." We have cited for the people in this *Qur'ān* all kinds of examples, but most people insist upon disbelieving. (Qur'ān 17:88-89)

This borderline set by the *Qur'ān* makes it clear that it sees itself as a miracle of attestation that surpasses poetry. If we take all this into account, the *Qur'ān* simply denies human poetry is able to surpass it and claims itself to be perfect and divine poetry. It is important

to note that the *Qur'ān* does not criticize poetry itself. The aim of its criticism is the poet and his ability to misuse the power of language for deceptive propaganda as Plato previously stated.¹⁹ The Prophet Mohammed himself as a religious leader, but also as a statesman, had to try to reconcile pre-Islamic traditions with Islam. It is known that he hired two poets, Hassan ibn Thabit and Labīd, to dispraise enemy tribes with their verses.²⁰ Works of poets like Al-Mutanabbi and also the attitude of *Qur'ān* towards poetry, with its reception and not condemnation, shows us that the pre-Islamic or early Islamic poetry is more a focal point of Arabic-Islamic culture than an antagonism to Islamic belief. D. S. Margoliouth states the fact that pre-Islamic poets used *Qur'ānic* terms and avowed themselves as monotheists.²¹ This could mean that pre-Islamic poetry maybe had promoted or prepared the rise of Islam.

A message, may it be of human or divine nature, must be understood to generate a following. From the linguistic and aesthetical point of view, the *Qur'ān* is something like the embodiment of linguistic perfection that is able to “make someone [the listener] unable to act”. Believers and Islamic scientists use the term *ijāz al-qur'ān* that is translated, often insufficiently, as “the wondrous nature of *Qur'ān*” to describe this effect. By promoting poetry to the status of a science (‘ilm) in the 2nd - 3rd (AH) / 8th-9th century (AD) poetry was accepted in orthodox circles. Adonis states that the evolution from sha‘ara (to feel) to sha‘ara (to know), in his opinion, is in fact a revolution that made poetry a “universe of higher truth”.²² Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 AH / 1064 AD) thinks that *‘ilm al-shi‘r* is one of the most important sciences through which the believer can strengthen his knowledge about Arabic grammar and language.²³ Ibn Qutayba (828-889 AD) says that Arabic poetry are books of wisdom, archives of Arab history, the treasure chamber of their greatest days and a stronghold to defend their honour.²⁴ The implication of that would be that Arabic poetry can be a source of knowledge, and is not only for aesthetic pleasure. The rising numbers of ‘ulamā’ who wrote poetry at the end of the Abbasid period points to the rising acceptance of poetry. Knowledge of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry became essential for

19 “The art of poetry seems to be dangerous to all those who are not in possession of a counteragent which is the cognition of the real world.” (The Republic, Book X)

20 See Sahih Bukhari Vol. 5, Book 59, No. 449 and Vol. 8, Book 73, No. 174.

21 Margoliouth, D. S.: Origins of Arabic Poetry. In: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, No. 3 (July 1925), pp. 417-449.

22 See Adonis, op.cit., p. 77.

23 Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī: “Risālat al-talhīṣli li-wuḡūh al-tahlīs”, in: Rasā’il al- Andalusī”, Vol. 3, Beirut 1981, pp. 163-164.

24 See Ibn Qutayba: “‘Uyūn al-aḥbar”, Vol. 2, Cairo 1925, p. 185.

exegating the *Qur'ān* and *Hadīth*.²⁵

It is not, therefore, acceptable to reason from *Qur'ānic* revelation that the Arabic-Islamic world in general has a hostile attitude towards poetry. Economical and political factors may support the opposing point of view but it is not mainly the public who argue against poetry but rather the regimes of the Arab World that try to repress freedom of expression and thought. Religion is sometimes the undeclared enemy of these regimes, but if we talk about expression of thought in an artistic way, religion is highly misused by these regimes to protect the claim of absolute power, because it is easy to influence people through their religious beliefs. This shows the regimes' ambivalent attitude towards religion.

At times religion is viewed as an abhorred moral authority, and at other times it is the beloved enemy.

Development under the Umayyads: Poetry in the service of the aristocracy

Usually the poet of Umayyad times was still loyal to his tribe but some of them tried to find their luck in the big new cities, looking for a patron who wanted to be praised by poems and was willing to pay these poets. The poet at that time benefited from the opulence of an emerging governing and military aristocracy. Although the tribal society was vanquished formally, the affiliation to a tribe kept on playing a big role in daily politics. For that reason the central power had to accept the power of poets because although living in a city he was still a member of his tribe, and a bridge between the urban and the tribal society, between the governor and the governed.²⁶ The people in the cities of the Hijāz (Mekka, Medina, Ṭā'if) changed their attitude towards poetry because of their growing prosperity and the temporary isolation due to the rival caliphate of 'Abdallāh bin al-Zubayr. Regarding political poetry, Umayyad rulers accepted the power of poets and tried to bring them into service just as the anti-Umayyad opposition did.²⁷ The romanticism of the pre-Islamic poetry was also rediscovered. The poetry about 'Majnūn wa Jamīl', for example, deals with a topic aside from war and peace: It is about the impossibility of a love due to tribal conventions.²⁸

25 See Bauer, Thomas: "Shāir", in: EI2.

26 See Blachère, Régis: "Histoire de la littérature arabe", 3 vols., Paris 1952-1966, pp. 544-548.

27 See Bauer, loc.cit., p. 3.

28 See Gabrieli, F.: "Djamīl al-'Udhri", in: EI2.

Development under the Abbasids: Poetry for representation and entertainment

To be a poet in Abbasid times meant to be committed to the court of the caliph, the governor of a province, functionaries in the military or any high ranking public servant. The panegyric poetry (madīḥ) developed into an important tool of representation for the ruler. At the same time the poet was an entertainer for the ruler and the guests of the court and used wine poetry (Ḥamriyāt) and hunting poetry (Ṭardiyya) to amuse the court. The atmosphere of the court allowed also people to verse whose regular occupation was not that of a poet. The so called nudamā', the drinking companions of the caliphs, also practiced poetry and made poetry even more popular at the court.²⁹ Poetry was also sung to a greater extent. Al-Jāḥiẓ (776-869 AD) tells us in his book 'Kitāb al-Qiyān' (Book of the Singing Girls) that successful singing girls could present more than 4000 songs with more than 10.000 verses to entertain the ruler and his guests.³⁰ The 'Kitāb al-Aghānī' (Book of Songs) of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (897-967 AD) attests that poets included the tonality (aṣba') and rhythm (ḍarb) in their works to make them singable.³¹ Also interesting is the parallelism of music and poetry. This connection reminds of the Greek poet, who was called the "bard", which means singer.³²

Harmonization between religious scholars and pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry

Arabic poetry was the major key to developing a theory of Arabic rhetoric because the discourse about poetry brought with it new forms of scientific tools like mu'ārada (criticism) or the takhmīṣ, a form of intertextuality providing the poet with the ability to use an existing composition for a new work. These techniques are of great importance since the classical Islamic sciences are based on similar tools like sharḥ (commentary) and mukhtaṣar which are developments of techniques which had been already practiced by poets.³³ The first Arab grammarians saw early Arabic poetry as a testimony to the originality and quality of Arabic language.³⁴ In brief, one could say that the purpose of Abbasid poetry was to entertain the court, but it was also the late Abbasid era that gave birth to a revival of more classical poetry through research. This revival reconciled in a way the relationship

29 Bauer, loc.cit., p. 4.

30 Motoyoshi Sumi, Akiko: "Description in classical Arabic poetry: waṣf, ekphrases and interarts theory", Leiden 2003, pp. 134-135.

31 Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī: "Kitāb al-Aḡānī", ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyār, 31 vols., Kairo 1969-1979.

32 See McKillop, James: "Bard", in: Oxford Dictionary of Celtic Mythology, Oxford 1998.

33 See Bauer, loc.cit., p. 2.

34 See Arazi et al., loc.cit., p.19.

between religion and poetry. With the 11th century poetry became a science and was not only enjoyed as entertainment. History itself contributed to make poetry thematically more original. The victory of Ṣalah al-Dīn (1138-1198) against the crusaders and the victory of Al-Zāhir Baybars (1223-1277) against the Mongols, who were considered as invincible until that time, brought the enthusiasm of days gone by back to the Arabs. This enthusiasm was expressed with poetry praising and celebrating these events.³⁵

Poetry as mass communication

Thomas Bauer sees a decline in the productivity of poets after the fall of the Abbasids and Ayyubids. One reason could be the lack in language expertise of the new dynasties, since they were non-Arabs. Another reason could be the unity between religious scholars and the non-religious elite, which was represented by the *kuttāb* (Writers). This fraction stood in opposition to the military, which had no connection to poetry at all. While mostly *kuttāb* decided what *adab* (culture) was, the religious circles tried to enter the discourse. Also the rising numbers of scholars writing poetry is a sign of this unity between the *adab*-orientated *kuttāb* and the sunna-orientated ‘*ulamā*’. For the Mamluk era Bauer characterizes the relation between scholarship and popular culture with two shortcuts: “‘*ulamā*’sation of *adab*” and “*adab*isation of ‘*ulamā*’”³⁶ To conclude: The borders between high culture and pop culture diffused. Some argue that these developments lead to the spread of literary work, containing not only poetry in a classical style but also entertaining literature for the masses.³⁷

Al-Naḥḍa – An answer in Arabic to the West

In the middle of nineteenth century the *naḥḍa* began. The *naḥḍa* is the renaissance of Arabic literature and of scholarly discourse under western influence. Some thinkers, like Jurjī Zaydān (1861-1914), see the invasion of Napoleon Bonaparte as the beginning of the *naḥḍa*.³⁸ A new generation of neoclassical poets tried to give rebirth to the *Kasida* which in their opinion was the embodiment of literary Arab cultural heritage. Nāṣīf al-Yāzījī (d.

35 See *ibid.*, p., 22.

36 See Bauer, *loc.cit.*, p. 6.

37 Shilington, Kevin: Egypt: “Mamluk Dynasty (1250-1517): Literature”, in: *Encyclopedia of African History*, vol. 1, New York 2004, pp. 443 ff.

38 See the introduction of vol. 4 in: Zaydān, Jurjī: *Tārīḥ adab al-luġa ‘arabiyya*, 4 vols., Cairo 1914.

1871) from what is today Lebanon and Sāmī al-Bārūdī (d.1914) from Egypt were the first writers who returned the Kasida to popularity in modern times.³⁹ Tomiche sees the naḥḍa as “a liberation and rejection of the shackles of the past, as well as an advance towards modernism as represented by foreign models”.⁴⁰ The naḥḍa-movement shows us the antagonism which plays a big role in the Arab region. On one hand, one criticized the political influence of the west and on the other hand western innovations, especially in scientific methodology, were welcomed. If we talk about renewal or renaissance we have to strictly differentiate between what we call naḥḍa and the tajdīd-movement, the aim of thinkers to make Islam compatible with modern times. Tomiche sees in the naḥḍa-movement an expression of hope, a beginning of a new dialogue with the West under new premises which also included the acceptance of a technical superiority of the West. But the First World War changed everything and made these hopes and the hope for independence die on the battlefields. The huge effort towards modernization by Muḥammad ‘Ali and Khedive Ismā‘il, for example, seemed to be fruitless.⁴¹

There is a close relationship between the literary search for identity and the political search for identity. At a time when neoclassical writers began to reintroduce old patterns of textualization, Palestine was confronted with Zionist immigration, and at that time there was no united Arab movement because there were disagreements on what the relationship between Arabs and the Ottoman Empire should look like. One group preferred independence from the Ottomans and the other part was in favor of a federation of Arab states administrated from Istanbul.

In terms of Christian-Muslim relations Nāṣīf al-Yāzījī, his son Ibrāhīm and writer and philologist Buṭrus al-Bustānī finished the translation of the Bible into Modern Standard Arabic in 1856. Their effort in terms of donating a political sense is not less valuable: The foundation of the Syrian Scientific Society in the year 1857 is based on proposals of Muslim Syrians while one has to thank the Yāzījī-family and al-Bustānī for shaping the organisation. The aim of the Syrian Scientific Society was to establish a scholarly discourse with the condition that religious issues, weather Christian or Islamic, had to be left aside. As fast as so called Scientific Societies were founded throughout the Arab region, it became more and more obvious that these organisations, often operating underground, were working to spread the idea of an Arab nationalism. In this effort,

39 See Arazi, p. 24.

40 Tomiche, N.: Naḥḍa, in: EI2.

41 See *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

promoting the Arabic language and a cultural heritage was the vehicle to establish a national consciousness and pride which was, as in the Syrian case, often not related to any religious affiliation. The source of national consciousness or identity consisted of the indivisibility of faith in the love for the mother country.⁴²

Mahmoud Darwish – He gave Palestine a voice

Rich in tradition, innovative, profound, but always down to earth. This could be a short characterization of Mahmoud Darwish's work. He rediscovered the voice of a people without a nation. Stefan Weidner, the German translator of many of Mahmoud Darwish's poems, selected the German title 'Wir haben ein Land aus Worten' (We have a nation, built from words) for an anthology containing poems from the years 1986-2002, which could be a good image for the self-conception of the politicized Arab poet. "They can't break or occupy my words!"⁴³, said Darwish, positioning himself in the Palestinian struggle for independence. Darwish is deeply connected with the fight of Palestinians for their rights. When Darwish published his poem 'Identity Card' in 1964 he expressed exactly what was going on in the hearts and minds of the Palestinian people. It is a poem for the Arab identity and kind of a warning if the lyrical I is speaking:

Record! I am an Arab
And my identity card is number fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth is coming after a summer
Will you be angry?

[...]

Record!
I am an Arab
I have a name without a title
Patient in a country
Where people are enraged

[...]

I do not hate people
Nor do I encroach
But if I become hungry
The usurper's flesh will be my food
Beware..
Beware..
Of my hunger
And my anger!

42 See Sinai, Anne & Pollack, Allen: "The Syrian Arab Republic : A handbook", New York 1976, pp. 36-38.

43 Ashwani, Saith: "Hope as Home in the Eye of the Storm", in: ISIM Review 15 (spring 2005), Leiden 2005, pp. 28-29.

The use of the verb “record” (sajjil) gives the impression that the setting of the poem must be a kind of a registration process. The use of the phrase “I am an Arab” plies the reader with the issue of national identity. The lyrical I is interchangeable if it states that its identification number is 50.000. A lyrical I that stands for many, suffering from the occupying forces. Sinan Antoon states in his article 'Farewell Mahmoud Darwish' that 'Identity Card' exemplifies Mahmoud Darwish's “resistance to existential and cultural erasure practised by an apartheid colonial state”.⁴⁴

Darwish was also expressing the grief and sadness of his people by taking key moments of Palestinian history and forming them into poems, hoping that catastrophes like the siege and massacre of Tal Al-Zaatar in 1976 will never be forgotten:

For two hands, of stone and of thyme
I dedicate this song.. For Ahmad, forgotten between two butterflies
The clouds are gone and have left me homeless, and
The mountains have flung their mantles and concealed me
..From the oozing old wound to the contours of the land I descend, and
The year marked the separation of the sea from the cities of ash, and
I was alone
Again alone
O alone? And Ahmad
Between two bullets was the exile of the sea
A camp grows and gives birth to fighters and to thyme
And an arm becomes strong in forgetfulness
Memory comes from trains that have left and
Platforms that are empty of welcome and of jasmine
In cars, in the landscape of the sea, in the intimate nights of prison cells
In quick liaisons and in the search for truth was
The discovery of self
In every thing, Ahmad found his opposite
For twenty years he was asking
For twenty years he was wandering
For twenty years, and for moments only, his mother gave him birth
In a vessel of banana leaves
And departed
He seeks an identity and is struck by the volcano
The clouds are gone and have left me homeless, and

44 Antoon, Sinan: “Farewell Mahmoud Darwish”, in: Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 910 (14.-20. Aug. 2008)

The mountains have flung their mantles and concealed me
I am Ahmad the Arab, he said
I am the bullets, the oranges and the memory

One of his most influential poems maybe is 'State of Siege (Ḥālat ḥiṣār) from 2002. It is dealing both with the Israeli occupation during the second Intifada and with the hopes of Palestinians in this hopeless situation. It also addresses the occupation force directly, appealing to humanity in an inhumane situation:

This siege will persist until we teach our enemies
models of our finest poetry

[...]

The soldiers measure the space between being and nothingness
with field-glasses behind a tank's armoury

We measure the space between our bodies and the coming rockets
with our sixth sense alone

You there, by the threshold of our door
Come in, and sip with us our Arabic coffee
[you may even feel that you are human, just as we are]
you there, by the threshold of our door
take your rockets away from our mornings
we may then feel secure
[and almost human]

[...]

[To a killer:] If you reflected upon the face
of the victim you slew, you would have remembered your mother in the room
full of gas. You would have freed yourself
of the bullet's wisdom,
and changed your mind: 'I will never find myself thus.'

[To another killer:] If you left the foetus thirty days
in its mother's womb, things would have been different.
The occupation would be over and this suckling infant
would forget the time of the siege
and grow up a healthy child
reading at school, with one of your daughters
the ancient history of Asia.
They might even fall in love
and give birth to a daughter [she would be Jewish by birth].
What, then, have you done now?
Your daughter is now a widow
and your granddaughter an orphan.
What have you done with your scattered family?
And how have you slain three doves in one story?

[...]

As we live in the age of video games and virtual realities, wars became a cold business.
The media states figures of casualties, starting a battle between different news

corporations for the highest death toll. Here, art can play a substantial role because it expresses emotions which are familiar to any human, while numbers remain abstract to catch. 'State of Siege' has such an overwhelming effect on the reader because Mahmoud Darwish is able to awaken a lost sense of empathy, when the Arab, who is again a role model for the struggling Palestinians, is addressing the Israeli. We, the readers, are able to get the two perspectives of people who are forced to fight against each other. Mahmoud Darwish is here breaking down the most complicated conflict of our times onto a comprehensive level of emotions, projecting a possible future for Israelis and Palestinians sealed by a hypothetical family in unity but affected by the ongoing conflict.

Nizar Qabbani – A voice for a modern relation between men and woman

Big political issues aren't the only inspiration for modern Arabic poetry. If our aim is to understand Arab culture, then the Damascene poet Nizar Qabbani is our source of knowledge regarding an awkward issue in the Arab world: the position of woman in Arab societies. In most of his poems we are confronted by a woman as the lyrical I. It is quite interesting how Nizar Qabbani, as a male, is able to describe the role of the Arab woman caught by moral values. Qabbani stated through his poetry that the tight jacket of moral values are also a problem for young male Arabs who are suffering from the social control their families exert on them in form of a supervised relationship. His first poems are dealing with the repression of physical urges young Arab males have to suffer from:

There is a woman in my red veins,
Striding with me in the folds of death,
Hissing in my bones, turning my lungs into a forge...
Desire gnaws at my core,
Its semen drawn from the primordial shore...
Compounded in my body is a hunger yearning for another,
Extending compulsive hands...⁴⁵

The later poetry of Qabbani describes a society in which the highest value is the chastity of a woman before marriage. His poetry then focuses more and more on the relationship between men and woman, and argues that the woman in marriage becomes nothing more than a piece of property that is sexually dominated by a man who takes his right to appease his sexual desires or his exclusive right to be jealous:

(A Letter to a Man)

⁴⁵ The poem *A Note to a Reader* is included in his collection *The Brunette said to me*.

My dear Master,
This is a letter from a stupid woman
Has a stupid woman before me, written to you?
My name? Lets put names aside
Rania, or Zaynab
or Hind or Hayfa
The silliest thing we carry, my Master - are names

[...]

And your East, dear Master,
Manufactures the delicate crown of the East
from the skulls of women

[...]

I am sorry my master -If I have insolently attacked the kingdom of Men
for the great literature of course -
is the literature of men
And love has always been
the allotment of men...
And sex has always been
a drug sold to men
A senile fairytale, the freedom of women in our countries
For there is no freedom
Other than, the freedom of men...
My Master
Say all you wish of me. It does not matter to me:
Shallow.. Stupid.. Crazy.. Simple minded.
It does not concern me anymore..
For whoever writes about her concerns...
in the logic of Men is called
a stupid woman
and didn't I tell you in the beginning
that I am a stupid woman?⁴⁶

In the end these two poems should show that Nizar Qabbani's poetry could be seen as a document for Arab sociology in terms of sexuality and the relation between men and woman, as scholar Salmā al-Jayyūsī states.⁴⁷ In the introduction to his book 'Diary of a Woman Who Does Not Care' he gives the reason for his approach towards woman related topics and it reveals that he is not only an advocate of woman issues but also an advocate for men who try to escape from traditional patterns but who do not succeed because of a sense of duty for the family, for the community, for traditions and/or religion.

This is the book of every woman whom this stupid, ignorant East sentenced and executed before she could open her mouth. Because of this... the East needs a man to put on woman's clothes and borrow her eyelashes and bracelets in order to write about her. Is it not the irony of fate that I should cry out with a woman's voice while woman are unable to speak with their own natural voice?!... We men... claim to be civilized while we are more primitive than the hyenas of Siberia. We study at

46 Some lines of his poem *A Letter from a stupid Woman*.

47 Al-Jayyūsī, Salmā: *Wathīqa lġtimā'iyya Hāmma*, vol. 2, Beirut 1957, p. 1.

universities in Europe and return even more savage than the Mau Mau. We present flowers to our beloved, but we saw off our sisters' necks [if found to have love affairs]. The freedom which I am asking for woman is the freedom to love, to say to a man: 'I love you', without her head thrown into the trash can... We need to break down the sex superstition, to look at it in a civilized, scientific way... I urge you to raise yourselves to the level of human beings! ...⁴⁸

Modern Egyptian Colloquial Poetry - Let the workers speak!

By the 1940s Egyptian industry emerged on a large scale. Further urbanization of Egyptian cities led to an increasing number of waged workers who tried to leave agricultural areas to try their luck in the cities.

Our tour through the history of Arabic poetry gave us an insight into the development of Arabic poetry and revealed how important poetry was in a pragmatic way. We know that the nomadic people of the desert moved to settle down in the small growing cities and that this process led also to a change in the perception of environment and therefore to a change on the contextual level of poetry. The desert became a rare topic in poems.

A similar process of contextual change began in the late nineteenth century in Egypt. Poets like Ya'ūb Sannu' (1839-1912), 'Abd Allah al-Nadim (1844-1996) Mahmoud Bayram al-Tunisi (1893-1961), Ahmad Fouad Negm (b.1929) left the path of their predecessors and chose a new form to address their readers by adding Colloquial poetry in a written form. Before that period the zajal (Colloquial Arabic poetry in strophic form) was accepted but only as an oral art. Then the writers began to use colloquial terms more and more in their poetry. This was certainly a reaction to the foreign French and British influence in Egypt. The zajal became an instrument with which Egyptians could artistically unify against the Western influence and at the same time it shaped the internal discussion about the role of the emerging worker class and its writers. Joel Beinin states that there were two contradicting positions: "While the ideological privileged image of workers in zajal is as nationalists, the style and content of the poems exhibit significant cosmopolitan-internationalist elements."⁴⁹

Ya'qūb Sannu' was the first who introduced Colloquial Arabic in a newspaper and also in theatre plays. Sannu' also understood how effective the use of Colloquial Arabic was in

48 As quoted in: Loya, Arieah: "Poetry as a Social Document: The Social Position of the Arab Woman as Reflected in the Poetry of Nizar Qabbani", in: International Journal of Middle East Studies, vol. 6, no. 4 (Oct. 1975), p. 492.

49 Beinin, Joel: "Writing Class: Workers and Modern Egyptian Colloquial Poetry (Zajal)", in: Poetics Today, Vol. 15, No. 2, Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies: Modern Period II (Summer, 1994), p. 193.

terms of propagandistic campaigns against Khedive Isma'il's government that was in Sannu's view responsible for the economical crisis in Egypt due to overtrading with European bankers. Poetry, written as *zajal*, was for him the "weapon in the armoury of humour [...] against the European presence in Egypt"⁵⁰ Sannu' pursued his aim to boost the Egyptian nationalist movement from Paris since 1877. In his weekly illustrated magazines 'Abu-Naddara Zarqa' and 'L'Univèrs Musulman' Sannu' attracted both French and Egyptian readers. While the Egyptians felt more and more confident and approved in their suspicions about possible mistakes of the Khedive's government in Egypt, the French loved the way Sannu' was praising France and dispraising the British.⁵¹ Finally he was expelled in 1878 due to his attacks on the Khedive's policies but continued to publish his poems, caricatures and articles in diverse publications.⁵²

Mahmoud Bayram al-Tunisi published his first poems in Standard Arabic and switched to *zajal*. In 1919 he published poems supporting the national uprising against the British. His poems circulated orally and were also published in his magazine 'al-Misalla' that was closely watched by the British police. He also published poems against key figures who were in support for the British like the Grand Mufti of Egypt Shaykh Muhammad Bakhit, who issued a fatwa against Bolshevism when the British argued that the nationalist uprising had its source in the extreme left:

"We open with prayers on behalf of the Prophet:
A nationalist Prophet – goddamn your father, Bakhit.
My second word, the delegation [Wafd] of Egypt our nation
Has lit its candle and found the match"⁵³

Satirizing the family of Sultan Fouad and criticizing the anti-nationalist governor of Cairo led to al-Tunisi's expulsion from Egypt in the same year. Al-Tunisi's poetry became more and more coloured by socialist thoughts. With the 1920s and 1930s his poems dealt with the most striking issues of Egyptian society; still the British presence was an issue and also the relation of modernism, Egyptian nationalism and European influence in a cultural sense. He also attacked Egyptian politicians for just following their personal interests instead of arguing for the Egyptian people. *Zajal* became a very common form to discuss

50 Beinin, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

51 See Fahmy, Ziad: "Francophone Egyptian Nationalists, Anti-British Discourse, and European Public Opinion, 1885-1910: The Case of Mustafa Kamil and Ya'qūb Sannu'", in: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2008), p. 170.

52 Beinin, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

53 As quoted in: *Ibid.*, p. 195.

and to debate matters of interest in newspapers.⁵⁴ In one of the most famous zajal poems by al-Tunisi called 'The Egyptian Worker', the worker, as the lyrical I, addresses the wealthy of his society. He is conscious that he is the reason for their wealth without being the one enjoying it. 'The Egyptian Worker' was translated and published by a group called 'Le Groupe d'Etudes' in the book 'Egypt Now'. The aim of the publication was to present a concise overview on contemporary Egyptian society for the Allied troops stationed in Egypt during World War II⁵⁵:

The Egyptian Worker

Why do I walk barefoot, while I sew your shoes?
Why is my bed bare, while I fluff your mattresses?
Why is my house a ruin, while I build your cupboards?

Is this my destiny?
God will settle accounts with you!

You live in houses on high. I build them.
You sleep in brocaded sheets. I weave them.
You own wheels of gold. I make them run.

By god, it is not envy.
But I do remind you..

From dawn to dusk the hammer is in my hands.
I bear this burden all the same until my day of rest.
The son of the streets is clothed, while I dress in rags.

You shun my steps.
And I recoil from addressing you.

Why do you tear me down, when I build up your glory?
I clothe you in cotton in linen.
On my burial day my family finds no shroud for me.
Not even sympathy, as I leave you forever.⁵⁶

Al-Tunisi inspired poets to come to use Egyptian Colloquial to express themselves and the interests of Egyptians. The poets after al-Tunisi were not all necessarily workers but they took a stand against poverty and corruption and sympathized with the Egyptian leftist movement and Egyptian workers in general. Poets like Ahmad Fouad Negm, Fouad Haddad, Salah Jaheen and Abd al-Rahman al-Abnoudi followed them and spoke through poetry for people who lost their voices.

54 See Booth, Marilyn: "Arabic Poetry, Politics, and the Press in Modern Egypt", in: *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Aug. 1992), pp. 422-430.

55 Beinin, op.cit., p. 200.

56 As quoted in: Beinin, Joel: *Writing Class: Workers and Modern Colloquial Poetry (Zajal)*, in: *Poetics Today*, Vol. 15. No. 2, *Cultural Processes in Muslim and Arab Societies: Modern Period II* (Summer, 1994), p. 198.

Songwriter and visual artist Salah Jaheen (1930-1986) is a good example of how a poet can be chronicler and speaker for his society. The group of previously named poets is a source of Egyptian national identity, expressed by poetry and also songs, sung by artists like Abdel Haleem Hafez.⁵⁷ Jaheen's work as a cartoonist was appreciated by readers of Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram for focusing the attention of the public and also the government for political mistakes and social issues.⁵⁸ One example is Jaheen's poem *In Paradise* in which he criticizes the attitude of leaders who keep on promising their people personal comfort, preventing them from speaking out against injustice. The religious connotation may propose that Jaheen saw religion used by state leaders now and then when it seems appropriate to harmonize artificially while the political and social situation is imperfect:

A golden jar
 And cushions of feathers from the ostrich
 Drink Sir, and enjoy your smugness
 Raise your eyes and you find mangos
 And plenty of fruits, more than you can imagine
 Kinds of fruits whose price I don't know
 Mangos
 Strawberries
 And bananas
 And apples, oh boy!
 And peaches and plums of the best quality
 Oh revered Sir!
 And oranges and grapes,
 Growing together on one branch... Ya Salaam!

Abracadabra...
 Abracadabra...
 Oh dignified Sir!
 Abracadabra...
 Abracadabra...

All desired things
 Demand the eyebrows of ants or the hearts of bears
 And they will quickly appear
 Amazing!

You should not do anything, just desire
 And demand, and demand things without any limit
 Everything
 Will be answered
 Of course it is a paradise, oh notable Sir...
 But there is nothing except one single thing
 That will be refused if you demand it:
 The wish to go out and pass the iron gate!

57 Radwan, Noha: "Two Masters of Egyptian Ammiyya Poetry". In: Journal of Arabic Literature, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Aug. 2004), pp. 221–243.

58 See Lutfi Al-Sayyid Marsot, Afaf: "The cartoon in Egypt". Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 13, No. 01 (Jan. 1971).

In his poem 'In Egypt's Name' (*'ala ism masr*) (1971) Jaheen expresses his love for Egypt, which is the source of his concerns:

History may say what it wishes in Egypt's name
Egypt, for me, is the most beloved and most beautiful of things.
I love her when she owns the earth, east and west.
And I love her when she is down, wounded in a battle.
I love her fiercely, gently and with modesty.
I hate her and curse her with the passion of the lovesick.
I leave her and flee down one path, and she remains in another .
She turns to find me beside her in misfortune.
My veins pulsating with a thousand tunes and rhythms.
In Egypt's name.

Ahmad Fouad Negm – folk hero and voice of the Egyptian underclass

Ahmad Fouad Negm, born in 1929 in Sharqia, Egypt to a big family belonging to the Egyptian peasantry. After the death of his father he lived with his uncle in Zagazig, and after that in an orphanage where he met the later singer and actor Abdel Halim Hafez. He was active in the underground against the British occupation and spent all in all 18 years of his life in Egyptian prisons because Egyptian politicians despised his words. With his poetry he has accompanied four decades of Egyptian policy, and an incident from 2006 shows that he did not lose his voice. During a lecture in a cultural centre in Cairo's downtown Negm congratulated Gamal Mubarak, son of Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, on his engagement to woman twenty years his younger with a poem: "You of fortune and fame for who we're all inheritance/ be merry, be game/ We couldn't care less!"⁵⁹ Negm had his breakthrough when he published 'Images from Life and Prison' while still in an Egyptian jail. In the sixties he worked with a blind traditional singer, Sheikh Imam Issa. They became as a duo famous for their sharp and satirical open opposition songs in Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. His poem 'Oh Azza, Love of my Dreams'⁶⁰ is a great example of how aesthetical aspects like the intense metaphorical language to describe a love story is combined with an attack on state security, politics in general.⁶¹

Colloquial poetry and the public

59 Slackman, Michael: In Egypt, poet keeps his word sharp. In: The New York Times of 12th May 2006.

60 At several occasions, mainly at recitals of his poetry in radio or television Negm called the poem only *Azza* or also *My Country, my Love*.

61 The complete poem can be found in the appendix of this work in English since it was recited at the event mentioned in the introduction of this work.

Above, we discussed the representatives of Egyptian poetry written in Egyptian dialect. Although some of them were and remain disliked because of their political attitudes, even their critics considered and do consider them today as talented artists. But all in all they were the beginning for a movement of writers writing in their real mother tongue. Sayed Hegab, in Al-Ahram Weekly, described the difficult relationship between Fosha (Standard Arabic) and Ammiya (Egyptian Colloquial):

Fosha is not our mother tongue. It is just a language we were taught at school. Our mother tongue is the language we are taught at home. We need to liberate ourselves from worshipping this idol. We need to regard the Arabic language as a thing created and developed by people and not imposed by the divine.⁶²

The media has recognized this new trend and, is starting to use more and more Egyptian Colloquial to address the viewers. In general, Egyptian media has opened up a little and different fields of media have merged to create superstars, capable of selling records for the music labels and at the same time capable of being a face attracting customers with product sponsorships for products imported from the West. The tension between imported mass culture from the West and indigenous cultural products became visible when windows of fast-food chains like McDonald's and KFC were smashed by young Egyptians, protesting against Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's policy against the Palestinian Authority.⁶³ Like in many other countries McDonald's has 1994 introduced a *McFalafel* to go with the consumer's taste. The marketing campaign for a new burger was supported by pop singer Shabaan Abd al-Rahim, the man who ironically had his breakthrough in 2000 with a song called 'I hate Israel' (Ana bakrah Israel) (2001) and who also sang a song called 'Amrika, ya Amrika', criticizing American foreign policy towards Israel and the Arab World, just as on his 2003 album "Hitting Iraq" he criticized American policies on Iraq⁶⁴:

heyyyy...

Enough decoys, we're fed up/ Take a look at Israel and forget about Iraq We will disarm, that's a beautiful thing/ You want to search Iraq, go search Israel instead

Since the twin towers, we've been living in a dilemma/ If one thousand died then, how many more thousands have died as a result

Now it's Iraq after the Afghanis/ Nobody knows who will be next

Leave Iraq alone, people, there's nothing left there/ The strikes have brought it down and finished off everything

62 As quoted in: Khallaf, Rania: "Son of a widowed city". In: Al-Ahram Weekly No. 915 (18th - 24th Sept. 2008).

63 See Gordon, Joel: Singing in the pulse of the Egyptian-Arab street: Shabaan Abd al-Rahim and the geo-pop-politics of fast food. In: Popular Music, Vol. 22/1 (2003), p.73.

64 See Khalil, Nevine: "Play it again, Shabaan", in: Al-Ahram Weekly No. 629 (13th -19th March 2003).

Do you want to divide it up, or what exactly?/ Or is the truth that you have your eye on the oil?

I fear for them and to be honest I'm at a loss/ Are you coming to fulfil the Israeli dream?

We will destroy terrorism and expel the occupiers/ Hitting Iraq is never the solution

The people of Iraq are pitiable, what can they do/ From the beginning they have been the victims

If for once they listened to us, no one would have invaded/ And the outsider would not have come

We sent hundreds of messages, we were like busy bees/ If only they would have listened

The president could sense it, he sent him a hundred letters/ He didn't listen to anything and put stones in his ears

I wish I could see the Arabs like the crescent and the moon/ I wish for once one of our conferences would be a success.

Enough excuses, we're fed up/ Take a look at Israel and forget about Iraq

While criticism on American policy on Iraq was kind of acceptable and popular since it was shared with most communities in the West, the McDonald's US Head Office decided to end the work with Shabaan Abd al-Rahim due to criticism expressed by the American Jewish Congress after the release of *I hate Israel*⁶⁵:

I hate Israel
And I'll say it if I'm asked
Even if I get murdered
Or thrown in jail
I love Hosni Mubarak
Because his mind is broad
If he takes a step
He weighs it with his conscience
I hate Israel
Because it adores destruction
And hates development
I love Yasser Arafat
He's very dear to me
The Egyptian people are mourning
The tears are running
I hate Israel
And Shimon and Sharon
I love Amr Moussa
Because his words are balanced
What's the guilt of the children
Who die every day?
People carrying weapons
And people carrying sticks
I hate Israel
And all of us do
We're all angry
It's Jerusalem we care about
When Aldura died

65 See Atia, Tarek: "Good night, Mr. Hamburger", in: Al-Ahram Weekly No. 540 (28th June - 4th July 2001).

The president was in mourning
And they said it in the newspaper:
Who's consenting to this oppression?
I hate Israel
And I hate Ehud Barak
Because he's a dullard
And the people all hate him
Egypt has always been rational
And can bear a lot
But when we became enraged
We withdrew our ambassador
I hate Israel
And ask the blood of the martyrs
And ask the ones who crossed
In that glorious October
I hate Israel
Because of South Lebanon
And Jerusalem and Iraq
And Syria and Golan

This song is an example of how the traditional form of a mawwāl is used to boost a political message. A mawwāl is characterized by a longer pronunciation of vowels and all in all a non-rhythmic interpretation of a poetic text and has its origin in pre-Islamic times when the poet improvised poetical text and also music to demonstrate his skills.⁶⁶ It is interesting to see how the layāly - a common mawwāl phrase "ya 'ain ya layl" (oh eye, oh night) - is replaced in the song by the formula "I hate Israel". On the contextual level it is a song representing public opinion and present climate, not only in Egyptian society. It is important to mention that this song is far from a call to arms: It is reflecting public antipathy for Israel while giving reasons for this antipathy. Although this kind of so called *sha'abi* (popular) music is certainly not loved by the upper class of people in Egypt, it perhaps reflects the view of most Egyptians. As we know now, the background of an artist must not be linked with his abilities to produce cultural material and maybe art. This has to be mentioned, because in a society where the middle class is diminishing and people are closing their eyes to avoid seeing poverty, one might say that poetry, sung or written, could only be produced by people from the middle- or upper-classes.

Conclusion

We have now seen some examples of what poetry could tell us about people with a different background. As a scientist one could analyse poetry to find out something about gender related topics, about Muslim-Christian relations at a specific time, about historical

⁶⁶ <http://www.maqamworld.com/> is the no. 1 resource for information about Arabic music forms, last checked 7th November 2009.

events and how they are perceived by different people. This possibility is of great importance if we understand that in some countries people do not have the right to speak freely, where chief editors of newspapers are afraid of going to prison after every edition, where religion is used for political manoeuvres, where websites are blocked by service providers because of governmental jurisdiction, where people are tortured by their own fellow citizens in uniform, where corruption is like terminal cancer devouring society, where state schools and universities do not want you to grow up, where silence and loyalty is taught. In that situation poetry might be a weapon to tell everyone what is going on, often in such a metaphorical manner that censorship realizes the explosiveness of the topic dealt with in the poem only a long time after the piece was published through different ways. Poetry inherits, as we saw, the consciousness of a group of people. Art here does not mean the reader's joy of decrypting imagery; art is, in those cases of oppression mentioned above, to use imagery as a weapon of protest when it is not allowed to speak openly.

We saw that poetry as an art was and is in the Arab World more connected to scientific and political discourses and has always been not only an instrument to entertain, but also more an instrument of guidance and kind of a secular counterpart of divine revelation, inspiring people to act. The challenges these artists are facing are tremendous. The Judiciaries of many countries in the Arab World charge people with blasphemy or insulting the state leader. We do not have to talk about the right or wrong of freedom of speech, but in these cases mainly the judiciary or religious leaders decide whether a poem is an insult or not: The reader as a citizen is not asked for any judgement.

These cases show us that art is inextricably interwoven with politics. For outsiders poetry and art in general can be an indicator of how free a society really is. Therefore scientists should not only deal with stylistic aspects of literature or contextual debates that are not dealing with the here and now. Scientific publications on poets from the Arab World tend to deal with the usual suspects from the past. With due respect for their works it should be possible to clear the way for the younger generation of poets who are, and this is distressing and shocking at the same time, dealing with the same topics in their poetry as their famous predecessors. This is because the political landscape has not changed or if it has, then it has become an obscene version of democracy, playing with moral double standards, harming the credibility of religion and of politics.

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APPENDIX: The recited poems

***Al-Ṣallaḥ and Al-Kabba* by Salem Shahbany**

Two poems about games children used to play in Egypt, about childhood, identity and life in general. Before the poet recites the poem, he will explain the rules of the game.

***The House has a God* by Ayman Massoud**

This poem has a religious connotation. The title means that the inhabitants of the house are safe because there is someone who takes care. Actually the poem then adds a political dimension when it speaks about demonstrations and the flimsy will to promote change in the society.

***The Bats know where the Way is* by Mohamed Mansour**

This poem talks in a mythical language about the contradiction between light (knowledge, freedom) and darkness. Darkness seems to have in this poem not bad connotations. It seems that darkness is preparing a new dawn of knowledge and freedom. The picture of drowning people seems to stand for desperate people. Some of them managed in my opinion to escape, still connected with their mother country. Also this poem talks about a change in society and politics and is – if politically translated – very intense in its message: "Between the eternal course towards extinction [the situation now] and the bloody course

towards perfection [maybe the price for a revolution?]"

***Your Beloved Beirut.. Beirut, My Darling* by Nizar Qabbani**

(translated by Ayman Massoud, Mohamed Mansour and Mustafa Ali Moussa)

This poem deals with the political problems in Lebanon, describing the civil war. The lyrical I speaks for people who blame themselves for the situation. Beirut appears here as the lover of the lyrical I which makes this poem very emotional.

***In Paradise* by Salah Jaheen (translated by Ramy Yahya)**

This poem plays with the promises of paradise. The style is very sarcastic and biting to give the main point at the end: All promises are of no worth if you are not able to enjoy basic freedoms.

***From Gropi to the Rain* by Amr Hassan)**

This poem gives us a vivid picture of Cairo Downtown area. It gives us ideas about consumption and the attitude towards the western influence. It criticizes the imitation of the western style of consumption in Egypt.

***To a Person whose Name I dare not mention* by Ayman Massoud**

This poem leaves room for many interpretations: Is it about the crusaders? Is the author speaking about the Arab attitude to talk more about the past than about the future? Is it about leaders of Arab regimes who positioned themselves into a godlike position?

***The Clown* by Fouad Haddad (translated by Amr Hassan)**

This poem tells us about a man who is hired by the king to make the prince laugh again. All in all this poem is questioning if a person should practice civil disobedience or not.

***They talk, convinced of their Suspicion* by Mostafa Ali Moussa**

This poem deals about the social control many especially young people in Arab societies are complaining about. The man in the poem stands for everyone in society trying to keep for himself a little bit of privacy.

***The Sura of Revolution* by Ramy Yahya**

Ramy Yahya is describing the situation of people oppressed by a ruler and his delegates and relates it to the story of Moses and the Pharaoh in the Bible and in the Qur'ān, where Haman is the Secretary of the Pharaoh. The style of the poem is similar to the style used by Mahmoud Darwish although Darwish used Qur'ān for the noble cause of giving Palestinians a voice in world affairs. Ramy Yahya could be criticized, especially because he writes in Egypt. In a country where some people call the President a pharaoh.

***At the Station of a Train Which Fell Off the Map* by Mahmoud Darwish**

(translated by Ayman Massoud, Mohamed Mansour and Mostafa Ali Moussa)

Mahmoud Darwish needs rarely an introduction. This poem was published 2008, marking sixty years of Nakba. Mahmoud Darwish himself experienced the Nakba himself 1948 when he was a child.

***Oh lover of Dreams, Oh Azza* by Ahmad Fouad Negm**

(translated by Salem Al-Shahbany)

This poem deals with a state in which its citizens are even not allowed to dream about love. The poem can be sharply divided. While the first part is just dealing with the love relation between the lyrical I and a girl called Azza, the second part is a description of the injustice of people who should work to promote justice.

***Do not Reconcile!* by Amal Donqol**

(translated by three of the poets)

For many people in the Middle East and especially in Egypt it was not acceptable at all that Sadat tried to normalize the relations between Egypt and Israel. For them it was a high a price many people paid in Egypt and in Palestine. Maybe Amal Donqol's poem is the most famous poem from the Arab World of modern times. Everybody connected with Arabic heritage is touched and deeply impressed by the way Donqol commemorates Arab history, Arab suffering and the way he relates the events to the situation in a family in which cousins are killing each other...

Şallah
by Salem Al-Shahbany

Rules of the game: There is a group of children. From this group one boy is chosen to stand with closed eyes, showing his back in front of the group. The boys slap then one of his hands. The boy in front of the group then turns around and tries to guess who from the group slapped him. The positions are changed if he succeeds to find the right person.

I was standing watching
At my shadow that
Got ahead of me step by step

Does he look like me
And me like him?
And does he know me
Like I know him?
And why is he one time behind me
And why I am one time behind him?
Is his life same like mine ?
Or is my life a double to his?

.....

Does he love
Like I love
Had he kids
And a wife and a house?
Or is he living like
A castaway of love... seriously wounded?
And why he goes
When the night passes over me?
Is there an old hostility
Between him and the night?
Or are the words between them
Nothing worth to mention?
And why he does not hang out by night and stays awake?!

Does he love poetry (of Fouad) or songs of Moneeb
"Inside the house a palm will grow, blooming well and giving shadow"
Does he love to drink tea at Al-Taka'eeba Coffee at sunset
Or does he like to have his tea at home?

Is it possible
That between us there is
The separation
And the disaffection
And if
It is possible
Who of us will be able
To accept the distance
Because I see him many times
I feel that we are one
What is if
The call of death
Will follow me
Or will he be scared
And pass over me?
Where will he go?

And I know
That he is alone
It is not possible for him
To survive a second
I am his friend
The only one in the universe
Dependent
His existence
Is related to mine in this world

Al-Kabba
by Salem Al-Shabany

Rules of the game: A game for two boys who choose for each one of themselves five round stones. Then they have to decide who begins. Both throw their stones into the air and try to catch them with their backhand. The beginner is the boy who is able to keep more stones than his opponent on his backhand. Then they throw all stones on the ground. The first player takes one of his stones, throws it into the air and catches it. While throwing and catching the stone he has to collect one stone from the ground, then two, then three, then four. Then he throws again all stones in the air and tries to catch it with the backhand. The points the player gets are counted by the stones that are left on the backhand.

Life throws us
Into the air
And we fall down
On the face of the street
We hide from our days
Still kids in the yard of the house
They were playing Al-Kabba
And a nightingale was their guest

(..... Help us God,
To be happy
So God will)

It was not up to them
To join the game
The crying was not wanted
Birthday
Street
And something in the absence
And people going to the promised death

Five steps
And the life is
Throwing us into the air
We fall down
On the back of the crying
And we split

Our problems decorate our souls
And our injuries increase
And they slaughter us
We scream in time
He returns

And it returns
Everybody who got lost
Like the bird who is doing "Fawaaaaahoooo!"*
He does smalltalk with every stranger on the way
He asks everyone he meets about the bird from the past
Who stole his feathers, pride and glory
He raises his voice and screams into the night

Fawaaaaahooooooooooooo!
Fawaaaaahooooooooooooooooo!

* ((فواهو)) is the sound of a small Indian bird. In the old Indian legends this word is the question about the whereabouts of the peacock who actually stole the beautiful feathers he is crowning himself with.

The House has a God
by Ayman Massoud

Two thousand adventures
And this heart
Nothing made it exhausted, except love
Years bled from the vein of life
The worries in the cells of heart went away

The tears on my cheeks played dirges
while I was travelling
In the green area of my forehead
My craving squeezes me
In the corner of the corridor

The house has a god
Who cares about it
He feeds the poor with dreams of gold

The house has a god
And there is for every plant
A sip in the skies

The house has a god
Because of that the enclosed heart
between my ribs
is like thousand windows

And the sun does not express
Two thousand intrigues for me
And i am the signer under them

And I am the gladiator of the victory over my defeat
I am threatened by the voice of jasmine
I came to beg for your mercy
To return
To you

We invented the years
My storm on the siege
Destroy it
Destroy me

Take from me your horses
Pull me with my hand towards myself
Because I missed myself

Thirst is in my eyes
It belongs to a lake
Between your cheeks
And its stream started towards me
To start my way

The voice of flowers
Are on your lips
It fired my torch

Two thousand demonstration
I make them here
The heart is throttled by the exclamations
After I knew you

I told my adventurous heart
To be scared

I am truly scared

The Bats know where the Way is
by Mohamed Mansour

(1)

In the darkness
A hand alphabetizes the emptiness
The heart organizes its beats
Eyes are searching for their light in the corners

In the darkness
The nightmares spread their events in a position
To persist on the top of the maelstrom
Every sleep is life for them

The darkness is caring like the womb for our prophetic ideas
Nothing lives in the fear of darkness
Except words

And nothing except stories

(2)

In the darkness
The stars gaze at us
The spirit of the rebellious rise in eagerness

In the darkness
The tears of the beautiful
Fall without concern

In the darkness
The poems rise
And wake up with the heart of the drowning people
Dream of salvation

They doze with eyelids that wanted to return
Glance of absence !

(3)

In the darkness, the definite is a probability

The bats know where the way is

The sound is the eye of those whose shadows disappeared

They disappeared in the night
And almost their voices call from far away
They give their names back to the shadows

(4)

In the darkness
Windows are not windows
And the colour does not know the opposite
All distances are unknown
The borders: Borders for those who wanted the outward voyage
To let the time split itself into two times
To let the desire split itself into two desires

Till we see the life in confusion

Your Beloved Beirut... Beirut, My Darling
by Nizar Qabbany

(1)

Forgive us...

Because we let you die alone...

We passed through the exit of the room, crying like escaping soldiers

Forgive us...

We saw your flowery blood that streams like the rivers of the valley

We watched the act of adultery...

And we kept quiet...

(2)

Oh... how disgusting people we were, and we were cowards...

When we saw you, oh Beirut, at the slave market

We booked the splendid apartments in l'Elysée district and in Mayfair district of London...

We washed the sadness with wine, sex and gambling

We remembered - the roulette table, the national news

And we missed the oleander of Lebanon...

And the age of pomegranate...

We cried like woman cry...

(3)

Oh... Beirut,

Mistress of the golden heart

Forgive us...

We made you to fuel and firewood

For the conflict that tears from the meat of Arabs

Since it was Arab

(4)

Make me sure about you

Oh Mistress of the sad face

How is the sea?

Did they kill it by the bullet of murder like the others?

How is the love?

Did it become also a refugee...

Between thousands of refugees?

How is the poetry?

After you, oh Beirut, who will sing poetry?

This war, without a meaning, slaughtered us...

It emptied totally our importance...

It threw us into the farthest places of the earth...

Unwanted...
Crushed...
Sick...
Suffering...
It made us, contradicting to the predictions, lost Jews...

(5)
This time... The army of Israel did not betray us...
But we killed ourselves...

(6)
Forgive us, Lady Beirut,
We did not leave you any option... Just to get divided...
We got bored...
From the toilet of politics...
From the kings of the circus... and the circus... and the deceit of the players
We were unbelievers...
And the shops that are everywhere in the city
Are selling the people in a malicious act and in grudge
And covers... and carpets... and smuggled fuel.. .
Oh my lady, how much are we suffering...
When we read about the sun in Beirut, that became
A ball at the legs of the mercenaries...

(7)
What can we write, my lady?
We are judged by death if we believe
Then we are judged by death if we lie
What can we write, my lady?
We cannot object against it...
Or scream...
Or splutter...
Or show our disappointment...
Or hope...
This war that is meaningless made us silent...

(8)
They demanded us to enlist in the school of killing...
But we decided to refuse...
They demanded that we split god into two parts
But that made us shy...
We are truly believers in god...
Why they made god here... without meaning?
They demand us to testify against the love...
But we did not testify...
They demanded from us... to curse Beirut that is wheat... and love
And tenderness... it fed us
They demanded...
That we cut the benevolent breasts that nursed us...
And we apologized...

We stood against everyone of the killers
We stayed in the plains of Lebanon... the mountains...
We stayed in the south of Lebanon... and in the north...
We stayed with the crossed Lebanon and the Lebanon of the crescent
We stayed with the Lebanon of the bridges...
The Lebanon of grapes...
The Lebanon of eagerness...
We stayed with Lebanon that taught us poetry...
And gave us the gift of writing

(9)

Oh, my lady Beirut
If peace comes,
We would come back like the birds that died from the strangeness and cold...
To search for our nest between the ruins...
To search for 50.000...
We were killed without meaning...
To search for our family and our lovers
They went away without meaning...
And the homes... the fields... the swings... the children...
The plays... the pens... the scetchbooks...
We were burned without a meaning...
Oh, my lady Beirut...
If peace comes,
We would come back like seagulls
Desire and longing were slaughtered
We have a desire for Manqousha El-Za'ter [Lebanese dish]... and the night...
And the one who was selling bracelets made of Jasmine
Is it possible, oh Beirut, that you do not recognize us?
In fact you changed a lot...
We changed a lot...
We became older – in two years - as if it were thousands of years

(10)

We bore our exilation two months...
We drank our tears two months...
We searched in the corners of the world for new love
But we did not love...
We drank wine from every varicose vein...
But we were not drunk
We were searching for a backup for you,
Oh, you greatest Beirut...
Oh, you kindest Beirut...
Oh, you purest Beirut...
But we did not find it
And returned...
We kiss the earth whose stones write poetry...
And whose trees write poetry...
And whose walls write poetry...
We held you at our chest...

Fields... birds... the corniche... and the sea...
We screamed like madmen on the deck of the ship...
You are Beirut...
And there is no other Beirut

In Paradise
by Salah Jaheen

A golden jar
And cushions of feathers from the ostrich
Drink Sir, and enjoy your smugness
Raise your eyes and you find mangos
And plenty of fruits, more than you can imagine
Kinds of fruits whose price I don't know
Mangos
Strawberries
And bananas
And apples, oh boy!
And peaches and plums of the best quality
Oh revered Sir!
And oranges and grapes,
Growing together on one branch... Ya Salaam!

Abracadabra...
Abracadabra...
Oh dignified Sir!
Abracadabra...
Abracadabra...

All desired things
Demand the eyebrows of ants or the hearts of bears
And they will quickly appear
Amazing!

You should not do anything, just desire
And demand, and demand things without any limit
Everything
Will be answered
Of course it is a paradise, oh notable Sir...
But there is nothing except one single thing
That will be refused if you demand it:
The wish to go out and pass the iron gate!

From Groppi to the Rain
by Amr Hassan

In the morning
The sun rose from the plastic purse
And laughed

Downtown
A clear snapshot into the direction of the people
One moment
The scowl became or intense
And the laughs became less
I have been seeing her for two years watching the dress
She did not go away, nor the shop window got bored
Everything what happens is
That when she opens her plastic purse
The novel ends

Some
consider her existence as an obstacle on the way
The store-keeper
Considers her as an advertisement
As a human mannequin

There is another shop window in the street
That makes the people leave their routine
That makes them concious about the European style

I testify
That this girl
Looks like lined up sweets behind the glass of Groppi

From the high balcony
The doors of the square are crossed
Four directions for the moon
And it took the coat of the sun before its dismissal
The sick sun complies to the thaw
And the cold
draws his laughs on the collar of the coat

Here the abnormal is normal
Parisian perfume in the blue collar
And Eau de Cologne from the cheapest perfume sellers

The person who goes to the Bolschoy Ballet Show at 8.30
And who preferred popcorn and a hug of a girl
Are here

The Songs of the licorice juice sellers for the thirsty
And the Vodka that still is in the hug of the foreigner
Until the last cent

Here is the exit of time
The December looks through the hole of the year to the other year
I did not find any light, so i got sad

At the square is
The core of experience
The salt for those who love the salt in the memory
At the square was a poor man
He stole a wing of illusion from
The feather of the sky
And dreamed to fly

The Shop window mixes the buyer with the goods
As if the Feteer baker
Is offering the people to the Feteer

At the square are the walkers,
The sellers, the woman handbags and the love songs

A streetboy's view traces the
Hair of a foreign girl
And his heart shivers
Like a floundering fish drowning in the bag

The aristocrat from the hug of the north
And the suffering southerner
Share the same seat in the bus

This is the only place in the world
Where you can't differentiate between
The guilty one and the holy one

Here is the party of the girl with the dress
She was standing and continued to gaze in deprivation
She did not fail, nor did she success

In the morning
The sun rose from the plastic purse
And laughed

To a Person whose name I dare not mention by Ayman Massoud

My master
I am searching for my blood
Under the ruins
Of the crying suicidal shadow
Burrow under the blackness of the found
To dig a well of secrets
Take now revenge
for the trees, full of olives
To kill the violence of the waterfalls

Welcome the fabrication of destiny
Create a statue
To make the sunrays yours
To reproduce the meow of the cat
To take care of the senses of fire

Do not ask me
To be solid
Like the rays of the running and flexed illusion
Behind the fences

Do not demand from me
To kill a morning that is
Roaring by night
When the blackness of darkness became intense
In its blood

Or when it queues the rays
In shining songs and flowers

My master
Take from the spin of love
a cut off vein
And make bring me into life with it

I vow that you are a river for the freedom
Recover the arteries
Of the sun
Light is running out its leaks

Swear to your illusion
Believe
That you are the guard of earth

If there is a god
Who comes to practise his reign
Fight him

Everything is the same in two categories
"Your hand does the good"
Everyone chants "نهج البردة" [poem to praise prophet Mohamed]
Between your hands
It is announced
That you were born before the sun was born

It is vowed that you are master of the sea
Do not be shy
Oh master
If your wonderful stomach guzzles
For the rest of its life
If your voice is honoured in the radio
The beat of the orient shakes the earth from Baghdad to Bab al-Sabr
When your right hand travels
Through the map of this world
Towards the East

It fills our senses with proud
We are your slaves
Until there are insurgents who order us
To deny your great will

And they say that there is another god
Who supports the victory
They commit feelings of revolution
Against the poverty

Everyone of them dreams
That he moves like a hurricane
And swims in the light of the dawn

Yours are the features of their revolution
Sometimes
They eat the fear
If they are hungry

And if they are thirsty
Everyone of them
Drinks a cup of patience

Everyone of them
Travels one day towards Jerusalem
And hugs the songs of Baghdad
They vowed to flow towards it
Between the prayers of the farmers

With a groan of agony
He got his hand out of his pocket
Black days became white

Excuse me master
I am one of them
So allow me

 to shiver
When I see Arabian blood
Is colouring the earth of the paths
Allow me

 to explode
When i feel that my mothers turn comes tonight
 to blow up your house

You changed the qibla [direction of prayer] towards your forehead
Then you ordered us
To pray

The Clown
by Fouad Haddad

I have a short story for you, good boy
It is my father who lived it
Nobody before me engraved it, to make it a message or a written piece
My father was like me a clown, but sad
And I was a cute child
My head is like his head
Its shape is like the shamoot [a breed of orange]
His voice – God bless his soul – was like a whistle
His body moved back and forth like a plow
His bones were bouncing in his dress

Once upon a day... pay attention
Here comes the main point of the story
The king called my father and the king was greater than the mayor
He hired him as a court jester for the heir to the throne
And he said to my father: "You are more playful than the eel"
If you can make the boy laugh I will increase your income
If you make the boy sad I will cut your throat
Understand my words and walk with your head up high

My father – God bless his soul – had enough problems
He raised the white weapon and cut his own throat by himself

The boy continued to cry and my father died satisfied
My father died satisfied because he opposed the orders of the king

The days when the king was the king
The pocket money of hope was compressed
Since these days I have a cold
And my eyes are like a tap
And my tears are faithful
A sea without coasts

They talk, convinced of their Suspicion
by Mostafa Ali Moussa

They talk, convinced of their suspicion:
He cleans his moons with the bark of the dog at the door

He was sleeping for two hours... free of noise like a dead man,
Empty of memories...

He dried the moon and got it back to its turquoise place where it was...

They talk, convinced of their suspicion
The sleep was light so do not scrape the night at his door!
The wing of the butterfly was broken in his bed
And it crashed with a nightmare on the tiles of the floor
This was not in our mind;
Actually he was walking under the wing of the butterfly till it recovered...
He came at a wrong time...

They talk, convinced of their suspicion.
He was lost like a sheep which did not find his herd...
He was sleeping on himself as if he were in a grave

He answered his teacher when he was asked what he wants to be when he grows up:

When I grow up,
- his eyes moved through the air where god is -

I want to be a secret!

The Sura of Revolution

by Ramy Yahya

Ten years and you still toss the palm of truth towards yourself
And you still keep on..
The palm does not want to let dates of knowledge fall down
Declare publicly your miracle
This miracle is..
That you are able to survive
Show your empty pocket.. and it will begin to shine for the watching crowd
The hidden hunger behind you is waiting for them.. they are the throwers
And act like this a second time, giving away the dignity

But take care..

1. Prophecy is not a shawl that you put on your shoulders..

And perform for the creatures that don't know how to get the license of prophecy out of
their lumber-room

2. Prophecy is behaviour, not just any miracles
3. Not everyone who stands beside you is with you.. beware of Judas the Samaritan

Focus on the eyes of the people

The sign of the believer is if you see in his eye seven meagre cows..

And in the other eye seven cows, more meagre than the others

They ordered the believers.. Tense your arms like gearwheels

Circle your eyes like waterwheels

Pray in a communal crying... without imam

When your tears cover the courts of the pharao...

Do not end your prayer

Intensify your chants with eagerness

It is of importance that they spice up the hood of Haman

And the sceptre swims in the hand of his master

And he explains: You saw eleven stars and the sun and moon.. equal

If your eyes become white like the eyes of your father

Then remember the blackness of the well

The bracelets of the queen..

The key of the prince's treasury..

The escaping treasure map..

The fruits are not in season

If all of that is floating on the face of the collective miracle

Do not interrupt the prayer and go for the spoils of war [al-anfal]

Proceed with the hymns

There are still two rak'ahs [Kneeling in prayer] and the Flood will become reality.

As recently as the water covers the buildings of mudd

Hit the throne with your stick

To go through his perdition

To a world without crowns

Then all people find their needs

At the Station of a Train Which Fell Off the Map

by Mahmoud Darwish

Grass, dry air, thorns, and cactus on the tracks

There, the shape of the object in the absurdity of non-shape is chewing its own shadow

There is nothingness there, tied and surrounded by its opposite

Two doves flying

over the roof of an abandoned room at the station

The station is like a tattoo which has dissolved into the body of the place

There are also two thin cypresses, like two long needles

embroidering a lime-yellow cloud

And there is a tourist photographing two scenes:

The first: the sun lying down on the bed of the sea

The second: the wooden bench without the traveler's sack

(The hypocritical heavenly gold is bored of its own solidity)

I stood at the station, not to wait for the train

or for my hidden feelings in the aesthetics of some distant object

But to know how the sea went mad and how the place broke like a porcelain jar

To know when I was born, where I lived

how birds migrated South or North

Is what is left of me still enough for the light imaginary to triumph

over the decay of the real?

Is my gazelle still pregnant?

(We have aged. we have so aged and the road to the sky is long)

The train moved like a peaceful snake from Syria to Egypt

It's whistling hid the hoarse bleating of goats from the wolves' voracity

As if it was a mythical time to tame the wolves to befriend us.

Its smoke billowed over the fire in the villages

which were blossoming like trees.

(Life is self-evident and our homes, like our hearts, have open doors)

We were kind and naïve. We said: The land, our land
Is the heart of the map and will not be afflicted by any external ailment.
The sky is generous with us and we rarely speak classical Arabic:
At prayer time and on the night of al-Qadr.
Our present converses with us: "We live together."
Our past entertains us: "If you need me, I will return."
We were kind and dreamy
so we did not see tomorrow stealing its prey, the past, and departing.

(Just a second ago our present was growing wheat and gourds and dancing with the valley)

I stood at the station at sunset:
Are there still two women in one who is polishing her thigh with thunder?
Two mythical- enemies-friends- and twins on the roofs of the wind
One flirts and the other fights with me?
Has the shed blood ever broken one sword so I can say:
My first goddess is with me?

(I believed my old song to belie my reality)
The train was a wild ship docking. . . and carrying us
to the realistic cities of imagination
whenever we needed some innocent play with destinies.
The windows of the train have the status of the magical in the mundane:
everything runs. Trees, thoughts, waves and towers run behind us.
The scent of lemons, the air and all things run.
So does the yearning for an ambiguous distant. The heart runs.

(Everything was concordant and discordant)

I stood at the station
I was abandoned like the time attendant's room in that station.
I was a robbed man looking at his coffers and asking himself:
Was that field, that treasure, mine?

Was this lapis lazuli, wet with humidity and night dew, mine?
Was I, one day, the butterfly's student in fragility and boldness at times,
and her colleague in metaphor at others?
Was I, once, mine? Does memory fall sick with me and have a fever?

(I see my trace on a stone and I think it's my moon so I stand and recite:)

Another elegy and I will kill my memories by standing at the station.
I do not love this dry and forgotten grass now
This absurd despair, writing the biography of forgetfulness in this mercurial place.
I do love like the daisies on prophets' graves.
I do not like my salvation through metaphor
even if the violin wants me to be an echo to myself.
I only love returning to my life
so that my end can be a narrative for my beginning.

(Like the sound of bells: Time was broken right here)

I stood when my wound was sixty years old
I stood at the station not to wait for the train
or for the cheers of those returning from the south to grain spikes,
but to preserve the shore of olives and lemons in the history of my map.
Is this. . . all this for absence? And for what is left of the crumbs of the unseen for me?
Did my ghost pass by and waive from a distance and disappear?
Did I ask it: Is it that whenever the stranger smiles and greets us we slaughter a gazelle?

(The echo fell from me like a pinecone)

Nothing guides me to myself except my intuition.
Two fugitive doves lay the letters of exile on my shoulders
and then fly at a pale height.
A tourist passes by and asks me: Can I photograph you to respect truth?
I said: What does that mean?
She said: Can I photograph you as an extension of nature?
I said: Possible. . . everything is possible

Have a good evening and leave me alone with death. . . and myself!

(Here, truth has one lonely face and therefore. . . I will recite)

You are you even if you lose

You and I are two in the past and one tomorrow

The train passed by and we were not watchful

Get up intact and optimistic!

Do not wait for anyone except you over there

Here the train fell off the map half way on the coastal road

Fires blazed the heart of the map and then were put out by the late winter

We have aged, we have aged so much before returning to our first names!

(I say to the one who sees me through a binocular atop the watchtower: I do not see you. I do not see you)

I see my place, all of it, around me

I see myself in the place with all my parts and names

I see the palm trees correcting the errors in my classical Arabic

I see the habits of almond blossoms training my song for a sudden joy

I see my trace and follow it

I see my shadow and I pick it up from the valley

with the tweezers of a bereaved Canaanite woman

I see the invisible gravity of the full and complete beauty

that flows in the eternity of the hills. I do not see my sniper.

(I become a guest to myself)

There are the dead who light fires around their graves

There are the living who prepare dinner for their guest

There are enough words for metaphor to rise above events

Whenever the place is distressed, a copper moon lights it and expands it

I am a guest of my self. Its hospitality will embarrass and over joy me

I will choke on words and words will choke on difficult tears

The dead will drink the mint of immortality with the living

and will not talk too much about resurrection.

(There is no train. No one will wait for the train)

Our country is the heart of the map

The heart pierced like a metal coin in the market

The last passenger from somewhere in Syria to Egypt did not return

to pay the sniper's fee for his extra work, as the strangers expect

He did not return and did not carry his death and birth certificate with him

so that the scholars of resurrection would know his place in paradise

We were such angels and fools when we believed the banners and horses

and believed that an eagle's wing will lift us above!

(My sky is a thought and earth is my favorite exile)

It's just that I only trust my intuition.

For proofs there is impossible dialogue.

For genesis there are the lengthy interpretations of philosophers.

For my idea about my world there is a defect caused by departure.

For my eternal wound there is a tribunal without a neutral judge

Tired of truth, the judges tell me: It is just that traffic accidents are common.

The train fell off the map

And you were burned by the past's ember

It was not an invasion!

But I say: It's just that I only trust my intuition.

I'm still alive!

Oh Azza, Love of my Dreams
by Ahmad Fouad Negm

The desire is spreading in the blood

And the love

Is the blooming kindness

And the longing to be close is great

My inner core hurts

Oh Azza
Your smile is the appearing dawn
You erased the sad night
You are the thaw of the morning that drops
Over my dry cheeks
It wetted their longing
It awoke the colours of flowers above them
Every cheek is a tattoo of flowers
Who tastes them
Who except you
My life
My angel
Oh breeze of love when you storm
It shakes my heart like an earthquake

This night, they came and took me, my angel
Two lazybones
And a dozen bulls
I was dreaming my beloved
I was dreaming
Of you
You and me, as if we were
In a green garden
Surrounded by oranges
And dragonflies
And carnations
I am running towards you and
You are passing by me and you are running towards me and
You are Hugging me
I am drinking in the scent
From your lips
And the branches
Standing and watching
Taking care of us
Just afraid of the eyes
And the eyes are saying words
And the words are flying like the dove
That calls us with songs
That endows peace on us as a gift

I was dreaming, my beloved
I was dreaming
Of you
Yes of you
Who except you,
My life
My angel
Oh breeze of love when you storm
It shakes my heart like an earthquake
Oh lover of the dreams, oh Azza

Suddenly,
My beloved,
A impulsive sudden voice went into the air
A voice that quickens the blood:

Wake up, Ahmad!
Wake up, Ahmad!
And it ended the beautiful dream
And the big issues started

- Where is Imam?
- Who are you?
- We are delegated people, so come on easily with us and you will not be harmed.
We are excused.
- You are earthworms and

A horrible blight,
You are grains of sand
In the eyes of the Caliph,
You are the whips of complains
And my tragedy,
You are a disease in the body of my country,
You are rotten!

– Shut up, son of dogs!
Eat dust!

They searched through every place
They took out the boards of the closet
They masked me, my beloved
They grabbed me, my beloved
They stood me up... they sat me down
They went through every hair of my body with their eyes
They carved the pillow like madmen
And then they ended the inspection
Nothing
Believe me
Do not be afraid
Are there any forbidden things with me, Azza?!
Except me loving people
And hating to keep silent
Inside my eyes
And you know
That these eyes are clear and kind
Like all eyes of your country
Two windows directly to the heart
He wished to find a simple sign of fear
Ok, from where should the fear come?!
Who of us is the coward?
Who of us is the traitor?
Who is it whose heart is filled with love and wishes

And spring of blooming green
And songs?
Or the hunting dog
And the sovereigns of tyranny
who are eating human flesh
Served on a tray
Who of us is the coward?
Who of us is the traitor?
He glanced into my eyes
And the limb in his throat
Twisted and backed off and he said
Two incomprehensible sentences
Because he saw two beautiful pictures
In the eyes of the good people
Egypt in the left eye and you, my beloved, in the right eye

Do not Reconcile!
By Amal Donqol

(1)
Would they grant you gold.
Should I gouge your eyes,
Fix two jewels in their place
Could you still see?
Such are not to purchase:

You and your brother, your memories of childhood,
Your sudden feeling of manhood,
Longing suppressed by bashfulness, when you hug him.

Silence...smiling at your mother's scold
As if... you were still children!
Your eternal reassurance:
That two swords are your sword
And two voices are your voice

That if you die:
The house has a god
The child a father
Could my blood turn water in your eyes?
Will you forget my bloody dress...
Wear a brocaded one with my blood underneath?
Such is war!
It may burden the heart
But the Arabs' shame is behind

Do not reconcile!
Nor seek to hide!

(2)

Do not reconcile!
Not even for blood!
Make no conciliation!
Would they say a head for a head!
Is one head like another?
Is the stranger's heart like that of your brother?
Has he your brother's eyes?
A hand whose sword was yours...
Could it even that whose sword bereaved you?

They would say:
We've come to you to spare blood
We've come, - O prince - be our judge
They would say:
Now we're cousins.
Tell them: they trod on their cousinship to those they killed
And plant the sword into the front of the desert
Till echo repeats
That for you I was
A knight,
A brother,
A father,
And a king!

(3)

Make no conciliation...
If you're denied sleep by screams of remorse
And retain...
If women in black with their children bereft of smile soften your heart
That "El-Yamama" your niece
Is a flower, in her youth,
Garbed in a mourning dress
She used to run down the palace stairs
On my return,
And on my coming down hold my legs...
I lift her – while she smiles- on the back of the horse.
Here she is...silent
The hand of treason
Has deprived her of hearing her father's words,
Wearing the new dress,
Having one day a brother,
Or in her wedding a smiling father
To whom she returns when the husband is mad at her,
And to whose arms, his grandchildren race
To get their presents,

To pull the turban,
And to mess up his beard.
Do not reconcile!
This dove (Al-Yamama) has committed no guilt
To suddenly see the burning nest
While she rests on the ashes!

(4)
Do not reconcile!
Would they crown you a prince
How could you step on the body of your father's son?
And on faces of fake joy...
Become a king?
How could you look in the hands you shake
Without noticing blood in every hand?
An arrow that caught me from behind ...
Will catch you from a thousand sides
For blood has now become a badge of honor.
Do not reconcile!

Would they crown you a prince
Your throne is a sword,
And false is your sword
Shouldn't you, with its wisp, weigh moments of honor
And in luxury find rest.

(5)
Do not reconcile!
Should those who waver in battle say
"...we can not bear swords unsheathe..."
When truth fills your heart:
Fire erupts when you breathe
And the voice of treason gets dumb
Do not reconcile!
No matter how many words of peace they speak
How could the lungs breathe in the foul breeze?
How could you look a woman in the eye...
If you know you can not shield her?
How could you, in love, be her knight?
Or for a newborn sleeping and waiting for a tomorrow?
How could you dream or sing of future for a boy

Who grows up between your hands with a weary heart?

Do not reconcile!

Nor share with your murderers food

And with blood,

Your heart waters

The holy soil,

And your resting ancestors

Until the bones do answer you

(6)

Do not reconcile!

Should the tribe beseech you

By El-Galila's sadness

To be a foxy fellow

And show acceptance.

They would say:

Here you seek a long vengeance;

Now take what you can:

A little right...

In these few years

The revenge is not only yours,

But the coming generations' too

And tomorrow...

Someone will be born to put on the full armor,

And a sweeping fire,

to demand vengeance

And to help the truth to come into life

From the heart of impossibility

Do not reconcile!

Should they say it is only a device

Such is revenge

Its flame in the heart fades away

As seasons pass by

And with its five fingers remains sealed the hand of disgrace

Upon disgraced brows!

(7)

Make no conciliation, though stars may warn you
And fortunetellers make you a prophecy
I would have forgiven had I died...
Perplexed between right and wrong.
I was not an invader,
Never sneaked near their camps,
Nor hovered around their borders,
Never approached their vineyards
Their garden I never trod.
My murderer did not shout: "watch out!"
He walked with me...
Then shook my hand...
Then hoofed a little
But in the bushes he hid!
Then all of a sudden:
A shudder riddled me between two ribs...
My heart shivered - as a bubble - and slacked!
I braced myself up, till on my arms I weighed
I saw my cruel cousin
With a sordid face, maliciously satisfied
I had no spear
Nor an old weapon,
Nothing but my rage complaining of thirst.

(8)

Do not reconcile...
Till existence returns to its cycle:
Till...
To their orbits, return the stars
To their twitter...the birds

To their grains...the sands
And the murdered to his waiting child
All was ruined in a fleeting second:
Youth, family joy, horse neigh, guests hosting, the heart murmur when a bud in the garden
wither, prayer for seasonal rain
The heart dodges when the bird of death hovers over the savage wild
All was ruined in a flagrant slide
And who murdered me is not a god
To have me killed by his will
Not grander than me...to take my life with his sword
Nor smarter...to finish me off with his sly fraud
Do not reconcile!
For it's only an accord between two rivals...
Unbroken by the honor of the heart
And that who murdered me is a mere thief
He stole the land before my eyes
As silence broke into a mocking laugh!

(9)

Do not reconcile!
Though all sheikhs against your sword may stand
With shadow men whose souls are cracked
Those who love sopped bread and meat
And surmounting slaves
Those whose turbans dangled on their eyes,
And their Arab swords have forgot chivalry years
Do not reconcile!
This desire shall be odd
In this age you're the sole knight
Others...are freaks!
Do not reconcile...
Do not reconcile...

