

4. Nocturnal Traces and Voyaging Critique: From Shahrazad to Said

Perhaps there is no narrative that can better accommodate the desire of Western mainstream readers to unveil and penetrate the hidden worlds, bodies, and minds of Arabs than *The Arabian Nights*. If Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* is the Andalusian mother of the modern European novel, *Alf Layla wa Layla*, known in English as *One Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights*, is truly its Arabic grandmother. By 1908, Martha Pike Conant had already dubbed the assemblage of parables, fables, and stories "the fairy godmother of the English novel."¹ Given the enthusiastic exoticism almost intrinsically linked to the long history of selective receptions, tendentious translations, and literary assimilations of the *Nights* in the West, some might be surprised to find its transgeneric mode of spinning stories within stories at work in the formation and transformation of Anglophone Arab representations. Sure, the strategy of firmly inserting Arab representations into the lasting and, by now, transnational narrative tradition running from Antoine Galland's twelve-volume transference, *Les mille et une nuits* (1704–1708), to the latest adaptations by Hollywood and the tourism industry or the net spheres of video and platform games perfectly makes sense for works that are meant to reach a global audience by way of Orientalizing themselves.² But the seemingly well-established functional route of self-marketing can hardly be adapted (at least not in an unbroken way) in those representations in which I am predominantly interested here: representations that, although they do not necessarily explicitly counter dominant perceptions of Arabs, often desperately struggle to emancipate themselves from the globalized Orientalist archive and its truth effects. However, if we consider not only the *Nights*'s almost unrivaled place in what we are used to calling world literature but also keep in mind this work's profound influence on the global production of Orientalist theater, opera, music, painting, architecture, and popular

1 Martha Pike Conant, *The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 1908) 243.

2 See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 4th ed. (1978; London, New York: Penguin, 1995) 325.

culture, and if we, in addition, allow ourselves to recognize the obvious—that Anglophone Arab representations are products of our increasingly globalized world and that their genesis consequently takes place within that world—then it might be less astonishing to discover traces of the nocturnal narration in Anglophone Arab representations.

The Book of Khalid can only partially anticipate this development, which occurred in the second half of the 20th century. Its eponymous hero is particularly successful in marketing his exotic attraction to American women. We learn that he does so “with all the rude simplicity and frankness of the Arabian Nights.”³ Elsewhere, the narrator compares certain adventures depicted in the Khedivial manuscript with those incidental stories “which Shahrazad might have added to her famous Nights.”⁴ Due to the focus of these depictions on negligible details and their ethical marginality, they are, however, quickly deemed not worthy of being transcribed and included in the novel. Although Rihani wrote a short study on *The Lore of the Arabian Nights* between 1928 and 1930, this text was not published during his lifetime.⁵ Basically concerned with demonstrating the quintessentially Arab origin of the famous tales and tracing the history of their various European translations, his enthusiastic espousal of the passionate traditional Arab storyteller’s natural sensuality and her capability of producing great works of imagination is almost a reversed caricature of the early 20th-century rejection of the *Nights* as popular entertainment outside the domains of both Arab *Adab* [high literature] and European *belles lettres*.⁶ The study certainly does not recommend the appropriation of the famous tales or the narrative mode employed in them in modern fictional writing. In fact, *The Book of Khalid*’s relation to the *Nights* is likewise imbued with this contradiction. On the one hand, the earliest Anglophone Arab novel offers little evidence for any importance that *The Arabian Nights* might have for the transgeneric deviation of Anglophone Arab poetics; if the editor-narrator comes across any such nocturnal presence in her or his source material, s/he explicitly rejects their entry into her or his narration. However, the novel shows clear affinities with the basic motifs and general features of Shahrazad’s narration, such as the relationship between enframed stories and frame story, the use of the runaway-return scheme, the coexistence of a variety of narrative styles, and the hyperbole of cross-cultural estrangement and ironic bricolage. This contradiction might be explained by arguing that the influence of the *Nights* has been so pervasive in the global literary production of the last three centuries, perhaps only second to the Bible, that it is difficult

3 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 84.

4 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 97.

5 This study was published in 2002: Ameen Rihani, *The Lore of the Arabian Nights* (Washington, DC: Platform International P, 2002).

6 Muhsin Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) 76-80.

to find any writer who has completely abstained from at least unintentionally alluding to it. I do, however, believe that *The Book of Khalid*'s incoherent stance over Shahrazad's narrative, at the same time strictly excluded and bashfully present, is indicative of a much deeper grounded uncertainty regarding the popular medieval tales' recognition among contemporary readers.

Such uncertainty is no longer seen as an obstacle by contemporary Anglophone Arab writers. The *Nights* have long made their way into those cultural representations in which I am primarily interested here. Yet, the ambivalences involved in this process of varying appropriations have by no means been resolved. On the contrary, they have been strategically multiplied and thus turned into a powerful metafictional weapon that goes beyond sole aesthetic preoccupations. In some cases, this regaining of Shahrazad as a narrative guide for resisting (neo-)patriarchy and countering hegemony is openly performed. In other cases, the recourse to the *Nights* rather takes the form of an oblique allegory. While many Anglophone Arab revisionist readings show the tendency to see Shahrazad as the prototypical feminist, the reclamation of her anti-hierarchical narrative technique and generic crossing is not at all restricted to female writers. At the same time, sustained creative engagement with the *Nights* paved the way for new directions in the spheres of socio-cultural criticism and political activism. All these developments ask the contemporary reader of Anglophone Arab representations to take into consideration the multiple and often contradictory nocturnal affiliations that inform these representations.

In order to seriously trace such affiliations, one would first have to revisit *The Arabian Nights*'s transcultural genesis in various oral traditions. One could then have a closer look at the dialectics between the tales' early textual codification and devaluation in Arabic literature and their continuing reception in Western translations and adaptations. Only on the basis of the profound knowledge of this complicated cross-cultural exchange can one understand the ambivalent role that the *Nights* played in the growth of modern Arabic fiction in general and the postcolonial Arabic novel in particular. And it is from these more recent developments that one can finally try to understand Anglophone Arab writers' and artists' increasing interest in and appropriation of the *One Thousand and One Nights*. Yet it goes without saying that the task of such exhaustive cross-cultural mapping of the composite genesis of contemporary Anglophone Arab nocturnal works lies decisively beyond the scope of this chapter.⁷

7 For overviews, see Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Allen Lane; New York: Penguin, 1994); Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, eds., *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 2004); Ulrich Marzolph, ed., *The Arabian Nights Reader* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2006); Ulrich Marzolph, ed., *The Arabian Nights in Transnational Perspective* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2007).

I will therefore restrict myself to giving a basic outline of those key migrations and transmigrations which have transposed the fictional voyages of the *Nights* into Anglophone Arab representations. I am less interested in answering questions of origins, influences, or directions of reception than in the function of the *Nights* as an intertext and of nocturnal poetics as a critical tool. My relational discussion will sometimes have to go beyond the Arabic-Western-Anglophone Arab nexus to include other postcolonial discourses which have turned the model provided by the arch-Oriental(ist) classic into a unique magical realist, science fiction, or feminist mode of telling stories and which, in turn, have influenced Anglophone Arab discourse. Using the Shahrazadian narrative as a paradigmatic intertextual point of departure, I will, in addition, introduce other intertexts and discursive affinities. These cursory and highly selective references include Anglophone Arab and Arabic texts as well as non-Anglophone non-Arabic discourses. Blurring the boundaries between the spheres of creative writing and criticism, I will finally consult Edward Said's cultural critique as an Anglophone Arab (studies) text. This revisiting will also allow me to address further critical precursors of particular importance and theoretical positions informing the production of Anglophone Arab representations as well as to clarify the role of Said's work in my own project.

Despite international scholarly efforts to track the *Nights*'s transcultural origins, internal Arabic transformations, cross-cultural receptions, and global mutations, many details of this influential text's early genesis are still unclear. The narrative, the earliest extant fragment of which dates from the 9th century and the oldest extended manuscript version, used by Galland for his early 18th century translation, of which dates from the 14th century, is by definition a multiplicity of texts, translations, rearrangements, variations, and editions. There is no point zero clearly located in a specific historical era and geographical space. Scholars can neither agree on an original text that burgeoned into later variants nor pinpoint an individual author or editor who can claim authority over this narrative.⁸ What we know is that the *Nights* were probably inspired by the Indian classic, *Panchatantra*, and the Persian *Hazar Afsan* as well as perhaps by Babylonian and Greek narrative traditions and other royal chronologies. We know that these stories were preserved and supplemented by Arabs in the Middle Ages and that, beginning in the 18th century, they were translated into European and other languages. Therefore, I do strongly agree with Ferial Ghazoul, who argues in her seminal 1996 study *Nocturnal Poetics* that the Orientalist experts' obsessions with this narrative's origins "are exercises in guess-work and are hardly convincing or relevant"⁹ for grasping the contemporary global significance of the *Nights* in comparative perspective. Given the tales' uncertain

8 Ferial J. Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* (Cairo: American University in Cairo P. 1996) 2-5.

9 Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 12.

origin, unfixable textuality, and inescapable incompleteness, identifying the first Cairo edition from 1835, commonly known as the Bulaq edition, as the most “complete” Arabic version or deliberating whether Edward William Lane’s uninspired expurgation from 1838/40¹⁰ or Richard Burton’s 1885 unabridged English transference of the second Calcutta edition (1839–1842)¹¹ is closer to the Arabic original in many ways ridicules the notions of the *Nights*’s completeness and authenticity or at least equips both notions with a certain irony.¹² The *Nights* simply resist canonization.

In cross-cultural perspective, the perhaps even greater irony results from the fact that the belated recognition of the tales in their own right among Arab scholars and literati was to a large extent a reaction to the vogue of the *Nights* in the West, in particular to 19th century European Orientalist interests in the tales.¹³ This controversial process of re-appropriation and rehabilitation of a narrative corpus that the elite had until then associated with popular street storytellers and coffee-house entertainment was decisively triggered by the Nahda discourses of the late 19th century and the reception of Western (mis-)representations of the Arab world. But it was only with the change in outlook towards the novel as a literary genre during the 20th century that attention was drawn to the long-depreciated tales as worth reading and studying by themselves as well as for the purpose of encouraging contemporary fictional writing in Arabic.¹⁴ The pressure of novelistic selving by mirroring the Western image of modernity, in other words, had a part in leading to the discovery of the broken mirror of the Arab self in the West’s obsession with the *Nights*.¹⁵ As Maher Jarrar argues, contemporary Arabic novelists “draw on the *Nights* both from within [...] and from without.”¹⁶ The same is largely true for the relation between contemporary Anglophone Arab representations and the Arabic tales. In fact, I argue that the reception of the *Nights* in Anglophone Arab literature and arts is directly related to its reception within the postcolonial Arabic novel. The particular Anglophone Arab configuration further complicates the differentiation

10 Edward William Lane, *The Thousand and One Nights*, ed. Edward Stanley Poole (London: Bickers, 1877), first published in three volumes between 1838 and 1840.

11 Richard Burton, *The Book of Thousand and One Nights* (London: Burton Club, 1885–1888); Richard Burton, *Supplemental Nights to the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, with Notes Anthropological and Explanatory* (London: Burton Club, 1886).

12 Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 3.

13 Muhsin al-Musawi, *Scheherazade in England: A Study of Nineteenth-Century English Criticism of the Arabian Nights* (Washington: Three Continents P, 1981).

14 Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 76–94.

15 Elias Khoury, “Ar-riwaya wa miraya al-waqi’ al-maksur,” [The novel and the broken mirror of reality], *Al-Mulhaq ath-Thaqafiq* 25.05.1996, 18–19 and 01.06.1996, 18–19.

16 Maher Jarrar, “The Arabian Nights and the Contemporary Arabic Novel,” *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West*, eds. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008) 299.

between inside and outside. However, the general ambiguity involved in using a re-imported text as a local and essentially Arabic intertext remains. The directly related anxiety of Western Orientalist (and hence uncanny) influence¹⁷ might explain the occasional recourse into exaggerated nativist reclamations of the *Nights*. But such anxiety can equally be seen as a source for the particular bidirectional metafictional richness of Anglophone Arab writings in the wake of Shahrazad. In other words, although the Shahrazadian text returned to Arabic literature as a European export from the colonial center and from there entered Anglophone Arab representations, it was successively reclaimed as part of a long-neglected Arab heritage of resisting centric narratives and hegemonic discourses of all kinds.¹⁸ In such relational nocturnal view, local monarchies, dictatorships, or pseudo-democratic cleptocracies and Western (neo-)colonial powers can be seen as historical duplicates of the *Nights*'s fictional character, King Shahrayar. Whereas authoritarian and imperial discourses are placed in a transcultural genealogy of violent repression, illegitimate authority, and unjust patriarchy, the trope of Shahrazad instead stands for the subaltern project of narrative resistance and emancipation: "Global powers can assume some unredeemed Shahrayar's role, so can dictators and neopatriarchs, to enforce presence and control, whereas the Scheherazades are the defiant communities and individuals who fight for a place of their own."¹⁹

At this point, it seems advisable to stress that nocturnal representations, Arabic and Anglophone Arab alike, do not necessarily draw on the many fantastic qualities of *The Arabian Nights*'s individual stories, which paved the way for their early European career during the 18th and 19th centuries. In fact, it is rarely the blatant reference to jinnis, animals or plants speaking like humans, human beings with supernatural powers, sexualized romances of enslavement, flying horses and magic carpets, subterranean worlds, or enchanted urban spaces that indicate a narrative's nocturnal traces. The representations with which I am here concerned reciprocate, in the majority of cases, the frame story's general subaltern drive to counter tyranny and hegemony, to appropriate its open character of permitting and perpetuating oppressed voices, and to adapt its anti-authoritarian emancipatory capacity. As Ferial Ghazoul demonstrates, the narrative significance of the *Nights* derives from an indispensable frame story which, set in abstract time, encloses and connects all other stories and stories told within these stories. Consisting of four narrative blocks, it accounts for the conditions of the act of storytelling—for Shahrazad sitting "on her very deathbed narrating stories."²⁰

17 Cf. Harald Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1973).

18 Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 71-115.

19 Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 74.

20 Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 35.

For the purpose of my argument, I will focus here on the two main narrative blocks of the frame story. In the first, the monarch, Shahryar, witnesses his wife copulating with a black slave and kills them both. As a consequence, he decides to marry a virgin every night, only to kill her in the morning. After three years, it becomes increasingly difficult for the king's minister to find potential brides. When the latter's elder daughter, Shahrazad, offers to marry the king and thus save the lives of innocent fellow women, she is taken to the royal palace. After sexual intercourse, Shahrazad asks the monarch for permission to relate some tales. He allows it, and with this, the first narrative block is fused with the second: Shahrazad continues to tell stories all night until dawn. The royal listener, anxious to hear more, postpones her sentence night after night. On the thousand-and-first night, Shahryar frees Shahrazad from the threat of beheading. They live happily ever after until they are parted by death.

The particular dialectic of this enframing narrative has narratological and metafictional dimensions in equal measure. It is not only a narrative about the conditions and effects of narration but also a meta-discourse about the relation of power and narrative. Although Shahrazad seems to submit to the king's authority,²¹ she resists his truth-regime and effectively subverts his will to kill her. While she is decisively not *Speaking Truth to Power*,²² to use a phrase coined in reference to an Anglophone Arab critic whose work will be discussed in the following sub-chapter,²³ Shahrazad narrates to the very power that Shahryar represents. Telling him stories without letting him know her true intention, she puts off the moment of death and manages to save her own and other women's lives. Shahrazad narratively re-invents herself as an agent and thus changes the rules set by the man in power who perceives her as the passive object of his sexual/murderous aggression: "The phallic pleasure is turned into a discursive pleasure."²⁴ Story-telling, and not truth-speaking, thus almost becomes a form of political action, of non-violent resistance, and subversion. It is the narrative performance of the resistant capacity of narrating within and against the discourse of patriarchal power as well as the storytelling heroine's unrelenting struggle against the deadly silencing of herself and other marginalized voices that marks the Shahrazadian text as an emancipatory intertext.²⁵

Of course, the relationship between the enframed and the enframing parts, the ways in which divergent narrative genres are mocked, and the intensity in which

21 Cf. Jarar, "The Arabian Nights and the Contemporary Arabic Novel," 303.

22 Here I am referring to Paul A. Bové, *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).

23 See my sub-chapter on Edward Said's importance for Anglophone Arab representations and Anglophone Arab studies, 4.2. of this study.

24 Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 95.

25 Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 35.

narrative voices are multiplied and sub-stories are perpetuated can vary in nocturnal works, depending on the specific topical focus, historical and sociopolitical context, or intradiegetic dynamics. However, it seems to be foremost the metafictional implications and counter-narrative qualities of the narrative frame pattern that characterize the trope of Shahrazad as a counter-discursive trope in Anglophone Arab representations. Anglophone Arab writers and artists find in the *Arabian Nights* a particularly engendering matrix for their own undertakings of creating “an-other poetics” that is translocated across and in-between Western and Arab discourses.²⁶ I believe it is not least the marvelous collection’s nomadic quality and cultural impurity, its non-canonicity, and its stylistic liberty to include diverse narratives from discrepant historical and cultural contexts that make this work so appealing for Anglophone Arab intellectuals. Although, or maybe precisely because, the *Nights* have long been assimilated into Western and Arab mass culture and literature, its “otherness”²⁷ in relation to both discursive situations remains. Therefore, whoever wants to claim the *Nights* as a representation of authentic Arabness has to rethink the tales’ ambivalent function within the colonial and postcolonial discourse of alterity and misrepresentation. It is this implicitly canonized (and, therefore, necessarily ambivalent) otherness of the nocturnal classic “strangely fraught with a mixture of need and rejection”²⁸ that makes it so important as an intertext for contemporary Anglophone Arab narrative, audio-visual, and performative attempts to uncover dominant structures, to articulate what has not been articulated, and to show what has been hidden.

I am not saying that Anglophone Arab representations are literary children or direct reverberations of the Shahrazadian text in the sense that they that can be firmly placed into a causal nexus of origin-influence legacy. It is rather my argument that the *Nights*, as an intertext in Anglophone Arab representations, is equipped with a particular, complex, and often contradictory cross-cultural meaning. This ambivalence partially results from the many discrepant ideological and translational contexts into which the fantastic Arabic tales, enframed by Shahrazad’s storytelling were historically placed. Although the *Nights*, a work of transcultural genesis, travelled and transgressed many boundaries in the course of its global reception, it constantly functioned as a carrier of Orientalist constructions of difference.

Whereas its significance for the internal transformation of the postcolonial Arabic novel or South American magical realist writing seems to be undisputed, and whereas Shahrazad has been widely acknowledged as a salient marker of Arab fe-

²⁶ Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 152.

²⁷ Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 152.

²⁸ Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 77.

male and diasporic Arab feminist discourses,²⁹ it proves extremely difficult to determine the place and function of the *Nights* within contemporary articulations of Anglophone Arab encounters. If, for instance, Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa entitle their 2004 anthology of Arab American short stories *Dinarzad's Children* to representationally frame such diverse writers as Mohja Khaf, Rabih Alameddine, Rawi Hage, Laila Halaby, Diana Abu-Jaber, Joseph Geha, Yussef El Guindi, or Evelyn Shakir, the filiative gesture towards Shahrazad's sister signifies hardly more than a rather diffuse identitarian claim of cultural ancestry or the use of the legendary tales and their allusions to Oriental narrative passion for the purpose of self-branding.³⁰ In order to grasp what nocturnal Anglophone Arab writing can mean beyond the use of the classic's image as a sign of inherited or chosen Arabness and the specific feminist appropriations of its anti-patriarchal contiguities and anti-sexist poetics, one will have to turn to those literary works of the 20th and 21st centuries which carried the nocturnal mode of narrating across temporal, spatial, and linguistic boundaries. These narratives must have had an impact on Anglophone Arab arts and literatures: perhaps a more enduring one than the marvelously traveling story-machine variously known as *Alf Layla wa Layla*, *One Thousand and One Nights*, or *The Arabian Nights*. They can, therefore, be seen as intertexts of Anglophone Arab representations in their own right.

I can only mention here some of what I perceive as the most significant and influential exponents of this equally transgeneric and transnational type. With a view to modern Arabic writing, I would like to focus on the so-called post-Mahfouzian novel, a generic term coined by Edward Said.³¹ Not solely due to its relative contemporaneity, this more recent prose fiction seems to have the most immediate impact on Anglophone Arab representations. Its exemplary value for Anglophone Arab nocturnal writing probably also relates to the fact that these writings are almost consistently (if not always immediately) available in English translation.

Naguib Mahfouz's own recreation of the *Nights* in his 1978 *Layali alf Layla [Arabian Nights and Days]*³² is an early key work at the crossroads of this development. Although the novel's contemporaneous regrouping of the *Nights*'s sociopolitical

29 On the importance of the *Nights* in Arab and Anglophone Arab women's writings and feminist discourses, see Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Shahrazād Feminist," *The Thousand and One Nights in Arabic Literature and Society*, eds. Richard G. Hovannissian and Georges Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 40-55 and Susan Muaddi Darraj, ed., *Scheherazade's Legacy: Arab and Arab American Woman on Writing* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004).

30 Pauline Kaldas and Khaled Mattawa, eds., *Dinarzad's Children: An Anthology of Contemporary Arab American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (2004; Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 2009) xv-xx.

31 Edward Said, "After Mahfouz," *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2000; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001) 317-26.

32 Nagib Mahfouz, *Layali alf Layla* (Cairo: Maktab Misr, 1978); English translation: *Arabian Nights and Days*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davis (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

morals is not confined to the framing tale, it celebrates Shahrazad's regaining of control of authority in a way that stresses the political instrumentality of the fantastic and "story telling as a way to justify action."³³ As a political allegory written against the backdrop of Anwar as-Sadat's neo-liberal open-door policy of economic privatization and the rise of militant Islam in Egypt, the novel represents a fictional exercise in the cultural politics of novelistic writing. Influenced by the ethics and aesthetics of Islamic mysticism, it mixes political concerns with metaphysical speculations on the relation of spiritual power and worldly power. While Shahrazad's Sufi sheikh guide represents the mystic counter-vigor to the ruler's repressive force on the level of the frame story, the enframed stories say obliquely what could not be said directly in an Egyptian novel of that time. *Layali al Layla* thus mixes the critique of the real with supernatural narrative devices.³⁴

However, it was not Mahfouz's re-creation of the *Nights* but the Palestinian Emile Habibi's *Al-Mutasha'il: al-waqa'i' al-ghariba fi ikhtifa' sa'id abi al-nahs al-mutasha'il* (*The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist*)³⁵ that set the tone for what I, for the purpose of this study, call the postcolonial nocturnal novel in Arabic. First published in the daily *Al-Jadid* in Haifa, Israel between 1972 and 1974, it is widely considered a breakthrough in post-Mahfouzian writing. The pessoptimist Saeed is a Palestinian inmate of a psychiatric clinic in Israel who pretends to have found refuge with extraterrestrial friends. He reports on his pre-exilic hopeless situation as a stranger in his own land through a series of letters. The tragic and consistently ironic life story of the Kafkaesque anti-hero represents the collective Palestinian experience of "deterritorialization."³⁶ Drawing on the Shahrazadian narrative structure of circularity and repetition, it allegorically describes the invisible condition of those who remained in the newly founded Jewish state after 1948 to become a despised and disenfranchised minority of second-class citizens. By inaugurating an anonymous redactor who finally reveals himself as the overt narrator of the frame story, the novel reflects the lived experience and surrealistic perception of Palestinian Israelis who, in order to stay in what is the right and the wrong place, cannot but jam together realistic pessimism with an narrative optimism that is close to madness.

33 Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 386. See, on Mahfouz' *Layali al Layla* 375-87.

34 Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 134-54.

35 Emile Habibi, *Al-Mutasha'il: al-waqa'i' al-ghariba fi ikhtifa' sa'id abi al-nahs al-mutasha'il* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Khaldun, 1989). English translation: *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist: A Palestinian Who Became a Citizen of Israel*, trans. Salma K. Jayyusi and Trevor Le Gassick (New York: Vantage P, 1982).

36 Maher Jarra, "A Narration of 'Deterritorialization': Imil Habibi's The Pessoptimist," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 5.1 (2002): 15-28.

Since the late 1970s, several post-Mahfouzian nocturnal novels have appeared in Arabic. Among these novels are the diverse works of such eminent literary figures as the Egyptian feminist writer, Nawal El Saadawi,³⁷ her equally influential compatriot, Edwar al-Kharrat,³⁸ the Lebanese Rashid al-Daif,³⁹ or, of the exilic literati of the region par excellence, 'Abd al-Rahman Munif. I have discussed Munif's 1977 novel, *An-Nihayat (Endings)*, in my beginning chapter. The attentive reader will remember the remarkable night of collective mourning after the death of 'Assaf, the eccentric outsider and solitary hunter, which marks the beginning of the narration's second part. Here the author draws on the narrating-against-death matrix of the Shahrazadian model. During that night, the almost-endless perpetuation of anonymous stories successively leads to the emancipation of the enframed narratives from the frame story's account of what happened. The intradiegetic listeners, and with them the readers, are immersed in a narrative conglomerate of a particularly empowering quality that finally culminates in the anticipation of extradiegetic resistive action. Similarly, Munif's five-volume work, *Mudun al-Milh (Cities of Salt)*, despite the presence of an assumingly omniscient narrator, employs the principle of weaving stories, one inside one another, and thus allows the inauguration of other uncontrollable narrative voices.

Perhaps the most significant living proponent of contemporary nocturnal writing in Arabic is Elias Khoury. In my view, his fictional work not only functions as a particularly important intertext for our understanding of today's Anglophone Arab representations but also forms a constant source of inspiration for several of

37 One of El Saadawi's paradigmatic feminist nocturnal novels is Nawal El Saadawi, *Suqut al-Imam* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqlal al-'Arabi, 1987) English translation: *The Fall of the Imam*, trans. Sherif Hetata (London: Methuen, 1988). See also Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arab Novel* 101-108.

38 Edwar al-Kharrat, *Rama wa-l-tinnin* (first published in a limited edition in 1979 in Cairo). English translation: *Rama and the Dragon*, trans. Ferial Ghazoul and John Verlenden (Cairo: The American U in Cairo P, 2002) and Edwar al-Kharrat, *Tarabuha Za'faran* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1985). English translation: *City of Saffron*, trans. Frances Liardet (London: Quartet, 1989). In *Rama wa-l-tinnin*, both the narrator and the implied narrator perceive themselves and mutually allude to each other as Shahrazad. *Tarabuha Za'faran* uses the *Nights's* model of circularity to present the experience of narrative recollection as a decentered mosaic of motifs and images that defy any rule of linear composition. See also Jarrar, "The Arabian Nights and the Contemporary Arabic Novel," 312-13 and Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 109 and 250-51.

39 See, for instance, Rashid al-Daif, *Tistifil Meryl Streep* (Beirut: Riad al-Rayyes, 2001); English translation: *Who is Afraid of Meryl Streep?* Trans. Paula Haydar and Nadine Sinno (Austin: U of Texas P, 2014). This novel's fragmentary application of the *Nights's* frame story alludes to Shahrayar's aggressive voyeurism in order to amplify the main character's sexual obsession with the visual. See also Jarrar, "The Arabian Nights and the Contemporary Arabic Novel," 312.

these representations. This assumed influence transgresses the spheres of literature. As a public intellectual, Khoury plays a major role in the cultural scene of the Arab Mashreq and beyond. His twelve novels have been translated into numerous languages; almost all are available in English. In addition, he is well known as a literary critic, playwright, curator, and as a cultural activist who served as a director at the Theatre of Beirut and co-director of the *Ayloul* Festival of Modern Arts in Beirut. In his native Beirut, he served as director and editor-in-chief of *Mulhaq*, the weekly literary supplement of the local daily, *An-Nahar*. His academic career includes his work as visiting professor and research fellow at the Lebanese University, the American University of Beirut, Columbia University, Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, and New York University. In 2001, Khoury was appointed Global Distinguished Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at NYU. In addition, the internationally renowned intellectual regularly attends readings, academic conferences, and other public events all over the world. Already between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, Khoury established a radically decentered novelistic mode of telling stories while speculating on histories with his novels *Al-jabal as-saghir* (*Little Mountain*),⁴⁰ *Rihlat Ghandi as-saghir* (*The Journey of Little Gandhi*),⁴¹ *Mamlakat al-ghuraba'* (*Kingdom of Strangers*),⁴² and *Majma' al-asrar* [*Junction of Secrets*].⁴³ In different ways, these narratives almost perpetuate themselves. The reader is merged into countless stories told by characters whose truthfulness cannot be guaranteed by an omniscient narrator. Historical events are presented in different versions, with competing beginnings and, at best, temporary endings. Each story reveals its own and other stories' factual inconsistencies. Due to their fragmentary and polyphonic modality, these narratives constantly struggle with the challenge of differentiating between "Where is the story? And where is the truth?" without providing a final resolution.⁴⁴ Like his literary representations, Khoury's criticism is concerned with the fictional nature of historiography just as much as with the role of literature as a practice of counter-memory. A collection of critical essays published in 1982 is almost exclusively devoted to the contemporary necessity and conditions of (im-)possibility of narratively regaining what he calls *The Lost Memory*.⁴⁵

40 Elias Khoury, *Al-jabal as-saghir* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Abhath al-Arabiya, 1977). English translation: *Little Mountain*, trans. Maia Tabet (Manchester: Carcanet P, 1989).

41 Elias Khoury, *Rihlat Ghandi as-saghir* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1989) English Translation: *The Journey of Little Gandhi*, trans. Paula Haydar (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994).

42 Elias Khoury, *Mamlakat al-ghuraba'* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1993). English translation: *The Kingdom of Strangers*, trans. Paula Haydar (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas P, 1996).

43 Elias Khoury, *Majma' al-asrar* [*Junction of Secrets*] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1994).

44 Khoury, *Majma' al-asrar* 151.

45 Elias Khoury, *Al-dhakira al-mafquda: dirasat naqdiya* [The lost memory: critical studies] (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Abhath al-Arabiya, 1989). On Khoury's novelistic and critical work, see also Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, "On the Necessity of Writing the Present: Elias Khoury and the 'Birth

In the context of Anglophone Arab representations, the poly-vocal recollection and narrative reassembling of exilic Palestinian memories of displacement and refugeeship in Khoury's 1998 anti-heroic epic, *Bab ash-Shams* (*Gate of the Sun*),⁴⁶ represent the by far most elaborate piece of nocturnal fiction in Arabic. Here, he not only employs the act of narrating as a particularly powerful practice of delaying death and fighting forgetfulness but, at the same time, uses this act's inherent ideological pitfalls, multiple gaps, and absences to open up a metafictional, almost metahistorical, space for a reflection on the imaginative limits of telling marginalized (hi-)stories and for the strategic insertion of counter-memories. The frame narrative is set in the makeshift hospital of a refugee camp on the outskirts of Beirut. Yunis, a well-known Palestinian freedom fighter who once made his people believe "that the road to the villages of Galilee was open,"⁴⁷ is in a coma. He is nursed by his adoptive son, Dr. Khaleel, a man who has no real medical qualification but possesses remarkable skills of storytelling. The quasi-Shahrazadian narrator tries to heal the dying embodiment of armed resistance by telling him his own heroic role in the Palestinians' struggle for justice: "HEY, YOU! How am I supposed to talk to you, or with you or about you? Should I tell you stories you already know, or be silent and let you go wherever it is you go?"⁴⁸ Yet Khaleel realizes from the very beginning that he does not know any factual event well enough to re-narrate it, that he can no longer rely on the stories that have been told, and that he consequently has to question his self-chosen mission of narrating legendary tales of national resistance: "Do you think of yourself as the hero in a love story? Why have you forgotten your other heroic roles? Or maybe they weren't so heroic."⁴⁹

Khaleel's discourse constantly shifts between a virtual dialogue with the non-responsive Yunis, the symbolic representative of the heroic narrative whose disintegration he refuses to admit, and the many micro-stories of other Palestinian lives not yet told. It seems that only the father figure's approaching death allows these other stories to incessantly find their way into the enlarging fissures and gaps of the filial grand-narrative. The novel draws partly on dozens of interviews that Khoury conducted with Palestinians living in Lebanese, Syrian, and Jordanian refugee camps in preparation for his novelistic endeavor. These uprooted people are the true storytellers of *Bab ash-Shams*. The simultaneous narration within and against one unitary version of memory not only leads to the intradiegetic multiplication of narrative voices of extradiegetic origin but also implies the radical

of the Novel' in Lebanon," *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (London: Saqi, 2010) 87-96.

46 Elias Khoury, *Bab ash-shams* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1998). English translation: *Gate of the Sun*, trans. Humphry Davis (2005; London: Vintage, 2006).

47 Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* 14.

48 Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* 7.

49 Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* 24.

self-questioning of Khaleel's (and the novel's) narrative intention: "I say I want one thing, but I want thousands of things. I lie, God take pity on you, on me and on your poor mother."⁵⁰ The reference to *One Thousand and One Nights* is obvious. Thanks to the step-son's ceaseless nursing efforts, Yunis survives for more than seven months before finally taking the shape of a baby. The Shahrazadian pseudo-doctor waits for his parental patient's re-birth: "Now we're at the beginning, as you asked, and you have to go through all the torments of childhood. Come on, let's begin."⁵¹ However, the magical therapy of rousing the ideological and spiritual father with his words has no success. The former hero does not stand up again: maybe because he cannot, maybe because he does not like the stories that have been told. The cyclical mode of narration reaches its metafictional peak with Yunis's death. His physical end marks the beginning of a new relation between the novelistic text and the reader. Now the latter cannot but accept his position as the primary addressee: "Would you like to hear a new story that its narrator and hero doesn't believe? We'd decided to stop telling such stories. We'd decided we wanted stories as real as the truth."⁵²

While the novel's end anticipates a new communicative set-off beyond the inconsistencies of hegemonic truth claims within communities and between collective formations of belonging, the actual novel opens with a narrator who does not know the truth anymore and, therefore, sets out to tell a tale of infantile innocence: "Once upon a time there was a baby." The opening line, *kana ya ma kana* (literally "it was or it wasn't;" figuratively not quite "once upon a time"), can be easily identified as the classical Arabic inauguration of any oral folk tale, such as the *Arabian Nights*. For the insecure narrator, however, it triggers much more: His own tale's beginning line provokes a self-critical reflection on the relation between historical events and narrative emplotment and finally results in Khaleel starting the story with its ending—that is, with the stroke which has caused Yunis's coma. For the purpose of my study, his short excursion into the narrative ethics of premodern Arabic storytelling almost paradigmatically grasps a nocturnal poetics that promotes a non-hierarchic adjustment of meaning between lived lives and told stories:

In the beginning they didn't say, "Once upon a time;" they said something else.

In the beginning they said, "Once upon a time, there was—or there wasn't." Do you know why they said that? When I first read this expression in a book about ancient Arabic literature, it took me by surprise. Because, in the beginning, they didn't lie. They didn't know anything, but they didn't lie. They left things vague, preferring to use that "or" which makes things that were as though they weren't, and things that weren't as though they were. That way the story is put on the

⁵⁰ Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* 7.

⁵¹ Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* 425.

⁵² Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* 492.

same footing as life, because a story is a life that didn't happen, and a life is a story that didn't get told.⁵³

Khoury's *Gate of the Sun* does not negate the difference between narrative and life or reality and fiction. It rather stresses the often painfully learned insight that so-called matters of fact of real lives do not always speak for themselves but must be acted out in a narrative of their own to be recognized in and by the world. It is not only in this regard that the novel's title clearly refers to Ghassan Kanafani's classic of resistance literature, *Rijal fil-shams (Men in the Sun)*,⁵⁴ a 1972 short story which gives voice to three illegal Palestinian migrants as the narrators of their own tragic deaths during a failed passage inside the empty water tank of a truck on the Iraq/Kuwait border. Due to its allegorical quality, the narrative of human trafficking and silent suffocation suggests "a call for purposeful [narrative] resistance that brings life into death."⁵⁵

The importance of Arabic writings like *The Pessoptimist*, *Gate of the Sun*, or *Men in the Sun* as intertexts for Anglophone Arab representations and, in particular, Anglophone Palestinian representations should not be underestimated. But they are not the only possible points of departure for reconstructing transtextual chains of relation. With a view to the broader discursive field's nocturnal traces, it is natural to consider detours of reception and loop ways of influences that do not necessarily lead directly from the medieval Arabic heritage of telling stories to Anglophone Arab representations. In this context, it is noteworthy that South American literature always had and still has a profound impact on both the contemporary Arabic novel and Anglophone Arab writings. This is particularly true for the works of those South American writers who themselves appropriated the *Arabian Nights*.⁵⁶

Over the course of this and the previous chapter, I have repeatedly referred to Jorge Luis Borges. Not only does he, as a literary critic, attribute the genesis of the Romantic movement to Galland's translation of the *Nights*, he also uses the tales as a pretext for poetological speculations on the relation between reality, imagination, and lingual representation. In fact, Borges's own fictional oeuvre—at least from the mid-1930s onward—can be seen as the product of a continued literary intercourse with the Shahrazadian narrative. This exchange goes significantly beyond the adaptation and extension of certain themes, motifs, or stylistic devices. Beginning with two short stories explicitly ascribed to the *Nights* and published in

53 Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* 25–26.

54 Ghassan Kanafani, *Rijal fi-shams* (Beirut: Dar at-Tali'ah, 1972). English translation: *Men in the Sun, and other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (London: Heinemann, 1978).

55 Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 123.

56 Jarar, "The Arabian Nights and the Contemporary Arabic Novel," 312.

his *Universal History of Infamy*⁵⁷ and the famous ironic essay on “The Translators of the 1001 Nights,”⁵⁸ the Borgesian corpus regularly presents itself as an equally intimate and ironic re-articulation of the Arabic classic and its fictocritical spirit.⁵⁹ The tales and their curious mistranslations function as a template for Borges’s own infinite textuality of (re-)reading and (re-)writing, questioning claims of originality and authorship, and framing translation as a polemical tool of creation.⁶⁰ His frequent references to the *Nights* show that his poetic anti-theory of translation does not only acknowledge the translational act’s generally intricate relation with the process of literary production but also stresses the unavoidability of mistranslation and censorship in cross-cultural exchange.⁶¹ Borges’s post-romantic praise of “creative mistranslation”⁶² in many ways anticipates the creative commission and critical juxtaposing of the deforming mirrors of alterity at work in contemporary Anglophone Arab representations.

Similarly, the Colombian novelist, screenwriter, and journalist, Gabriel García Márquez, “dared to think that the marvels recounted by Scheherazade really happened in the daily life of her time, and stopped happening because the incredulity and realistic cowardice of subsequent generations.”⁶³ His 1967 masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*,⁶⁴ is one of the best known examples of the magical mode of novelistic writing. The narrative emancipates itself from the strictly realist paradigm in order to reconstruct the lost memory of South America’s violent history, the (post-)trauma of the (continuing) *conquista*, and the failed dream of living a reality that is constantly “slipping away.”⁶⁵ The magical, or rather the myth-

57 Jorge Luis Borges, “The Chamber of Statues,” *The Universal History of Infamy*, by J. L. Borges, trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni (London: Penguin, 1975) 107-10, and “Tale of the Two Dreamers,” 111-13.

58 Jorge Luis Borges, “The Translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*,” *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, by Jorge Luis Borges, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 1999) 92-109.

59 Ghazoul, *Nocturnal Poetics: The Arabian Nights in Contemporary Context* 121-31.

60 For a paradigmatic example, see Jorge Luis Borges, “The Thousand and One Nights,” trans. Eliot Weinberger, *The Georgian Review* (Fall 1984): 564-74.

61 On the importance of (mis-)translation in Borges’s work, see Dominique Jullien, “In Praise of Mistranslation: The Melancholy Cosmopolitanism of Jorge Luis Borges,” *Borges in the 21st Century*, spec. issue of *Romanic Review* 98.2-3 (2007): 205-24 and Efraín Kristal, *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 2002).

62 Jorge Luis Borges, “The Translators of the 1001 Nights,” *Borges: A Reader. A Selection from the Writings of Jorge Luis Borges*, eds. Emir Rodríguez Monegal and Alastair Reid (New York: Dutton, 1981) 84.

63 Gabriel García Márquez, *Living to Tell a Tale*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Knopf, 2003) 219.

64 Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (1970; London: Penguin, 2014).

65 Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* 46.

ical, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* has a particular capacity to preserve a historical experience that is often idealistically discriminated as illusionary. The novel tries to capture what cannot be fully captured in rationalized versions of truths and thus develops a paradigmatic model for working narratively through the trauma of imperialism.⁶⁶ Of course, the emancipatory motive of relieving traumatized victims of colonial-racist violence from the status of passive witnesses to their own violation and turning unbearable memories into visions of alternative futures is not unique to the writings of García Márquez. But his profound influence on global literary production and postcolonial writing in English is undisputed.⁶⁷ How could it not have influenced Anglophone Arab writing?

Salman Rushdie's 1980 novel, *Midnight's Children*,⁶⁸ is another case in point for the widely ramified voyage of the Shahrazadian trope and her nocturnal mode of stretching the truth. With this narrative, Rushdie inaugurates a long chain of writings with fractal nocturnal imaginaries, of which *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*⁶⁹ presents perhaps the most obvious allusion to the *Nights*. Although the time span in the 2015 novel's title may add up to 1,001 nights, the auto-mythical science fiction narrative identifies with the medieval Andalusian polymath, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), whose controversial Aristotelian theology put his life in danger, rather than with Shahrazad's successful survival strategy of telling stories. In *Midnight's Children*, the proudly unreliable narrator-hero, Saleem Sinai, informs the reader that he was born on August 15, 1947 "[o]n the stroke of midnight, as a matter of fact,"⁷⁰ the night of India's arrival at independence. While he introduces himself as an individual "handcuffed to history"⁷¹ and thus as the involuntary metonymic personification of the nation's modern travails, he consistently resists representational accuracy. Instead, Saleem functions as a narrative vehicle to place the reader into a highly fragmented conglomerate of intertwined reports, memories, tales, rumors, miracles, elisions, additions, and outright inventions. In the context of my study, it is not only important to note that all these stories and sub-stories claim equal historical evidence but also that they assert to be intertextually tracing the sources' fantastic power of telepathically communicating India's trans-individual

66 See Eugene L. Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* (Amherst: Cambria P, 2011) 173–96.

67 See Michael Bell, "García Márquez, Magical Realism and World Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to Gabriel García Márquez*, ed. Philip Swanson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010) 179–195 and Pramod K. Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008) 13.

68 Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981; New York: Penguin, 1991).

69 Salman Rushdie, *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015).

70 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 3.

71 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 3.

experiences. In a direct address to the reader, the narrator explains that he is just one of many magically powerful midnight children.

Understand what I'm saying: during the first hour of August 15th, 1947—between midnight and one a.m.—no less than one thousand and one children were born within the frontiers of the infant sovereign state of India. In itself, that is not an unusual fact (although the resonances of the number are strangely literary) [...].⁷²

The numerical code used in this pseudo-didactical elaboration merges a hyperbolic reference to the infinite narrative of the *Nights* with a specific symbolic hint to the country's post-independence politics. Within ten years, 420 of the children die. Alluding to Shahrazad's 1,001 tales, while narratively subtracting the statistical death rate, reduces the group of worldly survivors to 581, which is exactly the number of members of India's parliament.⁷³ The merging of the fantastic and the real in *Midnight's Children* is not an aesthetic exercise for the sake of stylistic innovation; it aims at narratively questioning the oppressive fiction of unitary truth. A similar aim guides many Anglophone Arab works.

4.1 Lies, Counter-Lies, and Self-Made Lies

"To those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue, and see things as either black or white, either Eastern or Western."⁷⁴

By now it should be clear that, even if we take the *Arabian Nights* as the original *root* for the nocturnal traces in contemporary Anglophone Arab representations, it is virtually impossible to differentiate exactly between the various *routes* of reception and re-reception that these representations have taken. Moreover, there are many additional pre- and intertexts at work in the discourse, which I will explore in the following. These texts do not necessarily offer themselves to be easily grasped with the trope of the *Nights* or to be directly related to the transtextual voyages of one of the Arabic classic's narrative modes.

Let me continue my cursory journey into what I perceive as important intertexts by giving two particularly significant examples of these other points of departures. Re-visiting Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's 1960 Anglophone novel, *Hunters in a Narrow*

72 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* 224.

73 See Arva, *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction* 209-10.

74 Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (1969; London: Heinemann, 2010) 150-51.

Street,⁷⁵ and re-reading Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-hijra ila-sh-shamal*⁷⁶ as a 1966 Arabic text in English translation will forge supplementary links to expected and less expected discursive affinities for the reading of Anglophone Arab works and thus contribute to the further diversification of my discussion.

Hunters in a Narrow Street belongs to a corpus of early Anglophone Arab writings produced within the Arab world. Due to its place among just a few scattered Arab writings in English from the 1960s, the question of the novel's literary affiliations cannot be easily answered. In my view, it cannot be resolved by emphasizing its "dual nationality."⁷⁷ If there is any dual national affiliation to speak of, it would be a Palestinian-Iraqi one rather than an Arabic-English one. Educated in Jerusalem and at Cambridge University in England, the Palestinian exile Jabra was a renowned novelist, poet, playwright, literary and art critic, and translator. Until his death in 1994, he spent most of his professional life in Iraq. As a founding member of the Baghdad Modern Art Group, he was closely associated with the Iraqi modernist movement of the 1950s and 1960s. His criticism contributed significantly to the introduction of new experimental forms of painting and sculpturing to the growing educated, urban middle-class of the region. Like the movement's most prominent representative, Jewad Salim, Jabra argued for an explicitly avant-gardist Arab heritage art, or "turath[heritage]-as-art,"⁷⁸ that synthesized the search for distinctively local forms of artistic expression with a clear commitment to the universal aesthetics of modernism.⁷⁹ Similarly, he saw Arab literary production as an inevitably interpoetic project,⁸⁰ both arising from a particular literary tradition while at the same time being intrinsically tied to and participating in other, non-Arab literary legacies such as the Western one. As Jabra has put it in 1971:

If all the arts of an epoch are inter-related, the arts of all epochs are inter-related too. Change, in the final analysis, is an extension of creativity, a battle against

75 Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* (1960; Boulder: Three Continents, 1996).

76 Tayeb Salih, *Mawsim al-hijra ila-sh-shamal* (1966; Beirut: Dar al-Awdah, 1967).

77 See Hilary Kilpatrick, "Arab Fiction in English: A Case of Dual Nationality," *New Comparison* 13 (1992): 54. See also Nouri Gana, "The Intellectual History and Contemporary Significance of the Arab Novel in English," Introduction, *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture*, ed. Nouri Gana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013) 9-11.

78 Samir al-Khalil [Kanan Makiya], *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity, and Responsibility in Iraq* (London: André Deutsch, 1991) 78.

79 Nathaniel Greenberg, "Political Modernism, Jabra, and the Baghdad Modern Art Group," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.2 (2010): 1-11, 24 Mar. 2012 <<http://docs.lib.psu.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/13>>.

80 On the notion of interpoetics, see Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "On Interpoetics," Interview with Najman Yasin, *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arab Literature*, eds. Ferial Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow (Cairo: The American U in Cairo P, 1994) 207-12.

impoverishment—not only for one part of the world, but for the whole community of man. For the arts of all nations are equally inter-related. Thus Arab writers in their intellectual communion with the West have sought not only to take but also to give: theirs has been an endeavour to contribute to those very ideas that make up the spiritual and mental climate of this century. Many of them, whether poets, novelists, or dramatists, have even written in the languages of the West. Without forfeiting their own legacy, they are here to participate in the pool of all legacies: the civilization of today.⁸¹

Hunters in a Narrow Street must be read against this background. Jabra's second novel remains his only fictional work originally written in English. The story is set in pre-revolutionary Baghdad of the late 1940s and early 1950s, a city for which "[i]t's all very well for [Western, basically British and American] foreigners, who live off the fat of our land unbothered by our problems, to say it's a wonderful place,"⁸² as one of the main protagonists puts it. The obviously auto-fictional narrator, Jameel Farran, is a Palestinian refugee, a college teacher, and a poet who spends most of his free time with his friends, Adnan and Husain. Desperately longing for a successful upheaval against the British-supported puppet-monarchy, the young men discuss the role of Arab cultural heritage in Western-style modernity, lament the absence of private freedom and the religious taboos regulating the social relations between the sexes, and participate in revolutionary cultural politics. In many of their meetings in the streets of Baghdad or at public places, such as bars and cafes on the banks of the Tigris River, they are joined by Brian Flint, "a fair-haired, blue-eyed foreigner" whom Jameel and Adnan first get to know during an obviously homoerotic encounter in a public bath.⁸³ Flint pretends to be an Oxford graduate of Oriental studies who traveled to Iraq to improve his Arabic. The three friends suspect the Englishman of working for the British intelligence and/or the Western oil industry: "Your interest in us is because of oil,"⁸⁴ Adnan accuses him. Although a certain suspicion remains, they want him "to know Baghdad from within."⁸⁵ The slightly naïve foreigner (and with him, the curious reader) is taken to the narrow streets of the rapidly modernizing city to see for himself (for themselves) how the secular Arab men's daily lives are caught in an overlapping web of local and global power-politics of oppression. Their condition is described as that of a "double servitude: to evil masters from without, and to diseased powers from within. And both closely

81 Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "Modern Arab Literature and the West," *Journal of Arab Literature* 2 (1971): 91.

82 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 209.

83 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 36.

84 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 59.

85 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 58.

related.”⁸⁶ Flint, seemingly ignorant but always well informed, turns out “to love everything he saw, even the dirt of Rashid Street. ‘At least,’ he said, commenting on it, ‘it’s authentic’.”⁸⁷ The outsider’s exoticist gaze is countered with Jameel’s street-level depiction of the city’s tough social reality and his friends’ private reports or journal entries. Jameel, a private English tutor, falls in love with the daughter of a notable, Sulafa, who desperately wants to read *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* and badly needs a gun to kill either herself or the man her father wants to marry her against her will.⁸⁸ Sulafa’s corrupt uncle threatens to throw Jameel out of the country if he does not give up loving her, and the two have to wait, meet in secret, and nearly go mad. Adnan kills Sulafa’s father for other, rather ideological, reasons. He and Hussain are temporarily imprisoned due to their participation in student protests. While Flint, “in the meantime, becoming proficient in Arabic was learning to play the *mutbridge*, that very Arab twincane instrument”,⁸⁹ the local Arab men “impaled themselves on rows of political and social swords”.⁹⁰

Scholars of Arabic literature have placed *Hunters in a Narrow Street* within a broader tendency of experimental novelistic writing in Arabic of that time. On the one hand, they see the novel as influenced by the free verse form of so-called Tamuz poetry, a contemporary mythopoetic movement that emancipated itself from any codified bonds of classical Arabic poetry.⁹¹ On the other hand, they stress Jabra’s appropriation of traditional oral narrative traditions, specifically of the *Nights*.⁹² There might be some mythical motives at work in the novel, and one can surely attest a certain fragmentation of multi-layered narrative voices that reminds of Shahrazad’s perpetual mode of telling stories within stories. However, in the context of my study, I tend to stress quite different aspects: the novel’s clear political commitment to revolutionary politics, its deep concern with the spatial dynamics and the “new [social] kineticism”⁹³ of the urban setting, the almost existentialist juxtaposition of outward appearance and immanent experience, as well as the explicit anticipation of a non-Arab Western audience. In my view, this novel can be grasped as an early expression of political Arab modernism in cross-cultural translation, as an Anglophone Arab narrative that, in many ways, anticipates the so-called *adab al-multazim* [literature of commitment] of the 1960s. The *Iltizam* [commitment; literally: responsibility] debate was significantly inspired by Jean-Paul

86 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 60.

87 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 41.

88 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 153-55.

89 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 226.

90 Jabra, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* 232.

91 Kilpatrick, “Arab Fiction in English: A Case of Dual Nationality,” 46-55.

92 Allen, *The Arabic Novel. An Historical and Critical Introduction* 16.

93 Greenberg, “Political Modernism, Jabra, and the Baghdad Modern Art Group,” 2.

Sartre's notion of *littérature engagée* [committed writing]⁹⁴ and Albert Camus's existentialist body of work.⁹⁵ Following Sartre's example, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* engages in writing as willful political act rather than literary representation for literary craft's sake. What makes it so unique is its simultaneous commitment to local change and the explicitly interpoetic sense of its representational obligation toward an English-speaking audience. Although the notion of *Iltizam* began to disintegrate, along with the ideologies of pan-Arabism or Arab socialisms, after the Arab defeat in the June War of 1967, giving way successively to other concepts of cultural commitment and resistance, Jabra's understanding of cross-cultural representation as a tool of local social change that involves the strategic obligation to address a global audience is still an important incitement for Anglophone Arab writers and artists working within the Middle East. From a relational studies point of view, *Hunters*, like many Anglophone Arab articulations after it, represents a work of self-translation that mediates a local discourse across linguistic divides. When, in 1974, the novel was translated into Arabic, partly by Jabra himself, it became a vehicle of double mediation that transferred a pro-revolutionary English text across a temporal gap into a post-revolutionary Arab discourse.⁹⁶

It is difficult to specify the exact measure of Jabra's impact on contemporary Anglophone Arab representations. Unlike other authors of the Arab literary landscape of the 1960s who completed only a single work in English, such as Waguih Ghali (*Beer in the Snooker Club*)⁹⁷ or Isaak Diqs (*A Bedouin Boyhood*),⁹⁸ Jabra wrote *Hunters in a Narrow Street* in his early years as an intellectual, after which he went on to influence critical debates and cultural practices in the Arabic speaking world throughout the twentieth century.⁹⁹

Diqs's nostalgic childhood narrative is his only piece of prose writing. The auto-narrator looks back on his formative years among Bedouin tribesmen at the edge of the Negev desert from his adult position in the Jordan Ministry of Agriculture. The narrative draws on Arabic oral traditions to serve Western readership expectations while rather subliminally recounting the catastrophe that the 1948 war and the cre-

94 On Jean Paul Sartre's 1945 introductory statement to *Les Temps modernes*, devoted to littérature engagée, see Steven Unger, "1945, 15 October: Rebellion or Revolution?" *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (1989; Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001) 972-77.

95 On the Arab *Iltizam* debate, see Verena Klemm, *Literarisches Engagement im Nahen Osten: Konzepte und Debatten* (Würzburg: Ergon, 1998).

96 See Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Sayyadun fi shari' dhayyiq*, trans. Mohammad Asfour and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1974). On this translation, see Nibras A. M. Al-Omar, "The Self-Translator as Cultural Mediator: In Memory of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra," *Asian Social Science* 8.13 (2011): 211-19.

97 Waguih Ghali, *Beer in the Snooker Club* (London: André Deutsch, 1964).

98 Isaak Diqs, *A Bedouin Boyhood* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967).

99 Cf. Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* 48-50.

ation of the state of Israel meant for those who were dispersed, impoverished, and condemned to live as refugees.

Written while the author was in exile in Finland and Germany, Waguih Ghali's *Beer in the Snooker Club* is known as the first Egyptian novel in English. Long neglected by Western and Arab critics alike, the story is set in Cairo's cosmopolitan milieu of the 1950s. The novel has only recently been translated into Arabic.¹⁰⁰ Constantly shifting between subversive humor and disillusioned sarcasm, the story of the Coptic Ram, Edna, his Jewish lover and mentor, and the over-Anglicized Font takes up the perspective of those Westernized urban minorities and foreign non-citizens who were forced to leave Egypt after the 1956 Suez conflict. Ghali himself left Egypt in the late 1950s. *Beer in the Snooker Club* remained his only novel and, to my knowledge, had no traceable influence on Anglophone Arab writing. Considering the renewed interest in the book in Egypt, this literary sublimation of the inebriated dream of gambling with one's identity and the bitter irony of impossible secular affiliations in the age of ideological polarization definitely deserves further investigation.¹⁰¹

Jabra continued to write fiction, poetry, and art criticism after he published *Hunters in a Narrow Street*. His 1978 novel, *Al-baith 'an Walid Mas'ud* (translated in 2000 as *In Search of Walid Masoud*),¹⁰² and the 1982 experimental work, *'Alam bi-la khara'it* [World without Maps],¹⁰³ co-authored with 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, had a strong impact on Arabic and Anglophone Arab cultural practice.¹⁰⁴ The collaborative project has been described by Muhsin al-Musawi as "a novel on the art of the novel."¹⁰⁵ In relational perspective, the meta-novelistic undertaking represents an excess of cross-cultural intertextuality, with allusions ranging from the Abbasid poet, Al-Mutanabbi, to the Romantic English poet, John Keats, that does not stop at the imaginative boundaries of ethnic or national literatures.

¹⁰⁰ There are two translations available: Waguih Ghali, *Bira fi nadi al-bilyardu* (translation of *Beer in the Snooker Club*, 1964), trans. Mahir Shafiq Farid and Hana' Nasir (Cairo: Dar al-'Alam al-Thalith, 2006) and Waguih Ghali, *Bira fi nadi al-bilyardu* (translation of *Beer in the Snooker Club*, 1964), trans. Iman Mersal and Reem al-Rayyes (Cairo: Dar ash-Shuruq, 2013).

¹⁰¹ Cf. Deborah A. Starr, "Drinking, Gambling, and Making Merry: Waguih Ghali's Search for Cosmopolitan Agency," *Companion to the Arab Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture*, ed. Nouri Gana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013) 106-26.

¹⁰² Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *Al-baith 'an Walid Mas'ud* (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1978). English translation: *In Search of Walid Masoud: A Novel*, trans. Roger Allen and Adnan Haydar (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2000).

¹⁰³ Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and 'Abd al-Rahman Munif, *'Alam bi-la khara'it* [World without maps] (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-'Arabiyya li-d-Dirasat wa-n-Nashr, 1982).

¹⁰⁴ See Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, *Reading Across Modern Arabic Literature and Art* (Wiesbaden: Reichenert, 2012) 63-75.

¹⁰⁵ Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, *Al-riwaya al-'arabiyya* [The Arabic Novel] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1988) 282; quoted from Mejcher-Atassi, *Reading Across Modern Arabic Literature and Art* 74.

With a view to Anglophone Arab artistic practice, however, I would like to offer a close reading of Jabra's 1978 novel. The story of an Iraqi writer's narrative investigation of the main protagonist's mysterious disappearance is particularly important regarding its transgeneric incorporation of non-literary intertexts. The first-person narrator, Jawad Husni is in search of the Palestinian Baghdadi Walid Masoud. The latter, according to divergent rumors, has emigrated to Australia or Canada or is said to have been killed variously as a resistance fighter in Palestine or during the Lebanese civil war in Beirut. For his undertaking, Husni draws on a recorded tape found in a small Japanese cassette player in Walid's empty car at the Iraqi-Syrian border, letters and other written documents, stories told by friends, and on his own fragmented memory. Although the hyper-investigative project has little success in terms of reconstructing a coherent factual line of events, it demonstrates the metafictional power of imaginative research as artistic research. The "balance" between rough humanist idealism and the real problems of humanity in a "world of terror, murder, hunger, and hatred" that Walid "had talked about all his life"¹⁰⁶ cannot be found. The "search" would [...] often go to extremes of rumor and conjecture, and in the end true and false would be so intermingled that it would be impossible to distinguish between the two.¹⁰⁷ Instead of objective, quasi-statistical approximations to Walid's secret truth, we are offered a non-conclusive mosaic of a man's life's re-employment, the narrative modes of which by far exceed this man's ultimate text. The writer-narrator-researcher finally accepts the many unresolved contradictions between competing versions of Walid Masoud's life. He understands that these contradictions result from the inevitable fact that his life has been framed and emplotted by and in other persons' life texts:

I ought to sift through all the facts and data, eliminate the false trails and fabrications and delusions, then try to reach a conclusion that will entail the least degree of contradiction possible. But my sense of responsibility as a researcher won't let me do that. Even fabrications and delusions about a man have their own particular importance; why would they be invented otherwise, and where would they come from?¹⁰⁸

Tayeb Salih's *Mawsim al-hijra ila-sh-shamal* in many ways reverses the representational dynamics described in the case of Jabra's *Hunters in a Narrow Street*. The novel was first published in Beirut in 1967; its English translation by Denys Johnson-Davies appeared less than two years later. In my view, it is important to point out that not only was *Season of Migration to the North* published in London, but the Arabic original was also written in London. Salih studied political science in the British

¹⁰⁶ Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud* 3.

¹⁰⁷ Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud* 47.

¹⁰⁸ Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud* 288-89.

capital city, and he spent most of his professional life as a writer and BBC journalist there, where he lived with his Scottish wife.¹⁰⁹ Since he wrote *Season* in Arabic, he obviously had an Arab readership in mind. In other words, this novel, which begins and ends with a Sudanese frame setting and which sends its Sudanese anti-hero, Mustafa Sa'eed, to London into a deadly love-hate relationship of mutual exoticist desire and desperate revenge, was meant to be sent from London to Khartoum, Cairo, or Baghdad. It is both a postcolonial and a metropolitan novel.

Salih could not have foreseen that his work would fall victim to censorship in most Arab countries and that *Mawsim al-hijra ila-sh-shamal* would for a long time only be available in Beirut. Therefore, most Anglophone Arab readers will have come across this text first in English translation. Whereas the novel has long been incorporated into the canon of postcolonial literatures, the details of its Anglo-Arabic genesis are rarely known. The contrapuntal interpretation of *Season* as a resistant mimetic reciprocation of Joseph Conrad's turn-of-the-century classic, *Heart of Darkness*,¹¹⁰ as well as its related symbolic use as a paradigmatic example of what has been variously termed "writing back"¹¹¹ or "voyage in"¹¹² rather evoke that Salih wrote back from his native Sudan and that his text has traveled into the Western discourse from some distant African over-there. The implicit insistence on an authentic non-Western voice speaking to the West is not without ambivalence. With a view to the novel's critique of the (neo-)colonial practice of cross-cultural othering and its simultaneous deconstruction of the (formerly) colonized systematic self-othering, it carries an almost tragic irony.

At this point, I cannot possibly do justice to the topical density and metafictional complexity of this tremendously beautiful narrative. In what follows, I simply want to explain why this Arabic novel in translation might be an important matrix and almost inexhaustible tool-kit for interpretively grasping contemporary Anglophone Arab poetics and ethics. According to Geoffrey Nash, *Season* can function as "an important intertext for our reading of later Anglophone writing by Arabs,"¹¹³ and I agree with that. The British literary critic's both hermeneutic and teleological investigation stresses the genuine proto-postcolonial quality of *Season* regarding its content and form. But whereas he wants to see in it a pioneering prototypical

¹⁰⁹ Constance E. Berkley and Osman Hassan Ahmed, eds. and trans., *Tayeb Salih Speaks: Four Interviews with the Sudanese Novelist* (Washington: Office of the Cultural Counsellor, Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan, 1982) I, 5, 12.

¹¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993; New York: Vintage, 1994) 210-39. The novella was first serialized in three parts in 1899 in the pro-colonial *Blackwood's Magazine*; it was first published in book form in 1902, Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 1994).

¹¹¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

¹¹² Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 216.

¹¹³ Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* 62.

text that offers “the raw materials”¹¹⁴ for the following generations’ writing of the Anglo-Arab encounter (i.e. the presence of hybrid protagonists placed in juxtaposed West-Eastern setting, the cross-cultural merging of literary references and poetic modes, or the anti-Orientalist re-writing of shared histories),¹¹⁵ I prefer to concentrate on *Season*’s literary negotiation and ambivalent justification of what I call counter-lies.

In my view, this Arab-British novel, both in Arabic and in English translation, does not so much counter Western lies with non-Western truths but rather exposes the relational dynamics of Western lies and non-Western strategies of self-assertion developed under conflictual conditions in which honesty and truthfulness cease to be veritable virtues. I argue that the foremost quality of this novel is not the representation of a national or regional literary tradition from which it supposedly comes as a self-image of Arab Africa or the story of an authentic Sudanese experience of the Anglo-Arab encounter; it is rather the depiction of the tremendous bi-directional effects of Europe’s constant denial of the non-Europeans’ humanity and its symptomatic accompaniment: namely, the violation of the idealist humanist notion of communicative reason. There can be a gap, in other words, between what certain nativist or multiculturalist readers may expect when they pick up the book and what they are actually confronted with when reading *Season of Migration to the North*. I am not saying that one has to approach the text as a piece of extra-moral philosophy; it is, quite obviously, a work of fiction. But, it is one that narratively elaborates, and thus transforms, the concept of lying with nearly obsessive self-consciousness. It imagines lies and counter-lies as speech acts intrinsically linked to the colonial and postcolonial appropriation of cross-cultural authority, and it asks for the chances and pitfalls of lying as a transgressive activity of resisting the ideology of Western truthfulness. As a work of literary art, *Season* performs an aesthetic transformation of its own ethical determination and thus transgresses the given (neo-)colonial discourse of universal consistency. With a view to its idiosyncrasy as a postcolonial work of post-moral transgression, Salih’s novel is indeed an original and particularly important intertext for contemporary Anglophone Arab representations.

It is no paradox, therefore, to see in Conrad’s partial affirmation of colonialist-racist ethics in *Heart of Darkness* an antecedent of *Season*’s anti-imperialist project. Although the exiled Polish writer firmly believed that “fiction is nearer to truth”¹¹⁶ than any historiographical representation could ever be, his own novelistic writing constantly urges its readers to ask themselves whether they are being lied to by narrative voices who regularly repress what they believe is unspeakable. Benita Parry

¹¹⁴ Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* 60.

¹¹⁵ Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* 57–63.

¹¹⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters* (1921; London: Dent, 1949).

correctly argues that the historical truths of Conrad's imperial imaginary rather lie in what remains unspoken. According to Parry, such truths can therefore be quasi ex-negativo distilled from the novel's remarkable silence regarding the dark side of Europe's civilizational mission and its progressivist promise. First and foremost, they lie in its subversive "estrangement of colonialist perceptions and misconceptions."¹¹⁷ Postcolonial critics writing in the wake of Edward Said's reading of *Heart of Darkness* as "both anti-imperialist and imperialist"¹¹⁸ have variously stressed the novella's implicit critique of or dishonest complicity with an ideology that tried to cover the violent horrors of "the conquest of the earth"¹¹⁹ with the idea of economic development and civilizational progress. Whether they see the novella as the work of "a bloody racist"¹²⁰ writer or as a dystopian critique of colonial hypocrisy, they almost all agree that this narrative does not provide a realistic image of colonized Africa and that the novel therefore cannot be grasped as a "mimetic transcription"¹²¹ of the colonizers' experience. Although Marlow's recollection of his voyage into the brutal reality of colonial blessings repeats the traditional Eurocentric association of whiteness with "truth, probity and purity",¹²² it deploys the imperial project's constitutive white lies to evoke what is withheld from the dominant narrative.

Marlow's complicit-passion not to disrupt the "unbound power of [Kurtz's ideological] eloquence" or "to interrupt the magic current of [his racist] phrases"¹²³ reaches its colonial Gothic peak when he returns to the metropolitan heart of darkness after Kurtz's death. Although his visit to Kurtz's Intended is overshadowed by the memory of the famous "whispered cry" of a dying man who represented all evils of Europe—"The horror! The horror!"¹²⁴—Marlow does not grant him the honest justice that he wanted. With every lie spoken about "a remarkable man"¹²⁵ to whom other men looked up and upon "his goodness" that "shone in every act,"¹²⁶ Kurtz's monstrous shadow grows, and the dark memory of his colonial regime deepens. Instead of telling the Intended his true last words, Marlow saves her illusions and symbolically preserves the colonial lies of Europe's dishonest home culture: "I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether ..."¹²⁷

¹¹⁷ Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London: Routledge, 2004) 107.

¹¹⁸ Said, *Culture and Imperialism* xviii.

¹¹⁹ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 10.

¹²⁰ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," *Literary Criticism*, spec. issue of *Research in African Literatures*, 9.1 (1978): 9. First presented as a lecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in February 1975.

¹²¹ Parry, *Postcolonial Studies. A Materialist Critique* 133.

¹²² Parry, *Postcolonial Studies. A Materialist Critique* 135.

¹²³ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 72.

¹²⁴ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 106.

¹²⁵ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 107.

¹²⁶ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 109.

¹²⁷ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 111.

As John Kucich demonstrates in *The Power of Lies*,¹²⁸ long before Conrad, Victorian writers questioned the official bourgeois notions of truthfulness as a cornerstone of British national character. In my view, *Heart of Darkness* is significant for its questioning of the nation's ideological discourse of colonialism. Whereas Kucich mentions Conrad only in passing, Jil Larson's study on *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel*¹²⁹ focuses on his 1911 novel, *Under Western Eyes*. The "linguistic pessimism"¹³⁰ that Larson stresses exists at the foundation of Conrad's narrative ethics applies as well to *Heart of Darkness*. Although the narrator lays bare the ideological traps of an intrinsically amoral colonial situation in which speaking and narrating necessarily become ways to lie, to manipulate, and to coerce, he "retains the distinction between truth telling as virtuous and lying as harmful, both to self and others."¹³¹ One does not have to agree with Chinua Achebe, who interprets Conrad's retrieve into the tyrannical narrowness of tropical discourse as the intentional drawing of "a *cordon sanitaire* between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator,"¹³² to see that *Heart of Darkness* is primarily concerned with the deterioration of the European mind and not with the anti-colonial revision of European lies. Marlow himself supposes that his reluctance to revise these white lies "was an impulse of unconscious loyalty"¹³³ to Kurtz. Perhaps it would be unfair to psychoanalytically interpret Benita Parry's false quotation of Marlow's self-apology as a similar expression of her unconscious loyalty to one of her favorite writers, Joseph Conrad. Substituting his original word choice, "life-sensation,"¹³⁴ with the term "lie-sensation," she reads into *Heart of Darkness* a critical awareness of the incommensurability of colonialism and morality that cannot be proved in the novella. Here I quote Parry mis-quoting Conrad: "...No it is impossible, it is impossible to convey the lie-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning."¹³⁵ Even if we take for granted that this is simply a typo, one wonders from whence the meta-ethical evocation of a certain immanent, almost Nietzschean, critique of modernity's discourse of universal truth concealed in Conrad's prose fiction comes.

The materialist critic Parry is not alone in her assessment that in *Heart of Darkness* "Conrad [...] reconfigured imperialism's lust after power" by transcending "ideological determination of the milieu within which it was written."¹³⁶ In fact, one

128 John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994).

129 Jil Larson, *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001).

130 Larson, *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880–1914* 136.

131 Larson, *Ethics and Narrative in the English Novel, 1880–1914* 131.

132 Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 7.

133 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 105.

134 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 39.

135 Conrad, as quoted by Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* 138, emphasis mine.

136 Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* 139.

gets the impression that such quasi-loyal reading is shared by the majority of white postcolonial critics. It was first the avowed Conradolator, Edward Said, who already in 1976 compared the novelist's work to Nietzsche's radical transvaluation of our learned notions of truth and lie and, thereby, suggested looking closely at Conrad's literary contention of the alliance of colonial language with power.¹³⁷ For re-reading Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* as an important intertext for our understanding of contemporary Anglophone Arab representations, one does not have to fully agree with Said's comparison of *Heart of Darkness* and Nietzsche's corpus of extra-moral ethics.¹³⁸

Season is not concerned with lying as a merely linguistic dilemma or a problem regarding some general moralizing manner. The novel depicts the verbal act of lying as a given practice under the socio-historical condition of coloniality. The story of Mustafa Sa'eed's emigration and remigration is told from Sudan by a man, who has just returned from his studies in England at the dawn of Sudanese independence in the mid-1960s. Back in his native village, the estranged returnee meets an even more uncanny stranger who is said to have come from the city and about whom not much is known. When the stranger one night drunkenly recites an English war poem in an "impeccable accent,"¹³⁹ the returnee's curiosity is aroused. He decides to find out more about the secrets concealed by Mustafa Sa'eed: "Wouldn't it be better if you told me the truth?"¹⁴⁰ Mustafa gives in and starts narrating his long life story. He does so not without clarifying that he "won't tell [him] everything. [...]"¹⁴¹ At an early point in his narration, he adds: "I don't ask you to believe what I tell you. [...]"¹⁴² Before Mustafa disappears, the narrator, and with him the reader, listens to the life story of a highly talented half-orphan's educational transmigration. His migrational travails lead the twelve-year-old Mustafa from Khartoum to a secondary school in Cairo and from there to London and then Oxford University. The Sudanese's migration to the north culminates in a private, professional, and legal catastrophe. The enframed narrative begins in the early 20th century with Mustafa's decision to go to public school. It ends in the late 1950s or early 1960s with his remigration to Sudan after a seven-year imprisonment in England. After Mustafa's disappearance, the first person narrator does not give up researching the

137 Edward W. Said, "Conrad and Nietzsche," *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*, by Edward Said (2000; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001) 70-82.

138 See, for instance, Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense," *Art and Interpretation: An Anthology of Readings in Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art*, ed. Eric Dayton (Peterborough, ON: Broadview P, 1998) 116-24.

139 Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 14.

140 Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 15.

141 Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 19.

142 Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 21.

secrets of his diachronic alter-ego's true life. He does so in conversations with people who knew him personally as well as on the basis of what Mustafa has left in his house's hidden Victorian-style drawing room: a library full of English books, notebooks and autobiographical fragments, theoretical manuscripts, scraps of paper with handwritten poetry on it, photographs, and other private documents. While he is professionally involved in governmental development projects, the private researcher-narrator takes care of Mustafa's Sudanese family. Finally, the unnamed narrator attempts to commit suicide and, in the final words of the novel, possibly decides to survive.

Mustafa's life-story is indeed a *lie-story*. From the very beginning, he is lied to, and he lies to others. The many seemingly helping hands that are given to him rarely honor their pledges. School does not turn out to be the promised entrance card to becoming an official in the colonial government, a cleric's astonishment regarding his fluency in English is not at all an expression of respect, and his first European foster-mother's loving embrace does not come without the childless woman's oedipal claim of lust and power. In Cairo, she calls him "Mr. Sa'eed"¹⁴³ and in turn desires to be called "Elizabeth,"¹⁴⁴ while Mustafa insists on calling her with her married name. When she later writes to the adult, she addresses him with the infantilizing pet name, "Moozi."¹⁴⁵ In fact, the "sensation of panic"¹⁴⁶ that the twelve-year-old Mustafa feels when he gazes at Mrs. Robinson's armpits for the first time not only relates to his own anxiety of cross-cultural erotics but, in a psychological reading, hints at the threat of sexual abuse. Symbolically, this early gendered encounter already anticipates the discriminating exploitation of a man who has lost his father(-land) in the over-embracing arms of the colonial motherland.

In London, the brilliant student and excellent young lecturer, Sa'eed, marries Jean Morris and has several affairs with English women who yearn "for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons."¹⁴⁷ These women project their phantasies of "a thirsty desert" or "a wilderness of southern desires" onto Mustafa, thereby perceptually transforming him "into a naked, primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles."¹⁴⁸ While they turn the immigrant into a symbolic personification of their own truths of cultural and racial alterity, Mustafa Sa'eed is well aware of the dynamics of misperception and hyper-affirmatively reciprocates the women's expectations. In his Orientalized "bedroom where the smell of burning sandalwood and incense"¹⁴⁹ fills the lungs of

¹⁴³ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 25.

¹⁴⁴ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 28.

¹⁴⁵ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 147.

¹⁴⁶ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 26.

¹⁴⁷ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 30.

¹⁴⁸ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 38.

¹⁴⁹ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 42.

his exoticist partners with what these women imagine is “the smell of rotting leaves in the jungles of Africa,”¹⁵⁰ he variously plays the role of the “African demon,” the “black god,”¹⁵¹ or the Arab “master” of ever-changing “slave girl[s].”¹⁵² The Orientalized room in London functions as a reversed doubling of the essentialist cultural paradigms represented in the secret anglicized room which Mustafa Sa’eed builds back in Sudan.

The sardonically ironic role-play is both parts masochistic and sadistic. Mustafa’s deadly love affairs with English women are characterized by mutual desire and disgust, racialized stereotyping and cultural misperceptions, as well as by feelings of guilt, hate, and vengeance. The open performance of Orientalist lies and the secret acting out of counter-Orientalist revenge take the form of physical and/or psychological terror. The dynamic of gendered violence inevitably leads to liberating acts of murderous self-defense and self-destruction. With his “mind [...] like a sharp knife,”¹⁵³ the Black Arab Englishman kills his wife and brings other women to suicide. Mustafa actively participates in his own performative racialization and sexual exploitation and does not see himself as a victim. He comes to England as “a conqueror,”¹⁵⁴ as a hyper-masculine reverse “colonizer” and “intruder”¹⁵⁵—as “a drop of the poison which you [the British, the Europeans] have injected into the veins of history.”¹⁵⁶ As the president of the London “Society for the Struggle for African Freedom,” he is known for the slogan “I’ll liberate Africa with my penis.”¹⁵⁷ If Mustafa Sa’eed comes from the heart of darkness, he imagines himself penetrating the “belly of the darkness”¹⁵⁸ from within. As an academic, he makes himself a name as a leftist Fabian economist of colonial capitalism. The titles of his own published studies clearly signal the anti-colonial impetus of his scholarly activism: “*The Economics of Colonialism [...]. Colonialism and Monopoly [...]. The Cross and Gunpowder [...]. The Rape of Africa [...]*”¹⁵⁹

The tragedy of Mustafa Sa’eed’s life in the well-ordered world of Europe is not that he performs lies but rather that he mostly lies according to an archive of melodramatic colonial-racist lies that has been arranged by others. All of Europe’s hackneyed lies have participated in the making of what he has become. He knows that he directly relates his lies to prefabricated Western stories. Therefore, the killing of Jean Morris is presented as an inescapable self-punishing and yet liberating act:

¹⁵⁰ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 142.

¹⁵¹ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 106.

¹⁵² Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 146.

¹⁵³ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 31.

¹⁵⁴ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 60.

¹⁵⁵ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 94.

¹⁵⁶ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 95.

¹⁵⁷ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 120.

¹⁵⁸ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 93.

¹⁵⁹ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 137.

“Everything which happened before my meeting her was a premonition; everything I did after I killed her was an apology, not for killing her, but for the lie that was my life.”¹⁶⁰ The relation to and murder of Jean Morris is central to the novel’s metaethical ambivalence. From their very first encounter, she humiliates Mustafa with her “look of arrogance [and] coldness.”¹⁶¹ Unlike other English women, she intentionally humiliates him with blatant racism—“You’re a savage bull that does not weary of the chase,”¹⁶² “I’ve never seen an uglier face than yours.”¹⁶³—and publicly expresses her discriminating views regarding his cultural inferiority. Although Mustafa swears early on that he “would one day make her pay for that,”¹⁶⁴ he nevertheless falls in love with Jean and makes her his wife. Because she openly lies to Mustafa and thus speaks some truth, and precisely because she refuses to pretend that he can possess her, the course of emotions gets successively out of control. Even when he explicitly threatens to kill Jean, she does not give up provoking his violent aggression of bashed honor: “What’s stopping you from killing me? What are you waiting for? Perhaps you’re waiting till you find a man lying on top of me, and even then I don’t think you’d do anything.”¹⁶⁵ There are rare moments of partial truthfulness between the two. When Mustafa shouts at Jean that he hates her, she answers: “I too, my sweet, hate you. I shall hate you until death.”¹⁶⁶

The night of Jean’s murder is not only “the night of truth and of tragedy”¹⁶⁷ but also the night of ultimate lies. While Mustafa presses his dagger into her breast and blood gushes from the chest of the very woman that he so much desires, the two confess their mutual love for the first and the last time. The murder of Jean Morris marks a turning point in Mustafa’s life. It symbolically reverses the colonial imagination of the feminized or castrated native Arab by turning him into the hyper-potent agent of the conquest of European women. Only those who consider the extremely destructive part of the economy of human lust can interpret this violent gesture of power as one of sexual conquest. One can hardly speak of an anti-colonial act of political liberation. But that seems to be precisely Mustafa Sa’eed’s perception of what happens that night. In the courtroom, he relives his own pre-murder identity as “an illusion, a lie.”¹⁶⁸ While the accused is exhibited as an “example of the fact that our civilizing mission in Africa is of no avail,”¹⁶⁹ he

¹⁶⁰ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 29.

¹⁶¹ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 29.

¹⁶² Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 33.

¹⁶³ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 30.

¹⁶⁴ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 30.

¹⁶⁵ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 162.

¹⁶⁶ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 159.

¹⁶⁷ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 163.

¹⁶⁸ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 32.

¹⁶⁹ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 93.

himself has a “feeling of superiority.”¹⁷⁰ There is the triumph of rebellion, rather than redemption, in his emotions. Dignity and happiness for him are not choices but must be achieved in a painful struggle. It seems that the West’s violation of the idea of shared humanity has been countered by an equally violent strategy. This practice might not be legitimate from a strictly normative point of view, but it can be justified by Mustafa.

As Muhsin al-Musawi in my view correctly argues, Mustafa of *Season of Migration to the North* can easily be mistaken for the theoretician of racism and anti-colonial critic, Frantz Fanon.¹⁷¹ Musawi draws in particular on the Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks*.¹⁷² Seen through this psychoanalytical lens, one can indeed interpret Mustafa as an abandoned neurotic whose attitude is to not truly love the racial other in order to avoid being abandoned on racist grounds. Accordingly, his tragically impossible love story would demonstrate how the colonial-racist discourse of superiority and inferiority is embodied in both sexual desire and neurotic discontent. In this line of argument, the drama of Mustafa’s sexual preoccupation with white women represents the painful breaking of an internalized racist taboo.¹⁷³ His emotional and physical violence against white women would be the direct expression of his neurotic need for revenge. Mustafa’s “quest for white flesh,”¹⁷⁴ in other words, would be that of an alienated psyche.

An alternative view of looking at Mustafa’s performance might be offered in Fanon’s theory of anti-colonial violence as articulated in *The Wretched of the Earth*.¹⁷⁵ In his reflections on violence, Fanon not only argues that colonialism, at the outset, “is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence,”¹⁷⁶ but he also acknowledges that the “native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood.”¹⁷⁷ Fanon’s consideration of truth and lie in the context of violence stresses that anti-colonial truth is simply that which makes the break-up of the colonialist-racist regime possible. Just as he sees violence inherent in the colonial order, he argues that there are necessarily lies at work in the disciplining judgment and classification of non-white people.¹⁷⁸ Now, while Fanon acknowledges that the entrenchment of violence in individual and collective life makes revolutionary violence necessary, he does not explain how the vicious circle

¹⁷⁰ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 94.

¹⁷¹ Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* 195.

¹⁷² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (1967; London: Pluto P, 2008), orig. *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1952).

¹⁷³ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 52-54.

¹⁷⁴ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 59.

¹⁷⁵ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (1967; London: Penguin, 2001), orig. *Les damnés de la terre* (Paris: Maspero, 1961).

¹⁷⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 61.

¹⁷⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 50.

¹⁷⁸ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 46.

of colonial lies can be broken. Could one argue that, if lying is the discursive standard of the colonialist-racist order, then this order will only yield when confronted with greater lies? Could one, in other words, see in Mustafa Sa'eed's lies a resistive strategy of counter-lies?

The tragic end of Mustafa's transmigration actually counters the idea that using lies may be his way to avoid being lied to. Even after his return to his native country, he remains trapped in the violence and the lies he has both inflicted and suffered. Until the narrator forces Mustafa to tell the lies of his life, he hides his secrets and his memories in his concealed drawing room as in the attic of a Gothic horror novel. Against this background, the revolutionary insistence on the Sudanese people's right to lie does not signal a "denial of historical agency"¹⁷⁹ or a mystification of the true urgencies of the unfinished liberationist struggle, as critics like Wail S. Hassan want to have it. In my view, the self-confident statement rather anticipates a literary meta-ethics which, instead of morally condemning acts of lying, rehabilitates the strategic use of partial truth, lies, and counter-lies as justifiable forms of political agency—an agency that, in a similar way, guides the transgressive syntax and correlational narrative techniques of Anglophone Arab truth-making: "Once again we shall be as we were—ordinary people—and if we are lies we shall be lies of our own making."¹⁸⁰

Mustafa Sa'eed's lies do not always, or at least not ultimately, lead to the destruction of himself or of others. When he delivers a lecture at Oxford on the Abbasid poet, Abu Nuwas, for instance, he claims that the poet, known for his homo-erotic Bacchic poems,¹⁸¹ was an Islamic mystic and that, therefore, wine functions in his poetry as a symbol of his "spiritual yearnings" and his "longing for self-obliteration in the Divine."¹⁸² What he presents to the illustrious audience is basically "all arrant nonsense with no basis of fact."¹⁸³ After he reads out some poems "in a comic oratorical style which [he] claimed was how Arabic poetry used to be recited in the Abbasid era," the lecturer Mustafa Sa'eed is quite inspired and finds "the lies tripping off [his] tongue like sublime truths."¹⁸⁴ It is on this occasion, after his extravagant academic show, that he first meets Ann Hammond, a young Oxford student of Arabic literature and a fetishist regarding all things Oriental. She finds him "beautiful beyond description."¹⁸⁵ He calls her Sausan and pretends to know her from their shared time in Baghdad during the days of the caliph El-Ma'amoun.

¹⁷⁹ Wail S. Hassan, *Tayeb Salih: Ideology and the Craft of Fiction* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2003) 122.

¹⁸⁰ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 50.

¹⁸¹ See, on Abu Nuwas's controversial place in Arab discourse, Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007) 77-98.

¹⁸² Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 143.

¹⁸³ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 143.

¹⁸⁴ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 143.

¹⁸⁵ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 143.

She is enamored by the evening's Abbasid flair. Together, they drive to London. When he takes his new girlfriend to his house to recite Abu Nuwas to her privately, she takes on the role of his slave girl. Mustafa does not hesitate to act the part of the master: "It was as if she and I were on a stage."¹⁸⁶ Whereas the novelistic scene stresses the importance of performativity both on the story level and with a view to the narrator's act of narration, and although the performative determination of the remembered sexual encounter is openly acknowledged by Mustafa, he recounts the evening as a rare moment of *not-honest-yet-true* ecstasy:

Though I realized I was lying, I felt that somehow I meant what I was saying and that she too, despite her lying, was telling the truth. It was one of those rare moments of ecstasy for which I would sell my whole life; a moment in which, before your very eyes, lies are turned into truth, history becomes a pimp, and the jester is turned into a sultan.¹⁸⁷

It is not so much the stage-like situation but rather these words of Mustafa that will remind the Shakespearean scholar of the rhyming couplet of the English bard's Sonnet 138, which ambiguously plays out the flattering erotic of mutual lying: "Therefore I lie with her, and she with me, / And in our faults by lies we flattered be."¹⁸⁸

There are in fact several allusions to Shakespeare's work in *Seasons of Migration to the North*. When Mustafa Sa'eed is obstinately debriefed regarding his precise biological race by Isabella Seymour during one of his rather short affairs, he answers: "I am like Othello—Arab-African."¹⁸⁹ However, in the courtroom, he wishes he had shouted at the jury: "I am no Othello. I am a lie."¹⁹⁰ Later, he renounces both his self-identification and acting according to the European imaginary of racial blackness as well as the mimetic representativeness of the very dramatic character functioning as this imaginary's key reference: "I am no Othello. Othello was a lie."¹⁹¹ As I have repeatedly pointed out over the course of this study, modern Arabic and Anglophone Arab literatures participated in the anti- and postcolonial re-reading or re-writing of the Western and Arabic canonical texts. And perhaps there is no text in the English canon that "shows better the exploitation of race and color prejudice than *Othello*."¹⁹² If it is true that, due to its Moorish hero, this tragic play touches the

¹⁸⁶ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 144.

¹⁸⁷ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 144.

¹⁸⁸ William Shakespeare, Sonnet 138, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974) 1774.

¹⁸⁹ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 38.

¹⁹⁰ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 33.

¹⁹¹ Salih, *Season of Migration to the North* 95.

¹⁹² wa Thiong'o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* 21.

“chords of Arab sensibility and identity”¹⁹³ more than other Shakespearean works, one cannot be surprised to find Tayeb Salih using the dramatic character as an intertextual foil to underline the lies involved in the encounter between the Afro-Arab man of color and the white European woman and to test the universal or timeless validity of the Othello-type imaginary. The narrative of the assumingly prodigal Sudanese who kills his English wife in a moment of violent ecstasy has been variously interpreted as *Heart of Darkness* in reverse, an *Arabian Nights* in reverse, or as a story of a modern-day Othello.¹⁹⁴ However, as Barbara Harlow reminds us regarding the last of these comparisons, it is important to see that Salih’s novel is a “re-shaping of the tragic figure of the Moor.”¹⁹⁵ Mustafa Sa’eed not only rejects the identification with Shakespeare’s essentially non-European outsider, but he also rejects the act of killing himself after he has killed the Desdemona-like Jean Morris. The anti-Othello narrative assimilates the classic play without fully integrating into the dramatic sub-genre of tragedy. There is no hamartia, no inherent tragic flaw, no mistake of judgment in the hero. What is rather the inherent defect or shortcoming is the dominant racist perception of him. Neither he nor his narrating alter-ego end in full adversity. Anticipating something else beyond the catastrophe of the endless repetitions of Western lies, their life stories do not simply purge the reader of pity. This utopian and maybe revolutionary anticipation turns the sentimental presentation of cultural otherness into a cross-cultural allegory. Unlike Othello, who accepts his role as an army general fighting on behalf of Europe, Mustafa finally refuses to act according to the role assigned to him by the early modern European hypotext. What fails is the role of the Moor, not the 20th century Arab acting it. Contemporary Anglophone Arabs cannot afford to read or perform Shakespeare while colorblind.¹⁹⁶ In my view, *Season of Migration to the North* must be read as the attempt to partially revise *Othello* through the prism of a (formerly) colonized person of color. It seems that such Arab re-reading only looks into the classic play to critically face its own racialized image as an object of alterity before counter-discursively adjusting the borrowed representation according to its own political typologies.

I have mentioned *Don Quixote* and the *Nights* alongside the Bible and the Quran as important intertexts of Anglophone Arab representations. One cannot but add Shakespeare to this open-ended list. To point out that the work of “the icon of

193 Ferial J. Ghazoul, “The Arabization of Othello,” *Comparative Literature*, 50.1 (1998): 1.

194 Denys Johnson-Davies, Translator’s Introduction, *Season of Migration to the North*, by Tayeb Salih (New York: Kesend, 1989).

195 Barbara Harlow, “Sentimental Orientalism: Season of Migration to the North and Othello,” *Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North: A Critical Casebook*, ed. Mona Takieddine Amyuni (Beirut: American U of Beirut P, 1985) 75-79.

196 Cf. Ayanna Thompson, ed., *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

genius of British imperial culture”¹⁹⁷ also forms an important referential corpus in this particular cultural field is almost redundant. In fact, the same may be said for virtually all 20th-century writings in English. However, contemporary Arabic and Anglophone Arab representations not only testify “the large extent to which we are [all] possessed by him [Shakespeare],”¹⁹⁸ but also the extent to which Shakespeare’s work has been seized by Arab writers and artists.

This process of assimilation and multiple revisions began with the first translation and production of *Othello* in Egypt in 1884,¹⁹⁹ and it is continuing in the Arab productions of the 2012 World Shakespeare Festival in London or the many plays written and produced during and after the so-called Arab Spring.²⁰⁰ At this point, one should note that the author of the above-mentioned novels, *Hunters in a Narrow Street* and *In Search of Walid Masoud*, is considered among the most important Arabic translators of Shakespeare’s plays.²⁰¹ When writing his 1978 novel, Jabra in fact undertook the translation of *Othello*.²⁰² It is significant that he re-Arabized Othello’s name and, by extension, the title of the play into ‘*Utayl*’ while he transliterated all other characters’ names to reflect their English pronunciation.²⁰³ Whereas *Othello* often functions as a paradigmatic matrix for the critique of Orientalist discrimination and gendered violence, *The Tempest* has rarely been read in Arab discourse as a more “comprehensive allegory”²⁰⁴ of the violent dialectics of the colonial master-slave relation and the importance of language as a power tool in the colonial encounter. If Arabic or Anglophone Arab writers revisit at all the wretched situation of Shakespeare’s savage chained to a rock, they hardly do so to write back to Western possessors of repressive book magic. The “almost iconic status”²⁰⁵ that the cursing character, Caliban, has arisen to in South American and Caribbean literatures cannot be diagnosed for the Arabic and Anglophone Arab discourse. To my knowledge, there exists no Arabic or Anglophone Arabic work comparable to Aimé Césaire’s *Une Tempête*, although it is worth noting that the anti-colonial Martiniquan

197 wa Thiong'o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* 21.

198 Harry Levin, General Introduction, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974) 25.

199 Muhammad Mustafa Badawi, “Shakespeare and the Arabs,” *Cairo Studies in English* 26-27 (1964/1965): 183.

200 Margaret Litvin, Saffron Walkling, and Raphael Cormack, “‘Full of Noises: When ‘World Shakespeare’ met the ‘Arab Spring.’” *Shakespeare* 12.3 (2016): 300-15.

201 See Mejcher-Atassi, *Reading Across Modern Arabic Literature and Art* 51. Among Jabra’s translations of Shakespeare’s plays are those of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus*, *Othello*, *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth*; see ibd. 145-46.

202 Ghazoul, “The Arabization of *Othello*” 6.

203 Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, ‘*Util* [Shakespeare’s *Othello*] (Kuwait: Wizarat al-l’lam, 1978).

204 Bill Ashcroft, *Caliban’s Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2009) 16.

205 Ashcroft, *Caliban’s Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* 17.

poet and politician's French-language play was first performed at an international festival in Hammamet, Tunisia, in 1969.²⁰⁶

Modern Arabic cultural debates and literary practice have been particularly concerned with the fate of the Danish Prince Hamlet. Dramatic adaptations and other appropriations of *Hamlet* have become a constant feature of the region's postcolonial cultural discourse. It seems that, particularly since the 1967 Arab defeat, this play has proved suitable for exploring and criticizing the rotten internal situation in many Arab nations. As Margaret Litvin demonstrates, *Hamlet's Arab Journey*²⁰⁷ is closely related to the political presence and ghostly afterlife of Gamal Abdel Nasser's (failed) revolutionary promise. The deployment and negotiation of *Hamlet* is not primarily concerned with questions of resistance against Western hegemony but can be grasped as the "Hamletization of the Arab Muslim political hero."²⁰⁸ Against the background of earlier ideological adaptations of Shakespeare's play as self-empowering expressions of the emerging nation's pan-Arab aspirations in the 1950s, the more recent Hamlet rhetoric serves the inward interrogation of those post-heroic regimes which proved to be unable to fix what is obviously *out of joint* inside the Arab world. While Hamlet was mobilized against Claudius-like corrupt military leaders, feudal dictators, and neoliberal autocrats of the late 1960s and early 1970s, he has in more recent decades developed into a tragic and sometimes ironic anti-hero of unarticulated passivity, political ineffectuality, and the bitter laugher of those hoping for democratic change on the basis of human rights.²⁰⁹ In 2000, the Syrian philosopher and prominent critic of what he coined "istishraq ma'akusan" [Orientalism in reverse],²¹⁰ Sadiq al-Azm, directly related the unrelieved tragedy of 20th-century Arab societies to their hesitating oscillation and failed reconciliation between sentimental recourses to a glorious past and coming to terms with the present reality as the necessary condition for holding oneself responsible for the future. Al-Azm sees in the contemporary Arab intellectual's search for a modern identity in the cultural and religious heritage of classical Islamic empires a subconscious fetishistic procrastination: one that, according to him, prevents awareness of the all-too-evident everyday actualities of de-facto Arab sociopolitical and economic impotence. It is precisely this presumption of the deficit of insight regarding the de-facto historical agency of the region's people that leads him to compare them

²⁰⁶ Philip Crispin, "Césaire's *Une Tempête* at The Gate," *'The Tempest' and Its Travels*, eds. Peter Hulme and William Howard Sherman (London: Reaction Books, 2000) 149.

²⁰⁷ Margaret Litvin, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011).

²⁰⁸ Litvin, *Hamlet's Arab Journey: Shakespeare's Prince and Nasser's Ghost* 90.

²⁰⁹ See, on this transformation, Margaret Litvin, "Vanishing Intertexts in the Arab 'Hamlet Tradition,'" *Arab Shakespeare*, spec. issue of *Critical Survey* 19.3 (2007): 74-97.

²¹⁰ Sadik Jalal al-Azm, "Al-istishraq wa-l-istishraq ma'akusan," [Orientalism and Orientalism in reverse] *Hayat al-Jadida* 1.3 (1981): 7-51.

to Shakespeare's Danish prince: "[M]odern Arabs are truly the Hamlet of the 20th century."²¹¹ One does not have to agree entirely with al-Azm's pessimistic diagnosis to see the ramifications of his polemical intervention; the popular uprisings of the early 21st century in many Arab countries allow, at least partly, for more optimistic estimations. However, the equally Orientalist and Arab nationalist notion of Arabs who are caught between religious tradition and secular modernity was and continues to be a very powerful narrative throughout the 20th century, and Hamlet is one of its key allegorical tropes.

I must draw once again on Rihani to show that the Hamletian trope has entered Anglophone Arab representations very early on, perhaps even before it became a part of internal Arabic discourses. My case in point is once more *The Book of Khalid*. When the young immigrant Khalid oscillates between assimilating into the materialistic order of his host country and thus corrupting himself or staying true to his immanent morality and, in so doing, revolting against the American cash registers—"To trade, or not to trade"—the editor-narrator describes his anti-hero as "Hamlet-Khalid."²¹² This novel, whose author allegedly ran away from his father's US business at the age of eighteen to join a traveling Shakespeare company called the Henry Jewett Players,²¹³ pleads quite ambivalently for a revolt against the ruling spirit of his time. Rihani does so with a view to both the dominant tendencies of his native Arab and his adopted Western locations. It is my argument that Anglophone Arab writers have not given up this project of relational opposing and cross-cultural transgression. Rihani's turn-of-the-century novel, like most of the works discussed in the previous chapters, suggests that the proper intertextual study of any Anglophone Arab representation requires familiarity with virtually all artistic practices and critical discourses of potentially every temporal and geographical space on which the individual work draws. This, of course, is not a task for a single scholar of comparative literature, relational diasporic studies, or cross-cultural theory. To accomplish such an endeavor, one would rather need a transcultural community of polymaths.

²¹¹ Sadik Jalal al-Azm, "Owning the Future: Modern Arabs and Hamlet," *ISIM Newsletter* 5 (2000): 11.

²¹² Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 127.

²¹³ Fine, Afterword, *The Book of Khalid* 318.

4.2 Edward Said in Anglophone Arab Works and in this Study

“What are the East and the West? If you ask me, I don’t know. We must settle for approximations.”²¹⁴

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced the Shahrazadian trope as a key reference for my understanding of Anglophone Arab poetics. I have further argued that this trope stands for the critical project of permitting and perpetuating marginalized voices and can thus function as a narrative model for anti-hegemonic resistance and counter-discursive strategies of emancipation. Although the significance of the *Nights* for Anglophone Arab discourse concerns narratological and metafictional dimensions in equal measure, the Shahrazadian discourse’s particular relevance for contemporary fictocritical practice first and foremost concerns its subversive insights into the relation between power and narrative.

It is this very relation that forms the core of Edward Said’s literary and cultural critique—a critical corpus known for its analysis of colonial discourses as well as for his contrapuntal readings of imperialism, a textual corpus that 17 years after Said’s death seems to be well preserved in the everyday curriculum of international criticism. The name of the author of the seminal 1978 study, *Orientalism*, has almost advanced to a critical trope in his own right. At the same time, one can get the impression that the Saidian trope has been subdued to a standardized scholarly tool and compulsory reference of instant postcolonialism. Speaking of a Saidian trope in relation to Anglophone Arab nocturnal discourses, I do not argue at all that Said’s critique should be read as a direct reverberation of the Shahrazadian discourse. Actually, his work shows little interest in the narrative structure and metafictional implications of the *Nights*. If he addresses the tales, they are treated primarily as either uninspired or tendentious translations by Burton and Lane, as examples of Orientalist mis-representation.²¹⁵ However, for my purpose of re-reading the Saidian text as both an Anglophone Arab intertext and an Anglophone Arab text, one can easily point out several structural and meta-critical similarities between Shahrazad’s narrative subversion of the king’s truth-regime and Said’s critical project of *Speaking Truth to Power*.²¹⁶ According to Paul Bové, it is this self-imposed strategic task of “speaking truth *against* power and building the severe poetic institutions of freedom and justice”²¹⁷ that sets Said’s critique apart from the work of other academic critics of his time. While, for Shahrazad, storytelling is a quasi-

²¹⁴ Borges, “The Thousand and One Nights,” 564.

²¹⁵ See Said, *Orientalism* 164, 176.

²¹⁶ Paul A. Bové, *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000).

²¹⁷ Bové, *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power* 6.

political form of resistance and subversion, Said's criticism posits storytelling as so powerful "that he urges it as a form of political action and testimony."²¹⁸ His critique of grand narratives—most obviously those of empire, Orientalism, and the clash of cultures—as a condition for dialogue and justice stresses the central nexus between history, narrative power, and politics. Like Shahrazad, Said has somehow narratively reinvented himself as the agent of a critique that is directed against the very set of discursive rules that perceive him as a passive Oriental object. For him, as for her, the "Permission to Narrate"²¹⁹ is the inevitable condition for non-violent resistance as a practice of narrating one's own (his)stories within and against the discourse of power. While her storytelling is directed against patriarchal power, his critical narrative first and foremost aims at countering colonial-Orientalist representations. Both struggle unrelentingly against their silencing and the silencing of those marginalized groups with which they affiliated. Both texts take the liberty to include diverse narratives from discrepant historical and cultural contexts. And Said's almost classical critique, like the *Nights*, is constantly fraught with a mixture of need and rejection by its competing recipients.

That his work is important as an intertext for contemporary Anglophone Arab representations cannot come as a surprise. In fact, these narrative, audio-visual, or performative attempts at uncovering dominances, at articulating what has not been articulated, and at showing what has been made invisible are often inspired by direct or indirect encounters with Said's critique. Some of the most prominent Anglophone Arab writers, artists, and critics, such as Ahdaf Soueif, Emily Jacir, or Ferial Ghazoul, were students of Said. For many others, the internationally renowned scholar was a mentor. It would be difficult to exaggerate the intellectual impact of his critique of Western Orientalist representations. Hardly any book in recent history has managed to draw such complex simultaneous reactions, both positive and negative, across the disciplines on a truly global level as did *Orientalism*. Arab and Anglophone Arab readers were a significant share of these reactions, from both inside and outside the academy. But they do not at all form a homogenous audience. Sure, Said's role for the resurgence and development of Anglophone Arab writing "cannot be underestimated."²²⁰ Yet, the spectrum of this impact is extremely heterogeneous and cannot possibly be narrowed down to strictly affirmative voices.

In other words, one should not underestimate the number of those writers, artists, and critics who were long "sick and tired of having only Edward Said speak-

218 Bové, Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power 2.

219 Edward W. Said, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13.3 (1984): 27-48.

220 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 28.

ing”²²¹ on their behalf or who made him responsible for generations of Arab students who “spend their time and intellectual energy critiquing Western stereotypes and images of Empire in the novels of George Eliot, rather than actually looking at and analyzing contemporary artistic production in the Arab world.”²²² Yes, Said was there before to make us “believe, if just for a moment, that academia is not pointless.”²²³ He was and still is an icon for many Anglophone Arabs. However, people tend to kill their idols if they want to press on and do something new. Anglophone Arab artists and critics are no exception in this regard: “He demonstrated that Orientalism does indeed exist, as an overpowering discursive contraption, brilliant, surreptitious, and monumental at once, thoroughly conservative and yet incredibly mobilizing, a tenuous abstraction with very tangible effects. Not unlike Said himself.”²²⁴

I have elsewhere explored at length the genesis and multidirectional impact of Said’s work beyond the spheres of literary and cultural studies. My 2008 book, *Kulturkritik ohne Zentrum*, traces the importance of Arab pre-texts and receptions of Said’s criticism (Middle Eastern as well as diasporian) for our understanding of his traveling oeuvre, with a particular focus on its impact on critical Arab debates and his own adaptations of Arabic criticism. The book also demonstrates that Middle Eastern studies have been enduringly altered and often divided into opposing camps by Said’s critique of the academic discipline. This long-time project must surely have fed into my readings of Anglophone Arab representation. For that reason, Said’s emphasis on the struggle over representations of competing histories, overlapping spatial constructions, and identity was of relevance for the genesis of my present study, as well.

Nevertheless, I attempt to spare neither Said’s thinking nor my own previous reception of his work’s rigorous critical revision. While acknowledging the importance of the historical analysis of Orientalist power-knowledge, I do question some of his historical tracings (i.e., his focus on the post-Enlightenment era) and intentionally subvert his privileging of the Anglo-American canon as well as controvert the pessoptimist’s humanistic notion of harmony. In addition, I have found myself repeatedly questioning the critic’s responsibility to disenchant and the idealist notion of historical truth and truth-speaking as the inescapable condition of effective

²²¹ Statement by an anonymous artist during the conference *Ashghal Daakhaliya – Homeworks*, 2–7 Apr. 2002, City Theatre of Beirut. The international conference and artistic forum, the first of its kind, was organized by the artist association, *Ashkal Alwan*.

²²² Walid Sadik, quoted by Stephen Wright, “Tel un espion dans l’époque qui naît: la situation de l’artiste à Beyrouth aujourd’hui / Like a Spy in a Nascent Era: On the Situation of the Artist in Beirut Today,” *Parachute, Beyrouth_Beirut* 108 (2002): 25.

²²³ Tirdad Zolghadr, “Thanks God He Wasn’t French: Notes on Edward Said (1935–2003),” *Bidoun* 5 (2005): 41.

²²⁴ Zolghadr, “Thanks God He Wasn’t French: Notes on Edward Said (1935–2003),” 41.

cultural resistance. I think Said's latent social elitism and conservatism as well as his admirable insistence on the value of the human allowed him to sometimes forget the dialectic commonplace of the critique of ideology that even truths are not timeless. While I can perfectly see the strategic need to hold on to the illusion of candor, I do not want to deny Anglophone Arab representations' critical capacity to lie strategically, to utilize sub-harmonic aesthetics, or to contradict themselves intentionally. My interest in dissonant set-ups of (maybe, but not necessarily) mutually correcting cultural archives, in other words, draws on many of Said's insights and yet is bound to go beyond his notion of contrapuntal harmonics. I regard the Saidian corpus as belonging to both Western academia and to a broader Anglophone Arab diasporic discourse. Numerous diasporic scholars of Arab (af)filiation anticipated Said's work, and this work in turn participated in the formation of "a critical Middle Eastern/Arab diasporic studies project,"²²⁵ a project in which I place my own study. According to Ella Shohat, "Said's *Orientalism* can also be regarded as an Arab American Studies text," a project that aims to institutionalize an interdisciplinary "polylogue" that transcends ethnic studies and area studies approaches alike.²²⁶

Let me illustrate my relational reading and decentering of Said's text by revisiting *Orientalism*'s "being in the world"²²⁷ and by looking at the critic Said in his capacities as a reader, writer, and politically engaged person instead of synthesizing his ambivalent position and relegating him to a depoliticized sphere of theoretical transculturality or postcoloniality. If I underline the particular Arab conditions determining the emergence and acceptance of Said's work, it is not to prove that this work is an Anglophone Arab one and indeed part of Anglophone Arab studies—I take that for granted. I rather wish to sensitize my reader to the fact that this work was produced by a person whose chosen identity was based on the secular political commitment to being Palestinian. In my view, re-reading Said's Anglophone work via selected Arab(ic) readings can also provide a critical counterpoint to interpretive strategies of theoretically domesticating a work that has in fact traveled through many locations and histories and that, in turn, was affected by those many worlds. Willful ignorance of the dynamics that transformed Said's literary criticism into a project with political change as its purpose (and vice versa) not only misses the critic's concrete involvement in the Palestinian liberation movement but in addition excludes what is supposedly one of Said's most obvious interpretive communities: (Anglophone) Arab readers, writers, and artists.

If one evaluates those situations in which Said's text enters into a relationship with concrete socio-political issues and theoretical positions within the Mid-

²²⁵ Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," 46.

²²⁶ Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," 46.

²²⁷ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1983) 35.

dle East, thus playing a role itself in the worldliness of which it speaks, then Said's self-description as an Arab by choice can be grasped as a transgressive act that aims at connecting or at least relating two spheres that are all too often mutually ghettoized: his own preeminence in the postcolonial field and the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. The 1975 meta-theoretical essay, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*,²²⁸ can already be evaluated as a first intentional step to integrate his political life into his academic praxis. Anticipating the discussion of themes such as eurocentrism, colonialism, and racism into Western literary theory, as later carried out in *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), it marks a key turning point in Said's "unsettled intellectual way" from a doctoral Conrad scholar firmly rooted in the phenomenological strains of New Criticism to the politicized inaugurator of colonial discourse analysis.²²⁹ Already in this early book's conclusion, he calls for challenging the secret networks and ideological pre-figurations of institutional information "as a first turning back of power."²³⁰ His notion of criticism insists on methodologically uniting theory with a moral and practical need for political change. While *Beginnings* does not provide a direct worldly reference for this project, thus leaving the reader with some metaphorical emptiness, it clearly opened up possible questions for Said's future research projects: "the question of the cultural domination of one intellectual or national domain over another (one culture is more 'developed' than—having begun earlier and 'arrived' before—another); and the questions of liberty, or freedom, or originality."²³¹ Following Hayden White's reading of *Beginnings* as an instance of "Criticism as Cultural politics,"²³² one can assume that the crucial point of departure for writing this study lies outside the system of Western literary criticism. To locate these other points of departure, it seems advisable to revisit the historical circumstances and individual experiences that informed the transformation of Said's critical practice. To this end, I look first at Said's second birth as a political agent.

Before the setback of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, the literary scholar consistently tried to exclude his Arab background from his professional life at Columbia University. Suddenly, however, his life could no longer be lived in separate parts. To be an Arab in the US during and after the 1967 war was an experience of collective racist stigmatization and personal humiliation.²³³ At the same time, the emergence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as a

²²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia UP; Basic, 1975).

²²⁹ Subhy Hadidy, "Idward sa'id wa mufhum al-bidaya," [Edward Said and the meaning of beginning] *Al-Mulhaq ath-Thaqafi/An-Nahar* 28 Nov. 1998: 16.

²³⁰ Said, *Beginnings* 379.

²³¹ Said, *Beginnings* 381.

²³² Hayden White, "Criticism as Cultural Politics," *Diacritics* 6.3 (1976): 8-13.

²³³ Nubar Hovsepian, "Connections with Palestine," *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 8.

political organization independent from other Arab regimes made it possible for a growing number of Palestinians in exile to identify themselves as belonging to one people and nation.²³⁴ While Said's childhood experience of 1948 Cairo was a materially fortunate and "scarcely conscious"²³⁵ one, the events of 1967 in the distant Palestinian world of his frequent family visits led to a fundamental identity crisis: "I was no longer the same person after 1967."²³⁶ During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Said not only committed himself to a re-education in Arabic but also got involved in Palestinian intellectual debates and politics. He was introduced to Fatah-leader Yasser Arafat as early as 1969.²³⁷ In 1971, the latter addressed the Palestinian academic diaspora in the West with a quite suggestive rhetoric: "How do you contribute to the liberation of Palestine?"²³⁸ When Said spent his sabbatical in Beirut in 1972, he came into personal contact with other key actors of the PLO, which was located in the Lebanese capital at that time. Within a few years, in which Said produced an innovative study on the discursive predicaments of a socially responsible criticism,²³⁹ he became a Palestinian activist scholar. If it was his personal intention to become a politically involved Palestinian and to act against the constraints of freedom and justice in Palestine, *Beginnings* is the first, but by no means Said's last, step toward its fulfillment.

While Said took on the role of a high-profile intellectual in the Middle East during the 1990s, the question of his identity remains controversial to this day. Can one really decide to be an Arab? The intense intra-Arab reactions to his memoir *Out of Place* (1999)—an Anglophone Arab auto-fictional work in its own right in which Said tries to make sense of his life by placing himself into Arabic history as a formerly colonized and Orientalized subject—are an impressive illustration of Said's ambivalent location within contemporary Arab cultural debates. To a large extent, these reactions are re-receptions of the attempt by non-Arab critics to contest the validity and symbolic implications of Said's auto-narration.²⁴⁰ While some Arab readers discover their own feeling of alienation from the dominant Arab discourse

234 This is not at all to say that there was no distinct national Palestinian identity before 1967. See Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997).

235 Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1999) 114.

236 Said, *Out of Place* 293.

237 *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*, ed. Gauri Viswanathan (New York: Pantheon, 2001) 209.

238 Arafat as quoted by Hisham Ahmed-Farajeh and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *Resistance, Exile, and Return* (The Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies, Birzeit: Birzeit UP, 2003) 115.

239 "The kernel-essay of *Beginnings* was written during the winter of 1967–8; more of it developed in 1968 and 1969, and by winter 1972–3 most of it was completed." (Said, *Beginnings* xi.)

240 Justus Reid Weiner, "'My Beautiful Old House' and other Fabrications by Edward Said," *Commentary* 108.2 (1999): 23–31.

in this personal historiography, most critics defend the book as both a proof of the autobiographer's Arab identity and a representative Palestinian national statement on the will to narrate the Palestinian story and to claim the right of return from exile to an independent homeland.²⁴¹ As a response to this hyper-patriotic debate, Said, in September 2000, provocatively presented himself as "arabi bi-l-ikhtiyar,"²⁴² as an Arab by choice. The essay "To Write is an Act of Memento and Oblivion"²⁴³ was published in the Lebanese daily *An-Nahar* and is also the preface to the Arabic edition of his memoir. Here, Said stresses the narrative genesis of his Arab-Palestinian identity and explains the act of postcolonial identification as the strategic substitution of certain external inscriptions with other, more empowering self-interpretations. He underlines the need for intentionally beginning a new meaning instead of arguing for a return to an authentic origin. For Said, Arab-Palestinian identity by choice is first and foremost a political commitment of solidarity, and it is closely related to the aim of universalizing Palestinian human rights claims.²⁴⁴

In this context, it is important to remind ourselves that, although it is true that *Orientalism* does not amount to a coherent resistance theory, Said's most prominent work did not come out of some isolated hyper-discursive turns within the French and US academy or from a series of exclusively metropolitan struggles over civil rights, black power, third worldism, and anti-imperialism. Just like *The Question of Palestine* (1979) or *After the Last Sky* (1986), which explicitly aim at undermining the Western and Israeli practice of blocking the Palestinian presence by providing a narrative grounded in Palestinian experiences, Said's more scholarly works can also be seen as immediate responses to his active involvement in Palestinian politics. This activist dimension of his academic criticism is influenced by long-standing personal friendships and continuing collaborations with Palestinian and pro-Palestinian intellectuals, such as Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Shafiq al-Hout, Jean Genet, Elias Khoury, Mahmoud Darwish, and Eqbal Ahmad.

Said cherished Abu-Lughod as his mentor and intellectual "guru."²⁴⁵ Abu-Lughod was a key figure for the early formation and consolidation of a Palestinian-

²⁴¹ See for example Fakhri Saleh, *dif'a'an idward sa'id* [In defense of Edward Said] (Beirut: Al-Mu'asasa al-'Arabiya li-d-Dirasat wa-n-Nashr, 2000) and Schmitz, *Kulturkritik ohne Zentrum* 54-58.

²⁴² Edward Said, "al-kitaba fi'l-tadhakkar wa nisyan," [To write is an act of memento and oblivion], *Al-Mulhaq ath-Thaqafi/An-Nahar* 16 Sept. 2000: 10. Here quoted from the preface to the Arabic translation of *Out of Place: kharij al-makan. mudhakkirat*, trans. Fawwaz Traboulsi (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 2000) 9.

²⁴³ Said, "al-kitaba fi'l-tadhakkar wa nisyan," 10.

²⁴⁴ Elias Khoury, "Wulidat filastin fi-l-'alam tahta qalamih. idward sa'id: awwal al-'ad'in," [Palestine came into being on a global level through/under his pen. Edward Said: The first returnee] *Al-Mulhaq ath-Thaqafi/An-Nahar* 28 Sept. 2003: 15.

²⁴⁵ Edward Said, "My Guru," *London Review of Books* 13 Dec. 2001: 19-20.

American academic activist network in the US.²⁴⁶ It was he who introduced Said to the political actuality of the Palestinian liberation struggle, and it was he who, in 1967, asked his young colleague to write an article on the image of the Arab world in American mass media; "The Arab Portrayed"²⁴⁷ is the first essay in a long series of shorter studies on the Western manipulation, distortion, and exclusion of Arab experiences that finally culminates in the publication of *Orientalism*.

Eqbal Ahmad worked for the information office of the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* under Frantz Fanon in the early 1960s. After having returned to the US, he became one of the most prominent figures of the so-called New Left. From the beginning of the 1970s onward, he mounted a local Palestinian resistance strategy of non-violent aggressiveness paired with a campaign for human rights in the West. In addition, Ahmad was an important personal link and epistemological agent between Fanon's anticolonial theory of resistance and Said's conception of a decolonized, culturally decentered, and contrapuntally reformed humanism.²⁴⁸ It is to Abu-Lughod and Ahmad, and not to Michel Foucault, Fredric Jameson, Hayden White, or any other exponent of so-called Western high theory, that Said dedicated his two most influential books *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*.²⁴⁹

One cannot overlook the fact that Said's studies on the correlation between overseas practices of colonial domination and metropolitan forms of cultural representation are, even if not exclusively, also the instrument of a battle for political liberation whose setting happens to lie outside of Western academia. Produced under cover of literary criticism, they are meant to integrate the Palestinian struggle into Western platforms of representation. In this regard, Said's project of liberating the academy can be directly linked to Ghassan Kanafani's trans-local resistance strategy.²⁵⁰ At the same time, it places itself within a much broader critical movement within Anglophone Arab criticism since the late 1960s that historian Hisham Sharabi characterizes as the rejection and replacement of "the hegemonic Western discourse regarding the Other."²⁵¹ Against this discursive background, it seems indeed legitimate to call *Orientalism* "a partisan book."²⁵² It is both a foundational

246 Jamal R. Nassar, "Ibrahim Abu-Lughod: The Legacy of an Activist Scholar and Teacher," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 26.4 (2004): 23-24.

247 Edward W. Said, "The Arab Portrayed," *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective*, ed. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1970) 1-9.

248 Radwa Ashour, "as-saut: frantz fanun, iqbal ahmad, idward sa'id," [The voice: Frantz Fanon, Eqbal Ahmad, Edward Said] *Alif* 25 (2005): 79.

249 *Orientalism* is dedicated to Abu-Lughod, *Culture and Imperialism* to Ahmad.

250 Barbara Harlow, "The Palestinian Intellectual and the Liberation of the Academy," *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) 173-93.

251 Hisham Sharabi, "The Scholarly Point of View: Politics, Perspective, Paradigm," *Theory, Politics and the Arab World: Critical Responses*, ed. Hisham Sharabi (London: Routledge, 1990) 21.

252 Said, *Orientalism* 340.

work of colonial discourse analysis and a Palestinian political intervention, without either project over-determining the other.

Orientalism, as an Anglophone Arab and Anglophone Arab studies text, represents many of the ambivalences that one comes across regularly when reading Anglophone Arab representations. Reviewing the by now seminal 1984 Essex Conference on the sociology of literature,²⁵³ the Egyptian political scientist and human rights activist, Ahmed Abdalla, already brought the implications of Said's notion of alterity to the attention of his Arab readers. He pointed out that the concept of otherness propagated within the emerging field of postcolonial studies not only affirms a neo-imperialist possessive claim of dependency but primarily refers to Arabs and Muslims: "Europe's Others; these others—that's us."²⁵⁴

Said's significance was initially restricted to inner-Palestinian debates and to a relatively small group of writers and literary theorists, most of whom had studied in Europe or the US. It was only with *Orientalism*, however, that Said reached a larger audience. Translated into Arabic by Kamal Abu-Deeb in 1981,²⁵⁵ it did not elicit purely positive reactions. From the outset, it has been used selectively to both maximize cultural difference strategically and to negate that very difference categorically. To this day, the book and its author's name are exploited as a canvas for projecting Islamic and Islamophobic positions. Marxist and liberal Arab intellectuals, in particular, view the categorical denunciation of the Western modernity model by local academic elites as an intellectual cul-de-sac, partly blaming Said for this reverse orientalist trend.²⁵⁶ But religious scholars also find it difficult to relate the historical formation and continuing effects of power relations analyzed by Said to their own cognitive procedures of explaining man's place in the world.²⁵⁷ Turning a blind eye to his general critique of the idea of authentic origins and forced filiations, many critics initially questioned Said's cultural and ethnic belonging and his right to speak for the Arab world when his theoretical texts were first crossing West-Eastern borders.²⁵⁸ Until well into the 1990s, the majority of his Arab critics regarded him as a representative of the American cultural industry. Long before the publication of Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory*,²⁵⁹ Arab intellectuals blamed Said for

²⁵³ Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iverson, and Diane Loxley, eds., *Europe and its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1984* (Colchester: U of Essex, 1985).

²⁵⁴ Ahmed Abdalla, "uruba wa-l-akharun 'nahnu'" [Europe and the others 'we'], *Al-'Arab* 24 July 1984: 5.

²⁵⁵ Edward W. Said, *al-istishraq: al-ma'rifa, as-sulta, al-insha'* [Orientalism: the knowledge, the power, the discourse], trans. Kamal Abu-Deeb (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Abhath al-'Arabiya, 1981).

²⁵⁶ For a prominent example, see Sadik Jalal al-Azm, "Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse," *Khamsin* 8 (1981): 5-26.

²⁵⁷ Schmitz, *Kulturkritik ohne Zentrum* 230-37.

²⁵⁸ For the following, see the detailed analysis in my *Kulturkritik ohne Zentrum* 307-59.

²⁵⁹ Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992).

privileging the Western metropolitan university as a virtually exclusive location of postcolonial pedagogy. Already in 1982, the leftist critic, Nadim al-Bitar, accused him of ignoring the material conditions of criticism in the Middle East and impeding the free articulation of cultural difference without Eurocentric hierarchy, thus reproducing the unequal international streams of capital and dependence relationships generated by colonialism.²⁶⁰ The contrapuntal method formulated in *Culture and Imperialism* was seen as only a limited response to this accusation, its essential frame of reference still consisting of the classics of European cultural history. To many Arab critics, the notion of Arabness by choice appears less than suitable, given the oppressive conditions of their everyday work which rarely allow for free choices. Said's attempt to release the shackles of nationalist cohesion along with the discriminating fixations of colonial racist identifications has encountered (and still encounters) considerable resistance.

The reception of Said's work gradually shifted to the affirmative with his active involvement in public debates on the post-Oslo future of Palestine and his regular contributions to discussions on the role of the intellectual in relation to Arab civil society. However, in his political writings composed with a primarily Arab readership in mind,²⁶¹ but published bi-weekly in Arabic as well as in English,²⁶² the tension between national solidarity and critical insistence emerges openly. Criticizing the modalities of the so-called peace process as a betrayal of civil resistance and accusing Arafat of establishing a cleptocratic regime, the dissident in exile becomes a spokesperson for secular Palestinians disillusioned by the repressive implementation of the Oslo Agreement. As a co-founder of the *Al-Mubadara*, the *Palestinian National Initiative*, Said was an active commentator and participant in the expanding regional debate on civil and human rights, gaining influence over democracy movements in Palestine and in other Arab states. In his last decade, Said's presence within Arab critical debates grew significantly, with television appearances and other forays into the field of political journalism and public culture, and most of his scholarly works were translated into Arabic. He was a public intellectual in the Middle East, and this positionality in turn contributed to a wider appreciation of his more academic criticism. Many saw him as an alternative role model for contemporary Arab activist-intellectuals who found themselves pressed between

260 Nadim al-Bitar, "min al-istishraq al-gharbi ila-l-istishraq l-'arabi" [From Western Orientalism to Arabic Orientalism], *hudud al-huwiya al-qumiya* [The limits of national identity], by Nadim al-Bitar (Beirut: dar al-wahda, 1982) 151-69.

261 Edward W. Said, *ghazza - ariha: salam amriki* [Gaza-Jericho: An American peace] (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqlbal, 1994) 15.

262 For the English versions, see *Peace and Its Discontents* (London: Vintage, 1995), *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (New York: Pantheon, 2000), and *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map* (New York: Pantheon; Toronto: Random, 2004).

the desires of illegitimate regimes to co-opt them and their marginalization as a consequence of the rise of political Islam.

This other Said might not be well known among most Western scholars of post-colonialism. However, the literary and cultural critic's ambivalent role as an Arab activist-intellectual during at least the last decade of his life gained growing importance with a view to his reception among Anglophone Arab writers, artists, and critics. It is, therefore, this Saidian text, perhaps more than the strictly academic texts of the internationally recognized inaugurator of colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial theory, that one needs to consider as an important intertext when reading Anglophone Arab representations. Said's text does not speak for Arabs or Anglophone Arabs in the diaspora. Yet his speech acts participated in the formation of that very discourse, perhaps more than many others. His strategic identification with the Arab American community, with Palestine, or with the Arab world often consciously flattened identificatory differences to secure political agency. The inherent essentialism of such identifications has been criticized by some and instrumentalized by others. Arabic or Anglophone Arab critics who claim his work or his name for creating the impression of ethnic coherence or natural unity risk the marginalization of those voices within the respective, already marginalized communities who do not (want to) exhibit readily observable signs of such group belonging. The double bind of Said's strategic essentialism would then be replicated in a kind of double marginalization,²⁶³ and the anti-essentialist critique of *Orientalism* would be "simply an ephemeral pastime."²⁶⁴

263 See, on this particular dynamics of cultural identity politics, Gary C. David, "The Creation of 'Arab American': Political Activism and Ethnic (Dis)Unity," *Critical Sociology* 33.5-6 (2007): 833-62.

264 Edward W. Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Cultural Critique* 1 (1985): 107.