

3. Khalid's Book and How Not to Bow Down Before Rihani

First published in 1911, Ameen Fares Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*¹ has long remained neglected in the intellectual history of both the Arab world and North America. In 2012, it was republished by Melville House's Neversink Library, thanks to the efforts of Todd Fine and his *Project Khalid*, a campaign to commemorate the book's centennial anniversary.² Written in English by a self-identified Arab, the novel is usually perceived as the inaugural text of Arab-American immigrant literature and is thus hastily assimilated into the gradually expanding national canon of so-called ethnic literatures.³ Additionally, other critics reclaim *The Book of Khalid* for Arab cultural history by placing it among the first modern Arab novels, thereby implicitly affirming the Eurocentric devaluation of earlier novelistic writings in Arabic.⁴

It is probably correct to say that the narrative anticipates many of the challenges related to the experience of geographic dislocation and the dynamics of translocal identification that are addressed in later Anglophone Arab migratory

1 Ameen Fares Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1911).

2 Ameen Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* (New York: Melville House, 2012); with an afterword by Todd Fine. In the following, I refer to this edition. Fine is also the co-founder of the Save Washington Street effort. For the *Project Khalid*, founded by Fine to commemorate the novel's anniversary in 2011 by republishing it and celebrating it as the first Arab-American novel as well as advancing its author's reputation as an important Arab-American figure, see website *Project Khalid*, "Welcome to Project Khalid: The 100th Anniversary of the First Arab-American Novel," 2010, 12 Mar. 2014 <<http://projectkhalid.org/>>.

3 See, for prominent examples, Wail S. Hassan, "The Rise of Arab-American Literature: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in the Work of Ameen Rihani," *American Literary History* 20.1-2 (2008): 245-75; Wail S. Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011) 38-58; Evelyn Shakir, "Arab American Literature," *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Heritage*, ed. Alpana Sharma Knippling (Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1996) 6; or Lisa Suhair Majaj, "Arab-American Literature: Origins and Developments," *Arab American Literature and Culture*, eds. Alfred Hornung and Martina Kohl (Heidelberg: Winter, 2012) 62-63.

4 See, for instance: Nijmeh Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani. The Humanist Ideology of an Arab-American Intellectual and Activist* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2010) 4.

and/or diasporic representations. However, due to the novel's almost encyclopedic and sometimes over-bursting use of translinguistic intertextualities and its multi-layered topical and structural correspondences, it can also function as a vehicle for provisionally carving the spectrum of many other discourses informing the Anglophone Arab representations that I am interested in here. In what follows, I am less concerned with cultural characteristics, ethnic spirit, and direct or indirect artistic borrowings from either Arabic or Anglophone works than with historical contexts, topical motives, narrative devices, and structural affinities.

As Nijmeh Hajjar argues in her 2010 study devoted to the Arab American intellectual's humanist politics, "as a man of letters," Rihani certainly "marks many 'beginnings.'"⁵ Looking at the immense impact of his early poetic production in both English and Arabic, published from 1905 onwards, he can be regarded among the pioneers of free verse poetry (al-shi'r al-hurr) and prose poetry (al-shi'r al-manthur) in the Arabic language. Rihani's 1905 English poetry collection, *Myrtle and Myrrh*, can be seen as the first collection of Anglophone Arab poetry.⁶ The English language drama, *Wajdah*, written in 1908 and posthumously published in 2001, is regularly considered the first Arab American play. At least one of his more innovative political plays written in Arabic was staged in Beirut as early as in 1909.⁷ Those who also consider Rihani's early political and journalistic writings in Arabic, collected in his 1910 publication *Ar-Rihaniyat*,⁸ as well as his sometimes semi-fictional travel writing in Arabic and English⁹ even present him as an early Arab(-American) proponent of transmigrant critical cosmopolitanism that fuses an emerging humanist nationalism of pan-Arab identity with liberal ideas of global citizenship and multiple belonging.¹⁰

5 Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani* 49.

6 Rihani's first Arabic poem, "Life and Death: Fall and Sunset in Lebanon," was published in 1905 in the Egyptian literary and cultural journal, *Al-Hilal*. In the same year, he published *Myrtle and Myrrh* (1905; Washington, DC: Platform Intern., 2005). His collected Arabic free verse poetry was first published in 1955 as *Hutafal-Audiya* and translated into English in 2002 as *Hymns of the Valleys*, trans. Naji B. Oueijan (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias P, 2002). On Rihani's impact on Modern Arabic poetry, see Shmuel Moreh, *Modern Arabic Poetry: 1800–1970* (Leiden: Brill, 1976) 297–99.

7 Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani* 5.

8 Ameen Rihani, *Ar-Rihaniyat* [the Rihani essays] (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilmi, 2010).

9 See, for instance, Ameen Rihani, *Muluk al-'Arab au Rihla fi Bilad al-'Arabiya* [Kings of the Arab or a Voyage to the Arab World] (Beirut: Yusuf Sadir, 1924) and Ameen Rihani, *Arabian Peak and Desert: Travels in Al-Yaman* (London: Constable, 1930).

10 See Nuwar Mawlawi Diab, "Ameen Rihani's Vision of Globalization," *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West: A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding*, eds. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2004) 93–101 and Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani*.

Therefore, one cannot be surprised that Rihani's work and name are instrumentalized on all sides and to various ends. Nor does it seem inappropriate against this background that his bust was set up to bow down before at the beginning of the 21st century both in Lebanon and the US (fig. 3, fig. 4).¹¹

Figure 3: The unveiling of a large bust of Ameen Rihani in the presence of the Lebanese ministers of culture and education, parliament members, and other representatives. Metn region, Lebanon, on 28 July 28, 2011.



In 2007, William McGurn, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer and chief speech-writer for US president George W. Bush, rediscovered Rihani as a genuine Arab champion of American-style global freedom and democracy and as a powerful rhetorical vehicle to promote Arab-American political, economic, and military collaboration in times of the nation's global war on terror. McGurn stumbled upon Rihani's name while reading an openly anti-Arab book by Michael B. Oren, Israel's would-be ambassador to the United States, and in January 2008, persuaded Bush to use a short, second-hand quote from the *Ar-Rihaniyat* for one of his speeches

11 In 2004, an Ameen Rihani bust by the Lebanese sculptor Pierre Karam was unveiled at Tufts University, Boston. See website *Ameen Rihani*, "Ameen Rihani's Statue in the United States of America," 13 Sept. 2015 <<http://www.ameenrihani.org/newsevents.php?archive=bustattufts>>. In 2011, a much larger bust of Rihani was unveiled in Metn, Lebanon in the presence of the Lebanese ministers of culture and education, parliament members, and other representatives. See "Unveiling Rihani's Bust at a New Memorial in Lebanon," 13 Sept. 2015 <<http://www.ameenrihani.org/newsevents.php>>.

Figure 4: The Rihani bust by the Lebanese sculptor Pierre Karam was unveiled on December 1, 2004 at Tufts University, Somerville, MA, USA.



given during a visit to the United Arab Emirates.¹² At the time of his book's publication, Oren was senior fellow at the Shalem Center for the diplomatic and military history of the Middle East, located in Jerusalem. In May 2009, he was appointed ambassador of Israel to the United States. As a consequence, an American president who had chosen Albert Camus' famous 1942 novella about a Frenchman who kills an Arab Algerian, *L'Étranger*, for his summer holiday readings on the beach

12 See William McGurn, "An Arab for Ground Zero," *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 May 2011, 23 Sept. 2013 <<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304066504576341401418827660>>. For McGurn's reference, see Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy. America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 2007).

only two years earlier¹³ closed his remarks in Abu Dhabi by reminding his Arab audience of the Lebanese intellectual's call for introducing America's equally liberal and liberating values into the Middle Eastern discourse: "When will you turn your face toward the East, O Liberty?"¹⁴ It was again McGurn who in 2011, now inspired by Todd Fine and his *Project Khalid*, recommended erecting a memorial for Rihani close to New York City's Ground Zero site. According to him, ten years after 9/11, against the background of the events around the so-called Arab spring, and in accordance with president Barack Obama's new Middle Eastern diplomacy, there was a need for a monument of an "Arab-American immigrant [...] who believed the Arab world's destiny was freedom for its people and friendship with America."¹⁵ To this day, the Rihani memorial destined for Manhattan has not been erected.

Many of Rihani's multi-generic qualities of innovation and invention seem to converge in *The Book of Khalid*. His only novel does indeed lend itself to reclaiming him as a pioneer. But whatever one thinks regarding the narrative's right place within a general Arab literary history, the history of American ethnic writing, and American-Middle Eastern diplomatic history or the author's bust's appropriate public placement, it seems almost impossible to escape from the discursive precedents that are consistently claiming Rihani as the founding father of a literature that is "Arab in its concern, culture and characteristic, English in language, and American in spirit and platform."¹⁶ Concern, cultural characteristic, language, and spirit: these are the primary criteria of analysis used to categorize *The Book of Khalid* and to place it on the proper bookshelf either among other early modern Arab writings and/or among so-called hyphenated-American immigrant and minority literatures.

An interpretive way out of the narrow ideological concepts of heritage and authenticity might be offered by the Syrian poet Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said) in his preface to Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka's edited volume *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West*.¹⁷ His short statement on Rihani's symbolic importance as an intellectual and literary writer seems to be productively out of place, not solely because it was

13 John Mullan, "Bush Takes Camus to the Beach," *The Guardian* 17 Aug. 2006, 24 Oct. 2010 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/aug/17/usa.bookscomment>>.

14 George W. Bush, "Remarks in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Jan. 13, 2008," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush 2008-2009*, Book I – Jan. 1 to June 30, 2008 (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2012) 79.

15 McGurn, "An Arab for Ground Zero," n. pag.

16 This quote is from the website of the Ameen Rihani Organization: *Ameen Rihani* 18 May 2014, 23 Aug. 2014 <<http://www.ameenrihani.org/index.php>>. The organization supports the publishing of Rihani's work, research on the writer and intellectual, as well as the Rihani Museum in Freike, Lebanon.

17 Adonis, "A Cultural Symbol," *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West: A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding*, eds. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2004) xiii-xiv.

written in Berlin: “Today, we celebrate, in the person of Ameen Al-Rihani, a cultural symbol originating not so much from the past as from the future.”¹⁸ Using Rihani’s importance for the formation of prose poetry in Arabic as a point of departure, Adonis reads Rihani’s many beginnings as beginnings of something that has not yet happened. For him, Rihani’s work marks an unfinished disorder of transcultural aesthetic innovation that replaces older ideological concepts of authentic roots or heritages to be rediscovered by multiply interrupted, intentionally confused, and mutually incomplete ongoing relational tensions. By doing so, he presents Rihani as one of the forebears of a future poetics and political ethics which rather blur than bridge both Western and Arab tracks of modernity alike.¹⁹ I’d like to genuflect before Khalid’s book—rather than before Rihani—by reading it from the perspective of such unknown futures.

3.1 An Arab (Drago)man in New York and the Cultural Imaginary of Confrontation

“The response is in the fire.”²⁰

Presenting itself to the reader as a composition of dubious Arabic and French sources in translation, selected and commented upon by an equally dubious editor-narrator, *The Book of Khalid* tells the turn-of-the century story of two young Arab men, Khalid and his friend, Shakib. The two flee from the familial and political oppression in Greater Syria (ruled by the Ottoman Empire) to immigrate to New York City. The kernel part of the novel tells the story of these two Arab peddlers in Manhattan. In this regard, it seems to follow the classical immigrant paradigm of coming to America and re-inventing oneself as American. However, re-reading *The Book of Khalid* today as a literary articulation of Arab American crossovers has more to offer than just proving a manifestation of a well-known narrative mode. Such a reading can help to better elucidate the complex dynamics between the so-called West and the so-called Middle East that lead into our own times. In fact, the novel places itself within the long history of transnational encounters which goes back to early modern Arab immigration to Britain and which continues even after flying objects navigated by suicidal Arab terrorists’ hands hit New York’s World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

18 Adonis, “A Cultural Symbol,” xiv.

19 See also Adonis, *Ash-Shir’iya al-‘Arabiya* (1985), trans. Catherine Cobham as *An Introduction to Arab Poetics* (1990; Cairo: AUC P, 1992) 101 and Adonis, *Muqaddimah lil-Shi’r al-‘Arabi* [Introduction to Arab Poetry] (1971; Beirut: Dar al-Awda, 1983).

20 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Terror: A Speech after 9/11,” *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, by G. Chakravorty Spivak (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013) 378.

What has been regularly overlooked in the American post-9/11 controversy about the presence of Muslims in Lower Manhattan that has ensued over plans for a new 13-story Islamic Cultural Center²¹ (fig. 5) is that such a presence is not at all a recent phenomenon (fig. 6).

The postcolonial critic, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, also underestimated or intentionally understated the continuities of Arab immigration and anti-Arab discrimination when she revised her 2002 lecture on "Terror"²² almost 10 years after it was first presented at Columbia University's "Responding to War" Symposium²³ for its inclusion in the essay collection, *Aesthetic Education in the Age of Globalization*.²⁴ In the prequel to her 2012 version of this post-9/11 speech, Spivak explains the debate over the Islamic Cultural Center first and foremost as an issue that "is being used to discredit Barack Hussein Obama and to bring down the Democratic Party," although any rationally abstracting observer would easily grasp that conflict as one between "the right to build on private property" and "the outrage of the families of the victims, whose lives were casually extinguished, apparently in the name of Islam."²⁵ Given the feminist critic's deconstructivist-materialist training, her strict focus on the here and now as the primarily relevant context for explaining the ideological mapping persecuted within the Ground Zero mosque debate may come as a surprise—the absence of historical dialectics in Spivak's contextualization is rather non-Marxist.²⁶ Nevertheless, some of her "ruminations [...] in response to America's war on terror"²⁷ can be applied to the present situation's pre-history and thus might be a helpful interpretive matrix for re-visiting Rihani's 1911 novel as an

21 The Islamic community center, Park51—originally called Cordoba House and sometimes labeled Ground Zero mosque—was planned in 2009 to be erected as a community center plus mosque two blocks from the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan, New York City. The planned community center advanced to a controversial key issue of nationwide debates during the political campaigns of the 2010 midterm elections. In September 2011, the center provisionally opened in a 3-story building at a site that had housed a Burlington department store before it was damaged in the 2001 attacks. To this day, the original project has not been realized due to strong public outrage by Islamophobic activists allied with right-wing politicians.

22 Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," 372–98.

23 The symposium was organized in September 2002 by Columbia University's Institute for Research of Women and Gender with the aim of critically responding to the dominant "War on Terror" debate; see *Feminist News* 21 (Sept. 2002): 8–9, 16–19.

24 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013).

25 Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," 372.

26 Of course, Spivak must be aware of this debate's long discriminatory pretext related to Arab-Muslim immigration. One could in fact argue that her stressing of Obama's distinctively Muslim middle name, "Hussein"—one that has been systematically deleted from public discourse—hints to that very pretext.

27 Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," 372.

Figure 5: Rendering of Park51 Muslim Community Center by SOMA Architects, 2010.



equally self-critical and ironically mocking “confrontational imaginary.”²⁸ Such a reading of *The Book of Khalid* sees in it a double vision of multiple broken belongings, failed exchange, and destructive revenge rather than—as most critics want to have it—a literary immigration by way of self-orientalizing ingratiation or a pioneering fictional bridging of East and West in the name of tolerance, inter-cultural dialogue, and mutual understanding.²⁹

28 Spivak, “Terror: A Speech after 9/11,” 379.

29 For the critique of self-orientalization, see Wail S. Hassan, “The Rise of the Arab American Novel: Ameen Rihani’s *The Book of Khalid*,” *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English: The Politics of Anglo Arab and Arab American Literature and Culture*, ed. Nouri Gana (Ed-

Figure 6: *The Syrian Colony, Washington Street, undated drawing by W. Bengough of a turn-of-the-century New York street scene not far from the spatial focus of the debate over the Park51-project.*



By using Spivak's text on terror as a point of departure, I defect from Geoffrey Nash's interpretive script at the same time. The renowned scholar of Arab writings in English is quite aware that "[t]here are of course multiple ways of reading Ameen Rihani's *Book of Khalid*,"³⁰ ranging from biographical and contextual approaches to perspectives with a focus on intertextuality and linguistic innovation. But although he aims at revealing his own reading from the dominant Orientalist and anti-Orientalist interpretive chains of either celebrating the novel for its cross-cultural bridging and synthesizing capacities or blaming it for the failure of that very synthesis, Nash's interpretation of the novel as a representation of "the secularization of the Arab soul" completed through "the Muslims' migrations of the twentieth century"³¹ plays out the very essentialist construction that strictly divides between

inburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2013) 39–62; for the bridging-thesis, see Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka, eds., *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West: A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding* (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2004).

30 Geoffrey Nash, "Beyond Orientalism: Khalid, the Secular City and the Transcultural Self," *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) 63.

31 Nash, "Beyond Orientalism: Khalid, the Secular City and the Transcultural Self," 66.

religious identification and tribal solidarity within the intrinsically traditional Oriental town on the one hand and the techno-political urban society of Western secular modernity on the other. One wonders what precisely Nash means with “the Arab soul” (the Arab mind?) or how exactly the baptized Khalid’s journeys to and from the paradigmatic early 20th century technopolis relate to the immense spectrum of multidirectional migrations of Muslims of later decades. Moreover, one misses a postcolonial perspective on the doctrine of secularism and the cultural boundaries of moral belonging that have shaped the *Formations of the Secular*.³² Nash presents Khalid as Rihani’s alter ego. He sees both the author and his auto-fictional literary character as avant-garde secular Arabs revolting against the “obscurantism of the East” and “American materialism”³³ alike. According to Nash, the two men finally succeed in negotiating both strands of their divided selves (their two souls?) by creating a modern secular yet spiritually authentic identity. Now, this notion of a hyphenated East-Western, transcultural, or hybrid identity not only comes very close to the dominant interpretive paradigm of bi-cultural synthesis criticized by Nash, it also draws on an Orientalist binary in which traditional Islam, lacking the idea of (urban) community, constitutes the West’s primary Other. The secular literary critic seems to dress Khalid (and implicitly Rihani) with the stereotypical clothes of the essential *homo islamicus* who is ontologically incapable of separating the public from the personal and the state from religion just to demonstrate how living in the Western metropolis turns him into an emancipated Arab cosmopolitan of bi-directional non-alliance.

I do agree with Nash’s argument that the reductionist adaptation of the critique of Orientalism can easily lead to consigning Khalid to “an ineffectual mimicry of orientalist discourse.”³⁴ But I do not think that Nash fully himself emancipates from the episto-(ideo)logical prison of Orientalist secularism. In this context, it is significant that he draws on Harvey Cox’s 1966 theological study, *The Secular City*,³⁵ to explore the importance of the Western urban setting for Khalid’s spiritual secularization instead of using a much more skeptical work of urban sociology by a contemporary of Rihani as his reading’s interpretive matrix: Georg Simmel published his seminal “The Metropolis and Mental Life”³⁶ in 1903. While Cox, from the

32 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2003).

33 Nash, “Beyond Orientalism: Khalid, the Secular City and the Transcultural Self,” 65.

34 Nash, “Beyond Orientalism: Khalid, the Secular City and the Transcultural Self,” 73.

35 Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (1965; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2013). Nash refers to Cox on page 64 to 72.

36 Georg Simmel, “Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben,” *Die Grosstadt. Vorträge und Aufsätze zur Städteausstellung der Gehe-Stiftung Dresden Vol. 9*, ed. Th. Petermann (Dresden, 1903) 185–206; “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969) 47–60.

perspective of a privileged white urbanite, argues that the city can be a space where people of all faiths fulfill their potential and that God is present in both the secular and in formal religious realms, the sociologist Simmel focuses on the individual's inevitable struggle "to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life."³⁷ Where the American Baptist theologian believes the Western city is a place of expanded religious freedom, the offspring of German-Jewish converts, a secular social theorist of urban culture, is rather interested in the oppressive contiguities of modern metropolitan life, in the negative psychological effects related to the urban gains of freedom, and in the resistance of the individual urbanite "to being leveled down and worn out by a social technological mechanism"³⁸ of the city. I do not think Nash had read Simmel's profoundly influential essay on the pitfalls of the urban condition's liberating promises. If he had, he would have paid more attention to the socio-historical fact that the city, secular or otherwise, feels quite different to those for whom its emancipatory promise turns out to be a cruel deception, and that, particularly for Arab immigrants, the great Western city can in fact turn into the site of sophisticated humiliations. If Nash had read "The Metropolis and Mental Life," maybe he would have also incorporated Simmel's reflections on the sociological form of "The Stranger,"³⁹ first published in 1908—not even three years before *The Book of Khalid*. In this short essay, Simmel tries to grasp theoretically the particular social spatiality of the stranger as a person who, for those being or feeling fixed at home, embodies nearness and distance at the same time. He not only acknowledges the stranger's potential freedom for the objective critique of a formerly closed social group's perceptual sureties and self-certitudes and stresses the high degree of ideological independence and intellectual individuation related to this positionality but also shows how the stranger's strangeness can easily give rise to dangerous tensions of institutionalized non-relations, prejudices, de-individualization, and dehumanization.

When reading *The Book of Khalid*, one should not underestimate Khalid's individual freedom of coming and going. But the celebration of the experience of immigration's liberating effects should not lead us to ignore the threat that the Arab immigrant represents to the various groups he encounters. In addition, one cannot but consider Khalid's own vulnerability conditioned by his being more than only a "potential wanderer."⁴⁰ When the Orientalized immigrant (the immigrant of Muslim and/or Middle Eastern background or any person of color who is racialized as Muslim) enters the Western metropolis, s/he does not easily fit the secular

37 Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 47.

38 Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," 47.

39 Georg Simmel, "The Stranger," *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. Kurt H. Wolff (Glen-coe, IL.: Free P, 1950) 402-408.

40 Simmel, "The Stranger," 402.

notion of the abstract citizen. S/he enters as a stranger. Just like her or his political presence sits uncomfortably with the imagined community of the Western nation state or the Western city, her or his cultural self-representation (i.e. in the form Arab/Muslim immigrant literatures or art) is regularly placed outside the articulations of those who see themselves as naturally at home. It seems the imaginative boundaries of Orientalism crossed Anglophone Arab representations long before they were assimilated into Western criticism. Searching for the transcultural authenticity of Khalid's journey within these boundaries not only adds a certain quality of Western exceptionalism to the concept of authenticity but also necessarily narrows the interpretation of the literary character's agency to the idealist notion of the autonomous intentional ego revolting against both traditionalism and modernity with the aim of defending individual uniqueness.⁴¹

Reading *The Book of Khalid* instead as an imaginary of multiple confrontational encounters reveals Khalid's fictional activities as discursive effects and counter-discursive responses—that is, as re-actions to external conditions of serving rather than autonomous acts of authentic self-expression. Such an equally postcolonial and post-secular reading is a first step in the direction of a radical politics of interpretation that does not confine itself to the idealist claim of cognitively controlling and reconciling competing truth claims. Instead, it is equally interested in the strategic use and (im)moral economy of lies as well as in the aesthetic abstraction and symbolic representation of counter-lies.

In her essay on terror, Spivak quotes from Mahasweta Devi's short story, "Douloti the Bountiful," to stress the importance of confrontational imaginaries for our understanding of the enchantment and excess of planetary confrontations: "There are people for passing laws, there are people to ride jeeps, but no one to light the fire."⁴² If the American ideology of world peace through trade was a lie, the deadly attack on the World Trade Center as the symbol of the US's economic imperialism was based on a lie, too: the false liberating promises of the extra-state physical violence called terror. And if such terrorism, in turn, is used to legitimate the globalization of military interventionism and so-called peacekeeping missions, the traditional ethical difference between war and peace is swept away beyond any theoretical pursuit of peace or justice. Khalid and his friend, Shakib, come to America more than a hundred years before we have seemingly come to accept the moral oxymoron of planetary confrontation in the name of world peace.⁴³ As a confrontational imaginary, the novel depicts both the immigrants' experiences

41 Cf. Nash, "Beyond Orientalism: Khalid, the Secular City and the Transcultural Self," 75-77.

42 Mahasweta Devi, "Douloti the Bountiful," *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*, ed. Mahasweta Devi, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Routledge, 1995) 88, quoted by Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," 377-78.

43 Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," 378-83.

of humiliation and oppression as well as the resistive excess of real and symbolic destruction. In the case of Khalid, the confrontation with the socio-political environment of New York City as the symbolic center of techno-political imperialism almost takes the form of a self-annihilating confrontation between himself and himself. I am not suggesting that his auto-erotic violence is proto-terrorist. But, looking at the equally ironic and scary mix of Khalid's inner-worldly tasks and his transcendental referencing, one can read this part of the novel as an imaginative exercise in suicidal resistance.⁴⁴ Khalid knows how to light fire!

The immigrant's seemingly naïve secular optimism is not at all always harmoniously paired with the search for post-materialistic transcendence or philosophic truth. His path of spiritual resistance and ethical reasoning regularly leads to consistent transgressions into the worldly domain of angry confrontations and thus disturbs the illusion of East-Western harmony. In these moments, Khalid's story rather represents the despair of radical self-judgement and the dissenting anger of "rigorous morality"⁴⁵ than social assimilation or psychological balance. That he knows how to make fire first becomes obvious after the newly immigrated young Arab man "sets himself to the task of self-education."⁴⁶ Forced to live together with his friend, Shakib, and their fellow immigrant surrogate mother, Im-Hanna, an excellent cook of popular Syrian dishes, in a rented cellar "as deep and dark and damp as could be found,"⁴⁷ Khalid makes his life as a peddler selling trinkets like crosses, prayer beads, or scapulars claimed to be relics from the Holy Land. In his free time, he watches the "light-heeled, heavy-hunched women of Battery Park."⁴⁸ During the night, he begins digging into the intellectual and spiritual depth beyond his learned scholarly make-up. The Arab immigrant in America becomes a foreign student of both Western ideas and New York's everyday life. This simultaneous investigation into the celebrated ideals and attractive distractions of Western culture allows him to quarrel selectively before burning his idols' book. Never studying more than one book at a time before warming his hands at its flames, the "barbarously capricious" reader "would baptise the ideal in the fire of the real."⁴⁹ Khalid goes through Blaise Pascal's *Pensées* (1670), a defense of the Christian faith, and withdraws from it with a resolute "au-revoir."⁵⁰ He re-reads the Bible, but misses musical ecstasy and other joys in it. And he invites his friend, Shakib, to warm himself with the flames of Tom Paine's classic deistic pamphlet, *The Age of Reason* (1793-94).

44 Cf. Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," 384-85.

45 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 76.

46 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 53.

47 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 43.

48 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 54.

49 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 53.

50 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 58.

First consuming and then destroying the carriers of Western culture, the Arab student in New York allegorically anticipates other local and global confrontations to come. One hundred years after Khalid's fictional travails, a group of young Arab men would cross the Atlantic to destroy the symbol of global capitalism, political imperialism, and US military power: "the temple of Empire."⁵¹ The young Arab men of the so-called Hamburg cell who executed the attacks of September 11, 2001 were graduates from German universities. Khalid's self-educational Manhattan undertaking is directly set in this very symbolic temple. Although he is not primarily concerned with questions of political, economic, or military injustice, his transcendental struggle is also inspired by an almost excessive rejection of one-sided American materialism. Every day, he visits a second-hand bookshop located in a cellar close to the stock exchange. Its Arab owner is nicknamed "second-hand Jerry"⁵² by Khalid. The old man advances to an important authority for his secondary education. It is in the city's financial district that the Arab student is fired "with free-thought literature"⁵³ before he gradually develops his own dissenting ideas and radical interventionist strategies. After failing to convince Jerry either to sacrifice his second-hand books to "the god of Trade"⁵⁴ by setting them on fire in front of the stock exchange or at least to burn up his off-Wall Street-bookshop, Khalid starts attending political meetings of atheists. Soon turning away from this group's infidel dogmatism, he decides from then on to unseal his mind from any external authority.

On his last peddler tour to the Bronx, he publicly burns his peddling-box filled with fake scapulars to underline his new ethical stance: "Here are the lies, now turned to ashes."⁵⁵ While Im-Hanna believes that Khalid has gone insane, Shakib recommends that his friend burns himself as the logical consequence of rigorous morality. He tells him "to pour a gallon of kerosene over his own head and fire himself out of existence."⁵⁶ Khalid, however, instead of carrying out such an act of suicide, is carried off by his own self-critical integrity and freedom of mind. To test out his emergent "theory of immanent morality,"⁵⁷ he takes up an apprenticeship in a lawyer's office just to be discharged for openly expressing his radical views on the legally binding will of the dead or the deadly pettifogging of the dominant legal order.

51 Spivak, "Terror: A Speech after 9/11," 374.

52 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 61.

53 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 64.

54 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 64.

55 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 75.

56 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 76.

57 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 80.

Following this experience, Khalid decides to spend his time “with the huris.”⁵⁸ Turning himself into a long-haired dervish-gigolo, he wanders from one spiritual meeting of New York City’s many “Don’t Worry Circles of Metaphysical Societies”⁵⁹ to another. When he first enters into a liaison with a bohemian woman, she is drawn to his Middle-Eastern background. Soon “his dark eyes and her eyes of blue” seem to “flow and fuse.”⁶⁰ In the course of an extended “tête-à-tête [...], the stranger is made a member of the Spiritual Household”⁶¹ and “she, in an effort to seem Oriental, calls the Dervish, ‘My Syrian Rose,’ ‘My Desert Flower,’ ‘My Beduin Boy,’ [...] always closing her message with either a strip of Syrian sky or a camel load of the narcissus.” The American woman who presents herself as an esoteric medium imagines herself as a future Bedouin queen traveling ancient desert kingdoms and thus resuscitating the Orient’s former greatness. Despite her rather ripe age “at the threshold of her climacteric,”⁶² she knows to preserve her beauty. Although she infantilizes Khalid by calling him her “prodigal child,”⁶³ she in turn “does not permit him to call her, ‘mother’.”⁶⁴ The editor-narrator warns: “Ah, but not thus, will the play close.”⁶⁵ The Arab American anti-hero soon gets into a second erotic relationship with a female writer, another “huntress of male curiosities, originals” who “only skims the surface of things.”⁶⁶ After “a hectic uprush about pearly breasts, and honey-sources, and musk-scented arbours,” she “withdraws from the foreigner her favour” only to narratively exhibit him in the “magazine supplement of one of the Sunday newspapers” for which she works. There the Arab American immigrant is made a stereotypical Orientalist copy, “thrown into the cauldron along with the magic herbs. Bubble–bubble.”⁶⁷ The humiliating experience of being performatively exoticized and consumed against his will gives a clear hint at the uncontrollable side effects of the immigrant’s strategic self-orientalization. The narrative fragment on erotic attraction turning into sexual exploitation and representational commodification at the same time allegorically explains the particular

58 That is the title of chapter VIII of Book One; see page 83. The term huri/huris derives from the Koranic-Arabic *hur*, signifying a person with pure eyes of intense whiteness and blackness. The word has often been reductively interpreted as a paradisiac promise to male believers. It has entered the English language of Romantic Orientalism during the 18th century as a decisively erotic female figure. Here Rihani seems to refer to the Orientalist dispositive.

59 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 85.

60 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 83.

61 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 84.

62 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 84.

63 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 90.

64 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 84.

65 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 88.

66 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 86.

67 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 89.

ambivalence of a cross-cultural relationship that is framed by the dynamics of mutual desire and repulsion: "The fire-eating Dervish, how can he now swallow this double-tongued flame of hate and love?"⁶⁸ Khalid at least once considers curing his pain by burning the enchantress who turned into a typewriting witch just as he had already consigned many second-hand books to flames. But instead of killing her, he decides on a less murderous and more dosed variety of continuing revenge. Turning ritualized emotional violence of sexist counter-abuse against all the American women he meets in his many erotic short-affairs, Khalid's self-proclaimed immanent morality risks being seriously damaged. As I will show, the narrative motive of gendered revenge by feminized and infantilized Arab men against non-Arab women, against the counter-feminized West as such, or even targeted at Arab women reappears in diverse Anglophone Arab representations to this day. Rihani's *The Book of Khalid* provides an early literary example of this motive. The novel for the first time depicts the more readily neurotic than erotic attempt to regain Arab self-esteem triggered by complex social confrontations and humiliations. Khalid's desperate efforts to feel that he is the agent of (sexual) power, instead of its passive object, rarely come with relish. They rather take the form of an auto-erotic act of purposive self-destruction.

When the Arab anti-hero nearly loses his self within the dynamics of (sexually) abusing American women and being (sexually) abused by them, he and his friend, Shakib, decide to return to their native land. Since the latter has in the meantime become a successful local merchant who first needs to wind up his various business involvements, their remigration is however postponed. During election time, a fellow immigrant and Tammany Hall politician offers Khalid the post of a canvasser of New York's Syrian district to manipulate the Arab immigrant community's votes in favor of the Democratic Party, and the young man enters the corrupt machine of minority patronage and power politics.⁶⁹ His new role within New York City's leading political organization ultimately turns out to be one of a strategic trader of speeches conducted on the market principle of "supply and demand."⁷⁰ The hyper-moralistic poetic orator accidentally "potted in Tammany Land"⁷¹ is pelted by the Arab American audience with rotten tomatoes and eggs. Shocked by the angry missiles of his fellow-immigrants as well as by the intrigues of the pseudo-demo-

68 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 89.

69 The Democratic Party's Tammany Hall was, from the mid-19th century until the early 1930s, New York City's leading political organization. The organization's power drew particularly upon the support of the city's growing minority communities. For details, see Daniel Czitrom, "Underworlds and Underdogs: Big Tim Sullivan and Metropolitan Politics in New York, 1889–1913," *The Journal of American History* 78.2 (1991): 536–58.

70 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 102.

71 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 100.

cratic "Reality Stock Company"⁷² of Tammany Hall, Khalid gives honest expression to his disgust and publically complains about the organization's lack of honesty. As a consequence, he is first insulted by his openly racist boss for being a "brazen-faced, unmannerly scoundrel" preaching the naïve morality of "mountain peasants or other barbarous tribes"⁷³ and then falsely charged for misappropriating party funds. It is against the background of this humiliating experience in a prison cell of the free world's symbolic capital that he hallucinates about America's world-ruling future role and his own transnational destiny. Re-reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau's proto-revolutionary educational treaty, *Émile* (1762), and Thomas Carlyle's collection of lectures, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History* (1841), a magic transformation accompanied by painful spasms and rioting visions of biting irony sets in: "something was going on in him—a revolution, a *coup d'état*, so to speak, of the spirit."⁷⁴ Khalid emphatically predicts a global change in the course of which Americans, the "true and honest votaries of Mammon,"⁷⁵ would radically question their national quasi-deity of the dollar to rediscover the forgotten aspirations of their souls. It is such a renewed American secularism, blending the ideal of material progress with the universal aspiration of spiritual growth, from whence the imprisoned philosopher-prophet expects inspirations for "every race-traveller on the highway of emancipation."⁷⁶

Khalid's desperate posture of revolutionary prophethood is almost post-moralistic regarding its open contempt for Western-style reformist democracy. Although his vision of an American superman of transcultural inspiration and universal validity seems to be more inspired by the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman⁷⁷ than by Friedrich Nietzsche's post-humanistic genealogy of European morality,⁷⁸ there is an equally arrogant and ironic boast at work in Khalid's mimicry of prophecy that is reminiscent of Zarathustra's as well as other Nietzschean philosophizing voices' particular talent to sense oneself as a good message to the future world.⁷⁹ The transcultural

72 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 102.

73 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 107.

74 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 115.

75 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 108.

76 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 110.

77 On Rihani's reception of American transcendentalist writers, see Walter Edward Dunnivant III., "Rihani, Emerson, and Thoreau," *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West: A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding*, eds. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2004) 55–71.

78 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1887); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Chemnitz, Ernst Schmeitzner, 1883–91).

79 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo: wie man wird, was man ist* (Leipzig: C. G. Naumann, 1889).

formula for mankind's coming to its higher self is presented as a direct result of the Arab prisoner's individual transmigrating mind:

From his transcendental height, the Superman of America shall ray forth in every direction the divine light, which shall mellow and purify the spirit of Nations and strengthen and sweeten the spirit of men, in this New World, I tell you, he shall be born, but he shall not be an American in the Democratic sense. He shall be nor of the Old World nor of the New; he shall be, my Brothers, of both.⁸⁰

This is probably not the right place to discuss whether the transcendentalist call for American individuals to undergo a change from economic materialism of strategic reason to the intuitional wisdom of nature and spirituality before collectively changing world society has been politically reciprocated by the American majority. What seems to be, however, quite obvious is that Khalid's prophecy of a global secular order characterized by the peaceful coexistence of individual spiritualism, artistic innovation, and technological progress has not yet been fulfilled.

In 1971, exactly sixty years after the first publication of Rihani's novel, a Syrian-Lebanese poet, writing in the distant wake of the fictional character Khalid, still laments the unresolved relational tensions between Europe, America, and the non-Western world. Adonis' openly anti-American free verse poem, "The Funeral of New York,"⁸¹ directly addresses the champion of democracy, Whitman, to inform him of what has become of his beloved city and the world, only to allegorically bury him under the wreckage of modern-day New York. The doubly exiled poetic voice assumes the role of a multiply fragmented self that with courage asks "the prophet's questions"⁸² regarding New York City's hopelessly demised liberal tradition and its altered symbolic meaning against the background of the American empire's contemporary global impact. New York is described as a "rag called liberty with one hand / and strangling the earth with the other."⁸³ At the same time, the poem proliferates dark prophecies of violent confrontations: "An eastern wind uproots tents and skyscrapers."⁸⁴ Although Whitman's voice is at first hard to find, a direct reference to "The clock" from "Song of Myself," which "indicates the moment,"⁸⁵ is taken up to announce a new time to New York and suggest an alliance between the Arab poet and the American bard with the potential of historical change toward global justice. However, in this New York of the early 1970s, Whitman seems to be just as out of place as the turn-of-the-century Khalid: "And you, Walt Whitman, /

80 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 110-11.

81 Adonis, "The Funeral of New York." *The Pages of Day and night*. Trans. Samuel Hazo (Marlboro, VT: Marlboro P, 1994): 57-74.

82 Adonis, "The Funeral of New York," 67.

83 Adonis, "The Funeral of New York," 57.

84 Adonis, "The Funeral of New York," 60.

85 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855; New York: Dover Pub., 2012) 61.

stay exiled like an immigrant. / Have you become a bird unknown in the American sky?"⁸⁶ Adonis does not manage to convince Whitman of the urgent need to join him and the world's current emancipatory movements: "the absent god hears nothing."⁸⁷ Due to his simultaneous awareness of Western and non-Western 20th century lived realities, the Arab visitor sees what the American poet never saw, and he knows what the dead proponent of democratic transcendentalism "could never know."⁸⁸ The poem ends with the lyrical *I* leaving New York and returning to Beirut.⁸⁹

Khalid, too, after being released from prison with the help of his friend, Shakib, hears "the call of his own country."⁹⁰ Anticipating America's "true dawn,"⁹¹ he now more than ever wants to return to his native Lebanon. But the story does not end at this point. The New York immigrant who was offended by almost everything he encountered in the US and who in turn offended nearly every American with his revolting honesty and violent outbursts now discovers in himself "the chosen Voice!"⁹² of the Arab people. He prepares for a trans-atlantic voyage over the course of which he will revolt against both his people's dominant political ethics and his own inner morality. Up until this re-migrational turn, Rihani's confrontational imaginary can hardly offer a narrative model for East-Western coexistence or an ethical blueprint for the mutual understanding between Arabs and Americans. The narrative constantly shifts between radical individualism and pan-Arab vision, transmigrant universalism and spiritual transcendence, self-Orientalizing role play and counter-Orientalist mockery. If it is true that Khalid is an early prototype of the literary dragoman translating the Arab self from within and to the West, as many critics argue, one cannot miss that his project diverges significantly from the script—a script that, almost unchallenged, prefigured and regulated the unidirectional procedures of West-Eastern (mis-)understandings at the turn of the century. The novel's anti-hero does neither aim at fulfilling the West's expectations, nor is he the immigrant representative of his nation, the agent of his people's fate, or the cultural ambassador of any other collectivity's claims. It might be true that Khalid regularly sells a well-established image of the Arab, but he is not selling himself. His strategic constructions and deconstructions of himself as an Arab in

86 Adonis, "The Funeral of New York," 71.

87 Adonis, "The Funeral of New York," 57.

88 Adonis, "The Funeral of New York," 71; note again the direct reference to Whitman's "Song of Myself."

89 See also Roger Asselineau and Ed Folsom, "Whitman and Lebanon's Adonis," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 15.4 (1998): 180-84.

90 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 121.

91 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 125.

92 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 125.

New York are presented as the interpretations of a self-critical ironist of mutually excluding imagined alterities rather than articulations of a self-Orientalizing mimic-man or cross-cultural interpreter of his original culture. Yes, Khalid might be presumed to be a hyperactive narcissistic dragoman escorting us through the overlapping worlds of orientalist-occidental misperceptions, but he is decisively a dragoman for his own sake. His strategic self-display as an exaggerated Orientalist copy demonstrates that this copy has no original in the world. Khalid's traveling performances first and foremost follow from the care for himself and his will for personal freedom, but they are inescapably framed by competing collective politics of identifications.⁹³ It is this equally political and ethical concern of the self within representational formations, which decisively go beyond the individual level of subjectivity, that are so characteristic of many more recent Anglophone Arab works.

Khalid's rhetoric of violence regularly reciprocates the false promise of assimilation and the social practice of discrimination. The close link between the social and the discursive is thus directly incorporated into both the novel's mode of narrative emplotment and the plot's linguistic figuration. Looking at the Arab immigrant's continuing struggle between strategic self-exoticization and the revolt against involuntarily being exoticized as addressed in *The Book of Khalid*, the complex relation of social violence and cultural imaginary sometimes seems to be reversible indeed. Just like hegemonic American perceptions and representations of Khalid turn him into a social object of Orientalist humiliation, the immigrant's rhetoric strategies of social individuation and his performative attempts of becoming the agent of his own story repeatedly participate in the bi-directional discourse of cross-cultural violence. By rendering visible the particular discursive conditionality and strategies of its own narrative and rhetorical direction, the novel brings to the surface those dishonest assumptions that underlie the idealist rhetoric of integration, assimilation, intercultural dialogue, or multiculturalism. While there is a certain risk in seeing social and representational violence as an inherent and indeed constitutive component of *The Book of Khalid*—remember that “you can get burned when you are touched and called by the other”⁹⁴—there lies in my view a larger danger in accepting statist interpretive responses that deny the presence of this very historical violence. When reading Anglophone Arab representations, one cannot afford to ignore many of these representations' particular concerns with the predicament of their own violent adjustment. Rihani's novel is an early example of this metafictional tendency. It is first of all this quality that marks it as an

93 Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,” *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984*, Vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: The New P, 1997) 281–301.

94 Spivak, “Terror: A Speech after 9/11,” 378.

important intertext for any reading of Anglophone Arab articulations that is attentive to the political and ethical implications of the works it chooses. The study of competing aesthetic framings of planetary conflicts, the exploration of the trivializing modes of Orientalist objectification, or increased interpretive attention to the victims of Occidental counter-representations alone do not bring an end to the social suffering inflicted by global violence. The urgent need to produce conditions of peaceful coexistence intensifies the need to develop modes of cultural criticism which make the conditions from which cross-cultural violence continues to arise intolerable. My readings of conflictual imaginaries presented in the course of this study, ranging from William Peter Blatty's horror-narrative, *The Exorcist*, to the Palestinian concept artist Emily Jacir's Sydney performance, *Material for a Film*, share this aim.

3.2 Post-Gibran Before *The Prophet*: Khalid's Figurality and Performative Arabness

"They are so proud of Gibran. Probably the most overestimated writer in history. I don't think that any Lebanese has ever read him. If they had, they would keep their mouth fucking shut."⁹⁵

This is how Mohammad, the main narrative voice in Rabi' Alameddine's 1998 novel, *Koolaid's*, refers to probably the best-known representative of the early émigré school of Arab American writing. The decisively unfilial fictional comment on Kahlil Gibran's⁹⁶ literary work and its dominant Lebanese reception does not at all represent a rare exception within contemporary Anglophone Arab writing. In fact, the majority of representations with which I am concerned in this study regularly take up an implicit or explicit critical stance toward what is known in the Arab world as *Adab al-Mahjar*.⁹⁷ The need to go beyond what is seen as the

95 Rabi' Alameddine, *Koolaid's. The Art of War* (London: Abacus, 1998) 243.

96 Gibran's name was changed from Gibran Khalil Gibran to Kahlil Gibran during a registration procedure when he first entered a Boston school at the age of twelve. In his English-language writings, he would use this bureaucratically domesticated and Americanized abbreviation of his name. See Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 64.

97 *Adab* is the Arabic word for "literature". *Mahjar* translates as "place of immigration or exile." The term *Adab al-Mahjar* (Literature of Exile) is used in the Arabic-speaking academic world for the late 19th- and early 20th-century diasporic literary production nurtured by Arab immigrants in the Americas, particularly in Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires, and New York. On Anglophone *Mahjar* writings, see Nadeem Naimy, *The Lebanese Prophets of New York* (Beirut: American U of Beirut P, 1985) and Geoffrey Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter: Fiction and Autobiography by Arab Writers in English* 32-47.

self-Orientalizing confirmation of Western expectations presumably prevalent in early Arab American writing has by now been widely accepted among literary writers, artists, and critics alike. In 1999, Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash edited an anthology of new Arab American short poems, prose, auto-fictional writing, and critical essays under the title *Post-Gibran*.⁹⁸ The volume is particularly concerned with a more recent body of literature which intentionally moves beyond both the equally essentialist and reductionist mode of Arab immigrant articulations associated with the Arab American *Mahjar* school and with those writings in its immediate wake. As Mattawa puts it in his own poetological contribution on the multiple sources, predicament, and potentials of Arab cultural self-locations within the US context,

[...] the staples of grandmotherly aphorisms, thickly accented patriarchal traditionalism, culinary nostalgia, religious dogma, belly dancing and adoration for Kahlil Gibran are meager nourishments for cultural identity, let alone a cultural revival and subsequent engagement with the larger American culture.⁹⁹

The project recommended here has quite ambivalent implications regarding its literary politics of cultural identification. On the one hand, it presents itself as being inspired by Adonis' poetological call for re-discovering the Arab-Islamic cultural heritage's inherent modernity and innovative capacities outside the politico-cultural model of Western modernity¹⁰⁰ rather than by what is seen as a solely spiritual model of trans-civilizational renewal exemplified by *Mahjar* intellectuals like Gibran.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, the notion of diasporic creativity, although clearly identifiable as Arabic in character, is placed within and against the dominant social order and already-established symbolic patterns that regulate the Western repertory of defining non-Western alterity. Without further specifying their criteria of selection, Mattawa and Akash claim some truly Arab presences in contem-

98 Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash, eds., *Post-Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1999).

99 Khaled Mattawa, "Freeways and Rest Houses: Towards an Arab Location on the American Cultural Map," *Post-Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing*, eds. Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash (New York: Syracuse UP, 1999) 61.

100 See Adonis, *Introduction to Arab Poetics* 81.

101 It might be noteworthy here that Mattawa's own English-language poetry was decisively influenced by his work as a translator of Arabic poetry. Aside from the obvious influence of the Palestinian national poet, Mahmoud Darwish, Adonis' poetic model seems to have been particularly exemplary for Mattawa. In 2010, he published a substantial volume with his own translations of works by Adonis; *Adonis: Selected Poems*, trans. Khaled Mattawa (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010). For his poetry, see also Khaled Mattawa, *Tocqueville* (Kalamazoo, MI: New Issues P/Western Michigan U, 2010); *Amorisco* (Keene, NY: Ausable P, 2008); *Zodiac of Echoes* (Keene, NY: Ausable P, 2003) and *Ismailia Eclipse: Poems* (Riverdale-on-Hudson, NY: Sheep Meadow P, 1996).

porary Arab American re-presence: an equally ethical and aesthetical “system of values, attitudes, and manners” that can be traced back as far as the ancient epic of Gilgamesh and that persists in affecting current literary production in Arabic.¹⁰² Such post-Gibranian self-representations are expected to invalidate a false image of Arabs, Arab Americans, the Arab world, the “Arab-American world,” and Arab “destiny,” the design of which has been “created by the American imagination”¹⁰³ and has for too long been re-created and consequently affirmed by Arab American writers. Thus, the cultural articulation of a critically renewed Arab American identity is not only directed against American misrepresentations but also “needs a basis of eloquent and thorough social critique of its own subculture.”¹⁰⁴ The “Post” in the anthology’s title first and foremost suggests new directions of voicing divergent Arab American subjectivities that, while bearing witness to the rich cultural heritage of what the editors variously call “our spirit of Arabness” or “our Gellamishian [sic!] spirit,”¹⁰⁵ do not allow for comfortable notions of ethnic Arab literature, both in relation to Western mainstream perceptions as well as regarding the impossibility of some absolute return to an authentic origin. However, *Post-Gibran* neglects to reflect thoroughly on its very point of negative reference.

If literary critics aim to explore the so-called “Gibran Phenomenon,” as Wail S. Hassan does in his 2011 study, *Immigrant Narratives*,¹⁰⁶ they try to explain the enduring popularity of the Lebanese-American writer rather than “his works themselves, which [according to Hassan] do not reward rigorous analysis.”¹⁰⁷ At best, they acknowledge Gibran’s sly strategic use of “the trope of visionary Romanticism [...] to negotiate the market from within the institutions of power”¹⁰⁸ to achieve acknowledgment as well as economic success through the representational channels of Western mainstream discourse. At worst, scholars of Anglophone Arab literature diagnose “the failure of his project on the personal, social, and intellectual

102 Khaled Mattawa and Munir Akash, Introduction, *Post-Gibran: Anthology of New Arab American Writing* xi.

103 Mattawa and Akash, Introduction, xi.

104 Mattawa, “Freeways and Rest Houses: Towards an Arab Location on the American Cultural Map,” 60.

105 Mattawa, “Freeways and Rest Houses,” 60.

106 “The Gibran Phenomenon” is the title of Chapter 2 of Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 59-77. The respective chapter is devoted to Gibran’s work and his immensely successful reception in the West.

107 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 62; see also Wail S. Hassan, “Gibran and Orientalism,” *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, ed. Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 65-92.

108 Richard E. Hishmeh, “Strategic Genius, Disidentification, and the Burden of *The Prophet* in Arab-American Poetry,” *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, ed. Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 96.

levels.”¹⁰⁹ Following both views, Gibran’s Anglophone cultural pseudo-translations regularly take the form of self-exoticizing esoteric cogitations, which at least implicitly affirm the anti-Arab racial and cultural chauvinisms of early 20th century American mainstream representations. Accordingly, his writings contributed to the affirmation of the dominant discourse of American Orientalism at a time when European colonial powers were redrawing the entire Middle Eastern map rather than opening new discursive spaces for a critical dialogue between cultures or a future Anglophone Arab translational poetics.

When first reading *The Prophet*,¹¹⁰—a collection of prose poetry which became Gibran’s by far most successful work ever written in English, was translated into more than fifty languages since its first publication in 1923, and has been consistently placed on best-selling lists around the world—one cannot but agree that this *Mahjar* writer indeed knew how to address the Western and Westernized global audience’s expectations. Written at a historical moment when all things Oriental were particularly *en vogue* in American fashion, marketing, film, popular music, and fine art, the sociohistorical experience of first-generation Arab immigration to the US seems to be almost totally neglected in this book. However, the mystic visions of universal humanity and transcendental connectivity presented by Gibran are framed by a narrative (and articulated through the words) of an Oriental would-be re-migrant called Almustafa (The Chosen One). The prophet-like hero of the short frame story is only blurrily marked as a representative of some mysterious Arabic-Islamic conglomerate East. Having lived in the foreign city of Orphalese for twelve years, he is about to board a ship which is to take him home, a place of origin not further specified. Shortly before his departure, Almustafa is stopped by local women and men. They ask him to explain the deeper meaning of the human condition. His elaborations on the spiritual dimensions of love, marriage, children, joy, pain and sorrow, crime and punishment, reason, freedom and law—the philosophical and mystical preaching of the frame character—turn into the poetic voice of the collection’s main part.¹¹¹

I am not interested here in analyzing the formal or topical details of *The Prophet*’s short, almost aphoristic chapters. Nor do I aim at tracing the Arabic-Islamic sources, Baha’i influences, or Persian pretexts of Gibran’s instant mysticism.¹¹² What I am instead concerned with is the particular discursive (pre)figuration

109 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 77.

110 Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, new annot. ed. (Richmond: Oneworld, 2012).

111 Gibran, *The Prophet* 7.

112 For this, see Suheil Bushrui, Introduction, *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran (Richmond: Oneworld, 2012) xiii-xiv.

of the literary prophet in relation to Khalid's "figurative Arab-ness"¹¹³ created by Rihani. Looking closely at the selective adaptation of the character of Khalid in Gibran's performative dressing-up allows an alternative assessment of the paradoxes and power of strategic imitations and inauthentic self-enactments within Anglophone Arab representations beyond the strict division between a pre-Gibran and a post-Gibran discourse.

Khalid claims to be the chosen revolutionary voice of the Arab while still imprisoned in New York. Thus, his prophetic announcement to return to his place of birth and to liberate the Arab world comes with an equal portion of shivering arrogance and ironic boast.¹¹⁴ In fact, we do not learn whether anybody has stopped him on his repeatedly postponed journey aboard the transatlantic carrier of pan-Arab liberty or if any American has ever asked him for his spiritually inspired political visions and worldly-triggered hyper-moralistic truth. Given the tragic anti-hero's rather conflictual relation to his ultimate socio-economic surrounding, this seems rather unlikely, and the question is probably almost irrelevant for the following plot of remigration. For my argument, it is just as irrelevant whether Khalid's fictional prophethood finds its key inspiration in the experience of America's secular liberalism¹¹⁵ or if it instead lies in the "spiritual values of the East."¹¹⁶

I rather wonder whether the hallucinating Arab prisoner's first distressed prophetic enunciation could indeed have inspired Gibran's successful literary self-invention, *The Prophet*, or his performative embodiment of the chosen arch-Oriental writer-prophet. Could Rihani's fiction of Anglophone Arab prophecy have functioned as a sort of role model for Gibran and his early English-language collections of Sufi-style parables like *The Madman* (1918) and *The Forerunner* (1920)? Is it possible that Khalid's angry farewell to New York anticipated *The Prophet's* mild address of welcome directed at an English-reading global audience, an address that would soon advance to Gibran's most successful poetic conglomeration of esoteric Orientalism? And, if so: what went wrong, either in the respective process of selective adaptation or within most literary critics' degrading reception of Gibran's famous work?

Rihani and Gibran are regularly placed side by side in distinctive sub-files into the virtual *Mahjar* archive of early Arab American major literary figures: the first as

113 Jacob Berman, "Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation," *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, eds. Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2012) 66.

114 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 123-25.

115 Geoffrey P. Nash, *The Arab Writer in English. Arab Themes in a Metropolitan Language, 1908–1958* (Brighton: Sussex Academic P, 1998) 28-29.

116 Ameen Albert Rihani, "The Book of Khalid and The Prophet. Similar Universal Concerns with Different Perspectives: A Comparative Study," *PALMA* 7.1 (2001): 33.

an early pioneer of Anglophone Arab writing across the genres, the latter as the internationally best-known and economically most successful producer of what could be coined Arab American kitsch-Orientalism. Both men belonged to the so-called first wave of Arab, largely Maronite-Christian immigration to the US from the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire. Both immigrated to the US at an infantile age. Rihani arrived in New York in 1888 at the age of eleven. He moved from his native Freike, a village near Beirut, with his father, his brother, and his sister.¹¹⁷ Gibran grew up in the Lebanese mountain village, Bisharri, and in 1895, at the age of twelve, immigrated with his mother, his brother, and his two sisters to Boston.¹¹⁸ The two first met in 1910 in Paris.¹¹⁹ They were already friends when Gibran followed Rihani's advice and rented a studio in Manhattan in 1912.¹²⁰ The seven drawings made by Gibran to illustrate *The Book of Khalid* testify their early personal contact and intellectual collaboration (fig. 7).

The two proponents of disparate Anglophone Arab (pseudo-)prophetic writing, Gibran and Rihani, were founding members of *Ar-Rabita al-Qalamiya* or *Rubiyat al-Qalam* [The Pen League], a book-club-like diasporic literary organization established New York City in 1920 by intellectuals of Arab descent, among them Levantine immigrant writers like Mikhail Naimy, Ibrahim Rihbany, Abdul Masih Hadad, and Wadi Bahout. Gibran would later emerge as the president of that very organization. Although the majority of these men never received formal education in either Arabic or English, they often wrote in and experimented with both languages. While most of their English-language works remained unnoticed by a wider English-reading public in the West, the group members' impact on diasporic Arab journalism, transnational political activism, and the transformation of Arabic literary practice within the Middle East was significant. The diasporic identification of early Arab immigrants is particularly evident in the diverse Arabic-language newspapers and journals that had come into existence since the 1890s.

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- 117 On Rihani's biography, see "Biography of Ameen F. Rihani" and "Timetable of Events in Ameen F. Rihani's Life and in the World," *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West: A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding*, eds. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2004) 151-63. Berman and Hassan argue that he immigrated at the age of twelve with his uncle and teacher. Berman, "Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation," 66 and Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 40.
- 118 On Gibran's biography, see Suheil B. Bushrui and Joe Jenkins, *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet. A New Biography* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1998).
- 119 Todd Fine, Afterword, *The Book of Khalid*, by Ameen Rihani (New York: Melville House, 2012) 320.
- 120 Suheil Bushrui, Introduction, *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran (Richmond: Oneworld Pub., 2012): xiii.
- 121 On Rihani's authorial strategy of inventing an editor-narrator who claims to draw on various manuscripts and other sources in translation, see 3.4 of this study.

Figure 7: Detail from the cover illustration by Kahlil Gibran for Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*, 1911. This illustration shows in Arabic letters the novel's title, *Kitab Khalid*, as well as the year of its first publication. The illustration could alternatively be interpreted as showing a fragment of the cover of the fictional/original Khedival library manuscript that the literary narrative claims to be based upon.¹²¹



Often sectarian in their editorial composition and readership, periodicals like *Al-Hoda* (Guidance), *Kawkab Amrika* (The Planet of America), *Miray'at al-Gharb* (Mirror of the West), or *Al-Funun* (The Arts) functioned as particularly important platforms for the formation of a distinctive transnational “public sphere linking *mahjar* to *mashriq*.”¹²²

While establishing new patterns of diasporic politics, these periodicals also had to respond to the pressures of a heavily discriminatory and assimilationist US context. The first generation's attempt to preserve an Arab identity against such pressures increasingly clashed with the socio-political needs and practical

122 Stacy Fahrenthold, “Transnational Modes and Media: The Syrian Press in the *Mahjar* and Emigrant Activism during World War I,” *Mashriq & Mahjar* 1.1 (2013): 30. The geographical term *Mashriq* refers to the region east of Egypt.

predicaments of legal inclusion and economic participation. Particularly among the first American-born generation, exclusively diasporic-oriented debates on Arab-American identity were no longer seen as adequate for giving sufficient answers to urgently pressing questions of local everyday life in which this generation found itself caught up. The threat of being excluded and discriminated against within the US on the basis of racial definitions of American identity and citizenship rights was directly related to intense debates on who was and who was not a free white person according to the Naturalization Act of 1790. Before the 1920 census classified Syrians and Palestinians under the racial category "foreign-born white population," Arab immigrants had to prove their eligibility for citizenship in a series of individual petitions and court cases: hence, the practical need for individual immigrants and ethnic groups to perform cultural whiteness and non-Asiatic identity. However, such performative strategy could easily collide with both the Mahjar intellectuals' broader political goal to promote a sense of diasporic ethnic identity among the Arab-American community living in the United States and the American majority's perception of Arabs as intrinsically non-European, non-Christian, and non-white.¹²³

Arab Americans share this experience with other late 19th-century immigrant groups (non-European as well as European) initially cast as nonwhites. As with the Irish, Italians, and Jews, Arab whiteness was a socially and culturally constructed category that proved infinitely malleable as a political tool of either inclusion or exclusion. But the predicament of the Arab American's *Whiteness of a Different Color*, of their particular not-quite-whiteness,¹²⁴ and the various conscious and unconscious attempts at either escaping into impossible invisibility or critically exploiting the status of always being out of place on both sides of "the color-line"¹²⁵ continued to shape social struggles, identity politics, and cultural practice of Arab (diasporic) intellectuals throughout the 20th century.

123 Alixa Naff, *Becoming American. The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois P, 1985) and Gregory Orfalea, *The Arab Americans: A History* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch P, 2006).

124 Here I am not only referring to Matthew Frye Jacobson's seminal *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998) and Homi Bhabha's by now classical psychological definition of colonial mimicry in his 1984 essay "Of Mimicry and Man" [Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October. Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis* 28.2 (1984): 126, 132]. I first and foremost draw on Jamil Khoury's and Stephen Combs's (dirs.) film documentary *Not Quite White: Arabs, Slavs, and the Contours of Contested Whiteness*, ADF/Typecast Films, 2012. The film integrates scenes from Khoury's 2010 stage play, *WASP: White Arab Slovak Pole*, as well as interviews with scholars and activists from the Arab American and Polish American communities to critically reflect on the racialized history of these communities and particularly on the ambivalent history of their whitening through the use of anti-Black racism.

125 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007) 15.

Though classified as racially white according to the official census and most affirmative actions, Arabs have nonetheless been discursively constituted as a distinctive non-white group. The ongoing history of the dominant anti-Arab discourse shows a strange, almost fetishistic fixation on the Arab bodies' non-whiteness as the visible indicator of their intrinsic cultural alterity and the political threat to national security that these bodies represent.¹²⁶ Therefore, one cannot be surprised to find in Anglophone Arab representations to this day a constant concern with both the ambivalence of (partial) recognition and racist subjection as well as forms of resistance against being transformed into a normalized, that is Westernized, Oriental Other. Such countering of the equally ambivalent and authoritative Orientalizing discourse does by definition enter the representational spheres of politics and social activism. As I will show, Anglophone Arab attempts to lay bare the contradictions and destabilize the discriminatory paradigms of repressive integration also take place on the tropic axis between allegory and metonymy. This axis is of particularly importance to literary narratives and performative arts.

With the re-racialization of Islam and Middle Easterners after September 11, 2001, the contradictory articulations of Orientalizing desire and fear would not only turn out to be alarmingly well-preserved but would also involve a rather unexpected dynamic of global hyper-visibility and legal violence that demands critically renewed emancipatory strategies.¹²⁷ It is against this highly ambivalent background of instable racial identification and the often mutually excluding socio-cultural exigencies resulting from these identifications that one needs to evaluate early Arab American writers' strategies to engage the American audience. On the one hand, these writers found themselves in a discursive situation that demanded the reduction of their writings' cultural distance from European and Western narrative traditions. On the other hand, they quickly learned that any commercially successful address of a broader readership required marketing their works' tropological proximity to mainstream Americans' imaginaries of the Oriental. The employment of ancient-Eastern images, biblical rhetoric, and Christian spirituality was certainly a consequence of early 20th century Arab American self-representations' both racist and assimilationist discursive prefiguration. The literal or implicit self-distancing of Arab immigrant writers from the political actuality of (pan-)Arab nationalist political movements or contemporary Islam was another strategy of proving their successful assimilation into American mainstream culture and rendering themselves less alien.

126 Keith Feldman, "The (Il)legible Arab Body and the Fantasy of National Democracy," *MELUS* 31.4 (2006): 33-53.

127 Amaney A. Jamal and Nadine Christine Naber, eds., *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2008). See also Salah Hassan, "Arabs, Race and the Post-September 11 National Security State," *Middle East Report* 224 (2002): 18.

One particularly promising way for Arab American intellectuals of the 1910s and 1920s to perform the difficult task of presenting oneself as a clearly identifiable transhistorical arch-Oriental representative while denying any relation to the socio-economic actuality of what contemporary Americans now called the Middle East was to cast themselves and their literary characters in the role of an essentially depoliticized spiritual Eastern prophet. As Evelyn Shakir has put it, “[t]he first generation of Arab-American writers [...] dressed carefully for their encounter with the American public, putting on the guise of prophet, preacher, or man of letters.”¹²⁸ This seems to be precisely the performative and poetic formula used by Gibran. His prophet’s tremendous success is that of a non-threatening exotic stranger coming from an imaginative, spiritual East, situated at the same time both far away and close, who could be easily assimilated into the dominant American narrative without undermining the nation’s white-liberal-secular self-perception. As previously stated, Gibran’s Almustafa is preaching in the harbor of a fictional city named Orphalese. Against the historical context of *The Prophet*’s genesis, one tends to see this urban setting as a clear literary reference to New York City. But the poetic frame setting does not overtly signify any real socio-historical place. The city’s name might hint to the mythological worlds of the ancient musician-poet Orpheus. It could also be interpreted as drawing on the Aramaic name of Jerusalem, *Urshalim*, the City of Peace. But the brief narrative depiction of *The Prophet*’s urban setting allows for little comparison with any American or non-American metropole in the early 20th century. Orphalese rather seems to represent an almost primordial or *Urphallic* spatiality of the prophet’s visionary eruption,¹²⁹ an equally mythical and sacred nowhere of the poetic hero’s prophecy. If one insists on locating this city, one would have to locate it in the imagined geography of some mystical East. The place of Almustafa’s temporary exile and the isle of Almustafa’s birth seem to represent one and the same place. Therefore, his prophetic voyage home is not a physical but a spiritual one; it concerns the transcendental spatiality of the human soul rather than the cultural geography of East and West. Gibran’s prophet, in other words, departs from a city that he seems to have never lived in, and he seemingly stays within what his pre-prophetic self could never enter.

There are few literary traces of Gibran’s personal history within *The Prophet*, and the references to Khalid’s multiply broken path to prophecy are at best superficial. We do not learn much about this other Almustafa’s exilic experience, of his socio-economic life before he turns away from the materialist world to turn himself into

128 Evelyn Shakir, “Arab American Literature,” *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to Our Multicultural Heritage*, ed. Alpana Sharma Knippling (Westport CT: Greenwood P, 1996) 6.

129 This would be a third (admittedly one-sided psychological) reading of the fictional city name.

an Oriental prophet. The latter cannot “go in peace and without sorrow [...] without a wound in the spirit,” and he remembers “days of pain” as well as long “nights of aloneness” which he spent within the city’s walls.¹³⁰ There are remains of a certain ill-tempered energy, maybe even a residual-worldly anger, in Almustafa’s voice when he speaks of the spiritual uselessness of “burning your law books.”¹³¹ Although the reader can find some abstract memories of real-world suffering and respective regrets, the prophet Almustafa obviously succeeds in overcoming these materialist difficulties. Leaving behind his “heart made sweet with hunger and with thirst,”¹³² he finally speaks out those rather pedestrian eternal truths, that—critics of Anglophone Arab literature may like it or not—to this day are recited all over the world and in various languages by lovers of esoteric poetry on occasions of weddings, funerals, or birthdays, not to speak of innumerable esoteric blogs that pseudo-spiritually molest the World Wide Web.

Although Rihani created the Arab-American transmigrant, Khalid, more than one decade before Gibran let Almustafa preach shared spiritual humanity at his universal exilic non-place, the two narratives are clearly connected through more than their authors’ biographical linkage, Gibran’s visual framing of Rihani’s novel, a shared concern with universal spirituality, or the common use of a prophetic mode of emplotment. Both literary projects are deeply grounded in the immigrant experience with and the anticipation of West-Eastern misrepresentations. They work through and re-resemble essentially the same anticipations and representations, but they represent two significantly different directions of responding to their shared discursive prefiguration. The dilemma of having to prove themselves worthy within a hegemonic Western discourse which insists that Arabs perform some strictly prefigured cultural difference while at the same time disavowing any sociopolitical claim of difference has continued to molest and inspire later generations of Anglophone Arab artists, writers, and critics. Most post-*Mahjar* intellectuals have seemingly opted for Rihani’s narrative pronouncement of a disturbing multiplicity of Arabness rather than for Gibran’s model of staging disciplined and clearly located Arab difference. I do, however, argue—and will further show in the course of my study—that the two strategies are not always as strictly separated as some critics want to have it. The mutual effects of self-Orientalizing mimicry and counter-Orientalist mockery are sometimes very slippery, frequently hard to control, and by definition contested by the effects of (consciously or unconsciously) failed imitation. If Khalid’s non-harmonizing excess of partial imitations seems more appropriate to disrupt Western Orientalist representations’ authority, this is first and foremost due to the moral inappropriateness of his excess. His repetition

130 Gibran, *The Prophet* 3.

131 Gibran, *The Prophet* 54.

132 Gibran, *The Prophet* 48.

of stereotypes leads to the confusion of cross-cultural priorities and thus to what Homi Bhabha calls “the strategic production of conflictual [...] ‘identity effects’.”¹³³

Let me briefly elaborate on the splitting effects of Rihani’s literary figuration of Khalid before revisiting Gibran’s posing. Although *The Book of Khalid* shows a particularly creative exaggeration of the very prophetic Orientalness assigned to Arab immigrant writers that was so strictly adopted by Gibran, Rihani’s mode of narrating allows much more imaginative varieties of immigrant Arabness. Khalid’s assumingly naïve endeavor to envisage a universal humanity free from racial and cultural chauvinism¹³⁴ willingly clashes with American perceptions of Middle Eastern American presences and finally leads to his remigration. The part of the novel set in the US not only directly addresses the particular diasporic organizational conditions of its own emergence—one of Khalid’s many jobs is that of the local Democratic Party’s “Agent to the editors of the Syrian newspapers of New York”¹³⁵—but also depicts early 20th century Arab immigrant everyday experiences of institutionalized discrimination. Khalid is repeatedly sanctioned on the basis of cultural and racial prejudices. When his Tammany Hall boss calls him a “brazen-faced” descendant of “mountain peasants or other barbarious tribes” and recommends that Khalid should rather preach his inner morality “to the South African Pappoos,”¹³⁶ the insult obviously goes beyond the diagnosis of inappropriate political rhetorics or a lack of communicative manners. The Tammany boss’s choice of words clearly refers to the Arab immigrant’s racialized socio-cultural status as an intrinsically non-Western person of color.

At this point, it is important to remind ourselves that Khalid’s first occupation is not that of a preacher or prophet. Before he, with little success, tries the professional roles of the self-educating anti-capitalist student, the womanizing darwish-bohemian, the hyper-moral assistant lawyer, or the public Tammany orator, he, together with his friend, Shakib, makes his life as a street peddler. It is this social role more than any other that marks him as a degraded, lower-class Arab immigrant. As a peddler, he is highly visible on the streets of New York. By using the figure of the “Street Arab,”¹³⁷ Rihani’s novelistic representation plays out the dominant American discourse’ stereotypical trope of Oriental identity around the turn of the century, a trope that hardly responded to the *Mahjar* intellectuals’ self-image. The narrative foil of immigrant Arabness in need of normalizing eradication had already been proffered by popular writers of European descent in books like Horatio

133 Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” 131.

134 See Naji Oueijan, “The Formation of a Universal Self,” *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West: A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding*, eds. Nathan C. Funk and Betty J. Sitka (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2004) 83–92.

135 Rihani, *Book of Khalid* 57.

136 Rihani, *Book of Khalid* 61.

137 Berman, “Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation,” 69.

Alger Jr.'s 1871 children's series *Tattered Tom, or, The Story of a Street Arab*.¹³⁸ In 1890, Jacob Riis had captured the figure of the New York Street Arab in a collection of photographs (fig. 8 and fig. 9) entitled *How the Other Half Lives*.¹³⁹

Figure 8: Jacob A. Riis, *A Peddler Sits on his Bedroll*, 1888, photography.



In these visual and textual narratives, Arab immigrants appeared as forming an ethnically unique group of poor illiterates who, despite their culturally determined “wild independence”¹⁴⁰ and “biblical code of ethics,”¹⁴¹ nevertheless worked hard to climb the social ladder and enter the American mainstream. Khalid inhabits exactly this role and thus acts as a representative of the hegemonic narrative’s essentialism. At the same time, he disrupts the linear discourse of diagnosing socio-cultural shortcomings and prescribing unconditional assimilation. His repeated inversion and reversal of the Arab street figure and his sturdy multiplication of alternative self-identifications far beyond that figure do not allow for any

138 Horatio Alger Jr., *Tattered Tom, or, The Story of a Street Arab* (Boston: Loring, 1871).

139 Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives. Studies among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner’s & Sons, 1890).

140 Alger Jr., *Tattered Tom, or, The Story of a Street Arab* 104, quoted from Berman, “Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation,” 69.

141 Berman, “Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation,” 70.

Figure 9: Jacob A. Riis, *Street Arabs in Night Quarters*, 1888–89, photography.



either/or-fixation of abstract Anglophone Arabness. Khalid's constant juxtaposing of discursively presumed ontological being and de-facto performed cultural self-making radically questions the truth claim of any pre-figurative Arab identity. His abortive immigrant story instead stresses the inescapably performative modality of being Arab within and against those codes that have prefigured dominant Western perceptions of how Arabs are supposed to feel, think, and act. Even when he finally takes up the role of the Arab prophet, he is not willing to mask this masquerade's internal contradictions. The narrative of Khalid's many selves instead highlights the subversive power of performative contradictions. His decisively politicized and frankly ludicrous interpretation of the imprisoned prophet figure has little to do with the distilled exotic trope of the dignified Oriental mystic-prophet for which Gibran opted. It is this insight into what Jacob Berman calls the "sophisticated strategies of figurative self-representation,"¹⁴² as a tropic and performative tool of strategic subversion, critical revision, and correlative identification, that characterizes many Anglophone Arab representations after Gibran.

142 Berman, "Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation," 74.

In my view, we cannot blame Rihani's Khalid for Gibran's Orientalizing self-inventions. Nor should we blame Rihani for his fellow immigrant's highly selective adaptation of only one sub-facet of the literary character. If it is at all true that "Gibran adopted for himself Khalid's role,"¹⁴³ he only followed some of Khalid's deceptively genuine Orientalizing side-steps. I do, however, equally hesitate to over-hastily judge Gibran for marketing a poetically abstracted and obviously stereotypical Arab image as the image of his true individual self. It seems to me naïvely essentialist to lament that this image does not truthfully represent him or his particular ethnic community's authentic cultural heritage. Even if one agrees with those critics who, for good reasons consider it a mistake to understand Gibran's English-language writings "as representative of *mahjar* literature's overall characteristics,"¹⁴⁴ we cannot deny his immense visibility as a representative of this very Arab American cultural sphere. Gibran has obviously found "a truth"¹⁴⁵ among the different performative facets of Khalid's lies: one that taught him how to sell his exotic attraction to a Western reading public. If today's literary critics miss Khalid's powerful pain of multiply queered identifications in Almustafa's straightforward sermons, this might indicate Gibran's reluctance to follow the arduous fictional way that Rihani has paved for him. But this absence does not say anything about the possibly no-less-bumpy path that led to Gibran's public conspicuousness or about *The Prophet's* relation to the broader *Mahjar* experience.

Looking closely at photographic portraits of the Arab American immigrant teenager taken around 1898 by his surrogate-paternal friend and early mentor, Fred Holland Day, while in addition scrutinizing with equal iconographic rigor the poet-painter's self-portrait, drawn in the 1930s (fig. 13), might offer an alternative interpretive hint. Examining the photographs today, one cannot but sense both the symbolic contradictions and the tragic performative irony of Gibran's prophetic literary gestures and publically generated images. Although some of these portraits were frequently reproduced by both Gibran himself as well as his critics as a means of (self-)representation, none of them depict the historical agent Gibran at the age of approximately fifteen. They do not represent his independently defined late 19th-century social likeness but the photographer's power and his camera's potential to capture and visually freeze a theatrical staging.

While the first two images (fig. 10 and 11) present the result of a slightly homoerotic and explicitly exoticist Orientalist imaginary projected onto the immigrant

143 Ameen Albert Rihani, "The Book of Khalid and The Prophet. Similar Universal Concerns with Different Perspectives: A Comparative Study," 34. See also Nash, *The Arab Writer in English* 38.

144 Berman, "Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation," 73.

145 I do refer here to Gibran, *The Prophet* 55: "Say not, 'I have found the truth', but rather 'I have found a truth'".

Figure 10: Photographic portrait of Gibran by Fred Holland Day, ca. 1895.



boy's defenseless body staged in front of the studio-camera, the significantly dissimilar depiction of Gibran with a book in his hands, dressed in the costume of a self-learning patrician student (fig. 12), already anticipates the young reader's later career as an artist and literary writer. Gibran's own drawing (fig. 13), projecting the poetically engrossed self-image of an intellectual pilgrim and religious mystic wrapped in white cotton drapery, seems to selectively combine both poles of the earlier photographs' pictorial semantics. In this drawing, the visual trope of the beautiful Arab/Bedouin boy appealing to Western sexual fantasies has apparently made room for the iconic consolidation of more spiritually oriented Orientalist desires. Taken together, the four images allow for visually tracing the history of the self-Orientalizing merchandizing brand that the world-famous artist and poet would become. In my view, they can open up an alternative perspective on the fine line between strategic self-Orientalization and the (self-)exploitation by or of Orientalized people. In addition, these images invite the spectator to discuss the

Figure 11: Photographic portrait of Gibran by Fred Holland Day, ca. 1897.



related post-moralistic question regarding the instable gap between the morally illegitimate affirmative use of Orientalist signs and their post-moralistically justifiable resistive insertion.

When Gibran first got in contact with the wealthy Bostonian publisher and artist, Fred Holland Day, the Arab boy had already lost his Arabic first name, Khalil. Now Kahlil risked losing, if not his innocence, the right to control his own image, the right of his photographic copy, too. The much older photographer¹⁴⁶ dressed the young immigrant in burlesque oriental clothes and placed him in a chair covered with the coat of a wild cat. He alternatively enwrapped him in outsized Bedouin fabric before executing his proto-celebrity shots. Day was well known for his rather

146 Fred Holland Day was born in 1864 in Norwood, MA.

Figure 12: Photographic portrait of Gibran by Fred Holland Day, 1897.



eccentric understanding of photography as an allegorical artistic practice. The co-founder of the progressive publishing firm, Copeland and Day, was a close friend of Oscar Wilde and Stephen Crane. As the mentor to avant-garde photographers like Alvin Langdon Coburn and Edward Steichen, he was a central figure in artistic circles on both sides of the Atlantic. Since Day began making photographs in the late 1880s, he saw himself determined to promote photography as genuine fine art practice. By the turn of the century, he had established an international reputation as a key figure in the so-called pictorialist movement. This approach to photography embraced labor-intensive processes such as platinum prints, which yielded rich, tonally subtle images. It emphasized the role of the photographer as craftsman and countered the argument that photography was solely a mechanical

Figure 13: Kahlil Gibran, Self-portrait (drawing from the 1930s).



mimetic medium. Pictorialist photographic works instead claimed to be produced like any painter's canvas and to be as skillfully constructed as any graphic artist's rendering. Day had mounted the first important exhibition of American pictorial photography in 1900 at the Royal Photographic Society in England but was never affiliated with any American artist group.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ The second-generation German-Jewish immigrant, Alfred Stieglitz, was the most prominent spokesperson for pictorialist photographers in America. In 1902, he and several like-minded associates founded the New York Camera Club. Day chose to maintain independence from the New York group. On Day's photography, see Patricia J. Fanning, *Through an Uncommon Lens: The Life and Photography of F. Holland Day* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2008). On Gibran's relation to his early mentor 69-71.

In order to understand why Gibran attracted the Boston photographer's extraordinary patronage, one needs to ask further what discursively inspired and contextually enabled Day to make the Arab immigrant his model and protégé. Day, like many pictorialists, displayed a particular interest in non-Western cultures and artistic styles, most notably Japanese, Arab, and Native American art. His photographic work was especially controversial for its frequent employment of young male nudity and its glaring homoerotic aesthetics.¹⁴⁸ He regularly used underprivileged youths of ethnic minorities for his pseudo-ethnographic costume-driven depiction of mythical and religious subject matters. As we can learn from Jean and Kahlil Gibran, Day "would dress up young street urchins from the Slums of Boston's South End in ethnic garments."¹⁴⁹ During the first years after his immigration to America, Gibran was one of those underprivileged "young street urchins," a street Arab. Literary critics tend to affirm a quite euphemistic interpretation of Day's photographs of black, Asian, and other minority or immigrant children of color. They stress the philanthropic intention behind the act of turning ghetto teenagers, who suffered in their everyday lives from economic poverty and socio-cultural exclusion, into visual signs of Oriental nobility in front of the camera. It might be true that, in Gibran's particular case, photographic exoticization was indeed his entry into real-world educational and artistic support, so that within a short period Gibran managed to fortify a significantly improved image of his self that was decisively distanced from the slum conditions in which he had previously been. One could even argue that this experience triggered a process at the end of which Gibran finally "live[d] up [to] the grand illusions which Day had caught."¹⁵⁰ The pictorialist photographer was indeed well known for having supported the education of underprivileged youths from ethnic minorities in the Boston area and beyond. It was he who funded and guided the early American education of young Kahlil, encouraging him to study William Blake's drawings, to read Walt Whitman and Maurice Maeterlinck, and to publish his first drawings. But although the Lebanese immigrant surely must have taken note of his American mentor's artistic cross-dressings for his own subsequent professional dressing-up, there is a notable absence in these early photographic images of Gibran. When gazing at these visual representations, it is not only important to note that they belong taxonomically to a particular colonial sub-genre of late 19th- and early 20th-century photography—that

148 On the homoerotics of Day's Orientalist photography of Gibran, see Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014) 386-87.

149 Jean Gibran and Kahlil Gibran, *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1974) 54.

150 Jean Gibran and Kahlil Gibran, *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World* 55. See also Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 65.

of ethnographic or racial types.¹⁵¹ The critical spectator, in addition, needs to see that these portraits obscure the ultimate social and cultural conditions from which they emerged. The Oriental type that Gibran is turned into has a role to play in the intellectual dandy's proto-modernist project of artistic self-innovation.¹⁵² He is not intended to interrupt the authority of the very racist discourse upon which this innovation draws. The photographs thus represent first and foremost the repressive power-relations of racial and social alterity. Day's sublime shooting is an act of symbolic violence. It transforms the street Arab Gibran into an exotic image controlled through the exercise of artistic force, and it produces a visual knowledge of Gibran that he could not have produced himself.¹⁵³

But although there is overt social violence *within* and *of* these images,¹⁵⁴ Day's visualized imaginary involves more than a violent agent and a violated object. It might be due to the particular pictorialist quality of the photographs that one is invited to speculate on an individual presence beyond the artistic re-presence. We know that Gibran would go on make quite a career by selectively cultivating and further developing the role assigned to him in these photographic stagings. With a view to his later career as the author of *The Prophet*, the necessarily selective iconological reflection presented here also needs to consider Day's 1898 series of photographs portraying the passion of Christ. In this series, the photographer himself poses as Jesus (fig. 14). Day had trained for this role by losing weight and letting his hair and beard grow. A group of seven self-portraits, known as "The Seven Last Words of Christ," directly refers to Jesus' statements from the time of his crucifixion until his death. In each single shot, the photographer, in character, assumes what he felt were facial expressions consonant with the prophet Jesus' ordeal. At the same time, he clearly draws aesthetically on a long-established Christian iconography of European paintings.

Could it be that Day was not only his own studio model, but that his photographic proclamation of the artist as the visually re-enacted Christian prophet also functioned as a role model for Gibran's performative prophethood of the 1920s

151 On ethnographic or racial types in colonial photography and the general relationship between colonial racism and the visual technologies of photography, see Arjun Appadurai, "The Colonial Backdrop," *Afterimage* 24.5 (1997): 4-7 and Deborah Poole, "An Excess of Description: Ethnography, Race, and Visual Technologies," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 159-79. On racial typologies in the visual archives of anthropology, see also Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes, "Introduction: Anthropology, Photography, and the Archive," *History and Anthropology* 21.4 (2010): 337-49.

152 Trevor Fairbrother, *Making a Presence: F. Holland Day in Artistic Photography* (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 2012).

153 On the inherent violence of photographic representation, see Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," first published in 1977; here Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, 1st electronic ed. (New York: Rosetta, 2005) 10.

154 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005) 20.

Figure 14: Fred Holland Day, *The Last Seven Words of Christ*, 1898. Series of self-portraits as Christ with crown of thorns.



and 1930s, especially for his strategic iteration of Orientalist stereotypes and his Anglophone poetic imitation of Oriental spirituality? I suggest looking at Gibran's self-Orientalizing strategies against the background of his studio experience. If we use this experience as a point of departure, should we then not see in Gibran's later self-representation, and his literary voices' prophetic role-play, a purposefully mimetic repetition of a religious-Orientalist trope first encountered in a Boston photographic studio rather than simply despising this roleplay and holding him responsible for his unconscious continuation of Orientalist exploitation? In other words, could we take Gibran's ambivalent experience of the pictorial mode as an interpretive point of departure for looking at Anglophone Arab self-Orientalizing strategies? Seen through the interpretive *lens* of Day's photographic experiments, the Anglophone Arab writer Gibran seems to have successfully adapted the early experience of pictorialist-Orientalist photography's expressive potential of making meaning beyond simply reproducing the outlines of the worlds around him. His mentor's camera had powerfully demonstrated to Gibran that an artistically and commercially successful representation of Arabness could decisively diverge from the Arab immigrant world or the Arab Middle Eastern world that he knew. In addition, this experience suggested the incorporation and artistic re-interpretation of the trope of biblical prophecy. In order to assimilate Day's artistic modalities of proto-modernist Orientalist photography into his own literary performances of Oriental prophethood, Gibran had to use quite different technical devices. He had to transform the experience of being photographically turned into an object of symbolic possession to instead take form as a symbolic representation possessed by himself.

I argue that the Arab American poet-artist did not simply reproduce hegemonic Orientalist representations to sell himself but rather cultivated a unique Orientalizing technique of selectively manipulating the presentation of information in his very own interest. Just as the pictorialists manipulated their photographic negatives and thereby injected their own aesthetic will into the beholder's

perception of visual images, Gibran imbued his self-image with Orientalist meaning, pictorial and non-pictorial alike. Whether intentionally or not, his American mentor's photographic construction of visual meaning seems to have encouraged or even forced Gibran to commodify the figure of the Oriental prophet-poet self-consciously, without corrupting his self. I am not saying that such notorious poetic entrepreneurship can effectively test or even transgress normative ranges of early 20th-century American Orientalism. But the Anglophone Arab avant-gardist's performed embodiment of spiritually loaded poster-Orientalism is characterized by a particular historical semantics in which the contrasting pattern of Orientalist discrimination and artistic self-grounding in Orientalist tropes overlap. While Gibran's poetic politics of ethnic self-dressing and his literary engagement of religious tropes might not have the transgressive power of Rihani's fluxional narrative figuration of Arabness, his performance of prophecy invites today's students of Anglophone Arab literature to critically grasp the contradictions at work within the *Mahjar* discourse and Anglophone Arab writings after Gibran. Instead of avoiding the tropes of alterity used by Gibran, they can be misused as vehicles of an active critical commentary on their immediate discursive surroundings and continuing effects.

The struggle for autonomy, equally aesthetic and ethical, in opposition to the bi-directional narratives of intrinsic difference and unquestionable authenticity discussed in the previous section could not and has not at all been resolved within more recent Anglophone Arab representations. Rather, it is my general methodological argument that the tensions between externally produced images and inner illusions as well as the diverse narrative lines of escape resulting from these tensions should not be resolved or made invisible in the interpretation of these representations. As I will demonstrate below, the production of aesthetic and ethical resemblances formed out of such tensions not only constitute the conceptual core of various Anglophone Arab works to this day but are also decisively responsible for these works' particular cross-referential and metafictional richness. In my view, any progressivist conception that seeks to differentiate strictly between self-debasing Gibran-like and emancipatory post-Gibran representations risks idealistically plannishing such conflictual dynamics and thus cannot fully decode the allegorical and performative strategies at work in the ongoing rearrangement of individual and collective Arab selves.

If contemporary Anglophone Arab representations gain a good portion of their correlative aesthetic pleasures, post-moralistic pains, and critical gifts¹⁵⁵ from a

155 I use the words "pleasure," "pain," and "gift" here to indicate Anglophone Arab representations' ambivalent quality both as documents of the socio-historical pain of being externally re-presented and self-reliant narratives persistently enunciating the aesthetic pleasures of toxically-biting critical revisions.

rather decentered mode of self-enacting, such resemblance of cultural signs and historical archives cannot be interpretively restricted to the use of any interior Arab system of reference or any authentically signifying inside. Nor can it persist in the contextual reconstruction of what is imagined as exceptionally non-Arab references. Those who aim at theoretically grasping Anglophone Arab representations as cross-cultural translations triggered by respective physical migrations, as Wail S. Hassan does,¹⁵⁶ sometimes suggest that the originals of these translations can and should be fully recovered. However, in my view Anglophone Arab cultural translations, like any other cultural translation, more readily signify the irreversible loss of such original content. At best, they allow tracing an erasure in which the imagined original idiom, image, or sound was lost forever.

To further complicate the epistemological dilemma of reading Anglophone Arab works of literature and art, one needs to admit that it is equally impossible to create an analytical text with a pure metacritical language strictly derived from outside the analyzed tropological structure of figurative Arabness. Our critical practice, no matter how seriously connected to historical contextualization and socio-political interpretation, is not free from frictions between the figural and the grammatical sides of the text that it seeks to interpret. Nor is it free from the tension between the performative and the ethical at work in such a text. The scholar of Anglophone Arab representations, if s/he does not want to entirely suspend the idea of critical reading, must sometimes, like Khalid and Gibran do in quite different narrative and performative ways, take the liberty of participating in the Orientalist/Occidental system of tropes that s/he seeks to debunk with all necessary (unmasking) earnestness, (ironic) pathos, and (strategic) paradoxes. When s/he, at the same time, allows herself or himself to read literary or artistic representations as signs of cultural translations, s/he better does so in full awareness of the fact that such signs might contain more traces of what they do not mean than of what they do. Literary and cultural criticism thus understood is an impossible translational process that is aware of a certain “violence of culturing”¹⁵⁷ at work in any Western interpretation of Arab articulations. The critique of Anglophone Arab representations, therefore, needs to be conceptualized as a way of *reading-as-transcoding* that scrupulously uses the poetic dimensions and allegorical fragmentation of a given cultural text to transfer a socio-political meaning which is not necessarily intrinsic to that very text. In such poetics of translation, the question of cultural translatability is not primarily approached as a sociolinguistic problem. I do not believe that the process of semiotic regression can ever be fully

156 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 28–37.

157 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translation as Culture,” *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, by G. Chakravorty Spivak (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013) 244.

stopped or reversed in our critical practice. Instead, the interpretive undertaking must sometimes shift its focus from the question of a particular text's readability, from the search for some original meaning or the echo of such original meaning to the question of the critic's own reading-ability in relation to the respective cultural text. What is at stake, then, is the critic's ability to respond to a text by imposing meaning on it. Such responsibility in turn demands a mode of interpretation that breaks with both the self-proclaimed insider's belief in translational authenticity and the outsider's all-too-often disclaimed interpretive matrix of cultural exoticization.¹⁵⁸ It violates the insider's privileges without claiming a knowledge that the represented subject can never have of herself or himself or turning its essential truth into an object of interpretive possession. If there is any moral promise left in such an interpretive act, it is the interpreter's critical frankness regarding the crude ethics of her or his own post-mimetic transposition of meaning.

I do not at all argue that there is no Anglophone Arab identity other than an allegorical one—how could I do so without at the same time claiming to be a real Arab? What I do, however, believe is that the identities narratively and performatively iterated in the contemporary Anglophone Arab representations I am interested in are predominantly allegorical. They are stylized from different cultural signs, they are composed out of various socio-historical experiences, and they are produced against discrepant historical narratives with a view to competing utopian visions. These resemblances, instead of seeking the perfect union of form and meaning, are characterized decisively by the fragmentariness, arbitrariness, and discontinuity of allegory. They not only derive from the past archives of their original emergence but exist in potentially endless future relations. Consequently, the referential systems necessary for their interpretation can significantly exceed the here and now of their own articulations. In order to decode them, the critic cannot confine herself or himself to the search for authentic archival hints intrinsic to these works' central signifiers or for consistent counter-archival references. New interpretive archives must be continuously produced in which allegory is not only conceived of as a rhetorical trope but also used as an interpretive mode.¹⁵⁹ Such archives might not contribute to the affirmation of the static symbolic coincidence between a particular Anglophone Arab representation and the world. But they have, like Khalid's figurative self-representations and to some extent like F. H. Day's pictorialist pho-

158 See also Richard Jacquemond, "Towards an Economy and Poetics of Translation from and into Arabic," *Cultural Encounters in Translation from Arabic*, ed. Said Faiq (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2004) 126.

159 This understanding of allegory as a mode of reading is inspired by Paul de Man's writings on allegory. See Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) and de Man, *Blindness and Insight. Essays on the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2. ed. (1971; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 187-228.

tographs of Gibran, the capacity to subvert or transgress the oppressive notion of symbolic totality. My readings proceed precisely in that direction.

3.3 Transmigrations and Turnovers

“Homeless I am again”¹⁶⁰

These words of Khalid are not spoken in New York City but in his native village of Baalbek. They are enunciated shortly after he has rejoined what he, when still in the American prison, had envisioned as his people. Khalid is banished from family and home and feels deprived again of any sense of belonging. The declamation of exilic sorrow, equal measures desperate and agitated, is remembered by his friend and fellow-remigrant, Shakib, with tears in his eyes.¹⁶¹ However, this declaration does not at all mark the end of the anti-hero's cross-cultural identity struggle. Instead of indicating the spiritual resolution of the painful migratory path, accommodating himself within some eternal state of transcendental homelessness, Khalid's words mark the beginning of another (pan- or trans-Arab rather than intercultural) voyage.

For my understanding of this novel and later Anglophone Arab representations, it is crucial to see that Khalid's feeling of extraterritoriality,¹⁶² the strange impression of always being somehow disconnected from the notion of being firmly *here*, is never overcome. He is marginalized in the US; Khalid, like so many characters of Anglophone Arab narratives after him, is forced to feel like an eternal stranger and a problem in the Western metropole. He also repeatedly finds himself in the outsider's position after his return to the Arab world. Ironically, like many other characters in contemporary literary narratives, he feels “like a tourist in a bizarre land”¹⁶³ in his natural home. Sometimes unable and often unwilling to place himself firmly within competing local identity constructs of mutually excluding cultures, Khalid's self-conscious attempts at self-determination and his anticipation of a renewed collective self-identification do not easily fit into static paradigms of belonging, either *over there* or *over here*.

Stressing *The Book of Khalid's* pioneering role in the formation of a particular Arab variety of ethnic or minority literatures, critics working in the field of Arab American studies tend to forget the fictional setting of Khalid's sad exilic enunciation. Reading the novel primarily as a response to Rihani's American experience,

160 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 141.

161 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 141.

162 On the notion of extraterritoriality, see Georg Steiner, *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (1972; New York: Atheneum, 1976).

163 Rabi Alameddine, *The Hakawati* (New York: Knopf, 2008) 7.

they equally ignore the geographical place of the author's fixed residence at the time of *The Book of Khalid*'s composition.¹⁶⁴ It is a biographical fact that the man who is seen as the pioneer of Arab American literature par excellence gave birth to Khalid between 1905 and 1910 in Freike, Lebanon.¹⁶⁵ Such tendentious forgetfulness or ignorance is quite telling regarding these scholars' own disciplinary location. It is particularly significant with a view to the academic field's institutionalized taxonomic practice. Reading Rihani's novel as an Arab-American immigrant narrative, while turning away from its obvious re- or transmigrant contiguities, seems to be a direct response to the inherent interpretive postulates of national classifications. At the same time, such a reading risks circumventing or overseeing the complex nexus between failed assimilation, diasporic cultural politics, and the political history of the Middle East. First, I'd like to address this latter aspect before following the fictional remigrant's inner-Arab travails.

Khalid's painful spasms in the American prison inaugurate a transformative process over the course of which the Arab immigrant's rioting visions are turned into the doubtful certainty of being chosen to liberate the Arab world qua revolutionary prophecy. This desire to return to and politically transform his society of descent is by no way the consequence of a natural and thus inevitable re-filiation. It first and foremost results from the contradictory experiences of immigration: experiences of humiliation and benefit, of learning and unlearning, of love and hate. America is described by Khalid as his "greatest enemy and benefactor in the whole world." The host country is cursed as a "dumb-hearted mother [...] in whose iron loins" the proto-revolutionary remigrant has been created: "Was not Khalid [...] born in the cellar? Down there in the very loins of New York?"¹⁶⁶ Before leaving the US, Khalid imagines himself as the misunderstood spiritual child of a surrogate culture that unfairly denounces her immigrant children as monstrous scandals.

Presumably relieved from the pain caused by his often contradictory dogmatisms and continuous shifts between radical rationality, sexual desire, immanent

164 For examples of this tendency, see Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 38-58; Evelyn Shakir, "Coming of Age: Arab American Literature," *Ethnic Forum: Journal of Ethnic Studies and Ethnic Bibliography* 13.2/14.1 (1993-94): 65-67; Nash, "Beyond Orientalism: Khalid, the Secular City and the Transcultural Self," 63-81; Layla Al Maleh, "Anglophone Arab Literature: An Overview," *Arab Voices in Diaspora: Critical Perspectives on Anglophone Arab Literature*, ed. Layla Al Maleh (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009) 2-3; Salah Hassan and Marcy Knopf-Newman, Introduction, *MELUS* 31.4 (2006): 6; Majaj, "Arab-American Literature: Origins and Developments," 62-63.

165 Funk and Sitka, "Timetable of Events in Ameen F. Rihani's Life and in the World," 155. See also Fine, "Afterword" 319. Although Todd Fine does neither ignore the novel's technical genesis in Lebanon nor its distinctive inner-Arab plot, he firmly places *The Book of Khalid* on the virtual bookshelf of Arab American literature. Fine, "Afterword" 317.

166 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 123-24.

morality, and mystical spirituality, Khalid chooses, for the first time since he entered New York, to speak for those people with whom he has often been identified against his will. The immigrant's involuntary experience of being perceived (or even of perceiving himself) through an Orientalist lens and of being discriminated against in the Western metropolis is gradually turned into a diasporic vision of political change within the Middle East. Khalid's spiritual strivings of self-revelation and his incessant social self-questioning in reaction to mainstream American anti-Arab racial prejudice are first raised individually and then directed at a common goal whose geographic stage happens to lie outside the US.

It seems that the Arab American immigrant's particular experience of the "color-line"¹⁶⁷ and his re-doubled comprehension of the multiple moral contradictions resulting from this line's inherent deprivations allow a deeper understanding of the modern world that has a decisively "revolutionary potential."¹⁶⁸ I am not saying that Khalid's American experience of alienation is exactly the alienation that many African Americans experienced at the dawn of the 20th century. The latter's experience of slavery forms a unique historical pretext which cannot be compared to that of Arabs in relation to the West. I do, however, believe that the very discriminatory conditions that forced African Americans to reconcile the split visions of their selves in what W. E. B. Du Bois has coined "double consciousness"¹⁶⁹ determine turn-of-the-century Arab American everyday lives as well. At this point, one should keep in mind that, for Du Bois, the question of racism was never solely a matter of racial prejudice against Americans of African descent, nor was his criticism restricted to the innermost American conditions. The implicit internationalist and anti-imperialist critique found in *The Souls* was directed against inequity, exploitation, and domination in the global relation "of the darker to the lighter races of men."¹⁷⁰ Therefore, the book's emancipatory claim of socioeconomic participation, of sharing the opportunities of modern civilization, and of "be[ing] a co-worker in the kingdom of culture"¹⁷¹ on the basis of equality and justice was a universal one. It was a claim that could be shared by other discriminated communities of color within the US and by the colonized people of the global South. By the early 20th century, Du Bois's essays had appeared in many of the prominent popular periodicals of the time. *The Souls of Black Folk* was first published in 1903, only seven years before *The Book of Khalid*. Although both texts seemingly draw on similar American transcendentalist and European

167 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 3.

168 Thomas C. Holt, "The Political Uses of Alienation: W.E.B. Du Bois on Politics, Race, and Culture, 1903–1940," *American Quarterly* 42.2 (1990): 306.

169 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 8.

170 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 15.

171 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 9.

romantic sources,¹⁷² there is no indication of any direct reception by Rihani of Du Bois's work.

Given Arab Americans' imagined whiteness at that time and with regard to the long history of Arab slave trade and anti-black racism within the Arab world,¹⁷³ it is rather questionable that Rihani could easily identify his own immigrant community's sociopolitical struggle or the global positionality of Arabs, for that matter, with the situation of African Americans in the United States. It would be reserved for a later generation of Anglophone Arab intellectuals to express political solidarity with Africans and Black minorities living in the West or even to articulate a Black-Arab identity.¹⁷⁴ One would need a separate study to evaluate in detail possible traces and frictions between Anglophone Arab discourse and the African American sociologist's classic study of race and culture, his political commentary, or his civil rights activism.

It might not be legitimate to link the literary character Khalid's rioting struggle for "the higher Superman"¹⁷⁵ neatly to the unrelenting forceful quest of *The Souls* for "a better and truer self."¹⁷⁶ Whereas the former is presented as the vision of a spiritual merging of Asian, European, and American qualities (thus implicitly excluding African components), the latter longs to attain an African American identity beyond the discriminatory veil that until then separated the two selves of black men living in the US. However, it seems at least justifiable to argue that both texts share a particular concern with the "strange experience" of being a problem in the eyes of dominant white Americans.¹⁷⁷ Both narratives stress the moral inconsistency and limited knowledge resulting from the bonds of cross-cultural arrogance and racial

172 On Du Bois's adoption of American transcendentalist terminologies and his use of vocabulary derived from German Romantic thinkers, see Shamooun Zamir, *Dark Voices: W.E.B. Du Bois and American Thought, 1888–1903* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) and David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Holt, 1993) 305–306.

173 Trans-Saharan slave trade and racism in the Arab World both pre-date and post-date the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Scholars estimate that close to 18 million people were enslaved by Arabs between 800 and 1900. For the competing scholarly positions within the highly controversial debate, see Murray Gordon, *Slavery in the Arab World* (New York: New Amsterdam, 1989); Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1990) and Shaun Elizabeth Marmon, ed., *Slavery in the Islamic Middle East* (Princeton: Wiener, 1999). For a good overview on this still virulent issue, see 'Alik Shahadah, "The History of Arab Slavery in Africa" *Arab Slave Trade* (2002–2005), 27 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.arabslavetrade.com#convert>> and the website of African Holocaust, a non-profit civil society dedicated to the progressive study of African history and culture <<http://www.africanholocaust.net/>>.

174 See, for example, Suheir Hammad, *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (New York: Harlem River P, 1996).

175 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 110.

176 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 9.

177 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 7.

prejudice. Like Du Bois with his work, Khalid turns the involuntary *gift* of knowing others' discriminatory perception of himself into a quasi-transcendental "second-sight"¹⁷⁸—a double vision that can first be transformed into a powerful narrative of social significance and then function as a resistive tool for revolutionary action.

A similar transformative dynamic is at work in the transnational discourse of early Arab American writers, although to different measures and on a larger geographical scale. Khalid's fictional path of reverse-migration in many ways mirrors the historical role of Levantine diaspora intellectuals within the increasingly politicized *Nahda*-movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular, it reflects their ambivalent contribution to the rise of what is variously called Arabism, secular Arab nationalism, or Pan-Arabism.¹⁷⁹ Without uncritically affirming those conventional views of Arab nationalism, which identify Christian Lebanese intellectuals as the main social actors of the formative phases in the political history of the modern Middle East, and thus underestimating the importance of other regional contexts, such as the impact of Islamic modernist thinkers and movements,¹⁸⁰ one can argue that Arab nationalism was a local response to the process of the gradual incorporation of the Middle East into the colonialist-capitalist world system, a process that was effected by reciprocal external influences related to the globalizing idea of the nation-state. Like other nationalist discourses, it represented both a revival of heritage and old loyalties as well as the imaginative fabrication of new uniting myths and traditions appropriate for the political mobilization of group-solidarity.¹⁸¹ In both pedagogical and performative procedures of narrating the modern Arab nation,¹⁸² the spheres of language and literature were of particular importance. Hence, one cannot be surprised that several writers of the *Mahjar* participated in the construction of Arab nationness. Aside from the various regional points of the Arab nationalist movement's emergence, the transnational discursive

178 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 8.

179 For a general overview of this complex, often partisan, and highly controversial scholarly debate on Arab nationalism from its origins in the 19th century to the present, see Rashid Khalidi, "Arab Nationalism: Historical Problems of Literature," *The American Historical Review* 96.5 (1991): 1363-73 and Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003).

180 For a critique of this view, see C. Ernest Dawn, "The Origins of Arab Nationalism," *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, eds. Rashid Khalidi, Lisa Anderson, Muhammad Muslih, and Reeve S. Simon (New York: Columbia UP, 1991) 11.

181 Here I refer to the pattern described by Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson, with a focus on the birth of the Western nation. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

182 On the constitutive tension between the pedagogical and the performative in the narrative construction of nationness, see Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation," *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994) 146-50.

space created by the Arab periodical press, produced in São Paulo, Buenos Aires, or New York and circulated across both the Americas and the Middle East, significantly contributed to the nurturing of new patriotic visions of a shared Arab future. This trans-American and trans-Atlantic dissemination of open letters, political essays, and books in Arabic, English, Portuguese, and Spanish not only fostered Arab nationalist networks across the diasporas but also secured increasing influence on the Syrian press, thus gaining impact on virulent local debates within the Middle East on what it meant to be Syrian, Lebanese or Arab. Many important diasporic publishing houses, literary societies, and fraternities offered a platform for the formation of political committees and parties. Historians are just beginning to challenge the traditional focus on the sociopolitical geography of the Middle East and the one-sided concern with direct influences from Europe by exploring transnational modes of communication and the role of diasporic media within the cultural politics of early-20th-century Arab nationalism.¹⁸³

Reading Rihani's *The Book of Khalid* can help to re-construct such transnationally expanded interpretive geography for the study of diasporic discourses in relation to Middle Eastern cultural politics. Given the continuing exchange between Arab intellectuals and activists in the diaspora and their colleagues living in the Middle East, the relevance of a decentered relational approach necessarily goes beyond the question of early-20th-century nationalisms. Looking at today's growing number of transmigrant cultural agents who divide their time and work between more than one location and who can no longer be identified in terms of clear-cut group-belonging or place of residence, the study of Arab cultural politics is maybe more than ever in need of diasporic readings (literary and non-literary alike) which transgress the learned ethnic or nation-state analytical framework and which are willing to give up the firmly localized focus on unidirectional transfers and influences in favor of tracing multidirectional cultural dynamics. Anglophone Arab resemblings such as the fictional narrative of Khalid's travails are creative invitations for the study of Arab-Western correlations and these correlations' contested mediations beyond both the ideologies of representational othering and the epistemological consistency of the critique of Orientalism and Occidentalism.

Although Rihani is rarely included in scholarly discussions on the development of Arab nationalist or pan-Arab thought,¹⁸⁴ the author of *The Book of Khalid* was directly involved in the expanding struggle within the Middle East for Arab independence from both the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism from 1909

183 See Fahrenthold, "Transnational Modes and Media: The Syrian Press in the *Mahjar* and Emigrant Activism during World War I," 30-54.

184 In Albert Hourani's classic *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (1962), Rihani is completely ignored. Hisham Sharabi mentions him briefly in his *Arab Intellectuals and the West: The Formative Years, 1875-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins P, 1970) 118-19.

onwards. At least since his first published nonfictional writing in Arabic on “The moral revolution”¹⁸⁵ as the necessary precondition for effective political change, he successively advanced to work as a political activist on both sides of the “Arab/Muslim Atlantic.”¹⁸⁶ This publication actually coincided with the inception of the Syrian reform movement which had close ties to the diaspora. It also coincided with the emergence of the *Hizb al-Ittihad al-Lubnani* [Party of the Lebanese Federation], a rather syndicate-like committee that chiefly represented an urban professional class in the diaspora. By 1912, the committee already had a branch operating in New York. Na’um Mukarzil—like Rihani, born in Freike, Lebanon—was the owner of Little Syria’s most successful Arabic language dailies, such as *Al-Huda* (Guidance) or *Al-‘Alam al-Jadid* (The New World), and served as *Ittihad al-Lubnani*’s closest Arab American partner.¹⁸⁷ Rihani began writing for *Al-Huda* in 1899.¹⁸⁸ In 1911, Mukarzil founded the *Jama’iyya al-Nahda al-Lubaniyya* (Society of the Lebanese Renaissance) in New York to champion Lebanese independence from the Ottoman Empire. In late 1916, Rihani would form a new coalition together with Kahlil Gibran and Ayyub Tabet to counter Mukarzil’s long-standing support of an alliance with France. The *Lajna Tahrir Surriya wa-l-Lubnan* (Committee for the Liberation of Syria and Lebanon) instead championed an independent greater Arab federation.¹⁸⁹ It was only during World War I that Rihani’s Arab nationalist thinking developed from the support of partial autonomy to an inert call for independence to, finally, a full-fledged revolutionary support of military revolt. While the revolt against the Ottoman Empire was often proclaimed in the name of Islam, his Arabism stressed a secular national rather than a religious identity.¹⁹⁰

At the time of writing *The Book of Khalid*, Rihani had multiple first-hand experiences of reverse migrations to and extended stays in the country of his birth. Although he spent the 1890s and 1910s predominantly in New York City and alternated between the US and the Lebanese mountains during the 1920s and 1930s,

185 This is the English translation of what, according to Nijmeh Hajjar, was Rihani’s first Arabic language article: “Al-Thawra al-Khuluqiya” (1909), see Nijmeh Hajjar, “Ameen Rihani’s Humanist Vision of Arab Nationalism,” *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West: A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding* 134–47, 145n19.

186 The notion of an Arab/Muslim Atlantic is taken from Ella Shohat’s discussion of a multiply raced Atlantic of multidirectional routes of Orientalist and Occidental ideas, see Shohat, “The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism,” 50–55, here 55. On Rihani’s transatlantic political activism, see Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani* 43–68.

187 Fahrenthold, “Transnational Modes and Media: The Syrian Press in the *Mahjar* and Emigrant Activism during World War I,” 33–36.

188 Funk and Sitka, “Timetable of Events in Ameen F. Rihani’s Life and in the World,” 154.

189 Fahrenthold, “Transnational Modes and Media: The Syrian Press in the *Mahjar* and Emigrant Activism during World War I,” 36–37.

190 Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani* 120–231 and 245.

the man who gained American citizenship in 1901 in fact spent most of his lifetime in the Arab world. Rihani returned to Lebanon for the first time between 1897 and 1899 to teach English at a Maronite school and to undertake a re-education in classical Arabic. *The Book of Khalid* was written during a five-year sojourn at the family home in Freike between 1905 and 1910, interrupted by at least two extended visits to Egypt.¹⁹¹ These were extremely turbulent times in this part of the world, with the so-called Young Turk Revolution in 1908 providing a short moment of hope followed by an enduring delusion among reformers in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The young Arab American remigrant participated in the increasing local protests against the declining Turkish-Islamic Empire and wrote an impressive number of political and philosophical essays and speeches in Arabic, later collected and published as the *Ar-Rihaniyyat*. Although Rihani was known as a public critic of Christian dogmatism, and although he accepted the special place that Islam would have in the cultural life of the future Arab nation, his secular notion of Arabism was that of a Maronite and of man of letters who had spent a good part of his life abroad in the West. His understanding of what it meant to be an Arab in the increasingly globalizing modern world could, of course, easily clash with local conceptions of national belonging and independence, particularly with Lebanese-Christian and Islamic modernist ideologies, both in socio-political and materialistic-economic regards as well as in terms of spirituality and morality.¹⁹² As an auto-fictional narrative, *The Book of Khalid* seems to resonate with some of these local clashes. As a conflictual imaginary of Anglophone Arab transmigrancy, however, it anticipates a much broader spectrum of predetermined frictions and unpredictable breaking points, of sudden raptures, visions of radical renewal, and incomplete turnovers.

Khalid leaves America and returns to Lebanon together with Shakib. The irritation of the Western reader's preconceived notions resulting from this narrative shift is directly anticipated by the editor-narrator. Without further elaborating on the altered narrative setting's destabilizing effects regarding our learned reading positionalities and spatial knowledge, s/he implicitly warns her or his Anglophone audience of becoming religated readers, at least regarding their culturally predetermined reading competence: "Our readers, though we do not think they are sorry for having come out with us so far, are at liberty either to continue with us, or say good-bye."¹⁹³

We have no real choice, of course. A decentered relational reading of *The Book of Khalid*, or of any other Anglophone Arab representation, for that matter, does not allow so premature a farewell. It necessitates the obvious: to transgress one's

191 Funk and Sitka, "Timetable of Events in Ameen F. Rihani's Life and in the World," 53-62.

192 Dawn, "The Origins of Arab Nationalism," 11.

193 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 134.

apodictic certainty of contextual familiarity and to join those portions of the novel which are set in a rather uncanny *over there*. I will elaborate on the ambivalent shift of narrative authority and power in favor of the editor-narrator, partly resulting from the spatial alteration of the story's fictional landscape, at a later point in my analysis. For the time being, I want to focus on the content, contexts, intertexts, and anticipations of the respective novelistic part.

This part is by far the longest of *The Book of Khalid*, and it tells significantly more than a simple story of an Americanized Arab's final coming-home. According to the editor-narrator, it is actually "the more interesting portion"¹⁹⁴ of the novel. It is, therefore, misleading to argue, as Geoffrey Nash does, that the novel "ends within a Syro-Lebanese setting."¹⁹⁵ To describe the substantial section of 177 pages as an ending and to thus put it on the same structural level as the nine-page beginning section with an equally Syro-Lebanese setting¹⁹⁶ makes the New York immigrant episode of just 100 pages appear as the novel's proper main part.¹⁹⁷ Such tendentious hierarchical valuation of the different sections implicitly adheres to a principally US-centric divide between center and periphery that is radically questioned by this novel's constitutive narrative strategies of spatial transgression. In addition, such reading marginalizes those lines of action set in other, non-Syro-Lebanese narrative spaces.¹⁹⁸ While it is true that a significant part of *The Book of Khalid* is set in the US, this novel has clearly more to offer than an Arab-American immigrant narrative. In addition to providing an account of the main protagonist's failed attempt to re-invent himself in the American socio-cultural environment, it tells a story of emigration from and re-migration to Lebanon and accounts for subsequent migrations within the so-called Arab world. By doing so, it touches the core of 20th- and 21st-century Anglophone Arab narratives of transmigration.

Khalid and his fellow-remigrant, Shakib, "silently steal away"¹⁹⁹ from a country that was supposed to make them "forget their native land."²⁰⁰ The reader, willing to join them, might expect that Khalid's return to Lebanon naturally and necessarily leads to a decrease in cross-civilizational conflicts. But ideological collisions, social frictions, and other conflictual correlations in fact rather increase with Khalid's

194 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 134.

195 Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* 46.

196 Nash, *The Anglo-Arab Encounter* 46.

197 My page count refers to Todd Fine's 2012 edition.

198 See A. A. Rihani, "The Book of Khalid and The Prophet: Similar Universal Concerns with Different Perspectives: A Comparative Study," 39. Referring to the first three chapters, set in Baalbek and Damascus, as the novel's main chapters of Arab national concern, A. A. Rihani strangely excludes the following chapters of explicit Arab setting. Here the critic's Lebanese self-identification and related interpretive positionality obviously leads to a rather narrow focus for his analysis of Khalid's political self-identification.

199 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 132.

200 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 121.

remigration to the Arab "homeland." The returnee feels obliged to introduce to his people more than those "three prominent features of Civilization" that remigrants have until then brought to their country: "namely, a little wealth, a few modern ideas, and many strange diseases."²⁰¹ Back in Baalbek, Khalid, transformed by his experience of migration and equipped with even greater transformative ambitions, renounces all local filiative relations and religious authorities:

I hate Familism, which is the curse of the human race. And I hate this spiritual Fatherhood when it puts on the garb of a priest, the three-cornered hat of a Jesuit, the hood of a monk, the gaberdine of a rabbi, or the jubbah of a sheikh.²⁰²

Denounced by Jesuits to the Ottoman government as an anarchist and expelled from the town due to a blasphemous pamphlet against the church, Khalid's long-desired reunification with his cousin, Najma, seems to be utterly impossible. Their marriage is called off; Najma is first placed in bonds and then wedded against her will to a local nobleman. The tragic-romantic episode might echo Rihani's own excommunication from the Maronite church in 1903 as a consequence of his public critique of its religious dogmatism.²⁰³ On the level of the narrative plot, however, it inaugurates Khalid's temporary disappearance within "The Kaaba of Solitude."²⁰⁴ He retreats to a hermit's place in the beautiful forests of the Lebanese mountains—"this grand Mosque of Nature"²⁰⁵—to contemplate Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau, the shortcomings of scientific naturalism, and the primacy of social alliance. Khalid's lonely search for a spiritually grounded social harmony beyond the diacritical signs of historically generated and institutionalized religious dissonance leads directly to an ecstatic disentanglement or multiplication of his self that exceeds his New York prophecy. Questioning the established "logic about the I and the not-I,"²⁰⁶ he shifts the focus from the question of intrinsic honesty and authenticity in the individual articulation of self-identity to the practical need of the innovative mixture and social mediation of this self's various contingents. The matured prophet is not afraid of possible frictions between his Arab and non-Arab sources of selving. Nor does he fear the conflicts resulting from his new truism's diverse spiritual and materialistic components:

I have often worked and slept in opposing camps. So, do not expect from me anything like the consistency with which the majority of mankind solder and

201 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 131.

202 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 138.

203 See Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 40 and Hassan, "The Rise of the Arab American Novel: Ameen Rihani's *The Book of Khalid*," 41.

204 That is the title of the novel's chapter VIII, *The Book of Khalid* 171-80.

205 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 179.

206 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 210.

shape their life. Deep thought seems often, if not always, inconsistent at the first blush. The intensity and passiveness of the spirit are as natural in their attraction and repulsion as the elements, whose harmony is only patent on the surface. Consistency is superficial, narrow, one-sided.²⁰⁷

While Khalid's vision does not promise the equilibrium of any transcultural totality, the political liberation from imperial occupation and sectarian repression that it foresees nevertheless supposes a new universal transcendental spirit to come. He knows that the road to "freedom, faith, hope, health, power, and joy" will be inevitably and "always dominated by the instinct of self-interest." But he has the equally strong belief that the days of a narrow-minded "body-politic"²⁰⁸ are over. It is against this rather disembodied notion of identity politics that one needs to understand Khalid's unabashed struggle for change within himself and within the Arab world. He is not afraid of "falling on either side of the fence [that divides East and West], so he knows what lies behind."²⁰⁹ His revolutionary "rhapsodies"²¹⁰ of Arab political unity through the identification of West-Eastern inconsistencies are clearly loaded with motives of martyrdom. At times, they are explicitly suicidal: "for both [Orient and Occident] I shall work and suffer and die."²¹¹ His suffering almost appears like a universal humanitarian cause. Khalid sees himself as taking up humanity's historical role to imagine a global politics of the future beyond narrow materialist egoisms. Looking at this discourse from a contemporary perspective of a militant Islamist language of self-sacrifice, one cannot but see Khalid as a hyper-moral *terrorist in search of humanity*.²¹² His heroic action has no moral center. Aimed at the liberation of the Arab world, it takes the whole planet as an arena of inspiration. His universalist discourse sometimes almost seems like a parody of those interventionist humanitarian actions which were ideologically framed by the European promotion of human rights to justify colonialism as a civilizing project.

Armed with the notion of a strategically re-composed ego and a proto-performative program of identity politics, which does not shy away from inconsistencies and inner contradictions, Khalid then sets out to further his moral revolution to the world of power and politics. What was inaugurated in New York City by

207 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 221.

208 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 225.

209 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 225.

210 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 225.

211 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 226.

212 Faisal Devji, *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity: Militant Islam and Global Politics* (London: Hurst, 2008). Khalid's discourse shares several characteristics with the suicidal discourse of contemporary militant Islamist, as analyzed by Devji, such as trans- and supranational orientation, a lack of center, an environmentalist metaphoric, the transcendental identification with the suffering of others, and a heroic vision of self-sacrifice as humanitarian acts.

cross-cultural self-education, the experience of racist discrimination and Orientalist misrepresentation, as well as by the plural executions of social, sexual, and moral transgressions, and what brought him back into temporary exilic isolation in the Lebanese mountains, now decisively turns from spiritual "revolutions within" to revolutionary agitation "without."²¹³

Khalid's new worldly journey first brings him to Beirut, where he starts lecturing and writing manifestos on spiritual and moral freedom. He then travels to the principle cities of Syria. The highly controversial itinerant preacher of Arab national emancipation finally arrives in Damascus to give a speech in the city's Great Mosque. "Khalid's name, and Khalidism, and Khalid scandals"²¹⁴ are by then well known throughout the region. He is hailed by some as the real emancipator, true builder, and future leader "of a great Asiatic empire" and assailed by others as an instrument in the hands of European colonial powers and American speculators "who would build sky-scrapers on the ruins of our mosques."²¹⁵ In the meantime, Khalid falls in love with "a certain American lady, a Mrs. Goodfree, or Gotfry,"²¹⁶ who has adopted the Arabic name Jamilah. She is a wealthy votary of Baha'ism, who goes every year on a pilgrimage to the modern religion's spiritual center in Haifa, Palestine. The biting comments of the Egyptian press on the political prophet's cross-cultural liaison are directed at both the non-Arab woman as a representative of foreign interests and the successively internationalizing Baha'ist movement's cosmopolitan assimilation of the three monotheistic religions' eschatologies:²¹⁷ "Our new Muhdi has added to his harem an American beauty with an Oriental leg."²¹⁸

While Khalid's conception of political revolution does incorporate the legacy of Western scientific modernity and democracy, he decisively emancipates himself from these models' exclusive claims of authority: "For the world is not Europe, and the final decision on Who Is and What Is To Rule, was not delivered by the French Revolution."²¹⁹ He warns Arabs to simply imitate European instant knowledges that have long been discarded by European critics without drawing on their

213 "Revolutions within and without" is the title of the novel's Chapter VI. Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 262-71.

214 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 273.

215 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 274.

216 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 259.

217 The Baha'ist governing body sat and still sits in the city of Haifa, then located in an Ottoman province, today in Israel. On this modern monotheistic religion, which was founded in the 19th century in Persia to emphasize the spiritual unity of all humanity and has since the early 20th century gained an increased footing in Europe and the US, particularly on its relation to the dynamics of cultural globalization, see Christopher Buck, "The Eschatology of Globalization: The Multiple Messiahship of *Bahā'u'llāh* Revisited," *Studies in Modern Religions, Religious Movements and the Bābī-Bahā'ī Faiths* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 143-78.

218 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 274.

219 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 262.

own culture's inherent spiritual virtues. His critique of the old European colonial powers, whose ambitions in the region had become obvious, sometimes evokes a more positive role for the American model of hyper-modernity. But the core source of Khalid's heroic dream of an Arab Empire that stands "even higher than the Americans and the Europeans"²²⁰ is a blatantly declaimed Nietzschean "will-power"²²¹ to search for and rediscover Arab culture's own spiritual and hence superior inherent modernity. In the face of missing transformations in the Syrian provinces of the Ottoman empire after the turn-over by the Young Turks, the spiritual revolutionary, with the intent of political change, strategically bets on the transformative capacity of an alliance between "American arms and an up-to-date Korân."²²²

This strategy, however, quickly turns out to be a fatal mistake. Khalid's speech at the crowded Great Mosque of Damascus in the presence of secular nationalists and political Islamists of various sectarian filiations ends up in a violent riot, in the course of which the naïvely radical speaker is almost killed. Although his allegorical denouncement of the West's one-sided utilitarian spirit and decadent materialism is enthusiastically responded to by the audience, the vision of a reformed Islam to be modeled on the example of Saudi Wahhabism instead of popular anti-colonial Islamic modernists like Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani²²³ or Muhammad Abduh²²⁴ leads directly into tumultuously erupting accusations of infidelity: "Reactionist! Infidel! Innovator! Wahhabi! Slay him! Kill him!"²²⁵ Khalid's spontaneous announcement of the "beginning of Arabia's spring"²²⁶ in reaction to the impressive assembly of murmuring men with red fezes and green and white turbans, suggesting the image of "a verdant field overgrown with daisies and poppies,"²²⁷ must be postponed. With a "stiletto-thrust in the back and a slash in the forehead,"²²⁸ and with the help of Shakib and the American-Baha'i beauty, he manages to escape to Baalbek.

Excommunicated again, but still dreaming of the Arab awakening and not giving up "ejaculat[ing] somewhat of martyrdom,"²²⁹ Khalid promptly seeks asylum in Egypt. Mrs. Gotfrey, Shakib, and the seriously sick Najma, who has been in the meantime abandoned by her husband and has given birth to little Najib, join him.

220 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 265.

221 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 265.

222 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 276.

223 See Nikki R. Keddie, ed., *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani*, new ed. (1968; Berkeley: U of California P, 1983).

224 Malcolm H. Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Ridā* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1966).

225 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 292.

226 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 287.

227 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 287.

228 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 292.

229 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 296.

The final flight brings them to the Libyan desert near Cairo. The American lover stays in a hotel. The four intra-Arab refugees live in Bedouin tents.

The remaining part of the novel is not easy to grasp interpretively. Far from the world of power and politics, Khalid for the first time seems to be "perfectly happy."²³⁰ Soon after Shakib leaves the camp to start a career as a "poet laureate,"²³¹ a hired pen in Cairo, little Najib suffers from unexplainable convulsions. When the child is almost completely paralyzed, Khalid decides to consult a man known as "the great English physician."²³² The "great guesswork Celebrity"²³³ surgeon opens the boy's skull and "finally holds the instrument up to his assistants to show them that there is—no pus!"²³⁴ Within only three days, Najib, Khalid's spiritual son and the main source of his newly discovered deeper understanding of purest joy, dies under the influence of analgesics. Najma and Khalid bury him in the desert. Then Khalid again disappears like a hidden Shiite Mahdi. The reader cannot know if he has simply gone deeper into the desert or if he has entered another spiritual dimension from which he will reemerge with new visions of even deeper truths. The transmigrant narrative and the meaning of its Arab title character's name, Khalid (the immortal), have thus come full circle.

Najib's death and Khalid's disappearance mark at least a temporary end of the prophet-turned-man's tragically failed attempts to liberate the Arab world spiritually and politically. Khalid's revolutionary vision would rarely be reciprocated within the various Arab nationalist and pan-Arab movements that, after the Ottoman defeat and the end of the Second World War II, became the overwhelmingly dominant movements in the Middle East.²³⁵ He (and maybe Rihani too) had underestimated the intensified colonial aspirations of European powers in the region. Khalid could neither foresee the altered geopolitical framework after the implementation of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement between Great Britain and France nor could he anticipate the effects of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, which paved the way for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine in 1948. The hope that the US would play a more positive and less imperialistic role in the region would turn out to be a fatal error after World War II. The national liberation struggles, military coups, and revolutions, which during the 1950s and 1960s changed the political power-configurations within the region and which, in various ways and to different degrees, ideologically drew on a shared language, a common history and religious-cultural identity, and political solidarity between the Arab people, do hardly fit in

230 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 304.

231 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 311.

232 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 313.

233 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 313.

234 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 314.

235 See C. Ernest Dawn, "The Formation of Pan-Arab Ideology in the Interwar Years," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 20.1 (1988): 67–91.

with Khalid's both ambiguous as well as diffuse program toward the liberation of a territorially and politically integrated pan-Arab homeland. His notion of a cross-culturally generated transcultural spirituality of universal humanity cannot easily be integrated into a programmatic theory of political action. Finally, Khalid's diaspora-inspired elitist discourse of pan-Arab identity highlights the importance of political choice and voluntary aspiration rather than a return to some sort of natural unity of belonging²³⁶ that could serve as a very powerful idea for the ideological mobilization of large masses.

It is maybe first and foremost this non-essentialist notion of Arabness, derived from the diasporic concept of figurative Arab-ness, that *The Book of Khalid* shares with many of the more recent Anglophone Arab representations that my study explores. It is both a document of the early transnational cultural politics of the Arab American diaspora in the US and the Middle East and a fictional narrative that anticipates the unhoused re-coding of (Arab) identities in 20th- and 21st-century Anglophone Arab transmigrant writing. If it is true that some *Mahjar* writers, against the background of their social and intellectual lives within the American nation-space, opted for participating in the Arab nationalist movement by narratively turning the émigré experience of cultural difference and their renewed notion of Arab identity resulting from that experience from the American context to the Middle East, *The Book of Khalid* is a complex and contradictory expression of such an Arab nationalist endeavor. This narrative does not simply try to creatively turn the very boundaries of belonging, which within the Western metropolis discriminated and excluded Arabs like the fictional character of Khalid, into an inclusive sign of Middle Eastern solidarity or trans-Arab shared identity, but it also demonstrates the many obstacles and pitfalls of such a large-scale project of political prophecy, both at home as well as across continents. This is why it cannot possibly be exhaustively grasped as an American ethnic novel or an Arab-American immigrant narrative.

The Book of Khalid is not only an important intertext for our understanding of an Anglophone Arab politics of representation that aims at countering the long-standing consistency of Orientalist misrepresentations and discriminatory practices or at debunking the internal paradoxes of Western secular modernity from within the West. In addition, it provides a helpful interpretive matrix to visit works that are concerned with new ways of articulating forgotten, marginalized, or intentionally excluded local Middle Eastern experiences of the global present to an international English-speaking audience. Most of my readings actually revolve around such works. Almost all of them are to an extent influenced by the material and/or discursive exchange between the Arab diaspora and the Arab Middle East. They are often triggered by personal experiences of continuing transmigrations between

236 See also, on Rihani's Arab nationalism of Arabness by choice: Hajjar, "Ameen Rihani's Humanist Vision of Arab Nationalism," 139.

disparate geographic locations. In some cases, they are produced by writers, artists, and activists who are physically placed within the Middle East. The role of Anglo-phone Arab cultural representations is of particular relevance within Palestinian debates and practices of cultural resistance against occupation.

While some critics, like Todd Fine, stress the 20th-century novel's transhistorical value to the political present of the early 21st century by re-coining the so-called Arab spring events of 2011 "The Khalid Revolution,"²³⁷ I cannot see the plausibility of such a connection. Although the transregionally expanding chain of revolts, somehow overhastily code-named the Arab Spring, was co-inspired by diasporic Arab discourses, fictional and non-fictional ones alike, it seems misleading to retrospectively explain "Rihani's brand of Arab nationalism," represented in the literary character of Khalid, as the intellectual seed for this very revolt. Only someone who overemphasizes the movements' general cosmopolitan and strategic universal humanitarianism or the partial American orientation of the open-ended set of emancipatory uprisings against domestic tyranny and foreign domination inaugurated in Tunisia and Egypt can seriously assert that "every Arab youth [...] has become a Khalid."²³⁸ Such ahistorical comparison implicitly affirms the dominant view of the Arab world's intrinsic belatedness in terms of sociopolitical developments. With a view to the explicit post-ideological approach of the movement's early activists and their innovative strategy to subvert the learned nationalist aesthetics and ethics of ideological utopianism such as Arabism, Arab nationalism, or pan-Arabism, it is almost insulting. In addition, any connection drawn between Khalid's spiritually inspired imagination of an US-sponsored Arabian spring to the Arab emancipatory struggles of 2011 negates the decisively local worldliness of these avant-garde strategies. Although most of these civil rights movements were based on the internationally codified ideas of human rights and democratic participation, they distanced themselves from all kinds of exhausted universalisms, religious and secular alike. Most importantly, the recent nonviolent, at least in its early phase, Arab emancipatory struggle carried a post-postcolonial aesthetics and ethics of resistance that cannot be arrested within the logics of Orientalism and Occiden-

237 Todd Fine, "The Beginning of Arabia's Spring: The Khalid Revolution," *Middle East Institute Viewpoints: Revolution and Political Transformation in the Middle East*. Outcomes and Prospects, Vol. III (Washington: The Middle East Institute, 2011) 20-25, <http://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/RevolutionVol.III_.pdf>.

238 Fine, "The Beginning of Arabia's Spring: The Khalid Revolution," 24. For the selective polemical assertion of a connection between the novel and the popular uprisings of 2011, see also Jane O'Brien, "Century-old Book of Khalid sheds light on Arab unrest," *BBC News Online – Middle East* 9 Apr. 2011, 4 June 2015 <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13017564>>.

talism.²³⁹ an aesthetics and ethics that Rihani did not manage to, and probably did not even intend to, fully escape from.

Khalid's vision of democratic transformation toward freedom, justice, and economic prosperity within the Arab world through the merging of the West's capitalist spirit with Oriental spirituality did not come true—either through the Arab nationalist revolutions of the 20th century or as a result of the most recent Arab revolutions. If the synthesis of American entrepreneurship and reformed Arab-Islamic orthodoxy has ever been achieved at all, it seems to have lost the democratic components of freedom and justice envisioned by Khalid on the way to its doctrinal establishment as modern nation-states. A paradigmatic example of such a pseudo-spiritual political order would probably be the Wahhabi o(i)ligarchy of the Saudi Kingdom, whose oppressive power-mix of neo-puritanical Islamic discipline and ruthless economic exploitation of local resources has been so powerfully depicted in 'Abd el-Rahman Munif's literary writings. Departing from this hypothesis and arguing further that Khalid's vision of Arab modernity could also be related to the so-called Islamic State's contemporary strategy of using "American arms and an up-to-date Korân"²⁴⁰ to gain control over the region's resources would probably go too far. It would at least demand a relational stretching or even theological and ideological re-definition of the concepts of global contemporaneity and local up-to-date-ness: a task that cannot be fulfilled properly at this point.

3.4 Quixotic Entanglements and Disruptive Translations

"The Oriental, when he tells the truth, is seldom believed. The Occidental, when he tells a lie, is seldom doubted."²⁴¹

Up to this point, my discussion has basically revolved around the things told, evoked, or anticipated in the *The Book of Khalid*. The focus on what is signified by the literary narrative in terms of topicality, eventuality, and context largely excluded the question of the novel's narrative discourse—its particular signifying structure, or what Gérard Genette called "the narrative game."²⁴² I will now shift my attention to that very game.

239 On this particular aspect of the uprisings, see Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring. The End of Postcolonialism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

240 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 276.

241 Ameen Rihani, "The Lying Oriental," *The Path of Vision: Pocket Essays of East and West*, by Ameen Rihani (New York: White & CO, 1921) 191.

242 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1980) 34. First published in French in 1972 as *Discours du récit*.

The internal organization of the first Anglophone Arab novel's narrative playing field is a highly complex one and demands closer investigation. Such investigation, in turn, invites more general narratological and metafictional reflections on the almost inevitable tension between representational reliability and strategic inaccuracy in cross-cultural representations within and in-between the Middle East and the West. The question of narrative structures is thus directly related to the *dialogics* of authorship, narrative authority, readership pre-disposition, and strategic (mis-)translation at work in Anglophone Arab discourses of critical correlation. Although I find Genette's approach indispensable for the analysis of any given text's narrative structure or the extrapolation of the information it delivers, in order to explore the metafictional implications of Anglophone Arab representations, one needs to pay particular attention to these representations' constitutive transgressions between the fictional diegesis and the pseudo-mimetic claims of narrative patronage that are impossible to grasp in a strictly structuralist analysis.

Focusing on Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* as an important intertext for the narrative mode employed in *The Book of Khalid*, I include an early modern classic that not only represents a visionary mode of telling lies in order to tell the truth but also is the Andalusian mother of the modern novel. By relating contemporary Anglophone Arab narrative discourse to a Spanish work of partial Arab genesis that, during its long history of reception, never ceased to inspire writers, poets, composers, visual artists, and filmmakers all over the world, I place my discussion of what might be called Anglophone Arab meta-narratology in a translocal literary sphere that cannot be firmly assigned to either the West or the Middle East. It is, in fact, one of my arguments that the narrative and performative strategies at work in Anglophone Arab writings go beyond both the questioning of the factual accuracy of Western truth claims and the stretching of Arab truths. Due to their dialogic determinacy and cross-cultural directionality, they often narrate, speak, and act under the metaphorical or real surveillance of the dominant Western narrative mode. When an Anglophone Arab narrator "recounts facts which [s/]he knows perfectly well" for a Western audience, s/he partially produces "a sign of the [Westerner's skeptical] reading act."²⁴³

The performative evidence of these works' trustworthiness thus not only lies in their creative search for alternative documents and figments but also results from their strategic invention of modes of telling meaningful stories which anticipate and yet manage to escape the Western reader's overhasty "answering word."²⁴⁴ Al-

243 See Roland Barthes and Lionel Duisit, "An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative," *New Literary History* 6.2 (1975): 260.

244 See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, by M. M. Bakhtin, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: U of Texas P, 1981) 280.

though these stories try to surpass or subvert the doubtful veracity of hegemonic Western narratives and to erode these narratives' main referential systems, they can have truth effects in the world. Consequently, the following section is first and foremost interested in modalities of the narrative production of a meaning that intentionally refuses to be fully translated and thus cannot be grasped as the intercultural translation of Arab truth. I will focus in particular on this willful untranslatability of Anglophone Arab texts, their strategic resistance to being assimilated within normative Western notions of intersubjectivity or intercultural accuracy, as well as their refusal to be harmonized with the moral authority of exceptional Western reliability. It is Anglophone Arab articulations' capacity to turn their discursively inscribed and, therefore, inescapable cross-cultural unreliability into a self-confident narrative weapon of critical validity across the formerly separated representational spheres upon which my readings rely.

In order to structurally examine a literary representation's levels of narration, one has to first distinguish between its narrative voices and source materials. In *The Book of Khalid*, there are at least three main narrative voices involved: those of the editor-narrator, Khalid, and Shakib. The anonymous first-person narrator introduces her-/himself as an editor and transcriber who combines all the qualities of an investigative researcher, an expert of the social history of Arab-Western encounters, and a literary and cultural critic. S/he presents the English text as an annotated montage based on selective translations of the Arabic manuscript of Khalid's spiritual auto-narration and the French *histoire intime* written by Shakib. The novel begins with an editorial introduction on the discovery of Khalid's manuscript and its function within the narrated story. The opening section's title, "Al-Fatihah,"²⁴⁵ refers to the opening Quranic surah with the same name and thus seems to somehow act as a substitute for the classical religious inauguration of any text written by a believing Arab Muslim: Bismallah ar-rahman al-rahim [In the name of Allah, the gracious, the merciful]. But the title choice rather hints at a quite secular revelation: the narrator's archival searching and finding of a hitherto forgotten pseudo-prophetic book in Egypt's royal library at the beginning of the 20th century. The inaugural narrative moment of proto-literary divination presents an editor-narrator who is both the privileged receiver of what is revealed and the secondary messenger of the disclosed text:

In the Khedivial Library of Cairo, among the Papyri of the Scribe of Amen-Ra and the beautifully illuminated copies of the Korân, the modern Arabic Manuscript which forms the subject of this Book, was found. [...] and after examining it, we

245 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 3.

hired an amanuensis to make a copy for us. Which copy we subsequently used as the warp of our material; the woof we shall speak of in the following chapter.²⁴⁶

The Khedivial Library Manuscript has a double function within the general narrative order. On the one hand, it is presented as the original source or main medium of the narrative. On the other hand, it is just one diegetic element among many other elements of the novel's plot. The narrator of *The Book of Khalid* does not allow Khalid's story to tell itself. It is "woof" and "warp,"²⁴⁷ it forms the basic raw material for her or his narrative weaving, but it is by no means identical with the literary fabric presented to the reader. We are informed that what was supposedly the Arab American transmigrant's authentic auto-narrative is copied by a hired amanuensis. Although the exact measure of loss of information resulting from this early transcription remains unclear to the reader, the transcoding act represents the first entropy of Khalid's self-representational data. Some original data is always lost in the process of making a copy. This principal dynamic of what can be considered a form of textual generation loss—the reduction of resolution and the loss of information in the process of transmission and abstraction—is symbolically reciprocated by the editor-narrator's gradually progressing abbreviation of the source text. The source text introduced as the Khedivial Library Manuscript soon gets abbreviated as "Khedivial Library MS" and is finally reduced to "K. L. MS."²⁴⁸ The narrator's raw material is not as raw as s/he claims. Her or his narrative act rather multiplies the generational losses by producing selective translations and making rough abstractions of the copy.

What must be considered a loss with a view to Khalid's agency of narrating his real self marks the gain of influence and narrative authority from the perspective of the editor-narrator. Although the novel's title, *The Book of Khalid*, suggests that the eponymous anti-hero's point of view governs the narrative, the editor-narrator's frantic appeal and direct address to the reader repeatedly remind us that it is s/he who produces meaning by undermining her or his characters' authority and their narratives' reliability with a view to the Western reader's perceptions and generic conventions. Already on the first pages, the eponymous hero's neo-Byronic auto-fiction is devalued for not having studied the self-reflexive method and necessary narrative techniques of the memoir genre: "It is to be regretted, however, that he has not mastered the most subtle of arts, the art of writing about one's self."²⁴⁹ The normative reference operationalized by the editor-narrator is defined by the exalted autobiographical writings of the Western canon: "Gibbon [...] Rousseau [...]"

246 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 3.

247 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 3.

248 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 12–13.

249 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 12.

Spencer.”²⁵⁰ Here, the editor-narrator is mimicking and maybe also mocking the Orientalist imputation that there is something intrinsic to Arab culture and the Arab psyche which precludes proper literary self-reflection of autonomous individuality corresponding to Western autobiographical writing.²⁵¹ Unlike Khalid, s/he claims to know the legible narrative aesthetic for addressing an enlightened English-speaking readership that believes in the fiction of the self.²⁵² Unlike the author of the K. L. MS., who does not care for any Western masters’ example or the poetic standards of classic Arabic literature when narratively setting fire to New York or flirting with the Arab nationalists’ visions, the editor-narrator “must keep the [Western] reader in mind.”²⁵³

If one understands autobiography as a trope of reading or the autobiographical as an inescapable allegory of literary interpretation, then *The Book of Khalid* is the editor-narrator’s text of selving rather than a generic auto-fiction written by Rihani.²⁵⁴ The novel is not Khalid’s book; it is not the *Kitab Khalid* [The Book of Khalid] which the editor claims to have discovered in a Cairo library. Nevertheless, the calligraphic cover of the Arabic manuscript with Khalid’s name (fig. 7) is reproduced on the novel’s cover side by side with the English title. The title is thus fraught with an ambivalent double meaning: Khalid is and is not the person whose name is on the English book cover. If we consider in addition that the reader cannot assume the editor-narrator to be the historical person of Ameen Rihani mentioned as the novel’s author, the title advances to a supreme emblem of the literary representation’s metafictional contiguities.

Against the background of the dominant *Nahda* debate during what is usually thought of as the Arabic novel’s formative period, the editor-narrator’s claim of exemplarily unlocking an archive of forgotten or marginalized modern Arabic texts and making these texts accessible to the English-speaking world through the appropriation of the Western mode of emplotment is full of ironic ambivalences. It not only emphasizes the existence of mutually foreclosed literary archives within the Middle East and the West but at the same time reciprocates the notion of the beginning of Arab literary modernity as the merely defective imitation of Western models. The found manuscript can be seen as one of thousands of dusty documents

250 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 12.

251 For this by now long-revised Orientalist philologist position, see Gustav E. von Grunebaum, “Literature in the Context of Islamic Civilization,” *Oriens* 20 (1967): 1-14. Cf. Dwight F. Reynolds, ed., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arab Literary Tradition* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2001).

252 See Michael Sprinker, “Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography,” *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 321-42.

253 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 12.

254 See Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-facement,” *Modern Language Notes* 94.5. (1979): 919-30.

of non-canonized late-19th- and early-20th-century popular fiction stored in Middle Eastern libraries and archives to this day. It seems to fictionally represent those unread and unstudied books which, although they mirror the complex transnational social and cultural dynamic of their time, are still academically excluded by most scholars of the modern Arabic novel due to their hybrid narrative style.²⁵⁵

Stressing the inescapability of raiding the O/other's literary syntax and narrative mode in any cross-cultural translational endeavor, *The Book of Khalid* carries the very argument of plagiarism ad absurdum. As a transnational fiction, it subverts the culturalist assumption of originality and teleological itinerary which was prevailing among turn-of-the century Arab nationalists and Western Orientalists alike. The editor-narrator presents her or his reverse translation of a discovered Arabic story of emigration and re-migration as a work of novelistic fiction in its own right "outside of the teleology that leads from a vague origin in nineteenth century Europe to local realism and its avatars."²⁵⁶ Her or his generically hybrid narrative shows persistent resonances to both the historical tension among Arab intellectuals of the time between what was seen as "high" classicist-nationalist and "low" popular culture and the increasingly challenged Eurocentric binary of Middle Eastern traditionalism versus Western modernism. There is no definite (af)iliation to either of the intertwined debates. Although the editor-narrator pretends to have adapted strictly Western modes of narration to present to the English-reading audience the formally insufficiently modulated traditional life story of an Arab hero, her or his aesthetic vocation of juxtaposing Khalid's discourse to her or his own superior one leads to unique narrative gestures of Anglophone Arab self-empowerment as correlational subjectification.

The extradiegetic-homodiegetic editing voice repeatedly leaves the intradiegetic level on which her or his edited product is presented to establish a narrative level that exhibits the editing act itself in virtual dialogue with the metadiegetic Arabic material. While s/he can be clearly identified as a fictional researcher-editor character who appears on the novel's frame-story's intradiegetic level in her or his search for Khalid's true (his-)story, the narrator's semi-scholarly selecting and critically commentating voice constantly penetrates her or his hero's discourses. That the editor-narrator even meets one of her or his metadiegetic

255 On this understudied corpus of popular literature, see Selim, "The *Nahda*, Popular Fiction and the Politics of Translation," 71-89. One of such long-neglected important books, Khalil al Khuri's *Wayy idhan lastu bi Afranji* [Alas, then I am not a Foreigner] dates to 1859. The manuscript was rediscovered in a rare books collection held by the American University of Beirut and was reissued by the Egyptian state press (Cairo: Maktab al-Majlis al-'Ala lil Thaqaifa, 2007) as the first Arabic novel. Set in Aleppo, it tells the story of a Westernized Arab merchant's cross-cultural encounters. See Johnson, "Importing the novel: Arabic literature's forgotten foreign objects," n. pag.

256 Selim, "The *Nahda*, Popular Fiction and the Politics of Translation," 76.

characters further complicates the novel's narrative structure. Uncertain regarding Khalid's historical existence and his autobiography's reliability, s/he initially sets out to search for biographical traces and contemporary witnesses of the literary character's very existence. With the help of a Cairo sand-diviner and thanks to the mocking hints of hashish-smoking and laughing intellectuals, s/he finds Shakib at a colonial luxury hotel near the pyramids:

In the grill-room of the Mena House we meet the poet Shakib, who was then drawing his inspiration from a glass of whiskey and soda. Nay, he was drowning his sorrows therein, for his Master, alas! has mysteriously disappeared.²⁵⁷

When the narrator informs Shakib about her or his ambitious editorial project, the former-companion-turned-poet of the would-be-novel's main character shows himself overjoyed with the idea of making Khalid known to the world. He immediately offers his just finished *histoire intime* to be used to that end. Khalid's fellow-traveler's manuscript is to help the editor-narrator and her or his future Western readers to better understand his master's life and visions. It promises and is initially expected to metaphorically provide the narrative underwear and contextual chemise for the main hero's self-narrated outline: "That will give you *les dessous de cartes* of his character.' *Les dessous*'—and the Poet who intersperses his Arabic with fancy French, explains.—'The lining, the ligaments.'—'Ah, that is exactly what we want.'²⁵⁸

The editor agrees to explicitly mention Shakib in the book—"For after all, what's in a name?"—as to then set out to incorporate the information offered in the French text. The informant is assumingly acknowledged as the author of the second intermediary narrative, as the novel's secondary co-author. But the personal historiography is only brought to the first narrative level before it is taken charge of by the editor-narrator. S/he hires "a few boys to read it [...] and mark out the passages which please them most. This will be just what an editor wants."²⁵⁹ We do not learn whether the editor does her or his own translations of the sections selected by the unnamed boys. What we are instead informed about is that Shakib's journal can only partially compensate for his friend's auto-text's stylistic deficits, as he finds "no exaggeration in Khalid's words."²⁶⁰ In his journal, Shakib repeatedly admits that he considers it inappropriate "to incriminate his illustrious Master."²⁶¹ His intimate historiography of Khalid's life comes close to a one-sided affirmative hagiography and is thus insufficiently appropriate for the ambitious narrative project. The editor shows little respect for Shakib and his narrative authority. S/he

257 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 15.

258 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 17.

259 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 17.

260 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 16.

261 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 42.

suspects him of the chicanery of intentionally shifting narrative responsibility to her/himself. Consequently s/he calls him "our Scribe"²⁶² instead of by his name, as promised.

It is the narrator's editing devices which provide the decisive correctives. S/he defines the organizational frame for the reader's production of narrative meaning in *The Book of Khalid*. S/he selects and reassembles narrative fragments, splits up lines of events, re-orders voices, and combines story segments. Her or his literary montage dictates the reader's angles and perspectives. It is s/he who explains to the English-speaking audience how to translate Arabic terms and phrases or how to understand internal Arab sociohistorical conditions and the Arab hero's states of mind. The stylistic autonomy of the character's self-narrations is constantly undermined through her or his commenting and correcting presence. In these moments, s/he is clearly more than an editor and a translator. Her or his narrative act openly manipulates and censors the textual material produced by Khalid and Shakib. The editor-narrator leaves her or his traces in the narrative discourse, and s/he does so deliberately. At times, her or his ironically biting pathos of narrative authority and overexposure of absolute truth-claims even outstrip those of Khalid. In these moments, the editor-narrator is the true hero of *The Book of Khalid*, and Khalid's (hi-)story is her or his narration, her or his historiography.

The novel's particular metafictional dialectic results from the constant blurring of the editor-narrator-critic's level of narration and the metadiegetic level established by Khalid's and Shakib's narratives. Since these dynamics are significantly framed and determined by the anticipation of a general Western text, the queering of narrative levels implicitly carries signs of the Anglophone audience's reading act that happens or is expected to happen at the same time inside and outside the diegetic level. Such blurring of the line between the intradiegetic and extradiegetic level cannot be exhaustively explained in structuralist terms. In a certain sense, the narrative strategy invites the Western reader to read the narrative of his own reading quasi ex negativo and thus discover the limits of comprehension in this very reading act. But it first and foremost affirms the Anglophone Arab narrator's authority and stresses her or his representational power: the power to control which truth gets transferred to the English audience. Although the novel's editor-narrator, in many ways, is what s/he accuses the authors of her or his source texts to be, namely a "poor third-hand caterer"²⁶³ of derivative information, s/he triumphs over both her or his auto-narrators and her or his anticipated readers.

Let me explain the particular technique that leads to this triumph in more detail: After the story of how Khalid and Shakib "were smuggled out of their country" is told, the editor-narrator traces how the two young Arabs "smuggled themselves

262 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 42.

263 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 211.

into the city of New York.”²⁶⁴ The reader learns that Khalid, at the time of his arrival in the US, suffered from a serious case of trachoma. As a consequence, he is first detained in a hospital of the immigration board and then threatened to be deported back to Lebanon. Thanks to an intrigue of bribery by Shakib, however, he manages to escape, and the two start their peddler business with the faked contraband of imaginary Holy Land relics. It is at this point of the narrative that the editor-narrator first discloses her or his Arab identity without providing any further autobiographical detail. S/he does so while stressing the importance of the trope of smuggling in the context of Anglophone Arab literary migrations without explaining the Arabic etymology of this very metaphorical hint. The editor-narrator’s self-justification deliberately sidesteps the explanation of the metaphorical meaning and discursive implications of the Arabic term through the evasion maneuver of drawing on her or his alterity instead of on cross-lingual translation. By doing so, s/he acts as a narrative smuggler in her or his own right:

(we beg the critic’s pardon; for, being foreigners ourselves, we ought to be permitted to stretch this term, smuggle, to cover an Arabic metaphor, or to smuggle into it a foreign meaning), these two Syrians, we say, became, in their capacity of merchants, smugglers of the most ingenious and most evasive type.²⁶⁵

The evoked, yet hidden, Arabic metaphor openly clashes with the anticipated reader’s monolingualism. One could, in fact, argue that the Arab editor-narrator’s Anglophone narrative act willingly clashes with an unconditional ethics of direct translation. Circumnavigating the terrain of linguistic diversity and avoiding a crude transcultural recoding (or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls “transcoding”²⁶⁶), s/he does not want to be accountable for writing/translating any presupposed original meaning. If we leave aside her or his strategic reluctance for a moment, we can try to differentiate—because to theorize the pitfalls of cross-cultural translation, one needs to somehow think linguistic difference—what the respective section could transpose to a non-implied or additionally implied reader: The Arabic term *tahrib* [smuggling] is derived from the verbal form *haraba* [to escape or flee, or to desert]. The transitive verb *harraba* can be translated as both “to break free” or “free someone” and “to smuggle [something].” Hence, the *muharrib* is at the same time a refugee or emigrant as well as a smuggler. The half-covered etymological hint stresses that it is not only migrants and non-human smuggled goods that are carried from one place to another. It sensitizes the reader for the narrative *carrying across* involved in any translational or metaphorical transferring of meaning. Forcing the reader to reconsider what is really indicated by the English

264 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 42.

265 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 42.

266 Spivak, “Translation as Culture,” 244.

notions of translation (deriving from the Latin *translatio*) and metaphor (from the Greek *μεταφορά*), the editor-narrator's hint reminds us of the impossibility of taking any truth translated in Anglophone Arab cultural migrations in a non-metaphorical sense. When the Arab migrant-translator carries herself or himself across, if s/he wants to escape the inevitable violence of total assimilation, s/he must prevent the Western audience from having a direct grasp of her or his truths. S/he must expand the parameters of the real and transfer content in the sense of a strategic act of *ποίησις* rather than mimetic (self-)representation.²⁶⁷

Such a doubled metaphor of translation—as an emancipative migratory act of smuggling ex-centric meaning by smuggling oneself into a given normative cultural setting while resisting being consumed in direct translations is at work in many anticolonial, decolonial, and postcolonial representations. Writers and critics like Assia Djebar, Abdelkébir Khatibi, Édouard Glissant, or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o have each demonstrated, in her and his own way, how strategic translation, selective translation, or even non-translation can become a form of resistive identification under the historical condition of (post-)coloniality. Whereas Ngũgĩ's nativist identity politics of literary language lament the (neo-)colonial hegemony of the (former) colonizer's language in African literature as an extension of socio-economic discipline into the linguistic spheres of "mental control"²⁶⁸ and therefore see in the use of one's native language a necessary tool of self-definition and mental decolonization, Djebar, Glissant, and Khatibi rather take a poststructuralist approach of doubled or bidirectional decolonization through the redeployment of linguistic differences as translational interference and irreducible relational "opacity"²⁶⁹ in their respective use of the French "stepmother tongue."²⁷⁰ Where Ngũgĩ counters what he, in his 2010 Wellek Library Lectures on *Globalectics*, calls "an aristocracy of languages"²⁷¹ by reversing colonial-racist hierarchies and dedicating himself to the assumed essential clarity of his community's internal communication, the Francophone Arab and Francophone Caribbean intellectuals see the cross-linguistic translational literary text as a vehicle for the strategic multiplication of non-transparency and ambiguity. Glissant, in his *Poetics of Relation*, insists on the Caribbean writer's "right to opacity" as a logical aesthetic extrapolation of her or his ethical "right to difference."²⁷² In *La*

267 Spivak, "Translating into English," 256–74, here 265.

268 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986; Oxford: James Currey; Nairobi: EAE; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005) 16.

269 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 186, see also 189–94.

270 Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993) 214. See also Soheila Chaussy, "A Stepmother Tongue: 'Feminine Writing' in Assia Djebar's *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*," *World Literature Today* 68.3 (1994): 457–62.

271 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012; New York: Columbia UP, 2014) 60–61.

272 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 190.

langue de l'autre, Khatibi similarly reclaims the exercise of intentional unreadability as a technique that writing fiction in between two idioms affords.²⁷³ Finally, Djébar, while clearly identifying French *écriture* with male repression (Arab and colonial alike), paradoxically uses “the language of the former conqueror”²⁷⁴ to express her alienated and gendered experiences as an Algerian woman. On the one hand, she constantly questions the French language as an adequate idiom for conveying her Arabic memories of racist and sexist subjugation. On the other hand, Djébar’s narrative practice of equally “disruptive” and “extended translation”²⁷⁵ turns the doubly paternal language into a self-empowering instrument of queering dominant male French *his-story* with *her stories*.

Many of the Anglophone Arab representations with which I am concerned in the course of this study pursue a similar strategy as do the works of Djébar, Glissant and Khatibi. They re-write Arab experience in a language that defines them as Other without claiming to represent the truth of that experience. They perform selectively extended translations of Arab-ness to make themselves heard without promising to transparently mirror any real presence. If they conceal an essential truth claim, it is not simply transferred to the reader. To effectively *smuggle* their message into the dominant Anglophone discourse while *escaping* from the threat of disciplined integration, these travelling narratives repeatedly *desert* any normative mode of telling truth and *take refuge* in false translations. In these moments, their transgressive poetics of *breaking free* is one of *real doing* rather than of representing the real. Moreover, when reading Anglophone Arab texts, one should not lament the irreducible opacity of the text but rather ask how this lack of transparency relates to the always evolving intentional opacity of the author or to our own discursive closeness as readers. Cross-cultural translation in Anglophone Arab fiction does not necessarily attempt to provide a transparent passage between a conflictual source text and the comfortably placed Western reader. The use of the English “vehicular language” does not indicate the attempt to give transparency to any “vernacular”²⁷⁶ Arab texts. In my view, the Anglophone Arab text’s opacities do not primarily result from linguistic difference, the Western reader’s lack of cross-lingual competence, or conversely intertextuality; rather, they must be understood as poetic expressions irrespective of the problem of lingual separateness. They reciprocate a relational discursive formation that is all too often overwhelmed by politics of arrogant separation and representational alterity. One, therefore, cannot exhaustively

273 Abdelkébir Khatibi, *La langue de l'autre* (New York : Les Mains Secrètes, 1999). See also David Fieni, “The Language of the Other: Testimonial Exercises,” [Excerpt from the introduction to Khatibi’s *La langue de l'autre*], trans. Catherine Porter, *PMLA* 125.4 (2010): 1002-04.

274 Djébar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade* 181.

275 Ghaussy, “A Stepmother Tongue: ‘Feminine Writing’ in Assia Djébar’s *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*,” 460.

276 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 116.

interpret the translational role that Anglophone Arab representations play in cross-cultural communication by simply stressing their functional capacity to correct the dominant Western obliteration of their true "source culture" without at the same time addressing the strategic use of untranslatability or of what is intentionally not translated for "the smuggling of foreign goods"²⁷⁷ into whichever target culture.

It is certainly true that many Anglophone Arab writers, as "cultural translators and members of an embattled minority," are forced to place their works within a discursive spectrum defined by the poles of assimilationist self-domestication and corrective foreignization of the dominant modes of alterity, as Wail Hassan argues in his 2011 study of Arab immigrant narratives.²⁷⁸ However, as the Libyan American translator and poet Khaled Mattawa explains, using the anecdote of his own translational endeavors during an interview with a consular official at the American embassy in Athens in the course of his family's visa application, Anglophone Arabs sometimes have to lie in translation if they attempt "to make the powerful less powerful, and the powerless less powerless." Against the background of his own experiences as a refugee, Mattawa stresses that the translation of Arab lives into the English language "does not take place [in a politically neutral] cultural détente" and that therefore "generosity" of truths or "solicitude" regarding one's own sincerity are not always "viable way[s] to cross distances."²⁷⁹ Ameen Rihani makes a similar argument in one of his short *Pocket Essays for East and West* entitled "The Lying Oriental."²⁸⁰ More than 90 years before Mattawa questions the value of unconditional translational honesty for the purpose of migratory cross-overs, Rihani warns Arabs of "naive truthfulness"²⁸¹ and encourages them toward the instrumental use of creatively crafted truth in relation to the West:

Honesty itself ceases to be a virtue when it is made a means to an ignoble end. And the Oriental, whose craftiness is often practised in self-defense, negatively, seldom regards it as a positive method, a material virtue, an instrument of success.²⁸²

277 Khaled Mattawa, "Identity, Power, and a Prayer to Our Lady of Repatriation: On Translating and Writing Poetry," *Kenyon Review Online* (Fall 2014): n. pag., 13 Mar. 2015 <<http://www.kenyonreview.org/kr-online-issue/2014-fall/selections/khaled-mattawa-essay-1-656342/>>.

278 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 37, see in particular 28-37. Hassan's translational argument specifically draws on Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, trans. S. Heyvaert (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992) and on Lawrence Venuti, *Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998).

279 Mattawa, "Identity, Power, and a Prayer to Our Lady of Repatriation: On Translating and Writing Poetry," n. pag.

280 Rihani, "The Lying Oriental," 189-95.

281 Rihani, "The Lying Oriental," 191.

282 Rihani, "The Lying Oriental," 192.

Particularly in the context of international politics and merchandise, the author of *The Book of Khalid* recommends adapting Bismarck's negotiation strategy of "lapsing periodically into truth."²⁸³ Rihani stresses the moral relevance of intention and motive rather than factuality when choosing a particular communicative method or direction. He closes his English-language essay with an anecdote that allegorically explains "Oriental lying" as a strategically justifiable and sophisticated way of countering Western lies, if not a legitimate one. Since this, to my knowledge, is the earliest Anglophone Arab articulation of the notion of cross-cultural counter-lying, I quote the respective section in full length:

Once in Damascus I saw a merchant selling some ancient coins, which were probably made in Germany. Their patina seemed authentic and real. They even smelled of the earth. But the merchant sorted them out into two lots, carefully sifting and examining, and finally said, these are false, my Lord, these are genuine. And he swore by Allah and the Prophet that he was speaking the truth. Which was quite unexpected by the tourist, who was much impressed. He was in fact taken in. For by admitting that some of the coins were not genuine, the wily shop-keeper was able to sell to mylord some of the others, which were equally false. I spoke with him afterwards and he admitted to me—told me the other half of the truth—that the European who sold him the antiquified coins taught him also the trick.²⁸⁴

When reading Anglophone representations from a relationally extended translational perspective, we should remember Rihani's anecdotal justification for the countering of Western half-truths with the narrative insertion of partial Arab truths. What if, in the case of these representations, the first stage of translation is not "initiative trust" in "the coherence of the world,"²⁸⁵ as George Steiner puts it in his seminal work of translation theory, *After Babel*, but rather a learned distrust regarding the capacity of the Western semantic system to permit entrance to a non-Western meaning that is perceived as antithetical and intrinsically mendacious? What if we have not left Babel behind us yet? Could it be that the producer of Anglophone Arab works sometimes cannot get it right in his own transgressive interest without intentionally getting it wrong for the Western receiver? Is it possible to modify Walter Benjamin's important definition of "The Task of the Translator"²⁸⁶ to interpretively include translational violations that go beyond extending

283 Rihani, "The Lying Oriental," 192.

284 Rihani, "The Lying Oriental," 195.

285 George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3. ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998) 312.

286 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," *Selected Writings Vol. 1, 1913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (1996; Cambridge: The Belknap P of Harvard UP, 2002) 253-63.

the parameters of one's own language as part of a general universalist longing for transcultural linguistic "kinship"²⁸⁷ and "complementation"?²⁸⁸ Benjamin assesses "any translation[s] that intend[] a transmitting function [...] as bad translations" because they cannot transmit anything but "inessential content."²⁸⁹ Instead, he sees in proper translation a cultural practice that is "midway between poetry and theory" and that aims at "something other than reproduction of meaning."²⁹⁰ His supplementary understanding of the translator's task stresses the linguistic voicing of an original work of art's true "*intentio*"²⁹¹ in a principally harmonic translational act. But what if one radicalizes Benjamin's advice to transgress the barriers of one's native linguistic system by extending this transgressive advice to the ethical paradigms of intercultural communication? Can we then imagine new ways of being fellow humans in an era of impossible direct (self-)translations? How can one interpretively grasp Anglophone Arab representations in which no original is transplanted but in which the notion of cross-cultural translation itself gets radically questioned and displaced? How does one make sense of partial translational endeavors, inventive pseudo-transfers, strategic opacities, or faked transmittings which, although they consider the discursive disposition which regulates the communicative relation between sender and receiver, neither aim at doing justice to any original Arab source nor intend to serve the Western reader's neo-ethnographic desire for prefigured Arab truth? What, in other words, if we are dealing with translations of Arab-ness that are meant for "readers" who do not want to understand, so that strategic untranslatability and not "translatability is an essential quality"²⁹² of their narrative transposing? If it is true, as Benjamin argues, that the "language of truth [...] is concealed in concentrated fashion in translation,"²⁹³ what is the language spoken by those Anglophone Arab representations that turn the drama of mendacious cross-cultural "symbolizing into the symbolized itself?"²⁹⁴ These questions and related cognitive interests guide my following discussion.

Cultural representations like *The Book of Khalid* not only metafictionally reflect the Western discourse of alterity as one important condition of Anglophone Arab narrative selving but, in addition, directly project this shadow-text formed by the conditions of external communication onto the narrative level of internal communication. By doing so, they transgress both the functional difference between au-

287 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 255.

288 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 260.

289 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 253.

290 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 259.

291 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 260.

292 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 254.

293 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 259.

294 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," 261.

thor and reader and the structural differentiation between the implied reader and the worldly (empirical) receiver of the literary text. The effect of this narrative technique, equally strange and estranging, is reminiscent of what Jorge Luis Borges has demonstrated with his short story "Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote": "truth [...] is not 'what happened'; it is what we *believe* happened."²⁹⁵ Consequently, the real author of a story "is not only he who tells it, but at times even more, he who hears it."²⁹⁶

Given *The Book of Khalid*'s multiplicity of extra- and intradiegetic narrative voices and competing authorship claims as well as the editor-hero's power to selectively narrate, the Western readers' co-authoring function is in fact quite ambivalent. On the one hand, they are offered a certain privilege regarding the knowledge of discursively prefigured limits of the narrative's evidence. On the other hand, they are constantly reminded that very little is certain and that much was lost during the Arab narrator's rigorous editing work. What the Western reader is allowed access to is basically a selectively translated and highly abstracted world of shifting individual accounts of appearances that cannot easily be evaluated, either as facts or illusions. By making up a story that makes us believe that these events might have truly happened while not entirely letting us accept that something else possibly did not happen, the Anglophone Arab narrator invites us to discover the limits of our own perceptive power in the making of cross-cultural meaning. S/he presents herself or himself as a very ambivalent quasi-character of contradictory functions. On the one hand, s/he has no other rights to the story than those of the reader and translator of two transmigrant Arab texts. The novel's kernel sections are ascribed to the authors Khalid and Shakib; s/he rarely pretends to know anything for sure and consequently cannot be made responsible for the tales of others. On the other hand, s/he exercises her or his irresponsible game of translation as the abstraction, recoding, falsification, invention, and distortion of narrative Arab-ness with blatant authorial authority. The narrative celebration of her or his creatively distorted reading obviously overdoes and thus exhibits its own literary hoax. The excess of the disavowed invention of stories ascribed to others sometimes almost borders on its own parody.

Drawing on Jorge Luis Borges's self-ironic preface to his *Universal History of Infamy*, one could say that the editor-narrator in *The Book of Khalid* constantly reminds us "that good readers are even blacker and rarer swans than good writers."²⁹⁷ The novel is thus an important reminder for the potential good reader of Anglophone

295 Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard: Author of the Quixote," *Collected Fictions*, by Jorge Luis Borges, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998) 94.

296 Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 262.

297 Jorge Luis Borges, Preface to the First Edition [1935], *A Universal History of Infamy* (1972; New York: Penguin, 1987) 15.

Arab representations that her or his exercise of reading must involve a constant re-thinking of her or his own reading act in relation to the question of authorship and narrative authority. It goes without saying that such responsive transgression of the reading-writing binary necessarily involves self-critically transgressing the differentiation between the poetics of an individual work, the theoretical implications of its metafictional dialectics, and the ethical insights offered in that work in equal measure.

3.4.1 Cervantes's Fictional Flight, the Moorish Unconscious, and Reversed Plagiarism

The *Book of Khalid* offers numerous intra- and intertextual hints for the endeavor of transgressive Anglophone Arab readings. Khalid neither firmly believes in the scandalous truth that he claims to be—"Better keep away from the truth, O Khalid," he says to himself, "better remain a stranger to it all thy life"²⁹⁸—nor does the narrator see his discourse of "editorialship" itself "bound [...] to maintain in any degree the algidity and indifference of our confrères' sublime attitude."²⁹⁹ The editor-narrator is not afraid of misrepresenting her or his two heroes. Calling Shakib and Khalid her or his "gewgaws,"³⁰⁰ s/he clearly indicates their subordinated function as mere playthings for her or his narrative game. The non-conclusive reconciliation of the secondary-author-heroes' claimed facts and her or his own editorial truths sometimes leads to open complaints regarding the found text's literariness and consequently to their rigorous suppression: "Too tragic, too much like fiction it sounds, that here abruptly we must end this Chapter."³⁰¹ At other occasions, Khalid, irrespective of all stated aesthetic deficits and uncovered lies of his manuscript, functions as a foil to the editor's own narrative veracity: "he is genuine, and oft-times amusingly truthful."³⁰² The ambiguities resulting from an editor-narrative voice, which turns the editor into both the protagonist of *The Book of Khalid* as well as the reader of Khalid's book, culminate into absurd tragedy when Khalid's hopeless battle for spiritual freedom and sociopolitical justice almost leads to his martyrdom in the Great Mosque of Damascus. At this point of the narrative, Khalid's fight against internal and external enemies of the diegetic world has repeatedly presented itself as the naïvely idealistic battling of an imaginary enemy, namely the editor-narrator's notion of reality. Shakib's almost unconditional loyalty has by then already turned Khalid into a tragically unrecognized prophet-knight-errant and lets Shakib appear to be a foolish companion, worshipping his downright-mad master.

298 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 68.

299 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 68.

300 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 69.

301 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 170.

302 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 182.

Thus, one cannot be surprised to find the editor-narrator anticipating the readers' quixotic associations.

In this grievous state, somewhat like Don Quixote after the Battle of the Mill, our Khalid enters Baalbek. If the reader likes the comparison between the two Knights at this juncture, he must work it out for himself. We cannot be so uncharitable as that; especially that our Knight is a compatriot, and is now, after our weary journeying together, become our friend.—Our poor grievous friend who must submit again to the surgeon's knife.³⁰³

The editor's narrative preemption of the reader's intertextual comparison of *The Book of Khalid* with Miguel de Cervantes's arch-novel is not elaborated further. S/he explains her or his reluctance to offer such an elaboration with the shared national filiation and close ties of friendship between narrator and hero. The simultaneous avowal and disavowal of the novel's quixotic entanglements has metafictional implications that go far beyond the spheres of narratology and intertextuality. The implications of the short intradiegetic gesture even transgress the individual reading of the text in which it flourishes.

In this respect, I do not wait to receive the editor-narrator's official invitation for the comparative use of *Don Quixote*.³⁰⁴ The Spanish classic from 1605/15 in fact forms a constant matrix or virtual parallel reading for my interpretive attempts to theoretically grasp relational narratives of Arab-Western encounters. For the purpose of my study, the *Quixote* is an intertext of basic relevance. It cannot only be seen as an overall early modern antecedent to contemporary postcolonial writings;³⁰⁵ it also quite concretely anticipates many of the narratological, translational, and poetical-ethical questions already discussed in the previous sub-chapter and might conceal even more critical hints for our understanding of Anglophone Arab representations. In this regard, it is less important to see the obvious: that *The Book of Khalid* is a quixotic novel, that its narrative structure is patterned after Cervantes's model of retelling a story revealed as someone else's work, or that Khalid and Shakib bear several similarities to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. As Lionel Trilling already proposed in 1950, such ascertainment of thematic and structural variation would actually be true for almost all prose fiction that came after

303 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 297.

304 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, ed. E. C. Riley, trans. Charles Jarvis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992). This translation was first published in 1742.

305 William Childers, *Transnational Cervantes* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006) 44–80.

Don Quixote.³⁰⁶ This certainly applies to Voltaire's *Candide, ou l'optimisme* (1759)³⁰⁷ and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34). According to Wail Hassan, the two latter texts can just as well be read as “antecedent examples”³⁰⁸ for Rihani's literary project.

For the purpose of my discussion, I prefer to focus on *Don Quixote*. It is crucial to remember that the early-17th-century story of the (mis-)adventures of an Andalusian *hidalgo* who seeks to re-establish the traditions of knight errantry was originally written in Arabic, or rather, that the editor-narrator (the author Cervantes?) claims that this story was transferred from an assumingly unreliable Moorish source text. For Jorge Luis Borges, the *Quixote*'s “Partial Magic” of juxtaposing “a real prosaic world to an imaginary poetic world”³⁰⁹ first and foremost derives from precisely this narrative device:

It is also surprising to learn, at the beginning of the ninth chapter, that the entire novel has been translated from the Arabic and that Cervantes acquired the manuscript in the marketplace of Toledo and had it translated by a *morisco* whom he lodged in his house for more than a month and a half while the job was being finished.³¹⁰

Although we can never be sure of possible additional layers of narration, perhaps a “segundo autor” as the final editor or even “a more obscure ultimate author,”³¹¹ Cervantes's narrative follows a relatively strict tri-level author-translator-editor pattern. Accordingly, it is the Moorish historian and Muslim philosopher Cide Hamete Benengeli who has recorded the events in the lives of the two anti-heroes, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. The Spanish version is edited by Cervantes. The unnamed *morisco* (a forced Christian convert from Islam) who translated the Arabic manuscript is never clearly identified. The editor's narrative shows a strange double-treatment of his Arab source text. He echoes Cide Hamete Benengeli even as he questions the historian's reliability and openly suppresses his voice. What foremost undercuts Benengeli's authority seems to be his Arab descent. He is a Moor

306 Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking P, 1950) 207–209. For the field of British literature, see, for instance, J. A. G. Ardila, ed., *The Cervantean Heritage: Reception and Influence of Cervantes in Britain* (London: LEGENDA, Mod. Humanities Research Assn. and Maney Pub., 2009).

307 *Candide* was published under the pseudonym Docteur Ralph.

308 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives: Orientalism and Cultural Translation in Arab American and Arab British Literature* 49.

309 Jorge Luis Borges, “Partial Magic in the Quixote,” *Labyrinth: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, by Jorge Luis Borges, eds. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964) 193.

310 Borges, “Partial Magic in the Quixote,” 194.

311 Howard Mancing, “Cide Hamete Benengeli vs. Miguel de Cervantes: The Metafictional Dialectic of Don Quijote,” *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America*. 1.1–2 (1981): 64.

and is therefore seen as a quasi-congenital liar. According to the editor-narrator, Arabs are “all imposters, liars and visionaries.”³¹² Calling Benengeli “a lying dog of a Moor,” the editor-narrator’s racist discrimination goes significantly beyond subtle objections related to the play of competing narrative levels.³¹³ He gradually reduces the stature of the Arab source narrator and alienates the reader from him. Openly ridiculing him, the editor not only makes the Moor an object of the reader’s laughter, thus almost replacing the mad knight errant, Don Quixote, as the main source of comic antics, but at the same time underscores his own reliability.

The metafictional effect of this inverting narrative strategy is of direct consequence for the reader. S/he is turned into the final target of the literary work’s extradiegetic laughter: that is, her or his own laughter. In all this, the *morisco* translator is almost neutralized. Although the Spanish editor can never be sure about the accuracy of his cross-linguistic transferring, and though the *morisco* omits some of the historian’s lengthy descriptions, his translation is presented as presumably accurate. Lodged (or locked) in the cloister of a church, he represents an important yet subjugated narrative link between *original* author and authorial editor. For my reading of *The Book of Khalid* and, respectively, Anglophone Arab representations, the convert’s mediating function is of particular importance. It is significant that the Anglophone Arab editor-narrator does her or his own translations of Arab texts. S/he often does so in suspicious mind. But due to the shared anticipation of not being believed by the Western audience, there remains a certain alliance. Even if s/he knows that s/he has to strategically disrupt her or his translational mediation of Arabness to the point of lying, s/he will therefore regularly pretend to tell the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

While Borges stresses the magical effects of the *Quixote*’s inversion of readership and authorship—in particular, the reader’s becoming aware of her or his own semi-fictional positionality as co-writer of a fictional work that is not really written by the man whose name is on the book’s cover—the Lebanese writer and critic, Elias Khoury, in turn uses the Argentinian intellectual’s surprise as a point of departure to raise the issue of correlational identification in contemporary Arab cultural discourse. In his 2003 essay, “Reading Arabic,”³¹⁴ he, like Borges, is less interested in notions of authenticity or the truthfulness in the claim of translation than in the implications of this claim’s full-throated enunciation. Khoury’s allusion to Cervantes’s playful account of cross-cultural translation is to undermine

312 Cervantes, *Don Quixote de la Mancha* 484.

313 Cf. Mancing, “Cide Hamete Benengeli vs. Miguel de Cervantes: The Metafictional Dialectic of Don Quijote,” 66.

314 Elias Khoury, “Reading Arabic,” *DisOrientation: Contemporary Arab Artists from the Middle East* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2003) 10–13.

the all too often overstated and misleading question of authenticity or cultural origin in debates revolving around global cultural production. He instead suggests an understanding of literary and artistic creativity, or critical reading for that matter, which acknowledges contemporary Arab writers' and artists' capacity for narrative, audio-visual, or performative identifications that express the encounter with the West while blurring those boundaries that for too long discursively regulated the representation of this very encounter. According to Khoury, such self-questioning literary, artistic, and/or critical text "emerges where the author, [the literary writer, the artist, or the critic] migrates along with his text"³¹⁵ and transcends the ethno-cultural fragmentation of creative expression and interpretation alike. It ultimately presumes a translational mode of relation that does not primarily care for originality and that is not afraid of the dynamics of what the Arab critic calls "reversed plagiarism."³¹⁶ Expressing and at the same time criticizing, from within such ficitocritical texts, the structural limitations of its own cross-cultural endeavor, performative acts, sounds, or images can become the bases of future socio-political encounters in which the critique of "pre-packed ideas"³¹⁷ is institutionally turned into new forms of coexistence. Khoury describes this capability of writing and reading Arabic today as the "potential for identification through correlation."³¹⁸ It is this potential that my readings of Anglophone Arab representations want to flagrantly max out without irreverently exploiting it.

Neither Khoury nor Borges are concerned with the historical context of Cervantes's work. Their shared focus on the magic encounter between the real and the imagined in literary communication can give us a hint regarding the importance of the reception and transformation of magical (realist) modes of representation within Anglophone Arab discourses. I will touch upon the divergent fantastic strategies of destabilizing the static Western paradigms of identity, reality, or history by telling *Lies that Tell the Truth*³¹⁹ in the course of other readings. At this point, however, I want to revisit the specific socio-historical conditions of the *Quixote*'s emergence and, in particular, the historicity of the novel's imaginative Arab intertext. I thus wish to direct my and your attention to a chronotopic frame that regularly interferes with Anglophone Arab memories and narratives; one that can be grasped as both a cognitive and psychological concept as well as a political vision and a narrative feature. *The Book of Khalid* refers to this temporal and spatial setting only in passing when comparatively explaining the great expectations and even greater disappointments related to Arab-American immigrations:

315 Khoury, "Reading Arabic," 13.

316 Khoury, "Reading Arabic," 10, 13.

317 Khoury, "Reading Arabic," 13.

318 Khoury, "Reading Arabic," 12.

319 Anne C. Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magical Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

What the Arabs always said of Andalusia, Khalid and Shakib said once of America: a most beautiful country with one single vice—it makes foreigners forget their native land. But now they are both suffering from nostalgia, and America, therefore, is without a single vice.³²⁰

Don Quixote as a structural intertext at work in *The Book of Khalid* conceals quite a different aspect of Arab Andalusian memories. It sheds oblique light on a violent era in which Spain's Muslim culture came to a forcible end. Whether the historian Benengeli is a narrative jest or not does not matter here. He is, apparently, just as earnest as Don Quixote, just as peculiar, and just as important as the editor-narrator for understanding what this novel is about. What does matter is that, at the time when Cervantes was writing his proto-novel, an Arabic-speaking Muslim would not have easily been found in a public space like the Toledo marketplace. Jews had already been violently expelled from Al-Andalus during the *Reconquista* of 1492. Books in Arabic had been burned soon after with all the ferocity that the priest applies to Don Quixote's library of chivalric narratives. Muslim converts, like the translator in *Don Quixote*, had been completely expelled from Spain since 1609—just after the first part of Cervantes's novel was published. During the 16th century, forced Arab converts to Christianity lived as Muslims clandestinely, communicating in *aljamiado*—Spanish written in Arabic characters. Within only one century, Andalusia's multiculture of interreligious coexistence and collaboration had degenerated into a vicious cycle of intolerance, violent repression, and Inquisition, until the final expulsion of all Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula in 1614.³²¹

Don Quixote is born of memories latent in extinct and condemned Arabic texts. The earliest European novel seems to partly resonate the social dynamics of a time in which Arab-Muslim culture and religion, which had been part of Andalusian life for eight centuries, were forcibly suppressed. It is not only an ironic re-vision of a romance of chivalry; it can also be read as a tale of religious intolerance and ethnic cleansing. In such a reading, Benengeli's manuscript is a ghost story about the Arab memory of a lost world. Its degradation and partial suppression by the editor narratively reciprocates the traumatic Arab-Muslim-Jewish experience of oppression and expulsion. The historical person Cervantes could hardly have wandered around La Mancha without coming upon traces of that trauma. Whether the Spanish writer might have himself come from a family of *conversos*, and thus have been the "victim of a social order in which he belongs to a class that has no func-

320 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 121.

321 For details on this historical background, see L. P. Harvey, *Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005) and L. P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250 to 1500* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990).

tion,"³²² cannot be answered here. Selectively drawing on Erich Auerbach's socio-psychological interpretation of *Don Quixote*, however, allows to argue that the editor-narrator's disavowing treatment of the Arab historian's truth claims represents "a flight from a situation which [had become] unbearable,"³²³ a violent attempt to emancipate.

Of course, Rihani did not want to compose another *Don Quixote*. As I have explained, the similarity between *The Book of Khalid's* structure of narration and the classic's narrative organization first and foremost concerns the shared use of the found manuscript editor-narrator pattern for the disruptive-translational transgression of the truth/non-truth binary. If the Anglophone Arab novel is a structural plagiarism, it is the plagiarism of a successive literary transcription of an Arabic source narrative; it is an instance of Arab reverse plagiarism rather than plagiarism tout court. And if this reversed inversion of original and translation has an emancipatory objective, it must first be seen in the Arab narrator's flight from the unbearable situation of being translated by Westerners. In the context of my discussion, it is important to note that Rihani's short, direct excursion into the Andalusian chronotope is used for an ironic comment on the Arab American immigrant's forgetfulness and nostalgia.

The theme of Al-Andalus has featured prominently in both the Arabic and the Anglophone Arab novel throughout the 20th century and continues to be creatively extrapolated in narrative fiction.³²⁴ Radwa Ashour's 1994 *Gharnata* [Granada],³²⁵ the saga of an Arab family that remains in Granada after the defeat of the last Muslim dynasty, and Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*,³²⁶ a 2003 post-mythical novel of dislocated Arabness and impossible conviviality, are two recent and particular paradigmatic examples of this equally translinguistic and transnational sub-genre of Arab literature. The Andalusian imaginary does not simply help Arab writers to express their nostalgic desires for an irreversibly lost past but can equally represent a present

322 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953) 137.

323 Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* 137.

324 William Granara, "Nostalgia, Arab Nationalism, and the Andalusian Chronotope in the Evolution of the Modern Arabic Novel," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 36.1 (2005): 57-73.

325 Radwa Ashour, *Gharnata* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1994). The novel forms the first part of the Granada Trilogy: Radwa Ashour, *Thulathiyat Gharnata* (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-'Arabiya lil-Dirasat wa-n-Nashr, 1998). On the use of the Andalusian chronotope in *Gharnata*, see Granara, "Nostalgia, Arab Nationalism, and the Andalusian Chronotope in the Evolution of the Modern Arabic Novel," 67-71.

326 Diana Abu-Jaber, *Crescent* (New York: Norton, 2003). On the use of the Andalusian chronotope in *Crescent*, see Nouri Gana, "In Search of Andalusia: Reconfiguring Arabness in Diana Abu-Jaber's *Crescent*," *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) 198-216.

struggle for better local futures or the impossibility of the return to any geopolitically framed form of clear belonging. As a recurring formal feature of modern novelistic writing, it has a polyvalent, almost encyclopedic function. Due to its past-to-present-to-future temporality and the related expansion or transgression of spatial boundaries, it advances to a dynamic narrative vehicle for crossing over from the historical memory (or amnesia) of Al-Andalus as the lived experience of Arab-Western coexistence and exchange as well as racist discrimination and violent exclusion to today's conditions of tomorrow's cross-cultural relations.³²⁷

In *The Book of Khalid*, this journey goes significantly beyond the nostalgic idealization of Andalusian beauty and *convivencia*. By juxtaposing the memory of a golden Iberian past with the present suffering of cross-cultural conflicts in America while using a Quixotic narrative pattern, the novel doubles or even triples the trope of Al-Andalus. At the same time, it carries the cross-Atlantic diasporic memory of "The Two 1492s,"³²⁸ long tabooed by Arabs and non-Arabs alike: the temporal coincidence and ideological nexus between the *Reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula and the *Conquista* of the Americas. As Ella Shohat has argued at various occasions and in different contexts, this nexus refers equally to the dismembered history of both Islamic-Jewish and Arab-Western encounters.³²⁹ Relating the beginning of the modern colonial discourse manifested in the Iberian expansionism to the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain allows the theoretical awareness of early modern European anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as the decisive conceptual framework for the racist colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Seen through this important relational diasporic lens, one can indeed argue that, by drawing on *Don Quixote* as an intertext, *The Book of Khalid*, like many other more recent Anglophone Arab representations, implicitly recalls "the 'proto-Orientalism' of the Reconquista"³³⁰ to counter the Orientalist discourse of its own present. The Andalusian chronotope then allows the narrative transfer of what Shohat calls "the Moorish unconscious"³³¹ into the self-conscious contemporary struggle for post-Andalusian conviviality. It establishes a spatio-temporal reference and metafictional frame in

327 Granara, "Nostalgia, Arab Nationalism, and the Andalusian Chronotope in the Evolution of the Modern Arabic Novel," 58-60.

328 This is the title of a section of Ella Shohat's essay, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," 50-55.

329 See Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," 42-62 and Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006) 209-213; Ella Shohat, "Taboo Memories and Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews," *Performing Hybridity*, eds. May Joseph and Jennifer Natalia Fink (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999) 131-56.

330 Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic. Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," 51.

331 Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic. Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," 54.

which the memory of violent exclusion and loss stands in sharp contrast to the desire for peaceful coexistence across cultural, racial, and religious divides.

In *The Book of Khalid*, the subtle arrangement of the Andalusian theme, together with the novel's disruptive and selective merging of translated auto-narratives and its constant blurring of disparate narrative sequences, leads to a high degree of internal distances, discordances, concurrences, and external interferences. The scholarly obsession with stylistic purity and clear generic filiations is not satisfied. The novel presents itself as a fantastic narrative of entertainment and leisure, a realist transmigrant adventure-story, a piece of political crime fiction, and a spiritual auto-fiction. There are resonances to medieval Arabic narratives, popular epic cycles, and folk tales side by side with traces of European and American classics of modern poetry and fiction and new genres of popular fiction. Partly addressing the crisis of the cosmopolitan Arab subject in transmigration between worlds torn apart by the clash of competing modernities, *The Book of Khalid* is a realist novel. At the same time, it takes the form of a biting social satire, a cosmopolitan thriller, a cross-cultural romance, and an intercultural philosophical melodrama, thereby mutilating or even completely eluding the nationalist-realist conceptualization of narrative subjectification in a clearly fixed time-space configuration. The novel mobilizes familiar and unfamiliar narrative codes and lexical and syntactic canons at such great liberty that it escapes any genuinely comparative morphology.

Like other Anglophone Arab texts, this fictional work constantly reminds us that it exists within a larger cross-cultural and trans-temporal meta-text of symbolic mediations and deviations directly related to the long and rarely peaceful history of Western-Arab encounters. As I have shown in the previous section, the interplay between an individual Anglophone Arab text and such a meta-text, as well as the sometimes subtle effects of dialogic frictions between the two levels, cannot be exhaustively traced in a rarified analysis of the narrators' and heroes' internal narrative discourses. The exploration of cross-cultural communicational structures at work in Anglophone Arab representations needs to combine the structuralist analysis of the individual text (or the individual representation's visual or performative order) with the study of this internal organization's external discursive prefiguration. Such an approach on the one hand considers the presence of Western narrative modes, which have fixed Arabs within a differential network of unequal relations for a long time and which, therefore, still form an important matrix for Arab correlational representations. On the other hand, it is sensitive to the fact that these representations rarely care for the notions of culturally specific literary syntax or narrative genealogies. Whoever sees herself or himself as the intended receiver of an Anglophone Arab narrative should be aware of the ambivalent translocations of assumingly firmly located modes of emplotment or frames of references at work in the respective narrative. Wherever the interpreter is geographically located, s/he is confronted with translation as a deeply ambivalent and often contested activity

that goes beyond carrying a meaning that is at home in one language across into another language.

If it is true for any cultural imaginary that a direct non-tropic grasp on events or things is rarely possible, then the reader of Anglophone Arab representation faces a particularly complex and enriching dilemma related to the impossibility of definite tropical filiations, clear-cut semantic itineraries, or stylistic aptitudes. These representations translate without much scruple regarding their own faithfulness into any original cultural text or local truth. They sometimes do so in a literally linguistic and almost physical sense, but their disruptive translations are mostly metaphoric: they *smuggle* meaning from one place to another and thus displace self-totalizing truth claims and related representational modes on all sides. If they tell lies, they do so intentionally, not intrinsically. The strategic decision to lie results instead from the need to counter other hegemonic lies, and it celebrates the empowering will to *lie back*. Such neo-translational smuggling blurs the principally Eurocentric divide between center and periphery and weakens the learned division of *here* and *there* that is confined by the constitutive strategies of othering and selving. Just like Khalid disregards the spatial norms of New York, Baalbek, or Cairo because he either does not know his “right place” or is not willing to take up the social position designated to him, the readers of *The Book of Khalid* are forced to somehow read out of place and hence commit an interpretive transgression. This transgression has not only a spatial dimension related to the entering of an unknown social and cultural geography. The revision of spatially determined value and meaning ultimately gains an epistemological and moral component.³³² As readers, we are often not enough “in-place”³³³ to fully grasp the socio-historic evidence and moral consistency of the world that is narrated. There is no easy affective attachment to the narrated cultural space possible. The reader is constantly reminded that s/he cannot place herself or himself in the narrative space without the editor-narrator’s agreement. Seen from such a geocritical perspective,³³⁴ Rihani’s novel is a very early exponent of Anglophone Arab narratives of spatial and social transgressions within and in-between the Middle East and the West. It anticipates the inherent epistemological and moral transgressivity of many contemporary Anglophone Arab representations. As “spatial trajectories,” these representations can cut across what our ideological maps cut up.³³⁵ Allowing its heroes

332 On the link between social geography and the humanities and between spatial transgression and moral transgress, see Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1996).

333 Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2004) 51.

334 Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally, Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 41–74.

335 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984) 115. Here, I am referring to de Certeau’s famous dictum on the particular capacity

and anti-heroes to wander promiscuously amongst a hyperbolic range of locations, these narrative trajectories transgress the West/non-West binary. In their narrative play of abstracted bi-directional adaptations and selective translations, New York or London almost become Beirut, Cairo, or Andalusia and vice versa. It is increasingly difficult to differentiate between what is domestic and what is foreign, what has been imported and what has been exported. Narrative modes and linguistic signifiers associated with certain socio-spatial or ethno-cultural identities give way to a conflictual gesture of horizontal (although not necessarily equal) exchange in which translation no longer means one-sided imitation or adaptation. The genuine forgery of Anglophone Arab representations is regularly committed against narrative morphologies and normative moralities on both sides of the historically generated divide. Due to their willful cross-cultural contaminations, selective translational distortions, and strategic inauthenticities, these representations have unpredictable effects that exceed the institutionalized control of intercultural translation, poetic canonicity, and moral judgment. Thanks to their structural and semantic correlationality, they disrupt both our aesthetic conventions of cultural specificity and ethical norms of universal accountability: "And there thou art left in perpetual confusion and despair. Where wilt thou go? Whom wilt thou follow?"³³⁶

Khalid might not prove to be chosen, but he is virtually immortal. The immortal, the endless, or the eternal—that is the meaning of his Arabic name. Given the many extreme occasions in which he finds himself and looking at the almost endless chain of humiliations he suffers, one might translate his name as "the unbreakable." Khalid resists forces employed by individual men, he refuses sexual and psychological exploitation, he is not crushed by religious dogmatism, and he stands up against the social violence of systemic degradation. If he is indeed destined to suffer injustice, he is not obliterated by it. Violence comes to seem almost external to Khalid, both as victim and perpetrator. Before his immanent morality, the amoral perpetrator and the naïve victim stand almost equally innocent in the same distress. However, the casual discriminations, willful exclusions, misperceptions, and repeated heaping-up of violent deeds never culminate into incurable bitterness. Although the narrative often has a tone of pain and a coloring of sorrow, the editor-narrator never allows it to drop into lamentation. Justice and equality, which have hardly any place in this story of extremes, still guide the narrative's spirit. It is the ironic magic of *The Book of Khalid* that it lays bare the unhappiness of those suffering from injustice and inequality without dissimulation and disdain. Even the depiction of competing exercises of power usually comes with an utterly moral neutrality that presents itself as naïve innocence. The narrative's many passages

of literary fiction as spatial trajectory: "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across," 129. See also 116–30.

336 Rihani, *The Book of Khalid* 5.

have disturbing and dislocating impulses for the reader, but they testify to the narcissistic power of both Khalid and the editor-narrator to self-referentially produce meaning. The reader's alienation thus affirms the connection of both the editor-narrator and the performing anti-hero to the sociocultural spheres that they claim to inhabit without knowing how to comprehend them. The shock of mutual incomprehension is somehow turned into an anti-aesthetic principle which denies itself the illusion of cross-cultural mimetic beauty. Instead, it gives place to narrative discontinuities with the self-asserted universal exceptionality of Western reason. The self-conscious narrative is polyphonic and transgressive without demanding a harmonic resolution. There are possibilities of cross-overs and of testing limits. But these possibilities are not orchestrated by any consistent meta-narrative. *The Book of Khalid* as a piece of Anglophone Arab literary fiction is derived from more than one socio-historical space and is organized in mutual transgression. How could it but place itself within a poetic and ethic non-place off the normative edge?