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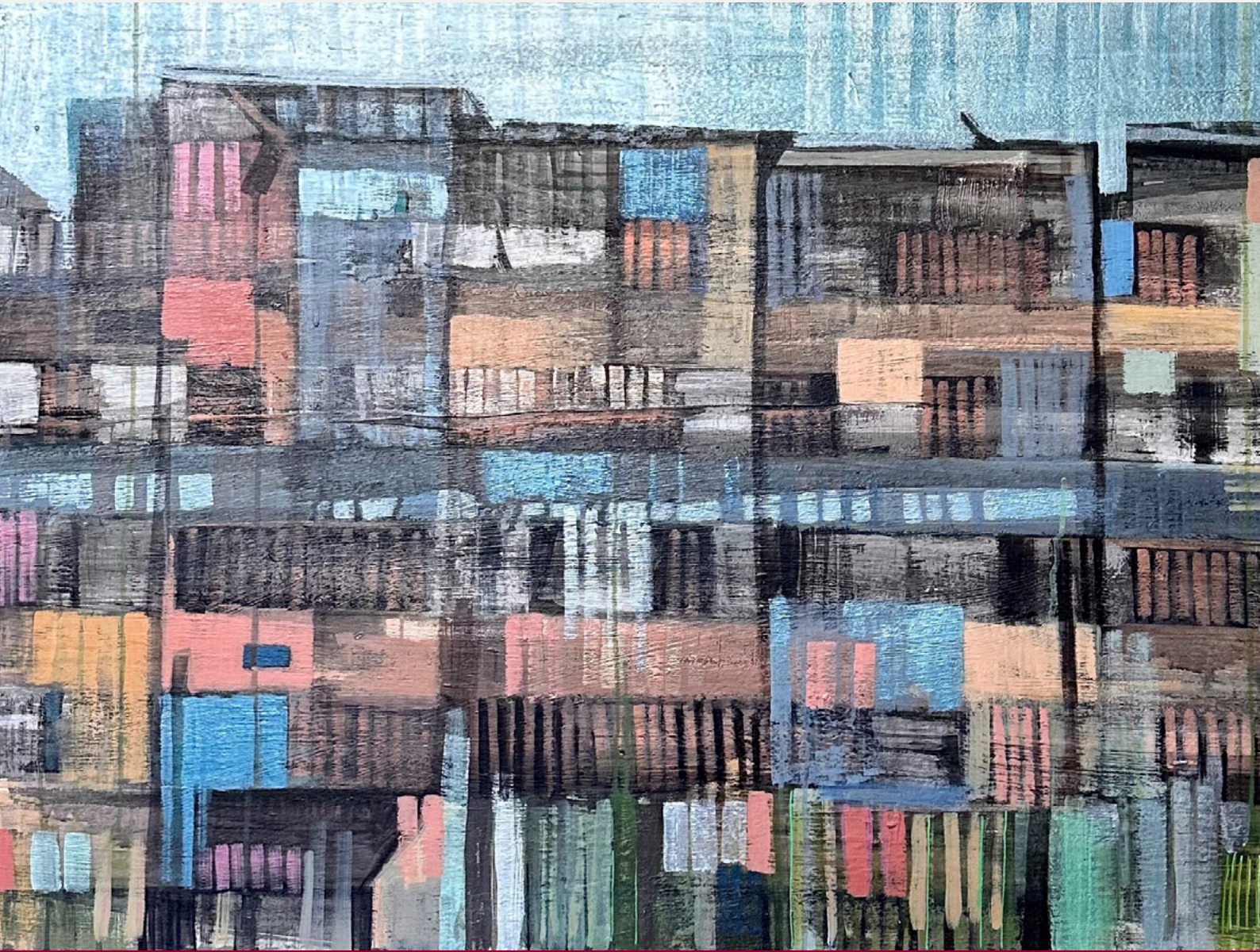


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AL-MUNTAQA

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ARAB STUDIES

Vol. 7 | no. 3 | September/October 2024



John Keane

The Beautification of War: Digital Communications, Public Indifference, Rebel Journalism, and Civilian Resistance in the Age of Meta Wars

Abdelwahab El-Affendi

Political Science in the Arab World

AL-MUNTAQA

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AL-MUNTAQA

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ARAB STUDIES

Vol. 7 | no. 3 | September/October 2024

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

John Keane

- 8 The Beautification of War: Digital Communications, Public Indifference, Rebel Journalism, and Civilian Resistance in the Age of Meta Wars

Bilal Mohammed Shalash

- 29 Emergency Telephone: The June 1967 War and Its Impact on Nablus in the Correspondence Between Hamdi Kanaan and Akram Zuaytir

Hani Mousa

- 44 Tribalism, Regionalism, and the Stalled Building of the Modern State in Libya

Abdelwahab El-Affendi

- 62 Political Science in the Arab World

Moataz El Fegiery

- 78 The Arab Charter on Human Rights and International Human Rights Standards: The Practices and Approaches of the Arab Human Rights Committee

AL-MUNTAQA

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON ARAB STUDIES

Vol. 7 | no. 3 | September/October 2024

CONTENTS

Farah Z. Aridi

- 98 Mapping the Literary: A Spatial Reading of Hilal Chouman's
Kāna Ghadan

ARAB OPINION INDEX ANALYSIS

Majd Abuamer

- 119 What Do Arabs Think About When They Think About Migration?
Insights from the Arab Opinion Index (2011-2022)

BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

Khaled Alkhaldi

- 134 The Horn of Africa: A Strategic Depth for Gulf States

EDITOR'S NOTE

Al-Muntaqa's content is usually selected for translation from the various Arabic journals of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, not pre-arranged to tackle specific topics or themes. In light of ongoing events in the Arab region however, we have sought to enclose relevant works. This volume contains six contributions that collectively provide insight into various dimensions of the state of affairs across the Arab region today, whether regarding wars, human rights, academia, or cities.

Our feature essay by John Keane, "The Beautification of War: Digital Communications, Public Indifference, Rebel Journalism, and Civilian Resistance in the Age of Meta Wars", argues that we have entered the age of destructive *meta wars*, enabled by unprecedented digital communications technologies that are producing frightening transformations of the modes and weapons of warfare but also, media representations of war that "gamify" war. The essay nevertheless sheds light on a counter-trend represented by rebel journalism digitally exposing the terrible realities of these wars.

Bilal Shalash's "Emergency Telephone: The June 1967 War and Its Impact on Nablus in the Correspondence Between Hamdi Kanaan and Akram Zuaytir" examines the correspondence between Hamdi Kanaan and Akram Zuaytir in the aftermath of the June 1967 War. Shalash argues that while the war disrupted traditional means of communication such as visits and telephone calls, it provided for an alternative form of communication based on personal relationships that helps shed light on unknown events and political positions under the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Hani Mousa's "Tribalism, Regionalism, and the Stalled Building of the Modern State in Libya" explores the underlying causes of the stalled state-building process in Libya, identifying tribalism and regionalism as the primary obstacles. It examines how different modes of governance and external interventions have aggravated and perpetuated the detrimental impacts of these obstacles, which have been intractable because state-building did not evolve organically over time.

Abdelwahab El-Affendi's "Political Science in the Arab World" assesses the state of political science within Arab academic institutions, pointing to a multifaceted crisis affecting education and research in this field, preventing it from achieving its broader objectives. It focuses on the pedagogical experience at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, as well as the studies and seminars organized by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, in order to counter this trend and bolster Arab contribution to the discipline.

Moataz El Fegjery's "The Arab Charter on Human Rights and International Human Rights Standards: The Practices and Approaches of the Arab Human Rights Committee" examines the Arab Human Rights Committee (AHRC)'s interpretation of the rights enshrined in the Arab Charter on Human Rights. It concludes that the AHRC has positioned its work not as contradictory to the international human rights system, but as supportive of and complementary to it, adopting an interpretative approach consistent with international human rights interpretations.

Farah Aridi's "Mapping the Literary: A Spatial Reading of Hilal Chouman's *Kāna Ghadan*" highlights the significance of space as a narrational component, treating the text as a critical roadmap capable of producing meaning and knowledge. It offers a spatial reading of Hilal Chouman's *Kāna Ghadan*, presenting a literary geography of Beirut, shaped by how the protagonists understand and experience the city. This practice and the way they converse about Beirut reflect a socio-spatial imaginary that challenges dominant narratives about the city.

Majd Abuamer's "What Do Arabs Think About When They Think About Migration? Insights from the Arab Opinion Index (2011-2022)" relies on data on migration based on eight Arab Opinion Index surveys. The study reveals that around a quarter of Arab citizens have consistently expressed a desire to migrate over the past 12 years, with higher interest recorded among the youth, men, and those with at least a secondary school education. It also shows that half of those wishing to migrate select Europe and the Arab Gulf countries as their preferred destinations.

This volume includes one book review, whereby Khalid Alkhaldi reviews Madoukh Ajmi Al-Otaibi's *The Horn of Africa: A Strategic Depth for Gulf States*.

MUSIC

ARTICLES

John Keane*

The Beautification of War: Digital Communications, Public Indifference, Rebel Journalism, and Civilian Resistance in the Age of Meta Wars**

تجميل الحرب: الاتصالات الرقمية، واللامبالاة العامة، والصحافة المتمرّدة، والمقاومة المدنية في عصر حروب الميتا

Abstract: This public lecture proposes that we have entered the age of destructive *meta wars*. Digital communications technologies are nowadays enabling not only frightening transformations of the modes and weapons of warfare but also, paradoxically, media representations of war by governments, military PR propagandists, breaking news journalists, soldiers, and citizens that “gamify” war, beautify its horrors, and lullaby millions of people into indifference toward wars that are seemingly emptied of blood, cruelty, and genocidal destruction. Especially in the old democracies of the Atlantic region, the new meta wars generate public indifference, and feelings of emotional disconnection. But this public indifference is vulnerable to a counter-trend unique to the age of meta wars: the birth of new media platforms whose rebel journalists digitally expose the terrible realities of these wars, cast doubts on their moral and practical necessity, and teach civilians everywhere that they have the right not to suffer meta wars, even that there is a time coming when war in every form will have to be abolished.

Keywords: Meta Wars; Digital Communications Technologies; Weapons of Warfare; Public Indifference; Citizen Resistance.

الملخص: تجادل هذه المحاضرة بأننا دخلنا عصر حروب الميتا التدميرية. وفي هذا السياق، لا تُتيح تكنولوجيا الاتصالات الرقمية اليوم تحولات مرعبة في أنماط الحروب وأسلحتها فحسب، بل من المفارقة أنها تتيح أيضًا تمثيلات إعلامية للحرب من جانب الحكومات، والإعلام العسكري، وصحافيي الأخبار العاجلة، والجنود، والمواطنين الذين «يلعبون» الحرب، ويُجمّلون أهوالها، ويُلقون ملايين الناس في عالم من اللامبالاة تجاه الحروب التي تبدو خالية من الدماء والقسوة والإبادة المدمّرة. وتولّد حروب الميتا التدميرية الجديدة لامبالاة عامةً وشعورًا بالانفصال العاطفي، لا سيما في الديمقراطيات القديمة في منطقة الأطلسي. ولكن هذه اللامبالاة معرّضة لاتجاهٍ مضاد متميّز في عصر حروب الميتا؛ أي ظهور منصات إعلامية جديدة يقوم صحافيّوها المتمردون بكشف الحقائق الرهيبة لهذه الحروب رقميًا، وإثارة الشكوك في ضرورتها الأخلاقية والعملية، ويعلمون المدنيين في كل مكان أنّ لديهم الحق في ألا يُعانون بسبب حروب الميتا، بل إنّ الوقت سيجيء، وسيتعيّن مَنع الحروب بكلّ أشكالها.

كلمات مفتاحية: حروب الميتا؛ الاتصالات الرقمية؛ أسلحة الحروب؛ لامبالاة عامة؛ مقاومة المواطن.

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** This essay was first presented as the inaugural lecture for the academic year 2024-2025 at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, 7 October 2024, under the title “Meta Wars of the 21st Century: Media Spectacles, Genocide, Public Indifference, and Resistance”.

In times of historical upheaval, single events sometimes gain the status of a paradigm. Without ceasing to be part of history, they begin to function at the same time as a model for understanding other events and even the entire historical process. They reveal the conditions of possibility that mark the horizon of the present, and subsequently become a tool for understanding and explaining the past.

Pawel Mościcki¹

Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues and Friends,

Today marks the first anniversary of the outbreak of a terrible war with potentially catastrophic consequences for your country and region and the wider world. It will thus come as no news to you when I say that we are living in an age of multiplying wars and chilling predictions of war; or that millions of people, at various points on our planet, are gripped by feelings that our world is sliding into confusion, lawlessness and violent disorder, and that, if current-day trends continue, a mega-war is coming, and that things are going to end badly. Their gloom and caution are understandable.

Global military spending has been rising for nearly a decade, reaching \$2443 billion in 2023, an increase in real terms that year of 6.8%, the steepest since 2009.² An American president lost in a mental fog approves the bombing of Yemen and the largest US naval battle since the Second World War, the occupation of eastern Syria and combat operations in Iraq, all without the approval of Congress, then asserts that “the United States is not at war anywhere in the world”;³ the same president who urges an Israeli ceasefire while feeding its war machine with weapons that make peace improbable; and simultaneously, on another front, finances an unwinnable war against Russia, authorizes long-range weapons for use against people inside its territory, and refuses to agree to the negotiations that would halt the senseless killing and environmental destruction.

Fears are meanwhile growing that global warming will trigger armed conflicts because of mass exoduses of people fleeing rising waters, crop failures, parched lands, and extreme weather events. The worst displacement crisis on our planet is already happening in Sudan, where a deadly uncivil war backed by outside forces has uprooted the lives of over 11 million people and plunged half the population into hunger. And there are the planned genocides: in Gaza and the West Bank, where Palestinians are suffering unspeakably cruel war crimes; in Syria, where more than 500,000 people have died and half the population forcibly displaced; and in Myanmar, where, following the 2021 coup d’etat, a nasty military government, in open defiance of an International Criminal Court of Justice (ICJ) provisional measures order, terrorizes 600,000 mostly Muslim Rohingya peoples in a hellscape of shelling and pillaging of villages, night raids, communication blackouts, mass arrests, sexual violence, torture, murders, disappearances, restricted access to food, water, shelter, sanitation, and medical care, and the forcible military conscription of men and boy children to fight for the Myanmar army and its allies in nasty frontline battles against the Arakan Army.⁴

It requires little reflection to understand that these are indeed dangerous trends and that we are passing through gloomy times in which old proverbs, sayings, and clichés make a comeback in blogs, columns, and pundits’ postings. War is the rhetoric of our times, we could say. There is a time for peace, and a time for war, we hear. Truth is war’s first casualty. War is death’s feast. Sovereignty must be defended. War is hell. Force and fraud are in war the two cardinal virtues. War is the statesman’s game. War is capitalism with the gloves off. A great country can have no such thing as a little war. It’s easier to begin a war than to bring it to an end. The quickest way of ending a war is to lose it.

¹ Pawel Mościcki, “Gaza as Paradigm,” *pawelmoscicki*, 6/3/2024, accessed on 10/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/5f2s5bdk>

² “Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity,” *SIPRI*, 22/4/2024, accessed on 2/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/ybjvt6fj>

³ “Remarks by President Biden in Statement to the American People,” *The White House*, 24/7/2024, accessed on 2/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2jy3czuv>

⁴ “The Intensifying Rohingya Genocide,” *Brouk*, June 2024 accessed at 2/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/6ddt8rr2>

An unfortunate if unintended effect of these oft-quoted, routine dicta is that they “normalize” war. They make it seem that war is an enduring feature of the human condition – that humans are creatures who live in a state of war by nature, that on our tiny planet humans are the only species to organize mutual savagery and the planned elimination of its fellow members using sticks and stones, muskets and rifles, bombs, rockets, and drones; or, in the pithy words of Plato, among humans, only the dead will not witness war. The trouble with these dicta is their faux timelessness. They have a metaphysical quality; they suppose or imply that whatever humans may say or imagine, war is nature doing what nature does (*natura naturans*), that since “man” is the “fighting animal, emotional, passionate, illogical”,⁵ war is ultimately the result of “forces inherent in human nature”;⁶ or, as Elon Musk has said recently: “All creatures fight. . . Animals in the jungle, every single day, every minute are constantly trying to kill each other. We’re not unusual in that respect”.⁷ In such formulations, history goes missing in action, which is unfortunate because history really matters when trying to make sense of the strange novelty and possible future of the meta wars of our age.

Let us pause, for any cursory glance at the past should underscore the elementary point that war is not only a human fabrication – an invention “like any other of the inventions in terms of which we order our lives, such as writing, marriage, cooking our food instead of eating it raw”, as the anthropologist Margaret Mead noted⁸ – but that through time the modes and means of war have undergone significant alterations. Historians typically define war as a mutually recognized conflict between two or more groups as groups, in which each group puts an army, however small, into the field to fight and kill, if possible, some or all the members of the other group’s army. While they often disagree about matters of timings and technologies, they help us realize, for instance, the profound military and political significance of newly invented weapons (the sword, Greek fire, crossbow, the machine gun, chemical weapons, the atomic bomb, drones) and changing modes of imagining and making war. We come to understand how, during the second half of the 19th century, war fought by cavalry and close infantry formations was rendered obsolete by rifles, steel cannon, and bursting shells; and, more chillingly, we are forced to wonder whether nuclear weapons and the so-called “balance of terror” will permanently protect our planet from human self-destruction, or whether, as the British historian of war A J P Taylor once put it: “a deterrent may work ninety-nine times out of a hundred. On the hundredth occasion it produces catastrophe”.⁹

Modes of Communication

History matters in yet another way. A strong sense of the historicity of things helps us appreciate the *novelty* and *strangeness* and *fleetingness* of our present-day conditions. When we are ignorant of the past, we invariably misunderstand the present; awareness of the past helps us grasp the measure of things in the present and prepare workable hopes for the future. Historical awareness indeed matters, as this lecture tries to show by proposing an off-centre, renegade interpretation of the widespread feeling that our world is spinning out of control and hurtling toward military disaster.

Here is the unconventional framing idea I want to explore: in matters of war, we are now living in a strange world unknown to our grandparents and great grandparents, a world immeasurably different

⁵ Sir Norman Angell, *Human Nature and the Peace Problem* (London: Collins, 1925), p. 7.

⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), p. 3.

⁷ “Elon Musk: War, AI, Aliens, Politics, Physics, Video Games, and Humanity | Lex Fridman Podcast #400,” YouTube, 9/11/2023, accessed on 2/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/43ce2b23>

⁸ Margaret Mead, “War Is Only an Invention—Not a Biological Necessity,” in: Roberto J. González, Hugh Gusterson & Gustaaf Houtman, *Militarization: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).

⁹ A. J. P. Taylor, *War by Timetable: How the First World War Began* (London: Macdonald, 1969), p. 121.

from both the Cold War of the 20th century and recent talk of “Cold War II”.¹⁰ We have entered the age of destructive *meta wars*. These are wars in which digital communications technologies are enabling not only frightening transformations of the modes and weapons of warfare – zero space-time coordination of armies, Hellfire precision-guided, air-to-ground missiles, and sophisticated cyber weapons capable of jamming and seizing control of enemy satellites – but also, paradoxically, media representations of war by governments, military PR propagandists, breaking news journalists, and soldiers and citizens that “gamify” war, beautify its horrors, and lullaby millions of people into nonchalance about wars that are seemingly emptied of blood, cruelty, and genocidal destruction. Especially in the old democracies of the Atlantic region, I want to say, the new meta wars generate *public indifference*, feelings of emotional disconnection and the cold unconcern of people busily preoccupied with their own cluttered lives. But my argument will be that this public indifference is contingent and vulnerable, threatened by a counter-trend unique to the age of meta wars: the birth of new media platforms whose *rebel journalists* digitally expose the terrible realities of these wars, cast doubts on their moral and practical necessity, and teach civilians everywhere that they have the right not to suffer meta wars, even that there is a time coming when war in every form will have to be abolished.

But let me not get ahead of myself. Central to my unorthodox interpretation of the meta wars of our age is the importance of digital communications. My background conjecture is that how texts, sounds, and images are produced and circulated during wartime is of foundational importance in understanding wars past and present. I studied in Toronto, where Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan and others taught us that media of communication aren’t just add-on features of any given society, or to be understood as timeless “neutral” channels that convey “information”. They emphasized how different historical modes of communication differently structure people’s bodily senses, their mobility, patterns of cognition, mental horizons, and daily spacetime experiences of the world, even shaping the conduct and interpretation of war.

What is odd is that historical transformations of the mediation of war, let us call them in shorthand, are typically neglected in studies of war. Passing remarks are made, say, about the impact of horsepower or the advent of iron-horse locomotives and artillery loaded on railway wagons, but that’s all. We lack a comprehensive study of war and communication. That is a reason why I would like in this lecture to try to begin sketching a research project, to begin filling the gap by thinking of the history of communication and war in the following way.

In times defined mainly by *oral communication*, news of war and rumours of war were conveyed by word of mouth and written messages carried by foot runners, horses, donkeys, and camels. Information about battles, sieges, victories, and defeats was reported only after the fact. War did not know instant media coverage. With the *advent of literacy*, news from battle fronts was still conveyed at snail’s pace or subsequently reported via the *printed word* in poems, plays, speeches, and books, some of which later came to be regarded as classics. Examples include the inscriptions on Babylonian, Assyrian, and Egyptian monuments, the Homeric poems and the famous Epic of Gilgamesh, originally written (c. 2100–1200 BCE) on clay tablets in cuneiform script in praise of the warrior king of the Mesopotamian city-state Uruk. Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, purportedly written toward the end of the 5th century BCE by a military commander in the previous century and originally treated as a state secret and confined to royal archives, is today remembered and recommended for its treatment of war as an unwanted disruption of cosmic harmony, its appeal to the moral importance of keeping “the people in harmony with their leaders, so that they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril”, and its comparison of war fighting

¹⁰ Aleksandra Ketlerienė, “‘We’re in Cold War Two’ – interview with British historian Niall Ferguson,” *LRT*, 5/10/2024, accessed on 10/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2w3jrx73>

with flowing water and proverbs such as “supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting”. Thucydides’ early 4th century BCE *History of the Peloponnesian War* is another example of military retrospection, remembered for its observation that in war “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must”.

Well into modern times, despite the advent of the printing press, written texts about war were very much *ex post* meditations on past battles. Often considered state secrets and their circulation restricted to ruling circles – there was not yet a reading public agitating for freedom of the press – these texts were mainly manuals in the arts of war, of the kind written by Raimondo Montecucoli, who served the Habsburgs throughout the Thirty Years War. Considered a state secret and published only posthumously, his mid-17th century treatises on the art of war made a case for the superiority of standing armies and examined topics such as fortifications and sieges, the arts of march and counter march, and the tactical difficulty of combining infantry with cavalry and artillery, muskets with pikes. The Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz’s *Vom Kriege*, also published posthumously in 1832, fits this pattern. Emphasizing that in an age of popular mobilization, war is a continuation of politics using other means, and that “the direct annihilation of the enemy’s forces... is the overriding principle of war”, it is nowadays considered a classic, even though it is a text hailing from an era marked by the absence of war reporting and the slow-paced delivery of news, as happened, for instance, at the now-famous 1815 Battle of Waterloo, when although there were 56 newspapers published in London, not one of them arranged in advance to relay news from the battlefield. Carried by horses and a rowboat, news of the historic defeat of Bonaparte by Wellington’s army less than 350 kilometres from London took 3 days to reach there – and 40 days to New York and 100 days to reach Sydney by sailing ship.

Mass Broadcasting

Things began to change during the 19th century. Wind-powered packet ships, so named because they carried packets of news-laden mail, began regularly sailing the Atlantic. They were followed by paddle steamers and iron steamships and coal-fired passenger locomotives. As printing presses began rolling out daily newspapers whose stories were spread with the help of trains and ships, followed by the telegraph and early radio broadcasting, *news of war underwent electrification*. Time-space barriers shrivelled, but much to the chagrin of the first war reporters, there were still time delays across vast geographic distances. It was in this context that the mid-19th century witnessed the invention of the profession of what Charles Dickens called the war correspondent (the character Jefferson Brick is a fictional war correspondent of *The New York Rowdy Journal* in *Martin Chuzzlewit*). Figures such as William Howard Russell, a fellow Irishman who reportedly liked to drink hard and chain smoke cigars when on missions, filed remarkable dispatches by telegraph for *The Times* of London from Crimea and the bloody fields of the Indian Rebellion, the American Civil War, and the early 1870s Franco-Prussian War. Although Russell apparently disliked the new-fangled phrase “war correspondent” as much as some military commanders disliked his pioneering coverage of the diseased realities of war, his reports, particularly of the Siege of Sevastopol (1854-1855) and the rout of the British Light Brigade cavalry by Russian forces, earned him a wide readership among a literate public witnessing for the first time in the modern world the horrors of war, up front and almost in real time.

The full electrification and time-space shrinkage of war reportage was to happen only during the 20th century. The beginnings of *mass broadcasting of war* are traceable to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. That conflict was not only the first modern war that resulted in victory for an Asian power at the expense of a European-based army. It was the moment when, for the first time, war journalists collaborating with

Lionel James, who reported for the *New York Times* and the *Times* of London, experimented with radio technology. To overcome the old problem of interference with telegraphed messages by operators at relay stations – reports were often censored, or their contents falsified – he provided these newspapers with news of battles from an offshore steamboat equipped with a jury-rigged radio transmitter mast tower. His opening report from the first “press boat” dedicated to war correspondence was successfully transmitted via the British-controlled, leased territory Weihaiwei and published the next day. “I am at sea on board the *Times* steamer *Haimun*, en route to Chinampo”, he wrote. “The military developments foreshadowed in my previous telegrams should be taking place very soon, as, according to later information, the ice is disappearing fast”.¹¹ James’s first report was filed and published on 15 March 1904, but his breaking news adventure lasted only a month. Confronted by Japanese government suspicions and Russian charges of espionage, James dismantled and abandoned the boat, from which he had sent 10,000 words of copy, and returned to slow-motion reportage.

Notwithstanding such spluttering false starts and setbacks, which are normal in the invention and diffusion of new communications technologies, the reshaping of the conduct and public experience of war by the application of radio, and then film and television technologies, became a defining feature of the 20th century. Electronically mediated messaging within the ranks of whole armies was normalized. By conquering illiteracy, distance and time lags, radio paved the way to the mass broadcasting of government propaganda to large audiences captivated by the weirdness of strange voices entering the home, factories and offices, bars and restaurants, and public squares. Radio reached into zones of everyday life untouched by newspapers and print technology. It nurtured popular cultures of profit-driven entertainment and helped to whip up nationalist energies and military sentiments. Just as Franklin D. Roosevelt enchanted mass audiences and prepared them for war by means of his pioneering radio fireside chats, so shortly after his first radio speech in 1925 the thunderous voice of the former journalist and newspaperman Mussolini helped spread the spirit of “each village and school must have a radio” fascist militarism through the airwaves of Italy, the country where radio broadcasting evolved under a totalitarian government to become a source of fascist entertainment, as in the broadcasting from Berlin of the 1936 Olympics, and an instrument of battle, for instance during the invasion of Ethiopia.

Marshall McLuhan accurately remarked that just as the Second World War was a radio war, the Vietnam War was the first *television war*. He noted the historic significance of the way journalists for the first time used portable, battery-powered video tape “portopac” cameras and filed filmed dispatches by jet aircraft overnight to supply television outlets news for the next morning’s broadcasts at home. “We are now in the midst of our first television war”, he wrote in *War and Peace in the Global Village*. “The television war has meant the end of the dichotomy between civilian and military. The public is now participant in every phase of the war, and the main actions of the war are now being fought in the American home itself”.¹² His point was not only that war had been rendered highly visible and its butchery made more emotionally palpable – that war had drawn closer to people’s lives and clawed at their senses as immediately “as the smell of a cigarette”. McLuhan invited us to remember the key historical point: in any age, in matters of war, the reigning forces and relations of communication structure how war is prosecuted, how war is reported, why this or that war is deemed significant, and how it “feels” to victims and witnesses alike. On the battlefield and in the living room, the medium shapes the sent messages – and the public reception of those messages.

McLuhan’s emphasis on the shaping power of communication infrastructures was soon to be confirmed by the advent (during the late 1960s) of satellite broadcasting which he predicted would wipe out time-space

¹¹ “First messages from the Yellow Sea,” *The Times*, accessed on 10/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/nhc8s2u5>

¹² Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 134.

differences and promote a sense of “all-at-onceness” among audiences huddled around television sets at various points on our planet. McLuhan did not live to watch *CNN*’s non-stop 1991 Gulf War coverage. The first truly global coverage of war in real time, it was a watershed moment that signalled the end of space-time lags and paved the way for a string of novelties, even making possible, as in Mogadishu in Somalia a year later, live reportage that featured journalists such as Christiane Amanpour armed with lights, cameras and microphones bizarrely greeting the beach landing of US marines in Operation Restore Hope.¹³

Meta Wars

Early satellite war reportage broadcasting relied on analogue technologies that conveyed data as electronic signals of varying frequency or amplitude added to carrier waves of a given frequency. What McLuhan could not have foreseen was the communications revolution to come: the shift to digital technologies that would have transformative effects on the *modus operandi* of armies and their weapons of war and immerse audiences in a strange new world of digitally integrated newspapers, radio, and television, the multiplication of gatekeeper and gate watcher media platforms, a satellite/fibre optic/wi-fi-linked world in which war is mediated by PCs, laptops, smartphones, cameras, podcasts, search engines, audio books, chatbots, video games, livestreamed music, digital marketing, instant messaging, cloud storage, and audio-visual conferencing tools such as Webex, Zoom, and China’s Voov.

Enter the 21st century world of *meta wars*. The dynamics I am about to describe and interpret are “meta” (from Greek meta [μετά], a preposition meaning “after, beyond”) in that wars are undergoing a metamorphosis and plunging us into a new world, a world that our great grandparents would not easily have recognized. For the first time in history, wars depend fundamentally on digital technologies which electronically generate, process, store, and distribute text, sound, and image information in strings of discrete, 0s and 1s binary format state. A quantum computing revolution may be coming – as James der Derian, Stuart Rollo, and other scholars are anticipating – but for the moment, in our age of meta wars, whole armies are regionally and globally connected, coordinated, and commanded using digital technologies.

These technologies – the dynamic routing of ARPANET is the best-known example – were of course born of military-industrial complex funding and efforts to build “hot potato” communications networks of networks that could survive partial destruction, such as by nuclear war. Without the “modernizing”, real-time, speed-of-light streamlining offered by these technologies originally based on packet switching, decentralized networks, remote login, the conjoining of networks of networks using communication protocols, notably TCP/IP, the United States could not nowadays efficiently and effectively command and manage its 800 military bases in over 75 countries. Without digital communications technologies, including its own global navigation system Beidou “Big Dipper”, China’s PLA couldn’t operate its Djibouti military base, experiment with sophisticated cyber weapons capable of mimicking, tricking, and confounding the signal systems of enemy satellites, land a spacecraft on the far side of the Moon, or operate its space station Tiangong (Heavenly Palace). Smaller armies are similarly restructured along digital lines: in major reforms of recent years, for instance, the Ukrainian army dispensed with combat units larger than battalions. Its fighting structures became flatter, its command and intelligence operations more tightly connected digitally.

What is more, in the era of meta wars, as you know well, armies’ weapons systems double as lethal digital tools: long-range hypersonic missiles such as Trident 2, Minuteman 3, sea-launched SM-6s, and Russia’s Avangard; AI machine learning systems like Israel’s Habsora “The Gospel”, Lavender and Where’s Daddy? that sift through data, monitor and identify targets, and operate as “mass assassination

¹³ “Operation Restore Hope Beach Landing, Mogadishu Somalia,” YouTube, 3/1/2014, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/ypy2c8cc>

factories”; killer drones dispatched from the armchairs of distant control rooms; precision-guided bombs; digitally guided, state-of-the-art Stinger and Javelin missiles; bombs disguised as booby-trapped wireless communications tools; Saab’s NLAW anti-tank weapons; Apache attack helicopters whose Hellfire missiles are capable of liquidating targets 11 kilometres distant; machine-gun armed Sharp Claws robots, and wifi-operated Mule 200 vehicles stationed by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) on China’s high-altitude frontier with India are just some of the best-known examples of the digitization of war’s weapons.

Gamification

McLuhan spoke of the coming of war into our living rooms, but he could not have foreseen another development unique to our age of meta wars: the novel ways digital technologies enable the multimedia 3D public representation of war in which governments and armies and various media platforms draw audiences into war’s battlegrounds. We could say that the “common sense” of war is dramatically transformed. *War comes to have a meta quality in a second sense.* As the Chinese scholar Shi Zhan has pointed out, digitized war undergoes a gamification. It is as if Mark Zuckerberg now designs war reportage; or, looking back, that the meta wars of our age are taking their cue from Neal Stephenson’s science fiction novel *Snow Crash* (1992), in which digitally networked 3D technologies draw socially connected users into what seem to be “realistic” virtual worlds; or perhaps from Ernest Cline’s novel *Ready Player One* (2011), in which individuals inhabit multiple virtual worlds in a single universe dubbed “the OASIS”. For the first time in history, meta wars are coming to have a digitally augmented reality quality. This is true in several senses.

We live in times in which armies train their soldiers to handle the fog and friction of war using battlefield simulator programmes, as the US Marine Corps has done by teaming up with the Prague-based Bohemia Interactive Studio to develop the gaming platform Virtual Battlespace 2, called VBS2. In the age of meta wars, war reporting has also gone digital. A large gaggle of skilled and seasoned journalists and public relations and marketing professionals function as the playwrights of war reporting. Drawing together the online and offline worlds, their job as game creators is to usher audiences into virtual rooms where they “inform” them of the progress of a war. The dramaturgs speak what could be called meta speak. Colonel Natalia Humenyuk, spokeswoman for Operational Command South, tells Ukraine television audiences things like “the counteroffensive in the south of Ukraine is moving forward. The Russian Army is demoralized”. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov chips in: “Our military does not hit social facilities and residential neighbourhoods and does not hit civilians”. There are familiar figures like Biden’s Karine Jean-Pierre and Jake Sullivan, and Mark Regev, an unfunny Melbourne-born spokesman for the Israeli government, who is proudly on record as saying repeatedly that genocide allegations against Israel are “preposterous” and that the current ICJ case against Israel is in effect the “defence of Hamas”, and that “as a democracy we’re keeping civilian casualties to a bare minimum”.¹⁴

And, for the first time in the history of war, AI-generated digital spokespersons deliver mainstream media war reports. Ukraine’s Victoria Shi is the pioneer: a character modelled on a Donetsk-born singer and former contestant on Ukraine’s version of *The Bachelor* reality show, she doubles as a stiff and smooth-talking propagandist who boasts that she is a proponent of “cutting-edge wartime diplomacy”, fluent in 30 languages, and “always looks good in the morning because I do not go out late at night”.¹⁵

In the age of meta wars, these mainstream media performances are laced with war room briefings by stern-faced, uniformed military commanders, commentaries by “accredited” experts, images of smoke-

¹⁴ See: Mark Regev, “Israel seeks to minimize civilian casualties; Hamas does the opposite,” X, accessed on 10/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/nntvebe2>

¹⁵ “We Interviewed Ukraine’s New AI-Generated Spokesperson,” YouTube, 3/5/2024, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/3hjp2chd>

filled battlegrounds, fighter jets overhead, tanks and troops, wrecked buildings, burning fields, and displaced civilians. Multi-game player dynamics are the norm. Soldiers using fake social media accounts to conceal their whereabouts demonstrate their prowess to publics back home by uploading images and clips of their strikes and manoeuvres to Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok. Government intelligence directorates call upon citizens trapped in battle zones to identify collaborators and to reveal the enemy's whereabouts. Civilians are invited into the game rooms. The Russian government approves the use of popular video games such as Roblox and Minecraft (owned by Microsoft) in which Russian soldiers battle against Ukrainian Nazis and conquer Ukraine territory. Civilians join cyber-armies on Telegram Messenger to feed on-the-spot, battlefield intelligence to their armed forces. Vloggers such as TikTok influencer Rom Carmi¹⁶ provide running text and video commentaries. The stories they tell are copied, posted, re-posted, mashed up, liked, disliked, and circulated by mainstream media platforms elsewhere in the world.

Not to be forgotten are the lone shooter star performers. Almost every day or evening a president of a war-ravaged country who was previously a comedian and television actor, the star of a series called *Servant of the People*, delivers moral appeals for military help to domestic and global audiences. The president's staged performances are carefully tailored to their target audiences. At home, he says things like: "I thank each of our combat brigades, all the soldiers and commanders who are destroying the enemy with all their might and, in particular, using our drone capabilities with precision".¹⁷ When abroad, what is said to the members of the Knesset (Russia is preparing a "final solution" for Ukraine) differs in tone and substance from what is told by video link to parliaments in Athens (Ukraine is one of the Orthodox countries that was Christianized by the Greeks), in Ottawa (where he received several standing ovations during a speech laced with references to Vancouver, the CN Tower in Toronto, and other cities and landmarks), and in New York (where the president rejects Chinese and Brazilian peace plans to end a three-year war by denouncing their diplomats as apologists of colonialism).

Media Spectacles

Notice how until this point of the lecture there's been almost no mention of the blood and guts and mental and environmental sufferings produced by meta wars. It has long been said that war is hell on earth – when war begins, the devil opens hell, runs an ancient English proverb – but a weirdly puzzling feature of meta wars is the way the hellish brutality of battlefield violence is both neutralized and rendered aesthetically attractive to media audiences. My thought is that war becomes an elaborately staged, picturesque tableau designed to transfix audiences and wall them off from war's horrors. Savagery and ghastliness are no more. War becomes bloodless. It undergoes a form of beautification more subtle and more insidious than ever happened in the era of radio, film, and television. In the 1920s, broadcast media was used for the first time by ruling groups to beautify war, as the German literary critic Walter Benjamin spotted. In the age of mechanical reproduction, he commented, war came wrapped in "illusion-promoting spectacles" charged with "aesthetic pleasure". Despite Benjamin's one-sided conviction that fascism was the prime driver of this aestheticization of war – he had little to say about the parallel contributions of Soviet communism – and although in the difficult political circumstances he probably didn't get to watch *Triumph des Willens* (1935), *Olympia* (1938), and other propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl or the Nazis' 1944 documentary "Beautiful Theresienstadt: the Führer Gives Jews a City",¹⁸ he correctly foresaw that electronic media

¹⁶ See his TikTok account: "@barefoot_rom," TikTok, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/pxzb7w7x>

¹⁷ "In July, Our Warriors Have Used More Drones Than the Occupier – Address by the President," *President of Ukraine*, 6/8/2024, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/nkvv9858>

¹⁸ "Theresienstadt: A Documentary Film, 1944," *Perspectives*, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdhd6f5x>

could have electrifying effects – that radio and film would be used to adorn war for mass consumption by turning its life-and-death horrors into multimedia entertainment.

The public beautification of war – I speak descriptively, if sarcastically – is among the oddest features of meta wars. These wars are “meta” in the sense of gamification to which I have already alluded. It is as if audiences living outside of war zones are invited to enter and immerse themselves in rooms in which wars are no longer violent, beastly, or soul destroying, entertainment rooms in which nobody has their brains or chests blown out, or is crushed under rubble, left limbless, scarred emotionally for life, or forced to live with broken hearts in ruined ecosystems. Yes, media reports are awash with dazzling images of drones in the sky, tanks advancing across fields, guns fired by ear-muffled soldiers in uniform, clouds of black smoke, and blackened buildings. Yes, there are press conferences, footage of diplomats sitting around flagged tables, war cabinet meetings, official warnings about “terrorism”, and predictions of progress. And, yes, there is non-stop deployment of metonyms, keywords, clichéd phrases. Incursions, evacuations, unconfirmed reports, footholds, confrontations, ground assaults, front lines, power targets,¹⁹ safe zones, abandoned villages, military analysts speaking on the condition of anonymity, intelligence reports, ceasefire negotiations, civilians fleeing fighting, overcrowded shelters, tent camps, and peace talks. But war is no longer death’s feast.

The fighters, victims, and witnesses who experience meta wars first-hand will tell you that they live day and night with war in their hearts and minds and inside their guts, but that is not how war is presented by prime ministers and presidents, politicians, government public relations specialists, and military spokesmen. In their statements, speeches, and press conferences, death and destruction are conspicuous by their absence. In democracies and despotisms alike, governments do more than ensure that “truth” is a casualty of war. They indeed tell lies, bullshit, and peddle calculated silence. In the age of meta wars, states and armies do all they can to frame, slant, block, and airbrush the images, sounds, and stories of war that audiences may find disturbing. Russian-style despotisms and their state-controlled news platforms such as *Vremiya* specialize in crushing and criminalizing their opponents’ messages. Twitter is throttled; Facebook access is subjected to slow downs. There are no angels in metaverse wars. The US and its allies hunted and hounded Julian Assange and forced him to suffer different forms of imprisonment without trial for 14 years because he decoded and circulated the collateral murder video tapes and other disturbing war documents. Video footage of Ukrainian soldiers executing captured Russian soldiers is now hard to find on the Internet. In the big cities and rural villages of Ukraine, almost everyone knows a family that has lost someone in the fighting. Dead flowers from funerals litter roads, and graveyards are filling up, but exact details of the numbers of Ukrainian soldiers daily killed and wounded in action are officially unavailable.

George Orwell was right to warn against war hawk politicians who twist syntax and words and “spray forth the correct opinion as automatically as a machine gun spraying forth bullets”.²⁰ But I doubt whether he could have imagined how in the multimedia age of meta wars there is much more than government censorship and slant and the spraying forth of correct opinions. *War is aestheticized*. Government platforms regularly tout media narratives designed to win public support for war, minimally by portraying war as bloodless. There is war on the language of war, new forms of meta speak in which we hear of “surgical strikes”, “autocrats”, “smart weapons”, “collateral damage”, “civilian casualties”, “humanitarian aid”, “terrorism”, “safe zones”, “ceasefires”, and “special operations”. Military manoeuvres come wrapped in multimedia publicity designed and handled by armed forces public relations professionals. Commanding officers are trained in the arts of avoiding bad publicity and gruesome realities. Government statements,

¹⁹ *matarot otzem*: the total destruction of hospitals, high-rise residences, universities, mosques, and other civilian targets.

²⁰ “The Principles of Newspeak,” in: George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949), Appendix.

reports, and press kit handouts are given to journalists. The point is to turn war into a spectacle, a tactical shooting stage performance, an Arma 3- or Battlefield 1-type video war game created and directed by the governing authorities. There are daily press conferences, where it is affirmed that there is no censorship beyond what is necessary for military victory and the safety of the troops. But war is inside their words. There are calculated morale boosts and good news from the front. A special place is reserved for men and women of bravery, legends, and heroes, some of them unknown soldiers who have laid down their lives or, like a combat pilot known as the “Ghost of Kyiv”, said to have scaled the peaks of impossibility by singlehandedly downing dozens of enemy planes (raised eyebrows later forced the Ukraine Air Force Command to retract the hype and to urge Ukrainians “NOT to neglect the basic rules of information hygiene”²¹). At every moment, the goal is to disparage the adversary, peddle the conviction that this war is a just war, deny that things are going wrong, publish instant denials, refuse to confirm or comment on operations, throw out the dead bodies when nobody is watching, and bathe bad news in satisfying silence.

Governments are not the sole source of the beautification of war. In the so-named capitalist democracies of our age, for-profit corporations and taxpayer-funded media platforms such as the *BBC*, the *CBC*, and *Deutsche Welle* contribute to the framing of war as a bloodless video game. Researchers examining the *BBC*’s online coverage of the Gaza and West Bank war in the first two months after 7 October, for instance, noted the scarcity of grisly images and how Israeli victims were typically said to have suffered “massacres”, “murders”, and “slaughter” whereas Palestinians were merely “killed” or “dead”. Across the Channel, media anthropologist Celia Chirol, the first person to study French coverage of the aftermath of 7 October, has shown that during one week in mid-January 2024, the most-watched 20 news programmes on taxpayer-funded *TNT* (*Télévision Numérique Terrestre*) devoted only 29 seconds of airtime to Gaza and the fate of Palestinians. *Arrêt Sur Images* (Freeze-Frame) similarly reported that during 30 hours of airtime and 46 news bulletins in a 10-day period (4-15 February 2024), France’s most popular TV channel, *TF1* (un) and *France 2* news broadcasts devoted just 5 minutes to the situation in Gaza.²²

Why do commercial and taxpayer-funded media frame war coverage in this way? Most obviously, they have a habit of bowing down and sucking up to government censors. They buckle because government press conferences and media handouts provide cheap and easily recycled raw material suitable for headlines, as in Israel, where IDF press statements get kid gloves treatment from every mainstream news outlet.²³ Editors also dread government threats of harassment, arrest, and closure. They fear those moments when, for instance, George W. Bush warned media critics of the Iraq invasion that they would be treated as the fellow travellers of terrorism. It had consequences. In its study of the first week of reportage of the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, the Washington-based Project for Excellence in Journalism reported that in more than 40 hours of material there were no images of people wounded or killed by gunfire. During the weeks that followed, public awareness of battlefield fatalities sharply declined, thanks to US government prohibitions on journalists filming coffins of dead American soldiers. The upshot was that bad news didn’t happen. Journalists became wartime “churnalists”, foot soldiers of the beautification of war, victims of a new kind of Stockholm syndrome in which journalism becomes the tame and willing public relations instrument of military strategies.

Europe’s largest commercial publisher and media giant Axel Springer SE similarly shields audiences from war’s darkest horrors. Kneeling before German government warnings, it requires all its employees to take an oath of unconditional loyalty to Israel; staff who dare raise questions about its genocidal war

²¹ Ines Eisele, “Fact check: The ‘Ghost of Kyiv’ fighter pilot,” *Deutsche Welle*, 5/4/2022, accessed on 10/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/yckf2nca>

²² “Gaza war vanishing from French news channels amid fears of media bias,” *RFI*, 7/3/2024, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/3t9ve39d>

²³ Sebastian Ben Daniel (John Brown), “How Israeli journalists carry out PR for the army,” *+972 Magazine*, 19/2/2024, accessed on 10/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2cdpndw7>

on Palestinians risk being taken in for questioning by senior management and summarily fired, while Springer's flagship publications such as Germany's *Bild* (once described by Axel Springer as his "dog on a chain") regularly celebrate the government's "Israel is Germany's Staatsräson" policy and run headlines like "God bless the IDF". On 10 October 2023, *Bild*'s deputy political editor Filipp Piatov summarized the editorial line: "Germany has ONE main task at this time. Germany must support Israel and cover its back until the Israeli army has achieved its war aims. No matter how long it takes or how hard the war becomes".²⁴ In a memo headed "from Mark" concerning "coverage guidance", *CNN*'s editor-in-chief Mark Thompson similarly told his journalists that although *CNN* would report the background history and human consequences of the Israeli war on Palestinians, "we must continue always to remind our audiences of the immediate cause of *this current conflict*, namely the Hamas attack and mass murder and kidnap of civilians".²⁵ Giant media platforms – Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube – meanwhile indulge the beautification trend by issuing "community guidelines" banning the use of "inappropriate" images of violence and practising what's known as "shadow banning": behind-the-scenes editorial decisions to close email accounts, to remove content linked to government-sensitive keywords, and to airbrush hashtags such as #FreePalestine and #IStandWithPalestine.

The camouflaging of death by non-governmental media happens for other reasons. Constrained by cost-cutting and personnel safety considerations, commercial and public service media platforms have mostly done away with foreign correspondents and no longer place journalists on battlegrounds. Gone are the days of Christiane Amanpour reporting live on the ground in wartime Somalia. Outsourced news is the new normal. In their early Ukraine war coverage, the *BBC* and most other mainstream Western media platforms outsourced news to "embedded" local fixers and influencers, figures such as Orysia Khimiak, former director of a Ukraine PR firm named Reface and contributor to the Kiev-based Projector Institute, whose leading slogan is "Glory to Ukraine. We will win!". It's true that in high-risk war zones, helmeted and flak-jacketed foreign journalists are still seen huddling together into clusterfucks (the word dates from the Vietnam War period). But the result is the same: on terrain of which they have little direct knowledge, dependent upon interpreters because they have little or no grasp of local languages, they resort to hearsay and hype and regurgitate materials issued by local military commanders. Encouraged to join "pool systems", first used in the 1991 Gulf War, they are warned not to report the grisly or ghastly. Media celebrities like *CNN*'s Anderson Cooper parachute in to broadcast hastily selected "human interest" stories befitting of their big name, big salary status. There are unending updates, but depth and context go missing in action. Cross-checking of the stories these embedded journalists despatch – reports based on statements issued by Myanmar's armed forces (Tatmadaw) or Ukraine army false flag operations aimed at triggering Western outrage and NATO intervention, for instance – becomes well-nigh impossible. For reasons of career advancement and reputational glory, they acquiesce in HQ "script approval", the practice whereby scripts in the field are checked and approved by senior editors back at base prior to recording.

Sensationalist, audience-hungry, *breaking news journalism* is also heavily responsible for the "war washing" of war. While non-governmental media usually pride themselves on their accuracy and truthfulness, outsourced war reportage often resembles a fairy tale with a breaking news bias. Acutely aware of the need to attract viewers, listeners, and readers, journalists employed by for-profit and public service media suppose that in a media-saturated world of infinite distractions and unending hunger for entertainment and the consumption of novelty, journalism must hunt for "clicks". The more clicks a headlined story

²⁴ "Aus Solidarität mit Israel verzichtet „Bild“ darauf, über palästinensische Opfer in Gaza zu berichten," *UBER MEDIEN*, 20/12/2023, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/5cjslx98>

²⁵ "*CNN* staff say network's pro-Israel slant amounts to 'journalistic malpractice'," *The Guardian*, 4/2/2024, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/46z2eh6y>

gets – stories of newborns beheaded and burned in enemy ovens, for instance – the higher the chances of more paid subscriptions, increased advertiser revenues, and company profits. That’s why they preach 800 words and practise the slam dunk headline, short stories which incite excitement and a sense of being “in touch”. Boredom is their enemy; “hookthink” (Rob Wijnberg) is their weapon. Yet they know that attentive audiences can be sickened by violence. That’s why they run “Warning: The following footage contains disturbing images” signs; and why they obey senior editors who tell them that the domestic principle “if it bleeds it leads” doesn’t apply to the terrible blood-and-guts dynamics of faraway wars.

Coded obsession with the shocking and scandalous, blind fixation on the new, hyping things up: these are among the vices of breaking news, profit-seeking churnalism. But mainstream breaking news journalism helps beautify war in a less obvious way. It manufactures *superficiality*. When it comes to war reporting, devils are usually in the details, but detailed investigation takes time, patience, professional skill, and money. The paradox is that within the otherwise intense commercial media coverage of military conflicts, few mainstream journalists bother to investigate how meta wars are ecocidal, makers of junk, spreaders of plastics, poisoners of fields, farms, and forests, and juggernaut destroyers of our planetary ecosystems. These journalists do not tell us what it is like to have a bullet in the back; how a mother feels when reading bedtime stories as bombs fall, or when her child is sickened by scabies or polio or starves to death in her arms; why soldiers swearing profanities force women and girl children at gunpoint to undress and burn their underwear; or why distraught relatives deem it their duty to piece together the remaining body parts of a whole family decimated by an enemy bomb. And breaking news journalists rarely sink their teeth into the political economy of meta wars.

Thumbnail coverage of the most anodyne kind is instead their specialty. “Several NATO countries are now supplying Ukraine with heavier weapons, to enable its army to push back against Russia’s army”, reported *BBC News* on 5 May 2022, ten weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Next day, *The New York Times* added: “Britain will offer an extra 1.3 billion pounds (about \$1.6 billion) in military support and aid to Ukraine”. Journalists who write such lines appear to forget that the words “offer” and “supplying” are euphemisms for the profit-driven “selling” of weapons of mass destruction; or that their reports bolster public silence about state-backed corporations like Moscow’s Rostec, or BAE Systems, Europe’s largest arms contractor, or Raytheon, the world’s biggest guided missile producer, or the global giant of profit-seeking giants, the arms manufacturer Lockheed Martin.

Then there’s the superficial treatment or outright silence of mainstream commercial journalists about the most historically significant issues raised by any given war. Consider the eastern Mediterranean war that erupted exactly one year ago today. Was the Hamas assault on Israel a limited operation to strike at Israeli military targets and to seize hostages – a small-scale intervention that managed to catch the IDF’s Gaza Brigade so unawares that most of the 1,400 fighters who scaled fences and expected to lose their lives returned alive, hostages in hand? Or was the Hamas operation designed from the outset to spark a regional war, to lure Israel into an unbearably long war it couldn’t possibly win because that outcome would ultimately require the elimination of all Palestinians, Hezbollah, Al-Fajr (the armed wing of Al-Jama‘a al-Islamiya) in Lebanon, and Yemen’s Houthis, the toppling of the Iranian regime, and the full-scale, permanent stationing of the US and its allies in the region?

And more radical questions: Why have mainstream Western media platforms, politicians, and institutions such as universities blindly memorialized 7 October by rhetorically linking today’s anniversary with the words “Hamas”, “terrorism”, “anti-Semitism” and Israel’s sacred “sovereignty” and “right to exist”? Might 7 October have a different and more profound historical significance? Can we speak of a Gaza moment in which a military assault finally exposed to the whole world as never before a colonizer’s brutal contempt

for international law, the hypocrisy of its Western government allies, and their active complicity in the destruction of their cherished “rules-based order” plus the flourishing of lawlessness, unrestrained violence, and US-led might-makes-right geopolitics? Could it be that the mega-destructiveness of meta wars of the Grozny-, Aleppo-, and Gaza-model – the extermination of innocent civilians and their ecological habitats by air-dropped MK 80 series 2,000-pound bombs, for instance – signal the beginning of a new era in which the distinction between nuclear and “conventional” non-nuclear weapons is finally rendered obsolete?

Indifference

Mainstream journalists rarely pose such tough questions let alone provide compelling answers. Their reticence has pathological consequences. It should come as no surprise that *citizen indifference* toward the cruelties and horrors of war is among the most remarkable features of meta wars. It’s true that geographically speaking indifference is unevenly distributed; when the claws and teeth of a meta war sink into people’s skins, their indifference is quickly dissolved by concern laced with fear and anger. It’s true as well that there are contexts, contemporary Israel and the US after 9/11 for instance, wherein mainstream media coverage of meta wars has aroused bellicose passions and loud calls by citizens to wage war on enemies ruthlessly, to the bitter end of total victory. For a variety of reasons, my judgment is that these examples of the passionate mobilization of war-mongering masses are outliers in decline. I may be wrong, but the age of democratic wars, considered by many scholars to have been born of the second half of the 18th century, is coming to an end, most obviously because, functionally speaking, the weapons of war, most of them overkill weapons, render obsolete mass mobilization and universal conscription.

It’s true that the warrior songs are still sung – Aux armes, citoyens; Formez vos bataillons; Marchons, marchons [Shoulder arms, citizens; form your battalions; march, march] – but the figure of the arms bearing citizen is nowadays replaced by audiences whose awareness of destruction and killing is muted by incuriosity, detachment, impassivity. When judged by the old standards of the war-fighting citizen, the citizens of countries such as Germany, France, Canada, and the US who tolerate meta wars might be said to have forfeited their citizenship; ancient Greek thinkers would have called them idiots (ιδιώτης), people selfishly preoccupied with their own lives and unconcerned with public affairs. When it comes to meta wars, the resigned torpor of the indifferent is the opposite of the highly idealized textbook figure known as the informed citizen, a citizen who sits atop the world because they purportedly know everything about everything. And the indifferent person is unlike what I have elsewhere called the wise citizen, a figure curious and caring about the world because they understand that since rulers often get things badly wrong because they don’t know everything about everything, the duty of citizens is to be on the lookout for abuses of power wherever they happen.²⁶

In striking contrast to these images of citizenship, the indifferent person, charmed, calmed, and pacified by media spectacles and the beautification of war and overloaded with other multimedia stories and multiple life commitments in a hyper-digitalized world, withdraws from public life. Philosophically speaking, their indifference is the negation of difference. Indifference means “not different”. It implies “undifferentiated” neutrality or impartiality, disinterest and incuriosity about someone or something, a lack of connection or care about matters such as war and peace, right and wrong, good and evil. The indifferent know there are wars happening, but they choose to ignore their details. With a shrug of the shoulders and frowns on their face, they turn their back on their realities. When the topic of war arises and when public disagreements about wars erupt, they say things like “Whatever”, or ask “Who cares?” or “What am I supposed to do?”, without expecting a reply. As in Alberto Moravia’s classic novel *Gli indifferenti*

²⁶ John Keane, *Democracy and Media Decadence* (Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 243-245.

[The Time of Indifference] (1929) and Jonathan Glazer’s film *The Zone of Interest* (2023), the indifferent person is practised in the arts of detachment. The indifferent may be well satisfied with life, happy, cheerful, and perfectly polite. They typically have multiple preoccupations such as money, family, friends, sport, work, hobbies, and holidays. They may be bored with life or generally uninquisitive about the world. They curse politicians and have little or no faith in high-level politics; their indifference is oiled by gut convictions that in matters of government, power, and world affairs their views count for zilch. It is as if the indifferent are alive and dead.

In matters of war, we could say that if engaged curiosity is half of life then disengaged indifference is half of death. The indifferent character is benumbed by war. They are certainly not ignorant. Especially when confronted by large-scale cruelty and suffering, indifference requires unconscious and conscious “work on the self”, notes the anthropologist Ghassan Hage.²⁷ Psychoanalytically speaking, it is more than “denial”²⁸, but it is hard to plumb the depths of people’s indifference, or to make generalizations. Is their indifference ultimately a form of strategic avoidance, a calculation rooted in fears of losing their jobs and ruining their own reputations? Do their hearts say yes, but their attention spans say no? Are indifferent people marked by the spirit of “slacktivism” and the belief that in the online identity supermarket “shopping is more important than voting”?²⁹ Do they have “bicameral minds”³⁰ split between conformity to power and self-concern and incapable of meta-reflection on why they are indifferent about meta wars? Are indifferent people “copium” addicts, in the words of Geert Lovink,³¹ who deal with cascading disasters by abandoning politics, killing time, going easy with life, quitting the hustle, ordering takeaways, chilling, and constantly checking their socials?

I don’t know. But what I can say is that although indifferent people catch glimpses of war’s horrors, they’re gripped by feelings of emotional disconnection and cold unconcern. They’re busily preoccupied with their own cluttered lives. Gripped by war fatigue, they say suffering isn’t their thing. They conclude that these wars are not their business, or beyond their control, and that, when all is said and done, nothing can be done about them because wars are the way of a corrupted and greedy world run by rich and powerful elites.

Rebel Journalism

You may be tempted to ask which is worse, ethically speaking? A people who beatify their government leaders and idolize their armed forces, fanatics who bay for revenge against enemies, blood on their hands, brimming with pride about the systematic use of “field questioning” (torture), the destruction of the enemies’ universities and schools and saying “if you need to kill a million, let it be a million” and other such things recorded in Mehdi Hasan’s documentary *Israel’s Reel Extremism* (August 2024)?³² Or people who don’t care, who knowingly look away, shut their mouths and spinelessly do nothing in the face of genocidal wars and eco-destruction? A people whose indifference implicates them in horrific crimes and who are in this sense as bad, or worse, than people willing to back extreme violence against other people and their planetary habitats?

Again, I do not know whether this question is correctly framed, or how it could plausibly be answered, but for me what is clear is that there is a disturbing affinity between indifference and the media beautification

²⁷ Ghassan Hage, “‘Zone of Interest’ as an Ethnography of Indifference,” *Journal of Genocide Research* (16 May 2024).

²⁸ Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001).

²⁹ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

³⁰ Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2000).

³¹ Geert Lovink, “Copium compendium,” *Eurozine*, 8/1/2024, accessed on 10/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/59x7zc82>

³² See at: Mehdi Hasan, “Our New Zeteo Documentary,” *Zeteo*, 11/8/2024, accessed on 3/12/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4jse7wm3>

of war. Bloodless war breeds heartless detachment. That being so, perhaps the more pertinent question is: pressured by meta wars and rumours of yet more wars to come, how durable is this indifference? Granted that people have multiple commitments and that healthy civil societies cultivate a measure of Stoic care about some things and indifference toward others, can indifference toward meta wars withstand widespread feelings that our world is hurtling out of control and that the probability of a major global war is rising?

Since uncertainty about the future is our fate, we can't by definition answer this question, but worth noting is that inside indifference is lurking the possibility of its undoing. The word itself, probably with roots in the Latin *indifferentia* and Middle French *indifference*, carries within it connotations of the *opposite* of impartiality. Indifference is marked by semantic instability, we could say. If indifference is not having a preference between knowingly different options, not preferring something to another, lacking motivation, being unconcerned, unmoved or apathetic, then it is a word which reminds us that indifference has a flipside, that indifference is convertible into its partner opposite: the choice to differentiate apparent sameness, to differ from orthodoxy, to be engaged with care, concern, and compassion for the fate of others.

Here I wish to draw things to a conclusion – and a more hopeful ending – by reflecting on a *third and final sense of the word “meta”*: if “meta” is used as an adjective/prefix to describe the way any given theme or subject is turned into an object of self-reflection, as in meta-theory, a theory about theory, or meta humour, joking about the ways jokes are cracked, then striking is how digitally networked infrastructures of communication in which war is conducted, reported, and gamified enable the growth of new forms of war reporting which trigger *self-reflexive meta-coverage of the realities and ethics of war*.

Energized by the opportunities offered by digital communications networks, the *rebel journalism* I am about to describe is unprecedented in the history of human wars. In the era of meta wars, we all know, multimedia information is simply and cheaply recordable, copyable, and distributable. Since all institutions functionally depend upon flows of digital information, they are vulnerable to leaks of sensitive information done by courageous individuals – that is the Wikileaks principle, the contestation of dominant narratives in the form of secrecy-busting counter-reportage. So long as they have adequate funding, alternative journalism platforms are also easily constructed. They prove that direct challenges to mainstream commercial platforms and government-controlled media outpourings are technically much easier than in earlier times. Cat and mouse contestations are thus commonplace, helped by the fact that digital communication networks have a *distributed* – not centrally controlled – quality. At their core, distributed networks disavow single centres of command and control. They comprise a myriad of connected nodes that enjoy a measure of mutual independence. When for any reason any of these nodes “malfunction” or are “disabled”, for instance by government censors, the whole network continues to function as a distributed network. That also means that information sent through a distributed network by rebel journalists can quite easily bypass a node that is controlled or has been rendered inoperable. In distributed networks, it follows that the power of actors to produce and circulate narratives is never centrally controllable. In contrast to the age of radio and television broadcasting, existing hierarchies of power are always vulnerable to disruption in the form of digital mutinies and media storms.

These familiar features of digital communication help to explain why rebel journalists are capable of contesting and breaking the vice grip of mainstream media platforms, their fetish of breaking news, their censoring effects, and their efforts to beautify war. In place of the “lone star” contrarian, reality checking journalists of the era of newspapers, radio, and television – brave and eccentric “ink in their veins” heroines and heroes such as William Howard Russell, Lionel James, Martha Gellhorn, George Orwell, Dorothy Drain, Ernie Pyle – today's rebel journalists more commonly operate in networked teams of less-well-known, experienced commentators who publish their carefully researched accounts and on-the-ground reports, often

with the help of larger media platforms such as *Al Jazeera*, *Haaretz*, and *The Guardian*. Rebel journalists are a diverse group. In their ranks are experienced journalists (David Hearst, Rami Khouri, Zeina Khodr, Gideon Levy, and Antony Loewenstein are examples), medical professionals, human rights observers, public intellectuals, self-trained investigators and writers, satirists, and the staff of inter-governmental agencies and commissions. They work alone or belong to not-for-profit bodies such as Médecins Sans Frontières, *Middle East Eye*, Oxfam, Wikileaks, the Lancet, +972, Amnesty International, the Global Investigative Journalism Network, Antiwar.com, and *Quds News Network*. Their work uses tools such as satellite imagery and social media feeds to unpick the decadent effects of breaking news journalism. Challenging lies and propaganda and stirring things up, pitting their own “truths” against the “truths” of the beauticians of war, they function as gate watchers of the mainstream gatekeepers. In matters of war, these rebel journalists are “semiotic guerillas”, in the words of Umberto Eco. Under difficult conditions, risking their lives (as did Shireen Abu Akleh and Ismail al-Ghoul and hundreds of other rebel journalists) when operating in battle zones, without fat-cat salaries, subject to gunfire, rocket attacks, abduction, torture, and constant internet shutdowns, they set off digital explosions. Refusing the gamification of war, they show and tell things frankly to publics, from the ground up. We could say that they do all they can to ensure that war is mediated more democratically: more openly, less entertainingly, in more plural and frighteningly down-to-earth ways.

Examples of rebel journalism are to be found in most war zones, including in the Arab world, which since the 2011 uprisings has witnessed the emergence of independent magazine-style websites specialized in investigative and data-journalism created by teams of writers, interviewers, academics, photographers, and graphic designers. Examples include “Mada” in Egypt, “Inkyfada” in Tunisia, Lebanon’s “Daraj”, and “Raseef22”, the satirical “not a news site...news is just organised gossip” platform “Alhudoob” in Jordan, and the Women Journalists Committee at the Palestinian Media Assembly. The unfinished war that erupted over a decade ago in Syria arguably reset the compass. In that war-battered country, rebel journalism – not mainstream platforms such as *Fox News*, *Deutsche Welle*, *CBS News*, or the *BBC* – made a real difference in the way war in that country was reported to the wider world. Thanks to the bravery of war crime monitoring bodies such as the Violations Documentation Centre and the search and rescue group known as the White Helmets, volunteers armed only with medical equipment and mobile phones, the world came to have a better sense of the terrifying earthly hell of a meta war. An unfinished war that has forced more than half of the pre-war population of 22 million to flee their homes. Massive “double-tap” aerial bombardments of densely populated areas. Entire neighbourhoods and cultural sites ruined. Barrel bombs. Chemical weapons attacks. Death by starvation in besieged cities. Nearly 7 million people living outside the country as refugees, or as stateless asylum seekers. Half a million deaths, most of them civilians. Tens of thousands tortured in government-run prisons. Beatings with metal rods, plastic pipes and electric cables. Flying carpets (sandwiching victims strapped face-up on foldable boards). Scalding with boiling water. Upside-down hangings with wrists tied behind the back. Amputation of prisoners’ body parts by trainee doctors using no anaesthetic. Genital mutilation. Rape. Slaughterhouse executions.

The Democratization of War

I would like to draw this lecture to a close by pointing to the way this new kind of war journalism has a novel significance, in two ways. Most obviously, in both form and content, rebel journalism *redefines the meaning and practice of journalism*. Journalism (from early 19th century French *journalisme*, from the older Anglo-French *journal*, *jurnale*, a day, a day’s work; from Old French *journal*, daily; from Late Latin *diurnalis*) was in early modern times originally understood as the reporting of daily events through the field of print media such as government gazettes and newspapers. With the advent of radio and television, and the early 20th century founding of J-schools and journalism training programmes, the word journalism underwent

a semantic stretching: journalists were those who collected, edited, and distributed news, commentary, and feature materials through print as well as via radio and television. Thanks to the unfinished digital communications revolution, a similarly profound redefinition and enrichment of the form and content of journalism is happening. In the new definition, journalists are those who investigate, prepare, and communicate daily and in-depth stories to publics via an even wider range of media including digital newspapers, radio, streamed motion pictures, and television, but also through magazines, books, blogs, podcasts, webcasts, and social media and social networking sites.

A product of this transition, rebel journalism has another, deeper significance. It helps to *democratize war*. By this unfamiliar phrase, I don't mean – nonsensically, foolishly, facetiously – that war and its weapons are shared equally among peoples, or that Hobbes' state of war of each armed person against every other armed person should be extended to the whole of our planet, as if democracy promotes something like a macabre reversal of the historic “ballots, not bullets” principle. In previous writings, I have tried to make the case for a radically different understanding of democracy by explaining how democratization involves much more than constructing and defending free and fair elections, written constitutions, the rule of law, and civil liberties. Democratization is a process that runs deeper and has more far-reaching effects. It disturbs prevailing “realities”. When its spirit and substance take root in communities of people, democratization renders contingent and refuses all forms of top-down power masquerading as “normal” or “natural” or “necessary”. It ruptures reigning narratives, widens mental horizons, and enables people to embark on their own adventures. Democratization makes room for unexpected beginnings. It has a punk quality. “Democracy breeds possibility”, the South African writer Njabulo Ndebele once told me. “People's horizons of what is thinkable and doable are stretched, and it is for that reason exciting, infuriating, punctuated by difficult, quarrelsome, ugly and beautiful moments”.³³

When seen in this way, the unorthodox phrase democratization of war thus means something counterintuitively different than what you might suppose: put abstractly, the phrase highlights the point that democracies tend to “denature” war. Vibrant democracies sensitize citizens to the complexity and contingency of power relations in which wars irrupt. In matters of war, their citizens are encouraged to question dominant versions of “reality” and to see that “truth” has many faces. With no historical guarantees of success, democracies break down indifference and cast doubts on the “beautility” of war. They expose war's non-necessity and, thus, challenge citizens to consider the possibility of its future prevention and eradication.

How does this “denaturing” of war happen? Most obviously, well-functioning democracies enable public rejections of war's necessity because they functionally depend upon clusters of institutions – parliaments, civil societies, rebel journalism, independent judiciaries, human rights organizations, legal commitments to war crimes tribunals, freethinking poets, writers and musicians – which facilitate citizens' efforts to organize themselves and to speak and act freely in opposition to war and its horrors. Robust democracies also experience normative anguish and shame about the cruelty, death, and destruction that war brings. If democracy, to put things simply, is a set of institutions and a whole way of life structured by non-violent means of equally apportioning and publicly monitoring and restraining power within and among overlapping communities of people who live within eco-settings according to a wide variety of morals, then war, the unwanted burdening and destruction of the bodies and souls of humans and their ecosystems, is anathema to its spirit and substance. Killing others violates the ethical principle of the equality of people and respect for the earthly habitats in which they dwell. But since wars also destroy ecosystems, break human hearts, poison decency, disable bodies, traumatize survivors and pave the way for follow-up

³³ Cited in: John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2009), p. 853.

wars, democracies equally encourage more realistic and pragmatic (consequentialist) public objections to wars. As war becomes ever more savage, democracies stir up citizens' sense that "very few wars are worth fighting" and encourage them to see that "the evils of war are almost always greater than they seem to excited populations at the moment when war breaks out".³⁴ Which is why, finally, wars brazenly launched by so-called democracies in the name of democracy tend to breed citizen resistance fuelled by loud public complaints about the lies, alibis, double standards, ecological risks, and moral decadence of politicians, governments, mainstream journalists, and arms manufacturers.

Rebel war journalism stands at the front lines of this slow-motion democratization trend. It is true that for all their intelligence and bravery, and despite the great violence they suffer, rebel journalists don't and can't stop the killing or bring about peaceful and just endings of meta wars. But this objection about their inefficacy misses my point: despite its apparent failure to halt destructive meta wars, rebel journalism does something different. It does more than problematize meta wars by chipping away at their beautification: rebel journalism keeps alive and nurtures *political hopes for an end to war*.

This observation might seem naïvely utopian but consider for a moment the possibility that rebel journalism rejuvenates, with an unprecedented sense of urgency and unique multimedia tools, older ways of thinking and living that regard war as an eradicable feature of human affairs. Michael Howard's *The Invention of Peace* famously noted that past human societies mostly took war for granted and built expectations of its periodic necessity into their governing arrangements.³⁵ The wings of the human condition were plumed with war's feathers. God was often invoked, as in "by thy sword shalt thou live" (Genesis 27.40) and "Hear, O Israel...let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified, because of them; for the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you" (Deuteronomy 20. 3). Sun Tzu (c. 490 BCE) bathed his account of the arts of war in earthly similes, comparing the rapid movement of armies with the wind and their compactness with a forest: "In raiding and plundering be like fire, in immovability like a mountain. Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt".³⁶ Or war was regarded as a functional necessity of worldly government, as in Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532), where it is said that "the chief foundations of all states, whether new, old, or mixed, are good laws and good arms" and that a prince "should have no other aim or thought, nor take up any other thing for his study, but war and its organisation and discipline, for that is the only art that is necessary to one who commands".³⁷ For these and other given reasons, fighting others in groups to the bitter end was regarded as inevitable, an unfortunate, or desirable necessity blessed by deities and as natural as sunrises and sunsets, summer and winter, birth and death. War's inescapable necessity was presupposed even when war was regarded "not as a leap into catastrophe but as an apt means of resolving disputes, something to be fought with as little passion as possible and only until one opponent is ready to yield to the other".³⁸

Then during the 18th century, especially in the heartlands of war-ravaged Europe, for the first time, war bred profound doubts about war's necessity and sparked serious interest in the arts of making peace. The writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau on war and peace – *The State of War (early 1750s)* and *A Lasting Peace through the Federation of Europe (1756)* – mark the beginning of a long tradition of doubts about whether war was an inevitable misery of the human condition. In scholarly circles and later among diplomats,

³⁴ Bertrand Russell, "The Future of Pacifism," *The American Scholar*, vol. 13 (Winter 1943-1944), pp. 7-13.

³⁵ Michael Howard, *The Invention of Peace: Reflections on War and International Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

³⁶ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War* (London: Routledge, 2015), chapter 7.

³⁷ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), chapters 12, 14.

³⁸ István Bibó, *The Art of Peacemaking: Political Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 66

cross-border institution builders, and citizens' peace movements, war came instead to be regarded as an avoidable disaster, a blood swollen monster, an evil that could be banished from the world by citizen resistance, "enlightened" government and social and political re-organization.

The new rebel journalism embraces these concerns. It honestly exposes war's cruelties. It warns against the potentially suicidal and ecocidal consequences of the shrinking gap between "nuclear" and "conventional" weapons such as hypersonic missiles and vacuum bombs. It reminds us that civilians – children, mothers, the disabled and elderly, not armies or states – are today the real losers of battles. By reporting in undiluted and self-reflexive form the horrors of war, rebel journalism contributes to its "denaturing". It does much more than destroy lies, satirize hubris, rupture silence, sharpen the public visibility of war's awful violence, and issue warnings that escalations of war in the name of total victory risk total extinction. It goes well beyond putting an end to the beautification of war. It is a dream bird promising fresh beginnings.

Rebel journalism invites us to jump over our own shadows, to see that war in all its ghastliness is not just contingent, but abolishable. In its meta commitment to describing, analyzing, and interpreting the rotten realities of meta wars, rebel journalism dares in effect to say the unsayable. It calls on citizens to exercise their right not to suffer meta wars. It says that people everywhere have the power to force the hand of the beauticians of war. It demands that mainstream journalists, corporate merchants of death, and political leaders hellbent on funding and fighting wars must now own up. Rebel journalists sketch the contours of a new democratic hope: that since war in all its ugliness is increasingly absurd, that in growing numbers of cases it is simply not necessary, there is a time coming when, for the sake of the health of our planet, meta wars of every kind will have to be banned.

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Bilal Mohammed Shalash*

Emergency Telephone: The June 1967 War and Its Impact on Nablus in the Correspondence Between Hamdi Kanaan and Akram Zuaytir**

هاتف طوارئ: حرب حزيران/ يونيو 1967 وآثارها في نابلس في مكاتبات حمدي كنعان وأكرم زعيتير

Abstract: This study examines the correspondence between Hamdi Kanaan and Akram Zuaytir in the immediate aftermath of the June 1967 War. Their exchange highlights how the war disrupted traditional means of communication such as visits and telephone calls but provided the occasion for an alternative form of communication based on personal relationships that helped solve newly arising issues facing the city of Nablus. Often functioning as a kind of diary, this correspondence sheds light on unknown events and documents the formation of political positions and ideas, as well as socioeconomic conditions and shifts under the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The correspondence reveals activities and events that Kanaan concealed in his memoir, such as his covert strategies to bolster the resilience of the inhabitants of Nablus and the surrounding region. The language of the letters conveys the psychological states of both men, the compound factors that shaped their opinions over time, and the impact such supportive personal bonds can have on the ability to persevere and survive.

Keywords: Hamdi Kanaan; Akram Zuaytir; June 1967 War; Correspondence; Nablus; Israeli Occupation.

الملخص: تتناول هذه الدراسة جزءاً من مكاتبات حمدي كنعان وأكرم زعيتير خلال الشهور التالية لحرب حزيران/ يونيو 1967. وتبين هذه المكاتبات أن الحرب عطلت وسائل الاتصال التقليدية، مثل الزيارات والمكالمات الهاتفية، ولكنها أتاحت ظهور شكل بديل من الاتصال يقوم على العلاقات الشخصية التي ساهمت في حل القضايا المستجدة في مدينة نابلس. تستكمل المكاتبات ما حُجِب في مصادر أخرى؛ إذ تحولت إلى ما يشبه اليوميات، فقد وثقت نشأة كثير من المواقف والأفكار السياسية، وبعض ظروف الأرض المحتلة الاقتصادية والاجتماعية، والتغييرات الحاصلة مع الزمن من جراء الاحتلال الإسرائيلي لفلسطين. وكشفت بعض ما تستر عليه كنعان في مذكراته، مثل طرائقه الخفية لتعزيز صمود أهالي نابلس خصوصاً، وسائر أهالي المنطقة عموماً. وقد حفظت لغة هذه المكاتبات الأوضاع التي عاشها كنعان وزعيتير، والعوامل المركبة التي أسهمت في تشكيل حالتهم النفسية، وأثر الدعم المؤسس في العلاقات الشخصية في الصمود والبقاء.

كلمات مفتاحية: حمدي كنعان؛ أكرم زعيتير؛ حرب حزيران/ يونيو 1967؛ مكاتبات؛ نابلس؛ الاحتلال الإسرائيلي.

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Though place and time have distanced us, you remain in my heart and always in my thoughts and prayers. I hope to renew our connection through thoughts and prayers, for the Prophet PBUH said: “Communication between people when settled is maintained through visits, and while traveling through correspondence”.

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin al-Mahdi¹

“My grandmother would send us a card each evening which we received by first delivery the next morning. She would then receive our reply card the same evening”. It is not for nothing that the postcard became known as the “poor man’s telephone”.

Martha Hanna²

Hamdi Tahir Kanaan³ and Akram Umar Zuaytir⁴ visited one another often in the years prior to the June 1967 war. The two had been classmates at An-Najah National School in Nablus in the 1920s. After losing contact when Zuaytir came under pursuit by the British colonial authorities, they got back in touch and deepened their friendship upon Zuaytir’s return home in June 1949.⁵

However, Zuaytir, who had relocated to Jerusalem and then Amman during the subsequent years, found himself cut off from his home in Nablus after the city fell under occupation on 7 June 1967 and was unable to visit Kanaan, who remained in the occupied city. Thus, the war and the subsequent separation of Palestine from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan prompted Kanaan and Zuaytir to turn to letter-writing. Their letters, delivered by travellers, became their only means of communication. When external telephone lines and internal communication were periodically cut to punish the people of the rebellious city, correspondence through letter writing became the “emergency telephone” of the occupied land.

Beginning with the First World War, various types of postal correspondence became a prominent source of historical insight, as people sought to maintain severed connections. Some historians argue that this type of correspondence is an unreliable source of information given the external and internal censorship that prevented correspondents, particularly those on the battle lines, from providing an accurate depiction of the war and its horror. However, such letters can provide intimate and novel insights into war, particularly

¹ Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Yahya al-Suli, *Qism Ash’ar Awwal al-Khulafā’ min Kitāb al-Awrāq*, J. Heworth Dunn (ed.) (Cairo: al-Sawi Printing, 1936), p. 37.

² Martha Hanna, “War Letters: Communication between Front and Home Front,” in: Ute Daniel et al. (eds.), *1914-1918-Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin, 2014), p. 3.

³ Born in Nablus, Hamdi Taher Kanaan (1910-1981) graduated from An-Najah National School before taking up work in commerce. He was appointed to the Nablus Municipal Council on 20 November 1950, with his membership later renewed by election. He was elected Mayor of Nablus in October 1963, and during the occupation of Nablus, he headed the city’s municipal council. In this capacity, he became one of the most prominent Palestinian figures in the occupied territories, maintaining his mayoral seat until his resignation in March 1969. He wrote his memoirs about the occupation of Nablus and its aftermath in June 1969. The author published a book on this topic: Bilal Mohammed Shalash (Study and Verification), *Shay’un ‘Ābir: Nāblis Taht al-Ihtilāl (Ḥuzayrān/ Yūniū 1967 – Ādhār/ Māris 1969)*, *Mudhakkirāt wa-Wathā’iq Ḥamdī Ṭāhir Kan’an*, Taher Hamdi Kanaan (intro.) (Beirut/Doha: ACRPS, 2023).

⁴ Born in Nablus, Akram Umar Zuaytir (1909-1996) graduated from An-Najah National School before briefly attending the American University of Beirut. He then worked in education until resigning in December 1929 to devote himself to journalism. He became Editor-in-Chief of *Mir’āt al-Sharq* newspaper in 1930, then *al-Hayāt* in 1931. He was one of the most prominent writers to incite armed revolt between 1929 and 1936, and a founding member of the Arab Independence Party. Zuaytir played a central role in the early days of the 1936-1939 revolution in Nablus and was arrested by the British colonial authorities on multiple occasions. He left Palestine to support the revolution from abroad, heading the Arab delegation to Latin America to support the Palestinian cause in 1947. After returning to Nablus that year, he worked for the General Islamic Conference in Jerusalem, then for the Jordanian government as ambassador to Syria (June 1962-August 1963), to Iran and Afghanistan (August 1963-1964), then as Minister of Foreign Affairs (February-December 1966). He was appointed Minister of the Hashemite Royal Court from 15 June 1967-25 April 1968.

⁵ Zuaytir’s diaries attest to the depth and closeness of this relationship. For example, Zuaytir appointed Kanaan as a member of a five-member committee to advise the guardian of his brother Adel Zuaytir’s children in his will, which he wrote before undergoing surgery at the American University Hospital in Beirut in 1957. See: Akram Zuaytir, “Waṣīyyatī,” 17 November 1957, a handwritten document preserved in the ACRPS Palestine Memory Archive (PMA), referred to hereinafter as PMA.

its psychological and social dimensions.⁶ War correspondence extends beyond soldiers on the front lines and families seeking reassuring news, as Martha Hanna recalls in the above quote. Attempts to draw on networks of traditional social relations and friendships as an alternative to official ties can also be seen in the letters of historian Marc Bloch to André Mazon during the Nazi occupation of France.⁷

The radical effects of wars are all-encompassing. The correspondence of Edward Jeffries, who served as mayor of Detroit during the Second World War, with friends became a valuable source for the social and economic effects of war and offers deep insights into personal relationships during this era of transformation.⁸ Kanaan, like Jeffries, harboured ambitious dreams for his city. However, unlike Detroit, Nablus fell under occupation, and Kanaan became the mayor of one of Palestine's most prominent cities during the 1967 war. Like Marc Bloch, Kanaan sought to overcome the effects of the war through his traditional social network and friendships. This included his communication with Zuaytir, who was appointed Jordan's Royal Court Minister on 15 June of that year.



Hamdi Kanaan in his office at the Nablus Municipality. Photo by Marc Riboud, 2 June 1969. PMA.

Beginning in 1917, Zuaytir's extensive personal collection of letters documents Palestinian resistance to colonial projects.⁹ His correspondence with Kanaan, spanning from 22 June 1967 to 4 March 1969, includes 33 letters from Kanaan to Zuaytir, and 17 letters from Zuaytir to Kanaan.

The correspondence between Zuaytir and Kanaan is distinct because it was not heavily censored; letters were sent clandestinely, evading the scrutiny of the colonizer and other surveillance. Hence, they preserved

⁶ Hanna, p. 2; Martha Hanna, "A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 108, no. 5 (2003), pp. 1338-1361; Shay Hazkani, *Dear Palestine: A Social History of the 1948 War* (California: Stanford University Press, 2021). Hazkani examines letters from soldiers during the 1947-1949 war sourced from official archives. Such archives have preserved letters that were looted from war fronts or captured by surveillance. Hazkani notes that war correspondence did not begin during this period, but due to the development of postal services, it became a comprehensive public service, as reflected in the volume and content of correspondence. For earlier examples of correspondence from the world wars and the Arab-Islamic tradition of war correspondence, see: Umar Ahmad al-Rubayhat, "Rasā'il al-Ḥarb fī Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā' li-Abī al-'Abbās bin 'Alī al-Qalqashandī: Dirāsa Taḥlīliyya Fanniyya," *Majallat al-Zarqā' li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Insāniyya*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2015), pp. 150-161.

⁷ Agnès Graceffa, "Academic solidarity under Occupation: The letters of Marc Bloch to André Mazon (December 1940-July 1941)," *Revue historique*, vol. 674, no. 2 (2015), pp. 383-412.

⁸ Dominic J. Capeci Jr. (ed.), *Detroit and the 'Good War': The World War II Letters of Mayor Edward Jeffries and Friends* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁹ This collection was a rich source for: Bayan Nuwayhid al-Hout (ed.), *Wathā'iq al-Ḥaraka al-Waṭaniyya al-Filasṭīniyya 1918-1939: Mīn Awrāq Akram Zu'aytir* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1979). Some of Zuaytir's correspondence has been published previously elsewhere, including: Saoud El Mawla (intro.), "Risālat Shakīb Arsalān ilā Akram Zu'aytir," *al-Fikr al-Arabi*, vol. 3, no. 23 (November 1981), pp. 240-248.

what some other primary sources written in war time, including Kanaan's own memoirs, did not. Initially, these letters served as an alternative to official correspondence between Kanaan, in his capacity as mayor, and the executive bodies in Amman. They described living conditions, developments on the ground, and the state of public morale as it oscillated between exhaustion and hope. They ranged from declarations of support to discussions of personal economic affairs, all while maintaining social and economic connections that had been severed by the war and occupation.

The value of Kanaan and Zuaytir's letters is magnified by their preservation of the colonial subject's voice, particularly given that the colonial narrative dominates most archives. Secondary sources barely question this narrative, as the aftermath of the 1967 War has been studied almost exclusively based on colonial sources, both primary and secondary. In addition to the archives, the most relevant sources to this study include the personal writings of Shlomo Gazit and the documents he had access to as head of the Unit for the Coordination of Operations in the Territories.¹⁰

The experiences of most of the colonized Palestinian population have been obscured by the absence of archives documenting their perspectives since the 1967 war and the subsequent expansion of the Zionist colonial project on their land. Based on a collection of handwritten letters from the period after the war (June-October 1967) alongside other primary sources, this study emphasizes the value of correspondence through letter writing as a means of contextualizing events in occupied Palestine after the 1967 war, unearthing details obscured by the absence of official archives and the deaths of many figures who lived through that period.

Every Age Has Its Emergency

I miss you. I wish I could meet you after this long absence. Being far away is so much worse than an ordinary absence ... I have tried to contact you over and over, but the only answer is no answer.¹¹

The first of Kanaan's letters to Zuaytir was written on 18 December 1962, coinciding with the start of Zuaytir's government service and his appointment as Jordan's ambassador to Syria. Zuaytir's departure marked the end of their visits and the beginning of their correspondence. While communication via telephone was possible, despite the difficulty of external communication from Nablus, Kanaan preferred to use hand-delivered letters. This allowed him to discuss political issues or criticize the authorities without the fear of surveillance through traditional postal systems or intercepted telephone calls. Given the expanded Israeli occupation of Palestinian land following the 1967 war, the "emergency telephone" became even more vital, though it required a different, semi-encrypted language to navigate the dangers posed by the new border guards and surveillance.

War Correspondence

The Early Days

On 7 June 1967, tanks of the 37th Armoured Brigade stormed the eastern gate of Nablus. After a short-lived tank battle, Brigade Commander Uri Aharon Romm (1926-2009) stationed himself in the home of former MP and minister Rashed Sidqi al-Nimr (1911-1974), where he waited for Kanaan to be brought

¹⁰ See Shlomo Gazit, *Military Zones—Five Years* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Education and Culture, 1972) [Hebrew]; Shlomo Gazit, *The Carrot and the Stick: Israeli Rule in Judea and Samaria* (Tel Aviv: Zamurah-Bitan, 1985) [Hebrew]; Shlomo Gazit, *The Bait in the Trap: Thirty Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories* (Tel Aviv: Zamurah-Bitan, 1999) [Hebrew]; Shabtai Teveth, *The Cursed Blessing: The Story of Israel's Occupation of the West Bank* (New York: Random House, 1971).

¹¹ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 18/12/1962, PMA.

before him. A few hours later, Kanaan appeared, and the city's document of surrender was written, although Kanaan did not sign it.¹²

On 22 June 1967, Zuaytir was awaiting news from his hometown and commencing his work as Jordan's Royal Court Minister when a courier came to him from Nablus with a letter from Kanaan. According to Zuaytir's diaries, Kanaan wrote to him:

My brother, no doubt you are eager to hear our news. Their entry was relatively calm compared to previous experiences, as there was no noteworthy destruction. About 80 died, most of them young men who climbed the mountains to resist in vain, and others who were killed in their homes, as well as some members of the fleeing Arab Army. The people of Tulkarm, Qalqilya, and the surrounding villages were evacuated. Some came on their own, and once the schools reached capacity, others were brought by the army and abandoned in the village of al-Badhan and on the roads of Balata, Askar, Rafidiya, and Nablus. Two days later, they allowed everyone to return, except the people of Qalqilya, Artah, and Zeita. After we had taken back a fair number of people, they ordered us to stop. However, these people require attention and Red Cross intervention. The country is suffering badly from unemployment and hunger and is on the verge of famine. They could easily mitigate the impact of events and restore life to normal, but it seems that they intend to [slowly] destroy us.¹³

In this first letter to Zuaytir, Kanaan highlighted two issues that had arisen because of the war. The first was the displaced, particularly those from the Qalqilya area. The second was the looming threat of famine, compounded by a stifling economic crisis in Nablus, given the high unemployment rate and extensive loss of livelihoods. Both problems reflected the occupation's intention of forcing people to leave their homes.¹⁴

The Beginnings of Self-Rule

They [the occupation authorities] have begun shaping public opinion, encouraging the idea of self-rule using the language of the United Nations and promises of protection, but we have thwarted this effort, the consensus being that we are part of Jordan.¹⁵

This statement piqued Zuaytir's interest and occupied a major part of his subsequent correspondence with Kanaan. In his first letter on 28 June 1967, he commended Kanaan for his stance against self-rule. Zuaytir took care to mention his new position in the Royal Court, saying, "My current position is very useful, despite the difficult circumstances. If you have ideas, I can implement them, and we are actively working with the Red Cross to prevent famine".¹⁶

In his reply to Zuaytir in early July 1967, Kanaan first reassured him about the well-being of relatives, then expanded on what he had alluded to in his previous letter regarding self-rule. He wrote:

As I mentioned earlier, the authorities are promoting the establishment of an autonomous government for the West Bank and Gaza. Despite this offer coming at the height of the nightmare

¹² Zuaytir, *Yawmiyat*, 5/6/1967, PMA. For an image of the handwritten document and details of the occupation of Nablus from the occupying power's perspective, see: Meir Haruvini et al. (ed.), *Our Brigade in the Six-Day War* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence Publishing House, 1969), pp. 34-47 [Hebrew]

¹³ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 22/6/1967, PMA.

¹⁴ The Minister of Defence for the occupation at that time, Moshe Dayan, spoke of this policy at a meeting of senior military figures responsible for the military government after their first battle with Nablus on 10 November 1967, saying, "On the one hand, we are interested in encouraging [Palestinians to] emigrate and leave the territories, and on the other hand we must continue to maintain a reasonable minimum standard of living". Dayan stressed the need for a selective economic policy, implying that unemployment would not necessarily encourage emigration, but, rather, become an explosive factor. See: "Determining the Guidelines for General Policy in the Territories," minutes prepared by Shlomo Gazit dated 12 November 1967, IDF Archive, File No. 1970/117/71. In a subsequent letter to Zuaytir, Kanaan wrote: "I made tremendous efforts to prevent people from leaving, and I told the authorities they could not leave without my permission. I personally checked the identities of those who wanted to leave ... Finally, things spun out of control in keeping with their [the Israelis'] policy of wanting people to leave, and [we resorted] to threatening drivers and using force [to prevent them from leaving], but people got away by paying the drivers exorbitant fares". "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/7/1964, PMA.

¹⁵ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 22/6/1967, PMA.

¹⁶ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 28/6/1967, PMA.

of occupation ... the proposal has been unanimously and decisively rejected ... But unfortunately, [Muhammad] Ja'bari, known for his hypocrisy and baseness,¹⁷ was the first [to support the idea], while Jerusalem was still reeling from the outcome of the war, so the rejection there was not as vehement as it was here. ... [W]hen I was unexpectedly questioned about what fate [awaited us] after the occupation... I said straight out that the natural thing was for us to be with our brothers in the East Bank.¹⁸

In his response to Kanaan on 5 July 1967, Zuaytir praised the unified stance taken by the people of Nablus, assuring his friend of the need to stand firm. He commended Kanaan's efforts and affirmed his complete solidarity with him. Responding to Kanaan's complaints in a previous letter about the poor economic conditions caused by the shock of war, Zuaytir wrote, "In any case, I hope you know, my brother, that I am prepared to share my salary with you. I would be happy to send you half of it at the end of every month, and if you need anything else from me, just say the word."¹⁹ Regarding the general political situation, Kanaan wrote:

I am pessimistic and I do not know why. People have done nothing to change their own situation, and the occupiers are taking measures that suggest they are here to stay, preparing for long-term projects. We hear on the radio about plans to transfer the Gaza refugees here.²⁰ Their officials speak of plans to transport water from Tiberias to the western Jordan Valley, and from the Baṭūf Canal to the plains of Qabatiya and Araba for irrigation, and to house the refugees. They have also begun to demand taxes and car licenses ... etc.²¹

Defiance Under the Radar

As the days passed, Kanaan continued to talk about the city's economic struggles and the danger of famine. In his letter of 3 July 1967, he noted that the occupiers appeared unconcerned about the issue, having taken no action to remedy the situation.²² In response, Zuaytir quickly read the letter to the King, who promised to instruct the Prime Minister to double his attention to the West Bank and provide the necessary supplies and financial support.²³ In addition to written correspondence, Kanaan also relied on oral messages to convey his concerns. Following his 3 July letter, he sent an oral message to Zuaytir with Abdul Rahman Abdul Hadi, suggesting solutions to some of the city's economic problem. Zuaytir was to present these suggestions to Prime Minister Saad Jum'a, who was fully prepared to help. Summarizing the matter in his letter to Kanaan, Zuaytir wrote:

The issue has two facets: operating funds for the municipality, and employee loans based on receipts. But the resulting difficulties, which I hope you can advise me on how to overcome, are delivering the money and arranging matters in a way that does not cause you complications. It would be helpful if you would write a detailed report on how things will be done. For example, can you come to Amman? ... The matter of cheques for merchants is out of the question and does not solve the problems! Might you, for example, come to Abu Shawqi's [Hassan al-Khatib's] orchard, and could something be sent to you by Abu Shawqi's son as an experiment? But then, how can you keep the matter under wraps when it requires lists and signed receipts from the

¹⁷ Kanaan's harsh words followed statements made by Muhammad Ali Ja'bari (1901-1980), the Jordan-appointed mayor of Hebron, at a press conference held on 16 June 1967, to the effect that the settlement of the Palestine question would preferably take place at a conference for representatives of Arab refugees from the west and east banks, with the participation of representatives of Arabs in Israel, to discuss their fate and future, and that he was prepared to take the initiative to hold such a conference. Among the statements attributed to Ja'bari was his assertion that the residents of Hebron hoped to become citizens of the State of Israel in one way or another.

¹⁸ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/7/1967, PMA.

¹⁹ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 5/7/1967, PMA.

²⁰ There is documented evidence of various projects prepared by the occupation to displace the residents of the occupied territories, most notably refugees from the Gaza Strip. See: Yoav Gelber, "The Program That Missed the Train: Exit from Gaza after the Six-Day [War]," *HaOme*, no. 201 (Spring 2016), pp. 44-57. [Hebrew]

²¹ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 22/7/1967, PMA.

²² "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/7/1967, PMA.

²³ Zuaytir, *Yawmiyāt*, 6/7/1967, PMA; Zuaytir, *Sanawāt*, pp. 85-86.

employees? We are at a loss here, but perhaps you can find a way out for us. I hope to receive your suggestions in writing, presented clearly and thoroughly, and I promise to follow up on the matter from here. I am with you all the way, as I appreciate the suffering my city is enduring due to this unemployment that threatens people with outright famine. Perhaps you will also inform me that a relief committee has been formed of reliable people, and ask me to arrange financial aid for it. Here also it is my duty to follow up on the matter, bearing in mind that efforts are ongoing with the Red Cross to send supplies. The Red Cross says the supplies are available, but what is needed is cash. However, the subject of supplies is all that can be discussed publicly. Everything else has to be agreed upon in secret.²⁴

The letter above reveals something Kanaan had been careful to conceal in his memoirs, namely, that he had facilitated a money smuggling operation to meet the needs of Nablus residents. Kanaan sent his reply immediately with Zuaytir's unnamed messenger, then followed it up with an additional letter in which he first confirmed their ability to properly distribute salary advances and aid, and their readiness to receive them from Abu Shawqi, i.e. Hassan al-Khatib.²⁵ "The employees are in a pitiful state", Kanaan added, "We managed to collect 6,000 dinars for needy workers from charitable societies and benefactors. We distributed flour to about 2,500 families, 50 kilos each, along with a little soap collected from the soap factories, and a bit of sugar and rice that we got from the agency [the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)]".²⁶

Prompted by the need to address the economic problem, Kanaan secretly requested a permit to travel to Amman from Israeli Minister of Defence, Moshe Dayan, so that he could meet Zuaytir directly and confront the officials with their obligations.²⁷ Seeing an opportunity to exploit the municipalities to ease the cost of military rule, Dayan approved the travel permit, and Kanaan arrived in Amman on 10 July 1967. Kanaan disclosed some details of this visit in his memoirs, noting that the meeting helped mitigate the economic crisis by paying employee salaries.²⁸ But Kanaan made no mention of the secret agreement revealed in the correspondence on a covert way to deliver the rest of the needed funds to the city. Upon Kanaan's return, he was prevented from spending part of the money he had brought with him publicly – an indication that the occupation authorities were caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to take advantage of Palestinian communications with Jordan to get others to foot part of the bill for upholding military rule, while on the other, they were determined to present the military government administration as the sole ruling authority in occupied Palestine.

In his letter dated 16 July 1967, Kanaan discussed administrative details for Zuaytir to convey to the relevant ministries, hoping that Zuaytir could speed up the procedures for the covert payment of salaries due to employees working for government institutions in the Nablus District.²⁹ Kanaan concluded, saying: "I await your response so that we can help the rest of the employees, who check with us constantly, especially since learning that I secured funding for some departments".³⁰

²⁴ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 28/6/1967, PMA.

²⁵ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 8/7/1967, PMA.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Dayan expressed this desire at a government meeting, saying: "It is a good idea to lead using local bodies, such as mayors, whose responsibilities can be expanded to neighbouring villages. In the area of administrative oversight, mayors who have expressed their desire to cooperate provide us with someone we can talk to. There's no need to pursue any other leadership style, since things can go on this way for a long time". Minutes of the Occupation Government Meeting of 18/6/1967, ISA, p. 16.

²⁸ Kanaan wrote in his memoirs about the Amman meetings: "My meeting with the brothers in Amman was full of generous sentiments, as if I had descended upon them from heaven; they were anxious to hear what was really happening with us. I met with His Majesty the King [Hussein bin Talal], the Prime Minister [Saad Jumaa], and some ministers, and I explained our situation to them. They responded to my request by handing me 40,000 dinars, half of which was for the Nablus Municipality, with the rest to be distributed among the municipalities of Tulkarm, Jenin, Qalqilya, and the Nablus Governorate. The Prime Minister gave me a cheque for five thousand dinars in aid for the needy, which I paid into the municipality's account. In like spirit, the officials in the Ministry of Education sent me back with the salaries of the employees in the Nablus and Jenin Governorates".

²⁹ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 16/7/1967, PMA.

³⁰ Ibid.

In a subsequent letter dated 22 July 1967 that was unavailable (perhaps Kanaan had concealed the letter because it spoke of covert procedures intended to evade colonial surveillance), Kanaan responded to a letter from Zuaytir that had arrived with the messenger “Khader”,³¹ and which had been sent with worker payrolls attached. Kanaan spoke about the payments sent previously to workers and the orphanage, thanking Zuaytir for his efforts to collect the salaries, and indicated that the occupation had paid the teachers’ salaries for June. In his letter, Kanaan inquired about Jordan’s Ministry of Education stance on this duplication of salaries, asking for Zuaytir’s opinion and awaiting reassurance regarding their approval of his actions, as well as the payment of the various departments’ salaries and pensions.³² Kanaan added in a subsequent letter:

I am waiting for the department payrolls so they can be disbursed, as [the employees] are checking in daily, and let it be for the entire governorate if possible, and the pensioners too. The judges refused to accept salaries and work, so it was necessary to send their payrolls promptly. The magistrate of Jenin was placed under house arrest and treated with some disrespect. I learned that the judges wrote to officials in Amman to ask their opinion on what to do, but received no response. It is in the government’s interest to give these matters special attention by appointing a committee to study and respond to them.³³

Kanaan concluded: “I have now learned from the education inspector [Rashid Saeed Marai] that all textbooks will be changed except for religious education, and that they have set 6/8 as the deadline for teachers to sign the forms.”³⁴ These forms require teachers to refrain from engaging with the Jordanian government and entail taking away their salaries.

The previous conclusion was part of a previous and subsequent dialogue in various correspondences. It touched upon some of the actions of the people of the occupied land against the colonial authorities, their efforts to replace textbooks, and attempts to impose a new reality on the educators.

The City’s Weapon: Strikes

By August 1967, the occupied land was on the brink of upheaval, with signs of revolution looming on the horizon. The first spark ignited in the Junaid area of Nablus when a resistance force attacked the military occupation, and the first house since the war was blown up. Amid preparations to reopen schools at the end of the long summer holiday, talk about a teacher and student strike began to circulate. Meanwhile, Kanaan received a document from Jordanian Prime Minister Saad Jumaa urging teachers and judges to refuse to cooperate with the occupation authorities. Kanaan had a different opinion, which he shared with Zuaytir in early August 1967. He stated:

In my opinion, even if it were permissible to pursue a strategy of non-cooperation in all other areas, it would still be out of the question for teachers to resort to non-cooperation without a justified reason – such as changing the curricula, for example. If non-cooperation were pursued without this justification, it would be a weapon against us, rather than a weapon in our interest. Therefore, I hope

³¹ In addition to “Khader”, who was mentioned in more than one letter, and Fathi Kamal mentioned by Kanaan, Mohammed Sherbini reported that his father, Mahmoud Mohammed Sherbini, then-secretary of the labour unions in Nablus and a prominent member of the printing workers’ union before the war, succeeded in smuggling an estimated seventy thousand dinars to the municipality, which he handed over to Kanaan personally. When Kanaan offered to pay al-Sharbini for smuggling the funds across the river, he refused. Mohammed Sherbini, personal interview, Nablus, 28/9/2021. Mahmoud Sherbini was later arrested on 25 March 1969 for smuggling Rashida Abd al-Hamid Ubaido (Salwa), a fighter with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine who was accused of participating in the operation to put explosives in the “Supersol” store on 21 February 1969, and was sentenced to three years in prison. *Lamerhav*, 6/10/1969, p. 2 [Hebrew]; *Al HaMishmar*, 6/10/1969, p. 8. [Hebrew]

³² “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 22/7/1967, PMA.

³³ “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 3/8/1967, PMA.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

that this issue will be studied and evaluated, as depriving nearly one hundred thousand students [of their education] without a valid reason is unacceptable.³⁵

He later added:

The issue of teachers is two-fold; the first relates to textbooks, and the second to the employment forms. Regarding textbooks, I spoke with a representative of the occupation's Prime Minister, who came to meet with me. I raised the issue of the textbooks and he agreed with my view, which is also shared by the city's military governor. The visitor told me that their government deals with matters logically, and therefore it is quite likely that our perspective will be accepted. Hence, I see no need to rush things until we see the outcome of these discussions. As for the matter of the forms, the city committee did not approve the teachers' point of view and said that they would be suspended as long as what is mentioned [on the form] is "Jordanian", and as long as, instead of bearing the name of the Israeli government, it refers to "the occupying army". Despite this, a group of teachers refuse. Thus, I do not think such matters should be left to them. Instead, they must abide by the decision of Amman, which will be responsible for salaries.³⁶

A statement issued later by Jordan's Minister of Education, Thouqan Hindawi following a meeting of the Jordanian Council of Ministers, advocated non-cooperation with the occupation authorities for two reasons: first, because of forms that included a written declaration that the nationality of the teachers was the same as that of the occupiers, and second, because of the imposition of new textbooks.³⁷ As Kanaan had indicated in his previous letter, the teachers' strike was not the only issue; other departments also needed to make decisions in this regard.

In a letter that reached Kanaan on 3 August 1967, Zuaytir indicated that judges also should refuse to cooperate with the occupation. Kanaan replied:

Although you have said they should not cooperate, judges were convinced a few days ago that they should come to work. The governor's view is that their work serves the public interest, because society cannot function without courts to secure people's rights and relationships, and because the authorities could appoint military governors. But these people do not apply the law the way judges do, and injustice will befall the people because of their rulings. In fact, a military judge was appointed in Jenin, and he began to issue extreme rulings, sentencing people to imprisonment without fines. Moreover, the situation for the judges in Nablus differs from that in Jerusalem, as the latter represents a special case. Thus, I have not informed them of your opinion expressed in your letter on 3/8, pending your reconsideration of this matter.³⁸

In addition to the strike, which became a major landmark in the early days of military rule and in the course of popular Palestinian resistance to the occupation, another issue emerged. The war had interrupted preparations for new municipal elections, which had commenced in May 1967. Kanaan wrote to Zuaytir: "As I have mentioned to you before, the municipal council's term expires at the end of this month, and the military governor of the West Bank has issued an order extending all councils indefinitely. Therefore, I think a similar order should be issued by our government",³⁹ which is exactly what happened.

³⁵ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," August 1968, PMA. In this letter, and within the context of leveraging Zuaytir's network to reach the media, Kanaan wrote: "A memorandum signed by the villages, Nablus, Hebron, and all other cities must be broadcast on the radio with the signatures, because it has been signed by a number of prominent Christians who took offense when they were not invited to sign Sheikh Abdul al-Hamid's memorandum. They thought your neglect was intentional, and they were criticized by the people of Lebanon. Hence, the memorandum needs to be broadcast along with the names [of its signatories]. A letter is attached with the signatures, and although this version doesn't contain all of them, we have another copy that was sent to the people of Jerusalem to be delivered to other official bodies".

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Bayān Wazīr al-Tarbiyya ilā Usrat al-Ta'līm fī al-Ḍaffa al-Gharbiyya," *Ad-Dustour*, 8/6/1967, pp. 1, 2; in: Munthir Faiq Anabtawi (ed.), *al-Wathā'iq al-Filasṭīniyya al-'Arabiyya li-'Ām 1967* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969), pp. 546-547.

³⁸ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 3/8/1967, PMA.

³⁹ Ibid.

Talk of the strike and the emergence of some forms of armed resistance in August 1967 marked the beginning of another form of resistance, which Kanaan referred to as passivity (*al-salbiyya*), which began with a call for a strike. In early August 1967, Kanaan wrote:

The winds of passivity began blowing here when, without consulting anyone, a number of girls began going around urging shops to close on Saturday [29 July]. The question was: Given that visitors fill the markets every day, why Saturday, and not another day of the week? We were forced to address an invitation to officials following a warning from the governor [that such a tactic would yield] negative consequences. And in fact, everyone denounced this approach, and a call was issued to form a committee of ten people to assume responsibility for the action.⁴⁰

In a letter dated 3 August 1967, Kanaan clarified his position on “passivity”, a position that may help explain his attitudes, expressed in earlier letters, toward the teachers’ strike. He stated, “My view is that in order for ‘passivity’ to be adopted as a form of resistance, three conditions must be met: (1) The appropriate time should be chosen based on a signal from you. (2) The community’s readiness to bear the consequences must be considered. (3) It should be undertaken collectively, across all fronts. And it goes without saying that the community is still in such a state of shock that it would not yet be ready to endure the consequences”.⁴¹

In a letter to Zuaytir in early September 1967, Kanaan wrote, “It has finally been agreed to close [the schools] entirely”. The potential strike was one of numerous bones of contention between the occupation’s Ministry of Security and other government ministries, most notably the Ministry of Education. A similar conflict had emerged between the Ministry of Security and the Prime Minister’s office, a dispute that had halted the talks regarding initial self-rule. In the same letter, Kanaan added, “popular circles have decided to boycott the schools over the change in curriculum in Jerusalem and other West Bank schools”.⁴²

As reflected in the correspondence between Kanaan and Zuaytir and their long-distance cooperation, Kanaan relied heavily on Zuaytir’s network of relationships in Amman, owing to his position as a minister in the Royal Court, as well as his other social contacts, in resolving issues that had arisen under the occupation, most notably the issues of employees’ salaries, and assistance for labourers and parties who had been harmed by measures taken in nonviolent, “passive” resistance to the occupation, such as lawyers, judges, and others. Their correspondence also served to strengthen Kanaan’s position locally.

The major school strike continued, as did the correspondence, highlighting some aspects of the conflict taking place within the Zionist government over how to manage the situation. On 5 September 1967, Kanaan wrote:

As of yesterday, all the schools in Nablus have closed their doors entirely. There is some inconsistency in Qalqiliya, while the situation in Jenin is unknown. Despite a statement by officials according to which only a few textbooks have been changed, the Department of Education and the schools in Nablus have turned their keys over to the municipality. I was given a list of 78 books whose editions would be changed, and this was enough to compel people to insist on the closure.⁴³

⁴⁰ Kamal Nasser, “‘Alā Ṣudūrikom Bāqūn,” *Filasṭīn al-Thawra*, no. 11, 6/9/1972.

⁴¹ “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 3/8/1967, PMA. Kanaan also affirmed this position of his to the envoy sent by the occupation’s Prime Minister. In a subsequent letter to Zuaytir, Kanaan wrote, “I received a visit from the Prime Minister’s delegate, whose purpose was to explain the statement he had made to the effect that he hoped the residents of the West Bank would not force the army to intervene again. This was following news of the strike and the memoranda that had been submitted by [figures in] Jerusalem, lawyers, and others. He said, ‘We are still a long way from a political solution. Such a solution lies first with Israel, secondly with Jordan, thirdly with the Arab states, and lastly with the major powers. Therefore, engaging in ‘passive’ actions at this time would not be in the citizens’ interests.’ I replied that no decision had been taken to engage in ‘passive’ actions against the occupation authorities, and that when we did decide to take this path, it would be done collectively, and under my leadership. To this he replied that he was pleased with my candor, and I asked him to convey what I had said to the Prime Minister”.

⁴² “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 1/9/1967, PMA.

⁴³ “Kanaan to Zuaytir,” 5/9/1967, PMA. Military Order no. 107 issued on 29 August 1967 prohibited the teaching of 55 textbooks. For a list of the prohibited books, see *Manāshīr: Awāmīr wa Ta’yīnāt Ṣādīra ‘an Qiyādat Quwwāt Jaysh al-Difā’ al-Isrā’īlī fī Mantīqat al-Daffa al-Gharbiyya*, no. 6 (November 1967), pp. 235-238.

On 10 August 1967, Zvi Ofer became Military Governor of Nablus. This coincided with the commencement of Kanaan's covert activities aimed at supporting and bolstering the city's resilience in the face of its economic crisis. As revealed in Kanaan's memoir, the early signs of the clash between the municipality and the occupation's military rule emerged from their first encounter. The confrontation began when Kanaan was interrogated over paying partial salaries to members of the police force and was investigated over received cash from Amman. Kanaan denied these things to Ofer, a denial he later reaffirmed in his memoir. As indicated earlier, Kanaan had imposed a degree of self-censorship in his writing to safeguard certain secrets. After Kanaan's denial, Ofer informed him of his decision to halt the payment of the remaining salaries. Nevertheless, on orders from Kanaan, the municipality continued paying them, and therefore, measures were taken against the municipality.

Exhaustion Sets in, and Hope is Renewed

On 17 August 1967, Kanaan sent a letter to the Israeli Minister of Defence stating his wish not to renew his chairmanship of the Nablus city council once its legal term expired. In response, the military government imposed immediate sanctions against Kanaan's private economic interests. The city council, however, quickly rallied in solidarity with Kanaan, prompting the Israeli Minister of Defence to nullify the sanctions. Nevertheless, Kanaan remained determined to resign, and his sense of exhaustion was evident in his correspondence.

Kanaan's weariness was not solely due to his dealings with the colonial authorities. Around the same time, Zuaytir left the country to escort King Hussein on a series of tours from 15 August to 11 September 1967, which included attending the Arab League Summit Conference in Khartoum on 29 August. As a result of this interruption in his correspondence with Zuaytir, Kanaan began communicating regularly with Ahmad Tuqan, then serving as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. However, Tuqan's responses were less than optimal, as indicated by the subsequent exchanges between Zuaytir and Kanaan. The temporary break in communication with Zuaytir took a toll on Kanaan's morale.

The first letter Kanaan wrote to Zuaytir during the latter's absence was dated 1 September 1967; however, it never reached him, as Zuaytir was accompanying King Hussein in Khartoum. Kanaan sent a second letter on 5 September 1967, which likewise failed to reach him due to similar circumstances. In this second letter, Kanaan began by inquiring about the political situation and developments regarding self-rule, or what came to be known as the Palestinian government, saying, "God strengthen you for these lengthy journeys. Given the decrees we have been hearing about, we do not know what is actually happening, and we would like to know if there is reason to be reassured concerning the future, since things here are getting steadily worse".⁴⁴

Kanaan followed this inquiry with an expression of support for the unification of the [east and west] banks of the Jordan River, while also criticizing those who opposed it. He described the latter's stance as "a product of sheer ignorance and a failure to see past one's nose. The bitter truth is that the intensity of patriotic sentiment that you see on the [TV] screen during demonstrations and rallies is nothing but hypocrisy and an attempt to capitalize on patriotism".⁴⁵

This last reference signals the beginning of a shift in Kanaan's attitude toward what he had previously referred to as "passivity", laying the groundwork for the major strike that Nablus would launch on 19 September 1967. In this letter, Kanaan also criticized the attitude of the people of Nablus, engaging in what might be viewed as a personal reassessment in light of recent developments, including the confrontations

⁴⁴ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 5/9/1967, PMA.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

with military rule in the city. It appears that Kanaan was preparing for the city's next battle, saying, "True patriotism is what you see among the Gazans, who insist on boycotting, going on the offensive, and refusing to welcome [the occupier] ... etc. even though three months have passed since the catastrophe. The news coming out of Gaza suggests that the majority of the population there supports unification with the Kingdom of Jordan, and they have opened the way for the people in the Strip to facilitate mass displacement, while they forbid people living on the [West] Bank to visit the Strip without permission [from the Israeli authorities]"⁴⁶.

In this letter, Kanaan openly expresses his sense of disappointment and the negative impact of the treatment he had received from the military authorities and official bodies in his friend's absence. He writes, "I have reached a point of such exhaustion that I no longer have the strength to endure, particularly on a psychological level. So I have told people here to arrange for someone to take over my position, and I have given them until the end of this month. I have written repeatedly requesting assistance for the unemployed, and I am still waiting for a reply. The negligence in this area is taking its toll. So I ask you please to read the letters I sent while you were away"⁴⁷.

In his response to Kanaan's letter, circa 12 September 1967, Zuaytir conveyed an optimistic picture of the overall political situation following the Arab summit conference, assuring him of his sympathy with his plight, and providing him with a summary of developments that occurred there. He urged patience and perseverance, reminding him, "We here are vulnerable to repeated attacks and insults, but we remain steadfast and bear our responsibilities until the end"⁴⁸. He also affirmed Kanaan's opposition to Palestinian self-rule, adding, "As for the Gazans' stance, it makes us proud, and we pray we won't let them down"⁴⁹.

With the arrival of the letter just quoted, the return of Zuaytir and his network, and the beginning of shifts in the overall situation in Nablus, Kanaan began to regain hope. His renewed optimism – which would continue to ebb and flow in response to events from day to day until his resignation – became evident in a letter Kanaan sent to Zuaytir around 14 September 1967, where he wrote, "I have discussed the matter of my leaving the municipality with advisors here, and the idea has met with strong opposition from almost everyone, including people who have been eager for me to step down. So it seems we will have to persevere until God intervenes in some way, though I assure you have reached the end of my rope"⁵⁰.

Taking advantage of his friend's return, Kanaan seized the opportunity to propose a way in which Zuaytir's network could help convey his proposals to higher levels of officialdom. He wrote:

Before your return, I wrote to Abu al-Abed [Ahmad Tuqan] suggesting that press interviews be conducted with Professor Izzat Darwaza and other scholars and thinkers in Syria and Lebanon, and in particular, with members of the academic research committee, such as Walid al-Khalidi, [Yousef] Sayegh, and their colleagues, and that their views on the Palestinian government be broadcast on Syrian and Lebanese radio and television, since their perspectives hold weight with people who do not think for themselves. People are known to have a lot of trust in Professor Darwaza, and they take his words to heart. The same is true for the others as well, especially those who make pretensions of being knowledgeable about things and in a position to instruct others. So I ask you to give priority to this matter.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 12/9/1967, PMA. Supporting his point, Zuaytir adds, "Abd al-Majid Shuman and Wasif Kamal also urge you to give up thinking about stepping down".

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Kanaan to Zuaytir," 14/9/1967, PMA.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Regarding developments in people's positions on self-rule, Kanaan wrote, "As for those who favour the notion of a Palestinian government, they are al-Ja'bari's allies in Hebron and a few Jerusalemites, as well as Aziz Shehada, Izzat Qurman, and colleagues of theirs in Ramallah, and Isa Aql. The idea is being promoted rather forcefully in Ramallah. In Nablus, by contrast, it has no proponents. Even so, there has been an uproar over it in the [city] councils, and some people are open to discussing it".⁵²

In an undated letter that appears to have been enclosed with the previous missive, Kanaan conveys the general Palestinian disdain towards the Islamic countries' stance on the Judaization of Jerusalem and the successive Zionist measures being taken in this regard, which has contributed to the escalating conflict in the occupied territories.⁵³ He also encloses a printed text that describes a decision by UNRWA to split its operations between the east and west banks of the Jordan River and maintain them as separate entities on a permanent basis, including the division of associated jobs. In Kanaan's view, this measure would pave the way for the next economic crisis to be caused by the occupation and trigger successive waves of mass exodus. He concludes with, "It goes without saying that when a decision of this nature is issued by an organization created by the United Nations, it raises serious questions about its association with schemes that are not in the interests of this country".⁵⁴

In his reply to Kanaan dated 7 October 1967, Zuaytir stresses that King [Hussein] will read Kanaan's letter as soon as he finishes forming the new government, led by Bahjat al-Talhouni, and that he will urge the King to act on the letter's contents. He states, "I was astounded by what it said about UNRWA, and I will tell Abu Abdullah [King Hussein] about it. I have also informed Abu Al-Abed [Ahmad Tuqan] of it, and he has promised to give it his serious attention". He then adds, "I will bring it to the attention of Abu Adnan [Prime Minister Bahjat al-Talhouni] tomorrow morning, and will personally follow up on the matter".⁵⁵

Zuaytir gave Kanaan the freedom to act as he saw fit in relation to the matter of paying the striking teachers' salaries. He also informs him of the Jordanian Government's "intention ... to form a special commission on the West Bank in the Royal Court, with me as its chair. Once that occurs, no transactions will be delayed anymore, and the West Bank's concerns will receive far more attention. The addition of West Bank residents such as [Abd al-Hamid] al-Sa'ih and Abu al-Ala' [Hashim al-Jayyusi] to the commission will also ensure that these concerns are afforded the proper attention".⁵⁶

Although Zuaytir left the Royal Court in April 1968, his correspondence with Kanaan continued, not only in response to issues that arose in the wake of the 1967 war, but as an extension and affirmation of the two men's life-long friendship, and the recurrence of circumstances that made visitation impossible. This ongoing exchange documents numerous significant aspects and phases of the Palestinians' experience of occupation after 1969. The final letter in their series of written communications was penned by Kanaan on 5 February 1981, just one month before his death.

Conclusion

The Zuaytir-Kanaan correspondence serves as a dual memoir, documenting the evolution of political positions and ideas, as well as the economic and social conditions in the Palestinian territories following the 1967 occupation and the subsequent transformations. This early firsthand documentation provides a rare

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Kanaan to Zuaytir, Appendix" 14/9/1967, PMA.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Zuaytir to Kanaan," 7/10/1967, PMA.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

glimpse into the actions taken by the people of the occupied land, their positions on issues that emerged in the months after the 1967 war, and the Zionist colonial expansion on their land, including various dimensions of the colonizers' perspective for which no archival evidence is available.

Moreover, this correspondence represents a qualitative addition to primary sources preserved by the colonizers, as well as Zuaytir's own memoir, written two years later in 1969, in which he either passed over or deliberately concealed certain details and events, possibly for security reasons. Similarly, the correspondence sheds light on certain aspects of Kanaan and Zuaytir's thinking on the management of affairs in the occupied territories, relations with the military government administration, "passive" (nonviolent) resistance, and Jordan's role in the Occupied Territories. As such, the correspondence presents a local narrative that reflects the perspective of the colonized and their interaction with the colonizers' actions, and the impact these actions had on the development of colonial policies as they related to military rule.

Lastly, the language of the correspondence conveys Kanaan and Zuaytir's complex psychological states and ways in which the support provided by personal relationships enabled the colonized to maintain steadfastness and resilience. Like the Bloch-Muzan correspondence, the exchanges between Kanaan and Zuaytir bypassed the obligations and strictures of official correspondence, marked instead by an intimacy that speaks a deep-rooted comradeship. As such, the correspondence serves as a testament to a mutual trust grounded in traditional social bonds that were not shattered by war and occupation, but were, in fact, reconstituted and brought to maturity.

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Hani Mousa*

Tribalism, Regionalism, and the Stalled Building of the Modern State in Libya**

القبلية والجهوية وتعثر بناء الدولة الحديثة في ليبيا

Abstract: This paper explores the underlying causes of the stalled state-building process in Libya, identifying tribalism and regionalism as the primary obstacles. It examines how different modes of governance and external interventions have aggravated and perpetuated the detrimental impacts of these obstacles, which have been intractable because state-building did not evolve organically over time. Instead, an externally imposed state model bypassed the transitional stages, preventing Libya from addressing its underlying tensions and contradictions. Consequently, Libya has remained mired in a cycle of self-serving, rival loyalty networks, creating an environment that hinders the formation of cohesive national identity – a prerequisite for a modern state.

Keywords: Libya; State-building; Tribalism; Regionalism; Governance; External Intervention.

الملخص: تبحث هذه الورقة في معوقات استكمال بناء الدولة الحديثة في ليبيا، ولا سيما العاملين الجهوي والقبلي بوصفهما عائقين أساسيين. وتدرس تفاقم عواقب العوائق واستمرارها بسبب أنماط الحكم المختلفة والتدخلات الخارجية التي كانت مستعصية جداً؛ لأنّ بناء الدولة لم يتطور على نحو عضوي مع مرور الوقت. بدلاً من ذلك، تعثرت ليبيا في تكوين الدولة الحديثة، ولم تجتز المراحل الانتقالية الضرورية؛ ما منعها من معالجة التوترات والتناقضات الكامنة فيها. ونتيجة لذلك، ظلّت غارقةً في «حلقة مفرغة» من شبكات الولاء المتنافسة التي تخدم مصالحها الذاتية، ما خلق بيئة تعوق تشكيل انتماء وهوية وطنيين على نحو متماسك، وهذه البيئة المتماسكة هي شرط أساسي للدولة الحديثة.

كلمات مفتاحية: ليبيا؛ بناء الدولة؛ القبلية؛ الجهوية؛ أنماط الحكم؛ التدخل الخارجي.

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Introduction

The geographical, political, and security situation in Libya since 2011, an extension of the country's socio-regional composition and divisions, reflects the stalled development of a modern state.¹ Historically, the quest for geopolitical unity in Libya has encountered significant challenges and major setbacks, hampering the development of a nation state capable of asserting sovereignty over its entire territory and population while effectively addressing internal and external challenges. The ongoing conflicts, social and institutional divides, civil warfare, and regional and international foreign interventions reflect the magnitude of the crisis that imperils the unity and territorial integrity of the Libyan state. This study relies on an interdisciplinary sociopolitical lexicon to examine the social aspects of tribalism and regionalism and their political ramifications. It approaches tribalism and regionalism as non-static, dynamic spaces for activities that imply political consequences.

Previous studies have adopted diverse approaches. Some have taken a historical perspective to explain the current Libyan condition,² while others have provided a more sweeping perspective, often overlooking the particularity of the Libyan case, especially in the post-Gaddafi era.³ Other studies have included Libya in their broader theorizing on the Arab state,⁴ while others have applied a descriptive approach.⁵ However, few studies have investigated the evolution of the relationship between the tribe and the state, nor adequately addressed regionalism, in the Libyan context.

Amid the ongoing civil strife and social fragmentation in Libya, important questions arise: How have tribalism and regionalism obstructed the formation of a modern Libyan state? What does the Libyan regional map look like? How has the social structure shaped political culture in Libya? In what ways has the prevailing political culture impeded the development of the modern state?

This study argues that the Libyan state's failure to dismantle the tribal identities and regional affiliations dominating all facets of Libyan society has prevented the establishment of an overarching national identity and unifying, inclusive citizenship. This shortcoming has weakened the state structure and hindered the development of a solid foundation for a modern state.

State Building and Formation Crises

Two main approaches explain state formation. The first attributes it to the natural and gradual evolution of social structures, suggesting that states emerge spontaneously from social interactions.⁶ In contrast, the second views state formation as an artificial process driven by internal interactions or external forces. When internal, the state is the product of a voluntary social contract that transforms society from a natural to a civil state, which can be either partial or absolute in its authority.⁷

¹ The modern state is built on the foundation of the nation-state, an entity that exercises sovereignty over its entire territory and population, the latter characterized by homogeneity and mutual acceptance among its components. The modern state emerged after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and has gradually evolved since then. At present, its legitimacy is based on a system of democratically elected institutions. See: Yasser Abu Hassan, "al-Dawla al-Qawmiyya al-Ḥadītha al-Rashīda: Al-Mafāhīm wa-l-Ma'āyir wa-l-Muṭālabāt," *Majallat Dirāsāt Mujtama'iyya*, no. 15 (June 2016), p. 105.

² Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, "Dawlat Mā Ba'd al-Istīmār wa-l-Taḥawwulāt al-Ijtīmā'iyya fī Lībyā," *Tabayyun*, vol. 1, no. 1 (August 2012), pp. 165-180.

³ Abdelilah Belkeziz, "Mushkilāt Mā Ba'd Suqūt Nizām al-Qadhāfi," *Al-Mustaqbal Al-'Arabī*, vol. 34, no. 393 (November 2011), pp. 119-121.

⁴ Burhan Ghalioun, *al-Miḥna al-'Arabiyya: al-Dawla Didd al-Umma* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2015), pp. 35-46.

⁵ Mohamed Abdel Hafiz Sheikh, "Lībyā Bayn al-Širā' al-Siyāsī wa-l-Širā' al-Musallah: al-Taḥaddiyāt wa-l-Āfāq," *Majallat Dirāsāt Sharq Awsatīyya*, vol. 19, no. 71 (2015), pp. 13-39.

⁶ Ali al-Jarbawi, *Al-Ma'rifa, al-Idyulūjīyya, wa-l-Ḥadāra: Muḥāwala li-Fahm al-Tārīkh* (Beirut: Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, 2021), p. 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 95-96.

The artificial formation approach, associated with 19th and 20th century colonialism, involved imposing the nation-state model on societies without consideration of their specific contexts.⁸ This has resulted in structural crises within Arab states,⁹ where colonial boundaries have hindered the development of a unifying national identity, leaving members of society strongly attached to narrow, local, regional, and tribal allegiances and undermining their sense of national affiliation. Authoritarianism has further marginalized society and obstructed the formation of a unifying political culture, leading to growing structural violence in government-society relations.¹⁰

Several factors can negatively impact the stability and continuity of the state, such as the question of allegiance, which arises when affiliations to narrow sub-state entities, like tribes, prevent social integration, leaving society factionalized and divided in loyalties to these closed sub-state structures. Another critical factor is the absence of homogeneity, particularly when a state lacks territorial integration, and when regional disparities exacerbated by distance from the centre aggravate social fragmentation. These two factors are significant in the Libyan case, where they have prevented the development of a modern state.¹¹

Furthermore, the Libyan state has failed to build cohesive institutions and a unified society, which requires not only cultural, linguistic, and civilizational unity but also organic interconnections between the diverse societal components enabled by an institutional structure that fosters inclusive economic, social, and political interactions transcending divisive tribal and regional structures.¹² In Libya, societal fragmentation did not transform into a positive, constructive pluralism, welding the “ethnic and sectarian fractures”¹³ and overcoming the tribalism that prevents the emergence of the individual as a citizen and a contractual society.¹⁴

In the context of state-building, a crisis can be defined as a dysfunction or a situation where the course of events in the state is disrupted across political, economic, social, or security levels. Disruptions at all levels may interweave, shaping and sustaining the overall crisis,¹⁵ which can throw the state’s operations off-kilter, and cause distortions in its roles or systemic behaviours, pushing it toward instability and paralysis. The longer a crisis persists, the harder it becomes for the state to correct its course over time. The crisis may be linked to internal or external factors, or a combination of both, and it may be material, moral, structural, or systemic.¹⁶

A state may face a cascade of crises that inhibit genuine political development. The most critical are identity, legitimacy, penetration, distribution, and participation crises. The first results from the failure to forge a collective consciousness among members of society. Legitimacy crises stem from obstructions to political participation, which undermine the peaceful rotation of power and leading to its monopolization. The penetration crisis relates to the states’ inadequate reach, which hampers its ability to integrate its disparate communities and regions, particularly those more remote from the centre, into the multifaceted

⁸ Nazih Nasif al-Ayubi, *Al-‘Arab wa-Mushkilat al-Dawla* (Beirut: Dar Al-Saqi, 1992), pp. 27-29.

⁹ Jamal Khaled al-Fadhi, “Muqāraba Nazariyya Ḥawl Azmat al-Dawla fī al-Mantiqa al-‘Arabiyya,” *Tasāmuḥ*, no. 67 (December 2019), pp. 47-48.

¹⁰ Shafie Boumnijel, “Huwiyyat al-Dawla wa-l-Mas’ala al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya fī al-Waṭan al-‘Arabī,” in: Ahmed Awad al-Rahmon (ed.), *al-Dawla al-Waṭaniyya al-Mu’āsira: Azmat al-Indimāj wa-l-Taḥkīk* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2008), pp. 91-93.

¹¹ Abdullah al-Ghathami argues that the tribe is a closed traditional cultural structure, in which the foundation of social cohesion is kinship and lineage, and loyalty is directed to persons. In the state, by contrast, the bond of citizenship is rooted in the rule of law and loyalty is directed toward the state. Abdullah al-Ghathami, *al-Qabīla wa-l-Qabaliyya aw-Huwiyyat Mā Ba’d al-Ḥadātha*, 2nd ed. (Beirut/Casablanca: Arab Cultural Center, 2009), pp. 229-230.

¹² Mohamed Jaber al-Ansari, *Takwīn al-‘Arab al-Siyāsī wa-Maghzā al-Dawla al-Qutriyya: Madkhal ilā l-‘ādat Fahm al-Wāqi’ al-‘Arabī* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1994), pp. 123-124.

¹³ Azmi Bishara, *al-Intiqāl al-Dīmuqrāṭī wa-l-Ishkālīyyātuh: Dirāsāt Nazariyya wa-Taḥbīqīyya Muqārana* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2020), pp. 96-97.

¹⁴ Azmi Bishara, *Fī al-Mas’ala al-‘Arabiyya: Muqaddīma li-Bayān Dīmuqrāṭī ‘Arabī* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2007), p. 245.

¹⁵ Ubada Muhammad al-Tamer, *Siyāsāt al-Wilāyāt al-Muttaḥida wa-Idārat al-Azamāt al-Dawliyya: Iran-al-‘Irāq-Sūryā-Lubnān Namūdhajan* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2015), p. 37.

¹⁶ Edgar Morin, *Fī Maḥūm al-Azma*, Badi’a Bouleila (trans.) (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2018), pp. 53-59.

dynamics of development. Distribution crises are related to reach, resulting from social and economic policy failures that create disparities in resources and investment allocation generally due to selectivity bias favouring clientelist and loyalty networks. The participation crisis encompasses all the above crises. It arises from the monopolization of power, which deprives individuals and their representatives, particularly political parties, of their right to political participation.¹⁷

Grassroots and elite responses to a nation-state crisis may range from demonstrations against the government's inequitable resource distribution policies to more critical challenges to its composition. These demonstrations may escalate to demand a government reshuffle or force its officials to resign. They might even spiral further to seek to overturn the political system, potentially leading to a breakdown that could jeopardize the survival of the state as an integral political and territorial entity. This latter scenario becomes more likely when the state-building process remains incomplete.¹⁸

Libya appears to be gripped by a combination of all the aforementioned types of crises. Several factors have contributed to complicating the state-building process in Libya. While these factors are also present in several neighbouring Arab countries, they have had aggravated impacts in Libya. Mustafa al-Tir notes that these factors are partially linked to Libya's stalled transition to modernity. Foremost among them are the submergence of the individual in the group – particularly in sub-state entities instead of a national collective entity – poor educational systems, the ruralization of the city, the state's diminishing role in producing a middle class, and the rentier economy which has fostered clientelism and reinforced the influence of predominantly tribal based interest groups.¹⁹

The Road to the Modern State: A Stalled Process

The Crisis of Political Formation in Libya: Roots and Contexts

Libya has a long history of crises in its quest for political unity and the formation of an inclusive nation-state. Before independence, it reeled under unstable administrative, legal, and social structures. Different regimes emerged and collapsed before Libya could evolve into a sovereign state with a central government capable of exercising a monopoly on legitimate violence across its territory.²⁰ The fragility of political unity was evident in the country's division into three main regions, each functioning as a relatively autonomous entity: Cyrenaica in the east, Tripolitania in the west, and Fezzan in the south.²¹

In the 10th century BC, during the Pharaonic and Phoenician eras, Cyrenaica was under Egyptian rule, while the Phoenicians ruled Tripolitania. The southern region was governed by the nomadic Garamantes tribes.²² During the Hellenic and Roman periods, Libya's political and social landscape largely remained unchanged. Cyrenaica came under Greek rule in the 7th century BC, while Tripolitania fell under Roman rule in the 2nd century BC. This division continued until the end of the Hellenic era and the Greeks'

¹⁷ Muhammad Shatib Aidan al-Majma'i, "al-Nukhba al-Siyāsiyya wa-Atharuhā fī al-Tanmiyya al-Siyāsiyya," *Majallat Jāmi' al-Tikrūt lil-'Ulūm al-Qānūniyya wa-l-Siyāsiyya*, vol. 1, no. 4 (2009), pp. 145-148.

¹⁸ Hani Musa, "Azamat al-Dawla fī al-'Ālam al-'Arabī: Dirāsāt Muqārana li-Hālatay al-'Irāq wa-l-Sūdān," PhD thesis, University of Tunis El Manar, Tunis, 2018, p. 5. [Unpublished]

¹⁹ Mustafa Omar al-Tir, *Širā' al-Khayma wa-l-Qaṣr: Ru'ya Naqdiyya li-l-Mashrū' al-Ḥadāthī al-Lībī* (Beirut: Forum of Knowledge, 2014), p. 84.

²⁰ The name "Libya" dates from the Hellenic era. The ancient Greeks applied it to the whole of North Africa. Over time, it came to designate the geographical area we know as Libya today, which is the territory stretching from the western border of Egypt to the eastern border of Tunisia. See: Nikolai Ilyich Proshin, *Tārīkh Lībyā min Nihāyat al-Qarn al-Tāsi' 'Ashar Ḥattā 'Am 1969*, Imad Hatim (trans.) (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīda al-Muttaḥida, 2001), p. 25.

²¹ Shawqi Atallah al-Jamal, *al-Maghrib al-'Arabī al-Kabīr min al-Fath al-Islāmī ilā al-Waqt al-Ḥāqīr: Lībyā-Tūnis-al-Jazā'ir-al-Maghrib al-Aqṣā (Marrākīsh)* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Library, 2009), p. 127.

²² For further information on these people, see: Mabruka Saeed al-Fakhri, "al-Mamlaka al-Jarīmiyya fī Fazzān mundhu al-Qarn al-Khāmis Qabl al-Mīlād Ḥattā al-Qarn al-Sādis al-Mīlādī," *Majallat Jāmi' at Ṣabḥa li-l-'Ulūm al-Insāniyya*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2015).

departure from Cyrenaica in 74 BC. At that point, the Romans unified these three Libyan regions under their suzerainty, which lasted for approximately four centuries.²³

Following the fall of the Roman Empire in 435 AD, Libya was once again divided into three regions. Cyrenaica came under Byzantine control, while Tripolitania and Fezzan remained within the Roman sphere.²⁴ During the Islamic era, from the Arab conquest of Libya in 643 AD until the 16th century, no single power managed to gain control over the entire Libyan territory. Instead, the regions fell to a succession of rival Islamic power centres. Cyrenaica and Fezzan were mostly controlled by the Mamluk sultanates in Egypt, while Tripolitania became part of the Emirate of Ifriqiya, based in Tunis. The absence of a central authority reinforced regional political entities, traditional social entities (tribes), and local regional affiliations, diminishing prospects for their assimilation under a unified civil state.²⁵

Administrative Decentralization and the Reinforcement of Regionalism and Tribalism: The Ottoman Era

Ottoman suzerainty over Libya lasted over three and a half centuries (1551-1911),²⁶ when Libya was governed by the Karamanli dynasty. Originally of Turkic descent, the Karamanlis had significant influence in building a network of loyalties among Libyan tribes, which enabled them to rise to power in 1711 and maintain their rule until 1835. To avoid conflict with this powerful family and its supporters, the Sublime Porte acquiesced in their control over Libya, satisfied with their assurances that tax revenues from that province would continue to flow into the Ottoman treasury, as was expected from other provinces in the Arab region.²⁷

The Ottoman state applied a decentralized administrative model in Libya,²⁸ exercising general oversight through a governor appointed by and accountable to the Sublime Porte. The governor's main tasks included maintaining law and order and collecting taxes, relying on local agents—tribal leaders, religious figures, notables, and other influential individuals. During both the Ottoman periods that preceded and followed the Karamanli era (1551-1711 and 1835-1911, respectively), Libya experienced a rapid turnover of governors, reflecting a deliberate strategy to keep governors bound to and dependent on the Sublime Porte, thereby minimizing the risk they would break free of Ottoman control.²⁹

Apart from the century and a quarter under the Karamanli dynasty,³⁰ the regional political entities remained relatively separate from one another. This decentralization amplified the role of local agents and intermediaries, who, in Libya as elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, were instrumental in reinforcing narrow tribal and local regional loyalties, while simultaneously feeding corruption and power struggles. As a result, the Sublime Porte lost its grip on some regions and provinces. This was evident in the Karamanlis' takeover of the Vilayet of Tripoli in the 18th century and in the colonial encroachments into Ottoman territories during the 19th century.³¹

²³ Muhammad Yusuf al-Maqrif, *Libyā Bayn al-Māḍī wa-l-Ḥādīr: Ṣafahāt min al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī*, vol. 1: *Mīlād Dawlat al-Istiqlāl* (Oxford: Centre for Libyan Studies, 2004), pp. 40-42, 44-47.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Fathi Hassan Nassar, *Libyā min al-Ḥīlāl al-Asbānī Ḥattā al-Istiqlāl: 1510-1951* (Jerusalem: Dār al-Jundī for Publishing and Distribution, 2015), pp. 15-17.

²⁶ al-Jamal, pp. 129-130.

²⁷ Nassar, pp. 69-70.

²⁸ The Ottoman state treated Libya similarly to its other Arab provinces, even if its approach to managing its provinces varied with time and place. See: Ibid., pp. 39-40.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Under Karamanli rule, Libya experienced centralized governance under which happened the subordination of all the regions to the central authority in Tripoli.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 108-109.

In 1835, the Ottoman authorities changed their approach and switched to direct rule. In 1879, Cyrenaica was separated from Tripolitania and subordinated directly to the Sublime Porte, governed independently from the other regions from Benghazi. The shift in modes of governance and administration did not resolve Libya's social, political, and economic crises. It was at this point, particularly in Cyrenaica, that a reformist Sufi movement emerged, the Sanusiyya,] founded by the Algerian-born Muslim theologian and political leader Muhammad ibn Ali al-Sanusi.³²

The declared aims of the Sanusi movement were reforming the social, economic, and political conditions in the Arab regions under Ottoman rule and resisting colonial encroachment in these areas. Its activities were concentrated in parts of Libya far from urban centres, targeting Bedouin and rural communities across the countryside and oases. The movement established a network of *zawiyas* (Sufi lodges) in these areas, which functioned as small government systems with a religious dimension and based on a tribal structure. Over time, the Libyan *zawiyas* evolved into semi-feudal units that eventually coalesced into a theocratic emirate. The political phenomenon associated with the Sanusi dynasty continued until 1911.³³

Regionalism and Tribalism: Colonial Tools

Like the Ottoman Empire's other Arab provinces, Libya did not gain independence after the collapse of Ottoman rule. In 1911, it fell under Italian colonial occupation, which lasted three decades (1911-1940). Historians divide this period into two phases: the pre-Fascist and Fascist periods (1911-1922 and 1922-1940). During the first phase, Libya's constituent regions remained divided, evident in the emergence of an autonomous Sanusi entity in Cyrenaica and the creation of a small republic in Tripoli driven by pressure from traditional political notables in the city and surrounding towns and villages. The colonial power supported the creation of such entities, as they served to fragment Libyan national identity by intensifying the political, tribal, and regional contradictions within society. Nevertheless, these self-governing entities were short-lived. In the second phase, the Italians quashed them and subjected the three Libyan regions to direct colonial rule to tighten and expand their control.³⁴

During both Italian colonial periods, the Libyan national movement lacked cohesion and coordination. It was divided between proponents of appeasing and negotiating with the colonial authorities – as was the case with the Sanusi leadership, particularly after the split within the movement in 1916³⁵ – and the opponents of conciliation with the occupation. This latter camp included many tribes, the Sanusiyya *zawiyas*, and Tuareg groups, all determined to fight the colonizers through military action. The national movement was also plagued by the prevalence of narrow interests over higher national interests. For example, during the pre-Fascist period, the Sanusis continuously strove to transform their autonomous rule into a private theocratic emirate and expand it across the whole of Cyrenaica. Meanwhile, disputes and rivalries over leadership intensified among notables and tribal dignitaries, both within the city of Tripoli and across the regional divides of Cyrenaica in Tripolitania.

Despite this fragmentation across the Libyan political spectrum, active resistance persisted, as vividly demonstrated by the movement led by Omar Mukhtar in the 1920s.³⁶ However, this resistance ultimately receded under the Italian occupation's brutal crackdown on resistance leaders and their

³² Proshin, pp. 58-59, 70.

³³ Ibid., pp. 69-73, 91.

³⁴ Bushra Khair Bek & Aqeel Namir, *Tārīkh al-Waṭan al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir: al-Maghrib al-'Arabī* (Damascus: University of Damascus, College of Arts and Humanities, 2015-2016), pp. 196, 206, 217.

³⁵ In 1916, the Sanusi movement experienced a rift between a faction led by Ahmed Sharif al-Sanusi, which advocated armed resistance, and a faction led by Idris al-Sanusi, which supported a political accommodation with the colonial power. The dispute was ultimately resolved in favour of the latter.

³⁶ Bek & Namir, pp. 192-195, 211-215.

grassroots bases in 1930. Omar Mukhtar was executed in 1931, the Sanusiyya's leaders were exiled, the *zawiyas* were closed, and their activities were banned. Italy then imposed direct military rule over all Libyan territories.³⁷

Italy's governance continued throughout the Second World War, eventually leading to clashes between Italian forces and French and British forces on Libyan soil. The confrontation ended with Italy's defeat in 1943, at which point Cyrenaica and Tripolitania fell under British colonial rule and Fezzan came under French colonial rule. The switch in colonial powers made no difference to the Libyan people; they remained excluded from the management of their own affairs and the new colonial authorities were just as determined as their Italian predecessors to exploit inter-tribal tensions and regional identities to sow divisions among the colonized population.³⁸

With the end of the Second World War in 1945, as independence movements gained momentum across Arab and African countries, various political actors in Libya became eager to define the country's future.³⁹ Against this backdrop, the Sanusiyya reasserted its ambition for establishing an emirate centred in Cyrenaica. At the same time, disagreements among Libyan political forces regarding unity and support for the envisioned Sanusi-led emirate,⁴⁰ combined with disputes between colonial powers over Libya's post-war arrangements, brought the question of Libya's future to the United Nations (UN). But before the UN could act, the Sanusiyya pre-emptively declared the independence of Cyrenaica in March 1949. It then began implementing this declaration by establishing a government and parliament and issuing citizenship documents for the people of Cyrenaica. Britain approved and supported this move, as it sharpened the geopolitical divide in Libya. The move simultaneously prompted the UN that year to set a timeline for Libya's independence, inclusive of its three regions, by no later than 1952.⁴¹

The Problem of Building a Modern State: From Traditional Structures to an Inclusive Structure

In 1951, Libya gained independence and drafted its first constitution, a process informed by internal and external interactions, leading to the rise of a federally structured state ruled by a monarchy. Idris al-Sanusi became the king of the newly federated regions. The monarchical period can be divided into two phases. The first phase ended with the constitutional and administrative restructuring of 1963, which marked the transition from a multi-tiered federal state, known as the United Kingdom of Libya, to a unitary state, renamed the Kingdom of Libya. The second phase continued from 1963 until the fall of the monarchy in 1969.

Before the constitutional amendment in 1963, political and administrative decision-making was split between Tripoli and Benghazi, Libya's two capitals as stipulated in the 1951 constitution. This division undermined the monarchy's ability to bind the regions to the centre. It also created an imbalance in the regions' political representation, exacerbating tribal and regional tensions and fuelling regionalist tendencies inimical to the development of a modern polity based on democracy, pluralism, and citizenship.⁴²

By the late monarchical era, the political elites recognized the need for a dynamic political structure that could transcend tribal and regional divisions. Efforts were initiated to transform the coastal city of

³⁷ Geoff Simmons, *Libya and the West from Independence to Lockerbie* (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2003), pp. 11-12.

³⁸ Khalil Hussein, *al-Tārīkh al-Siyāsī li-l-Waṭan al-'Arabī*, Muhammad Al-Majdoub (intro.) (Beirut: al-Ḥalabī Legal Publications, 2012), p. 643.

³⁹ One of the key political actors that emerged in Cyrenaica at this stage was the National Congress, which was founded in 1948 with the personal efforts of the leader of the Sanusi movement, Muhammad Idris al-Sanusi. At the same time, several emergent political forces in Tripoli opposed the vision of the Cyrenaica-based National Congress which insisted on those forces' approval for a Sanusi Emirate as a precondition for achieving Libyan unity. See: Simmons, p. 21.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

⁴¹ Hussein, p. 644.

⁴² Ahmida, pp. 169-170.

al-Bayda into a consensus capital, replacing Tripoli and Benghazi. However, these initiatives were abruptly halted by the September 1969 revolution.

The monarchic era maintained a traditional mode of governance, characterized by its tribal, clientelist, and regionalist elements. Nevertheless, it saw the initial modernization of some state structures, particularly in education and the economy. The pace of these transformations accelerated with Libya's entry into the ranks of oil-exporting countries in the 1960s, leading to the emergence of a middle class that began to challenge the status quo. At the same time, the Libyan political landscape was influenced by radical transformations occurring elsewhere in the Arab world and by the fall of monarchies to revolutionary regimes that resonated more with the aspirations of the nascent middle class. These developments sparked cultural, political, and intellectual currents and dynamics that ultimately weakened the monarchy and propelled the country toward the transition to a republican system in 1969.⁴³

Gaddafiism: Regionalism and Tribalism as Instruments of Control

The crisis in Libya's political system persisted throughout the monarchial era, despite the constitutional amendments, thwarting the political and national aspirations of the Libyan people, particularly the emergent middle class. Reflecting the widespread discontent, a group of military officers, calling themselves the "Free Unionist Officers", led by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, overthrew the Sanusi monarchy in 1969. This event, known as the Fateh Revolution, was based on the pillars of political unity, democracy, and inclusive representation; social justice and empowerment; and an anti-capitalist economic outlook.

These promises were never realized. The new regime soon proved authoritarian and staunchly opposed to political modernization. It showed no tolerance for political and intellectual pluralism, excluded and harassed technocratic elites, and suppressed dissent with the full force of the security apparatus.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, Gaddafi imposed a new mode of governance, articulated in his "Third International Theory", an amalgam of Marxist, Maoist, and Arab socialist ideas.⁴⁵

Gaddafi excelled at coining new terms that appeared democratic on the surface but were designed to manipulate, control, and entrench his authoritarian grip. Examples include "popular revolution", "direct democracy", "people's committees", "revolutionary committees", and "youth leagues".⁴⁶ He reactivated traditional structures as instruments of control, forging tribal alliances to strengthen his security grip. Further, instead of protecting and defending their interests, he entrusted tribes loyal to him with policing and containing their communities. Capitalizing on inter-tribal and regional disputes, he pitted adversarial groups against one another to advance his political ambitions and monopolize power.⁴⁷

Such tactics allowed Gaddafi to eliminate the structures and power centres of revolutionary forces pushing for modernist transformation and a more open society. In April 1973, he launched a five-point program to consolidate his leadership. It abolished existing laws, legitimized the persecution of his political adversaries under the guise of "purging the country of the sick and enemies of the people", and initiated what he called an administrative and cultural revolution. Cloaked in the populist rubric of "people's freedom" and "arming the people", he replaced institutional structures with "People's Committees" and other such

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 170-173.

⁴⁴ Yusuf Muhammad Jumaa al-Sawani, *Lībyā: al-Thawra wa-Taḥaddiyāt Binā' al-Dawla* (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2013), pp. 34-36.

⁴⁵ Ali Muhammad Ali Salem, "Lībyā al-Ḥurra: Lībyā min al-Shar'iyya al-Thawriyya ilā al-Shar'iyya al-Dustūriyya," in: *al-Mu'tamar al-'Ilmī al-Duwalī: al-Thawra wa-l-Qānūn* (Alexandria: University of Alexandria, Faculty of Law, 2011), p. 630.

⁴⁶ al-Sawani, pp. 40-42.

⁴⁷ Bilal Abdullah, *al-Ḥirāk al-Amāzighī wa-Dīnāmiyyāt al-Ḥayāt al-Siyāsiyya al-Lībiyya bayn Mumkināt al-Takayyuf wa-Azmat al-Indimāj al-Waṭānī* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, 2014), p. 25.

authoritarian frameworks centred around him. These measures further increased the political role of tribal and regional structures.⁴⁸

Gaddafi's reliance on tribalism stifled opportunities for transformation toward a modern state.⁴⁹ His approach was spontaneous, anti-institutional, emotional, and instrumentalist: the tribes and their attendant social structures were his tools to advance the ends of his regime. He used them for political mobilization, rallying support, spying on citizens, rooting out opposition, and forcing compliance with his regime's demands.⁵⁰

In 1977, Libya experienced a sharp shift toward Gaddafi's personalist rule with the declaration of the Libyan Jamahiriya (Republic).⁵¹ The new order replaced existing political and administrative bodies with new structures designed to secure his control and render his person the sole frame-of-reference of the regime.⁵² All legislative, judicial, and executive authorities were concentrated in his hands, facilitating his monopolization of all decision-making processes. As a further step, he dismantled the army as a national institution by creating new brigades and corps, primarily composed of tribesmen loyal to him.⁵³ In line with the vision laid out in Gaddafi's "Green Book", Tribal Clubs were created to perform security and policing functions.⁵⁴

Gaddafi's methods of governance during his rule of over four decades (1969-2011) exacerbated the regional divides between Cyrenaica, Fezzan, and Tripolitania, and widened the gulf between these regions and the state. Discriminatory policies marginalized the eastern and southern regions, depriving certain social groups of political representation and equitable resource distribution. In contrast, Tripolitania, particularly areas where the Gaddafi tribe and other loyal tribes were concentrated, such as Sirte and Sabha, benefited from favouritism. This naturally encouraged nepotism and other forms of corruption,⁵⁵ further fragmenting loyalties and entrenching obstacles to social integration, which is a key prerequisite for building a unified polity that incorporates all segments of society, particularly those marginalized and remote from the centre.⁵⁶

The long arm of authoritarianism under Gaddafi, the intolerance of any opposition and brutal clampdowns – such as the summary execution of 1,200 political detainees at Abu Salim prison in 1996 created a climate of mounting disaffection and anger. Coupled with its flagrant favouritism toward pro-regime tribes and regions, its insistence on treating citizens as subjects, and its refusal to seriously consider calls for reform,⁵⁷ these factors culminated in a social uprising. Backed by an external military intervention, this uprising overthrew the Gaddafi regime in 2011. The event marked a new phase in Libya's history, one no less fraught with and complex than its predecessors.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ Sadiq Hajal, *Lībyā wa-Ishkālīyyāt Binā' al-Dawla-Al-Umma 1951-2017* (Amman: Academic Book Centre, 2019), pp. 80-81.

⁴⁹ Abdullah, *al-Ḥirāk al-Amāzīghī wa-Dīnāmiyyāt al-Ḥayāt al-Siyāsiyya al-Lībiyya bayn Mumkināt al-Takayyuf wa-Azmat al-Indimāj al-Waṭanī*, pp. 20-22.

⁵⁰ al-Munsif Wannas, *al-Shakhsīyya al-Lībiyya: Thālūth al-Qabīla wa-l-Ghanīma wa-l-Ghalaba* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Mutawaṣṣit for Publishing, 2014), pp. 28-29, 33.

⁵¹ For further details on the Jamahiriya, see: Salem, pp. 637-638.

⁵² al-Sawani, p. 40.

⁵³ During his long rule, Gaddafi spent around \$30 billion on armaments, yet he never established a professional, institutionalized national army. See: *Dirāsāt Tamhīdiyya 'An al-Mujtama' fī Lībyā: al-Wāqī', al-Taḥaddiyāt, wa-l-Āfāq*, Part Two of a Preliminary Study for the Libyan Social and Economic Dialogue Project, prepared by Ali Abdullatif Ahmida (Beirut: United Nations: ESCWA, 2020), p. 23, accessed on 7/2/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3ui2yld>

⁵⁴ Siham al-Ghadhban, "Lībyā Mā Ba'd al-Qadhāfī: Mu'awwiqāt Binā' al-Dawla," *Majallat al-Islām wa-l-Ālam al-Mu'āṣir*, vol. 7, no. 3-4 (2012), p. 161.

⁵⁵ Libya ranked 146 out of 178 countries in the 2010 Global Corruption Index. See: Jibrin Ubale Yahaya, Jibrin Jibrin & Musa Mohammed Bello, "Libyan Crisis and The Escalation of Conflict and Insecurity in Africa," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 18, no. 4 (March 2020), p. 31.

⁵⁶ Abdullah, p. 27.

⁵⁷ One of the most prominent political and economic reform initiatives was launched by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi in the 1990s. The Libya of Tomorrow Programme, as it was called, met with a minimal and perfunctory engagement from the regime and its power centres. See: Hajal, pp. 98-99.

⁵⁸ Ramadan Abdelsalam Haidar, "al-Intiqāl min Marḥalat al-Thawra ilā Marḥalat Binā' al-Dawla," *Majallat al-'Ulūm al-Insāniyya wa-l-Taṭbīqiyya*, no. 25 (2014), pp. 156-159.

Post-Revolutionary Libya: The Fall of a Fragile Model

The absence of institutional infrastructure and a political culture conducive to democracy precluded the possibility of a smooth or automatic transition to a democratic system of government after the fall of Gaddafi's regime. Instead, underlying tensions due to a lack of institutions, anti-democratic practices, the suspension of the constitution and laws, pervasive tribalism and regionalism, intense factionalism, a weak military establishment, the squandering of national resources, and widespread corruption, erupted all at once. These crises fully manifested after the revolution of 17 February 2011, plunging Libya into an unending cycle of political, military, and ideological conflict that continues to this day.⁵⁹

Sociopolitical fissures flared, revealing regional, tribal, factional, and ethnic⁶⁰ variations reminiscent of the pre-independence era. In the post-Gaddafi period, Libyans disagreed over fundamental issues, including national unity, the structure of the state, the type of government system, and principles of resource distribution.⁶¹ The depth of the discord was most starkly evidenced in renewed demands from Cyrenaica⁶² and Fezzan for a return to the federal system. Some went further to propose a confederate model that aligned more closely with separatist aspirations.⁶³ Conversely, political forces in Tripolitania insisted on preserving the unitary state.

Libyans were also ideologically split over the identity of their desired political and social systems. Some advocated for Islamic rule⁶⁴ and others pushed for secular governance.⁶⁵ Against this charged backdrop, Libya descended into a cycle of violence. Amidst the chaos, city-based brigades and militias proliferated, such as those in Misrata and Zintan, while in Cyrenaica, the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar gained control over Benghazi. Subsequently, Haftar attempted to extend his control across the entire country.⁶⁶

The National Transitional Council (NTC), formed immediately after the February 2011 revolution, was unable to unify Libyans and guide the country toward stability. Although it was unable to resolve the myriad crises that had materialized so potently in the post-Gaddafi era, the NTC took important transitional steps. Notably, it succeeded in drafting a provisional constitution and holding general elections, which formed the General National Congress (GNC) in 2012. The NTC then handed over power to the GNC, which was based in Tripoli.⁶⁷

However, without an institutionalized regulatory framework and given the deeply fragmented political and military map, the GNC was unable to foster national unity and democracy. Its failure became obvious

⁵⁹ Mohamed al-Sheikh, "Ishkālīyyāt Ta'aththur al-Intiqāl al-Dīmuqrāṭī fī Lībyā Ba'd 2011," *Majallat Dirāsāt Sharq Awsatīyya*, vol. 18, no. 68 (Summer 2014), pp. 46-47.

⁶⁰ Ramadan Abdel Salam Haidar observes that the ethnic minorities in Libya, which account for around ten percent of the population, were politically marginalized under Gaddafi. The revolution inspired them to engage in the post-Gaddafi political scene to strengthen their political standing, improve their economic circumstances, and protect their cultural identity. The largest minorities are the Amazigh, the sub-Saharan Tebu, and the Tuareg. See: Haidar, p. 165.

⁶¹ Kamel Abdullah, "Limādhā Tata'aththar Muḥāwalāt Binā' Nizām Intiqālī fī Lībyā?," *Majallat al-Dīmuqrāṭīyya*, no. 75 (July 2019), pp. 198-199.

⁶² A notable instance of the separatist tendency occurred in 2012, when municipal leaders of Benghazi declared the establishment of a federal region in eastern Libya. See: Hanan Labidi, "Lībyā Bayn al-Tafakkuk al-Dākhlī wa-l-Ikhtirāq al-Khārījī," *Dafātīr al-Siyāsa wa-l-Qānūn*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2021), p. 624.

⁶³ Khaled Hanafi Ali, "Dawla Manzū'at al-Saytara: Muḥaffizzāt wa-Kawābiḥ Tafakkuk Lībyā Ba'd al-Thawra," *Majallat al-Siyāsa al-Dawliyya*, vol. 49, no. 195 (January 2014), p. 21.

⁶⁴ Libya saw intense competition between several political currents which surfaced immediately after the revolution. These currents have sharply conflicting visions for the future of the state and the political system in Libya. See: al-Sheikh, "Lībyā Bayn al-Şirā' al-Siyāsī wa-l-Şirā' al-Musallah," p. 15.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Abdullah, "Limādhā Tata'aththar Muḥāwalāt Binā' Nizām Intiqālī fī Lībyā?," p. 200.

⁶⁷ Khaled Hanafi Ali, "Suqūṭ al-Jamāhīriyya: Man Yaḥkum Lībyā Ba'd al-Qadhāfi?," *Majallat al-Siyāsa al-Dawliyya*, vol. 46, no. 186 (October 2011), p. 141.

in 2014 when the GNC refused to hand over power to the newly elected House of Representatives (HoR).⁶⁸ This behaviour deepened the crisis as it precipitated institutional bifurcation: from that point forward, two rival parliaments and governments have vied for power, one based in Tripoli and led by the GNC and the other based in Tobruk in the east and led by the internationally recognized HoR.⁶⁹

As the conflict between Tobruk and Tripoli escalated, the UN intervened to mediate. This effort eventually culminated in the Libyan Political Agreement, signed by representatives of the HoR and GNC in Skhirat, Morocco, in December 2015. The agreement established a State Council and a Government of National Accord (GNA). Once again, however, this unifying initiative failed to resolve the crisis. Instead, factional and regional interests became more pronounced as external actors became increasingly involved.⁷⁰

In the broader context of the the MENA region, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates backed the political forces in eastern Libya, namely Haftar in Benghazi and the HoR in Tobruk, against Islamist forces. Qatar and Turkey pitted their weight behind the Islamist forces that dominated the GNC and later the GNA, headed by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, against Haftar and his military expansion.⁷¹

Obstructing Modern State-Building: The Core Impediments

This section addresses the main impediments to building a modern state in Libya, which have emerged over successive eras and have become particularly intractable in the present context.

The Tribal Factor

Around 140 tribes, to which most Libyans belong and varying in size, influence, ethnic origin, and sectarian affiliation are distributed across Libya. In the south, particularly near Libya's borders with non-Arab countries, there are concentrations of Tuareg tribes and, nearby, Tebu tribes of sub-Saharan African origin. The Amazigh, who are indigenous to North Africa, primarily inhabit the highlands of western Libya. The remaining tribes, which make up the majority, are spread across Cyrenaica and Tripoli. Among the most prominent are the Bani Salim, al-Awaidat, Bani Hilal, Warfala, Tarhuna, Karaghla, and Tawajir tribes. The Qadadfa tribe grew in influence following Gaddafi's rise to power in 1969 despite its relatively small size.⁷²

Understanding Libyan political history requires familiarity with the tribal system and the relationship of the Libyan individual to the tribe. For centuries before independence, the tribe served as the primary mode of sociopolitical organization, defining the rights and duties of its members and shaping their relationship with other tribal entities. This explains why the outlook of the Libyan individual often conflicts with the notion of the modern state. Successive governments have entrenched tribal affiliations rather than loosening their hold to promote democratization, institutionalized government, and civil society.⁷³

⁶⁸ The GNC's refusal to hand over power stemmed from the refusal of the Islamist forces that dominated the GNC to accept the results of the 2014 elections. This crisis led to a clash between these forces and the eastern-based army commanded by Khalifa Haftar who aligned with the HoR in Tobruk and against the Tripoli-based GNC.

⁶⁹ Ahmed Moussa Badawi, "Taḥawwulāt al-Thawra al-Libiyya: Tafkīk al-Dawla wa-Zar' al-Irhāb," *Majallat Āfāq Siyāsīyya*, no. 16 (April 2015), pp. 86-87.

⁷⁰ Talaat Romaih, "Lībyā: al-Ḥall al-Siyāsī al-Ma'zūm wa-l-Sirā' al-'Askarī al-Malghūm," *Majallat al-Bayān*, no. 391 (November 2019), pp. 42-44.

⁷¹ Kamel Abdullah, "Lībyā Bayn Mufāraqat al-Mashhad al-Dākhilī wa-l-Mawāqif al-Iqlīmiyya wa-l-Dawliyya," *Majallat al-Siyāsa al-Dawliyya*, vol. 52, no. 205 (July 2016), pp. 152-153.

⁷² Mustafa Shafiq Allam, "al-Qabaliyya wa-l-Thawrāt al-'Arabiyya: Namudhajān al-Yaman wa-Lībyā," *Majallat al-Bayān bi-l-Sa'ūdiyya*, Cairo, no. 9 (2012), p. 136.

⁷³ Adnan Shabeen, "al-Nizā' al-Ijtīmā'ī al-Mumtadd fī Lībyā Bayn Rahānāt al-'Unf wa-Tadā'iyāt Inhiyār al-Dawla," *Majallat Dirāsāt fī al-'Ulūm al-Insāniyya wa-l-Ijtīmā'īyya*, vol. 3, no. 5 (2020), p. 362.

While successive governments exploited the tribal system to forge clientelist networks to serve the agendas of the ruling elites and their perpetuation in power, the Gaddafi era was unique. During his years in power, the role of the tribe waxed and waned. Initially, he restrained tribal influence, but with the declaration of the Jamahiriya in 1978, he recognized the potential of organic affiliations, channelling them through the Tribal Clubs and the People's and Revolutionary Committees, which were structured around tribal affiliations.⁷⁴

The tribe has thus continued to function as an intermediary between the individual, society, and the state. Beyond its role in political life, tribal affiliation has served as the main vehicle for people to secure jobs or access financial support from the state. Since Gaddafi came to power, the tribe has functioned as the antithesis of institutionalization and the formation of the modern citizenship bond.⁷⁵

The Gaddafi regime's approach toward the tribes varied from one to the next depending on his strategies for augmenting their differences and driving wedges between them. Some tribal leaders, such as those from the Warfala and the Zintan tribes in western Libya, received preferential treatment. Others, like the Misrata in the north and the Awlad Suleiman in the south, faced discrimination. Differential treatment explains the outbreaks of intertribal violence that occurred after the fall of the regime in 2011, including clashes between the Awlad Suleiman and Qadadfa tribes, and between the Warfala and Misrata tribes.

In the absence of institutionalized constitutional frames-of-reference and the consequent lack of vehicles for social and economic justice, the tribe has remained a formidable obstacle to integration and citizenship. Additionally, it has hindered the emergence of a civil society capable of reining in the sway of traditional structures. Likewise, the tribe has been instrumental in disseminating a culture of feuding and fanaticism, and, as such, it has been a destabilizing factor,⁷⁶ which is why it has been an obstacle to modern state-building.⁷⁷

The violent clash that erupted between the Tawergha and Misrata tribes following the outbreak of the 2011 revolution, which resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of Tawergha, best illustrates how the tensions generated by the Gaddafi regime's instrumentalization of tribal and regional contradictions erupted once the regime fell. It also exemplifies how the underlying fragmentation resurfaced following the collapse of the central authority.⁷⁸

The Regional Factor

Historically, subregional identities have prevailed over a unified national Libyan identity. Even after Tripoli was designated as the capital of the Libyan state, the political and administrative centre of gravity never fully shifted there. Cyrenaica, in particular, continued to countervail the capital's influence, a dynamic that was notably reinforced after the events of February 2011.⁷⁹ Today, this tug-of-war persists, manifesting in the political and administrative schism between the east and west – reminiscent of Libya's pre-independence era when it had two official capitals: Benghazi and Tripoli.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 364, 376.

⁷⁵ Haala Hweio, "Tribes in Libya: From Social Organization to Political Power," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 117-118.

⁷⁶ Tribal affiliations have been a main facet of the ongoing conflict in Libya since 2011 as, for example, 2014 when Field Marshal Haftar secured the support of the Farjan, al-Awaidat, Warshefana, and Maqarha tribes against the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord. See: Karbal Ibrahim al-Khalil & Khalasi Ka'asis Khalida, "Ishkālīyyāt Indimāj al-Qabīla fī Masār I'ādat Binā' al-Dawla al-Lībiyya Ba'd 2011 fī Zill al-Taḥawwulāt al-Nazariyya: Muqāraba Taḥdīthiyya Binā' iyya," *al-Majalla al-Jazā'iriyya li-l-Huqūq wa-l-'Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2021), pp. 829-830.

⁷⁷ Shabeen, pp. 376-377.

⁷⁸ Ali, "Dawla Manzū'at al-Sayṭara," p. 20.

⁷⁹ Khalid Muhammad bin Amour, "Anāṣir al-Da'f al-Juyūbūlītiyya wa-Ātharuhā 'alā Kayān al-Dawla al-Lībiyya: Dirāsāt fī al-Jughrāfiyya al-Siyāsiyya," *Majallat Abḥāth* (University of Sirte), no. 13 (March 2019), pp. 259-261.

Since the revolution began in the east, Benghazi naturally became the revolution's capital. It became the headquarters for new institutions, such as the Transitional National Council, the revolutionary field commands, and some embassies. Suddenly, Tripoli had been stripped of its status as the country's sole political and administrative capital. Now that Benghazi shared some of its functions and status, Libya operated with two centres of power.⁸⁰

The persistence of Libya's sub-regional identities can be largely attributed to three factors. The first factor is Libya's geographical expanse (1.75 million square kilometres)⁸¹ combined with low population density (about seven million inhabitants in 2021).⁸² To this, Tripoli's peripheral location in the far northwest can be added. The second factor⁸³ is the lack of inclusive social, political, and economic policies that could unify Libyans. This has hindered the development of a national, supra-regional identity. The third factor is the permanence of the main geographic administrative divisions (Cyrenaica, Fezzan, Tripoli). Together with the sociopolitical impacts of the tribal system, these divisions have engendered closed local communities mired in disputes with their neighbours. The clientelist alliances and accommodations promoted by successive governments have deepened these divisions, making them even more intractable.⁸⁴

Political Culture

Political culture is a major facet of a society's overall culture. It encompasses people's values, behaviours, knowledge, political participation, and attitudes toward their government.⁸⁵ Political culture is transmitted across generations through socialization processes, beginning within the family and extending through schools, peer groups, the media, and other social and political influences.⁸⁶

During his rule, Gaddafi made no efforts to connect and affiliate Libyans to the concept of the modern state. Instead, he imposed his version of "revolution", the Jamahiriya system, the Green Book, and the clientelist Tribal Clubs, at the expense of the modern state and its institutions. Under Gaddafi, the Libyan state experienced a four-decade-long caesura, during which no effort was made to foster political socialization or equip citizens to engage in participatory politics. There was no attempt to cultivate a cohesive national political culture grounded in values like tolerance, pluralism, and democracy, nor to promote institutionalized government or uphold the rule of law. Rather, the Gaddafi era reinforced a fragmented and manipulated political culture, which, to some extent, erased the Libyan citizen as an individual with political agency. It deepened the sociodemographic divides, obstructing the development of a collective national political life.⁸⁷ Given this context, it is not surprising that, when the regime collapsed in 2011, many Libyans sought refuge in their tribal and regional allegiances amid the ensuing anarchy.

The tribal system, both during and after the Gaddafi era, has played an important role in shaping the political attitudes and culture of Libyans. It has informed their core value system, which is often reflected in a submission to authority, an intolerance of opposing views, and a strong sense of tribal insularity. As a result, Libyan political culture has remained caught between fragmentation and manipulation.⁸⁸ This also

⁸⁰ Abdullah, *al-Ḥirāk al-Amāzighī wa-Dīnāmiyyāt al-Ḥayāt al-Siyāsiyya al-Lībiyya bayn Mumkināt al-Takayyuf wa-Azmat al-Indimāj al-Waṭanī*, pp. 27-28.

⁸¹ Amour, p. 261.

⁸² "Libya," *The World FactBook* (CIA), accessed on 13/5/2022, at: <https://bit.ly/48k5QCC>

⁸³ Amour, p. 262.

⁸⁴ Muhammad Najīb Boutaleb, *al-Zawāhir al-Qabaliyya wa-l-Jihawiyya fī al-Mujtama' al-'Arabī al-Mu'āṣir: Dirāsāt Muqārana li-l-Thawratayn al-Tūnisīyya wa-l-Lībiyya* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2012), pp. 143-144.

⁸⁵ Salim Nasser Barakat, "al-Thaqāfa al-Siyāsiyya: Mafhūm wa-Mumārasāt," *Majallat al-Mawqif al-Adabī*, vol. 50, no. 606 (October 2021), p. 5.

⁸⁶ Youssef Salem Abdulaali Amtair, "al-'Awāmil al-Dākhiliyya wa-Atharuhā 'alā 'Amaliyyat al-Taḥawwul al-Dīmuqrāṭī fī Lībiyā," *al-Majalla al-'Ilmiyya li-l-Dirāsāt al-Tijāriyya wa-l-Bī'iyya*, no. 1 (2021), p. 131.

⁸⁷ Zayed Ubaidallah Misbah, "Ishkālīyyat Binā' al-Dawla al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya fī Lībiyā: al-Qiyam wa-Ittikhādh al-Qarār," *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabī*, vol. 35, no. 403 (September 2012), pp. 76-79.

⁸⁸ al-Fitouri Saleh al-Satti, "Al-Thaqāfa al-Siyāsiyya fī al-Mujtama' al-Lībī," *Majallat Shu'ūn Ijtīmā'iyya*, no. 135 (2017), p. 191.

explains the absence of a culture of institutions and citizenship, the stalled democratic transformation, and the weak sense of a national identity that transcends narrow, pre-state affiliations.

The External Factor

Since the onset of the current conflict in Libya, external intervention has taken two forms: direct military intervention, as in NATO's 2011 campaign against the Gaddafi regime, and indirect intervention through political and material support to rival factions. Both forms of intervention have been motivated by economic ambitions, such as securing control over Libya's oil wealth, and geopolitical aims like curbing illegal migration to Europe, combatting extremism, or countering Chinese and Russian penetration into Africa.

The main international actors in the Libyan crisis are France, Italy, the United States, and Britain – countries that were also the colonial powers in Libya prior to its independence. Their involvement in the conflict conjures up lingering complexities of the late colonial era,⁸⁹ with its entrenched geopolitical interests and rivalries. Thus, Italy and the United States backed the Tripoli-based governments to safeguard their oil interests in the west,⁹⁰ while France, keen to promote its influence in the east, has provided political and military support to Haftar's forces.⁹¹

The conflicting interests of global powers have significantly aggravated the Libyan crisis.⁹² Each actor has sought to extend its influence over Libya and incorporate it into their geopolitical, economic, and military spheres. Their meddling in Libyan affairs has deepened the political and security vacuum, transforming Libya from a state to an "anti-state", i.e., a condition of pervasive anarchy characterized by the proliferation of arms, fanaticism, and fragmentation along tribal and regional divides.

Regional powers have also been vying for a foothold in Libya, and their interventions have entrenched the country's internal divisions. The main regional players include Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia,⁹³ which back Haftar in eastern Libya, and Turkey, Sudan, and Qatar, which support the Tripoli-based GNA in the west.⁹⁴

Conclusion

Libya's crisis of modern state formation has social and political roots. The central issue is the absence of national unity among its diverse social components. In 2011, Libya, an already fragile state, transitioned abruptly from the concealed weakness of Gaddafi's authoritarian rule to open disintegration and failed state in the post-Gaddafi period.⁹⁵ The tribal and regional dynamics were instrumental in undermining the development of a unifying political culture, and their impacts were compounded by the detrimental influence of external factors.

The Libyan crisis is primarily rooted in the artificial origins of the Libyan state. Instead of evolving organically through a smooth and gradual process or emerging from a consensual social contract, Libya's statehood was imposed exogenously. Moreover, the colonial powers that imposed the state model exploited

⁸⁹ Abdullah, "Libyā Bayn Mufāraqat al-Mashhad al-Dākhilī wa-l-Mawāqif al-Iqlīmiyya wa-l-Dawliyya," p. 153.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 153.

⁹¹ Shabeen, p. 375.

⁹² Western powers sought to achieve other ends by intervening in Libya. They include countering Chinese penetration into Africa and Libya in particular. See: Muhammad Abdul Hafiz al-Mahdi, "Athar al-Tadakhul al-Khārijī 'alā al-Thawra al-Lībiyya 2011," *Majallat Shu'ūn 'Arabiyya*, no. 162 (Summer 2015), pp. 178-179.

⁹³ See: Jonathan M. Winer, "Origins of The Libyan Conflict and Options for Its Resolution," *Policy Paper*, Middle East Institute (May 2019), p. 8, accessed on 7/11/2024, at: <https://bit.ly/3HL8RAS>

⁹⁴ See: Hajal, p. 136.

⁹⁵ For more on the concept and nature of the failed state, see: Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, World Peace Foundation, 2003), ch. 1, p. 5.

regionalism and tribalism as instruments of control. The consequent structural contradictions and tensions impeded centralization, while strategies of control based on clientelist relationships forestalled the coalescence of cohesive citizenship.

The Libyan crisis did not end with independence in 1951. Successive governments failed to address the underlying structural crises, which hindered their ability to establish a legal and institutional edifice capable of fostering citizenship, national integration, and peaceful coexistence. Nor did they leverage the wealth generated by the oil sector to establish a productive economy.⁹⁶

The mismanagement of Libya's ethnically, tribally, and regionally diverse society created an environment that has perpetuated the causes and symptoms of the ongoing crisis: the absence of a social contract, weak and fragmented institutions, reliance on authoritarian-dictatorial rule, and the dominance of tribal, regional, and ethnic determinants in political processes. Such conditions bred divided loyalties, extremism, and violence, while also creating a detachment from participatory political culture. As a result, concepts such as the modern state, equal citizenship, and democratic governance remained elusive. Instead, people retreated behind narrow local identities and interests at the expense of the broader national good. The current crisis in Libya is not just a product of Gaddafi's rule – though he certainly exacerbated it. Its roots stretch back to the pre-independence period and even before the monarchy.

In the post-Gaddafi era, Libyan society has become even more fragmented, with ethnicity playing a greater role. The Amazigh,⁹⁷ Tebu, and Tuareg communities have grown more active in defending their distinct identities and cultures, driven by a history of discrimination and exclusion. The political understandings and arrangements forged by Libyan factions in the post-revolutionary period have failed to satisfy these groups.

The continued fragmentation of Libya poses a serious threat to its future. Ongoing instability has fostered the persistence of regional entities defined by sub-national identities, overshadowing efforts to build unifying concepts and political frameworks. This dynamic threatens Libya's existence as a unified state within its current territorial borders.

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⁹⁶ Oil was discovered in Libya in the late 1950s, and production and export began in the early 1960s, transforming Libya virtually overnight from a poor to a rich country. Libya currently ranks fifth globally in subterranean oil reserves, accounting for 2% of the global output. It became a rentier state relying almost exclusively on oil revenues. However, successive governments did not take advantage of this boom to promote economic and political modernization or to build infrastructures to shorten the distances between the centre and the peripheries. Colonel Gaddafi had little interest in comprehensive development. To him, the vast oil revenues were a means to consolidate his grip on power, strengthen his alliances with certain factions, and buy tribal loyalties. See: Yusuf Muhammad Jumaa al-Sawani, "al-Wilāyāt al-Muttaḥida wa-Lībyā: Tanaquḍāt al-Tadakhkhul wa-Mustaqbal al-Kayān al-Lībī," *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabī*, no. 431 (January 2015), pp. 9-11.

⁹⁷ The Amazigh made its mark early in the post-Gaddafi period with the establishment of the Libyan National Amazigh Congress in 2011. For more on Amazigh national demands, see: Abdullah, *al-Ḥirāk al-Amāzīghī wa-Dīnāmiyyāt al-Ḥayāt al-Siyāsiyya al-Lībiyya bayn Mumkināt al-Takayyuf wa-Azmat al-Indimāj al-Waṭanī*, pp. 46-49.

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Abdelwahab El-Affendi*

Political Science in the Arab World**

العلوم السياسية عربياً

Abstract: This study emphasizes the importance of assessing the state of political science within Arab academic institutions. It posits that the humanities and social sciences, particularly political science, play a pivotal role in the advancement of any society. Pedagogical experience at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, as well as the studies and seminars organized by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, have demonstrated that there is a gap in our knowledge on this subject – as well as a need to evaluate the output of Arab universities and the extent to which they are equipping students to engage with the political sciences to a world standard. Drawing on observations from both the Arab region and beyond, the study examines the multifaceted crisis affecting education and research in this field. This crisis stems from the relatively recent introduction of political science in the Arab World, a failure to keep up with international developments in the field, and the political, economic, social, and structural obstacles that have prevented it from achieving its broader objectives. The study argues that the primary obstacle to the success of political science in the region is the absence of an Arab academic community.

Keywords: Political Science; Arab World; Academic Community; Doha Institute for Graduate Studies; Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

الملخص: تستكشف هذه الورقة أهمية تقصي حالة العلوم السياسية في المؤسسات الأكاديمية العربية، انطلاقاً من أهمية دور الإنسانيات والعلوم الاجتماعية عموماً، والعلوم السياسية خصوصاً، في نهضة أي مجتمع. وقد أثبتت التجربة التربوية في معهد الدوحة للدراسات العليا، وكذلك الدراسات والندوات التي نظّمها المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات، وجود فجوة في المعرفة بشأن هذا الموضوع، فضلاً عن الحاجة إلى تقييم مخرجات الجامعات العربية ومدى قدرتها على تأهيل الطلاب للتعامل مع العلوم السياسية وفقاً للمعايير العالمية. واستناداً إلى ملاحظات من داخل الوطن العربي وخارجه، تبحث الورقة في الأزمة المركبة في مجالات التدريس، بدءاً من تأخر دخول التخصص إلى الساحة العربية، وعدم مواكبة التطورات الدولية في الحقل، ووجود معوقات سياسية واقتصادية واجتماعية وهيكلية تعترض وصول الأداء في الحقل إلى غاياته الأوسع. وتخلص الورقة إلى أنّ المعوّق الأكبر لانطلاقة التخصص يتمثل في غياب جماعة علمية عربية في المنطقة.

كلمات مفتاحية: العلوم السياسية؛ العالم العربي؛ الجماعة العلمية؛ معهد الدوحة للدراسات العليا؛ المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات.

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In their introduction to a book published in 2009, Tickner and Wæver claim that they devoted significant time and effort to find studies on the state of the international relations discipline in the Arab World – more than they spent on all the other chapters combined. Ultimately, they were unable to find any relevant research, and were obliged to reprint an old article by an Arab writer and accept a brief, “disappointing” chapter from another.¹ They attribute this difficulty in finding materials to a dearth of writing on the subject, not only by Arabs but by other academics as well.

Writing elsewhere, I have described what I call the “Binder challenge”, referring to the observation made by Leonard Binder, an American scholar of Middle Eastern Studies in the 1980s. He noted that the Middle East and its academic life seemed to be “immune” to any sort of “scientific revolution”.² Binder compared the region to Latin America, which has contributed extensively to the reinvigoration of the liberal theory of development, producing such key ideas as dependency theory and “bureaucratic despotism”. In contrast, the Middle East has made no comparable contribution, and has, in fact, failed to make use of those ideas, never mind developing them. Binder attributes this disparity to the influence of Marxism on Latin American thinkers, as well as the region’s proximity to the West, as opposed to the assumed cultural insularity of the Arab World. Whatever other disagreements we may have with him,³ Binder’s point on the limited contributions of Arab thinkers – and even foreign academics working on the region – to political thought in general cannot be dismissed. This point is further supported by the work of Abdelkarim Amengay and Alan Aloskan, which underscores the near-total absence of quantitative methods in Arab political science even today.⁴ This is indicative of the deep crisis within the discipline, itself the product of an educational, social, and institutional failure. Understanding the causes of this failure requires serious consideration of the state of the field.

The Need to Assess the State of Political Science in the Arab World

Several considerations at work compel us, at this particular moment, to profoundly examine the state of political science in the Arab World from different angles. First, the study will address a series of questions: Where does the field stand today? What are its origins in each country? And how has it evolved and developed? It is necessary to assess its state intellectually and academically, particularly as political science remains absent in many Arab universities, with the discipline often unrecognized. Even in countries where political science courses are taught, the field’s presence is, in many cases, little more than nominal. Second, the study will turn to the development of the field in Arab academia to explore whether it has evolved into a fully-fledged discipline that meets contemporary global research trends and addresses pressing theoretical and practical issues. It will inspect the availability of qualified teaching staff and access to sources and resources in Arabic.

Third, the study will evaluate the practical presence of political science in society, beyond lecture halls and seminar rooms, as well as its efficacy and impact. Are political science researchers engaging with issues that matter to society? Are these studies being read and used by researchers to advance knowledge? Do they exert influence beyond academia and the narrow circles of the academic elite? This raises important questions regarding the state of the field worldwide, including the originality of contributions and the

¹ Arlene B. Tickner & Ole Wæver (eds.), *International Relations Scholarship around the World* (London/New York: Routledge, 2009).

² Abdelwahab El-Affendi & Khalil Al Anani, *After the Arab Revolutions: Decentring Democratic Transition Theory* (UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 5-6; L. Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 76-78.

³ Binder dedicates a whole chapter to a critique of Edward Said’s arguments on orientalism, arguments rooted in critical contributions by the Arab thinkers of the 1960s which eventually gave rise to a whole new discipline: postcolonial studies. This somewhat undermines his central thesis that there have been few original Arab contributions to the development of knowledge.

⁴ Abdelkarim Amengay & Alan Aloskan, “Hāmishiyyat al-Manhaj al-Kammī fī al-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya al-‘Arabiyya: al-Iḥṣā’ al-Istidlālī Namūdhajan,” *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 111-126.

effective interaction with the broader environment. The Arab Spring put these questions at the top of the agenda for the political science community, both locally and globally, by exposing the significant gap between this “science” and the world that it purports to describe. This brings us back to Binder’s observations – and he is not alone in this critique – on the paucity of Arab contributions to the field compared to those from the West and other regions, such as Latin America and the Indian subcontinent. That is: how great a presence does Arab scholarship have in political science globally?

In this connection, the relationship between contemporary political science and the Arab-Islamic tradition of the premodern era may also be considered. To what extent does contemporary political science in the Arab World draw upon pre-existing foundations? Finally, what is the relationship between the enduring absence of democratic systems in the region and the underdevelopment of political science, particularly since many scholars emphasize the centrality of this connection? Could the failure of democracy be the root cause of the crisis in political science or vice versa?

These questions arise from my teaching experience at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI), which has served as a venue for experimenting with the teaching of political science in Arabic while remaining closely connected to global developments within the field. The DI’s political science programme seeks to bolster the Arab contribution to the discipline, featuring a course, originally titled “Arab Contributions to Political Thought” (now renamed “Political Science and the Arabs”). The course is designed to familiarize students with significant Arab contributions, both historical and contemporary, to political thought and political science, inspiring and equipping them to tackle the challenge of making their own contributions. At the same time, the DI, in collaboration with its sister organization, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS), has taken on this challenge by coordinating the efforts of Arab scholars in the humanities and the social sciences, including political science and international relations. Together, they are broadening and deepening links with pioneering academic institutions and publishing houses within and beyond the Arab world.

The Arab revolutions also raised critical questions. From East to West, they revealed gaps in understanding Arab realities and questioned the effectiveness of political science theories and analytical tools more broadly. In-depth studies produced by the ACRPS on the Arab revolutions have cast light on some of these theoretical problems, as have many of the conferences organized by the ACRPS and DI. Numerous studies, too, have worked to find solutions to these challenges.⁵

From a practical perspective, my teaching experience at the DI has highlighted several gaps in Arab political science, reflected in the overall knowledge of incoming students. While most are academically gifted, their previous curricula have not provided them with a comprehensive education of contemporary contributions to the field, particularly when it comes to theory. Many are familiar only with theories that were already outdated in the 1960s and 1970s. Bringing them up to date with the latest theoretical and methodological developments and bolstering their research, analytical, and critical skills, has required considerable effort. Fortunately, we have made significant progress in this respect. However, encountering this problem has prompted us to think more deeply about the state of political science in the Arab World. Doing so would be crucial to joint Arab efforts to overcome the obstacles to scientific progress in the region.

For these reasons, among others, I came to realise the importance of studying how political science has been taught at Arab universities and asking questions about its development, the schools of thought it has subscribed to, the resources utilized in instruction, and the key studies it has produced. It interrogates the impact of political unrest in the region on teaching, learning, and research within the field, as well as

⁵ See, for example: Azmi Bishara, *Egypt: Revolution, Failed Transition and Counter-Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022).

the extent of political interventions in the academic process. It is a well-known fact that the discipline has only recently emerged in universities in many Arab countries, and has historically been taught under the auspices of other disciplines, such as law or economics. Furthermore, universities face many pressures that restrict freedom of research and expression, pressures that have unfortunately intensified over time, complicating both teaching and intellectual production.

Over the last few decades, the quality of Arab universities has experienced an alarming decline, due to political and economic deterioration in Arab states, and unrest and instability. The Universities of Cairo, Baghdad, Khartoum, Damascus, Rabat, and Tunis – to name but a few – once showed great promise, not only regionally but also globally.⁶ However, most of these universities now face a complex array of challenges, including inadequate funding, insufficient teaching resources, brain drain, and a partial or total lack of government support for students who face constant pressures during their education journey.

For all these reasons, exploring the state of affairs of political science teaching and research in the Arab World not only represents a significant scientific and academic contribution that chronicles the historical development of the field, but also contributes to identifying ways to further develop and modernize it. This can lead to a broader renaissance of political science in the region, enhancing its role in advancing our understanding of the world and promoting political modernization. The development of a country is closely linked to the depth and richness of political thought in it. The Hellenic and Islamic golden ages, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution in the UK and then the USA were interconnected with the increasing sophistication of political thought and praxis. The debates among philosophers, jurists, men of letters, as well as thinkers on matters of justice and the virtues of different political systems, produced competing ideas on these subjects and led to insights on the best forms of governance. Indeed, many of the political leaders of the great civilizations have themselves been leading thinkers.

Political Science in the Arab World: Emergence and Crisis

In 2010, the Faculty of Economics at Cairo University celebrated its 50th anniversary. Established in 1960, it represented a major shift in the development of political science as a discipline, although political science had been taught at the university for over 25 years before its official founding. It is perhaps not insignificant that only a year earlier, in 2009, the University of Baghdad had marked fifty years of political science teaching. The first classes at the University of Baghdad were launched in 1959, followed by the establishment of a faculty of economics and political science in 1963. These anniversaries were an opportune moment to reflect on the achievements and development of the discipline in both countries.

The discussion inevitably touched upon the broader state of the discipline across the Arab World, beginning with its relatively late arrival in the region, which coincided with the end of colonial rule and the return of politics to the forefront of national life. It also coincided with the end of what Albert Hourani termed the “liberal age” of Arab politics and the relative efflorescence of thought and culture. During this time, “aggressive” regimes began to assert control over society in general and academia in particular, attempting to impose political and ideological hegemony, especially with the humanities and social sciences. Political science thus began to develop in the Arab World at precisely the same moment that freedom of thought was starting to recede from Arab academia, particularly in government-related areas. Ironically, the rector of the Cairo Faculty of Economics during its Golden Jubilee, celebrated on the eve of the 2011

⁶ For example, Talal Asad, one of the world’s most prominent anthropologists, was full of praise for the University of Khartoum (where he was a professor in the 1960s while preparing his PhD thesis on the Sudanese Kababish tribe). He even compared it favourably to the University of Oxford. See: D. Scott & C. Hirschkind, *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 248-250.

Egyptian Revolution, was Ali El-Din Hilal, a leading member of the ruling National Party, underscoring the enduring and far-reaching interventions of the state in Egyptian academic life.

Political science as an independent discipline remained absent from many Arab universities for much longer. In some cases, such as in Morocco, it has recently been removed from the curriculum, most likely for political reasons. However, even as overall conditions have become much less welcoming now, political science is experiencing a paradoxical renaissance, even when compared to the recent past. For example, an academic article published in 1995 on the state of political science in the United Arab Emirates discusses the emergence of the field within the Faculty of Administrative and Political Sciences in 1977, noting its delayed establishment as an independent discipline and the changing view of the state on what its role should be.⁷ Such an article could not be written today given the political climate. The situation in many Arab countries in the present is well-known, particularly in Egypt, which once led the way in political science education. Studying and teaching political science has become perilous, to the point that one political scientist in Egypt has been sentenced to death in absentia on charges related to his academic work, while many others have been thrown in prison or forced into exile.

This situation raises important questions – not only about whether political science can flourish and remain relevant in the Arab context, but also whether the minimum viable conditions for its continued existence are even present. The discipline first emerged in close association with the awareness of the political as an independent sphere, governed by its own rules and distinguishing features, setting it apart from other spheres, such as law, philosophy, and history, with those studying this sphere recognizing its distinctiveness. This requires a degree of freedom of movement, both within the political sphere and the academic spaces that study it. When politics is as constrained as it currently is and universities resemble oversized prisons, where would this freedom of movement be found? Where might the “political” it is supposed to study be found?

Political science is a relatively new discipline, even in the West. Its emergence is often traced to the founding of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in 1903, followed by the evolution of international relations as a subdiscipline. Even in the American context, political science was very slow to acquire full institutional and disciplinary independence. Perhaps the first institution to formally offer classes in modern political science in the Arab World was the American University in Beirut (AUB), which some scholars consider the first modern Arab university.⁸ AUB’s records show that in 1896 when it was still known as the Syrian Protestant College, it began teaching classes on political economy. The 1926-1927 annual report indicates that in 1927, a class on “political science” was introduced.⁹ The first reference to a political science department, as opposed to the discipline itself, appears in 1941, while the 1950-1951 annual report mentions the “Department of Political Science and Law”. In 1957, the Department of Political Science and Public Administration was founded, and it continues to operate today.

⁷ Abdulkhaliq Abdullah, “Burūz wa-Taṭawwur ‘Ilm al-Siyāsa fī al-Imārāt al-‘Arabiyya al-Muttaḥida: Ḥalat ‘Ilm Qayd al-Ta’ sīs,” *Dirāsāt al-Khalīj wa-l-Jazīra al-‘Arabiyya*, vol. 19, no. 76 (1995), pp. 97-127.

⁸ AUB was founded in 1866 as the Syrian Protestant College and adopted its current name in 1920. Raymond Habiby, “Teaching Political Science in the Arab World,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southwestern Social Science Association 66th, Houston, TX, 22-26 March 1988, accessed on 21/1/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3BZFQpd>. Although the University of Algiers had been founded earlier (in 1833 in its earliest form, with the medical and pharmacological schools established in 1859 and the schools of law and sciences and literature in 1879, and the title of university granted in 1909), the situation in Algeria was complicated, first because the university was not initially open to Algerians, and they remained a small proportion of its students even once that policy was changed, and second because education was fiercely contested between those attempting to impose a hegemonic French culture and those attempting to resist this hegemony. A. A. Heggoy, “Education in French Algeria: An Essay on Cultural Conflict,” *Comparative Education Review*, vol. 17, no. 2 (1973), pp. 180-197. Ultimately, the Algerian cultural and academic sphere produced or employed many great French thinkers and sociologists, such as Albert Camus, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean-Francois Leotard, Jacques Derrida, and even Montesquieu and Jean-Paul Sartre. Nonetheless, AUB is usually counted as the first Arab university.

⁹ American University of Beirut, *The President’s Annual Report to the Board of Trustees, 1926-1927*, p. 20.

In Egypt, too, the Egyptian University was first established as a private institution in 1908,¹⁰ building on previous institutions including the Muhandiskhana (an engineering college established by Muhammad Ali in 1816), the Medical School (1827), and the Law School (1886). It officially transitioned to a state university in 1925.¹¹ There is some evidence that certain classes relating to political science were taught in the Higher School of Commerce, beginning in 1911.

The foundation of these universities was a political act, even an activist one, which resulted in a general upswing in politicization and political activity – evident in the campaigns that led to the creation of the Egyptian University. Similarly, the AUB had another sort of influence. Beyond its pioneering role in teaching political science, AUB fostered a vibrant political atmosphere, becoming the largest open space for debate between Arab students. For example, the student newspaper *al-ʿUrwa al-Wuthqā* (a name inspired by the first modernist-activist Arab newspaper founded by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his pupil Muhammad Abduh in Paris in 1883), consistently voiced Arab ambitions of unity and cultural revival.¹²

With the exception of AUB, Egypt was probably the first Arab country to incorporate political science as a discipline in its universities – a case can also be made for Algeria, although it is not well-documented. A political science department was established in 1935 in the Faculty of Commerce at the Egyptian University (later named Fuad I University from 1942 and Cairo University from 1953), followed about a decade later by another department at the Faculty of Commerce at Faruq University (now the University of Alexandria). A distinct Department of Postgraduate Studies in Political Science was established in Cairo in 1942, first offering master’s degrees and later introducing doctoral programmes in 1950. Officially, political science was first introduced at the University of Algiers in 1949. In Iraq, Sudan, and Tunisia, the first departments were set up between 1959 and 1960. It is worth noting, however, that many scholars characterize the foundation of law colleges in many of these countries (in the 19th century in Egypt and Algeria, in 1909 in Iraq, and in 1935 in Sudan) as laying the foundations for the later adoption of political science, because they taught international law.¹³

The teaching methods, resources, and approaches within the discipline have developed over time, confronting various challenges. Raymond Habiby notes that AUB (followed by the Egyptian University in Cairo in 1920) adopted an American teaching model, while Université Saint-Joseph, a French-language university set up by Jesuits in Lebanon the year after AUB as part of the interdenominational competition for converts, followed a French model. The Egyptian University, meanwhile, which began as an extension of the University of London, adopted a British model,¹⁴ as did the University of Khartoum, which was founded in 1902 as the Gordon Memorial College and incorporated into the University of London as a college in the early 1950s (Talal Asad also notes the influence of Oxford professors on the university’s development in the 1940s).¹⁵ Habiby also emphasizes the influence of Cairo University and other Egyptian institutions on higher education throughout the Arab World. Not only did they establish direct branches in other countries, such as in Khartoum in 1955, but Egyptian professors also staffed many university departments across the region.¹⁶

In subsequent years, universities began to take on new identities, influenced by the conditions under which they emerged and the social and political environment. For example, the Egyptian University

¹⁰ Hamdy A. Hassan, “The Development of Political Science in the Arab World: A Narrative,” *SSRN*, 25/7/2009, p. 2.

¹¹ See: “*Waqāʿi wa-Ḥaqāʾiq*,” *University of Cairo*, accessed on 21/1/2023, at: <https://bit.ly/3INkOam>

¹² Betty S. Anderson, *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), pp. 2-3.

¹³ Qahtan Ahmad Sulayman & Salah Abdelhadi, “*al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-ʿIrāq: Bidāyātuhā, Nashʾatuhā, Taṭawwuruḥā wa-Mufradātuhā al-Tadrīsiyya*,” *al-ʿUlūm al-Siyāsiyya*, no. 37 (2008), pp. 193-209.

¹⁴ Habiby, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ Hirschkind & Scott, pp. 248-250.

¹⁶ Habiby, pp. 6-7.

established its postgraduate political science departments under the umbrella of the Faculty of Law, while undergraduate classes were taught as part of economics. Economics was taught according to British curricula, whereas law followed a French approach, and as a result postgraduate students were obliged to familiarize themselves with the French method.¹⁷

Marwa Fikri argues that this dual influence remains evident in political science in Egypt.¹⁸ The teaching of political science in the Faculty of Economics and Political Science was influenced by its emergence from the Faculty of Law and Commerce, focusing primarily on economic and legal matters. In this, the French tradition and its great emphasis on constitutional law continues to play a major role. Additionally, teaching has been influenced by the development of the discipline in the West, particularly the rise of positivism in the United States. As a result, the majority of Egyptian political scientists today can still be described as positivists.

Equally significant are the impacts of political developments: the discipline first began to consolidate its independent identity in the early 1960s, coinciding with the rising influence of Nasserism and the state's increasing dominance over the cultural sphere. Fikri finds that the prevailing conception among Egyptian academics is that the role of the political scientist is to move within the dominant political and academic elites, serving the state and decision-makers. Therefore, the identity of the discipline has evolved under the influence of this mixture of positivism and alignment with the government.

Achievements of the Discipline

It is important to note that political science in the region has made great progress over the last few decades. From very modest beginnings – virtually from non-existence – it has established a solid presence in multiple universities in most Arab countries. Today, Arab universities graduate hundreds of political scientists every year. In Algeria, for example, the discipline has expanded from a single centre at the University of Algiers (the Institute of Political Science and International Relations) in 1991 to some 29 departments across the country today.¹⁹

This growth reflects a broader expansion of higher education across the region. In Algeria, the number of higher education institutions, including universities, institutes, and teaching centres, leapt from no more than 20 in the 1970s to 107 in 2021. The number of students has increased around 850 times over, from around 2000 to some 1.7 million. In Egypt, over two million students are enrolled in 20 state universities, along with 60,000 students scattered across 23 private institutions. Lebanon today boasts around 41 universities, while Sudan has multiplied its number of institutions over the last 40 years, with more than a hundred operating today. The same trend applies to most countries.

We might evoke here the concept of the “academic production cycle”, used by Sidahmed Goudjili in his account of the development of international relations. This cycle comprises three generations: the first generation, which entered the field between the early 1930s and the 1960s and paved the way for the second generation, the “delegation” generation sent abroad on scholarships and earned their PhDs between 1970 and 1985, and finally the millennial generation, who qualified between 2000 and 2015.

Notwithstanding Goudjili's criticisms of the contributions of these various generations and the difficulty of communication between them, his study shows that every group made significant contributions, some

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 5-6.

¹⁸ Marwa Fikri, “Ḥāl al-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya fī Miṣr: Tajribat Qism al-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya fī Kulliyat al-Iqtisād bi-Jāmi‘at al-Qāhira,” *Siyasat Arabiyya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 21-49.

¹⁹ Abdelkader Abdelali, Lubna Jassas & Qassem Hajjaj, “Azmat Takhaṣṣuṣ al-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-Jāmi‘a al-Jazā‘iriyya: Muḥāraqāt Ṭafrat Sittat ‘Uqūd min al-Istiqlāl al-Waṭani,” *Siyasat Arabiyya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023).

resulting in major advancements. The “founding generation” (the second generation) planted the first seeds of the discipline in the Arab World, while the millennial generation brought Arab scholarly output to a global standard.²⁰ This trajectory illustrates a steady improvement in qualifications and abilities from generation to generation, despite the limited academic resources. Moreover, we might also include the hundreds of scholars trained in major Arab universities, which have graduated large numbers of students who may have not pursued doctorates but went on to disseminate the discipline’s insights throughout society, whether via the media, the schools, or the bureaucracy.

Bassel Salloukh and May Darwich likewise emphasize this positive trend, noting some important contributions made in recent years through critical interrogations of the prevailing concepts and theories used in teaching worldwide.²¹ Such contributions allow the teaching space itself to become a space for theoretical development. The assessment of this “productive” phase between reception and research is important. The usual process is a cycle between research and publication; works that set out new theories or test existing theories against reality are put in dialogue with existing publications, including critical approaches to theories and new proposals for their development. Typically, teaching spaces are some of the most important sites in which students are exposed to these ideas and debates, preparing them for a later stage in which they will synthesize them into new publications, after which the cycle begins anew. But Salloukh and Darwich make this intermediate stage a very productive source of alternative knowledge.

The starting point for Salloukh and Darwich is the challenges faced by major IR theories, often of foreign origins, when they encounter realities outside the West, particularly in the Arab region. Here, some professors encourage students to critically engage with these theories by drawing on readings that interrogate their assumptions and premises and proceed from the Arab World. This might include postcolonial readings or radical critiques focusing on the security interests of great powers or rejecting stereotypes. Some, likewise, rely on theories developed locally, or on analytical eclecticism, bringing together multiple theoretical frameworks.

The goal is to develop a framework that more effectively captures the reality being studied. These efforts complement attempts to draw on classical works and values. Salloukh and Darwich see these efforts as serious attempts to escape the noose of Western intellectual and academic hegemony, potentially leading to new theories and approaches that will enrich the discipline. Nonetheless, there is still a missing link: how do these classroom debates transit from the mere exchange of ideas behind closed doors in the universities of the periphery to the formulation of coherent propositions capable of challenging established theories?

A Crisis of Accumulation and an Accumulation of Crises

Despite these positive indicators, the prevailing assessment among those working in the field is that political science in the Arab World is experiencing a major and multifaceted crisis. According to Fikri’s data, most political scientists in Egypt share this view, attributing it to the overall “political climate”, the lack of funding, the “gap between theory and practice”, and the difficulty of accessing data.²² By “political culture”, respondents presumably mean the undemocratic political system. However, it is worth noting that Chaker Houki describes another political dimension to the problem in Tunisia, that of the ideological polarization

²⁰ Sid Ahmed Goudjili, “Ḥaql al-‘Alāqāt al-Duwaliyya fi al-‘Ālam al-‘Arabī: Baḥṡ fi al-Tārīkh al-Ijtimā’ī li-Nash’atihi wa-Taṭawwurihi wa-Ḥālatihi al-Rāhina,” *Siyasat Arabiyya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 63-81.

²¹ Bassel Salloukh & May Darwich, “Tadrīs al-‘Alāqāt al-Duwaliyya fi l-‘Ālam al-‘Arabī: al-Ishkālāt al-Ma’rifīyya wa-l-Nazariyya,” *Siyasat Arabiyya*, vol. 11, no. 61 (March 2023), pp. 78-93.

²² Fikri.

of academic debate (a reference to the Islamic-secularist conflict) and what he calls “political confusion”.²³ Houki also cites political science’s loss of an independent disciplinary identity, which he attributes to the enduring link in Tunisian practice between political science and constitutional law. The discipline was first taught in the Faculty of Law and Political Science, where the pedagogical approach was dominated by public and private law, and administrative positions were primarily held by legal specialists. This characterization resonates with the situation in Algeria and applies more broadly to the Maghreb as a whole.

Houki also alludes to other important problems, including the issue of language. He emphasizes the importance of Arabization to domesticating and establishing the independence of the discipline, and the simultaneous danger that Arabization might obscure valuable sources available in foreign languages. Additionally, he points to the shortage of qualified teaching staff and the limitations of the local publishing industry. Equally important is the absence of active academic associations.

In Algeria, the crisis unfolds in the retrenchment of the field after a period of rapid expansion beginning in the early 1990s. Since 2014, many political science departments have been closed because of the lack of student interest. This can be attributed to policy decisions that have significantly limited the opportunities available to political science graduates, as a result of (or under the pretext of) the oil crisis that began at that juncture.

Respondents to the survey conducted by Jassas, Abdelali, and Hajjaj criticized what they described as the “arbitrary” expansion of political science programs and “random” closures.²⁴ But this was only one aspect of what respondents perceived as a potential larger crisis: the disappearance of the discipline’s distinct identity and independent character – independence from both other disciplines and state power – its failure to meet global academic standards, and its inability to adequately prepare graduates for specific professional roles. The same can be said of the imposition of a “socialist agenda” on the discipline prior to the 1990s, which contributed to the turn toward ideology at the expense of professionalism (although some respondents felt it was natural for the discipline to be influenced by the prevailing political climate). Jassas, Abdelali, and Hajjaj paint a relatively positive picture of political science in Algeria compared to other Arab countries, thanks to its long pedigree and the diverse foreign and Arab influences that have enriched it and enabled the incorporation of new methodologies, including quantitative approaches.

In Sudan, Hassan El Hajj Ali and Yasir Awad Abdalla likewise attribute the crisis in political science to government intervention in academia, particularly under undemocratic regimes.²⁵ They note that Khartoum University in its earliest form as the Gordon Memorial College was intended primarily to train administrators and later teachers and lawyers for junior positions within the new political system. In 1951, the College was amalgamated with several other higher schools to form University College Khartoum, which at the time was part of the University of London. Indeed, in its early years, Sudanese graduates received University of London degrees. This relationship continued until the Sudanese independence and the creation of an independent University of Khartoum, with the University of London overseeing examinations. Even after this direct oversight was terminated, British external examiners continued to be used by the university until the late 1970s, and English remained the language of instruction until the mid-1980s. The first political science classes were introduced by the Faculty of Literature in 1952, and in 1960, a Department of Political Science was established under the Faculty of Economic and Social Studies.

²³ Chaker Houki, “Taḥarrukāt al-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-Jāmi‘a al-Tūnisiyya: Mufāraqat al-Masārāt wa-Azmat al-Mawḍū‘, Kulliyat al-Ḥuqūq wa-l-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya Namūdhajan,” *Siyasat Arabiyya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 82-109.

²⁴ Abdelali, Jassas & Hajjaj.

²⁵ Hassan El Hajj Ali & Yasir Awad Abdalla, “Tadrīs al-‘Ulūm al-Siyāsiyya fī al-Jāmi‘āt al-Sūdāniyya: al-Nash‘a wa-l-Taṭawwur,” *Siyasat Arabiyya*, vol. 11, no. 60 (January 2023), pp. 50-61.

The University of Khartoum enjoyed far-reaching independence, and many foreign professors (mostly from Britain) continued to teach there until the 1980s. During its more left-wing period, the Gaafar Nimeiri government attempted to bring the University to heel by dissolving the student union and dismissing several faculty members. However, the fierce resistance mounted by students almost toppled the regime in 1973 and forced it to backpedal. The University retained its academic freedom, and students continued to enjoy political and cultural freedoms within its confines. This dynamic shifted dramatically, however, after Omar al-Bashir's coup in 1989. al-Bashir also attempted to tighten state control over universities by dismissing professors and replacing them with loyal appointees, enforcing total Arabization in teaching, and opening a number of new institutions.

These developments in Sudan serve as a compelling case study of the far-reaching and tangible negative impact of the deteriorating political situation, including dictatorship and a series of civil wars, on higher education. The University of Khartoum, once an institution renowned for upholding the highest international standards, found itself fighting to survive. Economic decline, beginning with the oil boom in the 1970s, dramatically exacerbated the crisis, leading to the migration of academic cadres to the Gulf and other African countries, such as Nigeria. With the outbreak of civil war once again in the 1980s, coupled with the imposition of arbitrary military rule in the 1990s, brain drain became almost collective – albeit now to the West, particularly to the UK and the US.

Nonetheless, Sudanese universities continued to enjoy relative independence compared to other Arab universities, particularly after the emergence of private universities. El Hajj Ali and Abdalla mention 90 such institutions in Khartoum alone, including eight state universities, 17 locally- or foreign-owned private universities, and 65 private colleges. They report that some 575,719 students are enrolled in university education in the country despite private universities only teaching political science to meet job market demands, such as diplomatic studies and strategic studies. Studies on Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, on the other hand, show governments in those countries are the ultimate direct decision-makers in universities, from the establishment and modification of disciplines and subject areas to the curricula themselves. This is a problematic situation, particularly when regimes have an agenda that does not sit easily with free research and expression and independent analysis of the political situation.

Studies in some countries have noted the importance of democracy to the development of political science. This reminds us of Samuel Huntington's famous assertion from his 1987 presidential address to APSA: "It is impossible to have political scientists in the absence of political participation [...] in a society in which there is no participation – no competition for power – political scientists would have nothing to do".²⁶ Evidence seems to support this claim. China and Russia, for example, have had relatively little impact on political science, despite producing many influential thinkers in other academic fields. Conversely, there are other counterexamples, such as Pinochet's Chile in the 1980s and 1990s, where political science flourished and ultimately contributed to the transition to democracy.

This, however, appears to be the exception that proves the rule: the boom in Chilean political science must be attributed to the many Chilean thinkers who fled the country in the 1970s to escape persecution, and they were subsequently absorbed into major universities in Europe and the US, where many enjoyed stellar careers. When the government permitted many of them to return in the mid-1980s, they took positions in various independent research centres, since they were still banned from teaching at universities, often with Western support. Ironically, this ban on teaching allowed them to focus instead on research, in which many excelled.²⁷

²⁶ S. P. Huntington, "One Soul at a Time: Political Science and Political Reform," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 82, no. 1 (1988), pp. 3-10.

²⁷ J. Heine, "Democracy, Dictatorship, and the Making of Modern Political Science: Huntington's Thesis and Pinochet's Chile," *Political Science & Politics*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2006), pp. 273-280.

The Chilean case thus confirms that democracy is a necessary condition for the flourishing of political science. Furthermore, the impressive development of the discipline in other Latin American countries and among migrants and exiles from those countries in the US during that period also helped support its growth in Chile.

Crisis of a Discipline, a Region, or Politics?

Mekia Nedjar underscores the importance of freedom of thought and expression to the development of the social sciences, arguing that academic production cannot flourish under regimes that forbid criticism and undermine freedoms.²⁸ Although she focuses on international relations, her questions apply equally to all the social sciences, particularly political science. She links the state of international relations, which emerged relatively late in the region, to various global problems, intellectual, political, and moral.

Nedjar notes that while the Arab countries may have won nominal membership in the global community, this “recognition” has led to their absorption into the prevailing theoretical and ethical framework, which is of Western origin. At the same time, Arab states remain unable to meet the conditions of true statehood: their sovereignty is frequently breached, their regimes are unable to address domestic or foreign challenges, and their global presence very limited. In other words, the Arab system is trapped within an indirect colonial hegemony, a situation further compounded by an epistemological hegemony that is no less dangerous. This hegemony controls the narrative and understanding of history, serving as the source of all forms of knowledge currently available.

In Nedjar’s view, the root of the crisis lies in an international political-economic-epistemological system that perpetuates hegemony and marginalization, and in local regimes that not only fail to produce knowledge but actively impede it with remarkable energy. Society does not only import knowledge from foreign sources but laps it up, including the “epistemological racism” inherent in the prevailing narrative, often to the extent of collusion and submission to hegemony.

There is a pessimistic impulse in Nedjar’s analysis of the crisis. She compares third-world countries (including Arab countries) to Foucault’s prisoner, who surrenders to the disciplinary regime under coercion but also voluntarily. The third-world state’s presence on the global stage is marked by a complex form of impotence, rendering the Westphalian nation-state a prison confined by a single, reductive way of understanding it within a modern system built on “surveillance” akin to the modern state. In response, Nedjar advocates for a confrontation grounded in what she calls “reflexivity” (drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and Inanna Hamati-Ataya, among others), as a “continuing process of sociological assessment of the tools of knowledge and the process by which it is produced”. For her, reflexivity serves not only as a “philosophy” and a “practical-social style of research” but also as a “tool for epistemological awareness” which empowers researchers to “understand the self and translate it into an axiological machine for the practice of knowledge”. Moreover, it enables them to “reconcile the claims of knowledge with the conditions of the possible as they face it and its social, as well as its political, responsibility”.

It is not difficult to spot an internal contradiction in this proposition and in postcolonial discourse more broadly. On the one hand, it attributes the epistemological crisis in the periphery to the multifaceted political, economic, and epistemological hegemony of the international system. On the other hand, it attributes that same crisis to the dictatorial regimes that suppress and undermine freedoms. Do Arab regimes possess agency independent of the hegemonic system, or do they bear no responsibility for the crisis? From another perspective: Are the radical regimes that present themselves as the enemies of colonialism – those that are

²⁸ Mekia Nedjar, “Limādhā Lā Tūwjad Nazariyya ‘‘Arabiyya’ fī al-‘Alāqāt al-Duwaliyya? Asbāb Quṣūr al-Musāhama al-‘Arabiyya fī Nazariyyāt al-‘Alāqāt al-Duwaliyya,” *Siyasat Arabiya*, vol. 11, no. 61 (March 2023), pp. 54-77.

often the most brutal in suppressing free thought in the Arab World – the product of “absorption” into a system of liberal Western values, for example?

How little attention we have given to the internal contradictions within Arab thought itself! Left-wing Arab intellectuals, some of whom have supported dictatorial regimes, have made important contributions to political thought both within the Arab World and globally. For instance, the first critiques of orientalism appeared in the mid-1960s at the height of Nasserism in the theoretical works of leftist thinkers such as Anouar Abdel-Malek (although he was writing in France), and of certain Islamists. Much of the work of Malek Bennabi, too, appeared in radical Algeria. Conversely, regimes loyal to the West have sometimes afforded greater freedom, despite their repressive impulses. Notable figures like Abdallah Laroui and Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, for example, wrote in Morocco. However, the more recent Arab rapprochement, wherein some countries loyal to the West have become more repressive, has created a new reality that requires a great deal of thought, particularly given that some regimes are colluding in the return of classical colonialism by inviting foreign interventions, including Israeli, in the region.

At the same time, important contributions to Western political thought have been made by leftist thinkers, who, at times, expressed favourable views toward repressive, dictatorial regimes in Eastern Europe and Maoist China (Michel Foucault or Jean-Paul Sartre, for example). The political movement known as European Marxism, or Western Marxism, enriched global political thought, notably through the Frankfurt School and thinkers such as Louis Althusser, Herbert Marcuse, Nicos Poulantzas, Ralph Miliband, and Benedict and Perry Anderson. But we must also recognize that while some of these thinkers attached to Marxist regimes – sometimes with a critical perspective – they all lived and wrote in liberal Western countries, and worked in universities or research centres situated in those countries.

There is no doubt that freedom and personal safety are important to any intellectual or theoretical endeavour. Thought cannot flourish in a country where academics lack safety assurance, freedom, and income. However, freedom alone is not sufficient. Resources are also needed, as well as an environment conducive to intellectual production. The crisis facing the humanities and social sciences in the Arab World is not merely a crisis of freedoms, but also a crisis of resources and the overall academic environment.

It is worth remembering here that Arab universities, including private universities like the American Universities of Beirut and Cairo, began as elite institutions that provided students and academics with the supportive environment necessary for teaching, learning, and research. These universities produced many great thinkers, some of whom went to work in the West and contributed to the growth of their discipline there. But the deterioration of the economic situation, coupled with an increasing demand for university education, has forced many universities into a struggle simply to stay afloat in an atmosphere of severely restricted freedoms. Indeed, even in countries where resources are more plentiful, freedom remains elusive.

Returning to those thinkers who draw inspiration from classical Arab and Islamic sources, such as Bennabi, Jabiri, and Araoui, for example, or Khaldoun Alnaqeeb on tribalism, these efforts have yet to coalesce into a school of thought capable of producing strong theoretical contributions. Fikri notes the attempts of Hamid Rabie to establish a school of thought that approached international relations from an Islamic perspective.²⁹ Additionally, there are the works of Riad El-Rayyes and Islamist critiques of orientalism, as well as the “Islamization of knowledge” school led by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi from the US and supported by a series of Saudi scholars, most notably the late Abdul Hamid AbulSulayman, which was supported generously by particular quarters in the Gulf. This group established the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Washington, DC, and supported the Islamic University in Malaysia and other institutions in Sudan, Turkey, and elsewhere. It also supported Arab and American periodicals.

²⁹ Fikri.

However, the theoretical fruit of these efforts remains limited relative to the time and money invested in them. This is particularly concerning given the importance of integrating the Arab-Islamic tradition into contemporary political thought through an approach simultaneously critical of modern and classical Islamic approaches. Discussing political science in Tunisia, Houki alludes to the legacy of Ibn Khaldun (who is not an exclusive property of Tunisia), but does not give any examples of modern Tunisian writings building on his ideas.³⁰

None of this suggests that we cannot work toward finding solutions to these complex problems, such as establishing centres of excellence in states with limited resources, with sufficient budgets to attract talented and capable staff. This was the idea behind the establishment of political science faculties in Egypt and Iraq. However, as I explained above, these centres have not achieved the desired outcomes due to political interventions, declining freedoms, and a lack of political will. Ironically, political science in countries like Tunisia and Algeria (and we might add Iraq and Sudan too) has regressed during a period of relative democratization. Nevertheless, creative engagement with the Islamic tradition is still on the table.

The Absence of an Academic Community and Research Problematics

No less important than teaching institutions is the presence of an academic community represented by specialist associations, research platforms, conferences, seminars, and publishing infrastructure. The history of the development of science in the West, including applied sciences, is closely tied to scientific associations – far more so than to universities. There have been great universities throughout Europe since the beginning of the second millennium, but they did not begin to produce meaningful scientific output until the emergence of associations like the Royal Society in the UK in the mid-17th century and similar entities in other European countries. In political science, there is a near-consensus pinning the date of its emergence to the founding of APSA in 1903. APSA continues to play a leading role in supporting and advancing scholarship by maintaining some of the most important journals in the discipline, organizing conferences that facilitate the exchange of ideas and knowledge, and offering training in different fields.

In the Arab World, however, such associations are few, whether at the pan-Arab level or in individual countries. The establishment of new associations is hindered in many countries because of the lack of freedom and fear from security agencies, particularly concerning associations focused on political science or international relations. The problem of resources also dogs many associations across the Arab World. For instance, the Arab Association for Political Science has faced major obstacles in this regards. While it publishes a biannual journal through the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, it lacks a permanent headquarters. Due to the turbulent environment in Arab countries, it was forced to hold its 1983 founding conference in Cyprus. It continues to grapple with funding issues and pressure from states that attempt to exercise influence at least through their members.

However, there are bigger problems that all associations and universities face: political polarization. Historically, this was a matter of left and right, as in other countries, but the polarization in Arab countries was particularly sharper, influenced by the region's political regimes. Today, the most significant source of polarization stems from the hostility between Islamists and liberals or leftists.

This polarization could have been harnessed, as in the West, by establishing competing research centres that embrace competing political approaches while striving to produce outstanding research and academic publications. Indeed, attempts in this direction were made in the last decades of the 20th century. But the

³⁰ Houki.

colleges and centres established in Arab universities in the 1960s have never operated in a climate suitable to the flourishing of scholarship. Their proximity to regimes, involvement with state bureaucracies, and adherence to government agendas, as well as a prevailing elitist perspective that saw political science as a tool to support the state and political regimes, have significantly hindered their development.

The founding of al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in 1968 under the auspices of the newspaper *al-Ahrām* – then headed by Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, a close associate of the Nasser regime – is a perfect example. Originally tasked with studying Israeli affairs and the Palestinian question, the Centre's remit expanded to broader political and strategic issues, including international and regional affairs.³¹ Its establishment outside existing academic institutions and within a media organization deemed politically reliable is indicative of the crisis of research within the university framework and the restrictions imposed on it. In subsequent years, likely inspired by the Egyptian example, most Arab regimes established their own research centres within their intelligence agencies or at least with intelligence support and funding, to study and discuss sensitive matters that universities were not permitted to debate explicitly.

Another political science institution, the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, was established in Beirut in 1975. It, too, has faced political pressures. It was followed by other centres, within and beyond universities, including local branches of foreign institutions such as the Carnegie Middle East Center in Lebanon and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Amman. A recent study lists some 224 Arab research centres active in politics and public policy. Most of these centres, however, are almost unknown, even within their own countries.³²

The issue of political science research is complex and multifaceted, yet it is a crucial part of the broader crisis of political science as a whole. Academic research is the ultimate aim of all study; teaching is only the first step toward qualifying students to carry out research, to discover, to develop, and research work is the material on which teaching depends. As such, a discipline can never fully mature within a specific cultural and national context unless it is able to produce knowledge that is relevant to the society and up to its needs.

Conclusion

The discipline of political science has made great strides in the Arab World, but its progress has been uneven, marked by many setbacks in recent years for various political, economic, and institutional reasons. Today, it faces a major crisis that takes various forms: decades-long stagnation in intellectual thought, a failure to keep up with global developments in the field, a near-total absence of the use of quantitative methods, the lack of an academic community, limited accumulation of expertise and knowledge, and the overall deterioration of the standard of universities – even when compared to their historical achievements – due to limited resources, brain drain, constraints on their activity, regime interventions in teaching and organizing, and the dearth of publishing infrastructure.

There are, however, causes for optimism, including the survival of certain reputable universities, the opening of new research centres and institutes, and the emergence of new generations of professors and researchers, many of whom benefitted from a foreign education. Notably, new, critical groups and schools of thought have formed, such as the Beirut Group for Critical Security Studies (2016). Additionally, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, founded in 2010 in Beirut, is one such advanced initiative supporting the humanities and the social sciences in the region. The centre receives support from the UN as well as Western and Arab bodies.

³¹ Hassan, p. 4.

³² Mabruk Sahili, "Dawr Marākiz al-Abḥāth fī Rasm al-Siyāsāt al-Āmma (Dirāsāt Ḥālat al-Ālam al-'Arabī)," *al-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt*, vol. 14, no. 23 (Winter 2017), pp. 256-261.

New initiatives are also emerging abroad, such as the Project on Middle East Political Science, launched in 2010 by Marc Lynch, a professor of political science at George Washington University. Although the headquarters of the project sits within the Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at the university, and was originally designed to support Middle Eastern studies in the US, it has since cultivated a broad network that includes many Arab researchers and provides backing to early-career Arab scholars. It seeks to diversify the research approaches in the region – particularly in light of the Arab Spring, among other developments – and has cooperated with the ACRPS across different fields. Similarly, the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut organizes activities and publishes studies on political affairs in the region.

To confront the fundamental crisis in political science in the region, it is urgent to create an Arab political community that can support the discipline. This initiative might build on the existing achievements of the ACRPS and the DI, which have already laid the foundations for political science research and teaching to meet global standards. Their accomplishments include establishing peer-reviewed journals dedicated to advancing the discipline within the Arab World and organizing regular events open to Arab scholars of politics to present peer-reviewed papers and publish them in books or journals. The ACRPS and the DI have also facilitated collaborative activities with leading academics from beyond the region through a series of conferences and events that bring together specialists from Western, Arab, and world universities, including those in China, Russia, and Africa. The next step could involve launching initiatives to support Arab political science associations and building partnerships with academic institutions in the region to build networks that will support the discipline, injecting a new vibrancy into intellectual and academic production in the political field.

Such vibrancy is not only indicative of a healthy society but is also an indispensable precondition of social, economic, and political prosperity. Rational intellectual debate, robust to the convulsions of arbitrary whims, interests, and power, is simultaneously the space in which identity is expressed, formed, and built. Within this debate, society determines the values that govern it, assesses them critically, evaluates how closely they are followed, compares itself with other societies, explores new horizons for development, and allows its members to share their views within a competitive framework that identifies the most promising paths forward. Without such debate, there is no difference between a living and a dead society.

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Moataz El Fegier*

The Arab Charter on Human Rights and International Human Rights Standards: The Practices and Approaches of the Arab Human Rights Committee**

الميثاق العربي لحقوق الإنسان والمعايير الدولية لحقوق الإنسان: مقاربات اللجنة العربية لحقوق الإنسان وممارساتها

Abstract: This article examines the Arab Human Rights Committee (AHRC)'s interpretation of the rights enshrined in the Arab Charter on Human Rights. It argues that the AHRC has positioned its work not as contradictory to the international human rights system, but as supportive of and complementary to it. The AHRC has generally adopted an interpretative approach consistent with international human rights interpretations, drawing upon them in its approach to the provisions of the Arab Charter. Instead of taking an interpretative approach that clashes with the work of UN human rights treaty bodies, particularly on culturally or religiously sensitive issues, the AHRC has often opted to avoid these topics entirely or has addressed them in minimal detail. Efforts to engage with human rights norms and their interpretation in the context of the Arab Charter have resulted from the increased attention of scholars to the issue of fragmentation in international law and its implications for the development of International Human Rights Law (IHRL).

Keywords: Arab Human Rights Committee; Arab Charter on Human Rights; Human Rights; International Human Rights Law.

المخلص: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم تفسير لجنة حقوق الإنسان العربية لحقوق الإنسان الواردة في الميثاق العربي لحقوق الإنسان، وتستنتج أن هذه اللجنة لم تقدم عملها باعتباره مناقصاً للمنظومة الدولية لحقوق الإنسان، بل بوصفه داعماً ومكملاً لها؛ إذ سعت اللجنة عموماً لتبني مقاربة تفسيرية تتناغم مع التفسيرات الدولية لحقوق الإنسان، وتستعين بها في تفسيرها لمواد الميثاق العربي. ولاحظت الدراسة أن اللجنة، بدلاً من تبني مقاربة تفسيرية تكون في حالة اصطدام مع عمل لجان حقوق الإنسان في منظمة الأمم المتحدة خلال التعامل مع بعض القضايا ذات الحساسية الثقافية أو الدينية، اتجهت إلى الامتناع كلياً عن تناولها، أو تناول بعضها من دون تفصيل. ويأتي تناول المضمون المعياري لحقوق الإنسان وتفسيرها في سياق الميثاق العربي، ضمن الاهتمام الأكاديمي بإشكالية التجزئة في القانون الدولي، وانعكاساتها على تطور القانون الدولي لحقوق الإنسان.

كلمات مفتاحية: اللجنة العربية لحقوق الإنسان؛ الميثاق العربي لحقوق الإنسان؛ حقوق الإنسان؛ القانون الدولي لحقوق الإنسان

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Introduction

The Arab Charter on Human Rights¹ has faced substantial criticism since it was adopted by the League of Arab States on 23 May 2004. Critics expressed concerns that Arab governments would use it as a means of circumventing their obligations under international human rights treaties. Additionally, there were fears that the Charter would restrict opportunities to promote the universality of human rights in the Arab region, as some of the rights it enshrines differ from those contained in international treaties.²

The Charter was adopted in its original form in 1994, but it was met with a tepid response, as it starkly contradicted international human rights treaties.³ Its revised second version was published in a charged atmosphere as the international community focused on issues of rights, public freedoms, and democracy in the Arab region in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 events.⁴

The revised version of the Charter represented an improvement over the previous one, but it remained ambiguous in defining several fundamental rights, and its interpretations of other rights were inconsistent with those outlined in international treaties. The Charter also repeatedly pointed to national legislation as the basis for regulating the exercise of certain rights. Mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of the Charter only specified the establishment of the Arab Human Rights Committee (AHRC) to receive and review periodic reports from States Parties on their compliance with the Charter's provisions and to issue concluding observations and recommendations in that regard.⁵

Previous research has focused on the origins of the Arab Charter on Human Rights and evaluated its content and mechanisms.⁶ More recent research has focused on efforts to establish an Arab Court of Human Rights, whose statute was adopted by the League of Arab States in 2014, although it has yet to come into force.⁷ However, there is a notable dearth of studies evaluating the AHRC's work, particularly its habitual interpretation of the Charter's provisions. Human rights actors have shown limited interest in both the Charter and the work of the AHRC, largely due to the normative flaws in the document's content, and the lack of implementation and enforcement mechanisms. As a result, the Charter's impact is diminished compared to other international and regional human rights frameworks.

This article adopts a different perspective on the Charter and the AHRC for two key reasons. First, regardless of how the Charter and its mechanisms are evaluated, the very existence of the Charter as an international treaty – along with the AHRC's active role in reviewing reports from States Parties and contributing to interpretative literature on the Charter's content – establishes a legal and normative framework. In the long term, this framework could shape Arab jurisprudential traditions concerning the Charter's interpretation and its relationship with international human rights treaties. Such developments

¹ League of Arab States, *Arab Charter on Human Rights* (Tunis: 2004). It was adopted at the Arab Summit by Resolution 270 Decision 270, AS 16, on 23 May 2004 and entered into effect on 16 March 2008.

² Dalia Vitkauskaitė-Meurice, "The Arab Charter on Human Rights: The Naissance of New Regional Human Rights System or a Challenge to the Universality of Human Rights?," *Jurisprudencija*, vol. 1, no. 119 (2010), pp. 166-178; Mervat Rishmawi, "The Revised Arab Charter on Human Rights: A Step Forward," *Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 5, no. 2 (2005), pp. 366-376.

³ Mona Rishmawi, "The Arab Charter on Human Rights: A Comment," *Interrights Bulletin*, no. 10 (1996), pp. 8-10.

⁴ See Paragraphs 27 and 28 at: "Naṣṣ al-Bayān al-Khitāmī lil-Qimma al-'Arabiyya bi-Tūnis 2004," *Aljazeera*, 3/10/2004, accessed on 17/9/2022, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4pnza5r7>

⁵ *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Articles 45-48; Mervat Rishmawi, "The Arab Charter on Human Rights and the League of Arab States: An Update," *Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2010), pp. 169-178.

⁶ Vitkauskaitė-Meurice, pp. 366-376; Konstantinos D. Magliveras, "Completing the Institutional Mechanism of the Arab Human Rights System," *International Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2017), pp. 32-39; Rishmawi, "The Revised Arab Charter on Human Rights," pp. 361-376; Mohamed Y. Mattar, "Article 43 of the Arab Charter on Human Rights: Reconciling National, Regional, and International Standards," *Harvard Human Rights Journal*, vol. 26 (2013), pp. 91-148; Jamil Ddamulira Mujuzi, "The Protection of the Right to Freedom from Torture in the Arab League States and under the Arab Charter on Human Rights," *City University of Hong Kong Law Review*, vol. 2, no. 2 (2010), pp. 247-259.

⁷ Ahmed Al-Mutawa, "The Failure of the Arab Court of Human Rights and the Conflicting Logics of Legitimacy, Sovereignty, Orientalism and Cultural Relativism," *Netherlands International Law Review*, vol. 68, no. 3 (2022), pp. 479-500.

merit critical examination, particularly in terms of their impact on the interpretation of human rights law in the Arab region and their influence on the process of forming a substantive global concept of human rights. Second, the Charter, as a legal document, remains open to multiple interpretative scenarios. In this context, expert members of the AHRC could play a major role in addressing the shortcomings of the text by developing interpretative approaches that expand the scope of the rights it enshrines, while also enhancing its normative authority in the Arab region.

This article examines trends in the AHRC's interpretation of the Arab Charter based on its actual activities. It explores areas of consistency and inconsistency between interpretations of the rights enshrined in the Charter on the one hand, and the broader UN human rights framework on the other. This article focuses on the development of the normative content of these rights without evaluating the enforcement mechanisms within States Parties or researching their development. Its interest lies in understanding the AHRC's approach to interpreting the Charter's provisions.

This focus on the normative substance of rights and methods of interpreting them, in light of regional and international mechanisms for protecting human rights, aligns with the growing attention among international law scholars to the phenomenon of the "fragmentation of international law" which coincided with the normative and institutional expansion of various branches of international law.⁸ The approach to addressing this phenomenon has shifted from examining the relationship between subsystems of international law to exploring the normative harmony between different systems and mechanisms within the same subfield – International Human Rights Law (IHRL), in this article.

This article argues that the practical experience of the AHRC since its establishment illustrates its keenness to establish a delicate balance between acting as a regional committee that complements, rather than competes with, the international human rights system, and the AHRC's status as a regional human rights mechanism that operates in a context characterized by weighty political, cultural, and religious sensitivities around issues of human rights. The AHRC has worked to ensure that its interpretation of the Charter, through its commentary on States Parties' reports, is generally consistent with the normative interpretations proposed by UN human rights treaty bodies.

The AHRC has demonstrated an openness to using international human rights treaties to address gaps in the Charter regarding the definition of certain rights. It has prioritized the rights contained in the Charter, even when they conflict with national legislation. In addition, the AHRC has adopted a gradual approach to interpreting culturally and religiously sensitive rights issues. In some instances, it has encouraged States Parties to amend local practices that derive their legitimacy from specific cultural and religious interpretations. In many others, the AHRC has chosen to remain silent or not to elaborate on certain rights rather than provide interpretations that are completely inconsistent with international interpretations thereof.

The Arab Charter and International Human Rights Law

The amended Arab Charter on Human Rights, issued in 2004, reflected an evolution of IHRL in terms of the comprehensiveness of the rights it addressed. It encompassed not only civil and political rights, but also economic, social, and cultural rights. It also stipulated rights for specific groups, such as refugees, migrant workers, children, women, the elderly, people with special needs, and people with mental or physical disabilities, as well as the right to development. The Charter addressed certain rights in detail, drawing on the jurisprudence of the UN Human Rights Committee, including the protection of non-derogable rights

⁸ Martti Koskeniemi, *Report on Fragmentation of International Law: Difficulties Arising from the Diversification and Expansion of International Law* (Geneva: International Law Commission, 2006).

that remain intact even under exceptional measures in times of emergency.⁹ However, four main issues have sparked criticism of the Arab Charter, raising doubts over its normative effectiveness. The first relates to the possibility that the scope of the rights it enshrines may be restricted due to the frequent references to national legislation in many of its articles. The second stems from lack of certain fundamental components in some articles which are rather included in international treaties. The third issue is the Charter's inclusion of articles that directly conflict with international human rights treaties. The fourth relates to the nature of its relationship with IHRL.

Stipulating Recourse to National Legislation within Standards for Exercising Rights

The Arab Charter repeatedly refers to States Parties' national legislation as the regulatory or defining framework for exercising many rights. Such references are found in articles addressing restrictions on the application of the death penalty (Articles 6 and 7); controls on medical or scientific procedures and the use of organs (Article 9); political rights (Article 24); minority rights (Article 25), freedom of movement and choice of residence (Articles 26 and 27); the right to a nationality (Article 29); freedom of thought, belief, and religion (Article 30); the right to property (Article 31); the right to information and freedom of opinion and expression (Article 32); the rights and duties of men and women in family and marriage (Article 33); protection of migrant workers (Article 34.5); and the rights to form associations or trade unions and to strike (Article 35). These references to national legislation and certain regulations pertaining to the exercise of rights have drawn criticism of the Charter, with concern that they may undermine the rights they are meant to protect. However, this remains subject to the interpretation of the Charter. These limitations are recognized in many international and regional human rights treaties and national constitutions, and are intended to accommodate local variations in the application of rights. They should therefore be interpreted within a narrow, justified scope that is consistent with the general objectives of the Charter.¹⁰

Components of Rights in International Treaties That Are Absent from the Charter

Article 8 of the Arab Charter prohibits "physical or psychological torture or cruel, degrading, humiliating or inhuman treatment of any person". It clearly defines torture as a crime that is not subject to a statute of limitations.¹¹ However, this article notably lacks a prohibition on cruel or inhumane punishments and does not provide a definition of torture, which would align it with Article 1 of the International Convention against Torture.¹² Furthermore, it neglects to guarantee that investigating authorities and courts cannot accept confessions obtained under torture, as stipulated in Article 15 of the Convention against Torture.¹³ Article 33.1 of the Charter, which addresses the rights and duties of men and women within the family, does not explicitly ensure gender equality,¹⁴ opening the door to various interpretations. This contrasts with the corresponding Article 23.4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that "States Parties to the present Covenant shall take appropriate steps to ensure equality of rights and responsibilities of spouses as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. In the case of dissolution, provision shall be made for the necessary protection of any children".¹⁵ Additionally, Article 3.3 refers to equality between men and women in rights and duties, "in light of the positive discrimination recognized by Islamic law, other divine laws, and the laws and charters in force in favour of women".¹⁶ This reference

⁹ Rishmawi, "The Revised Arab Charter on Human Rights," pp. 364-366.

¹⁰ Mattar, pp. 115-116.

¹¹ *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Article 33.

¹² Mujuzi, p. 257.

¹³ Rishmawi, "The Revised Arab Charter on Human Rights," pp. 372-373.

¹⁴ *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Article 33.1.

¹⁵ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 999 (United Nations: 19 December 1966), p. 171, accessed on 22/10/2024, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4yemsvyh>

¹⁶ *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Article 3.3.

to positive discrimination in Islamic law is ambiguous, and open to multiple interpretations. From a conservative perspective, discrimination against women in the family or public spheres can be seen as a form of positive discrimination in their favour, given the conservative theory of complementarity of roles between men and women. In contrast, a liberal perspective might interpret this article as an opportunity to expand gender equality and to enact measures that empower women in public and private life, particularly given their social, economic, and political marginalization in Arab societies.

Points of Conflict Between the Charter and International Human Rights Treaties

The Arab Charter adopts a restrictive approach to the application of the death penalty, in line with the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.¹⁷ Article 6 stipulates that the penalty only be applied for the most serious crimes, pursuant to a final judgment issued by a competent court, and that every person sentenced to death shall have the right to seek a pardon or a lighter penalty.¹⁸ Article 7.2 prohibits the implementation of the death penalty against “pregnant women, until they give birth, or nursing mothers, until two years have passed from the date of birth; in all cases, the interests of the infant shall prevail”.¹⁹ However, Article 7.1, despite prohibiting “the imposition of the death penalty on persons under the age of eighteen”, permits such a measure when the national legislation of States Parties authorized it at the time the crime was committed.²⁰ This article sparked widespread international criticism upon the issuance of the Arab Charter as certain Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Sudan, permit the application of the death penalty against children under 18.

The exercise of some rights contained in the Charter is limited to citizens of the states concerned. In Article 25, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights stipulates that the exercise of political rights may be limited to citizens of the States Parties, including the right to participate in the management of public affairs, as well as the right to vote and hold public office.²¹ Article 24 of the Arab Charter, which deals with political rights exercised only by citizens, is broader than its counterpart in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It encompasses not only participation in the management of public affairs, but also the right to run for office and choose representatives, the right to hold public office based on equal opportunity, the freedom to form associations, and the freedom to assemble peacefully.²²

Freedom of association, as referenced in this article, is related to the exercise of political rights and can be seen as a guarantee of the right to form political associations or parties. The Arab Charter committee has tended toward adopting this view, as will be further explained in the following section. Beyond the political freedom covered in Article 24, which is limited to citizens, the Charter also guarantees the broader right to form associations through Article 35.1, which stipulates that every person, citizen or resident, has the right to freedom of association.²³ However, the Charter does not address the right to freedom of association and freedom of peaceful assembly beyond Article 24. Article 24.6 guarantees the rights of freedom of association and peaceful assembly to citizens only, in contrast with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which devotes a separate article to protecting the right to peaceful assembly (Article 21) and stipulates that it is the right of every person within the jurisdiction of the state.²⁴

¹⁷ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 6.

¹⁸ *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Article 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 7.2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 25.

²² *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Article 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, Article 35.1.

²⁴ *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 24.6.

The Relationship Between the Arab Charter and IHRL

The Arab Charter emphasizes the universality of human rights and acknowledges the authority of international human rights treaties. It does not directly address cultural specificity or relativity, but rather underscores that one of its key objectives is “to establish the principle that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interconnected and interrelated”. However, the Charter includes references that blur the concept of human rights’ universality, such as the preambular text on “taking into account the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam”.

Previous literature has expressed great concern on this point, particularly given the Cairo Declaration’s ambiguous positions on the rights encompassed by international human rights treaties. However, the Cairo Declaration remains a non-binding document and has not been interpreted by specialized organs. The numerous references to Islamic law in the Cairo Declaration remain subject to different interpretations, given the diverse and flexible nature of Islamic jurisprudence and the various national practices across Muslim countries. Moreover, in October 2020, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) adopted a new version of the Cairo Declaration,²⁵ responding to a number of previous criticisms and taking a more open position toward IHRL,²⁶ but has not created a body to interpret its provisions.

Moreover, Article 43 of the Arab Charter reconciles the relationship between the rights outlined in the Charter with national legislation and international treaties ratified by the States Parties, ensuring that these rights are protected to the greatest extent possible. This article stipulates that

nothing in this Charter may be construed or interpreted as impairing rights and freedoms protected by the domestic laws of the States Parties or those set forth in the international and regional human rights instruments which the States Parties have adopted or ratified, including the rights of women, the rights of the child and the rights of persons belonging to minorities.²⁷

Known in legal literature as the “saving clause”, this article preserves the obligations the signatories have undertaken in other frameworks beyond the Charter.

Article 43 also plays an important role in interpreting the Charter’s remaining articles, as it ensures that national legislation is not used to restrict the rights contained in the Charter. It further enables the Charter’s provisions to be interpreted in light of the States’ obligations under the human rights treaties they have signed. This allows for the Charter’s articles to be broadened, and overcomes some of the restrictions inherent in its definition of rights.²⁸ According to the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1980), “any relevant rules of international law applicable in the relations between the parties” can be used in the interpretation of treaties.²⁹ However, reservations made by States Parties to the Charter³⁰ regarding international human rights treaties constitute an obstacle to the AHRC when using States’ obligations under these treaties in interpreting certain provisions of the Charter under Article 43.³¹ In such cases, the AHRC has the option of assessing the legal validity of these reservations in light of international law, based on the

²⁵ The Organization of Islamic Cooperation, *Cairo Declaration of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Human Rights* (Cairo: 28/11/2020), accessed on 18/9/2022, at: <https://tinyurl.com/z5ka7hj2>

²⁶ Turan Kayaoglu, “The Organization of Islamic Cooperation’s Declaration on Human Rights: Promises and Pitfalls,” *Policy Briefing*, Brookings Doha Center, September 2020, accessed on 18/9/2022, at: <https://brook.gs/3dojs9w>

²⁷ *Arab Charter on Human Rights*, Article 43.

²⁸ Mattar, pp. 91-148.

²⁹ Koskenniemi, p. 208.

³⁰ Paul McDonough, *Human Rights Commitments of Islamic States: Sharia, Treaties and Consensus* (London: Hart, 2021); Nisrine Abiad, *Sharia, Muslim States and International Human Rights Treaty Obligations: A Comparative Study* (London: British Institute of International and Comparative Law, 2008).

³¹ Mattar, pp. 126-127.

jurisprudence of the relevant UN human rights treaty bodies, and encouraging States Parties to withdraw their reservations to international human rights treaties.

The Practical Experience of the Arab League's AHRC

This section discusses how the AHRC has approached problematic issues in the Arab Charter on Human Rights. Based on observations and commentary on the reports of States Parties, the following analysis explores the AHRC's approach to interpreting the Charter.

Position on the Ratification of International Human Rights Conventions

In its concluding observations and recommendations, the AHRC sought to encourage States Parties to the Charter to sign international human rights conventions and to cooperate with UN mechanisms for the protection of human rights. This reflects the AHRC's recognition that the Arab Charter is a *complement* to the international human rights' system, rather than a substitute for it. The AHRC has noted and welcomed the ratification of international human rights conventions by States Parties and urged them to incorporate these conventions into their national legal systems.

However, the AHRC has not directly encouraged States Parties to withdraw their reservations to such conventions, although it has commended those that have made this step. For example, it welcomed the United Arab Emirates' accession to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment,³² but did not publicly encourage the UAE to withdraw its reservations to the Convention, which include a reluctance to categorize lawful sanctions or the resulting pain or suffering within the scope of the definition of torture, as per Article 1 of the Convention.³³ The AHRC did, however, recommend that the Convention's provisions be incorporated into the UAE's national legal system.³⁴ It has also urged the Iraqi authorities to amend their national legislation to align with the International Convention Against Torture,³⁵ and to adopt a definition of the offence of torture in national law consistent with international agreements.³⁶

The AHRC also welcomed Qatar's amendment of its Penal Code through Law No. 8 of 2010, which amended certain provisions of the Code under Law No. 11 of 2004 to conform with the definition of the offence of torture as per Article 1 of the Convention against Torture.³⁷ In its observations on Qatar's first report, the AHRC welcomed the country's ratification of several international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2009.³⁸ However, it did not urge Qatar to withdraw its reservations to the Convention, most of which were related to guarantees of equality between men and women in family and nationality laws.³⁹ In its commentary on the need to protect migrant and domestic workers in Lebanon, the AHRC urged the Lebanese government to consider ratifying the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers.⁴⁰

³² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the United Arab Emirates*, Fifth Session, 2013, paragraph 3.

³³ McDonough, p. 168.

³⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the United Arab Emirates*, p. 7.

³⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Iraq*, Sixth Session, 2014, paragraph 44.

³⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Iraq*, Fourteenth Session, 2018, paragraph 52.

³⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the State of Qatar*, Fourth Session, 2013, paragraph 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, paragraph 3.

³⁹ McDonough, pp. 171-180.

⁴⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Lebanon*, Seventh Session, 2015, paragraph 74.

In February 2014, the AHRC welcomed Iraq's withdrawal of its reservations to Articles 9.1 and 9.2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, relating to the establishment of equality between men and women in nationality laws.⁴¹ These changes followed the passage of Iraqi Nationality Law No. 26 of 2006, which enshrines the principle of gender equality in granting nationality to children born to Iraqi mothers married to non-Iraqi fathers.⁴² The AHRC also welcomed Kuwait's withdrawal of its reservations to Article 25(b) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) on 20 May 2016. This reservation restricted the right to vote to men.⁴³ However, the AHRC declined to comment on the reservations Kuwait continues to express toward the same convention.

In general, the AHRC has been keen to encourage States Parties to the Charter to engage with the mechanisms of the UN Human Rights Council and Special Rapporteurs.⁴⁴ It has also urged them to address the final recommendations of UN treaty bodies concerned with monitoring the implementation of international human rights conventions,⁴⁵ along with the recommendations issued under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism.⁴⁶ Additionally, the AHRC has recommended the designation of national bodies to monitor the implementation of the recommendations of international and regional human rights mechanisms.⁴⁷

Guarantees of the Exercise of Political Rights

The Charter's AHRC has monitored the implementation of various aspects of the freedom of political activity contained in Article 24 and has offered critical commentary on the institutions and legislation governing political rights in States Parties. In its review of Jordan's first report, the AHRC noted the unfair state of voting and voter representation in the Jordanian electoral system and noted that restrictions on freedom of assembly and peaceful assembly contravene the Jordanian constitution.⁴⁸

In its discussion of the UAE's initial report, the AHRC noted the absence of guarantees of freedom to engage in politics or laws regulating the right to peaceful assembly.⁴⁹ In its observations on the UAE's subsequent first periodic report, the AHRC recommended amending laws governing the Federal National Council, so that all or the majority of its members would be elected rather than appointed, thereby better safeguarding the political rights enshrined in Article 24 of the Arab Charter.⁵⁰ The AHRC also noted that UAE citizens had few avenues to exercise their right to political participation, particularly in the formation of associations or organizations.⁵¹

The AHRC also addressed political rights in Saudi Arabia, concluding that the country lacks an appropriate legal framework to ensure exercising political rights, including guarantees for freedom of association and

⁴¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraph 11.

⁴² *Ibid.*, paragraph 9.

⁴³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the State of Kuwait*, Twelfth Session, 2017, paragraph 6.

⁴⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Algeria*, Eleventh Session, 2016, paragraph 6; League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, Tenth Session, 2016, paragraph 8; League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, Sixteenth Session, 2019.

⁴⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 8.

⁴⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 16.

⁴⁸ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, Ninth Session, 2016, paragraphs 31, 32.

⁴⁹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 19.

⁵⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 51.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, paragraphs 52 and 53.

peaceful assembly.⁵² It also recommended that additional measures be taken to expand the base of political participation among Saudi citizens and that elections be supervised by independent mechanisms.⁵³

In its observations on Lebanon's first report in April 2015, the AHRC recommended that the country's authorities hold parliamentary and presidential elections on the date stipulated in the Constitution.⁵⁴ In its review of Qatar's second periodic report, the AHRC welcomed the promulgation of Law No. 6 of 2021 on the Shura Council election system. It recommended, however, that the law be amended to guarantee that the right to stand and vote in elections applies equally to all citizens.⁵⁵ The AHRC also urged Kuwait to establish a legal framework for the exercise of political rights, including the freedom to form political parties.⁵⁶

Guarantees of Respect for Civil Rights

a. The Rights to Free Movement, Residence, and Nationality

The AHRC has cited articles on the right to free movement (Article 26), freedom of residence (Article 27), and the right to a nationality (Article 29) in commentaries highlighting arbitrary travel bans or revocations of nationality. For example, in its observations on Bahrain's first periodic report in 2019, the AHRC raised the issue of arbitrary travel bans levelled against citizens without a legal or judicial basis, in contravention of Article 27 of the Charter.⁵⁷ The UN Human Rights Committee made the same remark on Bahrain in its concluding observations in November 2018.⁵⁸ The Arab committee also noted the inadequate legal safeguards in Jordan against arbitrary and unlawful revocation of citizenship. It recommended amendments to the Nationality Law to enable judicial appeals against any such decision.⁵⁹

In its observations on Qatar's second periodic report, the AHRC recommended adopting a mechanism for judicial review of administrative procedures and decisions restricting freedom of movement and residence.⁶⁰ In its concluding observations on Qatar's first report, the AHRC paid particular attention to the issue of statelessness and its denial of many individuals' civil, economic, social, and cultural rights.⁶¹ However, the AHRC did not address the rights of Kuwait's stateless "Bedoon" minority in its concluding observations and recommendations on the country's reports, in contrast to the UN Human Rights Committee which particularly focused on the group's political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights in its concluding comments on Kuwait's report.⁶²

b. Minority Rights and Freedom of Thought, Belief, and Religion

The AHRC has paid particular attention to minority rights and respect for cultural and religious diversity. In its commentary on Saudi Arabia's first report, it scrutinized the extensive powers of the Kingdom's

⁵² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraphs 40 and 41.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 44.

⁵⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Lebanon*, paragraph 67.

⁵⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Second Periodic Report of the State of Qatar*, Eighteenth Session, 2021, paragraph 44.

⁵⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the State of Kuwait*, Seventeenth Session, 2021, paragraph 37.

⁵⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, Fifteenth Session, 2019, paragraphs 51-52.

⁵⁸ UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the first periodic report of Bahrain* (New York: 15/11/2015), paragraph 49.

⁵⁹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraph 34.

⁶⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Second Periodic Report of the State of Qatar*, paragraph 40.

⁶¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the State of Qatar*, paragraph 20.

⁶² UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Kuwait* (New York: 11/8/2016), paragraphs 10 and 11.

Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice and how the body's practices violate the right to liberty and security of the person, as well as the rights of religious minorities.⁶³ In its observations on Iraq's first report, the AHRC commended the Iraqi Constitution's provisions that grant minorities the right to enjoy their cultures.⁶⁴ However, it later noted that the country had not passed any legislation to guarantee this right, nor the rights of such minorities to use their languages or practice their religions.⁶⁵ While Iraq adopted the Official Languages Law No. 7 of 2014, the AHRC noted that the Iraqi authorities have not taken sufficient measures to ensure that the state's activities reflect the society's religious and linguistic diversity.⁶⁶

Indeed, the AHRC has generally avoided addressing issues of freedom of thought, belief, and religion, refraining from detailing the components of this right as it pertains to individuals' beliefs, changing religion, or practicing religious rituals privately or openly.⁶⁷ The UN Human Rights Committee has repeatedly raised concerns over respect for freedom of religion in its review of reports submitted by Arab states that are parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which are also parties to the Arab Charter. The UN committee has criticized civil penalties imposed on Jordanians who leave Islam, such as restrictions on marriage and the deprivation of inheritances.⁶⁸ It has also criticized Sudan for criminalizing apostasy under Article 126 of the Penal Code, calling for the repeal of this provision.⁶⁹

c. Freedom of Association, Trade Union Rights, and the Right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The AHRC has made repeated observations on the signatories' national laws governing the right to form associations and trade unions, as well as the right to strike. These rights are restricted by most States Parties to the Charter. For example, the ACHR has urged Jordan to amend its Law on Charitable Associations "to eliminate obstacles to the exercise of the right to form associations".⁷⁰ It noted that workers are unable to establish trade union organizations and recommended introducing guarantees of their right to bargain collectively over terms and conditions of work, and their right to strike.⁷¹ In its review of Algeria's first periodic report, the AHRC also commented on the country's Law No. 12-06 on associations, which gives the authorities broad discretionary powers to reject the establishment of associations.⁷² The AHRC further noted that the UAE's Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 on labour relations restricts the free exercise of trade union activity and the right to strike,⁷³ and recommended that the UAE create a conducive environment for civil society organizations, including those focused on defending human rights.⁷⁴ Additionally, the AHRC

⁶³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 36.

⁶⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraph 6.

⁶⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraphs 80 and 81.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, paragraph 172.

⁶⁷ On the components of the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, see: Sarah Joseph & Melissa Castan, *The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Cases, Materials and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 501-516.

⁶⁸ UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Jordan* (New York: 4/12/2017), paragraph 28.

⁶⁹ UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Sudan* (New York: 19/11/2018), paragraphs 49 and 50.

⁷⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, First Session, 2012, paragraph 43; League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraph 74.

⁷¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraphs 45 and 46.

⁷² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Algeria*, paragraph 36.

⁷³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

called on the UAE to “insert an explicit provision stipulating the freedom to engage in trade union activity and the right to strike in its national law, in line with Article 35 of the Charter”.⁷⁵

The AHRC called on Bahrain to adopt a new law for civil organizations and institutions that would guarantee their ability to work in a suitable environment.⁷⁶ It noted the restrictions imposed by Bahrain’s Law No. 21 of 1989 on the freedom to form associations and the wide powers granted to the executive to interfere in the work of associations.⁷⁷ The AHRC also noted Saudi Arabia’s restrictions on the freedom to establish associations and professional unions and lack of guarantees of the right to strike. It recommended that the Kingdom pass laws guaranteeing the rights to form associations and professional unions and to strike, as well as encouraging involvement in defending human rights.⁷⁸ The AHRC also urged Sudan to “lift legislative restrictions on the freedom of professional unions [to operate] on a purely professional basis, and the freedom to practice trade union activity so the members of each profession can defend their interests”.⁷⁹

Regarding Qatar, the AHRC noted the restrictions imposed by Law No. 12 of 2004 on Private Associations and Institutions.⁸⁰ While it welcomed the issuance of a new law for associations (Law No. 21 of 2020), it also noted the limitations within the legislation, including the broad powers granted to the administrative body to issue decisions on the establishment and dissolution of associations.⁸¹

The AHRC noted that Algeria’s Law 89-28 on Public Meetings and Demonstrations restricts the freedom of peaceful assembly and demonstration by requiring prior authorization and failing to lay out rules on the dispersal of peaceful demonstrations by security forces.⁸² It also noted the UAE’s lack of regulations governing the right to organize peaceful assemblies and marches,⁸³ as well as Sudan’s frequent use of lethal force to disperse peaceful demonstrations and gatherings.⁸⁴

d. The Right to a Free Press and Freedom of Expression

The AHRC called on Jordan to amend its Right to Access to Information Act and repeal the Provisional Law on Protection of State Secrets & Documents.⁸⁵ It also commented on the implications of the Information System Crimes Law (2011) and the Prevention of Terrorism Law (2006) on the exercise of freedom of opinion, expression, and the press in Jordan. The AHRC recommended protecting journalists from criminal penalties for their media work and reviewing media legislation that imposes restrictions on press freedom.⁸⁶

⁷⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 85.

⁷⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, paragraph 43.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, paragraph 48.

⁷⁸ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraphs 54 and 56.

⁷⁹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Sudan*, Eighth Session, 2015, paragraph 15.

⁸⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the State of Qatar*, paragraph 26.

⁸¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Second Periodic Report of the State of Qatar*, paragraph 45.

⁸² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Algeria*, paragraph 38.

⁸³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 54.

⁸⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Sudan*, paragraph 9. See also: League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraph, 35; League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraph 83.

⁸⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraph 35.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, paragraph 36.

In its discussion of the first periodic report submitted by Algeria, the AHRC noted the implications of adopting a broad definition of terrorism in Article 78 (bis) of the Penal Code on the exercise of freedom of opinion, expression, and peaceful assembly.⁸⁷ Additionally, the AHRC noted the UAE's restrictions on press freedom, the lack of regulated access to information, and the impact of national law imposing penalties on journalists and bloggers. It also expressed concerns over internet censorship⁸⁸ and recommended further liberalization of cyberspace in the UAE.⁸⁹ The AHRC also outlined concerns about the UAE's adoption of Law No. 2 of 2003 on the State Security Service, Decree-Law No. 6 of 2012 on combating cybercrime, and Anti-Terrorism Law No. 7 of 2014, noting "vague and broad definitions of certain criminal offences they contain, making it difficult to determine what actually constitutes an offence; these provisions violate the principle of *nulla poena sine lege* (no punishment without law) and open the door to arbitrary interpretation and misuse".⁹⁰

Regarding Bahrain, the AHRC raised concerns about the possible prosecution and imprisonment of journalists and bloggers under legislation regulating the press and media, noted restrictions on the right of journalists to access information, given the absence of national legislative protections for this right.⁹¹ Additionally, the AHRC cited restrictions imposed by Saudi Arabia's cybercrime law and the severe penalties for the practice of peaceful expression of opinion in the Kingdom.⁹²

e. Protection of Human Rights Under Exceptional Measures and States of Emergency

In considering the reports of States Parties to the Charter, the AHRC made critical observations on the declaration of states of emergency and their effects on the exercise of rights and freedoms. The AHRC particularly stressed the principle that laws governing exceptional measures should guarantee rights that are non-derogable even during states of emergency, as outlined in Article 4 of the Charter.

In its observations on the UAE's first periodic report, the AHRC noted that Federal Law No. 11 of 2009 Concerning Martial Laws does not cover rights that remain non-derogable during states of emergency, as stipulated in the Arab Charter.⁹³ In its concluding observations on Bahrain's first report, the AHRC also commented on the formal implications of the declaration of a state of emergency, arguing that the country's "state of national security" did not comply with the formal procedures stipulated in Article 4 of the Arab Charter.⁹⁴ It also noted the absence of national Bahraini legislation to regulate states of emergency or to protect non-derogable rights during such times.⁹⁵ The AHRC urged Saudi Arabia to draw up legislative regulations to regulate states of emergency and define the conditions for declaring such measures, taking into account the protection of rights that may not be suspended or restricted during a state of emergency.⁹⁶

⁸⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Algeria*, paragraph 31.

⁸⁸ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraphs 22-24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraphs 47 and 66.

⁹¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, paragraphs 20 and 21.

⁹² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 44.

⁹³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 21.

⁹⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, paragraph 11.

⁹⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, paragraph 14.

⁹⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 24.

f. Guarantees of the Right to Liberty and Security of Person, the Right to a Fair Trial, and the Independence of the Judiciary

The AHRC noted the widespread use of pretrial detention by States Parties and the absence of legal provisions for victims of arbitrary and unlawful detention to receive reparations. It reserved particular criticism for anti-terrorism and public security legislation and their impact on States Parties' respect for the right to liberty and security of the person. The AHRC noted that Jordan's Law No. 18 on Anti-Terrorism of 2014 adopts a broad definition of a terrorism offence and grants the security authorities expansive powers to detain suspects.⁹⁷ It also criticized Sudan's Public Order Law for failing to uphold guarantees of the right to liberty and security of the person, urging Khartoum to review the legislation.⁹⁸ Furthermore, it criticized Iraq over its Anti-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2005, particularly in relation to guarantees of the right to a fair trial.⁹⁹ It subsequently commented on the practice of detaining suspects in pretrial detention for prolonged periods under Iraq's Criminal Procedure Code No. 23 of 1971, noting that the Iraqi authorities frequently detained people without charge for extended periods, which it considered unlawful.¹⁰⁰

In its review of Algeria's first periodic report, the AHRC noted that despite the lifting of the country's emergency law in February 2011, the army still enjoys broad powers to maintain public order, beyond exceptional cases, under its amended Law No. 91-23, and called for these powers to be brought into line with the Charter.¹⁰¹ It also noted that the UAE's report to the AHRC did not cover the legislation and measures put in place to protect persons from enforced disappearance, and urged the Emirati authorities to take effective national measures to address this issue.¹⁰² It also urged Lebanon to "address the issue of enforced disappearance, and to clarify the fate of persons who have gone missing [since the beginning of the 1975-1990 civil war], using modern forensic techniques".¹⁰³ The AHRC based its references to the issue of enforced disappearance on the Charter's articles on the protection of the right to life (Article 5) and the protection of the right to liberty and security of person (Article 14).

The AHRC made observations to States Parties regarding the lack of guarantees, in national legislation, of the independence of the judiciary. It recommended that the UAE amend its laws regulating the judiciary to ensure the latter's independence from the executive branch.¹⁰⁴ It voiced concerns over the executive's interference in the composition of the Supreme Council of the Federal Judiciary, and the subordination of the Attorney General and his deputies to the Minister of Justice. It called for a review of the Federal Judicial Authority Law No. 3 of 1983.¹⁰⁵ In its observations on Saudi Arabia's first report, the AHRC noted the absence of measures to ensure the independence of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary and the Public Prosecution, recommending that the Public Prosecutor's Office should be subordinate to the judiciary rather than the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁰⁶ The AHRC also urged Lebanon to review the composition of

⁹⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraph 26.

⁹⁸ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Sudan*, paragraph 5.

⁹⁹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraph 34.

¹⁰⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraphs 69 and 71.

¹⁰¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Algeria*, paragraph 18.

¹⁰² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 18.

¹⁰³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Lebanon*, paragraphs 12, 48.

¹⁰⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the United Arab Emirates*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 39.

¹⁰⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraphs 32 and 33.

the Supreme Judicial Council to ensure its independence and recommended that the authorities amend the rules governing trials before the Judicial Council and military courts to guarantee fair trials.¹⁰⁷

g. Prohibition of Torture and Restrictions on the Death Penalty

The AHRC paid particular attention to Article 8 of the Charter, which relates to the prohibition on torture. It examined the definition of the offence of torture in the national legislation of States Parties, as well as the assessment of national mechanisms and policies to combat torture. To do so, it relied on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. For example, the AHRC noted that the penalties prescribed in Article 208 of the Jordanian Penal Code for the crime of torture are disproportionate to the severity of the offense, noting the lack of provisions in Jordanian law regarding compensation for victims of torture and arbitrary detention. The AHRC also argued that civil law alone is insufficient to deal with “abuses and breaches of the law by agents of the public authorities”, and noted the absence of any independent mechanism for lodging complaints about torture.¹⁰⁸ Regarding Jordan’s first periodic report, the AHRC welcomed the amendment of the Jordanian Penal Code to align the definition of the crime of torture with that of the UN Convention Against Torture. However, it reiterated its previous observation that the penalty for torture was not commensurate with the seriousness of the crime, as it had been considered no more than a misdemeanour.¹⁰⁹ Notably, the AHRC relied on the definition of the offence of torture in the International Convention, bypassing the limitations of Article 8 of the Arab Charter.

The AHRC advised Bahrain to provide effective, independent institutional mechanisms to investigate all complaints of torture.¹¹⁰ It called on the Lebanese authorities to address the problem of overcrowding in prisons and transfer responsibility for prison management to the Ministry of Justice.¹¹¹ The AHRC noted that the UAE’s Code of Criminal Procedure does not stipulate that investigations and evidence obtained under torture are invalid, nor does it exempt the offence of torture from any statute of limitations.¹¹² It advised the Emirati authorities to incorporate the provisions of the Convention against Torture into national law by amending the Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure to provide a comprehensive definition of the offence of torture.¹¹³ Additionally, the AHRC emphasized that national law in the UAE must prohibit the deportation of foreigners to any country where they may face a risk of torture.¹¹⁴

However, the AHRC did not address the issue of harsh punishments within the definition of the offence of torture. In its concluding observations on Saudi Arabia’s first report, the AHRC noted that Saudi national legislation lacks a definition of that offence and does not provide rules for compensation and rehabilitation for victims of torture. It also highlighted the ineffectiveness of institutions charged with monitoring places of detention.¹¹⁵ However, the AHRC avoided commenting on corporal punishment in the Kingdom, instead calling for a penal code that codifies penalties for crimes of *hudud* (serious acts seen as crimes against God) and *qisas* (retaliatory) offences, and *ta’zir* (lesser crimes with discretionary

¹⁰⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Lebanon*, paragraphs 56 and 66.

¹⁰⁸ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraphs 10, 11, and 25.

¹⁰⁹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraph 17.

¹¹⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, paragraph 29.

¹¹¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Lebanon*, paragraphs 61 and 62.

¹¹² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraphs 12 and 13.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraphs 27 and 58. See also: League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Algeria*, p. 26.

¹¹⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraphs 28-30.

penalties), in accordance with the principle of *nulla poena sine lege*.¹¹⁶ In its commentary on harsh punishments, the AHRC could have evoked Saudi Arabia's obligations under the Convention Against Torture, which it ratified in 1997, without expressing reservations about the definition of that crime. The UN Committee Against Torture has called on Saudi Arabia to amend its legislation to abolish all forms of corporal punishment, such as flogging and amputations, arguing that such punishments constitute torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment.¹¹⁷

The AHRC has called for limiting the use of the death penalty to the most serious offences and for mechanisms that allow for amnesty from its application.¹¹⁸ It has noted the wide range of offences punishable by death under Sudanese national law, particularly noting the lack of a precise definition of certain offences, such as "undermining the constitutional order".¹¹⁹ While the AHRC has not addressed the application of the death penalty to persons under the age of 18, it has emphasized the need to set an appropriate age of criminal responsibility. It has noted that Lebanon, which holds children under the age of 12 criminally responsible, does not align with the child protection clauses of the Arab Charter.¹²⁰ This age limit is generally accepted in the jurisprudence of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which, in its General Comment No. 24, recommended raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14.¹²¹ It could have encouraged states not to apply the death penalty to children under the age of 18; most States Parties to the Arab Charter, except for Saudi Arabia, have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which explicitly prohibits such punishments under Article 6.5.¹²²

Women's Rights

In its observations on States Parties' reports, the AHRC addressed the issue of equality between men and women and the positive discrimination measures that States could take to turn this into a reality. It expressed regret that Article 6 of the Jordanian Constitution does not guarantee equality between men and women, arguing that this violates the provisions of the Arab Charter and Jordan's obligations under the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).¹²³ This is the only reference the AHRC has made to a State Party's obligations under the CEDAW. It also deemed insufficient the measures taken by Saudi Arabia to promote positive discrimination in favour of women in order to implement this article,¹²⁴ emphasizing that the application of the wardship system in the Kingdom undermines women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights on an equal basis with men.¹²⁵ The AHRC also urged the Lebanese authorities to boost women's representation in parliament, evoking the positive discrimination mentioned in Article 3.3.¹²⁶ It urged Qatar to adopt positive measures (quotas) to expand women's participation in the Shura Council and municipal councils.¹²⁷ In its observations on Kuwait's first periodic report, it recommended measures to eliminate discrimination against women "in conformity with

¹¹⁶ Ibid., paragraph 38.

¹¹⁷ UN Committee Against Torture, *Concluding observations on the second periodic report of Saudi Arabia* (New York: 8/6/2016), paragraph 11. See also: UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Sudan* (New York: 2018), paragraphs 35 and 36.

¹¹⁸ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, paragraphs 22 and 23; League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 27.

¹¹⁹ UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Sudan*, Paragraph 20.

¹²⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Lebanon*, paragraph 26.

¹²¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General comment No. 24, Children's rights in the child justice system* (New York: 18/9/2019).

¹²² *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, Article 6.5.

¹²³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Kingdom of Jordan*, paragraph 9.

¹²⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 22.

¹²⁵ Ibid., paragraph 23.

¹²⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Lebanon*, paragraph 47.

¹²⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Second Periodic Report of the State of Qatar*, paragraph 19.

Islamic law”, without elaborating on what this meant within the context of its commentary on Kuwait’s medium-term development plan.¹²⁸ This is the only instance in which the AHRC explicitly referred to Islamic law in relation to discrimination against women.

The AHRC urged the UAE to eliminate gender-based discrimination in the judiciary and public prosecution by amending certain provisions of Federal Law No. 3 of 1983 on the Judiciary.¹²⁹ In discussing Algeria’s first periodic report, it recommended that the country promote de facto equality between women and men in senior public positions.¹³⁰ It welcomed the appointment of women to senior positions in Sudan and encouraged the government to take measures to promote female enrolment in education.¹³¹ The AHRC urged Iraq to ensure women’s participation in public life without discrimination, equality between women and men in labour laws, and that women receive preferential benefits in cases of pregnancy and childbirth.¹³²

The AHRC stressed the need for States Parties to take measures to address violence against women. It welcomed the 2016 amendment of the UAE’s Penal Code, which removed a clause allowing husbands to “discipline” their wives, as well as the passing of the 2019 law on protection against domestic violence, recommending that policies be implemented to ensure the effective enforcement of this law.¹³³

The AHRC criticized the Bahraini law that allows rapists to evade criminal liability by marrying their victims, arguing that this practice contradicts the principle of consent in marriage.¹³⁴ It subsequently welcomed the Bahraini authorities’ announcement of the adoption of legal amendments to abolish these provisions, as well as the move to reject the use of violence when justified based on local customs or “mitigating circumstances”, such as a wife being caught in the act of adultery.¹³⁵

The AHRC’s commentary on discrimination against women in personal status laws was limited to its responses to the reports of Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait. It welcomed Bahrain’s promulgation of Unified Family Law No. 19 of 2017, which applies to all citizens whether they follow Sunni or Jaafari (Shiite) jurisprudence. However, the AHRC did not address women’s rights within the family under this law.¹³⁶ It noted the absence of a codified legal framework for personal status in Saudi Arabia and recommended the development of a personal status law that would strengthen women’s rights.¹³⁷ It urged Iraq to review provisions of its Personal Status Law that discriminate against women.¹³⁸ It also criticized Kuwait for preventing women from exercising guardianship over their children under Article 209 of the Kuwaiti Personal Status Law No. 51 of 1984 and Article 110 of the Civil Code No. 67 of 1980.¹³⁹

Additionally, the AHRC has raised the issue of forced marriage and the legal age of marriage in States Parties. It noted Iraq’s insufficient legal protections for women against forced marriage¹⁴⁰ and called on

¹²⁸ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the State of Kuwait*, paragraph 43.

¹²⁹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 36.

¹³⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Algeria*, paragraph 17.

¹³¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Sudan*, p. 1, paragraph 20.

¹³² League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraph 115.

¹³³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraphs 68 and 71.

¹³⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Bahrain*, paragraph 23.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, paragraph 62.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 47.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, paragraph 49.

¹³⁹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the State of Kuwait*, paragraph 17.

¹⁴⁰ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Republic of Iraq*, paragraph 108.

Sudan to introduce a minimum age of marriage to protect minors from such practices.¹⁴¹ However, the AHRC did not follow the UN Human Rights Committee in taking a position on what this minimum age should be,¹⁴² except in its observations on Kuwait's first periodic report, in which it urged the authorities to amend the Personal Status Law to ensure that women enter into marriage only after giving their full consent without coercion, and to set the minimum marriage age at 18, in line with Kuwait's law on the rights of the child.¹⁴³

In its observations on States Parties reports, the AHRC has emphasized the question of equality between men and women in nationality laws. For example, the AHRC noted the discrimination suffered by women in the UAE under Nationality and Passports Law No. 17 of 1972, which denies citizenship to the children of Emirati women married to foreigners.¹⁴⁴ In its observations on Saudi Arabia's first report, the AHRC recommended amending the Nationality Law to allow the children of Saudi women married to foreign men to acquire Saudi nationality, on an equal footing with children of Saudi men married to foreign women.¹⁴⁵ The AHRC also criticized Lebanon's discrimination against women in its Nationality Law No. 15 of 1925¹⁴⁶ whilst welcoming Qatar's adoption of Law No. 10 of 2018, which enables the children of Qatari women married to foreigners to obtain permanent residency. It also urged the country to extend the right to citizenship to these children, on the same basis as Qatari men married to foreign women.¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

The AHRC has generally followed an approach of harmonizing its interpretation of the Arab Charter on Human Rights with international human rights conventions. The AHRC's concluding observations and recommendations have been characterized by a critical approach to national laws and practices, while consistently monitoring the adherence to the rights enshrined in the Arab Charter. It has upheld these rights without allowing them to be undermined by national legislation, particularly in areas such as freedom of opinion and expression, the prohibition of torture, the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of association, the independence of the judiciary, and the guarantees of a fair trial.

The AHRC has also reviewed States Parties' implementation of its recommendations, creating continuity and consistency in its own work, regardless of its composition. It has stressed the importance of international conventions and welcomed cooperation with international human rights mechanisms, the accession of the Charter's signatories to those treaties, as well as steps taken by some States Parties to withdraw certain reservations. However, the AHRC has avoided discussing, evaluating, or directly encouraging the withdrawal of these reservations, particularly when discussing the application of certain rights enshrined in the Charter, which are affected by such reservations. Although the AHRC could have commented on these reservations, taking advantage of the evolution of the jurisprudence of the UN Human Rights Committee regarding the regulation of reservations to human rights conventions, it has chosen

¹⁴¹ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Report of the Republic of Sudan*, paragraph 12. See also: League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the State of Qatar*, Thirteenth Session, 2017, paragraph 110.

¹⁴² UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the first periodic report of Bahrain* (New York: 15/11/2015), paragraph 18.

¹⁴³ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the State of Kuwait*, paragraph 44.

¹⁴⁴ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the United Arab Emirates*, paragraph 19.

¹⁴⁵ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 43.

¹⁴⁶ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the First Periodic Report of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, paragraph 68.

¹⁴⁷ League of Arab States: AHRC, *Concluding Observations and Recommendations on the Second Periodic Report of the State of Qatar*, paragraph 48.

instead to base its opinions on international conventions when affirming certain rights contained in the Charter. This is especially true when defining the offence of torture, as the Charter does not provide a comprehensive definition thereof.

The AHRC has avoided detailed discussions of rights that involve cultural or religious sensitivities, opting to remain silent on some of these issues and to develop its positions according to the political and legal contexts within States Parties. At the same time, it has avoided direct conflict with international human rights conventions or adopting interpretations of articles of the Charter that entirely contradict these conventions. In this context, the AHRC has not taken an interpretive position on the relationship between Islamic law and the rights enshrined in the Arab Charter, steering clear of in-depth discussion of related issues such as freedom of religion and belief.

The AHRC has refrained from elaborating on women's rights in personal status laws, except for passing references in its concluding observations on some States Parties' reports, without delving into issues of discrimination against women in marriage and divorce. In its comments on personal status matters, the AHRC has restricted its commentary on women's guardianship over children, women's full consent when entering marriage, and the need to set a minimum marriage age (without specifying this age). An exception to this is in its observations on Kuwait's report in December 2021, when the AHRC called for setting the minimum age at 18, which may establish a precedent on this issue. The AHRC has paid extensive attention to issues of violence against women and guarantees of women's participation in public life.

The AHRC has refrained from taking a position on the application of Islamic criminal law and corporal punishment, except in relation to the broad powers of Saudi Arabia's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice and the impact of these practices on the rights to liberty and personal security. The AHRC has also called for the codification of Saudi Arabia's penal code to ensure it aligns with the principle of *nulla poena sine lege*. It is worth noting that the AHRC has indirectly supported more progressive interpretations of Sharia law when advocating for the elimination of discrimination against women in the personal status laws of certain States Parties.

That said, the AHRC could have placed greater emphasis on the cultural legitimacy approach to human rights by encouraging the reinterpretation of religious laws or practices based on local cultures, in a manner consistent with the rights enshrined in the Charter. Additionally, it could also have drawn on comparative jurisprudence to transfer and adopt good practices from other countries in the Muslim world and share them with States Parties to promote women's rights, freedom of religion and belief, and reforms to Islamic criminal law, and to restrict or halt the application of corporal punishments.

Whether the AHRC continues to adopt, develop, or even revoke these approaches will depend on its composition, the keenness of its members to preserve and develop its traditions in interpreting the Charter, and the extent of States Parties' support and cooperation with its work. The limited representation of Arab and international human rights NGOs at the Arab League and the Arab Human Rights Commission deprives the AHRC of allies and supporters of its independence, as well as divesting the Charter's substance of an important factor in developing the Charter and safeguarding the expansion of its normative scope.

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Farah Z. Aridi*

Mapping the Literary: A Spatial Reading of Hilal Chouman's *Kāna Ghadan***

فضاءات النص الأدبي: قراءة مكانية في رواية "كان غداً" لهلال شومان

Abstract: This study highlights the significance of space as a narrative component capable of opening up a text to various possibilities. As such, the text is treated as a critical roadmap capable of producing meaning and knowledge. This study leans on spatial literary studies, with an emphasis on the relationality of spatiality and textuality, to offer a spatial reading of Hilal Chouman's *Kāna Ghadan*. A reconsideration of the concepts of spatiality and textuality is paramount, particularly amidst the recent conjectures in spatial-literary studies, which focus on the specificity of the Arab experience. It presents a literary geography, based on Chouman's literary map, specific to the experience of Beirut. This geography is not only shaped by how the protagonists see or understand the city, but also by how they experience and practice it on a daily basis. This practice and the way they converse about Beirut reflect a socio-spatial imaginary that challenges dominant narratives about the city.

Keywords: Spatial Literary Studies; Spatiality; Textuality; Literary Map; Hilal Chouman.

المخلص: تركز هذه الدراسة على المكان عنصرًا سرديًا أساسيًا لكشف النص الروائي وفهمه، معتبرةً إياه مساحةً تأويليةً مفتوحة؛ وتقاربه باعتباره خريطة طريق نقدية تسعى لإنتاج معرفة ومعنى، وذلك من خلال الاعتماد على الدراسات الأدبية المكانية التي تشدد على أهمية التفكير في النص مكانيًا؛ أي استنادًا إلى العلائقية المبنية بين نصية المكان ومكانية النص، من خلال مقارنة نص روائي عنوانه «كان غداً» لهلال شومان. إن إعادة النظر في مفهومَي المكانية والنصية أمرٌ بالغ الأهمية، لا سيما في خضمّ تطورات الدراسات المكانية-الأدبية، التي تركز على خصوصية التجربة العربية. وتقدم هذه الدراسة جغرافية أدبية، تستند إلى خريطة شومان الأدبية، الخاصة بتجربة بيروت. ولا تتشكل هذه الجغرافيا من خلال الطريقة التي ينظر بها أبطال الرواية المدينة أو يفهمون بها فحسب، بل من خلال تجربتهم وممارستهم لها على نحو يومي أيضًا. وتعكس هذه الممارسة والطريقة التي يتحدثون بها عن بيروت خيالًا مكانيًا اجتماعيًا يتحدى السائدات المتعلقة بالمدينة.

كلمات مفتاحية: الدراسات الأدبية المكانية؛ المكانية؛ النصية؛ الخريطة الأدبية؛ هلال شومان.

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Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between text and space, its role in narrative formation, and its contribution to socio-spatial knowledge. Positioned within the approaches of modern comparative literature and literary-spatial studies, the paper critiques both distant reading, which adopts a quantitative approach to literary works, as well as close reading, which overlooks material contexts. It proposes a comprehensive reading that synthesizes both approaches. In doing so, it serves as a foundation for a broader project to map the Arab novel spatially and textually, and to narrativize the Arab urban landscape.

The paper examines how spatial practices, including the processes of reading, interpretation, and knowledge production, give rise to multiple narratives that reflect a socio-spatial imaginary that confirms a spatial multiplicity often marginalized by monolithic narratives. This approach seeks to extend itself beyond and spill over readings that approach a text as a city or a city as text. Instead, it advocates for thinking spatially about the text and textually about a city in a manner that lends attention to their emplacement within a relational process. It therefore does not seek to approach the city merely in terms of the complex geographical or topographical dimensions of its spaces, nor by reducing it to what is merely narrated about it. Rather than objectifying the text and flattening its potential to a monolithic narrative and discourse (of, in this case, Beirut), the paper considers the text as both a producer and product of space, engaging with it as an active process of knowledge production.

The reasoning adopted here is grounded in the understanding that the textuality of a particular work (i.e., what makes it a text) and its spatiality (i.e., what makes it a space, rather than merely a vessel for events) are in a reciprocal relationship in which several factors continuously interact. Therefore, the paper does not suffice with the conventional view that the literary text, particularly the novel, is an urban product shaped by the city's architecture and prevailing discourse, with specific contextual determinants and conditions. Rather, it problematizes this by refusing to consider the relationship between text and space as conform. It centralizes space as a key narrative element within the text, thus opening it up to multiple critical interpretations and interactions that reflect the diversity of life experiences it embodies.

To this end, this paper approaches the novel as a critical roadmap, drawing on recent spatial approaches emerging within the New Comparative Literature studies, such as Gayatri Spivak's emphasis on the importance of considering the text as subject to multiple interpretations and reading as an ongoing ever-renewing critical act.¹ The paper leverages the relationality it builds between the textuality of space and the spatiality of the text as an analytical tool, highlighting the role of spatial reading of the novel. This spatial approach to a literary text is crucial for the re-examination, reassessment, and retheorization of both concepts of space and text. Consequently, it offers an alternative means through which to read not only such concepts as distinct, but also as formative and informative of their relationality and the ensuing connections, venues, and trajectories (or possibilities). Building upon developments in Western and Arab spatial theory,² this paper emphasizes the specificity of the Arab experience in this field. It considers the socio-spatial imaginary as a producer of narratives, and by extension, of socio-political existence. It demonstrates the importance of spatial practice in the act of reading, and the function of the text not only in producing meaning and knowledge but also in the process of (re-)theorization.

After discussing the issues of the relationality of text and space, the paper addresses the following questions: First, what does spatial-textual relationality mean, and how does it manifest? Second, how does

¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Megacity," *Grey Room*, no. 1 (2000), pp. 8-25.

² An interest in the concept of social space has emerged among some Arab writers relying on the Kantian concept of place, while many others have been influenced by the works of French Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre, as well as Robert Ezra Park and Gaston Bachelard. Idris Maqbul studied the city and place from a sociolinguistic perspective. See: Idris Maqbul, *al-Insān, al-'Umrān, wa-l-Lisān: Risāla fī Tadāwur al-Ansāq fī al-Madīna al-'Arabīyya* (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2020).

the multiplicity of spatial and textual narratives reflect our daily practices, and how are they reflected therein? Third, how does a text “open up”, and how do readers encounter it as an embodied experience that, in turn, embodies the text? Lastly, the study examines Hilal Chouman's novel, *Kāna Ghadan*,³ which offers a narrativization of Beirut's lived geography. The novel maps the city, enabling readers to visualize it by combining detailed descriptions of specific places, with a portrayal of the characters' intimate relationship with the city's daily rhythms, history, changing discourses and accessible practices, political-spatial and social conditions, landmarks, and street names.

Chouman's novel reveals the power structures that govern both spatial practices and narratives of space (inside and outside the novel). The focus here is on identifying the mechanisms by which these power relations are challenged in the novel, and how they manifest in daily practices that defy stereotypes and create socio-spatial knowledge. The paper does not draw parallels nor project a discourse analysis from one context onto another, but rather opens a dialogue with both processes under a relationality imposed by the spatiality of text and the textuality of space, overcoming the dialectical trap of reconciliation.

Spatial-Textual Relationality as an Analytical Tool

The Spatiality of Text and the Textuality of Space

Placing the spatiality of text and textuality of space⁴ at the centre of the critical interpretive process emphasizes their interrelatedness as two facets of an open, but not dialectical, relationship in which the possibilities and tensions inherent in the socio-spatial configurations and organizations coexist. These configurations and organizations are political, cultural, and ideological, manifesting in daily practices and in the public and official discourse that sets the rhythms of life and the narratives it engenders. Spatial and urban configurations impose certain social formations that determine which social classes inhabit them, their daily routines, and the nature of their lived narratives.⁵ These social formations, in turn, influence the evolution of space over time or reproduce the dominant or prevailing configuration.⁶

The existing order operates through power techniques and social control strategies to preserve these social relationships, while discourse is a space for these techniques. Hence, the perception and representation of space are linked to a specific discourse that maintains or reproduces it in ways that reinforce the power of the existing order. The material, spatial, social, and discursive components of this formation combine to shape the production of daily life and spatial and cognitive experience.⁷ These factors influence the process of meaning and knowledge production, within which literary and critical practices find their place. At worst, the prevalence of a single narrative at the expense of others leads to systemizing, normalizing, and the hegemony of a singular and monolithic spatial experience. Consequently, daily life becomes structured to accommodate a specific category of people while marginalizing others, often by imposing a particular discourse and system – whether through biopolitics or other forms of social control.⁸ Through varying

³ Hilal Chouman, *Kāna Ghadan* (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2017).

⁴ Robert Tally Jr., *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013); Barney Ward & Santa Arias (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009); Robert Tally Jr., *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Kevin R. McNamara (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to The City in Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Adam Hansen, “Introduction: Narrating Cities,” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 39, no. 3 (2009), pp. 271-279; Yasin al-Naşir, *Madkhal Ilā al-Naqd al-Makānī: al-Khiṭāb - al-Ḥudūd - al-Ma' lafa - al-Tafaddī - al-Mawḍa'a - al-Mābayn - al-Masāfa - al-Isti'āra - al-Kafā'a* (Damascus: Dār Nīnawā, 2015); Ali Abd al-Rauf, *Mudun al-'Arab fī Riwayātihim* (Cairo: Madārāt li-l-Abḥāth wa-l-Nashr, 2017).

⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.) (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life: The One-Volume Edition* (London: Verso Books, 2014); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, A. M. Sheridan Smith (trans.) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁸ Vernon W. Cisney & Nicole Morar (eds.), *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

degrees of obliteration and silencing, depending on the type of power in play, no opposing or alternative narrative that threatens the survival of this formation is allowed to emerge, further perpetuating erasure.

The Imaginary, Power, and Critical Practices Inside and Outside the Text

There is no such thing as a neutral or homogeneous space/text. Every socio-spatial configuration necessarily produces an “other” by which it measures its distinctiveness and difference. This relationality offers a better understanding of a given space as well as its functionality and ways of operating. Therefore, space cannot be studied in isolation from its connection to other spaces, be they similar or different.⁹ In other words, social configurations create “differences” and multiple narratives¹⁰ that fluctuate between revelation and concealment, depending on the policies enacted and the interests of the existing order.¹¹

Further, spatial experiences are manifested in the practices and performances of specific individual or collective biographies. How one inhabits or engages with a particular space frames and controls the quality of life that that space produces. Thus, understanding daily experiences as an adaptation to our spaces becomes an understanding of how to produce our own spaces, how we negotiate, confront, or oppose a particular configuration, and how we talk about our spaces.

Like space/city, text, discourse, and narrative are selective-exclusionary processes, capable of concealing or revealing what they choose, while excluding whatever and whoever conflicts with their desired image. As such, they are also producers of difference, which, in certain cases, is kept out of sight. The production of difference goes beyond the production of possibilities to what already exists; it also involves the production of possibilities that resist what is dominant and challenges its control. Thus, by focusing on the textuality of space, we can approach the city as we would an open text; that is, viewing it as inclusive of multiple, different narratives, in line with Doreen Massey’s concept of “throwntogetherness”,¹² a way of being that underscores the necessity of viewing space as a practice.¹³

In this sense, the text extends beyond the page containing it. From a literary-spatial perspective, we cannot consider the text as a static, abstract entity or a homogeneous place/space. Here, we can draw on Abdelfattah Kilito’s distinction between text and non-text,¹⁴ and his argument about the impossibility of defining the text. As a subject of research, the text resists fixed definitions, presenting itself as a flexible existence across different fields of knowledge, contexts, spaces, times, and cultures. Its characteristics, therefore, are subject to change and positionality. The text in this regard is like the city: a fertile ground for numerous cognitive possibilities, conceptual departures, and critical interpretations. Etienne Balibar described it as a space of ideological conflict,¹⁵ an idea reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s view on textuality and discourse. According to Foucault, “discourse” is concerned with the multiplicity within a text, as well as with history, power, knowledge, and society.¹⁶ From this standpoint, no text can be singular, just as no city can be the same for all its inhabitants.

Here, the act of reading is a selective process aimed at producing meaning, one that we engage in with both with our bodies and imaginaries alike. The processes of producing text and producing space are

⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹⁰ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2005).

¹¹ See: Ash Amin & Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Rethinking the Urban* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Ash Amin & Nigel Thrift, *Seeing Like a City* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

¹² Massey.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁴ Abdelfattah Kilito, *al-Adab wa-l-Gharāba* (Milano: Al-Mutawassit Books, 2022).

¹⁵ Verena Andermatt Conley, *Spatial Ecologies: Urban Sites, State, and World-Space in French Cultural Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Edward Said, “Introduction: Secular Criticism,” in: Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

similar in that they arise from a certain perception or imaginary and are shaped by a guided practice. In the context of social space, Lefebvre refers to this constituent as “the spatial imaginary”,¹⁷ which eventually develops into a map or image before transitioning into the practical application of constructing the space, so that space becomes both a work of art and of politics – what Lefebvre calls an *œuvre*.¹⁸

The process of producing a text follows a similar path, departing from an imaginary, or from a containment and expression of a specific human experience, or a certain rhetorical and political functional aspect. Place and text are simultaneously products and processes of production.¹⁹ The walker, much like the reader, has a fundamental role in using this product, and in producing, or reproducing, the space and its discourse and meaning.

Space as an Active Participant in Mapping the Narrative

As a narrative element, space becomes a producer and determinant of events. The novel being a product of relationships interacting in the city, including the latter’s urbanization, lifestyle, human interaction, and openness to others. The city serves, on one hand, as an incubator for the novel, and on the other hand, a space for its neighborhoods, streets, and alleys, the dreams of its residents, their conditions of life, their camaraderie and harmony or their alienation in and from it, their attitudes toward it, and the way in which they reveal both its beauty and its ugliness – in short, a space that embraces spaces.²⁰

Thus, space produces social life, its forms, and its cultural, political, and performative representations. Ali Abd al-Ra’uf states that “spatial/temporal relationships also permeate the narrative framework of every literary work, as there are no events or characters outside the literary space, even if the characters and events are probable, imaginary, or belong to a purely metaphysical world”.²¹ Thus, the literary space may be viewed as a socio-spatial product which, even if it draws certain details from the external world, remains an integral social and political reality in itself.²²

Michel de Certeau believes that we can know a city and uncover its narratives through two approaches. The first is the perspective from above, which reveals the city’s structures and layout, and the second is the direct, embodied experience of the city from below. De Certeau considers the latter, gained through walking, to be the most effective way of truly knowing a city.²³ The corresponding approaches in comparative literature as instrumentalized here are distant and close reading approaches to a text.

Franco Moretti²⁴ views narration as a spatial practice, highlighting its representational aspects, a consideration on which this paper is based. However, it diverges from Moretti’s contribution, particularly his advocacy for a distant reading of the text. Moretti considers narration as an act of mapping which he instrumentalizes to serve a quantitative approach to literature and to produce a map that fits literary history trapped in canonical classifications. Moretti’s focus is on uncovering the system within which his selected literary works operate, classifications of literary genres, rhetorical considerations, literary innovations, and

¹⁷ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre discusses in detail how this imaginary accompanies a conscious spatial practice capable of reading spatio-political laws and producing knowledge.

¹⁸ Work, or what Lefebvre calls *œuvre*, goes beyond being a material product and a production process to include a creative element. This production process relies on the intellectual and critical capital of its creator, and their ability to employ it in the creative moment. It is also a process subject to influence, impact, and change. Therefore, we can constantly rethink and alter it to suit the requirements of our daily lives and the demands of living in a given place. This idea in Lefebvre’s works constituted a starting point for another idea that he later expanded upon, namely, the right to the city.

¹⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

²⁰ Abd al-Rauf, p. 55.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reinsertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

²³ Michele de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²⁴ Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (London: Verso, 2005); Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso Books, 2013); Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” in: Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 148-162.

the like. However, in his quantitative analysis, he neglects context, literariness, and textuality, prioritizing positionality, organization, and relational structures over the inherent possibilities within the text itself, thereby closing rather than opening the text.

On the other hand, proponents of close reading, such as Jacques Derrida, negate what exists outside the text, while scholars such as Edward Said and Spivak occupy a middle ground, viewing the text as a practice and extension of what is outside it, while accounting for the political-cultural positionality, condition, and context.²⁵ This paper aligns more with the latter approach, stepping back from the text to reveal its dominant system, and approaching it to reveal ruptures, differences, and variations that cannot be seen from afar. In doing so, it emphasizes the importance of context, so that reading becomes akin to walking: an ongoing social-political practice.

What is meant by “walking” here is more than movement through the city. De Certeau describes walking through the city as a long poem, one that “speaks” and elicits speech. He compares it to writing, emphasizing the walker’s ability to inscribe his narrative on the city’s streets, actively shaping daily life and producing knowledge.²⁶ Similarly, the text – whatever its form – takes on a material and social dimension, akin to social space. It unfolds through our daily practice and movement within it, or through our experience of it and our attempts to understand it.

Walking, Embodiment, and Mapping: Essentials for a Critical Reading

The reader/researcher embarks on a physical and mental experience through the text, engaging in an exercise of perception and knowledge production. Like a walker following a map, the reader navigates the text toward understanding. However, the process of spatial reading, like any critical endeavor, is not totally open. Rather, it is bound by the viewer/recipient’s personal “baggage” and attitudes. Similarly, it is influenced by the conditions under which the text was produced, in addition to the limitations inherent in the reality of the narrative world.

Reading as Action and Practice

Reading space requires awareness and knowledge of the built environment, its everyday use,²⁷ and the nature of inhabiting it.²⁸ Therefore, any spatial experience is an embodied socio-political practice, where the space’s discourse and system are either affirmed, negotiated, or rejected. This process is only possible when accompanied by spatial knowledge and political positionality, as the individual’s perspectives reflect his/her position within the socio-spatial formation to which he/she belongs.²⁹ In other words, the way we use and inhabit a space reflects our position within the network of social, economic, and political relations within which we move; and is reflected in how we talk about our cities. This network offers us a roadmap, guiding us to learn what these spaces are and how to use them, that is, the normative practices that are accepted and expected. A close reading of this map and the

²⁵ For more details on these two perspectives, see: Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Kilito; Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” in: Prendegast (ed.), pp. 148-62; Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.) (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

²⁶ De Certeau, p. 102.

²⁷ Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*.

²⁸ The experience of space is viewed here as going beyond merely inhabiting a space in the sense of being in place and staying, to poetic, embodied and political considerations. For more on this topic, see: Martin Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Albert Hofstadter (trans.) (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1981); Jeff Malpas, *Rethinking Dwelling: Heidegger, Place, Architecture* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi (trans.) (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Maria Jolas (trans.), Richard Kearney (intro.), Mark Z. Danielewski (foreword) (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

²⁹ Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997).

patterns it produces shows not only how our daily lives, their rhythms, and our production of meaning and knowledge are governed, but also the systems and relations these patterns conceal, in that they reveal differences, variations, ruptures, and possibilities for the emergence of different, though not necessarily opposing, narratives.

The act of reading can be seen as a kind of crossing into a new world through which we communicate, and sometimes identify, with its protagonists. This would be impossible had the writer been unable to present the familiar and make it relatable, drawing a world on paper that, if only for a brief time, we can trust is real. As Edward Soja has noted,³⁰ every literary world blends elements of reality and fiction, constructing a social reality in which we, as readers, temporarily inhabit during our journey across its pages.

Readers do not move within a text in a linear fashion. The contemporary novel, in particular,³¹ challenges the traditional structure of the genre, taking us in multiple directions and defying readers' expectations in terms of form, narration, or the navigation of temporality. Accordingly, reading becomes a process requiring constant movement across time and space like walking through a city, a physical/embodied experience.³² Indeed, we would lose our way without the guidance provided by the novelist, through spatial and temporal cues and codes that enable us to imagine the protagonists' circumstances and the social and political frames of their daily experiences. Without these guidelines, readers would struggle to keep pace with the text, understand it, follow its logic, or even analyse it accurately. Accordingly, it is these guidelines that make the text coherent and readable.

These directions determine the starting points for narrational events and spatiotemporal junctures and define the spatial landmarks that shape the context of events. They enable us to visualize these events in detail and interpret the literary text by understanding the social space in the context specified by the writer. The narrative places and spaces that make up the literary world – neighbourhoods, houses, streets, buildings, alleys, cities, and the like – take on a tangible presence in our imagination (differing from one reader to another), and accompany us on our journey through the text, functioning as actual lived spaces, allowing us to process them as real. Abd al-Ra'uf remarks:

The novel that evokes a place reflects its reality and its material and immaterial possibilities. In the creation of a novel, places constitute both the framework within which events come together, and the background against which they take place and reach completion.³³

Readers cannot be considered as mere passersby, forced to walk in one direction or toward one destination. They are not driven by an absolute force that precludes active participation in producing meaning and space (literary or beyond). Instead, they are guided. Readers play a crucial role in uncovering/understanding spatial laws and producing intellectual possibilities and critical reflections, in addition to their ability to produce the text itself (indeed, every act of interpretation through reading can be seen as an act of production). As such, spaces – here those of the novel – are open to critical and analytical possibilities and multiple uses, varying according to readers' experiences of, and within, them.

³⁰ Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*.

³¹ Robert Young, "Contemporary Literary Theory: Its Necessity and Impossibility," *The Newest Criticisms*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1982), pp. 165-173; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981); Mikhail Bakhtin et al., *Modern Genre Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016); Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, Anna Bostock (trans.) (London: The Merlin Press, 1971); Paul Dawson & Maria Mäkelä (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Narrative Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2022); Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: An Overview* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023); Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson & Peter Brooker (eds.), *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2016).

³² Setha Low, "Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture," *Space & Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2003), pp. 9-18; de Certeau.

³³ Abd al-Rauf, p. 56.

This approach enables us to spatially read the literary text as a space in itself,³⁴ one that contains spaces and places that form the novel's world. Within this text and by virtue of it, the events of the novel take place. Thus, the relationship of "the novel to the city, and the relationship of the city to the novel" is one of communication and exchange; a "contradictory and ramified relationship going beyond its two sides to include a third party, the readers, the city's residents".³⁵

The Embodied Experience of Space

The body is our first, closest, and most intimate space; hence, our understanding of space or place cannot be isolated from our understanding of the body. Our experience of space is considered an extension of our relationship with our body (and our experience of it); no spatial experience is possible without or outside the body.³⁶ This demonstrates that social space cannot be viewed as a void, disconnected from its context, in which we move or which moves us absurdly, without purpose or consequence. Similarly, context cannot be viewed as absolute, denying its particularity that will never be repeated in its current/present form, even if its manifestations resemble or intersect with another's. No event takes place in a vacuum. Therefore, social space includes a set of relations, structures, and characteristics that make it distinct from other spaces. In this way, our spatial experience and daily social practices are linked to this particularity and simultaneously constrained by it.³⁷

Through a careful, learned reading of this particularity, we form an understanding of the potential and limitations of a space, as well as the challenges it presents in shaping the frameworks for our practices. This also includes the possibility of practices that resist or offer alternatives to the prevailing structure. Even as they define and frame our daily movement and understanding of the world, these spaces include areas of opportunity through which we can resist them if they become too confined or fail to meet our needs and desires as inhabitants.³⁸ According to Foucault, every prevailing social structure contains the conditions and circumstances to resist it, and the tools and means to do so, which individuals and groups can avail.³⁹

If we view the novel as a world and a social reality that expresses a specific human condition and social experience, encompassing multiple spaces, then reading the literary text as a map becomes key to understanding its characters, events, and developments from a spatial perspective. This approach leads to a similar result: revealing the system that defines and frames the social and spatial structures of the literary world (as if we were looking from above); and producing renewed meaning, knowledge, and relations open to new possibilities, experiences, and biographies (through close reading, as if we were looking from below). This process enables us to gain new insights into the characters, their experiences, and the events taking place in the novel. Herein lies the importance of being aware, as readers, of the writer's literary

³⁴ For more on textual components that fall outside the text yet produce it, see: Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Jane E. Lewin (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, Jane E. Lewin (trans.) (New York: Cornell University Press, 1980); Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Leon S. Roudiez (ed.), Homas Gora, Alice Jardine & Leon S. Roudiez (trans.) (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1969).

³⁵ Abd al-Rauf, p. 19.

³⁶ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre touches on the relationality between body and place.

³⁷ For more on social and political organizations, including spatial policies, see: *ibid.*, as well as: Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 330-336; S. Susan, "The Place of Space in Social and Cultural Theory," in: A. Elliott (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 337-357; Edward Soja, "The Socio-Spatial Dialectic," *Annals of the Association of the American Geographers*, vol. 70, no. 2 (1980), pp. 207-225; Edward Soja, *The Political Organization of Space* (Washington: The Association of American Geographers, 1971).

³⁸ The following works offer helpful discussions of the right to the city: David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *Debates and Developments: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2003), pp. 939-941; Robert Park & Ernest W. Burgess, *The City* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019); Phil Hubbard, *The City* (London: Routledge, 2018); Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, Eleonore Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas (trans.) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life*.

³⁹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

cartography/map, so that we can play a prominent, conscious, and interactive role in producing our own literary geography, which in turn offers critical insight on the world of the novel, and the beginning of our cognitive and critical relationship with the text.

The Spatiality of the Literary Text: Mapping as Critical Reading

In their joint literary work, *‘Ālam bilā Kharā’iṭ* [A World Without Maps],⁴⁰ Abd al-Rahman Munif and Jabra Ibrahim Jabra write: “Give me a map, then let me see what is left for me to conquer the world”. This quote comes in the context of a conversation between Alaa Salloum, an author and the novel’s protagonist, and Riyadh Burhan, the protagonist of Alaa’s own novel. In this prolonged dialogue, which spans several pages, Riyadh blames Alaa for not giving him the space he needs to become and say what he wants; because Alaa, as Riyadh claims, did not give him the map to the novel, but rather threw him into it exposed and helpless instead. As a result, Riyadh feels lost and believes Alaa has wronged him.

This dialogue offers a glimpse into the labyrinthine world of writing, where confusion reigns, and we experience the acute pains of writing, and the need for defining lines and circles for building the structure of the novel and its spatiotemporal reference point. In the absence of a roadmap to the novel, the reader misses a specific order, i.e., configuration, that enables readers to traverse the novel in a way that is conducive and productive of knowledge.

Herein lies the importance of spatial reading. When we, as readers, approach the text as a social space in its own right, with spatial, social, and historical dimensions that produce the literary world and allow the characters to interact within based on power relations, we undertake an embodied experience. While reading, we share in the feelings and states of the novel’s protagonists, identifying with their actions, sensing, and savouring their experiences. We cannot arrive at meaning – that is, read the map, construct its geography, and identify its narratives – without the directions, guidelines, clues, frameworks, and contexts provided by the text. Accordingly, when we follow a protagonist down the streets of a city, sit with him in a cafe waiting for an important appointment, or withdraw with him to a corner of his new house, we make an unconditional commitment⁴¹ (sometimes, spontaneously and temporarily) that we have made to ourselves as readers. The fictional events and details that we read become possible and meaningful thanks to a map containing a tangible material space, its timeframe and boundaries, and its social and political conditions that provide us with the general context of the novel and organize the events in our minds and services our imaginaries.

The Textuality of Literary Space: Narrativization as Critical Reading

Peter Turchi, who draws a parallel between maps and works of fiction,⁴² suggests that when we enquire about a map, we often ask for a “story”, and that it is impossible for a single map to include all spatial uses and directions, and to serve all the daily socio-spatial destinations, goals, and desires. Every map is designed with a specific purpose and guides toward particular destinations. Thus, map-making and reading, like text writing and reading, are selective and exclusionary processes with clearly defined purposes. According to Turchi, we choose a specific map that matches our needs, aims, and the type of experiences we seek. Turchi states that a writer determines the text’s details, structure, and intensity based on the nature and

⁴⁰ Abdelrahman Munif & Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *‘Ālam bilā Kharā’iṭ* (Beirut: Dār Al-Tanwīr, Arab Institute for Research & Publishing, 2018).

⁴¹ Kilito discusses “horizon of expectation” (*ufuq al-intizār*), which is a type of intellectual readiness on the part of the reader, formed by their knowledge of literary genres, their requirements, conditions and structures, on which they rely as a pillar of the map that will guide their reading. See: Kilito, p. 31.

⁴² Peter Turchi, *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2004).

purpose of the work they wish to create. A novel, like a map, is defined by its purposes,⁴³ which guide us unambiguously toward a specific destination or goal and its possibilities.⁴⁴ This enables us to trust it as a source of information and knowledge and as a rational reference for open interpretive possibilities within these limits.

Viewing the text as a roadmap does not mean reducing its literary or textual nature, rather, it involves treating these components as narrative elements that organize the literary world. Robert Tally Jr. mentions that when the writer determines the elements of a novel/map, which ones will predominate, and which ones will perform background or secondary roles, and organizes them in a way that best influences the reader, they succeed in determining the type, function, and purpose of the novel.⁴⁵ If the writer engages in this mapping process to organize real and imagined spaces to create a map of their literary world, then the reader participates in it, according to Tally, by visualizing these spaces, following their directions, and identifying the shifting, transient meanings they find in the map, thereby giving it critical and analytical value. In so doing, the reader-critic transforms into a geographer, interpreting the literary map to produce a drawing (new arrangements of the coordinates of the drawn map), and subsequently, previously unexpected maps.⁴⁶ Tally refers to this as the “literary geography” produced by the reader through a reading process that follows the literary map of the text.⁴⁷

This paper interprets literary geography as encompassing specific narrative possibilities that are opened up by the reader. By following the literary map laid out by the writer, the reader colludes with the text to narrativize the literary geography that their reading has produced. The writer is not bound to follow a linear chronological timeline which, for example, as a divergence from traditional narration, became common in contemporary novels. This enables the writer to break the chronological flow, producing yet another dimension of mapping. In addition, the writer can use literary techniques that enable the execution of this breakage materially or spatially, including deconstruction, multiple narratives, intertextuality, and multiple-genericity, among others. Breaking the material form of the text makes it a tangible visual map, and not simply a mental or conceptual one.

The Literary Map in Chouman's Novel

This paper views the urban planning policy adopted in Beirut after the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) as a manifestation of a militia-economic culture, as described by Najib Hourani,⁴⁸ and an extension of the violence that has gripped the country since the war and continues to the present day in forms such as explosions, assassinations, “little wars”, “military presence”, etc. Violence is also evident in the oppressive neoliberal actions, power dynamics, and social control strategies implemented by the Lebanese state, which control the daily lives and experiences of the population. Chouman's depiction of the city situates the novel within the framework of a war that has yet to end. As such, it can be seen as part of a collective literary narrative that adopts a similar approach, enabling us to trace the socio-political situation that brought it into being and provided a space through which it narrated this situation.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 69.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Tally Jr., *Spatiality*, p. 54.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁷ For more on literary geography, the literary map, and the reciprocal relationship between writer and reader, see: Tally Jr., *Spatiality*; Tally Jr. (ed.), *Geocritical Explorations*; Robert Tally Jr. (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Robert Tally Jr., *Literary Cartographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Salah Saleh, *Qadāyā al-Makān al-Riwā'ī fī al-Adab al-Mu'āṣir* (Cairo: Sharqiyāt Publishing House, 1997).

⁴⁸ Najib Hourani, “Transnational Pathways and Political-Economic Power: Globalization and the Lebanese Civil War,” *Geopolitics*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2010), pp. 290-311.

Beirut Outside the Novel, Beirut Inside the Novel

In his preface to *Kāna Ghadan*, Chouman alludes to the ongoing nature of the war, stating, “Despite rearranging general events in its own way, broadening the margin of the imaginary in some, and inventing others that never happened, it can be said that most of the accounts in this novel are based on events that actually took place in Lebanon in 2016 or earlier, or are likely to occur in 2017 or beyond”.⁴⁹

The events of the novel take place in the present narrative time, 27 years after the end of Lebanon’s civil war. Chouman’s depiction of the prevailing system in Beirut reflects the state’s strategic hegemony over history and geography, as it seeks to erase the war from the collective memory of the Lebanese people and distance them from their capital city, depriving them of their right to it. This novel illustrates this through several examples, such as the pervasive advertisements promoting excessive consumption of luxuries, entertainment and “decadent” music concerts, compositions that are heavily invested in, the undeterred military presence in the streets, and so on. The novel’s main characters frequently comment on these phenomena, remarking that things have always been this way, that there is nothing new under the sun, and that only superficial changes occur.

Outside the novel, and in various studies addressing Lebanon’s post-civil war conditions,⁵⁰ Beirut continues to grapple with a state of systematic-institutionalized, state-sponsored amnesia regarding its painful and bloody past. This amnesia is evident in the sectarian power structures, where authority remains concentrated in the hands of warlords who, by virtue of a general pardon issued in 1991, became the guardians of the new state. Further compounding this is the near-total absence of the civil war from official and political discourse and daily conversations. The Lebanese school curricula’s history textbooks, for example, fail to address the war, with the chapter on Lebanon concluding with its independence from the French mandate in 1943. Additionally, the city lacks memorials, museums, or official archives dedicated to that period of the country’s history. Thus, the normalization of forgetting has become a means of exercising social control over the population and the entire country. This is evident in systematic restrictions on movement and access to certain public spaces, as well as the marginalization of the city’s residents and their exclusion from decision-making. Through neoliberal strategies that include construction projects, marketing efforts, security plans, and permissive privatization regulations, Beirut’s residents find themselves in constant negotiation with their past and their space, unable to envision the future, accept the present, or confront their past.

The Beirut portrayed in Chouman’s novel resembles the one we encounter in reality. In *Kāna Ghadan*, expressions of violence permeate the lives and movements of the residents, alongside traffic accidents, crumbling infrastructure, the spread of crass racist political rhetoric, bogus appeasement, raucous concerts, and the like. The city’s contradictions are starkly evident, while at the same time, the hegemonic political system is laid bare in its frantic attempts to control the city’s residents by distracting them from its plans to restrict and control both space and time.

Walking as an Attempt to Rationalize the City

In his book, *The Poetics of Space*,⁵¹ Gaston Bachelard states, “Each one of us ... should speak of his roads, his crossroads, his roadside benches; each one of us should make a surveyor’s map of his lost

⁴⁹ Chouman, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 2nd ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012); Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005); Theodor Hanf, *Coexistence in Wartime Lebanon: Decline of a State and Rise of a Nation*, John Richardson (trans.) (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015); Samir Khalaf, *Heart of Beirut: Reclaiming the Bourj* (Beirut: Saqi, 2006); Aseel Sawalha, *Reconstructing Beirut: Memory and Space in a Postwar Arab City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Hiba Bou Akar, *For the War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut’s Frontiers* (California: Stanford University Press, 2018); Ghenwa Hayek, *Beirut, Imagining the City: Space and Place in Lebanese Literature* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015); Yasmine Khayyat, *War Remains: Ruination and Resistance in Lebanon* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2023).

⁵¹ When translating Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* to Arabic, Ghalib Halasa rendered its title as *Jamāliyyāt al-Makān* [The Esthetics of Space], which in my view is inaccurate. Poetics are a subcategory of Esthetics; however, the terms cannot be used synonymously.

fields and meadows”.⁵² In Chouman’s novel, this is what Khaled and Reem, the novel’s protagonists, attempt to do through walking. Khaled, with his alternative perception of the city, revealed in his constant questioning and daily quarrels as he strives to break the pattern of things, walks the city, knowledgeable of its urban, spatial, architectural, and political history, pays particular attention to the changes that have shaped it – whether against the backdrop of the civil war, controversial urban planning, or political and socio-economic developments that have altered the priorities of authorities and were manifested spatially.

Khaled anchors his challenge to spatial narratives and defeatist, oppressive practices in spatial awareness. In examining this alternative experience, the paper highlights the importance of reading the spatial connotations in the novel and the alternate way in which Khaled and Reem map the city’s spaces and places through walking. This reading also reveals the multiple (and sometime contradictory) narratives of the city held by the city’s residents – some of which affirm, while others oppose and conflict with, the dominant narrative. This approach aims to analyse the agency of walkers by examining the spaces produced by Khaled and Reem, which, if only temporarily, allow them, to achieve a spatial experience often excluded/suppressed by the system that governs socio-spatial productions and organizations. In doing so, a different spatial narrative emerges. As Abd al-Ra’uf states, the city is “an existing material context continuously recreated by its residents”.⁵³

“The Backyard”: Reading the City and Uncovering its Order Through Walking

Khaled and Reem’s relationship with the city is one marked by tension and anxiety, undergoing continuous negotiation, re-evaluation, and reinterpretation. This relationship determines the nature of their spatial practices, which manifest in their views and interactions with and within the city, their understanding of it, their perceptions of its systems, and their ability to define their positionalities within it as individuals, residents, and active users (rather than passive consumers). Each of them holds a unique view of the city, shaped by personal experiences, knowledge, and spatial, political, and social awareness, determined by this same positionality and knowledge, and the different daily practices this leads to. As a woman, for example, Reem feels unsafe in Beirut and avoids walking there, especially given the frequent spates of violence that afflict the city on daily basis.

Reem depicts this reality through her description of the city’s image in the minds of its residents, highlighting how these images influence individual identities, their sense of place and belonging, and their daily experiences and practices. In light of a dream that has left a powerful impression on her, Reem describes the people of her city as living in the “backyard”, as she refers to it, as if they’re banned from the interior of the house, living on the margins of the city rather than inside it. She says,

I see us all marching. I look, and I recognize everyone. We’re all walking, including the dead, those who passed and those who will. We step forward, while small explosions go off behind us. They only go off once things are behind and overcome. It is as if we’re the ones who set them off, then survive them. In the space behind us, confessions are made and left behind. I will call this place: the backyard. In it, all we think is great perishes.⁵⁴

Reem goes on to add that this situation is shared by all members of society. They all sense this contradiction, without concern, and are fully aware that this “backyard” could swallow them all up. “We don’t know when will the pattern break and everything change”, Reem adds, “when we become little explosions behind others marching ahead.”⁵⁵

⁵² Bachelard, p. 33.

⁵³ Abd al-Rauf, p. 32.

⁵⁴ Chouman, p. 133.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

To Reem, the “backyard” symbolizes a contradiction that the city’s residents experience every day. The city space, she mentions, encompasses everything that has happened, and everything that might happen in the future. As such, readers imagine an almost non-existent future. This picture is further deepened when Reem describes the city’s residents as onlookers waiting “tensely and anxiously” on the margins, as if their reality has turned them into spectators unable to move forward or change their reality, or even influence the decisions that shape their daily lives. This reality has thus become biopolitically normalized in their daily practices.⁵⁶ However, Reem’s perspective is not a defeatist one, as the city’s residents are not predetermined in their actions but have grown indifferent to phenomena and ways of life to which they have become accustomed. Despite her awareness of their affliction and indifference to the reality, Reem believes that the residents live in constant anxiety and fear that they themselves will become violent explosives chasing after others.

This sense of responsibility drives Khaled and Reem to resist marginalization, lethargy, apathy, and loitering (passive spatial experience). They strive to change the reality by differently experiencing their spaces via walking, and producing space (rather than reproducing it) by drawing an alternative map of their city based on a perception and spatial imaginary different from what has been normalized around them. They document the spaces and side streets, naming them by their real names that dropped out of the vernacular language and its daily and official discourse, and recording the personal, historical, and political events that these spaces have witnessed. This serves to produce a spatial memory and an urban experience that remembers what has been, or forced to become, forgotten, while paving the way for alternative narratives that are more faithful to the daily experiences of ordinary people.

Building on Reem’s observation, Khaled examines the sheer political impasse and the rampant violence embedded within the various classes of Lebanese society, like a state of “limbo”, a vicious cycle of irresponsible, indifferent *laissezfaire* that disrupts people’s daily lives. The conflict thus appears to be numb and suppressed, while the dominant system effective and sovereign. Khaled remarks, for example, in his recurrent walks, that nothing changes in this country, and the road is headed toward a point of “no return”, “flooded with boredom”.⁵⁷ None of this surprises him or the city’s other residents. He considers this deterioration to be expected, leading to a kind of “disconnection between their personal lives and what’s happening around them, as they take every public event out of the details of their daily lives and set it aside. They simply pass it by [...] and thus there’s no engagement ceases to exist”.⁵⁸ This lack of engagement worries both Khaled and Reem. It is from this very concern that they are able to uncover and analyse aspects of the city and produce this alternative map (not only spatially, but also cognitively and ideologically) as indicative of a different approach to understanding the city and practicing its daily life, while at the same time drafting one of Beirut’s multiple narratives.

The Alternative Roadmap: Negotiating and Circumventing City Structures

The residents of Beirut in *Kāna Ghadan*, much like the city itself, are experiencing a kind of detachment. Their condition is repeatedly described as “ennui” throughout the novel. The description is accurately reflected in the slackness and weariness that have afflicted most of the city’s residents, who have been compelled, sometimes unconsciously, to reproduce the system and its policies in their daily lives. Within this reality, people’s subjectivity and agency become problematic, as this process of reproducing violence and its consequences

⁵⁶ Vernon W. Cisney & Nicole Morar (eds.), *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Thomas Lemke, *The Government of Things: Foucault and the New Materialists* (New York: New York University Press, 2021); Hubert L. Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1986).

⁵⁷ Chouman, p. 214.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

mirrors the daily localization, normalization, and internalization of violence, and the firmness of its coercive techniques used to subjugate their daily lives.

Khaled continues his description of the situation by naming it an abject failure of the entire society, manifested in the daily defeatist living of the city's residents. "As they take every public event out of the details of their daily lives", as Khaled says, "and set it aside".⁵⁹ The separation from their surroundings is the result of the normalization of their reality, which cause them to seem as though they are living outside society, or on its margins, in denial of their socio-political context and reality. By "simply passing it by", they evade engagement and confrontation. Hence, most of those whom Khaled refers to can be seen as docile vagrants, passersby, and defeatist consumers, who ask no questions in an invented city, submissive to its systems and regulations. This image aligns closely with the one Reem paints in her memoirs, where she describes the city's residents as living in its backyard, far from its socio-political centre, on the edges of political life rather than within, easily controlled docile bodies.⁶⁰

In a brief section of the novel titled "Roadmap", the attempts of Reem and Khaled to negotiate space are seen through the map they invite readers to follow. They take off from a specific location, and walk the city down specified streets, enabling readers to follow their movements and recognize their destination, whether by visualizing the streets (if they are familiar with them) or by looking at an actual map of Beirut. Khaled and Reem do not walk aimlessly, nor do they follow the main routes, thus rebelling against the common modes of using space in Beirut.

This is done in three different ways: First, Khaled and Reem do not walk alone, violating the stereotypical definition of a walker (i.e., a *flâneur*),⁶¹ nor do they linger in one place, since their presence on the street is in constant motion. Second, Khaled does not walk aimlessly; rather, he carves out a path for himself and his friend despite the restrictions they face, which include closed streets, roads blocked by cement barriers or barbed wire, public property that has been privatized, and Beirut's ubiquitous security checkpoints. In doing so, they construct their own path, walking and crossing it as independent subjects fulfilling some of the city's potential despite the restrictions imposed on them and their awareness of it. It is through this act of walking itself, as de Certeau suggests, that these restrictions become visible.⁶² Third, aware of the spatial and sociopolitical topography of the streets, Khaled draws a pedestrian map rooted in his spatial memory, which he shares with Reem as they walk along. He insists on using the streets' original names, which have been swept out of collective memory and everyday usage over time. Khaled's insistence suggests that forgetting these names and replacing them with others, or rather with different means of identification and reference, is a coping mechanism for residents with their altered spatial reality, and the spread of a certain discourse that dominates daily life and defines (and limits) the experience of the city – and thus people's sense of place and belonging – while obscuring the control exerted by the existing system. As Edward Said says, power manifests clearly as a struggle over geography, that is, a struggle over place.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Alan Sheridan (trans.) (London: Penguin Books, 1991); Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76*, David Macey (trans.) (London: Penguin Books, 1997); Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, vol. 1, Robert Hurley (trans.) (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

⁶¹ The word "walker" is not used here in the sense of *flâneur* due to the two words' differing contexts and experiences. The concept of "walker" is approached in this study in keeping with the experiences of Reem and Khalid in the city of Beirut, a city in the Global South, in a country with its own experience, extending over periods of wars, violence, and class struggles and contradictions. Neither Reem nor Khalid have class privileges that make them part of the elite, which is reflected in their spatial experience. For more information on *flâneur*, see: de Certeau; Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin (trans.) (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999); Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A Short History of Walking* (London: Granta Books, 2014); Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016).

⁶² de Certeau, p. 100.

⁶³ See: Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in: Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile & Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (New York: Granta, 2000), pp. 173-197.

Reem acknowledges her indebtedness to Khaled for the new perspective of the city. She notes that absurdity has become a way of living in Beirut, saying that “we pass through things without noticing them, no more asking questions”.⁶⁴ This observation highlights the residents’ inability to break out of the spatial practices imposed upon them. Khaled comes here to shake Reem out of her stagnancy, urging her to reconsider the relationship with her spaces and the ways in which she uses them. He provides her with the opportunity to become acquainted with her city and, contrary to what she has been accustomed, to experience it in a way that she forges her own path within it.

Practicing and Narrativizing Khaled and Reem’s Spatial Imaginary

Through Reem’s digression and her analysis of walking through the city, we see a backlash against the stereotyping and prevailing rhythm imposed on the people of her city. She recognizes the potential for an alternative spatial experience with Khaled. Here, walking becomes an act that “affirms, tests, transcends, and respects paths”, as de Certeau suggests, an act capable of conveying meaning.⁶⁵ Reem and Khaled’s walks starkly contrast to the way Reem describes how people typically engage with the city on a daily basis, as if they were merely passing through it without wondering, questioning, doubting, or noticing the details. There are two main reasons for this marked contrast. The first is Khaled and Reem’s spatial perspective, which is grounded in intellectual insights drawn from their adherence to spatial, social, political, and historical narratives excluded from the dominant urban discourse. The second is their insistence on a practice-based experience of the city that breaks free from the restrictions inherent in the prevailing state of affairs, with their adherence to the original street names. In this regard, de Certeau says that official names can reveal hidden and familiar meanings, as naming lends meaning to a place and one’s experience of it, incentivizes movement, and transforms the non-place of public space into transit areas.⁶⁶ These areas, according to de Certeau, become a sphere to appropriate, become emancipated, and produce alternatives.

Lastly, Khaled continuously shares stories with Reem about the streets they walk, as if to evoke a forgotten history and narrative. In this way, he weaves his own experience of the city into a unique narrative that combines the personal and the collective at once. This narrative can be read as an attempt to activate an alternative spatial imaginary of the city, one that challenges the homogeneous and monolithic urban narrative promoted by both state and non-state actors in the collective consciousness and permitted socio-spatial practices, through neoliberal and biopolitical strategies that are rife in all of Beirut’s lifestyles and rhythms.

Conclusion

This paper emphasized the importance of spatial reading in unlocking the various interpretive and critical possibilities of a literary text. This is done through mapping the text and exploring its narratives driven by the relationality between textuality and spatiality that this mapping creates. The paper approached textuality⁶⁷ and spatiality as fluid concepts whose flexibility enables them to challenge traditional boundaries and controls that seek to standardize meaning, essentialize experience, and arrive at a single, monolithic, reductive narrative. The paper proceeded from the idea of the text as practice and process,⁶⁸ emphasizing the need to problematize the concept of space as a narrative tool, and reconsider literary narrative structures accordingly. This problematization was shown in three main starting points used to interpret the spatial practices of the characters in Hilal Chouman’s novel, *Kāna Ghadan*.

⁶⁴ Chouman, pp. 167-168.

⁶⁵ de Certeau, p. 100.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

⁶⁷ For more on textuality, see: Hugh Silverman, “What is Textuality? Part II,” *Phenomenology + Pedagogy*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1986), pp. 54-61.

⁶⁸ For more detail on text/textuality as social practice, see: Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in the Poetic Language*, Margaret Waller (trans.), Leon S. Roudiez (intro.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 208-213; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 17-102.

These starting points are: (1) Viewing the spatiality of text and the textuality of space in a novel as a critical process that seeks to read and interpret within a relational framework open to multiple possibilities and trajectories, all within the boundaries of the geographical map created by the author; (2) Approaching the text as a space reveals the conditions and frameworks for an integrated, narrated social reality, where multiple narratives and lives interact. This approach also makes it possible to map this text, then, instrumentally and analytically, narrativize this map; and (3) Recognizing the reader's active role in producing textuality and spatiality in a literary work through a critical-spatial reading enables the reader to engage with the geographical and intellectual map drawn by the writer. This reading becomes an exercise in both perception and the production of socio-spatial knowledge following a distant approach (from above) through mapping, and a close approach (from below) through narrativizing the map.

Khaled managed to map his city's spaces and places through an alternative, perceptive, and guided socio-spatial practice of walking. Armed with a critical questioning gaze and geographical and spatial knowledge grounded in history and practice, he walks with the intellectual and political aim of reclaiming his sense of place. He is thus an example of a space user, according to Lefebvre's definition, who resists all forms of spatial consumption that strips the space of its experience. Chouman's novel presents the violent daily lives of the common folk in the city of Beirut. Thus, day-to-day reality appears as a conflict zone, holding the potential of a purposeful act, as Lefebvre emphasized in his critique of daily life, that is at once politicized, resistant, and transcendent.⁶⁹ Khaled's insistence on his right to the city can be read as a defying counter-hegemonic act. Asef Bayat's assertion that "an active use challenges the authority of the state and those social groups that benefit from such order" is relevant here.⁷⁰ The reading adopts Bayat's analysis of Khaled's alternative practice in Beirut.

Based on the experiences of Khaled and Reem, this paper presented a literary geography, based on Chouman's literary map (to use Robert Tally Jr.'s term), specific to the experience of Beirut. This geography is not only shaped by how Khaled and Reem see or understand the city, but also by how they experience and practice it on a daily basis. This practice and the way they converse about Beirut reflect a socio-spatial imaginary that challenges the existing narrative. Therefore, the act of mapping alone is not sufficient for an understanding of the text and its narratives, nor for effective use of spatial-textual relationality. Accordingly, the process of closely analyzing the text came to be an experience of activating the spatial-textual relationality, manifested in the process of spatialization-narrativization followed here. Inspiration from the approaches of modern comparative literature that combine close and distant readings were underscored, in accordance with the approaches employed in literary-spatial studies.

The paper drew from de Certeau perspective, which includes two dimensions: (1) a view from above that reveals the city's layout and its socio-spatial structures (i.e. the order(ing) of space), and (2) a street-level view involving a direct practice of space on the daily level. The spatial approach proposed here combines form, content, and context spontaneously and relationally, while also recognizing the importance of constant critique and motion in the production of meaning and knowledge. The reader and the text enter a state of continuous positioning which reflects a critical, philosophical, and political stance, and a commitment to the text's ability to reveal and theorize.

Having established starting points for a project grounded in the narrativization of spatial experience and the spatialization of narrative experience, the following questions can be posed based on this relationality: How does this approach serve the literary text's ability to theorize for itself? How does this ability help transform the theory into practice? How can the reading presented here reveal the novel's socio-spatial

⁶⁹ Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*.

⁷⁰ Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 63.

imaginary? What forms and types of knowledge does this imaginary produce? How can this knowledge be employed in a creative and productive manner? How can we benefit from this positioning of novels like Chouman's and the approach proposed here within a theoretical framework that builds on and mimics the Arab context? And what is the multiplicity possible for this context, that still accounts for its particularity?

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MANA

ARAB OPINION
INDEX ANALYSIS

Majd Abuamer*

What Do Arabs Think About When They Think About Migration? Insights from the Arab Opinion Index (2011-2022)**

فِيمَ يَفْكَرُ مَنْ يَفْكَرُ فِي الْهَجْرَةِ؟ إِجَابَاتٌ مِنَ الْمَوْشَرِ الْعَرَبِيِّ (2022-2011)

Abstract: This paper examines Arab public opinion trends on migration based on data from eight Arab Opinion Index surveys conducted annually by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in 14 Arab countries in 2011 and 2022. It explores the desire to migrate, the motives behind migration, and the preferred destination. The findings reveal that around a quarter of Arab citizens have consistently expressed a desire to migrate over the past 12 years, with higher interest recorded among the youth compared to older age groups, men compared to women, and those with at least a secondary school education compared to those with lower education levels. The paper highlights economic conditions as the primary motivation for migration. Additionally, it shows that half of those wishing to migrate select Europe and the Arab Gulf countries as their preferred destinations.

Keywords: Arab Public Opinion; Arab Opinion Index; Migration; Youth; Arab Countries.

الملخص: تهدف هذه الورقة إلى قراءة اتجاهات الرأي العام في المنطقة العربية نحو الهجرة، من خلال استطلاعات المؤشر العربي الثمانية التي نفذها المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات دورياً في 14 بلداً عربياً خلال الفترة 2011-2022، وذلك عبر ثلاثة محاور رئيسية: الرغبة في الهجرة، ودوافع التفكير في الهجرة، ووجهة الهجرة المفضلة. وتبين النتائج أن ربع مواطني المنطقة العربية يرغبون في الهجرة بنسبة شبه ثابتة على مدار الاثنتي عشرة سنة الأخيرة، مع ارتفاع هذه النسبة لدى الشباب مقارنةً بالفئات العمرية الأكبر سناً، ولدى الرجال مقارنةً بالنساء، ولدى الحاصلين على مستوى تعليمي ثانوي فأكثر مقارنةً بالحاصلين على مستويات تعليمية أدنى. وتظهر الورقة أن تحسين الأوضاع الاقتصادية ما زال العامل الأهم في تفكير مواطني المنطقة العربية في الهجرة، وأن نصف الراغبين فيها يفضلون أن تكون هجرتهم إلى بلدانٍ أوروبية ودول الخليج العربية.

كلمات مفتاحية: الرأي العام العربي؛ المؤشر العربي؛ الهجرة؛ الشباب؛ البلدان العربية.

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Introduction

“We are all becoming migrants”, states Thomas Neill in *The Figure of the Migrant*, reflecting on the unprecedented increase in regional and international migration, rendering our time “the century of the migrant”.¹ Since the beginning of the third millennium, the Arab region has experienced repeated waves of migration driven by episodes of violence, internal wars, and deteriorating economic, security, and political conditions in many countries. From 1990 to 2020, the number of Arab migrants and refugees surged from approximately 10.8 to 32.8 million – an increase of 203% over three decades.² This figure encompasses internally displaced persons, regional and international migrants (permanent and temporary),³ economic migrants, refugees, those fleeing for political and security reasons, and the forcibly displaced.

Among the most significant trends in Arab migration are forced migration and youth (aged 18-24) migration. The latter includes the migration of Palestinian youth since the Nakba in 1967, Lebanese youth since the civil war in 1975, Iraqi youth under authoritarian repression and the chaos that followed the US occupation of Iraq. Add to this Tunisian, Algerian, and Moroccan youth who have migrated due to authoritarian rule and economic hardship. More recently, Syrian, Libyan, and Yemeni youth have been forced to migrate after peaceful protests in their countries devolved into internal wars.

Furthermore, a significant number of Arabs express a desire to migrate. Although these potential migrants are not captured in official figures, their views on migration can be gauged through public opinion polls. Such polls not only help us understand the dynamics of migration but also provide valuable insights into their conditions and the broader socio-economic and political circumstances in their countries that shape their desire to migrate.

This paper examines trends in Arab public opinion on migration, focusing on Arab citizens’ responses to three questions: “Would you like to emigrate?”, “what is the main factor that would prompt you to emigrate?”, and “to which country would you like to emigrate?” This analysis is based on Arab Opinion Index (AOI) data from eight public polls conducted by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies between 2011 and 2022, covering 14 Arab countries.⁴

Desire to Migrate in the Arab World: An Overview

The question, “Would you like to emigrate?” was posed to a representative sample of 180,911 Arab citizens over the last 12 years. According to the results of the 2022 AOI, 28% of respondents expressed a desire or intention to emigrate, marking the highest percentage recorded in the survey’s history. Previous findings showed the same among 22% in 2019/2020; 26% in 2017/2018; 24% in 2016; 23% in 2015; 22% in both 2012/2013 and 2014; and 24% in 2011. These figures reflect relatively minor fluctuations, with the percentage of Arabs wishing to emigrate ranging from 22% to 28%. Although these variations are statistically insignificant, the overall consistency of the figures – along with their rise in the most recent survey – suggests that the percentage of Arabs hoping to emigrate, currently around one-quarter of the population, may exceed one-third in the coming years.

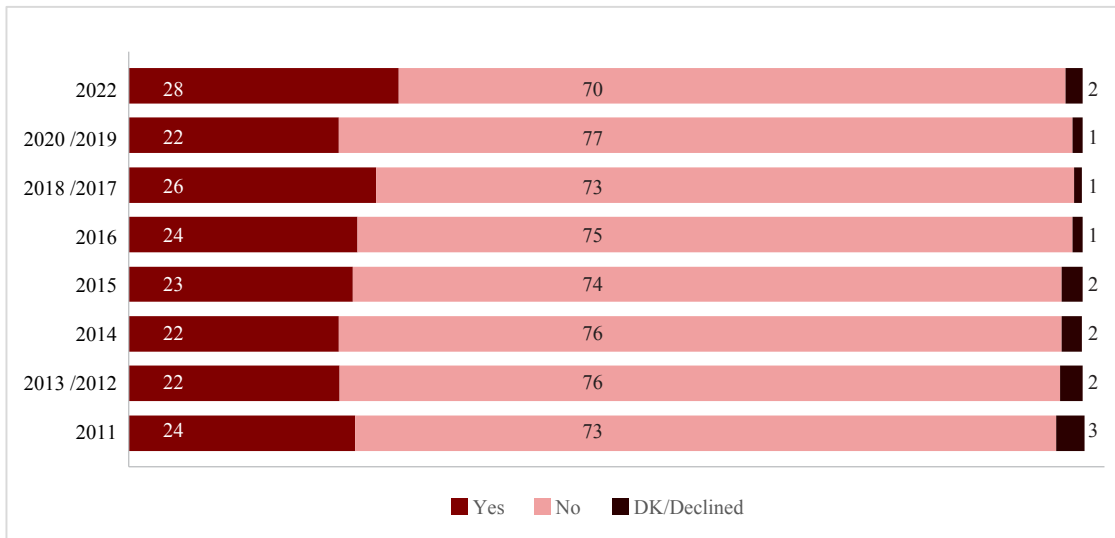
¹ Thomas Nail, *The Figure of the Migrant* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 1.

² The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), *Situation Report on International Migration 2021: Building forward Better for Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region* (Beirut: ESCWA Publications, 2022), p. 23.

³ The United Nations defines an international migrant as “any person who has changed his or her country of usual residence”. It distinguishes between short-term migrants, who have changed their countries of usual residence for at least three months, but less than one year, and long-term migrants, who have done so for at least one year. International Organization for Migration (IOM), *World Migration Report 2022* (Geneva: 2021), p. 23.

⁴ The Arab Opinion Index is a comprehensive tool designed to capture trends in public opinion on a set of economic, social, and political issues across the Arab world. To view the Arab Index reports and data, see: ACRPS, “Arab Opinion Index Program,” accessed on 12/14/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2jzaxumr>

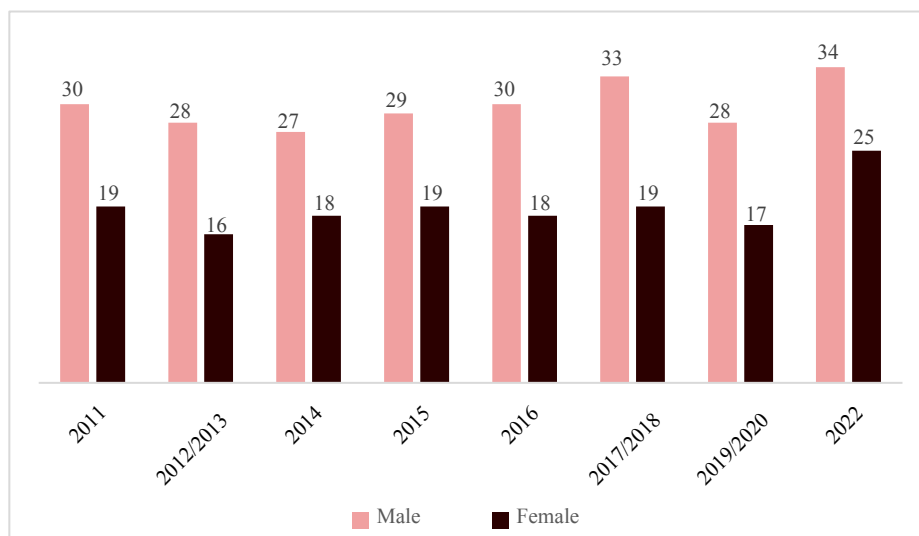
Figure (1): Trends in Public Opinion on the Desire to Emigrate in the Arab Region



The AOI results reveal that Arab men have been more likely than women to consider migration over the past 12 years. For men and women, the percentage has remained nearly constant. Standing at approximately one-third for men, the percentage fluctuates between 27% and 34% of the total respondents. However, the percentage has not exceeded one-fifth for women, hovering between 16% and 19%. The only exception to this pattern occurred in the 2022 survey, when the proportion of women wishing to migrate rose to a quarter.

However, some Arab countries exhibit only slight gender differences. In 2022, 67% of Lebanese men and 61% of Lebanese women expressed a desire to migrate. Similarly, 55% of Sudanese men and 48% of Sudanese women reported the same wish, while 23% of Libyan men and 20% of Libyan women indicated their desire to migrate. Notably, Kuwait recorded identical migration intentions among both genders, standing at 12%. Overall, these gender differences in migration aspirations have remained largely consistent over the years, with no statistically significant changes.

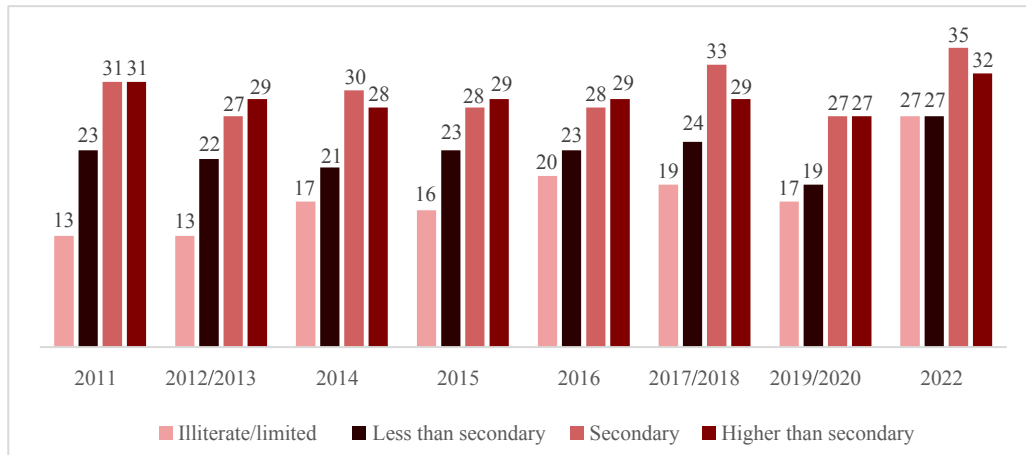
Figure (2): Percentages of Those Wishing to Emigrate in the Arab Region Based on Gender



Despite the unprecedented increase in the desire to emigrate across various demographic groups in 2022, an analysis of the results shows that over the years, there has been a direct correlation in the Arab

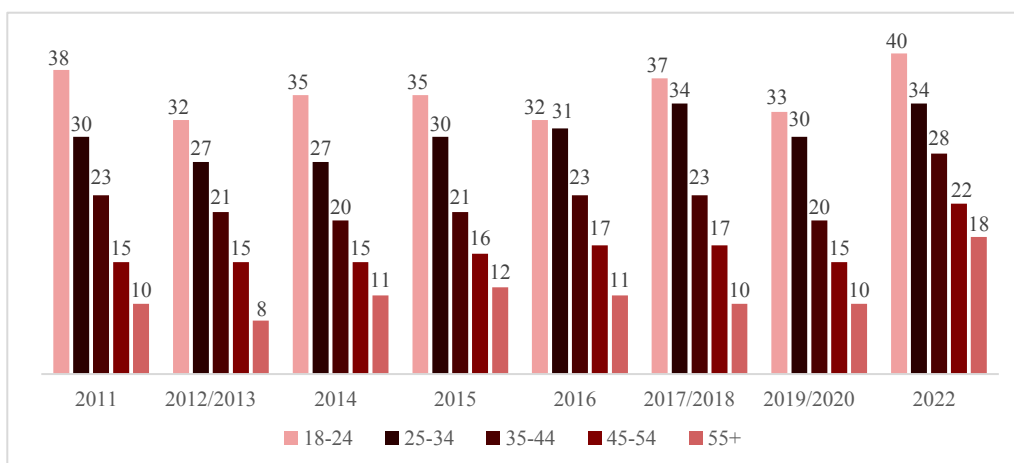
region between educational level and the desire to emigrate. The percentage of those wishing to emigrate is notably higher among those with higher levels of education – such as graduate degrees, university degrees, and even secondary education – compared to those with lower educational levels (never completing secondary school or illiterate). This pattern feeds into the already challenging “brain drain” siphoning out talent from Arab countries, which has been exacerbated by initiatives in North America, Europe, and Australia to attract skilled migrants. Additionally, the availability of job opportunities in the Arab Gulf countries has driven migration patterns as the preferred destinations of those wishing to emigrate.

Figure (3): Percentages of Those in the Arab Region Wishing to Emigrate by Educational Level



In contrast, the results reveal an inverse relationship between the desire to migrate and age. Among young people aged 18-24, the desire to migrate consistently exceeds one-third in various years, peaking at 40% in 2022. This was followed by the 25-34 age group, with migration intentions shared among one-third to one-fourth, ranging from 27% to 34%. The desire to migrate then declines among those aged 35-44, with rates falling to approximately one-fifth at 20% to 23%. For older age groups, particularly 45-54 years and over 55, the desire to migrate is significantly lower, not exceeding 17% and 12% respectively. However, an exception was noted in 2022, when the rate shot up to approximately one-fifth for both groups. Therefore, youth emerges as a defining characteristic of Arab migration. This is particularly evident in Lebanon where the 2022 report showed that 80% of youth aged 18-24 years, as well as 72% of 25-34 year-olds wished to emigrate.

Figure (4): Percentages of Those in the Arab Region Wishing to Emigrate by Age Group



Indicators of Contemplating Migration in the Mashreq

Of the different Arab regions, the Mashreq (Iraq and the Levant) records the highest percentage of citizens wishing to emigrate, even though surveys do not include Syria, which has been the source of the most prominent waves of global migration over the last decade. In 2022, the percentage of those wishing to emigrate across the Mashreq as a whole was 41%, while the percentage for the entire Arab region stood at 28%. Notably, Palestine records the lowest desire to emigrate in the Mashreq, followed by Iraq and Jordan, and Lebanon, where the particularly high desire significantly contributes to the overall high figure for this region.

In Jordan, an analysis of public opinion over the years shows a gradual increase in the percentage of citizens wishing to emigrate, reaching nearly 50% in 2022. This trend can be partly attributed to the worsening economic challenges, including rising prices and tax burdens on the middle class, as illustrated in Figure 6.

In Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip), the percentage of those wishing to emigrate has remained relatively constant over the years, standing at one-fifth of the respondents. However, it is important to distinguish between the West Bank and Gaza Strip when examining aspirations of migration. At the beginning of the new millennium, the percentage of those wishing to emigrate was higher in the West Bank than in Gaza.⁵ However, with the imposition of the Israeli blockade in 2007, the percentage in Gaza rose rapidly and noticeably then gradually increased as a result of the deteriorating living conditions and repeated Israeli assaults. By 2011, 19% of respondents in Gaza expressed a desire to emigrate, compared to just 10% in the West Bank. This gap widened further by 2022, with 33% of Gazans wishing to emigrate, compared to 14% in the West Bank.

In 2022, Lebanon recorded the highest rate of desire to emigrate in the Arab region at 63%, rising sharply from rates recorded in previous years. The increase after 2020 can be largely attributed to the deterioration of Lebanon's already fragile economic, political, and security conditions that followed the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, the unprecedented collapse of the Lebanese currency, the acute economic contraction, and the ongoing political crises that culminated in the October uprising (2019-2021).

In Iraq, the percentage of citizens wishing to emigrate saw a gradual increase over the years, with some minor fluctuations. The rate rose from 19% in 2011 and steadily increased thereafter to a peak of 37% in 2022. This rise can be explained by the widespread disillusionment following the failure to meet the demands of the October uprising, compounded by the worsening security situation and the economic and health crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic.

When examining the motivations for emigration, analysis of the survey results over the past years shows that economic factors continue to be the major driver for citizens across the Mashreq, outpacing other reasons such as security, political, family, or educational reasons. Over two-thirds of respondents in the region cite economic factors as their reason for wanting to emigrate. This rate is most pronounced in Jordan, where more than 90% of respondents consistently cite economic factors, followed by Lebanon, where over 80% have indicated the same over the past six years, and Palestine, with 70% over the same period. Iraq, however, records the lowest percentage of respondents wishing to emigrate for economic reasons, with fewer than half over the years citing economic considerations. In Iraq, other concerns, such as the lack of insecurity and political instability, take precedence.

⁵ Majd Abuamer, "Palestinian Youth Migration from Gaza Strip to Turkey: From Crossing to (Un)Stable Existence," paper presented at Political Exile and Arab Migrations in Turkey Conference, The French Institute of Anatolian Studies (IFEAS), Istanbul, 3-4/11/2022.

Figure (5): Public Opinion Trends in the Desire to Emigrate in the Levant

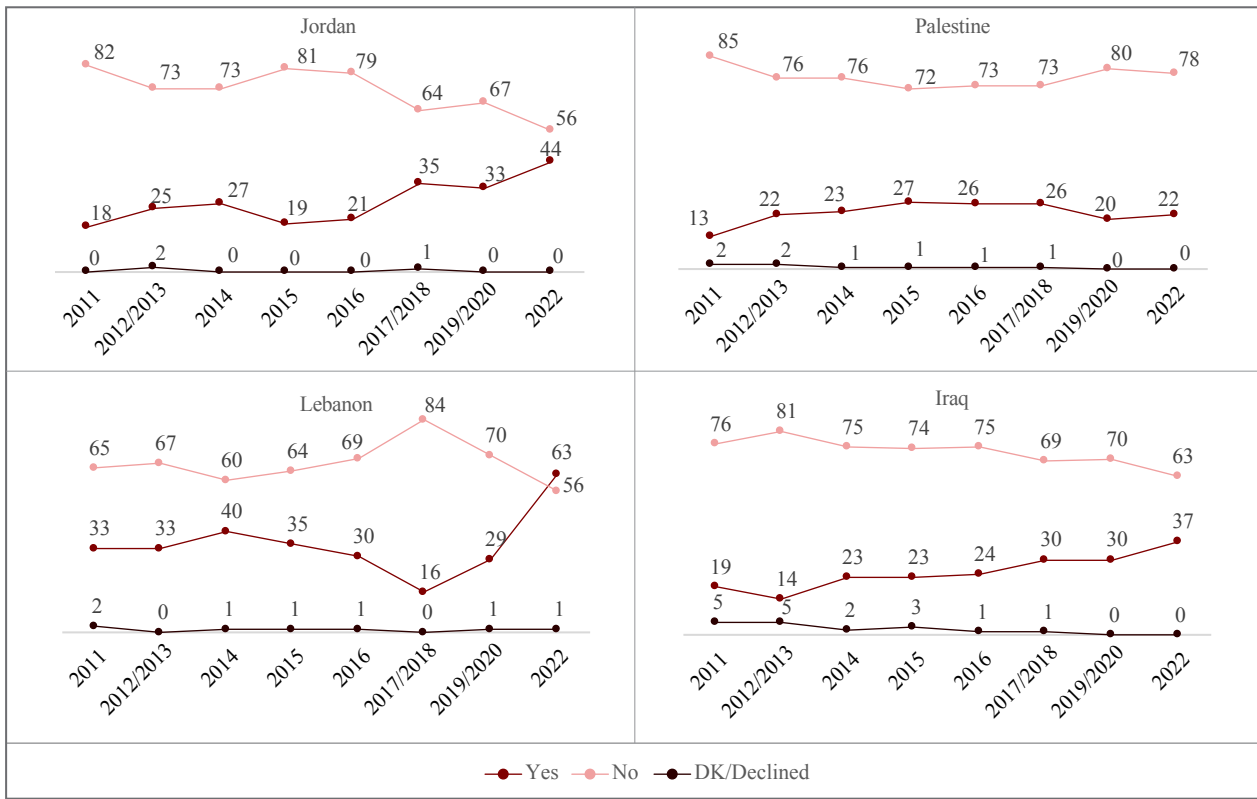
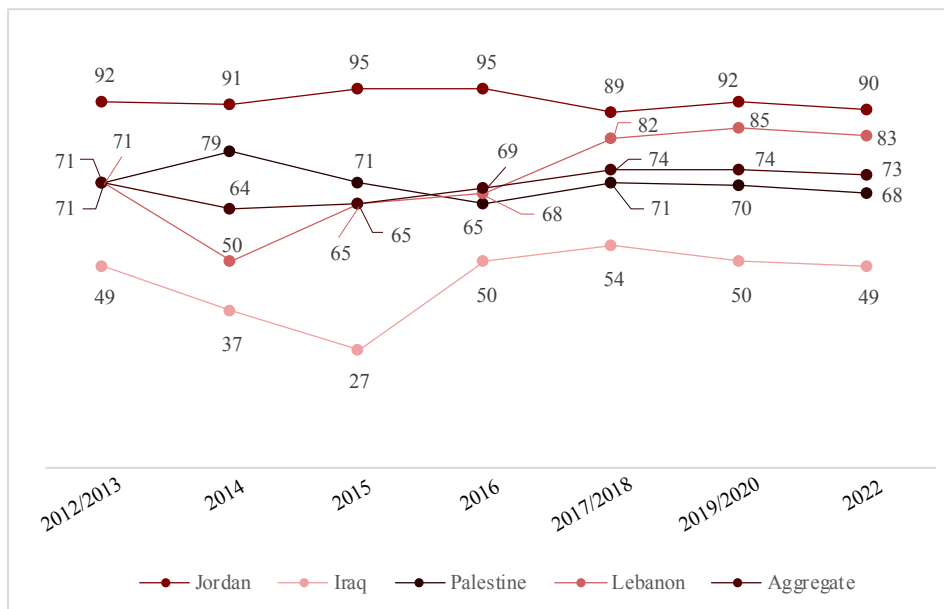


Figure (6): Those Wishing to Emigrate for Economic Reasons in Countries of the Arab Levant



Of those wishing to emigrate from the Mashreq, much like the greater percentage of citizens in Arab countries, a third consider European countries the ideal destination. Following Europe, the most popular destinations include the Gulf countries, Turkey, Canada, and the United States, at varying rates over the years. In 2022 and 2019/2020, Turkey ranked second after Europe, while Canada held the second spot in 2017/2018, the US in 2015 and 2016, and the Gulf countries from 2011 to 2014.

Table (1): Preferred Destinations for Those Wishing to Migrate from the Arab Levant

Destination	2011	2012/2013	2014	2015	2016	2017/2018	2019/2020	2022
European countries	32	33	29	36	37	37	32	32
Gulf countries	15	22	21	10	13	11	10	13
US	12	12	14	16	14	9	8	10
Canada	9	7	10	12	12	12	15	11
Turkey	-	-	4	6	5	8	16	14
Australia	-	-	7	6	5	5	4	3
Other Arab countries	9	5	4	3	4	4	2	5
Other countries	12	10	3	3	3	4	3	4
African countries	-	-	1	1	1	1	0	1
Don't know	8	10	6	5	6	3	10	7
Refused to answer	4	1	1	3	1	5	-	0

Indicators of Contemplating Migration in the Nile Valley

In 2022, the Nile Valley (Egypt and Sudan) recorded the second-highest average percentage of citizens wishing to emigrate, at 36%, following the Mashreq. This marks a notable increase from 2019/2020, when the figure stood at 26%, placing the Nile Valley in third place. While the percentage of Egyptians wishing to emigrate remains relatively low, the overall trend is notable due to the consistently high emigration aspirations among Sudanese citizens, half of whom have expressed a desire to emigrate over the past years.

An analysis of the results shows that the percentage of Egyptians wishing to emigrate was relatively low (less than one-fifth) compared to other Arab countries. The figure was just 8% in 2011, gradually rising to 21% in 2015, before again declining to 14% in 2019/2020. However, it resurged in 2022, reaching its highest of 23%. While this percentage may seem modest, it is significant given Egypt's large population; a rate of 23% translates to over 20 million Egyptians considering emigration.

Sudan has consistently registered one of the highest and most persistent percentages of citizens wanting to emigrate over the past 12 years. In 2011, half of all Sudanese polled (50%) expressed their desire to emigrate, a rate which ranged from 51% to 54% in subsequent years. It then declined notably, to 38%, in 2019/2020 following the December 2018 revolution that brought down the regime of Omar al-Bashir and increased people's confidence in the country's future stability. Despite this drop, the rate rose again to 49% in 2022, and it is expected to rise further in response to the ongoing civil war that has plagued Sudan since April 2023.

Despite the disparity between Egypt and Sudan with respect to the percentage of citizens wishing to emigrate, economic reasons remain the primary motivation for most Egyptians and Sudanese considering emigration. In recent years, the percentage of Egyptians wishing to emigrate for economic reasons has ranged between 72% and 82%, while in Sudan, it has ranged between 75% and 89%. The second most common reason in both is instability, with a percentage of Egyptians citing this factor ranging from 3% and 18%, and Sudanese ranging between 3% and 9%. A third motivation to emigrate in both countries has been political conditions: between 4% and 6% in Egypt and between 3% and 5% in Sudan.

Figure (7): Public Opinion Trends vis-à-vis the Desire to Migrate in the Nile Valley

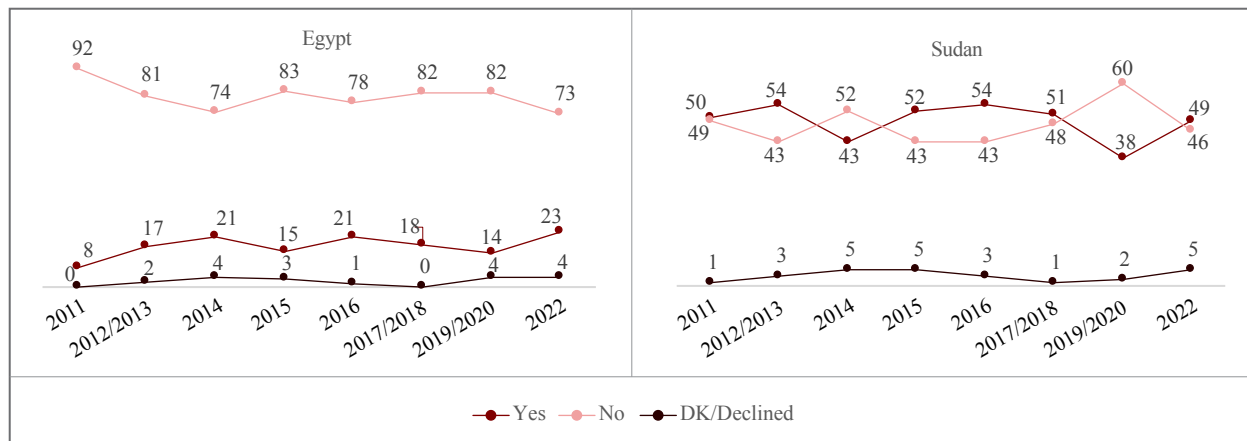
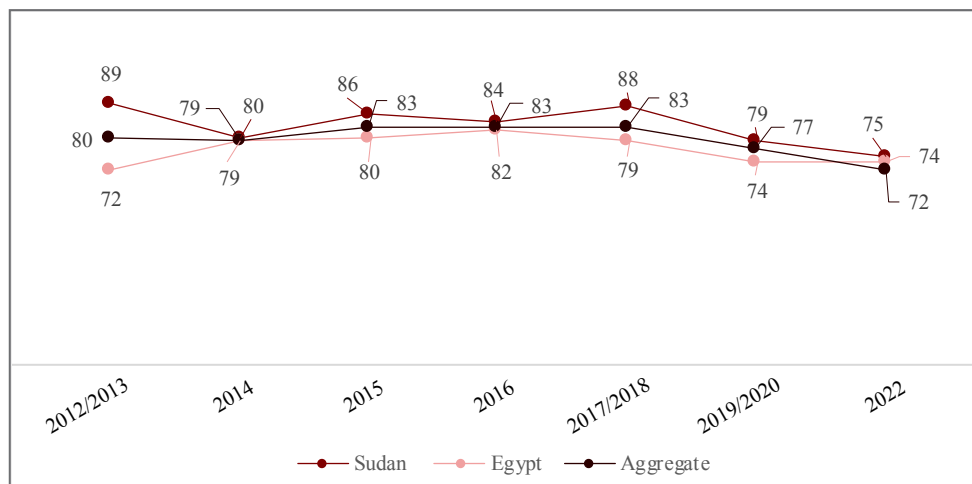


Figure (8): Those Wishing to Emigrate for Economic Reasons in Nile Delta Countries



Those wishing to migrate from the Nile Valley primarily choose the Gulf States as their preferred destination, with around 50% of all respondents, consistently selecting this option. European countries rank second, with approximately 20%, followed by the US, Canada, and Turkey. These figures suggest that respondents are not thinking of permanent relocation so much as they are thinking of going abroad temporarily to work and improve their financial situation, given that the Gulf states do not offer a path to citizenship.

Table (2): Preferred Destinations of Those Wishing to Emigrate from the Nile Valley Region

Destination	2011	2012/2013	2014	2015	2016	2017/2018	2019/2020	2022
Gulf countries	55	46	44	45	51	50	39	46
European countries	11	11	18	22	21	20	24	20
US	13	10	9	9	7	6	9	10
Canada	3	2	2	3	3	6	5	4
Turkey	-	-	0	3	2	2	3	5
Australia	-	-	3	2	2	2	1	1
Arab countries	4	8	6	5	6	3	6	6
Other countries	4	7	5	2	2	2	4	3

African countries	-	-	0	0	0	0	-	0
Don't know	8	15	9	6	4	5	9	6
Refused to answer	0	1	4	2	1	2	-	1

Indicators of Contemplating Migration in the Maghreb

Migration from the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania, and Libya) has surged over the past two decades, surpassing six million migrants in 2020. Of these, 86% went to Europe, with 49% specifically heading to France,⁶ a trend rooted in historical colonial ties, language accessibility, geographical proximity, and the presence of well-established communities. According to the AOI, the percentage of those wishing to migrate from the Maghreb has remained relatively stable. The overall migration aspiration rate increased slightly from 27% in 2019/2020 to 28% in 2022.

In Morocco, public opinion regarding the desire to emigrate has fluctuated in the past decade. The proportion of Moroccans wanting to migrate declined from 29% in 2011 to 25% in 2013, likely reflecting a sense of optimism generated by political reforms following the 2011 protests. However, the percentage rose again to 36% in 2015, peaking at 41% in 2017/2018 after the Rif Movement (October 2016) and the Jerada protests (December 2017), which left many disillusioned about the prospects for meaningful change and reform. Subsequently, the proportion of Moroccans wanting to migrate declined once more, settling at 30% in 2022.

Meanwhile Algeria witnessed the largest decline in the number of citizens wanting to emigrate. In the 2022 survey only 10% of Algerians expressed a desire to leave. The rate was 22% in 2019/2020, which may be indirectly linked to the Hirak protest movement, which began on 22 February 2019.⁷

In Tunisia, the number of citizens wishing to emigrate gradually declined following the Tunisian revolution from 33% in 2011 to 23% in 2015. However, this trend reversed in subsequent years, surging to 44%, the highest among Arab countries, in 2022. The AOI results on related issues show that this increase coincided with a growing distrust in political parties, which grew from 69% in 2015 to 82% in 2022, as well as an increase in the number of Tunisians uninterested in political affairs, from 30% in 2015 to 46% in 2022.

In Mauritania, the proportion of the citizens wishing to emigrate fluctuates from year to year, generally remaining at about 20%. However, there were notable spikes in 2017/2018 and 2022, when the percentage exceeded 25%. An analysis of other survey results reveals that this increase coincided with growing pessimism about the country's economic and political conditions. In 2017/2018, 45% of Mauritians described the economic situation as bleak, up from 29% in 2016, and in 2022, the figure rose to 53% compared to 39% in 2019/2020. Similarly, concerns about the political situation also grew, with 46% in 2017/2018 describing it as bad, up from 38% in 2016, and 54% in 2022, compared with 33% in 2019/2020.

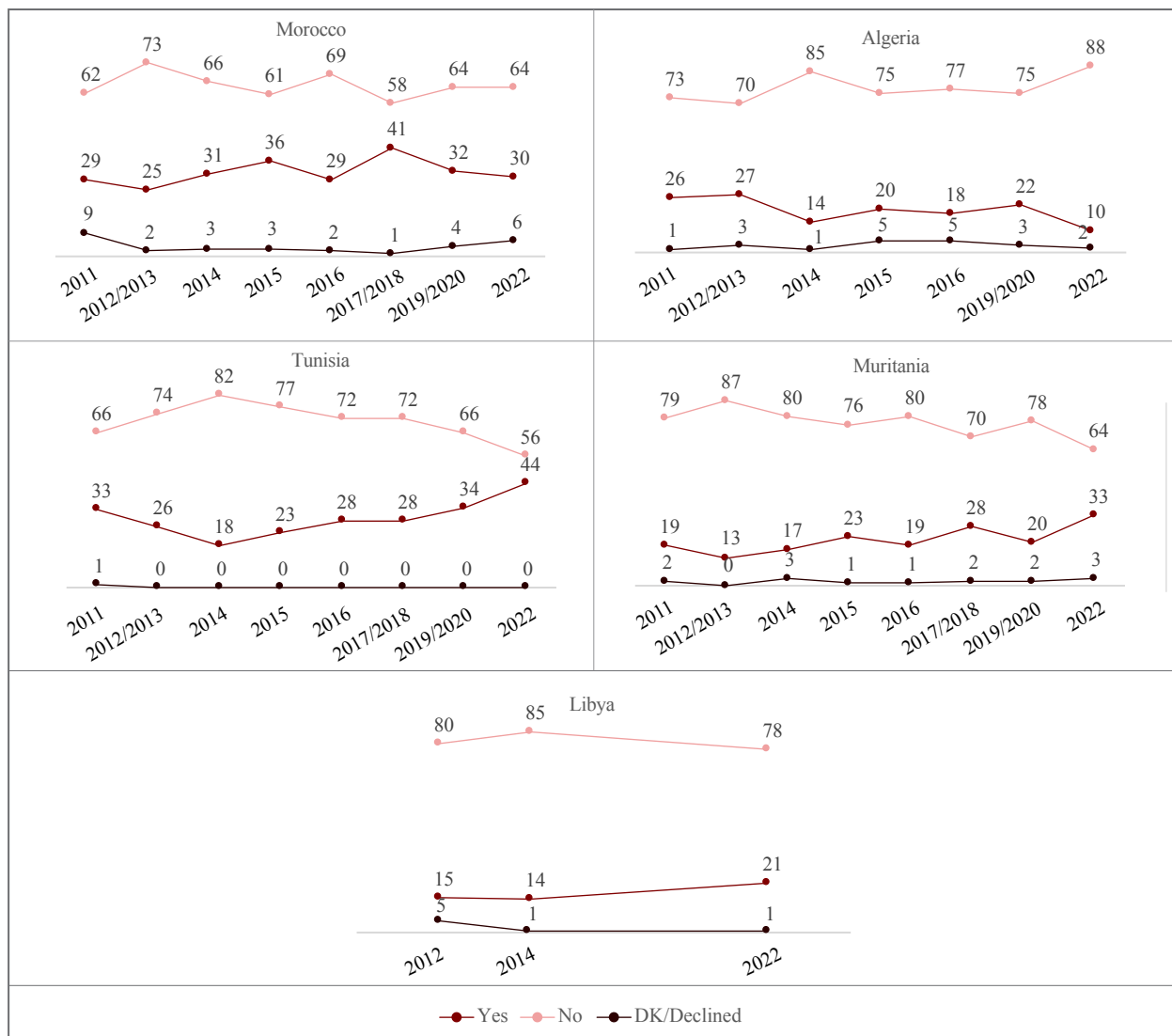
Finally, there is insufficient data on Libya to track changes in public opinion regarding the desire to emigrate. However, available figures suggest that it has remained relatively stable, generally not exceeding 20% of respondents. The percentage was 15% in 2012/2013, 14% in 2014, and 21% in 2022. This is backed up by ESCWA data, which shows no significant changes in the number of migrants from Libya, with the annual total consistently staying below 190,000 between 1990 and 2020. Similarly, the percentage of Libyans residing abroad remained low, at just 3% in 2020, the smallest share of any country in the Maghreb.⁸

⁶ ESCWA, pp. 38-41.

⁷ This is confirmed by some press reports. See, for example: "Since the launch of the popular movement in Algeria, the rate of illegal migration has dropped to zero!," *France24*, 2/4/2019, accessed on 18/11/2024, at <https://tinyurl.com/bden3sy5>

⁸ ESCWA, pp. 38-39.

Figure (9): Trends in Public Opinion Regarding Migration in the Arab Maghreb

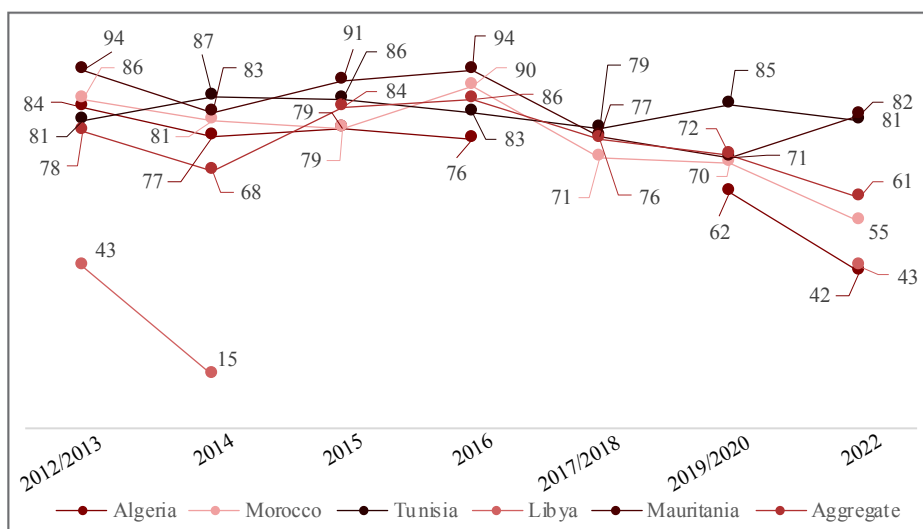


Like their counterparts in the Mashreq and the Nile Valley, citizens of the Maghreb are primarily motivated to emigrate due to economic considerations. The highest proportion of citizens motivated by economic reasons is found in Mauritania, with nearly 75% of respondents, while the lowest is in Libya, where no more than 50% cite economic reasons. In Morocco, the percentage of people wishing to migrate for economic reasons declined from 86% in 2012/2013 to 55% in 2022, while the percentage of those wishing to emigrate for other reasons (political, educational, familial) has increased. Similarly, in Algeria, the percentage of those wishing to migrate for economic factors gradually declined from 84% in 2012/2013 to 44% in 2022, with an increase in the percentage of those wishing to migrate for purposes such as education, which increased to 39% in 2022.

Unlike Morocco and Algeria, the rate of Tunisians wishing to migrate for economic reasons has remained nearly constant over the years, consistently exceeding 80%. The second most common motivation has varied, depending on the year, between security instability or political reasons. In Mauritania, economic reasons continue to be the primary motivation for emigration, with over two-thirds of respondents. Additionally, the desire to study abroad constitutes another significant factor. While the desire to improve one’s economic conditions was the main motive among Libyans in 2012/2013, at a rate of 43%, lack of security ranked second at 24%. By 2014, lack of security became the dominant motivation, with 65% of respondents citing

it, followed by economic reasons at 15%. Despite gaps in the data, the trends remained similar in 2022, with economic reasons again being the main motive at 43%, followed by lack of security at 31%.

Figure (10): Those Wishing to Migrate for Economic Reasons from Countries in the Arab Maghreb



In terms of preferred destinations, European countries, particularly France,⁹ topped the list for Moroccans, with around half of respondents between 2011 and 2022. This was followed by the Arab Gulf countries, the US, and Canada. When analysing the results, a notable trend emerges with the steady rise in the rate of Moroccan respondents considering migration without having a specific destination in mind. While the rate fluctuated between 2% and 6% from 2011 to 2018, it rose to 12% in 2019/2020, and reached 17% in 2022. This shift suggests that either these individuals have not yet seriously considered migrating, or that they view migration as a form of escape, believing life abroad offers better prospects than staying in Morocco.

Table (3): Preferred Destinations of Those Wishing to Migrate from the Arab Maghreb

Destination	2011	2012/2013	2014	2015	2016	2017/2018	2019/2020	2022
European countries	54	44	53	54	50	53	50	47
Gulf countries	10	13	11	9	9	10	9	7
US	8	9	9	10	13	6	7	10
Canada	11	8	7	11	10	8	9	7
Turkey	-	-	3	3	2	3	5	4
Australia	-	-	1	1	1	0	0	0
Arab countries	3	4	4	2	2	4	2	3
Other countries	4	7	6	1	1	2	6	2
African countries	-	11	0	4	5	8	0	1
Don't know	6	3	5	3	6	2	12	17
Refused to answer	4	1	1	3	1	5	0	1

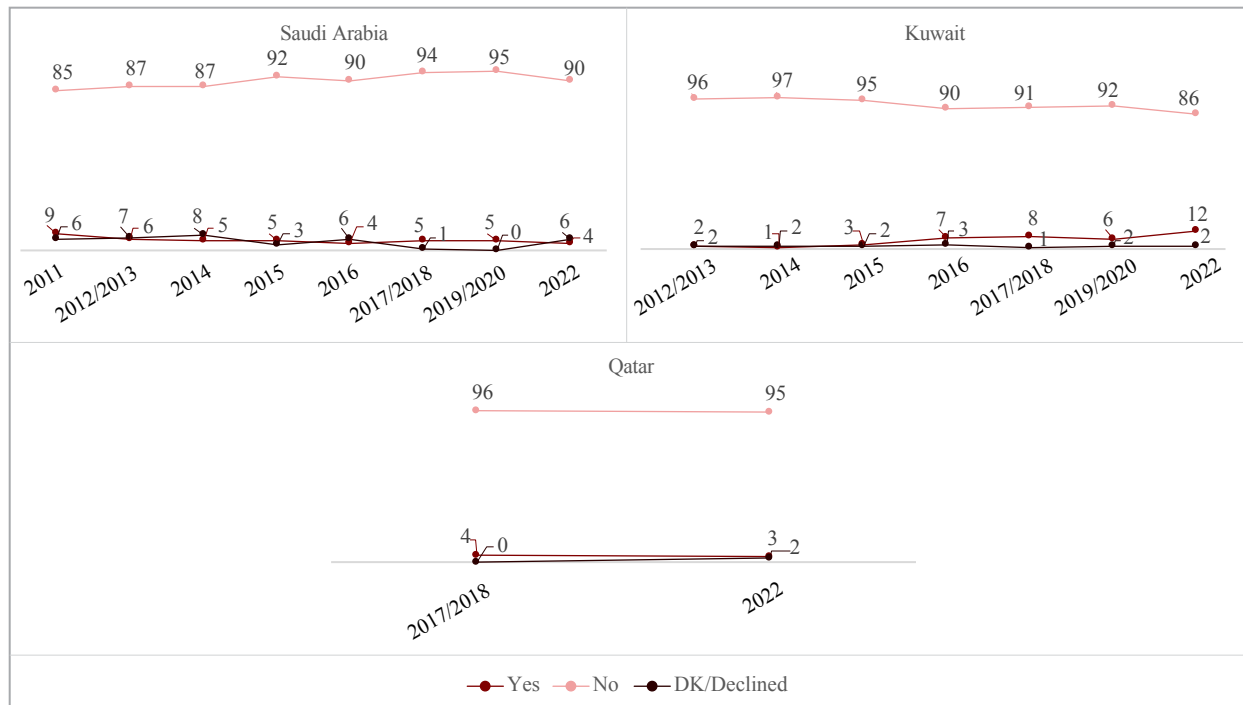
⁹ A study issued by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies in March 2023 showed that the percentage of immigrants in France from three Arab Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia) has been stable since the 1980s at about 30% of the total number of immigrants annually. See: *Immigrés et descendants d'immigrés en France*, Insee Références (Paris: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, 2023).

Indicators of Contemplating Migration in Arab Gulf Countries

In recent decades, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have become one of the primary destinations for global migration, particularly from Asia and the Arab region. In 2020, the GCC states received nearly 30.8 million migrants from Arab countries, accounting for 74% of all Arab migrants worldwide.¹⁰ However, the issue of migration itself seems to be of lesser concern in the Gulf compared to the demographic imbalance created by the large influx of migrants and expatriate workers, which significantly outnumbers the number of citizens in Arab Gulf countries.

Saudi Arabia received the largest number of immigrants in the Arab region, with 13.5 million people in 2020. It ranks as the third-largest migrant destination in the world, behind Germany and the US.¹¹ Meanwhile, the proportion of Saudis wishing to emigrate is low and has gradually declined over the years, from 9% in 2011 to just 4% in 2022. Similarly, in Kuwait, the percentage of citizens wishing to emigrate is low, being consistently around 10%. However, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, the number of Kuwaitis wishing to emigrate has shown a slight, gradual increase, rising from 2% in 2012/2013 to 8% in 2017/2018, and reaching 12% in 2022. As for Qatar, data on emigration intentions is limited, but it appears that the desire to emigrate among Qataris is notably low. At just 4%, Qatar has the lowest emigration aspirations among GCC and Arab countries. This can be attributed to the small size of the Qatari population, as well as Qatar’s exceptional quality of life and economic conditions.

Figure (11): Public Opinion Trends in the Desire to Emigrate in the Arab Gulf



The aspiration to improve one’s economic conditions is a key driver of migration for GCC citizens, although the proportion of Saudis and Qataris wishing to emigrate remains relatively low. Despite this, the overall average of those wishing to emigrate from GCC countries for economic reasons typically hovers at 60% than the nearly constant 60% in the Maghreb, 70% in the Levant, and 80% in the Nile Valley.

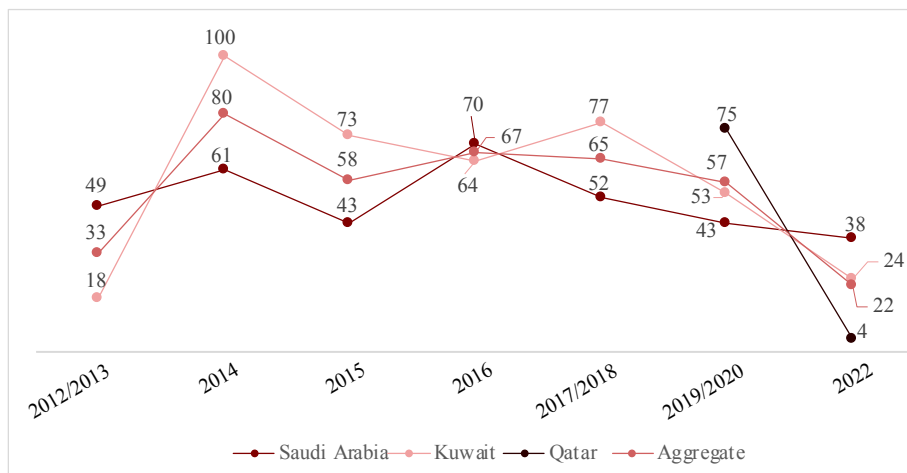
¹⁰ ESCWA, p. 30.

¹¹ Ibid.

Other factors, such as educational, social, familial, and political motivations, also contribute to migration aspirations in the GCC countries.

In Saudi Arabia, the desire to complete education is a second major motivator, with over 25% of potential emigrants citing this reason. Saudi Arabia is the largest Arab country of origin for students pursuing higher education abroad, accounting for 16% of the total Arab student population abroad in 2018 – equivalent to 73,000 Saudi students.¹² Kuwait and Qatar also send large numbers of students overseas. In Saudi Arabia, political considerations and lack of security serve as a third motivation for migration, while social and familial considerations constitute a third motivation for Kuwaitis and Qataris.

Figure (12): Those Wishing to Emigrate for Economic Reasons in the Arab Gulf



European countries have been the preferred destination for approximately one-third of those wishing to emigrate from the GCC countries over the years, followed by the US, Canada, and other Gulf countries. There has also been a rise in the number of those who would like to emigrate but have not yet decided on a specific destination. The size of this group peaked in 2019/2020 at 32%.

Table (4): Preferred Destinations for Those Wishing to Migrate from the Arab Gulf

Destination	2011	2012/2013	2014	2015	2016	2017/2018	2019/2020	2022
European countries	24	23	30	44	29	39	27	33
US	2	28	23	26	17	22	13	12
Canada	5	8	7	5	10	6	2	16
Gulf countries	-	3	13	9	2	1	16	1
Turkey	-	-	0	1	7	4	0	9
Australia	-	-	1	4	7	0	3	0
Arab countries	8	0	0	-	-	3	6	8
Other countries	27	6	0	5	1	5	0	9
African countries	-	-	0	-	-	3	-	0
Don't know	26	29	19	2	16	11	32	5
Refused to answer	8	1	7	3	11	6	-	7

¹² Ibid., p. 29.

Conclusion

What do Arabs think about when they think about migration? An analysis of the AOI results shows that about a quarter of the citizens in the Arab region have consistently thought about emigration over the past 12 years. The desire to migrate is most pronounced among youth, men, and those with at least a secondary education, shaping a typical profile of the Arab migrant as a young, educated male.

The primary reason for considering migration is the desire to improve economic conditions. Economic hardships drive people to seek better living opportunities and improved quality of life abroad. Thoughts of migration are also affected by inflation, financial crises, and general economic instability in their home countries.

Political stability and the enjoyment of political rights reduce individuals' inclination to migrate. Conversely, escaping violence and security instability becomes a priority for many individuals during periods of political unrest or armed conflicts. In most cases examined, the percentage of those desiring to migrate decreased after the outbreak of popular movements and uprisings. These events often restore confidence in the possibility of change and reform, providing citizens with political hope, unlike situations where such movements were met with repression by ruling regimes and/or devolve into internal wars.

Other reasons for considering migration include the pursuit of higher education or family reasons. As for the destination, almost half of the Arab citizens wanting to migrate consider European countries or the Arab Gulf states. The remainder are looking at the US, Canada, Turkey, and Australia. This trend suggests that the majority of potential migrants are thinking of permanent or long-term migration, as opposed to temporary migration.

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BOOK REVIEW
ESSAYS



MADOUKH AJMI AL-OTAIBI, *al-Qarn al-Afrīqī 'Umqan Istrātijīyyan Khalījīyyan* [*The Horn of Africa: A Strategic Depth for Gulf States*] (Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2021), pp. 230.

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The geopolitical location of the Horn of Africa overlooking the Bab-el-Mandeb strait – a crucial maritime passage for 12% of global trade – has positioned it as a theatre for the intervention of dominant international powers at multiple junctures during the colonial period: first the Portuguese, followed by the Italians and French, and then the British.

Madoukh Ajmi al-Otaibi's *The Horn of Africa: A Strategic Depth for Gulf States* addresses the multifaceted relationship between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

states and the countries of the Horn of Africa. It posits that the states of the Horn of Africa could play a significant role in enhancing the strategic depth of the Gulf, driven by geopolitical considerations, shared historical and cultural ties, mutual interests in promoting security and stability, and an increase in the volume of investments. The book covers the period from 2001 to 2018, a time when the presence and influence of Arab Gulf states in the Horn of Africa expanded perceptibly.

Al-Otaibi argues that, with the rise of Islam, the geographical proximity of both regions facilitated the expansion of Arab influence into the heart of the African continent through its eastern coast. This connection strengthened the ties between the peoples in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula and those in East Africa, as clearly observed in Zanzibar, which was a key trading post for Arabs.¹ The author highlights the reciprocal waves of migration and political ties from the pre-Islamic period and onward. He cites the mediation of the Abyssinian chiefs in disputes among pre-Islamic Arab tribes, the migration of the Prophet's Companions to Abyssinia amid growing hostility from his own Quraysh tribe, as well as the assistance sought from the Sultan of Oman by the tribal leaders of Mogadishu, who turned to him for support against increasing Portuguese pressure, given his command of the most powerful navy in the East at the time. Additionally, the book discusses intermarriages between Arabs and Africans, linguistic similarity among speakers of Hamitic and Cushitic languages such as Somali, and Semitic languages such as Arabic, Amharic, and Tigrinya, as well as the religious continuity that spanned both regions. Indeed, the three Abrahamic faiths travelled to Africa through the Arabian Peninsula and left a major imprint on the civilization of the Horn of Africa.²

Al-Otaibi draws significantly on the ideas of Ali Mazrui, a Kenyan intellectual of Arab descent, particularly his concept of "Afrabia". The theoretical model offers valuable insights for developing relations between the Arab Gulf and the Horn of Africa, grounded in shared geography, history, and social dynamics, which align with the principle of strategic depth.³ The author contends that culture and language are essential

¹ Madoukh Ajmi al-Otaibi, *al-Qarn al-Afrīqī 'Umqan Istrātijīyyan Khalījīyyan* (Doha: Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 2021), p. 30.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 31-35.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40.

components of soft power within “the Gulf’s strategic depth project in the Horn of Africa”. He emphasizes the importance of religious congruence, linguistic overlap, and the influence of Arabic literature on East African culture through various stories and popular proverbs.⁴

The “Gulf strategic depth project” undoubtedly faces significant internal and external challenges.⁵ Internally, the Horn of Africa grapples with legitimacy, integration, participation, and the equitable distribution of wealth and power. The growing influence of tribes and their laws, coupled with authoritarian governments, exacerbates these challenges. This inadequacy of regimes in addressing urgent social, political, and economic problems is evident in the persistent wars between and within countries of the Horn, and the rise of ethnic-based separatism.⁶ However, the Arab Gulf states cannot easily navigate the internal challenges in the Horn of Africa, particularly as they lack a political model that can be exported, just as Western powers (as opposed to Russia and China) do with their democratic model.

External challenges to the strategic depth project, according to al-Otaibi, include the global perception of terrorism, which has led the United States to establish a strong security presence in the region. This includes intensive maritime patrols to oversee US and European warships along the Somali coast, the establishment of a military base in Djibouti to monitor conditions in the Horn region and East Africa, and the creation of the “Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism” in Somalia. In contrast, France’s approach emphasizes the interconnection between security and development, focusing on military support to foster stability in African states through economic ties.⁷ These challenges raise critical questions about the ability of Arab Gulf states to take on the responsibility of securing straits, maritime corridors, and the long coastline of East Africa.

Al-Otaibi holds that the capitalist economic order should be leveraged in alignment with the Gulf’s strategic depth in the Horn of Africa. Despite the major political and economic transformations Africa has undergone since the late 20th century, these developments have led to a new mode of governance dubbed “Afrocracy”. It retains the legacy of totalitarian, autocratic rule, which global capitalism supports to further its interests.⁸ Al-Otaibi advocates for a capitalist model that would enable Gulf states to assert their influence in the Horn of Africa, potentially rivalling the Western model. Furthermore, a strategic Gulf presence in the Horn could complement the existing US/Western presence through coordination. Gulf states could benefit as “free riders”, taking advantage of American protection of the waters of the Horn to quietly establish their influence. This approach allows them to avoid directly clashing with US/Western influence, and to evade the burdens of military protection and economic support in a region marred by crisis and famine.

Al-Otaibi discusses what he terms “the Gulf political will toward the Horn of Africa”, focusing on issues of conflict, security, development, and investment climate 2001 and 2018,⁹ evident in the Gulf states’ proactive efforts to resolve conflicts in the region, for instance in Sudan and Somalia. Qatar played a significant role in conflict resolution in Sudan by sponsoring a peace agreement between the Sudanese government and armed groups in Darfur, culminating in the 2013 Doha agreement. Likewise, Kuwait demonstrated its commitment by supporting a \$3.5 billion project to develop East Sudan. These Qatari and Kuwaiti efforts were welcomed and praised by other GCC states.¹⁰

⁴ Ibid., pp. 53-55.

⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁹ Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 64.

Moreover, the Gulf states have ascribed great emphasis to resolving the perpetual conflicts and civil wars in Somalia. In 2017, Saudi Arabia hosted Somali factions in Jeddah, successfully persuading them to sign a peace agreement. In fact, the GCC has consistently invited these groups to settle their disputes on multiple occasions, including Saudi conflict resolution efforts between Sudan and Chad in 2007 through the Janadriyah Agreement signed in Riyadh, as well as the 2018 Jeddah peace summit aimed at reconciling Ethiopia and Eritrea.¹¹

Conversely, the Gulf states have prioritized social security, which is an important dimension in al-Otaibi's argument regarding their political will toward the Horn of Africa. He incorporates social exchange theory to analyse the establishment of peace and social security among GCC states and the Horn. The concept centres on relief work and funding for development and reconstruction projects, which the author refers to as "the voluntary humanitarian action of the Gulf states toward the Horn of Africa". Additionally, it encompasses economic agreements, commercial exchanges, and investments.¹²

The author poses a key question: How do leaders and elites in the Horn countries perceive the voluntary action of Gulf states? To provide an answer, he conducted interviews and surveys with 200 experts from a sample of academic and political elites.¹³ He argues that the strategic mindsets of leaders and elites vary from country to country according to Gulf States' interaction with conflicts in the region. However, there is a consensus among them in recognizing and accepting the role of Gulf states as peace brokers in internal and external conflicts within the Horn of Africa.¹⁴ However, while these elites acknowledge the tangible charitable and humanitarian initiatives, they do not find them commensurate with the scale and financial power of the Gulf states. Additionally, the magnitude of Gulf wealth is perceived as disproportionate to the scale of Gulf states' investments in the region.¹⁵

Al-Otaibi's book fills a significant gap in the scholarship on Arab-African relations, which has primarily focused on North Africa and the Nile Basin, often overlooking the Gulf. The book, however, does not explore in depth the potential advantages of recent academic interest in Indian Ocean studies, which posits shared cultural connections between the western Indian Ocean and the Gulf. These ties are rooted not merely in trade, but in the "idea" of a common world linking the harbours of the Arab Gulf, East Africa, and India.

The book provides great potential for further research and reflection. Perhaps the starting point should be investigating whether the Gulf states function as a cohesive bloc with harmonious long-term perceptions and goals, or if their engagement is overshadowed by country-level concerns. Several issues warrant consideration: the history of the Western Indian Ocean, particularly the close ties between the Gulf States and the Horn of Africa and how the colonial period has undermined these connections; the water conflict between Egypt (integral to the Gulf's strategic depth) and Ethiopia, a thorny issue for the Horn of Africa; the expansion of armed groups in Yemen and the influence of sub-state actors in the Horn of Africa, along with external factors given the region's proximity to the Bab-el-Mandeb; the impact of the 2017 Gulf crisis on the shared "political will" of Gulf states toward the Horn; and the Gulf states' location on the map of growing regional and international competition in the Horn, particularly from countries like Turkey and Iran.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

¹² Ibid., p. 70.

¹³ Ibid., p. 117.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 127, 187.



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) is an independent social sciences and humanities institute that conducts applied and theoretical research seeking to foster communication between Arab intellectuals and specialists and global and regional intellectual hubs. The ACRPS achieves this objective through consistent research, developing criticism and tools to advance knowledge, while establishing fruitful links with both Arab and international research centers.

The ACRPS encourages a resurgence of intellectualism in Arab societies, committed to strengthening the Arab nation. It works towards the advancement of the latter based on the understanding that development cannot contradict a people's culture and identity, and that the development of any society remains impossible if pursued without an awareness of its historical and cultural context, reflecting its language(s) and its interactions with other cultures.

The ACRPS works therefore to promote systematic and rational, scientific research-based approaches to understanding issues of society and state, through the analysis of social, economic, and cultural policies. In line with this vision, the ACRPS conducts various academic activities to achieve fundamental goals. In addition to producing research papers, studies and reports, the ACRPS conducts specialized programs and convenes conferences, workshops, training sessions, and seminars oriented to specialists as well as to Arab public opinion. It publishes peer-reviewed books and journals and many publications are available in both Arabic and English to reach a wider audience.

The ACRPS, established in Doha in autumn 2010 with a publishing office in Beirut, has since opened three additional branches in Tunis, Washington and Paris, and founded both the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic and the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. The ACRPS employs resident researchers and administrative staff in addition to hosting visiting researchers, and offering sabbaticals to pursue full time academic research. Additionally, it appoints external researchers to conduct research projects.

Through these endeavours the ACRPS contributes to directing the regional research agenda towards the main concerns and challenges facing the Arab nation and citizen today.



The Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI) is an independent institute for learning and research in the fields of Social Sciences, Humanities, Public Administration and Development Economics in Doha.

Through its academic programs and the research activities of its professors, the DI aims to achieve its mission of contributing to the formation of a new generation of academics and intellectually independent researchers who are proficient in international scholarship standards and modern interdisciplinary research methodologies and tools, and leading professionals who can advance human knowledge and respond to the needs of the Arab region, resulting in social, cultural and intellectual development.

The DI seeks to establish an intellectual hub that will benefit the Arab region in particular. The DI supports academic research that deals with Arab issues, in an atmosphere of institutional and intellectual freedom.

The DI works in cooperation with the ACRPS and the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic Language to facilitate its students and faculty members in their research of the most important current issues related to the Arab world and the wider international community. The involvement of students in the most important research projects is at the heart of the DI's interests.

The DI adopts Arabic as its official and primary language for education and research. English serves as an accompaniment to Arabic, with both languages used in presenting and research.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies Conference

The Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies is organizing a conference on “Conflict and Humanitarian Studies” in collaboration with the DI, the Carter School at George Mason University, and the Network on Humanitarian Action. The conference seeks to foster dialogue that critically examines the theoretical frameworks, methods, and ethical considerations that underpin conflict and humanitarian studies.

22-23 January 2025

Khaldoun al-Naqeeb and His Contributions to Gulf Studies and Arab Social Sciences

The Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit dedicates an upcoming symposium to evaluate the work of the late Khaldoun al-Naqeeb. His contributions have laid the groundwork for what is now recognized as “Gulf sociology”. The symposium seeks to explore the significance and impact of his work on Gulf Studies and Arab Social Sciences as a whole.

13 February 2025

The Strategic Studies Unit Fifth Annual Conference

The Strategic Studies Unit is holding its fifth conference titled “Small States’ Defence Strategies: Tactical Adaptations and Operational Innovations of Small(er) Forces and their Implications”, examining the defence strategies of smaller states, latest research, policymaking, and impacts. This includes a multi-level analysis of tactical innovations, operational art, and strategic adaptations, as well as comparative case-studies.

23-24 February 2025

COVER ARTWORK



“The City” (2024)

Metallic acrylic on wood, 155*85 cm, by **Rania Abu Elazm**

Egyptian visual artist. She holds a PhD in painting and works as a lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Helwan University. She participated in more than 80 group exhibitions in Egypt and abroad and won multiple awards.