

0. Setting in Motion: The Trans-Location of Anglophone Arab Cultures

In season 5, episode 2 of the popular American television series *Homeland*,¹ the former CIA officer Carrie Mathison, now in her new job as a security advisor to a hyper-humanitarian German oligarch, is escorted by Hezbollah militants through a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon. The buildings and walls of the filmic setting are excessively covered with Arabic graffiti (fig. 1 and fig. 2). Among the messages spray-painted on the film set's walls are "al-watan 'unsuri (*Homeland* is racist)," "mafish watan (There is no *Homeland*)," and "al-watan batikh (*Homeland* is a watermelon)." ² One of the graffiti shows the Arabic transcription of the English words "Black lives matter." What happened to the film set?

Although the respective episode is set in an imagined Arab refugee camp, it was shot on an old factory site on the outskirts of Berlin. In the summer of 2015, the series' producers hired a collective of Egyptian street artists to add authenticity to the camp's location design. The artists known as Heba Yehia Amin, Caram Kapp, and Don Karl aka Stone used the unexpected opportunity to vent their political discontent with the controversial series.³ The drama was not only known for being one of President Barack Obama's favorite TV shows but has also garnered the reputation of being among the most bigoted series for its undifferentiated and highly biased depiction of Arabs and Muslims. Although it supposedly questions America's war

1 "The Tradition of Hospitality," *Homeland*, season 5, dir. Lesli Linka Glatter, Keith Gordon et al., perf. Claire Danes, Mandy Patinkin, Rupert Friend et al., Showtime, 2015.

2 Dan Bilefsky and Mona Boshnaq, "Street Artists Infiltrate 'Homeland' with Subversive Graffiti," *The New York Times* 15 Oct. 2015, 30 Oct. 2015. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/world/europe/homeland-arabic-graffiti.html?_r=0>.

3 Eric Hynes, "Interview with Heba Yehia Amin, Caram Kapp, and Don Karl of 'Homeland is not a Series,'" *Field of Vision* 20 Dec. 2015, 22 Dec. 2015 <<https://fieldofvision.org/interview-with-heba-yehia-amin-caram-kapp-and-don-karl-of-homeland-is-not-a-series>>. Heba Amin has by now received international recognition as a concept and performance artist and participant of the 10th Berlin Biennale; see "Heba Y. Amin discusses her work in the 10th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art," *ARTFORUM* 5 June 2018, 11 July 2018 <<https://www.artforum.com/interviews/heba-y-amin-discusses-her-work-in-the-10th-berlin-biennale-for-contemporary-art-75675>>.

against terror at home and abroad, the series essentially affirms the dominant representational formula of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. What it adds to the known screen image of Arabs and to the established cinematic scripts of homeland-paranoia is the notion “that Arabs are so dangerous that even all-American White men can be corrupted by them and become equally dangerous to America.”⁴ Against this background, the artists expected to add Arab authenticity to the set braced themselves with critical slogans that comment on the ideological nationalist and racist contiguities hidden behind the series’ real-Middle-Eastern decoration. The supplementary visual backdrop detail of Arabic script was thus turned into a tool to smuggle a subversive message into the filmic representation’s main text.

Figure 1: Heba Amin, Caram Kapp, and Don Stone, Graffiti “Al-watan ‘unsuri (Homeland is racist)”, 2015. Photography of the film set, Homeland, Season 5, episode 2. On the top left, “#gasusu”—a reference to an Egyptian Abla Fahita puppet which stands for the critique of the Egyptian regime spying on its citizens.



4 Joseph A. Massad, “Homeland, Obama’s Show,” *Aljazeera Online* 25 Oct. 2012, 30 Oct. 2015 <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/10/2012102591525809725.html>>.

Figure 2: Heba Amin, Caram Kapp, and Don Stone, Graffiti, “Black lives matter” [phonetically English, yet in Arabic transcription], 2015.



The artistic intervention into a German location that was meant to provide the Middle Eastern setting for an American-produced television show is rich in dislocations. The Egyptian street artists' use of Arabic script for the semantic transgression of an Anglophone filmic text broadcast worldwide further multiplies their transgression's disorienting effects. The signs of critical comment only directly address those viewers who read Arabic. Hence, the message “*Homeland* is racist” is not primarily directed at the makers and consumers of the American TV series but first and foremost criticizes the artists' homeland and Egyptian nationalism. This meaning is further underlined by the reference to “#gasusu” (fig. 1), a puppet character on Egyptian social media which stands for the critique of a regime that spies on its own citizens. Yet shortly after the episode was broadcast on October 11, 2015, the critical Arabic intervention was covered up and translated to a global English-speaking audience by European and American mass media. In sum, these graffiti can be read as the critique of both the TV series *Homeland* and of the nationalist notion of homeland (security). They articulate a powerful critique of any form of nationalism and racism, by anyone, anywhere.

What makes these messages particularly relevant to my project is that they simultaneously express and criticize the structural limitations of their subversive endeavor. Their cross-cultural meaning can be fully grasped only in a relational reading that transcends both analytical frameworks of national cultures, linguistic belongings, and ethnic identity as well as the neatly fenced off geographical allocation of disciplinary cognizance and expertise. Although the Arabic transcription of a phonetically English phrase like “Black lives matter” (fig. 2) does not exactly fit into the cultural practices with which my study is primarily concerned, it nevertheless shares these practices’ regularly conflictual genesis and transgressive effects in various ways. Formed out of and within the tension of cross-cultural and translational misrepresentation, the TV series’ equally transnational and post-national Arab subtext is therefore an appropriate symbolic point of departure from which to set my project in motion.

The twenty-first century began with two major events of global relevance: the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the Arab uprisings of 2011. I do not need to elaborate on the contextual importance of these events for a study like the one at hand. They had somehow already set my project in motion before I had set foot on its topical terrain. Depending on our individual geographic location and intersectional positionality, they continue to influence our daily lives to different extents. Both the supreme fictions of the-West-versus-the-Rest as well as alternative representational modes of global identification are tied to the worldly dynamic of history. And the Middle East, Arabs, and Islam continue to fuel controversy. Since at least the late eighteenth century, these collective significations have been at the center of cross-cultural power struggles around distorted knowledges, reductive images, and often mutually ignorant polemics. The many conceptual mutations within recent academic and extra-academic debates on secular versus religious identity, cultural alterity, or terror and counter-terror do not indicate a foreseeable end to these tensions.

Although I cannot fully escape from epistemo-ideological precedents that suggest a calendrical ground zero for literary and cultural studies, my project is not intended as a contribution to the transdisciplinary field of post-9/11 studies or the expanding academic industry of intercultural/interreligious dialogue and terror-expertise. Without excluding works produced by Muslims or works that are identified as Islamic, for that matter, my project primarily explores secular discourses. Those readers who expect me to expose the Anglophone Arab writer’s, artist’s, or critic’s true self, her or his Arab mind, her or his soul, or the socio-historical truths of her or his community will be equally disappointed. This study is not concerned with the individual Anglophone Arab intellectual’s psychology or authentic cultural self-identification but with the psychology and originality of her or his work. I treat both the entity of a literary, critical, or audio-visual representation as well as the individual author or artist first and foremost as a communicative function. I have

selected Anglophone Arab representations according to their topical and aesthetic specificity and with a view to their interventionist quality. It is not my intention to trace any original truths of those that represent or are (mis-)represented. The works that I discuss do not speak for the Arab world. If my project pursues any psychoanalytic interest, it approaches individual works as symbols and critical vehicles for the recognition of a disavowed writing across cultures.

Transgressive Truths and Flattering Lies aims at tracing the production and circulation of contemporary Anglophone Arab discourses as well as literary and artistic responses to the modern history of Arab-Western (trans-)migrations, misrepresentations, and translations, frictions, and cohabitations across various cultural sites against the historical backdrop of cross-cultural flows between what we have become accustomed to call the Arab world and the Anglophone West. It tries to interpretatively grasp the paradoxical situation of Anglophone Arab representations both in the US and Europe, where Arab voices and bodies are desired and rejected, ideologically assimilated and legally excluded, spectacularly exposed and discursively silenced, and within the Middle East, where Anglophone works increasingly gain importance as carriers of internal critique and external self-representation. Based on selected readings of Anglophone Arab representations of various geographic origins and genres ranging from early 20th century Arab American *Mahjar* writings to recent artistic practices of transnational Palestinian resistance, this study pursues multiple objectives: It explores individual and collective sociopolitical struggles from which Anglophone Arab representations emerge, it traces these artistic-literary works' multiple cultural beginnings and intertexts, it analyses their aesthetic devices and ethical contents, and it describes the multidirectional spectrum of the recursive effects of these interventions. The works of Anglophone Arab literatures, audio-visual arts, and critique that I discuss do not only respond to Western discourses that position the Middle East, Arabs, or Arabness as consumable objects but also offer more radical queries of our understanding of (self-)representation, authenticity, cross-cultural translation, or inter-subjectivity. Dissonances of cross-cultural encounters and inconsistencies of transmigratory identifications are not only unavoidable but of direct conceptual and interpretive evidence for my project. I have chosen my material first and foremost with a view to its particular narrative capacity, its inherent poetic and ethical transgressivity, and its metafictional quality regarding the representation of these cross-cultural dissonances and inconsistencies. Personal preferences and political leanings have surely fed into the selection procedure. The selection at hand does not claim any collective representativeness in terms of cultural or generic specificity. It instead claims a particular critical value in (sometimes violently) partial accounts.

Charting the shifting significations of overlapping forms of Orientalism and Occidentalism, *Transgressive Truths and Flattering Lies* addresses Anglophone Arab cultural practices (diasporic and non-diasporic alike) from a transnational perspec-

tive that brings the methods of postcolonial cultural studies together with Arab American studies, Arab British studies, and Middle Eastern studies. My relational (diasporic) approach to Anglophone Arab studies intends to disentangle the conventional separation of regions and cultural realms, moving beyond the binary notion of here and there to reveal the interconnectedness of cultural geographies. For this endeavor I draw on Ella Shohat's conceptualization of an interdisciplinary polylogue, an understanding of interdisciplinarity that transcends narrow linguistic, ethnic, or nation-state analytical frameworks prevalent in regional studies and ethnic immigrant studies approaches.⁵ Although I explore representations produced by immigrants and/or members of minority groups, I am not concerned primarily with questions of immigrant literatures and minority literatures. If my study contributes to the field of American studies, it does so from a transnational American studies perspective. If it is designed as a contribution to British studies, its conceptual design is a decisively transnational one. And if my approaches and findings are of relevance for scholars of Middle Eastern studies, they are so because they allow a better understanding of either Arabic Middle Eastern cultural articulations generated in exchange with Anglophone Arab diasporic actors or representations by Middle Eastern intellectuals who choose English as the primary tool of their cultural enunciations. In other words, I place my comparative project at the disciplinary intersections of these academic fields without claiming my subject matter for any of these disciplines.

The prominent placement of the notion of translocation in the title of this introduction first and foremost underlines the disciplinary translocation of my project as a relational study project. It also indicates an interest in the representational practice of spacing, imaginaries of other spaces, physical and discursive movements between places and across borders, as well as in the spatial politics of identity.⁶ In addition, the notion of translocation applies to the individual works' shifting fields of reference and utterance and to the scandal of unpredictable cross-cultural translations. It hence carries direct methodological implications: according to my understanding of Anglophone Arab literary and cultural studies, the analysis of cultural representations of lived or imagined spatial transgression needs to be complemented with reflections of the inherent poetic and ethical transgressivity of literatures and arts themselves. Questioning established ethics of reading the

5 See Ella Shohat, "The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism," *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, eds. Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2013) 42-62.

6 See Marga Munkelt, Markus Schmitz, Mark Stein, and Silke Stroh, "Introduction: Directions of Translocation—Towards a Critical Spatial Thinking in Postcolonial Studies," *Postcolonial Translocations: Cultural Representation and Critical Spatial Thinking*, eds. Marga Munkelt et al. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013) xiiiv-ix.

Anglophone Arab literary text, audio-visual work, or performance, my study interrupts the acquired epistemological claims of unconditional intercultural truthfulness and intentionally displaces what is usually seen as the *correct* politics of cross-cultural interpretation. The partial readings presented in this study do not aim at formulating a coherent ethics of Anglophone Arab representations. Neither is it my primary goal to trace unique formal and stylistic innovations that allow us to speak of genuine Anglophone Arab aesthetics. While I cannot see any contraction in addressing moral and extra-moral issues or questions of style related to my material, I do believe that poetical and ethical queries can be applied to the interpreted and to the act of interpreting in equal measures.

The transgressive character of my subject matter repeatedly forced me to revise my own interpretive positionality. Reading Anglophone Arab representations triggers an ongoing questioning of the conventional notion of a firmly located reading ego and can lead to a growing suspicion regarding one-sided disciplinary consistencies. This study intentionally undermines the all-too-often overstated and in my view misleading question of authenticity or cultural origin in debates revolving around global cultural production. Drawing on Elias Khoury's notion of critical correlation⁷ and Édouard Glissant's relational poetics,⁸ I suggest an understanding of literary and artistic creativity and critical reading, for that matter, which acknowledges contemporary Arab writers' and artists' capacity for narrative, audio-visual, or performative identifications that express the tensions involved in Arab encounters with the West while at the same time blurring those boundaries that for too long regulated discursively this encounter's representation. Such relational criticism aims at transcending the ethno-cultural fragmentation of creative expression and interpretation alike. It ultimately presumes a translational dynamic at work in Anglophone Arab representations which cannot be traced in the binary terms of originality and plagiarism. The dissonances and inconsistencies addressed and/or expressed in the representations that I explore require the critic to challenge and maybe to unlearn the consensual conceptions of moral aesthetic boundaries which usually determine the limits of corporate identification. They equally urge us to question both our own subject position and that of our respective cultural other. Such questioning necessarily goes beyond the dual critique of Orientalist and Occidentalist misrepresentations. Writing from the geographical and epistemic positionality of a white German scholar with a decisively cross-disciplinary background who is working outside the English-speaking world and who can hardly claim to be an Arab (if not by choice), I have adapted the notion of relational reading to facilitate a bi-directional critique of Anglophone Arab cultural resemblances that

7 Elias Khoury, "Reading Arabic," *DisOrientation: Contemporary Arab Artists from the Middle East* (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2003) 10-13.

8 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997).

involves more than simply questioning established Western truths by paternalistically giving voice to alternative Arab truths.

I argue that the particular aesthetics and ethics of Anglophone Arab resemblances cannot be exhaustively explained with the tension between competing notions of veracity and beauty. The allegorical and performative strategies at work in the ongoing Anglophone rearrangement of individual and collective Arab selves regularly speak a language that is at the same time both inside and outside the topological structure of figurative Arabness and Westernness. Our critical practice, however, seriously connected to historical contextualization and socio-political interpretation, is not free from frictions between the figural, the performative, and the ethical side of the cultural text that it seeks to interpret. In my view, Western scholars of Anglophone Arab representations, should they not want to entirely suspend the idea of self-critical cultural reading, must sometimes take the liberty to respond allegorically to the Orientalist/Occidental system of tropes they seek to debunk. This is better done with ironic exposure of one's own interpretive paradoxes than with earnest pathos. In other words, whoever wants to read Anglophone Arab representations as signs of cross-cultural translations must be aware that such signs might contain more traces of what they do not mean than of what they actually mean. Literary and cultural criticism thus understood is an impossible translational process that is aware of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls the "violence of culturing".⁹ There is a degree of this violence at work in any Western interpretation of Arab articulations in Arabic and Anglophone Arab articulations alike.

Reading Anglophone Arab representations is therefore conceptualized in this study as an act of responsible transcoding rather than enriching explaining. At times I use the allegorical fragmentation of a given cultural text to transfer a socio-political meaning which is not necessarily intrinsic to that text. The question of cultural translatability is not primarily approached as a sociolinguistic problem. In theoretical alliance with Spivak, I do not believe that the process of semiotic regression can ever be fully reversed. 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. Such mode of interpretation is skeptical with regard to both the self-proclaimed insider's belief in translational authenticity and the outsider's all-too-often disclaimed interpretive matrix of cultural exoticization. *Transgressive Truths and Flattering Lies* therefore participates in the comparative translocation rather than in the identitarian relocation of Anglophone Arab discourse.

9 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as Culture," *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013) 244.

Please do not get me wrong! I am not saying that there are no real places and real bodies involved in the making of this discourse or that there is no Anglophone Arab identity other than an allegorical one—how could I do so without claiming to be a real Arab at the same time? What I argue is that the identities narratively and performatively iterated in contemporary Anglophone Arab representations are predominantly stylized from various cultural signs and socio-historic experiences that cannot be easily resolved in any conceptual unity of form and meaning. They are regularly characterized by the fragmentariness, arbitrariness, and discontinuity of allegory. Consequently, the referential systems necessary for their interpretation can significantly exceed the place and text of their own articulations. In order to decode such representations, the critic cannot strictly confine herself or himself to the search for authentic archival hints intrinsic to these works' central signifiers or for consistent counter-archival references. Drawing on Paul de Man, one could argue that allegory, beyond its function as rhetorical trope, itself advances to a mode of reading in such project.¹⁰ In *Transgressive Truths and Flattering Lies*, critical reading is understood as an interpretive way of transgressing the notion of Anglophone Arab symbolic totality. It goes without saying that such responsive transgression of the reading-writing binary necessarily involves 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 self-critically and in equal measure. In other words, reading Anglophone Arab representations demands a (co-)relational rethinking of how meaningful (cross-)cultural critique can be approached today. My study wishes to contribute to precisely such rethinking.

I have tried to methodically incorporate my discomfort with the idea of rationalizing Anglophone Arab arts and literatures as products that are either intrinsically linked to an equally exotic Arab cultural essence or a shadow reflex of hegemonic Western culture. One way to overcome this unease is the redemptive step into and multiplication of the uncertainties of tentative endings, open-ended beginnings, and (occasionally very) distant intertexts which blur such simple binaries. Since I claim to treat both my subject matter and my critique as discursive events in their own right, the Foucauldian notion of discourse is of direct relevance here. I neither claim to place myself outside or on the other side of the discourse that I explore, nor do I pretend to always know exactly how to differentiate strictly between a work's inner identity and its discursive structuration or external codification. As Julia Kristeva has demonstrated, the comparative axis that connects a text to another text is constantly crossed and altered by the axis that connects a

10 See Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) and Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays on the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd ed. (1971; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 187–228.

text and its reader.¹¹ And of course my readings cannot fully escape the discursive rules of interpretive inclusion and exclusion that they seek to lay bare.

One of the key-arguments of this study is 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 essential Arab truths. Although I trace counter-discursive strategies of writing back and other dialogical dynamics at work in Anglophone Arab representations, I am equally interested in the tension of lies and counter-lies. In my view, the cultural practices of counter-lying, representational inaccuracy, the performative invention of half-truth or risky truth, of *matters of fact*, strategic opacity, unreliability, and incoherence, the practices of faking, forging, and counterfeiting, have been badly neglected in Anglophone Arab literary and cultural studies. The reasons for such reluctance are manifold. One reason certainly lies in the enduring discursive afterlives of the racist Orientalist trope of the Lying Arab. Another can supposedly be grounded in the plain identity-political or institutional necessity to speak (or pretend to do so) one's people's truth to whatever hegemonic power. So far, only (and one might add significantly) Victorian literature's lies have been systematically explored.¹² The idealistic scholarly disregard for Anglophone Arab cultural statements that willingly risk being (or being seen as) paradoxical with a view to universalized (or self-universalizing) standards of morality, however, results in the marginalization of works that do not feel inclined to become visible in their true existence; works that do not believe in the identity of truth-bearing, truth-telling, and truth-making. Many of the Anglophone works that I discuss fall into this category.

While the epithets of post-truth and post-fact were being declared words of the year by various dictionaries in 2016, this study is not concerned with the dialectics of enlightenment, the popular rhetoric of alternative facts, or the politics of post-truth.¹³ It starts from the premise that the dominant truths of the so-called Oriental, of Islam or of the Arab world never spoke for themselves from the point of view of those represented in these very truths,¹⁴ although the new discomfort with a post-factual present naively presumes a factual past. Given the not-at-all-new critique of power-knowledge and the identification of universal truth claims as dogmatic claims made by those who control the representational means to rule

11 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) 69.

12 John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994). See also Andrew Hadfield, *Lying in Early Modern Culture: From the Oath of Supremacy to the Oath of Allegiance* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017).

13 Cf. Matthew D'Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London: Ebury P, 2017).

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

out ambiguity, this assumption must come as a surprise. Whereas normative philosophical theories of truth seldom transcend their own fact/value dichotomy to reflect the practice of knowledge within the aesthetic realm, aesthetic theories in turn are often based on the convergence of meaning and its empirical manifestation.

Instead, I am interested in the poetic and interpretive devices that produce meaning, in the historically shifting discursive structures that evolve and devolve systems of Anglophone Arab meaning-making, and in the synecdochic capacity of individual poetic interventions for more than distorted substitutions. My interest in Anglophone Arab writers' and artists' particular imaginative faculty of translating a perceived reality into significance partly draws on Jacques Derrida's insight "that each time an event has been produced, for example in philosophy or in poetry, it took the form of the unacceptable, or even of the intolerable, or the incomprehensible."¹⁵ Understanding events of art and literature as prospective with a view to alternative articulations of experiences of impossibility (articulations of experiences which otherwise due to a lack of agreement cannot be represented), I willingly risk to give up the illusion of absolute candor in cross-cultural representations and my own relational criticism alike. I am interested in analyzing a poetics and ethics in which producing and circulating dissonant set-ups appears almost inescapable for those who want to effectively undermine a hegemonic representational system that is blocking their truth claims. I argue that Anglophone Arab representations have a particular capacity to transgress one-sided fact-claims and creatively imagine counter-lies that tell other truths. Under conditions in which so-called objective truths do not correspond with the subjective experience and in which not everybody can find herself or himself in that truth, these representations intentionally blur the orthodox division between the objective and the subjective. As a consequence, what appears as blatant lies for some can *in fact* be expressions of necessary truths of individual experiences and collective aspirations for others. It goes without saying that Friedrich Nietzsche's genealogy of (extra-)morality, Jean-François Lyotard's concept of the *differend*,¹⁶ and Michel Foucault's archeology of (un-)reason are of direct relevance for theoretically grasping such dynamics of transgressing dominant idioms in Anglophone Arab rough truth-speaking and flattering lying. I draw in particular on an important link that exists between these critics constituted by their critique of interiority and intersubjectivity. Following this strand of theory, the question is not: does this literary or artistic work carry a truth? But: does it work? What is its operational quality? What lies does it lay

15 Jacques Derrida, "Passages—from Traumatism to Promise," *Points... Interviews 1974–1994*: Jacques Derrida, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1995) 387.

16 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. G. Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1988).

bare, and what portion of truth does it cover? What power-truth does it denunciate? What social antagonisms and historical contradictions does it represent? What alternative sensations and perceptions does it open up? How does it counter the truth of our learned dispositives? What new thoughts and enunciations does it make possible? And how is the event of its emergence (of its *écriture*) marked by the discursive ambivalences of that very process?

The Anglophone Arab representations that I explore rather perform than represent selectively extended translations of Arabness to make themselves heard without promising to mirror any real presence transparently. If they conceal an essential truth-claim, it is not simply transferred to the reader. In order to smuggle their message into the dominant historical, political, and ethical discourse effectively, while escaping from the threat of disciplined integration, these traveling narratives repeatedly desert from normative modes of telling truth and take refuge in false translations. In these moments, their transgressive poetics of breaking free are ones of *real doing* rather than of representing the real. They imagine opponents of dominant truth-claims and express the whole force of the difficulty which would be felt by anybody attempting to think, narrate, and act the Anglo-Arab encounter differently. They thus creatively investigate the dense relations of the factual and the fantasmatic in both political rhetorics and literary poetics.

Transgressive Truths and Flattering Lies is subdivided into five chapters. The first and second can be read as extended introductory chapters. The sections of the fifth chapter represent various experimental travails into areas of cultural practice that are not secured by the traditional focus on works of literature in Anglophone Arab studies. The sharp contrast that the readings of this final chapter mark in relation to the previous sections directly results from my chosen source materials' generic location (theory, popular literature as well as concept and performance art) and their specific medialities (film and other audio-visual devices). However, the impression of difference might also derive from some of the discussed works' particular historical and political places of emergence (i.e. Palestine).

Chapter one makes the issue of discontinuity my beginning question. To underline the complex correlations of Anglophone Arab narrative beginnings with the world of cross-cultural representations, I use two quasi-unending narratives by 'Abd al-Rahman Munif (*Endings*, 1977/88 and *Cities of Salt*, part 1, 1984/87) as points of departure and literary vehicles to address key questions that will repeatedly be encountered in the course of my systematic discussion. This short chapter is intended to sensitize the reader and complicate the notion of beginnings for writing about Anglophone Arab representations. It explains why Anglophone Arab representations can neither be located within a clearly demarcated sphere of first Anglophone articulations by ethnically Arab writers nor can they be understood as necessarily diasporic, ethnic immigrant, or transmigrant representations.

Against this background, chapter two focuses on several semi-inaugural works, quasi-initiating starting points, or decisive stop-overs for the formation of the discursive field with which I am dealing. The chapter traces Anglophone Arab representations' plural beginnings and thus revises models of clear transitivity or direct influence. Focusing on early and particularly innovative ways of making Anglophone Arab meaning, the discussion involves historical, theoretical, and practical issues in equal measure. It relates the literary and cultural discourse of the so-called Nahda (Arab renaissance) of the nineteenth and early twentieth century to cross-cultural contacts between the Arabic-speaking world and the English-speaking world since the early modern period. Without arguing for comparative narrative morphologies between early Arabic popular fiction and early Anglophone Arab writing, this chapter provides prerequisites for a transnational interpretation of Anglophone Arab representations which disrupt the conventions of West-Eastern representational accountability. In addition, it explores the conditions of (im-)possibility of tracing translocal, translinguistic, and translational correlations in a historical perspective.

Chapter three forms the kernel part of this study. Here I use Ameen Fares Rihani's 1911 novel *The Book of Khalid* as a vehicle for carving out the spectrum of discourses informing contemporary Anglophone Arab representations. Closely re-reading a text that is perceived as the inaugural text of Arab writing in English, 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. Drawing on the poet Adonis, I am particularly interested in those aesthetic innovations that allow replacing concepts of authentic roots or heritages by multiply interrupted, intentionally confused, and mutually incomplete ongoing relational tensions. In this spirit, I place the novel within the long history of transnational encounters which go back to early modern Arab immigration to Britain, encounters that continue even after the events of September 11, 2001. I read *The Book of Khaled* as an equally self-critical and ironically mocking confrontational imaginary instead of interpreting it as a prototypical literary representation of immigrant secularization. With this reading, I take my first concrete steps into 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 and that is sensitive to the strategic use and (im)moral economy of lies. I do so by stressing the narrative's anti-hero's experience of humiliation and oppression, his resistive excess of real and symbolic destruction, or his desperate posture of revolutionary prophet-hood. The novel is interpreted as a reciprocation of the false promise of assimilation and the social practice of discrimination. Stressing the close link between the social and the discursive directly incorporated into the novel's mode of emplotment, I describe the paradoxes and power of strategic imitations and inauthentic self-

enactments against the background of the Arab *Mahjar* movement and American racism. These enactments are explained as early incidences of the social struggles, identity politics, and cultural practice of Arab (diasporic) intellectuals that have shaped Arab American experiences of not-quite-whiteness and ambivalent racial identifications throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Discussing topical and performative tools of strategic subversion, critical revision, and correlative identification, I shall then use the example of *The Book of Khalid* to re-construct a transnationally expanded interpretive geography for the study of diasporic discourses in relation to Middle Eastern cultural politics. Consequently, I spend a separate sub-chapter on the exploration of those portions of the novel, which are set within the Middle East. Here I place particular focus on the spatial alteration of the story's fictional landscape. The chapter's last section explores the novel's narrative discourse to lay bare tensions between representational reliability and strategic inaccuracy in cross-cultural representations within and between the Middle East and the West. Thus the question of narrative structure is directly related to the metafictional *dialogics* of authorship, narrative authority, readership pre-disposition, and strategic (mis-)translation at work in Anglophone Arab discourses of critical correlation. Using Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* as a particularly important intertext, I include a classic that not only represents a visionary mode of telling lies in order to tell the truth, but that can be seen as the Andalusian mother of the modern novel. By relating it to contemporary Anglophone Arab narrative discourse, I place my discussion of Anglophone Arab meta-narratology in a translocal literary sphere that cannot be firmly assigned to either the West or the Middle East and that transgresses the historical period of my primary material. The examples of Assia Djebar, Abdelkébir Khatibi, Édouard Glissant, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o help to illustrate how under the historical condition of (post-)coloniality, strategic translation, selective translation, or even non-translation can become a form of resistive identification and how the strategic multiplication of non-transparency and ambiguity form the narrative devices in the Anglophone Arab discourse. Drawing on a more contemporary comparison, the notion of cross-cultural translation itself gets radically questioned in order to make sense of partial translational endeavors, inventive pseudo-transfers, strategic opacities, or fake transmittings in the literary figuration of Arab truth. In addition, the Spanish classic's Andalusian chronotope helps one to grasp literary instances of Anglophone Arab reverse-plagiarisms as flights from the unbearable situation of being translated by Westerners.

The fourth chapter voyages from the Shahrazadian trope derived from the *The Arabian Nights* (the European novel's Arabic grandmother) to the Saidian quasi-trope as disparate literary and critical intertexts of contemporary Anglophone Arab representations. It traces varying Anglophone Arab appropriations of the *Nights* that have turned the classical narrative into a powerful metafictional weapon

that goes beyond sole aesthetic preoccupations. In some cases, this regaining of Shahrazad as a narrative guide for resisting (neo-)patriarchy and countering hegemony is openly performed. In other cases, the recourse to the *Nights* rather takes the form of an oblique allegory. These different developments ask the contemporary reader to take the transgeneric and transnational genesis of nocturnal writings into consideration. With a view to modern Arabic writing, I stress the importance of the so-called post-Mahfouzian novels such as Emile Habibi's *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* (1974/1982) or Elias Khoury's anti-heroic epic *Gate of the Sun* (1998/2006) as intertexts for Anglophone Arab writings. In addition Jorge Luis Borges and Gabriel García Márquez's oeuvres are read both as products of a literary intercourse with the Shahrazadian narrative and as important pretexts for contemporary Anglophone Arab writers. Salman Rushdie's 1980 novel *Midnight's Children* is used as another example of the widely ramified voyage of the Shahrazadian trope and her nocturnal mode of stretching the truth.

After reading Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's 1960 novel *Hunters in a Narrow Street* as an early example of an Anglophone Arab text written by a person living and working within the Middle East, I discuss Tayeb Salih's 1966 *Mausim al-hijra ila-sh-shamal* as an Arabic text that had an immense impact in its English translation. At the same time, I read *Season of Migration to the North* (1969) as the depiction of the tremendous bi-directional effects of Europe's constant denial of the non-Europeans' humanity, leading to the violation of the idealist humanist notion of communicative reason. I demonstrate how this narrative imagines lies and counter-lies as speech acts that are intrinsically linked to the colonial and postcolonial appropriation of cross-cultural authority. It is against this background that I re-visit Joseph Conrad's partial affirmation of colonialist-racist ethics in *Heart of Darkness* (1899–1902), as an antecedent of *Season's* anti-imperialist project. Arguing that the novel depicts the verbal act of lying as a given practice under the socio-historical condition of coloniality, I interpret the lying of Salih's anti-hero, Mustafa, as a resistive strategy that rehabilitates the strategic use of partial truths as justifiable forms of political agency and that in a similar way guides the transgressive syntax and correlational narrative techniques of Anglophone Arab truth-making. Against the background of earlier ideological adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I then describe the Hamletization of the Arab political and literary hero for the interrogation of current post-heroic regimes inside the Arab world. It is at this point that I re-read Edward Said's oeuvre as that of an Anglophone Arab critic and as an important intertext for Anglophone Arab representations as well as an Anglophone Arab studies text in its own right. By doing so, I confess his criticism's importance for my own critical endeavor and profess those dissonances between his and my approach that cannot be resolved in theoretical harmony.

Chapter five enters a different sphere of Anglophone Arab enunciations in order to discuss the complex nexus of blocked and forced visibility, discrepant concepts of

(non-)belonging and identity, competing representational modes of alterity, mutually exclusive archives, and the limits of enunciability. Including popular literature, theory, and the audiovisual arts, the cross-cultural analysis goes beyond the still-predominant focus on literature to underline the continuing topical and structural overlaps across genre divides. More than early Anglophone Arab literary representations, recent works of Anglophone Arab concept and performance art explicitly admit to being shaped by the representational norms that they anticipate. More openly than the former, they perform the mechanisms of their own adjustment of meaning. Thus they represent what I see as a particularly parafictional strand of Anglophone Arab representations.

Reading the novelist and screenplay writer William Peter Blatty alongside the postmodern literary theoretician Ihab Hassan, the first section of chapter five focuses on the discursive practices of assimilation and non-assimilation. By selectively exploring the writings of two Americans who are usually placed in the margins or outside of the Anglophone Arab discourse, I interpret their texts against the grain. I interpret Blatty's auto-fictional narrative *Which Way to Mecca, Jack?* (1958) with a view to its engagement in the psychology of impossible assimilation and its narrative strategies of resisting the assimilationist paradigm of identification. I suggest seeing the invisible violence resulting from the horrors of discriminatory assimilation as a missing link between this piece of popular fiction and the best seller *The Exorcist* on which Blatty's success as an American mainstream writer is based. My psychoanalytic reading interprets the 1971 horror novel as an allegory of a much more horrific and ambivalent intra-psychic struggle related to the assimilationist pressure to exorcise the Arab within. I argue that *The Exorcist* additionally carries the unsettling suggestion that the act of exorcism is directed at those to be assimilated. The interpretation of the text as an Anglophone Arab Gothic allegory of the horrors of Arab experiences of assimilation in the West uses Kristeva's notion of abjection to lay bare the fictional representation's deeper allegorical meaning related to the dynamics of racialized subject-constitution and the fears of reverse colonization and miscegenation. Against this background, the section revisits Hassan's rigorous refusal of any Arab ethnic identification. Without re-claiming Hassan's theoretical work for the corpus of Anglophone Arab studies, I partly explore the hidden (non-)Arab contiguities of postmodernism. Relating the theoretical notion of *indetermanence* (indeterminency + immanence) as the quasi-ethos and post-moral episteme of postmodern theory to Hassan's writings at the intersection of autofiction and theory [*Out of Egypt* (1986)], I ask for both these writings' poetics and ethics of self-concern and the psychic inconsistency of rigorous identitarian indeterminacy. The discussion then shifts to Hassan's critique of postcolonial theory and his counter-notion of spiritual interculturalism. Exploring the strengths, psychological implications, and conceptual contradictions of his notorious anti-

Arab polemics, I stress the political ambivalence of Hassan's farewell-to-the-roots talk.

The following subchapter uses the literary writings of Rabih Alameddine and the concept and performance art of Walid Raad as examples of Anglophone Arab transmigrant works that blur boundaries between fiction, metafiction, and parafiction. Questioning the notions of stable morality, factual history, and sexual normativity, the discussion stresses the sordid anger of tragic memories and the fragile wisdom of unstable truths. The section opens with a reading of Alameddine's 1998 literary debut *Koolaid's*, a novel that relates situational, cross-cultural settings of physical deterioration to graphic depictions of bodily love and that juxtaposes public mediations with private musings. Transgressing the referential system by which we usually position ourselves against others, this queer narrative not only unsettles our heteronormative convictions and one-sided cultural identifications but also questions our own geographic, historiographic, and epistemic self-locations as readers and critics. Alameddine's third novel, *The Hakawati* (2008), shares this radically disorienting strategy of crossing dividing-lines of belonging. The text is presented as metafiction about storytelling that draws on both the counter-narrative power and the hegemonic commodifications of the Shahrazadian trope. It expresses a fundamental skepticism regarding the narrative capacity to represent factual truth. The discussion then switches to the audio-visual and performative spheres of Anglophone Arab cultural production, using an example in which the performative adjustment of authority is particularly evident: the Atlas Group forms the constant basis for the concept artist Walid Raad's multimedia performances. The project is interpreted as a pseudo-scientific laboratory that mimics and thereby exposes the mechanisms of the archive as a place where the production of historical knowledge happens and which thus questions the claims of archival truth. The projects selected for my analysis undertake a performative reversal of translational power by working with faked documents presented as *art-facts* rather than as *arte-facts*.

The last chapter focuses on recent transformations within Palestinian transnational cultural resistance across genres. Starting with a discussion of the long-term concept and performance project, *Material for a Film* (2005–ongoing), by Emily Jacir, a project that sheds light on the lost and obscured fragments of a murdered Palestinian activist to expose the archival violence involved in the production of historical evidence, I illustrate how the local struggle for liberation is transposed into the domain of Western representation. In addition, I demonstrate that this work transgresses a morality of counter-truth that long dominated the Palestinian resistance paradigm of narrating back. Interpreting the project as an artistic research project that is concerned with the aesthetics of *formativity* rather than the aesthetics of form, *Material for a Film* is presented as encapsulating a poetics of post-romantic lies rather than an ethic of counter-truth. The remaining section

traces similar frictions of truth and fiction in Anglophone Palestinian representations, with a particular focus on questions of space, place, and (im)mobility. Using a geocritical approach, I read Raja Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks* (2007) as an anti-travelogue that counters imperial, military, or tourist mappings of the occupied territories and its people. Drawing on the independent online project *Electronic Intifada*, the section stresses the importance of the internet as a transnational space of counter-journalistic activism. Reading selected audio-visual works of art that respond to the experience of spatial restrictions alongside the practices of traceurs in Gaza, the discussion culminates in a dystopian interpretation of Larissa Sansour's 2009 *A Space Exodus*, a mixed-media installation that turns the exilic experience of Palestinian deterritorialization into a vision of impossible escape and loss in outer space.

The concluding chapter recapitulates my reading's main findings, drafts the spectrum of desiderata and possible future research directions in Anglophone Arab studies, and discusses my project's general theoretical and methodological implications with a view to the future of the broader field of postcolonial literary and cultural studies and comparative cultural theory. It stresses in particular the need for an extra-moralistic re-conceptualization of lies and counter-lies in our theoretical stance towards postcolonial archival dissonances.

Although *Transgressive Truths and Flattering Lies* is first and foremost carried (and sometimes carried away) by the creative works that it explores (and at other times exploits), it regularly carries across other critics' interventions. Ella Shohat's scholarly work functions as a constant model for the disciplinary decentering of my own critical endeavor, not failing to (trans-)locate this study in relation to the various disciplines' approaches. I have learned from Fanon and Glissant that the search for cross-cultural conviviality cannot possibly end up in the construction of depoliticized transculturality or trans-difference. Freud and Kristeva have taught me, each in her or his own way, that there is no relational reading without at least a certain dynamic of narcissistic transference involved. From a different disciplinary perspective, Clifford Geertz states that "it has become harder and harder to separate what comes into science from the side of the investigator from what comes into it from the side of the investigated."¹⁷ Against this post-factual approach, Spivak was a constant reminder that postcolonial allegorical readings, if they claim to be responsible, necessarily demand relating one's own intersectional positionality to the text to which one claims to respond. My first teacher, Munasu Bonny Duala M'bedy, brought to my attention that the so-called O/other, too, has a political existence and that, therefore, the cultural analysis of the dynamics of selving and othering needs

17 Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995) 135.

to go beyond the interpretation of cultural sign systems.¹⁸ Said, who was always somehow present, agreed and allowed for some strategic simplifications and essentialisms. Last but not least, Nietzsche showed up (often in Foucault's baggage) on the most unexpected occasions, insisting that I be true to myself against all conventions. I resisted as much as I could at some points, but allowed him to seduce me at others though I knew well that this could easily end up in a slightly contradictory undertaking.

However, the critical voice in the text that you read is basically my own. It is I who selected, re-composed, and interpretively reciprocated other people's representations. Hence, it is I who is responsible for the effects involved in such transposing. If I occasionally switch from the first person singular to the plural form 'we', this is not to place, or even hide, myself within an abstract academic *communitas* and thus to exonerate my own truth-claims from the inescapable epistemological nexus of intersecting positionalities, power relations, and knowledge production. I rather use the first person plural pronoun in the most naïvely inclusive sense to imagine a conversation *across* that does not disavow historically generated differences. It is up to the reader to selectively feel herself or himself included in such an interpersonal conversation or to resolutely reject the respective interpretive inclusion. It goes without saying that this study is not designed to trigger any unconditional interpretive identification with my arguments. In fact, it leaves my own relation to some positions unresolved. In these situations, I prefer to use the depersonalized subjunctive "one could" which, together with a vague "or," turns the notion of final statements and interpretive resolutions into one-sided preconceptions.

Again, my readings do not claim to inaugurate formerly unknown truths of local or translocal Arabness in relation to a clearly located Anglophone Westernness. Instead, they suggest alternative ways of relating oneself and responding to Anglophone Arab articulations. They are first and foremost meant to provide some theoretical, methodical, and interpretive innovations. That is what characterizes the different fragments of this book as essayistic offerings for hopefully continuing conversations on matters of shared interest across discrepant ethnic self-identifications, geographical and disciplinary locations, epistemological and linguistic filiations, or ideological pretensions. The absence of resolution or theoretical consistency is generic. For myself, reading Anglophone Arab representations marked a significant break with what I had done until that point as a literary and cultural critic, both regarding the project's extended frame of theoretical reference and interpretive tools as well as with a view to the particular extra-moral interest in the political poetics of art and literature. The following readings and theoretical mus-

18 Munasu Duala-M'bedy, *Xenologie: Die Wissenschaft vom Fremden und die Verdrängung der Humanität in der Anthropologie* (Freiburg: Alber, 1977).

ings, therefore, ask to be approached as documents of a necessarily open-ended starting out—a setting in motion...

A note on my spelling of Arabic names and terms: There are different approaches to the transcription and spelling of Arabic in Latin characters. In my view, no system works perfectly in all literary and extra-literary contexts. I have generally used the spellings of names and words as used by Anglophone Arab writers and artists themselves. If such spellings were not available, I have tried to approach a less-formal modern pronunciation that non-Arabic readers should find somewhat familiar and pronounceable. The avoidance of institutionalized academic transcriptions results from my conviction regarding the contemporariness of Anglophone Arab representation. My decision stresses these representations' modern, postmodern, and postcolonial worldliness instead of invoking that they are coming from a different world, a so-called classical Arabic and pre-modern literary tradition. The exception that proves this rule is the use of more formal spelling when pre-modern Arab writers and works are mentioned.