



Günther / Milich (Eds.)

REPRESENTATIONS AND VISIONS OF
HOMELAND IN MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE

OLMS

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Edited by Sebastian Günther
and Stephan Milich



فادي بارتقي، 2015

Representations and Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature



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Olms Verlag

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Acknowledgments

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Special thanks are due to a number of colleagues and friends whose support, in one way or another, made the present publication possible: Many faculty members and students from the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Göttingen assisted either with the organization of the workshop or the editing of the present volume. Dr. Agnes Imhof (Göttingen) must be mentioned in particular for her efficient help in the editorial process of preparing this volume for publication. Likewise, Dr. Dorothee Lauer, Jana Newiger, Ahmed Sagheer and Akram Bishr, assisted in various other ways. Furthermore, the Editors wish to thank Elizabeth Crawford (Göttingen) and Rebekah Zwanzig (Pennsylvania State University, University Park) for their professional support in checking and editing English texts.

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*

While the Editors take full responsibility for the technical appearance of the contributions published in this volume, the opinions and analyses expressed in the individual studies remain entirely those of their respective authors. Such academic freedom is perhaps particularly called for in studies on themes whose relevance—paradoxically—goes beyond mere academic interest. To some degree or another, political and humanitarian issues are inevitably emotionally charged,

especially those pertaining to *Representations and Visions of Homeland*, whether in the context of the Arab world or elsewhere.

This is particularly pertinent now in view of the entirely new dimensions of loss of home and homeland, of the uprootedness not only of individuals but of entire communities and nations, and the mass exodus of refugees from their Arab native countries. Dramatic political and societal upheavals are currently shaking an entire region, and these shed an utterly different light on the acute relevance of critical research on issues relating to home and homeland in the Arab world and beyond. Obviously, these recent cataclysms in large parts of Africa and Asia have reached a magnitude and an accelerating speed that was completely unforeseeable—and indeed unimaginable—at the time our workshop took place in Göttingen.

The Editors

Göttingen and Köln, February 2016

Introduction

Sebastian Günther and Stephan Milich

The emergence of nation states in the Middle East coincided with complex processes of modernization, economic liberalization and social change. One domain which has inspired and documented this new culture is modern Arabic literature, especially poetry. The ideas and concepts of the homeland/nation (*waṭan*) expressed in this literature functioned as a virtual space for creating, negotiating or reformulating concepts of Arab identity. In poetry, these literary visions and representations at times assumed a mythic dimension, transforming city space into a utopia of socialism/humanism or turning a native village into a mystified setting of national renewal and salvation. The meta-narrative of the necessity to destroy the old world with its traditions, language and social norms, to allow a rebirth in a modern form, seems in retrospect like the self-fulfilling prophecy of an increasingly violent and de-humanizing history of political repression. It is important to note that this development in the Arab world was preceded by ideological projects of radical European modernity. Unlike the mystifying of reality sometimes seen in poetic texts, which is partly due to the extensive use of myth in modernist poetry in general, the emerging Arabic novel speaks a more realist or naturalist-didactic language which is less prone to totalitarian visions of a new world.

Up to the 1990s, poetry¹ was used as a basic form of expression to create, construct, and question nationalist paradigms as well as consciousness of and loyalty to the homeland. Yet nowadays, many Arab critics and authors consider the novel and drama to be better suited than poetry to tackling contemporary societal problems.² The potential of the novel to elucidate, narrate and expose the psychological dimensions of the individual and connect them to social dynamics as well as to political events and developments has gained particular importance. This might explain the tendency among Arab poets to stop writing poetry for the sake of prose literature, a trend which has created a severe crisis for Arabic poetry today, as some critics and writers argue.

The literary spaces in both poetry and narrative Arabic literature have implicitly or explicitly been linked to notions of masculinity and femininity.

¹ Yassir Suleiman writes in his “Introduction” to *Literature and Nation in the Middle East* (p. 5), that language—and poetry rather than the novel—are paramount to the construction of Arab nationalism. Similar to most other national(ist) literatures, “Arabic nationalist poetry enhances the experience of ‘unisonality’ which national literature aims to promote among the members of the nation.”

² A case in point is the frequent use of different forms of the dramatic poem by a number of Arab poets (e.g. Sa’dī Yūsuf, Nizār Qabbānī, Muḥammad al-Māghūṭ, and Adonis) that lends modern Arabic poetry a particularly polyphonic, dialogical, and dramatic character.

Studies in modern Arabic literature have revealed that each country has its own very individual tradition and practice of ‘gendering’ private and public spaces, thereby shaping, or reformulating, notions of the homeland or the nation. Moreover, the specific roles and functions of the feminine and the masculine in the construction of homeland/nationhood have been elucidated. Another essential element that has influenced the form and content of depictions of the homeland/nation in modern Arabic literature has been the often ambivalent relationship to the cultural other, mainly Europe, America and Russia. The two dimensions of the gendered conceptions of nation and the ambiguous relationship with the ‘West’ very often intermingled and mutually influenced each other. Since borders were shaped and reshaped by colonial and post-colonial politics, and Arab-Muslim identity was constantly questioned and devalued by the normative power of the European model and western political interventions, modern Arabic literature began to perform a ‘geo-poetical’ function, creating alternative spatial realities in order to contest and challenge the spatial facts on the ground that were produced by a complex—and in hindsight—fatal concoction of foreign intervention and domestic politics.

Towards the second half of the 20th century, the nation state, be it in its greater pan-Arab guise or its national variants, had become the essential paradigm for thinking about the homeland, thus greatly inspiring the imaginations of many Arab writers, poets, and intellectuals. Depending on the poet’s vision and biography, it was either the rural setting that was mystified and idealized in poetic imageries of romantic salvation, or the Arab capitals (Beirut, Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus) that provided a projection screen for the realization of freedom, individuality and self-fulfilment. Yet the Arab city usually kept its threatening force of self-estrangement even in the works of poets who sympathized with life in the capital.

While in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, these images, visions and concepts tended to have a utopian character, after the setback of 1967 (*naksa*) and the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, and especially the Israeli invasion of the southern parts of Lebanon in 1982, the tone and message of Arabic literature on the homeland changed substantially. Not only the feeling of a deep and lasting cultural crisis, but also the urgent need to improve the social and political living conditions prompted prose writers and poets to create new images of *waṭan*, accompanied increasingly by a dystopian undertone. The more Arab countries experienced political and military setbacks during the second half of the 20th century, the more poets and novelists started to question the possibilities of regaining an independent, free and just homeland/nation. Moreover, many Arab intellectuals and writers, targeted by the ‘state security’ or police of oppressive regimes, were silenced or forced to leave their countries in search for refuge and a safer life in exile. Thus, a modern Arabic literature of exile emerged that was distinct from the earlier Arab-American *mahjar* literature due to its extremely politicized character and the specific social and political conditions from which it arose.

The feeling of constantly being oppressed led to the accumulation of frustration, anger and hopelessness. In the eyes of many, the Arab dictators had appropriated or robbed their subjects of their homeland. Similar to a number of post-colonial countries in other parts of the world, the homeland had turned into the private property of the ruling class. Before the *Naksa* of 1967, an innovative scholar and respected historian such as Hisham Sharabi (1927-2005) could still claim that in a number of Arab revolutionary countries “a new type of leadership” had emerged that he characterized as “dedicated, austere, audacious”. In his book *Nationalism and revolution in the Arab world* (published in 1966), Sharabi wrote about the new Arab nationalist leadership: “To hold office came to mean public service, not personal profit and self-aggrandizement. [...] the ideal of the benevolent dictator gained strength to such an extent that a new kind of legitimacy has come to be associated with it.”³ From the perspective of today and with the examples of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia or Libya in mind, exactly the opposite seems to be true, namely that the politics of those leaders had nothing in common with benevolent politics for the sake of the citizens, society and state. The uprisings and revolutions of 2010 and 2011 fought to a large part against the politics of “personal profit and self-aggrandizement”.

As another decisive turning point, the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990/91) had a lasting effect on the conceptualization of homeland among Arab intellectuals and writers. Political violence and extremism had erased the hope to create a civil society and a state that guaranteed civil rights and individual liberties. In a short text about her understanding of *waṭan*, the novelist and editor of a popular women’s magazine in Lebanon, Alawiyya Sobh (b. 1955), writes:

Wars kill our cities; confessional and ethnic extremism empties them of civic laws and individual liberties while my protagonists holding the dream of change, of a secular civil society and individual liberties, are overwhelmed by disillusionment and failure, and finally led to their defeated destinies. [...] It’s a fragile homeland, ready to explode in any moment. And at the same time, it still remains a dream.⁴

In the eyes of many Arab writers, the Arab homeland is in a state of half or complete paralysation, incapable or impotent (*‘ājiz*) of facing reality and its challenges.⁵ One result of these deceptions and setbacks has been that the concept of *‘urūba* (Arabhood), a core element of the nationalist self-understanding of the Baath party both in Iraq and Syria, as well as the concept of Arab unity (*waḥda ‘arabiyya*), became marginalized among intellectuals. While today Arab nationalism (*qawmiyya ‘arabiyya*) as a key component of political rhetoric has lost its vital force and is no more able to mobilize the Arab street, some political

³ The role models for this new type of leader are, according to Sharabi, Nasser and Ben Bella. Sharabi, *Nationalism* 88.

⁴ Quotation from an unpublished essay (in Arabic) that Alawiyya Sobh presented at the 2011 Göttingen Symposium (translation by S. Milich).

⁵ Compare the introduction of Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought* 78.

institutes, organizations and semi-state bodies try to rethink Arab nationalism, re-inventing it as an ideological framework for future cultural politics.⁶

Over the last decades, various uprisings, strikes and protests against political repression have taken place in a number of Arab countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, which, however, did not succeed in toppling a dictator or changing a political system. Only the mass uprisings of the so-called Arab Spring finally led to the fall of Mubarak and Ben Ali in 2011. Although heavy setbacks characterize the efforts to democratize the political and social structures in the Arab countries, the people who went into the streets in order to protest and unmask the corruption and injustice experienced a political force that had been unthinkable to them for many years. While in each country the uprisings took a different shape, the new paradigm shared by so many people in the Arab world was their claim for political participation in order to again identify positively with the homeland. The demand that all citizens should have a say in shaping society and politics turned the formerly passive subject into a citizen actively and critically engaged in the affairs of her or his country. In 2016, this demand seems now to be highly threatened, or has already been reversed. Moreover, the region finds itself in a state of disruption, instability, and insecurity never experienced before, falling apart in conflicting sections and rapidly changing identity formations. But the question of who is to blame for the failure of the 2011 Arab uprisings, and what consequences these developments will have on the cultural levels, remain issues of utmost importance and controversy. Is this state of disruption a direct or indirect result of the politics of ‘creative chaos’ that went along with the Greater Middle East Initiative modelled by the neo-conservative US-government of George W. Bush?⁷ Here, the question to what degree the foreign interventions of global super powers (such as the United States, the European Union, and Russia) and regional players (such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, and Qatar) have had a detrimental effect also on the most recent developments in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and how these interventions intersect with local politics and local political culture, is key to a

⁶ In the final declaration of a conference on the future of Arabhood, we read the following still very general definition of what Arabism might mean: “[...] al-‘Urūba comprises cultural, social and psychological features that were formed historically and characterize—as a relative tendency—the group we call the Arab nation (*al-umma al-‘arabiyya*).“ Ghalyūn et al. (eds.), *al-‘Urūba fī l-qarn al-ḥādī wa-l-‘ishrīn* 509.

⁷ Two years after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice argued that every action in the Middle East would be better than no action: “In times of extraordinary change such as ours, when the costs of inaction outweigh the risks of action, doing nothing is not an option. [...] It is sheer fantasy to assume that the Middle East was just peachy before America disrupted its alleged stability. Had we believed this, and had we done nothing, consider all that we would have missed in just the past year: A Lebanon that is free of foreign occupation and advancing democratic reform. A Palestinian Authority run by an elected leader who openly calls for peace with Israel. An Egypt that has amended its constitution to hold multiparty elections. A Kuwait where women are now full citizens. And, of course, an Iraq that in the face of a horrific insurgency has held historic elections, drafted and ratified a new national charter, and will go to the polls again in coming days to elect a new constitutional government.” Rice, *The Promise*.

more precise, more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the social, cultural and political dynamics in the Arab countries. These issues are not only at the heart of political discourse, but also function as a kind of driving force in Arab literary writing today, as for example in many of the novels nominated in recent years for the short list of the “Arabic Booker” show. By narrating contemporary social and political histories in subtle ways, they succeeded in creating literary texts of high aesthetic value that highlight the complexity of the current situation and the at times elusive interrelation with the past.⁸

The papers compiled in this volume reflect and illustrate in various aesthetic forms the complexity, ambivalence and plurality of the changing conceptions, representations and images of the homeland and the nation. The symposium “Visions and representations of homeland in Modern Arabic prose literature and poetry”, held at the Lichtenberg-Kolleg of the University of Göttingen from 30 June-1 July, 2011, aimed to contribute not only to a deeper understanding of literary figurations of the homeland and its impact on cultural mentalities and politics, but also to a fuller appreciation of the rich repertoire of innovative and critical ideas on nation and homeland evident in this particular literature. While a number of contributions focused on the processes of symbolic nation building, others dealt with literary techniques and devices that aimed to deconstruct and question the political discourse on *waṭan* and Arab nationalism. The contributions range from analyses of novels and poetry to classical works about home and nostalgia, travel accounts, *naḥḍa*-literature, didactic epistles, prison memoirs, and the genre of collective autobiographies or “village books”.

BEATRICE GRUENDLER’s study, “*Al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* and its Alternatives in Classical Arabic Literature,” provides a preliminary analysis of the historical development of the term *waṭan* in classical Arabic literature and thus offers important background information for the more contemporary themes that constitute the major parts of this volume. With this historical overview, she emphasizes the ambivalent attitudes towards the “home” as a term, and shows how contradictory ideas about it lay equal claims to understanding its basic principles. She also demonstrates how the meanings and associations regarding “home” have changed over time. The first part of her study explores the development of genres dealing with *waṭan*, beginning with a look at how the longing for “home” has influenced Arabic poetry. At first a lesser motif in early and pre-Islamic poetry, it then began with the Abbasid poets to develop into a poetic genre, as a yearning and plea to return home. She then explores the second half of the 3rd/9th century when *waṭan* shifted from a major poetic genre into a thematic umbrella for the creation of literary anthologies and chapters within anthologies. While early anthologies named multiple reasons for the emotional connection to the “home,” later anthologies presented two sides of every position towards the home. The

⁸ It may suffice here to mention a few examples out of many excellent recent Arabic novels: *Frankenstein in Baghdad* by Aḥmad Sa’dāwī or *A rare blue bird that flies with me* by Yūsuf Fādil (published 2013 and 2014). See also the homepage of the International Price for Arabic Fiction: www.arabicfiction.org.

trend to assign two sides to every attitude towards the “home” and “homesickness” is continued in dictionaries of poetic motifs, in treatises that extolled and blamed concepts and objects (*al-maḥāṣin wa-l-masāwī*), and in larger anthologies that included the two sides of a topic. It is in these larger anthologies in the 5th/11th and 6th/12th centuries that more space is given to the advantages of moving, and the many reasons and circumstances for moving. Eventually, in this later period the genre of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* anthologies is complemented and countered by genres of books about strangers and travelers. This leads to the second part of the paper in which the focus shifts to illustrating the specific themes and attitudes found in the previously mentioned texts. Using numerous examples from anthologies, GRUENDLER presents the divided and shifting positions on geographical origin, the shape of the home, the changing home, the choice to leave home, the idea of the universal home, freedom and ambivalence, as well as mobility and exile. The numerous and varied examples given for each of these categories, although by no means exhaustive, strengthen her conclusion that the recognition of *al-ḥanīn ilā l-awṭān* in classical Arabic literature owes more to the eye of the beholder than any consistency in the sources, and that “home” in these texts differs from the modern connotations associated with country or nation.

NIKOLAY N. DYAKOV’S “Travel Books in the Age of the *nahḍa*: Egyptian Scholars Writing on Europe and Russia in the 19th Century”, then looks at how the travel books of the Egyptian scholars Muḥammad ‘Ayyād al-Ṭanṭāwī (1810-61) and Aḥmad Zakī Bāshā (1867-1934) represent a new era in the history of the genre of *al-riḥla* or travelogues, an era in which an increasing number of Arabs were visiting and writing about their experiences in Europe and Russia. Al-Ṭanṭāwī’s writings document cultural, political, and geographical details about mid-nineteenth century Russia. In addition, he apparently also had an important influence on the development of Oriental Studies in Russia. Zakī was the first Muslim Egyptian intellectual to visit Spain and describe its historical monuments. Interestingly, he was also the first Arab in modern history to describe al-Andalus as a “lost paradise.” It is noteworthy that DYAKOV also provides important biographic details about these scholars’ lives abroad, and about the ways their travel works differ from those written in medieval times.

LESLIE TRAMONTINI’S contribution, “Place and Memory: Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Muḥaffar al-Nawwāb revisited”, analyzes the “poetics of homeland” in the Iraqi poets Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb and Muḥaffar al-Nawwāb by exploring how poetry acts as a medium for the repetition and recollection of memories that challenge the official institutional forms of memory. She illustrates the different strategies employed in these poetics through a detailed analysis of poems by both authors. This appealing exploration proceeds in a linear fashion that also provides important biographical information about each poet and illuminates how events in their lives shaped their visions. Al-Sayyāb’s idealization of nature and the creation of Jaykūr as a place linking the ideal past with a utopic vision of the future eventually turn into an unattainable “lost paradise” and a personal refuge due to the political turmoil surrounding the 1958 Tammūz Revolution. Al-

Nawwāb's epic poem about the Palestinian refugee camp Tel Zaatar creates a site of memory for his vision of a collective Arab homeland, which is a state of mind, a vision that stems from his experience of exile and the longing to retrieve his identity.

In his chapter, "Concepts that Changed the World: *Waṭan* as One of Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī's "Eight Words," STEPHAN GUTH looks at Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī's *Risālat al-kalim al-thamān* (*The Epistle of the Eight Words*) and his explication of the term *waṭan* that is one of the eight concepts mentioned in the title of the work. GUTH analyzes the structure of the treatise through a close reading of this epistle, and develops arguments which counter Delanoue's claim that the work is unsystematic. Before engaging in this examination, GUTH gives an overview of al-Marṣafī's life, and situates his *Risāla* within the political and literary climate in nineteenth-century Egypt. This contextualization serves to strengthen the classification of the treatise as *adab*, in reference to the term's meaning of "culture" rather than "literature", as well as to illustrate the multiple levels—philological, political, cultural, etc.—that al-Marṣafī uses to articulate his hierarchical structure of education. Al-Marṣafī's *Risāla*, according to GUTH, can be read as a document of "indigenous self-assertion," illustrating how Western concepts became "naturalized" in a period of emerging Arab/Egyptian national self-consciousness.

GÖRAN LARSSON's paper, "The Egyptian Writer 'Alā' al-Aswānī and the Concept of Nation in the Novel *The Ya'qubian Building*," analyzes the *Imārat Ya'qūbiyān* (*The Yacoubian Building*) by Egyptian author 'Alā' al-Aswānī, and how the characters in the novel represent the generational and class differences that shape the views of the nation and nationhood in contemporary Egyptian society. LARSSON situates this analysis within the climate of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution and emphasizes al-Aswānī's support of the revolution as well as the political and social capital he had gained through the popularity of his novel. Although LARSSON highlights al-Aswānī's activism within Egyptian society, he works to dismiss any suggestion that there is a direct causal relationship between this author's literary vision of Egypt and the respective revolutionary movement's vision. The study also develops arguments that situate al-Aswānī within the broader field of Arabic literature (as he has largely been overlooked by Western scholars) and as a contemporary link in a chain that has addressed the concept of *waṭan* in a variety of ways over the years. Moreover, LARSSON presents a close reading of the love affair between the elderly Zaki Bey el-Dessouki and his young lover Busayna in *The Yacoubian Building* and suggests that this relationship best illustrates how the author himself struggles with the concepts of nationhood, generational differences, and social class in Egyptian society.

HARTMUT FÄHNDRICH's chapter, "Out of the Coziness into the Cold: Glimpses of the Idea of Home in a Few Novels of Modern Arabic Literature" explores the diversity of perspectives on the topic of homeland that appear in the modern Arabic novel by focusing on five authors. The study begins with an overview of some of the major themes connected with homeland, and identifies some novelists who employ them as well as the ways in which they create specific

variations on broader themes. These themes include: the loss of the homeland while still living in it; “emigration” to study or find work; and the Arabic language as a “home.” After this concise overview, FÄHNDRICH looks at the specific issues explored by Emily Nasrallah from Lebanon, Naguib Mahfouz from Egypt, Tayeb Salih from Sudan, Hamida Nana from Syria, and Ibrahim al-Koni from Libya. This spectrum of authors not only allows FÄHNDRICH to illustrate how each individual author’s portrayal of the topic is connected to various regional and political issues in the Arabic speaking world, but also enables him to illustrate the complex and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards homeland found in these modern authors.

In his contribution “*Heimsuchungen: Writing waṭan in Contemporary Arabic Poetry*”, STEPHAN MILICH studies a selection of poems about the “home/land” by prominent Arab poets from the 1950s to the 1990s. He frames his analysis around the German word *Heimsuchung*, which etymologically is a combination of the verb “to search” and the noun “home/homeland” (with the latter carrying contemporary connotations of a looming catastrophe), and relates this approach to the Arabic conceptual construction of *waṭan* as dealt with by these poets. The main part of his chapter explores the work of several poets and the various ways by which they address the topic of *waṭan*. These include oscillation between overtly chauvinist nationalism (as in ‘Abd al-Razzāq ‘Abd al-Wāḥid’s work) and parodies of this type of nationalism (as in ‘Adnān al-Ṣā’igh’s writing), an overwhelming and possessive love for the homeland (exemplified by Rāshid Ḥusain), and an unbridgeable distance from it (as addressed by Zakariyā Muḥammad). Through this analysis, MILICH suggests that the experience of the loss of home (*waṭan*) influenced the varied political, national, and cultural positions of these poets.

HOSN ABBOUD’s chapter, “Representations of the “Nation” in Arab Women’s Prison Memoirs”, explores the diverse ways in which the concept of *waṭan* is articulated in the prison memoirs of the artist Injī Aflāṭūn, the preacher and activist Zaynab al-Ghazālī, and the professor and literary critic Laṭīfa al-Zayyāt. All three Egyptian women were politically active in the opposition during the regimes of Nasser and Sadat. The paper discusses three central topics: authorship, the representation and vision of “the nation”, and the relationship between the self and other. In the course of analyzing these issues in the three memoirs, ABBOUD emphasizes the role that the female body plays in each woman’s navigation of the cultural, religious, and intellectual aspects of these topics.

In her chapter, “A Mother or a Grave? Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature,” SAMAR ATTAR analyzes the varied and sometimes contradictory ways the concept of homeland is dealt with in modern Arabic poetry and prose. The focal point of this analysis is the dual nature of the image of the homeland (*waṭan*) as a nurturing mother and an alienating/oppressive tyrant. She also sustains an analogy between the Arabic literary trope and the German and French existential trope of alienation. Her analysis is embedded in the context that both foreign colonial and native authoritarian political powers are at fault for the grievance of

“not being at home in one’s home.” Foreign colonial powers and native authoritarian political regimes share similar traits, and they equally spark literary articulations and reactions to *waṭan*. ATTAR provides an overview of the term *waṭan* and its various connotations, particularly emphasizing the influences of colonialism and the post-1948 preoccupation with Palestine. In this context, two images dealt with throughout the paper are introduced: the image of the homeland as a stable for animals, as a place where people are housed and nurtured, or as a place where people are caged and held prisoner, and the image of the homeland as a mother and grave, with the dead being buried in her womb, while for those exiled from their homeland, there is no womb (“mother”) where they can be laid to rest. The darker sides of these images are a preoccupation of Palestinian poets, and the paper’s main theme of “a mother or a grave”, comes from a line of Darweesh’s poetry, “He who has no country, Has no grave on earth.” ATTAR also discusses in detail how modern views throughout the Arab world of “homeland” as a place that does not offer security, proper dwelling places, or personal freedom are a result of the conflict in Palestine. Furthermore, she expands the scope of the paper to look at the poetry of the Syrian writer Nizār Qabbānī, how it articulates the oppression of native authoritarian powers, and poetry’s role in igniting revolution against colonial and authoritarian powers, an igniting that gives the “homeland” a nurturing element. She also discusses literature as a vehicle to depict the “homeland” as a grave, not a mother, in the works of authors such as the Sudanese writer al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ and the Iraqi author ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bayyātī. These latter writers deal with the themes of exile and alienation, and in al-Bayyātī’s case, we learn that it is impossible to define the homeland as an opposite to the state of exile, since the human condition is one of exile and alienation in the world. All this shows that the themes of exile and *waṭan* are not dealt with in any uniform manner in modern Arabic literature.

ROCHELLE DAVIS studies “Palestinian Village Books as Collective Autobiographies: Recounting the homeland, history, and stories of Palestinian villages.” In an effort to remember and reclaim the homeland, Palestinians have begun in the early 1980s to write books on their villages lost in the 1948 war. These books recount descriptions of the land of the village, lineages, village culture, traditions, education, economics, and agriculture, among other subjects. Composed through a combination of collected oral testimony from former residents (as well as the memory of the author) and written documentation such as land records, maps, and photographs, these texts strive to present a picture of the village as it existed prior to 1948. The village books share the same qualities as autobiographical texts in that they tell the “*sīrat qarya*” or the (auto-)biography of a village, narrated from the perspectives and memories of those who lived there. Close examination of these two narrative forms—autobiographies and village books—reveals an urban/rural split among Palestinian authors: individuals who spent most of their life in urban environments write autobiographies, while individuals who lived in rural environments author village books, constructing a narrative of the self that fits into the collective village history form. The village books allow us to explore how stories of the past are constructed and received and push us to move beyond

seeing “autobiography” as an individual form. Moreover, they let us include collective stories (*siyar jamāʿiyya*) as part of an autobiographical textual tradition. Village books, when seen as a collective autobiography of a particular village population, can challenge the largely city-centered elite history that emerges from using autobiographies as a source of history, and can also provide us with sources to incorporate peasant stories and perspectives into the construction of twentieth century history in Palestine.

ANETTE MÅNSSON’s concludes the tableau of this volume with her chapter on “Strategies of Realizing Place and Home in Two Palestinian Novels.” Her analysis is devoted to two texts: Aḥmad Ḥarb’s *Baqāyā* (*Remains*), which revolves around the area of al-ʿAyn, situated between al-Khalīl (Hebron) and Biʿr Sabʿ (Beer Sheva); and ʿAzzām Tawfīq Abū l-Saʿūd’s *Sūq al-ʿAṭṭārīn* (*Alley of the Perfume Vendors*), which focuses on the Old City of Jerusalem. Both novels deal with the topic of Palestinian geography in the wake of the Oslo Accord and show how named and well-defined places are inscribed in history and memory, as well as how conceptions of place and geography affect one’s actions. To emphasize in what way the authors’ approaches differ not only from each other but also from previous representations of place in Palestinian literature, MÅNSSON opens her chapter with two introductory sections: the first offers an overview of how Palestine has typically been represented in Palestinian literature, and the second expands on themes of the “other” and nationalist claims to the land mentioned in the first section by setting up a contrast with representations of national space in Hebrew literature. The paper then presents a close reading of scenes from both novels to demonstrate how although Ḥarb’s novel reflects on the competing and alien interpretations of place and geography, and how Abū l-Saʿūd attempts to present a particular perspective of a place before it becomes just a memory. In both the local and particular is the origin of the definition of place.

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In view of the current dramatic developments in Syria, Yemen, and other countries of the Near and Middle East, “homeland”, “exile” and “migration” will remain key topics in Arabic literary writing. Irrespective of whether Simone Weil’s observation that “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul”,⁹ quoted by Edward W. Said in his *Reflections on Exile*, is true or not, for the world of today and tomorrow one may assume that Arab authors will continue their reflections and visions on this basic human need in its manifold, often ambivalent dimensions.

⁹ Said refers to Weil with another statement of upmost relevance for the developments after World War II until today: “Yet Weil also saw that most remedies for uprootedness in this era of world wars, deportations, and mass exterminations are almost as dangerous as what they purportedly remedy.” Said, *Reflections* 183.

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Representations and Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature highlights the complexity, diversity, and vitality of literary voices in expressing a broad spectrum of ideas and images centered around the Arab homeland and nation. This book therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical dimensions and literary representations of home and homeland in the modern Arab world on the one hand, and the far-reaching cultural and political impact of these concepts on the other.

* * *

This volume represents a cornucopia of delights for those who wish to explore the perennially haunting theme of “homeland” in modern Arabic literature. In an age of increasing immigration and exile, the various thought-provoking and insightful essays in the volume invite us to ponder the different, contested ways of construing national belonging and identity in a world with increasingly porous boundaries.

Asma Afsaruddin

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Representations and Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature proves yet again that it is worthwhile, especially in the disciplines concerned with Near and Middle Eastern Cultures, to look at long-familiar terms and concepts from new angles and perspectives.

Lale Behzadi

Professor of Arabic Studies
University of Bamberg, Germany

Watan/homeland has animated the work of poets, politicians, and Palestinian political prisoners. This volume is an indispensable guide for understanding one of the key concepts of attachment and belonging in classical and modern Arabic literature.

Jens Hanssen

Associate Professor of Modern Middle Eastern and Mediterranean History,
University of Toronto, Canada

In times of barbaric violence, it is refreshing to learn how fluid the Arab idea of “homeland” has been, be it as imagined community or as cherished territory. Representations and Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature, with its excellent articles, is indispensable reading on this—literally—burning subject.

As'ad E. Khairallah

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