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CONTENTS

I. REPRESENTATIONS OF ANIMALS IN THE ARABIC LITERARY TRADITION

ADELA CHIRU. The Chains of Liberation as Seen Through the Lens of Sadeq Chubak's Story "The Baboon Whose Buffoon Was Dead"	9
أنتسنة الحيوان في الأدب العربي: رمزيات التخيل وجماليات التوظيف. حنان طاب	25

II. MISCELLANEA

SAMERA ABDELATI. Linguistic Performances in the Dialect of Mohammedia: Analysis of Phonological Aspects	35
ELISA GUGLIOTTA, ANGELAPIA MASSARO, GIULIANO MION, MARCO DINARELLI. Definiteness in Tunisian Arabizi: Some Data from Statistical Approaches	49
ELIE KALLAS. Al-Chakhs (Le Personnage désincarné). Opérette libanaise. Auteurs-compositeurs : les frères Rahbani, vedette : Fairouz	77
LETIZIA LOMBEZZI. Narratio Brevis in the Arabian Peninsula: from the First <i>Ittiġāhāt</i> to the Recent Production of Ḥaldūn al-Dālī	97

III. BOOK REVIEWS

Zahra Ali. 2020. <i>Féminismes islamiques (deuxième édition)</i> . Paris: La Fabrique éditions. 234 pp. ISBN: 978-2-35872-190-5 (LAURA SITARU)	113
Manuela E.B. Giolfo, Federico Salvaggio (editors). 2023 <i>More than Just Labels Relating TAFL to CEFR Levels</i> . Roma: Aracne. 248 pp. ISBN: 979-12-218-1094-3 (EDUARD BOGDAN COJANU)	121

I.

REPRESENTATIONS OF ANIMALS
IN THE ARABIC LITERARY TRADITION

ADELA CHIRU¹
University of Bucharest

THE CHAINS OF LIBERATION AS SEEN THROUGH THE LENS OF SADEQ CHUBAK'S STORY "THE BABOON WHOSE BUFFOON WAS DEAD"

Abstract. This article proposes an examination of the theme of alienation and freedom in Sadeq Chubak's short story "The Baboon Whose Buffoon Was Dead". Through the character of Makhmal, a domesticated baboon bound to his deceased master, Chubak constructs an allegory that explores the existential and social dimensions of alienation within the context of Iran's rapid modernization. Using Jaeggi's philosophical concept of alienation as powerlessness and internal division, alongside Seeman's social-psychological model, the study investigates how Makhmal's symbolic struggle with the death of his master reflects broader issues of autonomy, subjugation, and existential anxiety. The analysis reveals how Makhmal's attempts at liberation are restrained by existential fears and the remnants of oppressive societal chains. The study contributes to existential discourse by connecting the narrative's themes to broader socio-political dynamics, positioning Chubak's work as a reflection of alienation in transitional societies like Iran.

Keywords: Alienation, Freedom, Social Constraints, Allegory, Sadeq Chubak

1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

"Like the statue of Glaucus, which time, sea, and storms had so disfigured that it less resembled a God than a ferocious Beast, the human soul, the human soul altered in the lap of society by a thousand forever recurring causes, by the acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by the changes that have taken place in the constitution of Bodies, and by the continual

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impact of the passions, has, so to speak, changed in appearance, to the point of being almost unrecognizable.” (Rousseau 1997: 124)

This is how Rousseau begins his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality among Men*. The disfigurement Rousseau speaks of here is the deformation of human beings by society, a concept masterfully captured by Sadeq Chubak in his narratives, thereby establishing a nuanced convergence of philosophy, sociology, psychology, and literature.

In Iranian literature, few narratives resonate as deeply with the complexities of the human condition as Sadeq Chubak’s short stories. The present article aims to explore the philosophical underpinnings embedded in Chubak’s narrative, seeking to explore and understand the complex relationship between two contrasting concepts, freedom and alienation, as portrayed in his masterful storytelling of *The Baboon Whose Buffon Was Dead*. Renowned for his deep understanding of the complexities of existence, Chubak incorporates ideas and themes related to existentialism in this short story, which often explores fundamental questions about human existence, freedom, purpose, and isolation.

The theme of alienation is one of the foremost subjects in the exploration of human understanding, extensively examined across various fields of humanities, including philosophy, sociology, and psychology. From a sociological perspective, individuals experience alienation either in relation to themselves or in relation to the unfamiliar societal framework. In literary texts, this theme has also captured the attention of authors to such an extent that it has become a central motif of modernity. Contemporary writers worldwide often depict their protagonists, or more precisely, their anti-heroes, as embodiments of alienation. Sadeq Chubak (1916-1998) is among the contemporary Iranian writers who have portrayed the corruption and decline of the modern world. His works emphasize the darker and more somber aspects of life, such as suffering, despair, alienation, and hopelessness, while highlighting the struggles individuals face within a morally corrupt and deteriorating society. The characters of Chubak’s stories are individuals who perpetually remain bound and captive, never able to contemplate liberation or escape their constraining circumstances.

In this research, I have adopted a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the reflections of alienation as embodied by Makhmal, the protagonist of *Antari ke lutiash morde bud (The Baboon Whose Buffon Was Dead)*.

2. Discussion

2.1. Biography

Sadeq Chubak, born on July 4, 1916, in Bushehr, emerged into the world of literature following a period of illness during his childhood, prompting his family to migrate

to Shiraz for medical treatment. He studied in Bushehr, then Shiraz, and at the American College in Tehran. Choosing to diverge from his father's commercial pursuits, Sadeq opted for a literary path, leading his employment in the Ministry of Culture. Chubak undertook journeys to England, the USSR, and the United States. He was also engaged in the translation of works by Edgar Allan Poe to Persian, alongside other stories like *Pinocchio*. After the World War II, Sadeq Chubak dedicated several years to teaching English in various language institutes and schools. He also served as a translator at the Information Department of the British Embassy in Tehran for a period of two years. In 1949, he was employed by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, later continuing his tenure with the National Iranian Oil Company after the nationalization of oil industries in 1951. His role evolved into that of the head librarian, a position he held until his retirement in 1974. During the initial years of his retirement, Chubak spent time in England before relocating to the United States in 1979. He settled in El Cerrito, near Berkeley, California, where he lived until the end of his life (Ghanoonparvar 2009²).

In 1945, he published his first collection of stories titled *Kheyime Shab Bazi (Puppet Show)*. Ghanoonparvar notes that Chubak's skill in describing details, landscapes, character development, and their relationships is worth mentioning in these narratives (Ghanoonparvar 2005: 14). This might be the reason why the collection quickly gained popularity and attracted many admirers. However, due to one of the stories, it was prohibited from publication for ten years. In 1950, Chubak published his second collection of stories, titled *Antari ke lutiash morde bud (The Baboon Whose Buffon Was Dead)*. The stories within this book also attained acclaim, contributing to his recognition as a prominent literary figure.

What brought Sadeq Chubak to prominence was the publication of his novels, particularly *Tangsir (Tangsir)* and *Sang-e Sabur (The Patient Stone)*. *Tangsir* has been translated into eighteen languages worldwide, and in 1973, Amir Naderi adapted the novel into a film of the same title. Notable actors such as Behrouz Vossoughi, Parviz Fanizadeh, and Mahmoud Bahrami featured in this cinematic adaptation, which was released in 1974.

While his novels have undergone extensive examination in the Western literary sphere, his short stories remain comparatively less acknowledged, attracting limited scholarly investigation. However, Sadeq Chubak's short stories are noteworthy contributions to modern literature. His storytelling effectively captures the unique linguistic and cultural characteristics of southern Iran, using everyday, informal speech to make his characters and dialogue feel authentic and relatable. His exceptional precision and depth in describing details, coupled with the accurate and vivid representation of reality, has led scholars to define his work as one of exaggerated or extreme realism. His writing instrument served

² Article only available on the internet: Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar, "Chubak, Sadeq", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, online edition, 2009, available at [Chubak, Sadeq](#) (accessed on 12 October 2023).

as a conduit for the voices of the impoverished and marginalized segments of society, leading many to categorize his works within the framework of naturalism. However, some critics have also condemned what they describe as the “pestilential naturalism” present in his works (Parham 1957: 46). Others, as Dastqeyb puts it, extended their critique by asserting that he failed to accurately depict Iranian society (Dastqeyb 1973: 10).

2.2. Historical overview of the theory of alienation

The concept of alienation has evolved throughout history, developing in tandem with shifting social, economic, and philosophical contexts. In the following lines, we will trace the evolution of thought surrounding alienation, pointing out the contributions of prominent scholars who have engaged with its complex dimensions. Although the concept of “alienation” holds a distinct position within contemporary life studies and research, its precise meaning remains somewhat ambiguous.

In the 18th century, Rousseau published influential works on the theme of alienation. Around the start of the 19th century, Hegel used German terms in partially different senses for this concept, such as *Entäußerung*, signifying a form of separation and alienation from oneself within the context of Christian theology and Lutheran tradition. This very term later was substituted by *Entfremdung* or social alienation in the works of Feuerbach and Marx. The notion also found a different pathway into existentialism through thinkers like Kierkegaard, as reflected in existentialist literary-philosophical works such as Camus’s *The Stranger* (Lukács 2012: 20).

Especially through Marx’s perspective, the concept of alienation became detached from its metaphysical undertones and took a more distinct form within this world. It signified that self-alienation was not merely an intrinsic part of human essence within the world, but rather its roots were embedded in the historical sphere, specifically within the realm of “estranged labor”. Thus, with Marx, the concept of alienation evolved from cognitive essence into a philosophical-societal understanding. In this context, self-alienation was perceived as a consequence of the ever-increasing labor estrangement, the mechanization of tasks, and the increasing human dependence on objects (Musto 2021: 3-10). Gradually, this notion of alienation distanced itself from its philosophical roots and approached the concept of human objectification in the works of modern thinkers like Lukács – a concept where humans are reduced to instruments and transformed into objects (Lukács 2012: 19-21). In the 20th century, following World War II and the emergence of totalitarian fascist and communist regimes, along with the mass destruction of lives and the unrestrained control of governments over individuals’ destinies, the concept of alienation regained serious consideration

in philosophical-societal discourse. Intellectuals such as Marcuse, Eric Fromm, C. Wright Mills, and others regarded it as a testament to human decline in the 20th century.

In the context of modernism, alienation refers to the sense of estrangement, detachment, or disconnection that individuals can experience from themselves, their society, and the world around them as a result of the rapid societal changes brought about by modernization during the 19th and 20th centuries. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1976) described alienation as the “perceived lack of socially approved means and norms to guide one’s behavior for the purpose of achieving culturally prescribed goals”, proposing the concept of *anomie* in this regard. He writes that when individuals find themselves in a normless state within society, they lack the parameters to hold on to and, as a result, cannot situate themselves within that society, leading to social drift and isolation (Durkheim 1976, apud Sarfraz 1997: 50).

In my research, in defining alienation, I chose Jaeggi’s explanation, who describes it as “indifference and internal division, [...] powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent and alien. Alienation is the inability to establish a relation to other human beings, to things, to social institutions...” (Jaeggi 2014: 3). I also followed Seeman’s social-psychological point of view. He proposes five main types of alienation that represent different aspects of an individual’s relationship with their social environment and can contribute to feelings of alienation, which are as follows:

1. *Powerlessness* – When an individual perceives they cannot determine their fate in the society in which they live, or when they are unable to control their actions, behaviors, and decisions that affect them.
2. *Meaninglessness* – A state in which an individual can no longer perceive the organizational functions of the social system to which they belong and, consequently, cannot predict the outcome of their actions. Individuals experiencing this dimension feel that their life lacks purpose or significance.
3. *Normlessness* – A condition where ethical norms, as regulators of behavior and social relationships, become unstable, endangering the cohesion of society. This dimension refers to an individual’s perception of not fitting into the social norms and values of their society, and, to attain a desired outcome, they might have to act in ways that are not accepted or approved by the larger social context.
4. *Isolation* – A state in which an individual can no longer identify themselves with the societal goals of the community in which they live. In other words, the person does not feel a mental connection to their community and sees themselves as alone.

5. *Self-estrangement* – When an individual brings about their own realization, and if they do not experience satisfaction within themselves, they feel a sense of self-estrangement. This dimension pertains to a sense of detachment from one's own identity, values, or sense of self (Seeman 1959: 784-91).

2.3. Historical and political context

Before delving into the central theme of this research, we find it essential to draw on the events that led to the modernization of Iran and discuss the dynamics of this modernization process. When we refer to modernization in the context of Iran, does modernization align with the Western understanding of it, or did the process of modernization in Iran develop differently? Moreover, if it is indeed different, what implications does this distinct modernization hold for the individuals? Such clarifications serve to provide a deeper understanding of the contextual backdrop within which the works of Sadeq Chubak were composed, as well as the potential challenges that his characters may have been struggling with.

Consequently, it is imperative to conduct a brief overview of the phenomenon that transpired together with modernization, specifically the emergence of the *intelligentsia* and the *literati* group – a group to which Sadeq Chubak also belongs. Such an inquiry is deemed necessary to gain a better understanding of the various changes that occurred alongside modernization and their interplay with the intellectual and literary dimensions of Iranian society.

The primary actual encounter of Iranians with manifestations of the modern experiences of the early 20th century, including technology and secularization, started with the Constitutional Revolution, which occurred between the years 1905-1907. The crowning achievement of this revolutionary era was the establishment of Iran's first parliament in 1907. As Abrahamian remarks, Iran's Constitutional Revolution – like many other revolutions – began with great expectations but foundered eventually in a deep sea of disillusionment. It promised the “dawn of a new era”, the “gateway to a bright future”, and the “reawakening of an ancient civilization”. It produced, however, an era of strife that brought the country close to disintegration (Abrahamian 2018: 34).

In other words, the Constitutional Revolution was meant to lead toward a comprehensive modernization of the nation by replacing traditional governance methods with a more democratic framework. However, the formation of the parliament did not trigger a seamless transition towards democratic governance and liberal rule in the country since the Shah persisted in upholding an arbitrary system of governance. This approach enabled him to wield considerable power and enforce abrupt modernization measures according to his own discretion,

rather than adhering to the gradual and participatory evolution that democratic ideals would suggest. In addition to the prominent influence of foreign intervention that considerably constrained Iran's sovereignty during the period subsequent to the Constitutional Revolution, another factor contributing to the limited efficacy of the revolution was related to the fact that the revolutionary movement itself was not entirely cohesive. Different groups and factions had varying visions for the future of Iran. Some wanted a more radical transformation of society, while the more conservative or traditional ones, such as some religious leaders and landowning elites, were concerned about losing their influence, or that the Western culture would prevail in Iran. Moreover, some reforms fell short of addressing the deep-seated socioeconomic problems faced by the majority of Iranians, such as poverty, land inequality, and lack of modern education. Katouzian thus states that both the "systemic arbitrariness (*estebdad*) and the resulting individual examples of injustice (*zolm*) create an acute sense of fear and insecurity, mistrust, disbelief, frustration, resentment and alienation" (Katouzian 2003: 261).

Given the previously stated, as Najafibabanazar claims in her doctoral thesis, "modernization happened in a defective manner in Iran, since it did not include the individual in a seemingly democratic progressive shift; thus creating and enforcing a sense of dislocation and alienation of the individual from the state" (Najafibabanazar 2018: 43). Therefore, a forceful and speedy modernization left many alienating effects on individuals, in a society that was in a transitory phase.

While the impact of the Constitutional Revolution was limited, the revolution did bring about certain positive changes as a response to "social malices" (Dabashi 1985: 171), such as the formation of *intelligentsia*, a "modern bourgeois phenomenon", a "self-conscious social group concerned with ideological solutions to real or perceived social problems" (Dabashi 1985: 151) that "saw itself as the seer/knower/redeemer, destined to deliver the masses from the bonds of poverty, ignorance, and tyranny" (Dabashi 1985: 155). As Dabashi mentions, their *raison d'être* was "the trinity of liberty, equality, and fraternity – located within the larger trinity of democracy, rationality, and anti-imperialism" (Dabashi 1985: 157).

Within *intelligentsia*, a distinct group of intellectuals known as the *literati* assumed a significant role in shaping the socio-political landscape of the nation, thus they became "the most sensitive and vocal segment of the *intelligentsia*" (Dabashi 1985:170). This group comprised writers, poets, scholars, and artists who utilized their literary and creative endeavors to express political ideas, advocate for social change, and contribute to the broader discourse surrounding constitutionalism and modernization. One of the subgroups of the Persian *literati* emerged from "minds and souls unperforated by total political commitment" (Dabashi 1985: 172). Their literature was "born out of the struggle of the nation for a better life" (Shaki 1956) and Sadeq Chubak was an integral component of this movement.

According to Ghanoonparvar, Chubak's stories "are marked by the author's choice of characters from among the lowest strata of society, his meticulous reproduction of colloquial Persian, and his accurate description of the scenes, actions, and behavior of characters" (Ghanoonparvar 2009: no page number). Many of his fictional works are set in the southern provinces, in particular in the Persian Gulf region. Drawing frequently on childhood memories and experiences, Chubak's fictions leave little room for the joyous aspects of life in the region, and instead, are inhabited by displaced and outcast persons who, because of an accident of history and geography, are trapped in the dead-end of tradition, and are gripped by dire need and caught in the struggle for existence (Ghanoonparvar 2009, Mostaghel 1979) Although Chubak in his narratives does not explicitly criticize society and its behaviors, and "there is no moralizing voice to interpret what we see" (Mostaghel 1979: 228), his characters appear to be more like archetypes of individuals whose identities have been taken away alongside with their alienation and we only know and perceive only what we read in the short stories written by Chubak.

For example, he presents us with an incident from the characters' lives, as is the case with Morad, the protagonist in the story *Flowers of Flesh*, where Chubak depicts the solitary figure of Morad, a seemingly adrift young opium addict, captured in a poignant moment that briefly disrupts his existence amidst the bustling street. Or a snippet from the life story of one of the characters. This snippet usually showcases the individual at the most challenging juncture of their life, the point of complete estrangement. Such is the instance of Seyyed Hassan Khan, the protagonist of the story *A Man in a Cage*, who experiences fleeting moments of happiness solely during slumber, when smoking opium, or when around his dog, Rasu. However, as the mating season approaches and Seyyed Hassan Khan lets in one of the street dogs, that means he will remain all alone, he becomes entirely self-alienated, and ultimately, we find his crouched-up corpse behind the garden gate, with Rasu and the stray dog mating shamelessly nearby. But Chubak's characters are not only human beings. In the story *The Baboon Whose Buffoon was Dead*, "Chubak addresses such concepts as freedom and the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed from the perspective of a domesticated primate" (Ghanoonparvar 2009: no page number), and, as Mostaghel asserts, "in between the human and the animal worlds, Makhmal symbolizes all of Chubak's characters. Some are better off materially than others, but none is free. All are bound by the chains of an often-cruel master-society" (Mostaghel 1979: 229).

All these characters show those who, when are estranged from what is real, can no longer be themselves. They are alienated from themselves and society.

2.4. *Literary Analysis*

For most of Chubak's characters, estrangement is an inevitable fate. The short story *The Baboon Whose Buffoon Was Dead*, in which the protagonist, a monkey named Makhmal, faces solitude, anguish, fear, and coercion following the death of his master, Jahan, provides a narrative that unfolds psychological and emotional tensions. The storyline unfolds as Makhmal awakens one morning to the lifeless state of his master. Despite thoroughly examining the lifeless body and the surrounding environment, Makhmal is unable to identify any indications of life: "The skin of the buffoon's face remained perfectly still. The eyes were open, rolled upward, showing their whites. The face was curiously stiff" (Chubak 2011: no page number³). Consequently, Makhmal becomes ensnared in mental and emotional distress. The demise of his master is presented as a transformative event, symbolizing Makhmal's liberation from a constrained existence. But to what extent can this liberation be understood as freedom? Makhmal now confronts the challenge of navigating this newfound state and experiences uncertainty about how to cope with and make sense of this significant and unfamiliar aspect of his existence. The juxtaposition of liberation and uncertainty adds complexity to Makhmal's emotional and psychological state in the aftermath of the discovery. Of course, one can think that he was now able to shape his life in accordance with his own choices, but, when the identity fails to appear, the estrangement makes its way. Realizing that his master was dead, that "he escaped from his master" and he was "off to a new world, on his own", "all at once an ache of loneliness seized his vitals as he realized that in all that wide, vacant plain he was entirely alone", then he suddenly felt joy and he "felt he was the victor at last", "yet the pattern of a lifetime was stubborn. The memory of thrashings, curses, kicks dealt out by his master in fits of depression could not be erased by Makhmal's recognition that his master now could have no effect on him" because:

"He was forever anticipating the raps of his master's cane on his head, the cruel pull of the collar around his neck, the kick in the belly. A glance from his master paralyzed him with fright, for he was more afraid of Jahan than of anyone. His life was one of a continual state of terror, and his terror was matched only by the loathing and disgust he felt for all mankind and for his master in particular" (Chubak 2011).

³ The English translation of the narrative *Antari ke Lutiash Morde Bud* was found in the online edition of the anthology *Tablet & Pen: Literary Landscapes from the Modern Middle East* (a *Words Without Borders* anthology), edited by Reza Aslan and translated by Paul Avery. However, the page numbers were not provided. This story appears in Part 2, Section VII.

And then, a relentless fear reemerges within Makhmal's psyche. In the absence of Jahan, the protagonist is confronted with a profound existential dilemma: "Without his buffoon, he was not complete". But as Makhmal acknowledges that now only the chain is the one that keeps him captive, he starts exploring it with loathing and astonishment. As he examines the chain, he realizes that it was "rough, heavy, stained with rust", mirroring his existence during the period of captivity under his master. The moment when Makhmal decides to uproot the stake serves a powerful existential metaphor: "At last he reached the other end, the end that was not a part of himself, but another, a hostile world". Upon reaching "the other end", he initiates his transformative journey toward liberation, a journey previously unknown to him, "not part of himself" until that moment. However, the existence of a "hostile world" suggests that his liberation may be more complex than a simple physical act, and anticipates the struggles that the baboon will be faced with. Fear is a recurrent image within the storyline. It pervades the entire narrative, as it is exemplified in the narrator's exposition of the motivations that led Makhmal to refrain from liberating himself from the chains while his master was still alive: "Yet, in reality, only Makhmal's habitual fear had kept him from pulling it free in the past". But eventually, Makhmal manages to free himself and:

"What a marvelous feeling! Makhmal began to leap about, overjoyed at his liberation. Then he moved away from the almond bush, and the chain followed him. As he leapt, the chain leapt. As he bounded about with joy, the chain bounded. It, too, had been freed, but each was fastened to the other. He winced at the pull and the noise of it. His spirits sank. But there was nothing to be done" (Chubak 2011).

In this excerpt, one can see how Makhmal experiences an initial surge of euphoria upon attaining freedom. His jubilation is manifested through lively and unrestrained movements, marked by leaps and bounds. However, the joyous occasion takes an unexpected turn when Makhmal realizes that the chain, which once bound him, now obediently trails along with each enthusiastic movement he makes. The chain, while no longer confining him directly, continues to be an inseparable part of his liberation, symbolizing a lingering connection to his past captivity. As Makhmal leaps with joy, the chain mirrors his every move, serving as a constant reminder of the history they share. The synchronized movements of Makhmal and the chain suggest that liberation is not absolute; it comes with a connection to the past that cannot be easily erased. The discomfort arising from the pull and noise of the chain adds a note of ambivalence to Makhmal's liberation, highlighting the complexities involved in the transition from captivity to freedom. The unbreakable link between Makhmal and the chain highlights the lasting effects of past confinement on one's sense of liberation, capturing the paradoxical nature of newfound freedom.

Then, the narrative unfolds as Makhmal separates from his master, venturing into a new and unfamiliar world to him. As Makhmal explores, he experiences a range of emotions, from initial curiosity and peace to loneliness and discomfort. The encounter with the shepherd turns violent, leading Makhmal to flee in fear and confusion. Eventually, he finds a moment of contentment but is interrupted by a hawk, which triggers a renewed sense of danger. This passage from the narrative delves into Makhmal's sensory experiences, including his pleasure in scratching, eating grass, and the temporary escape from his troubles. However, the return of the hawk shatters his peace, leaving Makhmal anxious and vulnerable.

As the narrative progresses, Makhmal, compelled by his instincts, decides to return to the oak tree where Jahan's body lies. We can see how "on his daylong trek he moves, gradually from a feeling of exhilarated freedom to one of terrified captivity" (Mostaghel 1979: 228). When Makhmal finally decides to leave his master and be on his own, in the face of peril, his instincts invariably guide him to his dead master's side: "While the boy rolled about and bellowed, Makhmal bounded off and retraced his path at top speed, instinctively selecting the only route he knew" (Chubak 2011).

The story takes a dark turn as two charcoal burners carrying axes approach. Makhmal, caught between the worlds of man and ape, is filled with terror, sensing that these men mean harm. Despite his frantic attempts to flee, the chain around his neck, both literal and symbolic, holds him back. The passage ends with the woodsmen approaching, laughing, and Makhmal in a state of extreme distress.

It is remarkable to see how, amidst it all, a recurring tableau unfolds – the image of the chain, ceaselessly bound to Makhmal, steadily accumulating weight as the day wanes. In this relentless cycle, his destiny is irrevocably woven towards a cruel demise, each link of the chain etching a tale of brutal finality:

"Madly he bent down and bit into the chain, gnawing at it in his fury. Its links clanked between his teeth. He rolled his eyes in rage, blood and bits of tooth and froth spurting from his mouth. Suddenly he jumped into the air and let out a yell that subsided into a harsh, ugly, painful grating in his throat" (Chubak 2011).

2.5. Alienation and Isolation Seen from an Existentialist Perspective

Makhmal's loneliness and inability to connect with the external world resonate with existentialist themes of isolation. The following paragraphs will discuss and analyze various aspects of Makhmal's isolation, addressing both its physical and existential dimensions.

Makhmal's Loneliness: Makhmal's deep sense of loneliness and alienation serves as a poignant expression of existentialist themes. Existentialist philosophers,

particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, emphasized the concept of “existential isolation”, suggesting that individuals are fundamentally alone in their existence. Makhmal’s isolation after the death of his master is not just physical but also existential – a sense of being cut off from meaningful connection or understanding with the world around him.

Absence of Meaningful Connection: Makhmal’s relationship with Jahan, his master, is one of subjugation rather than companionship. Jahan represents an external force that exerts control over Makhmal’s actions, and their interactions are marked by exploitation and cruelty. In the absence of genuine human connection, Makhmal is left in a state of isolation, unable to establish meaningful bonds with others.

The Chain as a Symbol of Alienation: The chain around Makhmal’s neck becomes a symbolic representation of the alienation inherent in his existence. It physically binds him to his master and metaphorically binds him to a life devoid of authentic relationships. The chain is a tangible manifestation of the constraints imposed by external forces, restricting his freedom and reinforcing his sense of isolation.

Encounter with the Shepherd: When Makhmal encounters the shepherd boy, there is a fleeting moment where he seeks connection by observing the boy and accepting the offered acorn bread. However, the connection attempt quickly turns into an episode of violence, highlighting the difficulty of overcoming existential isolation. The shepherd, representing the human aspect, becomes an unknowable and potentially threatening figure.

Return to Jahan: Makhmal’s return to Jahan’s lifeless body signifies a complex relationship with familiarity. Despite the oppressive nature of his connection with Jahan, the baboon seeks solace in the known, even in death. The familiarity of the master-baboon dynamic, no matter how abusive, becomes a more comforting prospect than the uncertainties of the external world.

Existential Angst: Makhmal’s actions and reactions throughout the narrative reflect a sense of existential angst – a deep, often irrational anxiety about his place in the world. The inability to establish genuine connections with others contributes to his existential alienation, leaving him in a perpetual state of unease.

2.6. Existential inquiry based on Jaeggi and Seeman’s perspectives

Examining the narrative through the lens of Jaeggi’s and Seeman’s perspectives on alienation can offer a more nuanced framework for understanding the protagonist’s experiences. The story resonates with multiple dimensions of alienation, highlighting the profound struggles of the character Makhmal:

Powerlessness: Makhmal’s chaining symbolizes his lack of agency and control over his own destiny. The physical restraint around his neck becomes

a metaphor for the perceived inability to determine his own fate. The chain restricts his actions and decisions, emphasizing a powerlessness that extends not only to his immediate circumstances but also to his broader connection with the world.

Meaninglessness: Makhmal's journey, marked by a lack of clear purpose or direction, aligns with the dimension of meaninglessness. The narrative suggests that Makhmal is adrift, unable to perceive the organizational functions of the world around him or to find significance in his own existence. The violence and encounters with the shepherd boy and woodsmen contribute to the sense of unpredictability, further deepening the theme of meaninglessness in Makhmal's experience.

Normlessness: Makhmal's interactions with the shepherd boy and the woodsmen highlight the challenges of fitting into societal norms and values. The violent and non-conforming nature of these interactions reflects a rupture with established norms, placing Makhmal in a state of normlessness. Moreover, the protagonist's actions, such as biting at the chain, suggest a defiance of conventional norms, contributing to his sense of alienation from the larger social context.

Isolation: The narrative encapsulates Makhmal's isolation from the societal goals and values of the community. His solitary journey, both physical and existential, underscores a lack of mental connection to his surroundings and a feeling of profound aloneness. Makhmal's inability to establish meaningful connections with others, as seen in his encounters with the shepherd boy and woodsmen, reinforces the theme of isolation.

Self-estrangement: Makhmal's biting at the chain and his return to Jahan's lifeless body signify a sense of self-estrangement. His detachment from his own identity, values, and well-being is palpable throughout the narrative. The internal conflict and the inability to find satisfaction within himself underscore Makhmal's profound self-estrangement, echoing Seeman's dimension of alienation related to detachment from one's own sense of self. In essence, Makhmal's journey becomes a powerful allegory for the human struggle with these facets of alienation, reflecting the complexities of the individual's relationship with oneself and the surrounding world.

3. Conclusions

As a concluding remark, as Jaeggi claims, “The alienated subject becomes a stranger to itself; it no longer experiences itself as an «actively effective subject» but a «passive object» at the mercy of unknown forces” (Jaeggi 2014: 3). Alienation means indifference and internal division, but also powerlessness and relationlessness with respect to oneself and to a world experienced as indifferent and alien. An alienated world “presents itself to individuals as insignificant and meaningless, as rigidified or impoverished, as a world that is not one’s own, which is to say, a world in which one is not ‘at home’ and over which one can have no influence” (Jaeggi, p. 3).

The characters in Chubak’s novels struggle with isolation and alienation. If social pressure is the main root of such a feeling, the characters themselves are ill-fitted in society and feel deeply different from average people. Their sensitiveness makes them suffer but also creates their consistency.

Makhmal’s struggles, as depicted in the story, resonate with the various and complex aspects of alienation outlined by scholars such as Jaeggi and Seeman. The protagonist embodies powerlessness, grappling with a sense of agency and control that is elusive, symbolized by the chain around his neck. The meaninglessness of Makhmal’s journey mirrors the societal upheavals during Iran’s modernization, where individuals found it challenging to perceive the organizational functions of the changing social system. Normlessness is evident in Makhmal’s defiance of established norms, reflecting the broader societal instability and challenges to traditional values. Isolation emerges as a deeply emotional theme as Makhmal navigates a world where he struggles to connect with societal goals, emphasizing the profound mental disconnection and solitude experienced by the character. Finally, self-estrangement unfolds as Makhmal grapples with his own identity and values, echoing Seeman’s dimension of detachment from one’s sense of self.

The modernization of Iran, marked by the Constitutional Revolution, played a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual landscape, giving rise to the *intelligentsia* and *literati*. Sadeq Chubak, as part of this literary movement, contributed significantly to the discourse on societal change and individual struggles. His short story *Antari ke lutiash morde bud* explores the concept of alienation against the backdrop of a changing society, intertwining with the historical currents of Iran, and offering a profound meditation on the human condition and the struggles of individuals who find themselves at odds with a world that is transforming around them. As reflected in Makhmal’s journey, the individual is left to ponder the transience of identity and the impermanence of belonging.

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أنسنة الحيوان في الأدب العربي: رمزيات التخيل وجماليات التوظيف

ملخص. تتغيا هذه الورقة البحثية ولوج مسالك الخطاب العربي، للكشف عن أنسنة الحيوان وطريقة توظيفه في الأدب، حيث تجاوز نمطية السرد والوصف المقترنة بالشخصيات الإنسانية، إلى الكتابة عن الحيوان أو على لسانه، هذا الأخير الذي أضحى بطلا رئيسا يصنع الحدث وينفذ عميقا إلى الحيوانات الإنسانية، ويتخذ مكانة بارزة ضمن الكتابة الأدبية. ومن ثمة يتحول الحيوان – في حضرة الكتابة – إلى كائن عاقل وحالم وقادر على أن يؤنس الفرد ويعوض وحشته. إن اللافت في مسألة توظيف الحيوان، هو عناية الأديب بالجانب التخيلي والترمزي الجمالي دون إهمال للتداعيات والمقاصد الكامنة. ومن ثم حظي هذا النمط من الكتابة بأهمية بالغة ومكانة فريدة في الثقافة العربية قديما وحديثا.

مقدمة

لعل أول ما يطالع القارئ العربي هو قيمة الحضارة العربية والتراث الإسلامي والإنجازات البلاغية والنقدية بوصفها منارة العلم والفكر وقبلة الفلاسفة والأدباء، فقد أبدع الأدباء العرب في تدوين أفكارهم وتوثيق بلاغتهم، والبحث عن أشكال جديدة في الكتابة تمنح خطاباتهم التفرد والديمومة. والحال أن أبرز ما ظهر في الأدب العربي القديم الاستثمار اللافت للحيوان² والتوظيف الذي حظي به في الثقافة العربية بوصفه تقليدا ينتهجه الأدباء، فكان الحيوان ناطقا فاعلا ومشاركا رئيسا في الأحداث، فأسندت إليه مهمات وتجارب وأفكار، وأصبح الحيوان في حضرة الكتابة يشترك مع الإنسان في العديد من المشاعر، يحب ويكره ويشعر ويخون ويقتل وينتقم. وألصقت به الكثير من الصفات، فهذا الثعلب – مثلا – رمز الخيث والخداع، فيما كان الأسد رمزا للقوة، وجاء الكلب تعبيرا عن الوفاء وأحيانا عن الذل والمهانة، فيما وصفت الطيور بالوداعة واللطافة. فكان لكل حيوان دلالاته ورمزيته العميقة التدلالية. ولئن كان هذا رأي الأدباء فإن العلماء والفلاسفة تباينت نظراتهم للحيوان، ففريق منهم يرى أنه كائن مجرد من الوعي والعقل مهتديا في رأيه بطروحات ديكارت، فيما ينظر الفريق الثاني إليه بوصفه مهيا بجمع مميزات البشر العقلية، مهتديا بمذهب التشبيهية الإنسانية³ Anthropomorphism. ورغم هذا الاختلاف والتباين حوله، لازم الحيوان كتابات الأدباء وتعددت مقاصد توظيفه.

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² تعرف موسوعة الإنكارتا الإنجليزية في طبعتها لسنة 2006، قصة الحيوان في المادة المخصصة لها بأنها حكايات وأساطير شعبية تحفل فيها الحيوانات مقدمة الصورة، بوصفها أشخاصا رئيسيين أو مشاركين مهمين في تطور الأحداث.

³ أحمد بهجت: قصص الحيوان في القرآن، دار الشروق، ط4، 2000، ص11.

أولاً: أنسنة الحيوان من القصص القرآني إلى الأدب العربي

إن أبرز مظهر من مظاهر وجود الحيوان في القرآن الكريم، هو أن عديد السور القرآنية سميت باسم الحيوان، وعلى سبيل المثال لا الحصر: سورة البقرة، سورة الأنعام، سورة النحل، سورة الفيل... وهذه التسميات مرتبطة بطبيعة الموضوع المعالج في سورة بعينها، وكذا اشتمالها على ذكر بعض الأنعام والإشارة إلى منافعها وفوائدها وقيمتها بالنسبة للإنسان. كقوله تعالى في سورة النحل الآية 8: (وَالْخَيْلِ وَالْبِغَالِ وَالْحَمِيرِ لَتَرْكَبُوها وَزِينَةً وَيَخْلُقُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ)، أو ارتباطها بمعجزات معينة، وقصص معبرة، تعظ البشر وتلفت عنايتهم للتدبير في ملكوت الخلق. مثل قول العزيز الحكيم في سورة البقرة الآية 26: (إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَجِيبُ أَنْ يُصْرَبَ مَثَلًا مَا يُعْوَضُهُ فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا بَضُلاً بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ).

وقد تم توظيف مجموعة من الحيوانات التي حملت دلالات قوية في التاريخ، كالفيل والغراب والذئب والذباب وطائر الهدد وغيرها، فتحول الحيوان من كائن حي إلى آية من آيات الله سبحانه وتعالى يرسل عبرها رسالات أخلاقية وحكما ومواعظ، وقد أورد صاحب كتاب قصص الحيوان في القرآن عددا نذكر منها:⁴

- الغراب الذي بعثه الله لابن آدم ليريه كيف يوارى سواة أخيه.
- الطير التي ذبحها إبراهيم وفرقها على قمم الجبال وبعثها الله من الموت.
- بقرة بني إسرائيل التي أمر موسى بذبحها لكشف جريمة قتل غامضة.
- الذئب الذي اتهم ظلما باتهام يوسف.
- هدهد سليمان الذي أطلعه على نيا بلقيس.
- دابة الأرض التي أكلت عصا سليمان وهو ميت على كرسيه، فخر عليه السلام على وجهه.
- حمار عزيز الذي أماته الله مائة عام، ثم بعثه أمام عيني صاحبه.
- الحوت الذي ابتلع يونس في جوفه زمنا، ثم قذفه إلى البر لأنه كان من المسيحين.
- كلب أهل الكهف الذي نام مع أصحاب الكهف ثلاثمائة عام وتسع سنوات.
- نملة سليمان التي ناديت على النمل أن يدخل مساكنه حتى لا يحطمهم سليمان وجنوده وهم لا يشعرون.
- فيل أبرهة الذي كان مكلفا بهدم الكعبة، ثم سمره الخوف من الله تعالى في مكانه فلم يتقدم.

في مقابل هذا، عرف الأدب العربي المتوسل بالحيوان مصادر متعددة استثمرت الخرافات والأساطير القديمة، كما نقلت عن المأثور الفارسي والهندي، إضافة إلى ما أبدعه العرب مضمنين كتاباتهم "الحيوان"، وهذا ما حاول ابن النديم في الفهرست تأكيده من خلال الإشارة إلى جملة من الأدباء ممن تحدثت على أنسنة الطير أو الحيوان عموما، وقد ذكر منهم: ابن المقفع، سهل ابن هارون، علي بن داود، إخوان الصفا، الجاحظ في البيان والتبيين وفي كتابه الحيوان، كذلك حياة الحيوان للدميري وغيرهم... ولعل أبرز مرجع في تاريخ الأدب كتاب كليله ودمنة لابن المقفع⁵ الذي ترجم عن الأدب الفارسي، وضم مجموعة من القصص التي جعلت المؤلف يحتفي برموز الحيوان ويتوارى خلفها لتحقيق أغراضه. وهذا الكتاب يعد أول مرجع أدبي في موروثنا الحكائي انتقل بقصص الحيوان من المرويات الشعبية الشفوية إلى التدوين. ولهذا فهو يحتل مكانة بارزة في مدونة الأدب العربي ترجمة وتجنيسا أدبيا متفردا ومقصدية حكمية بالغة.

⁴ أحمد بهجت: قصص الحيوان في القرآن، مقدمة، ص7.

⁵ هو أبو محمد عبد الله روزبه بن دانويه، المشهور ب"ابن المقفع" الفارسي الأصل العربي اللغة، كان اسمه قبل إسلامه "روزبه" وبعد إسلامه عبد الله، أسلم في عصر الدولة العباسية على يد عيسى بن علي، فترك اسمه الفارسي روزبه وكني بأبي عمر. تم بأبي محمد عندما ولد له ابنه الذي سماه محمدا. أما سنة ولادة ابن المقفع فلم تحدد بدقة، وعلى الأرجح أنها كانت عام 106 هـ - 724 م في قرية "جور" وهي مدنية "فيروز آباد" الحالية، وتوفي سنة 124 هـ - 759 م.

والحال أن الكتاب تجاوز الترجمة للنسخة الأصلية، "فتصرف في أسلوب السرد ومعانيه بما يتوافق والنوق العربي"⁶. كما حظي باهتمام بالغ، فترجم لأكثر من سبعين لغة منها الفارسية والتركية والإيطالية والأرمينية واليونانية والإسبانية والعبرية والفرنسية وغيرها، وقد أثار الكتاب اهتمام الأدباء من مشارق الأرض إلى مغاربها. فتأثر بترجمته الفرنسي لافونتين، وكتب شعرا على منواله، نال به حضوة كبرى في العالم، ليؤثر هذا الأخير بدوره في الشاعر العربي أحمد شوقي، والذي صرح في مقدمة الجزء الأول من "شوقيات" فقال:

"وجريت خاطري في نظم الحكايات على أسلوب "لافونتين" الشهير، وفي هذه المجموعة شيء من ذلك، فكنت إذا فرغت من وضع أسطورتين أو ثلاث، أجتمع بأحداث المصريين وأقرأ عليهم شيئا منها. فيفهمونه لأول وهلة، ويأمنسون إليه ويضحكون من أكثره."⁷

إضافة إلى هذا، برز كتاب "ألف ليلة وليلة" الذي صدح هو الآخر بحكايا الحيوان الغائرة في المخيال الشعبي العربي، فظهر الحيوان في مثابة وسيلة رمزية للبوح عن القضايا الشائكة التي يعجز الإنسان عن التصريح بها. وكان وسيلة تعويضية تفصح إشكالات الهيمنة ومركزيات السلطة والصدامات الحضارية والسياسية وحتى العقد النفسية التي يعيشها الإنسان.

والواقع أن الجاحظ⁸ في كتابه الحيوان، كان سابقا في الكتابة في باب "علم الحيوان" فهو أول كتاب عربي في هذا الشأن، وله الفضل على جميع من عاصره أو سبقه على حد تعبير عبد السلام هارون.

تكأة على ما سبق، اعتمد الأديب العربي على الطاقة البالغة التي يكشفها توظيف الحيوان رمزا للحكي، ومقاما للبوح والتعبير، وملجأ لحرية صاحبها والخوض في المسكوت عنه، والتفكير في اللامفكر فيه، وفق آليات ترميزية تنطلق من الواقع، لكنها تتجاوزه نحو عوالم التخيل.

والحال أن أنسنة الحيوان واستثماره برزت بشكل لافت في دراسات الأدب الجاهلي، حيث تغنى الشعراء بالإبل والحيوان الوحشي والنوق والظبي ... فكان الحيوان هو الصاحب والمؤنس والمحاور والشاهد على رحلاتهم وقصصهم ومغامراتهم، "فالشعر العربي وبخاصة البدوي منه، قد تحدث عن الحيوان حديثا طويلا، تحدث عن الأنيس منه ولم يهمل الوحشي، بل أشرك بين هذا وذاك..."⁹.

وقد صاغ الشعراء أبلغ الأشعار عن حيواناتهم التي باحوا لها بأسرار الوجد والشوق والولع لرؤية الحبيبة، فكان الخيل مثلا من أحب الحيوانات إليهم، وأكثرها ورودا في أشعارهم. وفي هذا الصدد نستذكر قول ابن عباس:¹⁰

أحبوا الخيل واصطبروا عليها	فإن العز فيها والجمالا
إذا ما الخيل ضيَّعها رجال	ربطناها فشاركنا العيالا
نقاسمها المعيشة كل يوم	ونكسوها البراقع والجلالا

كما أنشد مالك بن الربيع راثيا نفسه، ذاكرا الأشياء التي ستنكيه بعد رحيله ومن بينها فرسه؛ لأنه مؤنس وحشته، وشاغل وحدثه، وساقيه إذا عطش فقال:¹¹

تذكرت من بيكي علي فلم أجد	سوى السيف والرمح الرديني باكيا
وأشقر خنذيذ جرجر عنانه	إلى الماء لم يترك له الدهر ساقيا

⁶ بديع محمد جمعة: دراسات في الأدب المقارن، دار النهضة العربية، بيروت، ط2، 198، ص192.

⁷ محمد غنيمي هلال: دور الأدب المقارن في توجيه الادب العربي المعاصر، ص88.

⁸ قيل عن الجاحظ: كان واسع العلم بالكلام، كثير التبحر فيه، شديد الضبط لحدوده، ومن أعلم الناس بغيره من علوم الدين والدنيا، وله كتب مشهورة في نصره الدين. والجاحظ عظيم القدر عند المعتزلة ... ينظر: شمس الدين محمد الذهني: سير أعلام النبلاء، تح وإش: صالح السمر، شعيب أرنؤوط، دمشق، مؤسسة الرسالة، ط1، 1402/هـ1982م، ص527، 526.

⁹ أبو عثمان عمر بن بحر الجاحظ، تحقيق وشرح، عبد السلام هارون، ج1، منشورات المجمع العلمي العربي الإسلامي، ط3، بيروت، لبنان، 1969، ص18.

¹⁰ القرطبي يوسف بن عبد الله بن محمد: بهجة المجالس وأنس المجالس وشذذ الذاهن والهاجس، تحقيق محمد مرسى، الخولي، دار الكتب العلمية، بيروت، ص69.

¹¹ ديوان مالك بن الربيع، تحقيق: د. نوري محودي القيس، مستل من جملة معهد المخطوطات العربية، مج 15، ج1.

كما توسلوا بالحيوان وصفا لأعدائهم وخصومهم وشبهوهم بحيوانات مفترسة أو تتصف بالخبيث والغدر كالأفاعي والحيات والثعالب. فيما تحدث بعض الشعراء عن ولعهم بحيواناتهم. ولعل من أشهر وأطرف ما ورد في كتب الأدب ما روي عن بشار بن برد وحمارة:
 ذكر الرواة أنه مات لبشار بن برد حمارة، فلما زاروه وجدوه مغموما محزوناً على حمارة، قائلاً إنه رأى حمارة في المنام فقال له: ويلك... مالك مت؟
 قال الحمارة: إنك ركبنتي يوم كذا، فمررنا على باب الأصبهاني، فرأيت أتاناً - أنتى الحمارة - عند بابيه، فعشقتها فمت.
 وزعم بشار أن حمارة أنشدته المقطوعة التالية:

سيدي مل بعناني	نحو باب الأصبهاني
إن بالباب أتاناً	فضلت كل أتان
تيممتي يوم رحنا	بثناياها الحسان
تيممتي بينان	وبدل قد شجاني
وبحسن ودلال	سل جسمي وبراني
ولها خد أسيل	مثل خد الشيفران
فيها مت ولو عش	ت إذن طال هواني

فقال أحد جلسائه: ما الشيفران؟ قال ما يدريني؟ هذا من غريب الحمر، فإذا لقيتم حمارة فسلوه.

ثانياً - في رمزيات التوظيف:

يتأسس فعل الكتابة على ما تمنحه من تصوير للواقع، غير أن التخيل بما هو اشتغال على عنصر الجمال يسهم بشكل كبير في فهم الخطاب والكشف عن دلالاته من خلال فعل التأويل وافتتاح النص. ومن هذا الموقع، تتحدد وظيفتنا كقراء ومتلقين نملك أحقية تأويل منطوق النص، ذلك أن القارئ شريك في استنتاج علامات النص والكشف عن اللامقول فيه والمغيب خلف جدران اللغة، وفي هذا السياق يتم تفعيل مقاربة التأويل التي تعمل على فك شفرات النص الحامل لدالتين، دلالة تنطقها الكتابة - توظيف الحيوان - ودلالة تعزى إلى مرجعيات مختلفة - المقاصد والغايات -.

فما هي الأبعاد التي يرومها توظيف الحيوان في الخطاب الأدبي؟

احتل الأدب مكانة بارزة في تاريخ الإنسانية، فهو مرتبط بإشكالاتها وهواجسها، متأثر بقضاياها الاجتماعية والفردية، يطرح قضايا الذات/المجتمع/الوجود/ دون أن يفقد جوانبه الفنية والجمالية. ولما كان يمثل هذه الأهمية، راح يبحث عن آليات جديدة، ومجسمات نقدية قادرة على سبر غور هذه البنى الروائية المعقدة، وبالتالي فك شفراتها. واستنطاق المضمرة فيها، متوسلاً في هذا بجملته من الآليات والطرق الرمزية والتخييلية، في مقدمتها التواري خلف رمزية الحيوان التي لا تنفي اختلاف مقاصد الأدباء وتباين نواياهم، وتعدد طرقهم في استجلاء رمزية الحيوان في خطاباتهم الأدبية وتوظيفها ضمن أسبقة كثيرة. وعلى هذا الأساس، فإن "كل خطاب ينطق به حيوان يكون مطابقاً للواقع الذي يحتله هذا الأخير في مجمع الحيوان، والدور الذي يلعبه فيه، فيختلف دور الأسد عن دور ابن أوى أو الثعلب أو التمساح، وتلك تصاغ حسب الموقع الذي يحتله في قمة التراتب الحيواني، فيندرج سلوكه في إطار الدور المبرمج المخصص له مسبقاً. وتستهدف المحاكاة الطريقة التي يجب أن يتصرح بها ويعبر بها، والنتيجة هي استنساخ نمط قد حددت سماته بصورة نهائية"¹².

¹² عبد الفتاح كليطو: المقامات: السرد والأنساق الثقافية، ترجمة عبد الكبير الشرفاوي، دار توبوقال للنشر، الدار البيضاء، ط2، المغرب، 2001، ص108

ولعل من أبرز النماذج السردية العربية المعاصرة التي احتفت بالحيوان كموضوع للدراسة أو جعلت الخطاب على أسنة الحيوان: زمن الضباغ لأشرف عشموي، الفراشات والغيلان لعز الدين جلاوي، حيوانات للصادق نهبوم، القندس لمحمد حسن علوان، إنسانزم لسعد سعيد، القرد الليبرالي لسفيان رجب، مذكرات كلب عراقى لعبد الهادي سعدون، رحلة باستيت الأخيرة لحامد عبد الصمد، خلدولوجيا لسعد سعيد وغيرها، وهي خطابات سعت باختلاف طرحها، إلى تحقيق جملة من الأبعاد السياسية والاجتماعية والفنية.

1-التجليات السياسية والإيديولوجية:

يسعى الأدب إلى تقديم كتابة جمالية ولغة شعرية وتجربة إنسانية، لا تخلو من تمرير رسائل مشفرة من شأنها أن تتيح خطابا للإيديولوجيا، فلا ننكر وجود قيم إيديولوجية تتخفي خلف خطاباتها وتنتزيا باستعاراتها ورموزها، فالخطاب الإيديولوجي خطاب حتمي، ف"لو لم تكن الإيديولوجيات موجودة أو انتهت، سيبصغ العالم بلا معنى، والحياة ستصبح بلا هدف، ولا تستحق أن تعاش"¹³. فحتى من خلال مناهضتنا ونقدنا للإيديولوجيا نحن نسعى لتجسيد إيديولوجيا أخرى، فرفض الإيديولوجيا إيديولوجيا في حد ذاته. وما الأدب في محصلة الأمر إلا " تجسيد للصراعات الدائرة باستمرار بين إيديولوجيات متشكلة ضمن البنية الثقافية – الاجتماعية، وهو في ذلك تجسيد للصراعات على مستويات أخرى ضمن البنية السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية والفكرية واللغوية"¹⁴. ومن ثمة كانت الرواية بما هي خطاب أدبي من منظور حميد لحميداني "نسقا من العلاقات يتأسس بالتناقضات التي تخلق عن طريق الأفكار الإيديولوجية الجاهزة في الواقع، إذ تدخل كل إيديولوجيا إلى الرواية متساوية مع غيرها، وكأنما تختبر صلابتها مواجهة الأسئلة التي توجه إليها من الطرف الأخر، وفي هذه الحالة تكون الرواية ذات بعد ديالوجي أو تخضع بعضها لبعضها بوسائل فنية تلهي القارئ عن معرفة ما يجري من تواطؤ ضد ملكاته الإدراكية، وفي هذه الحالة تكون الرواية ذات طابع مونولوجي ومظهر ديالوجي"¹⁵.

إن القصص على لسان الحيوان جاء استجابة لصراع الأفكار وتداخل الإيديولوجيات واحتدام السياسات، الأمر الذي فرض على المبدع أن يتوسل بهذا النمط فناعا يخفي من خلاله أفكاره وتوجهاته. إذ يتوارى الأديب خلف مجموعة من الحيوانات ليحقق أغراضا سياسية ويخفي إيديولوجيته ويناقش قضايا الحكم وسلوكيات الحكام وسلبياتهم على أسنة الحيوان.

والحق أنها طريقة آمنة للبوخ والتكشف بعيدا عن محاكم التفتيش وحراس النوايا. فالكاكتب يمكنه أن يمارس حق النقد ويوجه معول الشك والسخرية دون أن يخشى غطرسة حاكم أو ظلم ملك، فهذا النوع من الكتابة آمن على حياة الأديب وقرائه وأتباعه.

2-التجليات التعليمية والتوجيهية:

رغم أن الأسلوب الكتابي الغالب في الأدب على لسان الحيوان يشتمل على السخرية والطرافة، إلا أن هذا لا يلغي دلالاته ومعانيه التعليمية، من خلال العبر والحكم والنهيات القاسية التي تصل إليها الشخصيات. حيث تعمل على تفعيل الفكر وتحريروا الرؤية النقدية للقارئ، فتتجاوز النظرة السطحية إلى معان عميقة وجوهرية، تستلزم من قارئها البحث والمساءلة وصولا إلى المكاشفة.

¹³ عادل ضرغام: في السرد الروائي، الدار العربية للعلوم ناشرون، بيروت، ط1، 2010، ص 18.

¹⁴ كمال أبو ديب: الأدب والإيديولوجيا، مجلة فصول، مجلد 5، عدد4، الجزء2، الهيئة المصرية العامة، القاهرة، 1985، ص57.

¹⁵ حميد لحميداني: النقد الروائي والإيديولوجيا، من سوسولوجيا الرواية إلى سوسولوجيا النص الروائي، المركز الثقافي العربي، بيروت، ط1، 1990، ص42،43.

ولعلنا في هذا الصدد نستذكر النهج الذي أورده ابن المقفع وهو يرمم قارئ النصوص على السنة الحيوانات فيقول: "ينبغي لمن قرأ هذا الكتاب أن يعرف الوجوه التي وضعت له والرموز التي رمزت فيه، وإلى أية غاية جرى مؤلفه فيه عندما نسيه إلى الهائم، وأضافه إلى غير ذلك من الأوضاع التي جعلها أمثالا، فإن قارئه متى لم يفعل ذلك لم يدر ما أريد بتلك المعاني، ولا أي ثمرة يجتني منها، ولا أي نتيجة تحصل له من مقدمات ما تضمنه هذا الكتاب. وإنه إن كانت غايته منه استتمام قراءته والبلوغ إلى آخره دون تفهم ما يقرأ منه لم يعد عليه شيء يرجع إليه نفعه"¹⁶.

وهذا يعني أن الكتابة على لسان الحيوان من شأنها أن تخلق نمطا تعليميا، يتحرى النصح والإرشاد، دون أن ينتكر للمتعة والتشويق، كما تقدم نقدا للسلوكيات السلبية في الأفراد والمجتمعات عبر تمثيلها بالحيوان المناسب للغرض والسياق.

3-التجليات الجمالية والفنية

لئن كان الأدب يحظى بجمالياته كلما زادت رمزيته، فإن استثمار الحيوان وتوظيفه في الأدب لا يخرج عن دائرية الجماليات، ولما كان الرمزي علامة دالة وموحية تؤثت لتوالد الدلالات وتحقق مبدأ الاستعارات، فإن الخطاب الأدبي الذي يتوسل بالحيوان تمثيلا وتعبيرا وتدلالا يكشف عن فنيات التشكيل وجماليات الكتابة ودلالات رمزية بعيدا عن التجسيد الواقعي المباشر، لتتحول هذه الرمزية إلى وسيلة للإثارة الفنية والاستفزاز الأدبي المقنع.

وهذا ما يمنح القارئ نوعا من التشويق البالغ، واللذة الطريفة التي تخلقها الرمزية القابعة خلف كل حيوان، إذ يُعمل القارئ فكره بحثا عن دلالات هذه الحيوانات، وما يخفيه خطاب الحكاية من أسرار وأغاز. وهذا ما يبرر جماليات التكنيف والترميز والتخييل التي تتجسد في الكتابة على السنة الحيوانات ليتعانق الواقع بالتخييل وتخرج الكتابة نحو أفق أرحب يؤسس لجمالية وشعرية اللغة. ختام القول، بعد هذا التطواف في الأدب العربي المتوسل بالحيوان تمثيلا وتصويرا وسردا للأحداث، نقدا للسلوكيات والممارسات السلبية، نصل إلى أن الاحتفاء بالحيوان قديم قدم الإنسان، حيث استثمر في الأساطير والخرافات والآداب العالمية والقصص الشعبي والقصص القرآني والأشعار قديمها وحديثها، وقد تنوعت أغراضه وتباينت مقاصده، محافظة بين هذا وذاك على القيمة المعرفية والجمالية لهذا التوظيف.

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¹⁶ محمد رجب النجار، النثر العربي القديم من الشفاهية إلى الكتابة، فنونه مدارس، اعلامه، ط1، الكويت، 1996، ص32.

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II.
MISCELLANEA

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LINGUISTIC PERFORMANCES IN THE DIALECT OF MOHAMMEDIA: ANALYSIS OF PHONOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Abstract. Although the state of the art of dialectological and sociolinguistic research concerning Moroccan dialect is nowadays satisfactory when compared to other areas of Northern Africa, the varieties of some regions still lack a comprehensive description and have never been analyzed from a structural point of view. Consequently, the aim of the present paper is to take a closer look at the variety spoken in one of those areas: Mohammedia. One of the possible reasons that lie behind this variety being not much studied may be its proximity, both dialectologically and geographically, to other mainstream cities, that have been the object of historical and linguistic studies for a long time. Thus, with the awareness that exposure to new socio-economic environments and the expansion of social networks are often responsible for language variation², this research aims at providing a description of the Arabic spoken in Mohammedia, and the way this latter is phonologically evolving, through the adoption of a cross-generational point of view. To this end, fieldwork was conducted in the city in August 2022, and data were collected through audio recordings involving informants, all women, who may represent three different age stages: early, middle and later adulthood, with the oldest informant aged 78 years old, and the youngest one 21.

In this way, I will try to identify some obsolete as well as new emerging traits of the dialect in question, besides making more general considerations about it.

Keywords: Mohammedia dialect, Moroccan Arabic, Phonology, Vowel system, Consonants, Variation

1. Introduction

The social changes that a speaking community undergoes over time are the basis of the constant evolution of language practices, which gives an explanation to

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² This concept is well expressed by Labov in his *English in New York city* (1964).

the adoption of different linguistic features, according to the age of the speakers. One of the areas that, after the Second World War, went through a demographic growth, and therefore a process of urbanization, is Mohammedia, which will be at the centre of our discussion and conclusions regarding historical and, more consistently, linguistic analysis.

As may be expected, with the concentration of people coming from various areas of the country and having different social and ethnic backgrounds, more language varieties start to interfere and merge, determining phenomena like regional dialect levelling and koineization. In particular, this latter, which consists in the formation of a common language variety, or koine, incorporating features from more dialects spoken in an area, has been investigated in many studies focusing on Morocco and its socio-anthropological linguistics (Caubet 1993, Messaoudi 2003), which tried to demonstrate whether this process is the result of recent converging trends, or it goes back to an earlier, but undefined, stage.

This paper aims at giving a clearer picture of some aspects concerning the phonology of the dialect spoken in Mohammedia, to whose informants I had easy access, being a native speaker of this variety myself. Therefore, I intend to focus on the correlation between language use and age, illustrating, wherever possible, the variation of linguistic performances among the speakers of this community, after providing a general overview of the historical and geographical aspects of the city.

2. Historical and geographical data

Mohammedia is an Atlantic city located in the North-Western part of the administrative region of Casablanca-Settat, and it falls between the two biggest cities in Morocco, Casablanca and Rabat. As for the first name of the town, Fedala, there are still conflicting opinions among those who advocate its Berber origin, ⵏⴰⵏⴰⵢⴰ /Fḍāla/, and those who argue that the name could be linked to the Arabic, as well as Islamic utterance فضل الله, /faḍl Allah/, meaning “the gift of God” and referring perhaps to the natural benefits that the city enjoyed thanks to its geographical location in the middle of the largest agricultural regions in the country. The former interpretation may however be more accurate, since sources confirm that Fedala was originally the land of the Zenatas, a group of Amazigh tribes, who dominated the politics of the western Maghreb in different periods between the 8th and the 16th century. Whatever the original name, in 1959 the city has been named Mohammedia after the then Sultan of Morocco Mohammed V (1927-1961).

This area played an important commercial role under the Almoravid dynasty (11th century)³, but it was especially from the 14th and 15th centuries on that Mohammedia became a popular destination for European merchants who were merely looking for cereals and dried fruits. In particular, there was a great competition between the Germans and the French, whose end was sanctioned by the signing of a treaty (1911) that forced the formers to leave the city and abandon their lands in favour of the French, who understood the importance of developing and transforming Mohammedia into an industrial center.

Its current population, based on the Census published by the website of Morocco's administrative region Casablanca-Settat, is 403,392⁴, distributed over 34 km².

Tourism, especially domestic one, is thriving too in the city, also because Mohammedia, as mentioned before, is well connected to both Casablanca and Rabat, which every year are ranked among the favourite destinations in Africa.

3. Linguistic premises

One of the primary concerns of dialectological research in North Africa, and therefore in Morocco, is the classification of Arabic varieties into different categories, i.e., sedentary and Bedouin dialects⁵, also known as pre-Hilali and Hilali types⁶, respectively. More specifically, Moroccan dialects have been divided into four groups - *parlers citadins*, *parlers montagnards*, *parlers juifs* and *parlers ruraux* - of which only the last one falls within the Hilali type.

Most studies generally agree in considering the dialect of Casablanca as a rural variety, since this latter has been the center of convergence of Arabic speaking families of mainly rural origins, even though in recent years the contrast between urban and rural dialects went through a sort of levelling, in favour of the emergence of a new urban colloquial variety, which incorporates features of different vernaculars. The same concept may also be applied to Mohammedia, where migrants, when moving to new residential areas, started abandoning the regional traits of their dialects, proving their willingness to adapt to the new situation of urban citizens (Messaoudi, 2003: 114-5), and creating thus a sort of "mixed variety", which became the dialect of the city. This explains why, when paying attention to the dialect used by old people, we can detect some variables which are commonly considered typical of Bedouin varieties, while when talking to young people, the insertion of the dialect that

³ Mohammedia – frwiki.wiki

⁴ Province de Mohammedia et Préfectures | Région Casablanca-Settat (casasettat.ma)

⁵ Although considering the tribe as a linguistic unit may generate conflicting information, "Bedouin" dialects are generally divided into "Hilali", "Sulaymi", and "Maſqili" groups, named after the tribes who settled in North Africa in the 11th-century (Benkato, 2019).

⁶ Labels referring to the period before and after the arrival of the Hilalians in North Africa.

respectively, signifying that they both function as allophones. *ʔimāla*, the raising of /ā/ towards /ē/, seems to be generalised among all speakers, even though the shift is blocked in certain conditions, as will be shown below. Regarding /ō/, although not totally avoided by old speakers, it is more frequent in the speech of young informants, which led me to suppose that we may be dealing with an enlargement, not-so recent, of the phonemic inventory of this dialect. Thus, one of the questions my research attempts to answer is whether there are some prosodic or inner phonetic features that encourage the use of /ō/ or not.

Note that even though all the informants are born and raised in Mohammedia, only the younger ones can be said to have “urban origins”. Indeed, the older speakers lived in a totally different environment, which also implied another level of social interaction and networking.

4.1.1. /ē/

As mentioned before, in the dialect of Mohammedia, the Old Arabic diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ are reduced to /ī/ and /ū/, respectively, which means that the long vowel /ē/ arises from other processes. First, it should be pointed out that the phenomenon of *ʔimāla* only occurs in medial position, and this explains why /ā/ shifts to /ē/ in *bēb*, *nēs*, while cases like *ššā* and *stā* preserve the lower realization of the vowel. This variation is also blocked when /ā/ is adjacent to an emphatic or uvular consonant, as well as to /ʔ/ (*šbāḥ*, *bašla*, *ṛās*, *nhār*).

However, I could remark that the presence of /ē/ is not always ascribable to *ʔimāla*, since it is not totally unusual to find cases in which /ē/ replaces /ī/ instead of /ā/, and it seems that this happens only among younger informants: the same Arabic word *ḡayr* (‘only’), is pronounced *ḡīr* by my oldest informant and, more than once, *ḡēr* by my youngest one. The same is true for *xayr* (‘good’), whose two possible outcomes are *xīr*, and *xēr*.

If we look at these last examples from a comparative diachronic perspective, we could conclude that /ē/ is the outcome of the vowel lowering of /ī/, rather than a direct realization of the diphthong /ay/. However, given the limited occurrences in my corpus, the proliferation of this tendency is an aspect that, in any case, deserves greater attention and further investigation, which will allow us to make more accurate conclusions as to whether it may be considered as a new phenomenon in expansion among young speakers or not.

4.1.2. /ō/

The following rows show cases of lowering of the etymological /ū/ to /ō/, which are very widespread in the corpus under investigation. From the following examples it emerges that this phenomenon is nearly always elicited by the contiguity of the same phonemes, among which emphatic (/ṣ/, /ḍ/, /ṭ/) and velar (/ħ/, /x/, /q/) consonants:

- (1) f əs-sbāh hna ndīru lə-**fṭōr** [...], w əlli
 in DET-morning 1PL do:IPFV.1PL DET-breakfast and REL
 tḥoṭṭ əṣ-ṣwāni w əlli...
 put:IPFV.3FSG DET-trays and REL
 “In the morning we prepare breakfast [...], and there is one who brings
 the trays, one who...”
- (2) w wəqt **əṣ-ṣḥōr**⁸ n-nōḍo n-tṣahḥro
 and time DET-suhoor get.up:IPFV.1PL eat.suhoor:IPFV.1PL
 “And when the time of Suhoor arrives, we get up to eat”
- (3) la ma kān-š **əs-sōq** ta ykūn
 if NEG be:PFV.3MSG DET-market until be:IPFV.3MSG
əs-sōq ṣād yttəkṣa
 DET-market then buy.clothes:IPFV.3MSG
 “If there is no market, then he will wait for the market to buy clothes”

Note that the phenomenon of vowel lowering, generally speaking, is more frequent when the Arabic /ū/ is adjacent to an emphatic consonant, rather than to a velar one; on the contrary, velar sounds are more likely to elicit this process when they are contiguous to short vowels, that will be dealt with in the next paragraph.

However, it should be considered that /ō/ is strongly encouraged by the proximity of *rā* (ر) too, in about 80% of cases, which suggest that this phoneme is undergoing a process of pharyngealization due to which it exerts the same phonetic influence as emphatic consonants:

- (4) nxallīw-h hukka **yfōr**
 let:IPFV.1PL=3MSG like.that steam:IPFV.3MSG
 “we let it steam like that”
- (5) ydxol ṣadd-ha yšūf **ṣrōst-o**
 enter:IPFV.3MSG to=3FSG see:IPFV.3MSG wife=3MSG
 “he enters to see his wife”

Further examples based on the most common occurrences in speakers’ speeches are:

Yzōro (‘they visit’), **əz-zōrān** (‘the visit’), **mən mōr** (‘after’), **əṣ-ṣrōt in**⁹
 (‘the routine’), **ḍarḍōri** (‘necessary’).

⁸ Note that in the word *ṣḥōr* < *suḥūr, the sibilant gets pharyngealized in contact with /h/; this word refers to the meal eaten before dawn during the month of Ramadan.

⁹ The French loan *routine* undergoes this process too.

4.2. Short vowels

Although the prevailing vocalic system of Mohammedia displays two short vowels (/ə/ and /ǔ/), I would not totally exclude the presence of /ǎ/, since I could find some minimal pairs, although extremely rare, that oppose:

/ǎ/ ≠ /ə/: *dərt* ‘I did’ ≠ *dǎrt* ‘I turned around’, *tmǎr* ‘dates’ (Indef. Pl.) ≠ *tmər* ‘it has matured’.

/ǎ/ ≠ /ǔ/: *qǎrfa* ‘bottle’ ≠ *qǔrfa* ‘draft’, *šǎrba* ‘one drink’ ≠ *šǔrba* ‘soup’.

4.2.1. /o/

Again, the phenomenon of vowel lowering, which is more common when the etymological vowel /u/ is short, is triggered by the same phonemes that transform /ū/ into /ō/ (§ 4.1.2).

(6) *tʃəʒni* *ta-wwa* **l-xobz**
 knead:IPFV.2SG also=3MSG DET-bread
 “You knead the bread too”

(7) *kānət* *əl-ʕdūza* *təmši*
 be:PFV.3FSG DET-mother-in-law go:IPFV.2FSG
txʔob
 ask.for.the.hand:IPFV.2SG
 “The mother-in-law used to go ask for the hand”

əḍ-ḍhoḥ (‘the lunch’), **doḥk** (‘now’), **l-boḥma** (‘the pot’), **hoḥḥ** (‘pure’), **tšʔob** (‘she drinks’).

After the examination of both long and short vowels that undergo this phenomenon, it is worth noting that in most cases the informants tend to preserve, or restore, the high vowel /ū/, when a verbal element is followed by a suffix, i.e., a negative particle or a possessive pronoun, which lengthens and places the stress on the vowel. This is the reason why we find:

ḥoḥḥto (‘we put’) VS **ḥoḥḥtū-ha** (‘we put it’)
ndīro (‘we make’) VS **ka-ndīrū-ha** (‘we make it’)
ki-ləbso (‘they wear’) VS **ma-ki-ləbsū-š** (‘they do not wear’).

This is a trend that, however, is not always respected. In fact, especially in the speech of younger informants, we do also find divergent forms: for the first illustrated

verb, there are some recorded cases of **nḥottō-ha**. The fact that this practice is mostly affecting younger people may suggest that the process of vowel lowering is still being gradually extended to cases where it has been previously avoided, such as those aforementioned.

5. Consonants

5.1. Assimilation

This section will focus on sound changes arisen from assimilations that have affected the dialect of Mohammedia, alongside most Moroccan varieties. From my data it emerges that the assimilation of the nasal consonant /n/ is frequent when the same precedes a voiced or voiceless dental stop, i.e., /t/ or /d/.

- (1) Bəʕd y-kūn mṛīd yžīw **ʕadd-u** n-nās
 when be:IPFV.3MSG sick come:IPFV.3PL to=3MSG DET-people
 “When he gets sick, people come to visit him”.

In this case, *ʕand* followed by the possessive pronoun produces the form *ʕadd-u*, in which /n/ disappears in favour of a double /d/. The same process happens commonly with personal pronouns in which /n/ precedes /t/, hence the forms *tta*, *tta*, *ttūma* are widespread alongside *nta*, *nti*, *ntūma*. In these cases, in fact, we are dealing with a trend, rather than a phonological law, and this is the reason why the correspondent forms with the nasal preceding the dental are not completely lost in this dialect: they simply coexist with the ones showing assimilation, and the choice of either seems totally random, since both forms are acceptable.

This concept does not apply to the cases in which assimilation is triggered by the presence of two similar sibilants within the same lexical element. Whenever these phonemes are contiguous, it is the second one that affects the former (Ph. Marçais, 1977: 20-21):

- (2) ma **nxroš-š** bla byād
 NEG go.out:IPFV.1SG-NEG without symbolic.offer
 “I don’t go out without any symbolic offer”

This example shows the assimilation of the last root of the Arabic verb *xaraža*, which is adjacent to /š/, hence *ž + š > šš*. The same phenomenon leads to articulations like *ytž^uwwəž* and *žūž* (‘he gets married’; ‘two’ < **zawaža*), *yžahžo* (‘they prepare’ < **žahaza*), *šəms* (‘sun’ < **šams*), where the mutation takes place even though the similar segments are separated by other phonetic elements.

5.2. Elision of consonants

Strategies of deletion of consonantal elements are widespread in this dialect and concern the etymological fricatives /ħ/ and /h/ in particular.

- (3) təbšī¹⁰ **ta-yya** **l-maḥāl-a** tḥayd
 go:IPFV.3FSG also=3FSG to=house=3FSG take.off:IPFV.3FSG
ḥwayž-a ddəwwəš **ta** **hi**
 clothes=3FSG take.a.shower:IPFV.3FSG also 3FSG
 “She goes too to her house, she takes off her clothes and takes a shower”

This sentence is full of elisions: first, in the segment *ta-yya*¹¹ there is the loss of /ħ/, the initial sound of the Arabic word *ḥta* (‘also’), which is exactly the same of what happens in the next to last word, and then the elision of the glottal /h/ in the third-person pronoun *hiya* (‘she’).

Note that the form *ta* is always the result of the dropping of *ħ-*, and can never be the outcome of the second-person personal pronoun losing the initial *n-*, since, in that case, the dental sound would have been doubled, as seen before.

As for the *hi* we find at the end of the sentence, this is a reduced form of the feminine personal pronoun *hiya* which occurs very rarely in my data, and that, in my opinion, can be associated to old speakers, since it is never realised as such by middle age or young informants.

Moreover, in *maḥāl-a* and *ḥwayž-a*, we can recognise the same process, whereby the feminine possessive pronoun suffix /ha/ is reduced to /-a/, after the loss of /h/ in a prevocalic context. This latter is however much more resistant than its male correspondent, which systematically shows the elision of /h/ when following a consonant, so that only /-o/ remains: *žīrān-o* (‘his neighbours’), *klām-o* (‘his words’), *mart-o* (‘his wife’).

As my data reveal, this is very similar to what happens when /h/ constitutes the Arabic object pronoun (*-hu*, *-ha*, *-hum*) attached to the verb in a final or pre-vocalic position. However, this elision seems to be more frequent with the plural persons of the final-weak verbs having the desinence *-īw*¹², as the following examples show:

¹⁰ In this dialect, the verb مشى shows a continuous alternation between /m/ and /b/, regardless of the phonetic environment.

¹¹ Other forms too are frequent: *ta-wwa*, *ta-wma*, *ta-na*.

¹² In this dialect, all the Arabic final-weak verbs showcase the reconstruction of the last radical. Studies of Arabic dialectology have considered this practice as typical of sedentary dialects.

- (4) *kandīro* *l-ḥəlba* [...] *ngəslūha,* *nʃalqūha*
 PRVB-do:IPFV.1PL DET.fenugreek wash:IPFV.1PL boil:IPFV.1PL
nsəddu *ʕlīha* *mʕa* *dʒ-dʒāž*
 close:IPFV.1PL on=3FSG with DET-chicken
nqalliwa *məzyān*
 brown:IPFV.1PL well
 “We add fenugreek, we wash it, we boil it, then we put it with the chicken
 and brown it well”
- (5) *ylḥag* *waqt* *əḍ-dhor*
 arrive:IPFV.3MSG time DET-early.afternoon
ka-yddiw *l-əž-žāməʕ*
 bring:PRVB:IPFV.1PL DET-mosque
 “When the time arrives for the early afternoon prayer, they bring him
 to the mosque”

In the last example, the context makes it clear that the verb *ka-yddiw* is supposed to be followed by the objective pronoun referring to someone previously mentioned, although *-h* is dropped. This premise does not mean that the above illustrated process concerns only the Arabic final-weak verbs, though; in the corpus, in fact, we do also find many cases in which /h/, preceded by a consonant, gets elided: *xass-a*, *y-yaxud-a*, *tšūf-a* instead of *xass-ha*, *y-yaxud-ha* and *tšūf-ha*, respectively.

Based on the distributional frequency of the phenomenon, we may hypothesize that this has begun to affect Arabic final-weak verbs in the first instance, and then started spreading slowly even to other types of verbs, although, to date, the elision of the glottal /h/ in the objective pronoun cannot be considered as completely generalized in either verbal category.

This phenomenon is not new to modern Arabic dialects, and, as Yoda (2017: 85-86) points out, it can be observed especially in the pronouns or pronoun suffixes, along with some cases in which /h/ is an initial and pre-vocalic consonant, as happens in some sedentary varieties, i.e., Judeo-Arabic. This tendency generates forms like *āda* (< CA *hāda*), *adāk*, *adāk-əš-ši* which, in the dialect of Mohammedia, survive beside those who do not showcase the deletion of /h/, being these last ones more frequent.

In addition to /h/ and /h/, there are other cases, although rarer, in which an etymological /l/ does not appear. This only occurs when there is a /t/ between two liquids. In *gāt l-ih* (‘she told him’), in fact, the elision of the first /l/, makes it easier to pronounce this segment. Therefore, it is possible to find the form *gāt* only in cases where the verb is followed by the preposition /l-/.

5.3. /q/ - /g/

One of the main topics that drew the attention of Maghrebi dialectologist since the earliest works has been the variation of /q/, which can be realized as /g/, and more rarely /ʔ/. This oscillation has also been considered important for the identification of sedentary and Bedouin colloquial varieties (Cantineau, 1960). As for the distribution of these variants in Moroccan Arabic, it seems that /q/ and /ʔ/ prevail in the Northern areas and in the historical pre-Hilali varieties of Rabat, Fes and Taza, while /q/ and /g/ are more common in rural varieties and in the Southern regions. In the variety we are describing, indeed, there are no instances of /ʔ/ as a reflex of the Old Arabic *qāf*, and hence only /g/ alternates with /q/. Although there are some lexemes for which only one variable is preferred, it is easy to perceive that the former prevails among old and middle-aged speakers, who tend to employ /g/ in most cases, and to preserve /q/ chiefly when the same is adjacent to /ā/ (*bāqa*, *qābla*) or to liquid phonemes (*qrība*, *qlīl*). On the contrary, young informants show a more balanced distribution of the two variables, mainly because /g/ is considered less prestigious, and it is usually associated with rural origins. Moreover, one's linguistic behaviour is also affected by their social activities. Thus, with the transformation of Mohammedia into an urban area, the possibility of meeting and interacting with new people, as well as education, may have favoured the spread of /q/ to a certain extent.

5.4. Interdental fricatives

Interdentals have undergone a phonological merger in Moroccan dialect, whereby /t̪/ → /t/, /d̪/ → /d/ and /ð/ → /d/, although it is still possible to find exceptions in some areas (Guerrero, 2023). In Mohammedia, these consonants are completely lost, according to the shift described above. However, the speech of my oldest informant contains some few instances of the interdental /t̪/ being realized as the labiodental /f/: in the same sentence she alternates *fāni* and *tāni* < **t̪āni*. This sound was recorded only in three occasions, and always in the same lexeme, which makes it hard to make conclusions about its spread among old speakers. What can be asserted with certainty is that the interdental articulation is never preserved.

5.5. Affrication of /t/

The affrication of the dental /t/ in Moroccan dialect, mainly in sedentary varieties, has been attested for a long time, during which many variants of the etymological phoneme have been identified. This phenomenon has often been attributed to the influence of the Berber substratum, and it affects the realization

of the etymological /t/, as well as of the /t/ derived from /t̪/ (Cantineau 1960: 37). In Mohammedia, affrication is very common, but the alveo-dental /t^s/ and the alveo-palatal /t^ʃ/ realizations, which are the most recurring alternatives to the /t/ allophone, seem to be more common among young speakers. This may be indicative of the more recent spread of affrication from Moroccan historical urban centers to other regions.

- (6) əl-ʔakt^sarīya ma ki-bšīw-š l-dyōr-hom
 DET-most NEG PRVB-go:IPFV.3PL-NEG DET-house=3PL
 “Most (of them) don’t go home”

Except for the presence of sibilants (/s/ and /š/) that block affrication, my data would suggest that the occurrence of this process is not dependent on the adjacency of some specific phonemes, and this could be an index of its generalisation to several environments among young speakers. However, affrication is conventionally seen as a feature of the dialect spoken in Casablanca and, given the proximity between the same and Mohammedia, it becomes difficult to draw a conclusion about whether this phenomenon has spread from Casablanca to the surrounding cities, or it has simultaneously affected more areas.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the understanding of phonological aspects of the dialect of Mohammedia, which has never been described before, and to the exploration of the way it is evolving from one generation to the next. As it turns out, some linguistic traits, although not completely new to old speakers, are being generalised more and more among young ones, i.e, the lowering of /ū/ to /ō/, the prevalence of /q/ over /g/, the affrication of /t/. However, since most of these phenomena are also to be found in other modern varieties and are not exclusive to the dialect of Mohammedia, we may hypothesize that more recent converging trends, resulting from the process of koineization, are progressively levelling the difference between varieties spoken in the new urban areas.

Thus, besides offering a more general overview of the linguistic practices implemented by the speakers, the present study suggests that some traits, especially those associated to Bedouin dialects and to the old speakers of Mohammedia, are gradually disappearing, and that innovative uses of the language are still taking place in the community under study, generating various linguistic layers which reflect the changes of the physical space.

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DEFINITENESS IN TUNISIAN ARABIZI: SOME DATA FROM STATISTICAL APPROACHES⁵

Abstract. We present a statistical analysis of the realization of definiteness in Tunisian Arabic (TA) texts written in Arabizi, a hybrid system reflecting some features of TA phonetics (assimilation), but also showing orthographic features, as the use of arithmographs. In §1, we give an overview of definiteness in TA from a semantic and syntactic point of view. In §2 we outline a typology of definite articles and show that TA normally marks definiteness with articles or similar devices, but also presents zero-markings or weak definites. In §3 we discuss TA and how definiteness is instantiated in TA. In §4, we present data from the Tunisian Arabizi Corpus (TAC), a multidisciplinary work with a hybrid approach based on dialectological questions, corpus linguistics standards, and deep learning techniques. In §5 we define the behavior of TA with respect to what we observed in §1, §2 and §3, describing our TAC-based analysis.

Keywords: Arabizi, Definiteness, Corpus Analysis, Deep Learning, Tunisian Arabic

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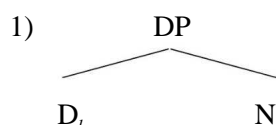
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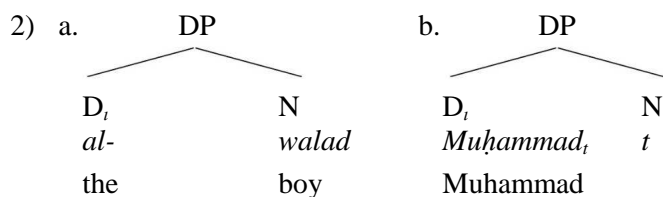
⁵ All four authors collaborated on the project. For academic purposes, Massaro is responsible for §1 and §2. Mion is responsible for §3.1 and §3.2, while Gugliotta for §3.3 and §4.1. §4.2 has been jointly prepared by Dinarelli and Gugliotta, being based on Gugliotta's post-doctoral research work supervised by Dinarelli; §5.1 is under Gugliotta responsibility, while §5.2, §5.3 and *Conclusions* have been jointly elaborated by Massaro, Gugliotta and Mion.

1. Introduction

Definiteness is a semantic feature. In logical terms, a definite noun undergoes an iota (t) operator, which binds it to specific referents of the same noun's property. Put simply, an iota operator selects a precise element from a set of all possible variables of the noun, shifting from property-denoting to individual-denoting elements (Longobardi 2008) as in (1), a language with pre-nominal articles.



Certain nouns, like proper names, inherently possess iota semantics: they are inherently definite as they refer to unique entities. In certain languages with definite articles, proper names are non-articled, as in Standard Italian or Arabic. Syntactic theories (Longobardi 1994) suggest that in such languages, proper names occupy the position typically occupied by determiners, through a mechanism called N-to-D.



A number of languages⁶ that typically mark definiteness with articles or similar devices have in fact bare proper names. Definiteness exists in all natural languages, but its grammatical representation varies significantly. Not all languages have definite articles, yet they still express definiteness, and strategies for expressing definiteness differ across languages. This raises the question of whether definiteness is a feature specific to determiners, a syntactic position independent of determiner realization, or silent determiners (Wiltschko 2009).

⁶ With the obvious exception of languages where proper names are articulated, like Greek or Northern Italian varieties:

- i) a. *O Yanis* /to Yanis Modern Greek, Matushansky (2006: 286)
 the Yanis /the Yanis
 ‘Yanis’
- b. *La Maria* Northern Italian varieties
 the Maria
 ‘Maria’

At a level greater than simple determiner phrases, definiteness is linked to the organization of information structure. It also affects the (un)availability of certain syntactic operations which is tied to the phasehood status of DPs (Bošković 2012), (3).

- 3) a. *Which poem did you hear Homer's recital of last night?
(Adger 2003: 327)
- b. Which poem did you go to hear a recital of last night?

In (3a), *wh*- extraction (*which poem*) is disallowed with definites, whereas (3b) demonstrates that extraction is possible with indefinites, and the impossibility of extraction with definites is connected to phases. Structure is constructed phase by phase, and once a phase is completed, its internal content becomes frozen and inaccessible to further syntactic operations (Chomsky 1998). Adger (2003), Bošković (2012), Jiménez-Fernández (2012), and others argue for the phasehood status of DPs. With regard to Semitic languages, Construct State genitives have been considered as phases (Shormani 2016), and within Romance, the same idea has been applied to genitives with definiteness agreement (Massaro 2022).

2. A Short Typology of Definite Articles

The contexts in which elements grammaticalize definiteness greatly vary across languages. Greenberg (1978) proposed four configurations, intended as diachronic stages, while also applicable synchronically. The boundaries between these stages are not clearly defined, and languages exist in between them.

Table 1

Types of languages according to the realization of definite articles, Greenberg (1978)

0	I	II	III
No definite articles. Definiteness is interpreted via other means.	A definite article emerges. Specific to definites.	Definite articles also appear with generics and nouns which are not necessarily definite.	The article is completely generalized, with no definite semantics being expressed. It functions as a nominality marker.

Persian is a type 0 language. With an indefinite article, it realizes definiteness elsewhere, *e.g.* through Differential Object Marking morphology. In Mandarin, indefinite nouns are never pre-verbal, while the post-verbal position can convey definite or generic interpretations (Cheng and Sybesma 1999).

Type II languages are particularly apt to show that, as Ramchand and Svenonius (2008) argue, the mapping from syntax to the C-I system is not trivial⁷, consequently posing a challenge for NLP tasks. For Semitic Construct State genitives and Romanian genitives, it raises the question of how a definite interpretation is achieved without explicit marking. In Construct State, for instance, heads lack definiteness marking, yet the entire phrase is interpreted as definite.

- 8) a. *šə'if ha-yaldá* Hebrew, Borer (1988: 48)
 scarf the-girl
 'the girl's scarf'
- b. *kitābu l-binti* Arabic, Hoyt (2008: 5)
 book the-girl
 'the girl's book'

Borer (1988) proposes that the definiteness feature of the modifier percolates to the head, resulting in the whole phrase being definite. Hoyt (2008) demonstrates that phrases with heads similar to (8b), but with indefinite modifiers, are indeed interpreted as indefinite.

- 9) *kitābu bintin* Hoyt (2008: 6)
 book girl
 'a girl's book'

Romanian has two types of genitives. In one type, oblique morphology is sufficient. In the other type, a linker element appears between the head and the modifier, bearing oblique morphology. Typically, non-linker genitives are limited to definites, while indefinite contexts require a linker (Dobrovie-Sorin 2000).

- 10) a. *casa vecin-ului*
 house neighbor-the
 'the neighbor's house'
- b. *o casa a vecin-ului*
 a house LKR neighbor-the
 'a house of the neighbor's'

However, in some instances, non-linker genitives can also contain indefinite nouns, as in (11).

- 11) *confesiunile unui asasin economic*
 confessions-the a hitman economic
 'the confessions of an economic hitman'

⁷ And namely a conceptual-intentional system processing linguistic information, i.e. responsible for its interpretation (Hauser et al 2002).

Dobrovie-Sorin (2000: 216), states that “the denotation of the overall nominal projection is obtained by applying the denotation of the head N to the denotation of the DP in SpecDP” (SpecDP is the position assigned to the genitive, in her work). Like for Semitic Construct State (with a difference in the direction of definiteness percolation), a definite interpretation is achieved through mechanisms like (in)definiteness spreading.

Complementizers are similar to iota operators. The variable they bind is then realized within the predication contained in the complementizer phrase.

- 12) *'axu l-walad illi byidrus bi-'amērka* Palestinian Arabic,
 brother the-boy that studies in-America Mohammad (1999: 32)
 ‘the brother of the boy who studies in America’

The predication inside the complementizer phrase serves in fact as precise individuation of the reference expressed by the noun (*l-walad*) it modifies. Higginbotham (1985: 563) suggested that modification is analogous to coordination (see also Bošković 2020).

- 13) *a big butterfly=that is a butterfly, and it is big (for a butterfly)*

In a similar vein, also the restrictive interpretation yielded by complementizers can be said to be similar to coordination.

- 14) *the brother of the boy who studies in America=he is the brother of the boy, and the boy studies in America*

Next in this paper we will try to make sense of how definiteness is realized in TA Arabizi. But first, an introduction to TA is in order.

3. Tunisian Arabic

3.1. General Overview

TA, also known by the autoglottonym *derja* (or, in scientific transcription, *dārža*; see St. Ar. *dāriġa* ‘current language, dialect’), is one of the North African varieties of Neo-Arabic. The label generally refers to the Arabic dialects spoken in the Republic of Tunisia.⁸

According to the general classification established in the Arabic dialectology, TA is one of the varieties spoken in the Eastern Maghreb and, as a Maghrebi dialect,

⁸ A TA diasporic dialect is spoken in Mazara del Vallo (Sicily, Italy), for which see D’Anna (2017).

it is typically characterized by the *n*-prefix of the imperfective, as in *nqūl* ‘I say’ and *nqūlu* ‘we say’ (whereas both Old-Arabic and the Eastern Arabic dialects have *'aqūl ≠ niqūl*).

TA is considered as particularly relevant for its crucial role in the Arabicization of North Africa. In fact, it is worth remembering that the city of Kairouan (Central Tunisia) was the first Arab settlement in Ifrīqiyā, founded in 670 A.D. by ‘Uqba ibn Nāfi’. The Arabicization of the Maghreb had its starting point in this city.⁹ Consequently, the other North African sedentary dialects would be genetically related to Kairouan to the point that they have been named *parlers kairouanais* according to the definition given by Cohen (1988).

In the eleventh century, North Africa was invaded by some Bedouin tribes of Arabian origin, the Banū Hilāl and the Banū Sulaym, who came from Egypt. This event is traditionally considered a significant watershed in the linguistic history of the region, as the arrival of these tribes is at the basis of a typological dichotomy existing until nowadays between the sedentary and the Bedouin dialects. The first ones date back to the first phase of the Arabicization, when the Arabs conquered North Africa in the seventh century, while the latter resulted from the Hilalian invasions.¹⁰ The current dialectological situation, that is the result of these historical events, consists of several urban dialects (mainly situated in the coastal areas), some rural dialects (the best known, even if partially, are those of the Sahel region), and a great number of Bedouin dialects. These differences have not been taken into consideration in our research, as the language expressed through Arabizi often appears as a pretty koineized dialect.

Today, TA is an unofficial language, and is still used mainly as a spoken language for informal communication, and there is no fixed tradition for its practice in written domains. But nonetheless, after the so-called Jasmine Revolution of 2011, publications in TA began to touch several written domains that had previously been a prerogative of Standard Arabic, and both their amount and their quality increased considerably. These publications consist of novels, translations of foreign novels, magazines, and even some essays, and they find generally positive feedbacks in post-revolutionary Tunisia. The TA used in these publications is habitually a standardized koine based on the urban Tunis dialect, and it is written in an Arabic alphabet that tends to replicate the orthographic rules of Standard Arabic. Aside from these habits, some activists began to claim the full independence of TA (simply called by its autoglottonym *Derja*) from the Arabic phylum.¹¹ They proposed the adoption of two parallel writing systems: a first and more traditional system that consists in the adoption

⁹ There is a large bibliography on the history of the Arabic language in North Africa, a first reference is Marçais (1961).

¹⁰ For a general presentation of the Tunisian dialectological situation, see Marçais (1950) and, more recently, Baccouche (2009).

¹¹ They organized themselves in a very active association named *Derja*.

of the Arabic alphabet, and a second system based on the Latin alphabet with some modifications concerning special graphemes inspired by Maltese and IPA, that, however, is completely different from the Arabizi system used for our research. These proposals are still far from being adopted or, at least, seriously taken into consideration by Tunisians, and they have not been analyzed in our contribution.

3.2. *Definiteness in Tunisian Arabic*

In the field of Arabic linguistics and dialectology, several studies deal with definiteness from very different points of view (Turner 2018). Many of them concern the formal representation of definiteness and discuss forms and roles of the definite article */al-/.¹² Conversely, others analyze the emergence and the development in several Neo-Arabic varieties of an ‘indefinite article’, an element that is not attested in Old-Arabic (Mion 2009; Edzard 2006). So, while the situation of the definite article cross-dialectally is quite stable, instead it has been noticed that elements representing indefinite articles emerged mainly in the peripheries of the Arabic-speaking world, due to interlinguistic contacts (Mion 2009; Turner 2021). In fact, in some Neo-Arabic varieties located at the edges of the Arabic Sprachraum, an indefinite article is issued from the grammaticalization of terms related to the notion of ‘singularity’, typically the numeral *wāḥid* ‘one’ or other items referring to individuality like e.g. *fard* ‘single or individual (thing/person)’: from the first Moroccan Arabic derives *wahd-əl-*, from the second Mesopotamian Arabic derives *fadd* and other variants (Leitner and Procházka 2021).

But beyond the extremely schematic introduction given so far, the situation of the strategies marking (in)definiteness among the Arabic dialects is more entangled. Recently, Turner (2021) proposed a general classification of the Arabic dialects using a semantic typology that distinguishes two main groups: 1) dialects with a strict formal distinction between true definites and indefinites, and 2) dialects with a lax formal distinction between true definites and indefinites, each group having its subgroups. Even if not expressly mentioned in Turner’s work, TA can easily fit in the subgroup with no highly conventionalized marking of indefinites, which belong to the first group.

So, broadly speaking, a non-articulated noun like *ṛāžəl* is unmarked and indefinite and it means ‘a man’, while an articulated noun like *əṛ-ṛāžəl* is marked and definite and it means ‘the man’. Anyhow, a non-articulated noun can be considered definite if it appears in certain syntactic contexts (or if it is a proper noun) and, on the contrary, as already shown in 1.2, a definite noun does not always imply a definite interpretation: the Arabizi corpus of our research includes several examples of both these conditions.

¹² See, e.g., Zaborski (2006) for a concise diachronic perspective.

Consequently, definiteness is a system more complicated than the mere morphological operation of marking or unmarking a noun with or without an article.

In TA definiteness appears to be organized hierarchically through a regular series of levels. As shown in Table 2, definiteness is delineated along a continuum that ranges from strongly marked as generic elements (++generic) to strongly marked as specific elements (++specific), passing by the intermediate levels of genericity (+generic) and specificity (+specific). The division between (+generic) and (+specific) exhibits the transition from an unmarked indefiniteness (\emptyset) to a marked definiteness (**/al-/*) feature.

As for the strongly marked elements (++generic and ++specific), in addition to the typical features of indefiniteness or definiteness, we can find elements reinforcing definiteness: in the case of (++generic) we find the intervention of the numeral *wāḥad*, and in the case of (++specific) the intervention of demonstrative adjectives, like *e.g. hāda* ‘this’. Demonstratives often function as reinforcers, as in the case of Romance and Germanic languages, for instance (see Bernstein 1997; Brugè 1996).

Table 2

Definiteness continuum in TA

++ <i>GENERIC</i>	+ <i>GENERIC</i>	+ <i>SPECIFIC</i>	++ <i>SPECIFIC</i>
I look for a man	I look for a man	I look for the blond man	I look for that blond man
<i>nlawwəž 'la wāḥad řāžəl</i>	<i>nlawwəž 'la řāžəl</i>	<i>nlawwəž 'la əř-řāžəl</i> <i>lə-blond</i>	<i>nlawwəž 'la əř-řāžəl</i> <i>lə-blond hāda</i>

In conclusion, in the case of (++ generic) *wāḥad* remains in the orbit of the nominal class without becoming an indefinite article, and its intervention can be reinterpreted as a sort of reduced relative clause (= ‘someone who is...’). Semantically, this becomes even more evident when the element that appears after *wāḥad* is an adjective: *nlawwəž 'la wāḥad rūsi* ‘I look for a Russian’ → ‘I look for someone who is a Russian’. In the case of (++ specific) the deictic element reinforces the level of definiteness and it is worth noting that is usually postponed to the noun, according to the syntactic rules of TA, or that the noun can be inserted between two deictic elements, the first one proclitic and the latter postponed: *nlawwəž 'la hā-r-rūsi hāda* ‘I look for this Russian’.

3.3. Tunisian CMC and the Arabizi Encoding

The Arabizi encoding emerged in the Arabic-speaking world to bridge a technological gap following the introduction of electronic devices in the late 1990s. These devices

lacked Arabic keyboards or input systems for typing in Arabic script. Arabizi, along with “Arabish”, is the most popular term today (Bianchi 2013).

The use of Latin-based encoding in languages with non-Latin alphabets is also observed in Greek (*Greeklish*) and Serbian (*Latinica*). Androutsopoulos and Schmidt (2002) and Jaffe et al. (2012) employ the term *neography* to describe Greeklish. Similarly, Arabizi approximates TA phonology while incorporating elements, like digits, to represent Arabic graphemes, as shown in the following table.

Table 3

Arabizi Code System for TA – only most common Arabizi graphemes have been reported

<i>Arabic script</i>	ا	ء	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز	س	ش	ص
<i>Tunisian Arabizi</i>	a e	2	b p	t	th	j	7 h	5 kh	d	dh	r	z	s	ch	s
<i>Arabic script</i>	ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ	ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	ه	و	ي	ة
<i>Tunisian Arabizi</i>	th dh	6 t	th dh	3 a	4 gh	f	9 q	k	l	m	n	8 h	ou w	y i	h a t

Albirini (2016) discusses Arabic usage on the Internet from a socio-linguistic perspective, highlighting the prevalence of multilingualism and code-switching. He observes that young social network users employ an informal register, understanding the context of their communication rather than adhering strictly to standard language rules. Caubet (2019) ascribes the widespread adoption of *dārža* in written form to grassroots movement termed ‘Do It Yourself’, describing it as a collective effort to acquire literacy in an unstandardized language (Caubet 2019: 391).

We view Arabizi from two perspectives: as a neutral technology for representing spoken language, and as a socio-linguistic phenomenon itself. In the case of TA, no standardized system exists for its representation, leading to challenges with both Arabic and Latin scripts. Alghamdi and Petraki (2018) show that Arabizi appears, to the young CMC users in Saudi Arabia, as easier, faster, flexible, and also stylish. This preference may stem from the familiarity with the Latin keyboard. While Facebook and Twitter emerged in 2006, their Arabic versions were introduced in 2009 and 2012, respectively (Alghamdi and Petraki 2018). Facebook’s impact on Tunisian society, highlighted by Salem (2017), underscores the significance of Arabizi.¹³ Younes and Souissi (2014) collected a corpus of TA messages, revealing that over half were encoded in Arabizi.

¹³ Tunisia is the third most active Arab country on Facebook. Twitter is only 2% widespread.

The substantial volume of linguistic data generated in Arabizi significantly impacts linguistic research, particularly in Natural Language Processing (NLP) for colloquial Arabic. Access to extensive text data is crucial for NLP, and the abundance of Arabizi content has led to increased visibility for TA in recent years within the field of Arabic NLP.

4. Tools and Data Employed

4.1. An Overview on the Tunisian Arabizi Corpus (TAC)

The rise of Dialectal Arabic (DA) data has boosted research on DA in the NLP field (Bouamor et al. 2018; El-Haj 2020). This facilitates DA tool development by adapting existing MSA tools like Penn Arabic Treebank (Maamouri et al. 2004) and creating DA corpora from web data. Specific DA tools are crucial for effective NLP on Arabic social media, where DA is prevalent (Diab et al. 2010: 66). Our research employs the Tunisian Arabizi Corpus (TAC) (Gugliotta and Dinarelli 2020), designed for web-based dialectological investigation using a hybrid approach of dialectology, corpus linguistics, and deep learning techniques. TAC addresses the challenge of the lack of standardized DA encoding by employing the Conventional Orthography for Dialectal Arabic (CODA), providing specific guidelines for dialect-based conventions (Habash et al. 2018). TAC texts were encoded into Arabic script using CODA*.

Various corpus types include parallel, mono-varietal, and annotated corpora, like LDC's Levantine and Egyptian Arabic Treebanks (Maamouri et al. 2014), offering syntactic annotations. Fisher Levantine Arabic Conversational Telephone Speech (Maamouri et al. 2007) contains spoken text. The Levantine Dialect Corpus (Shami) covers Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria dialects with 117,805 non-annotated tweets (Kwaik et al. 2018). Curras is a written Palestinian Arabic corpus with about 56,000 tokens, morphologically annotated using the MADAMIRA tool (Jarrar et al. 2017). MADAMIRA (Pasha et al. 2014) was also used for SUAR, a Saudi Arabic corpus with 104,079 words, where automatic annotations underwent manual review (Al-Twairesh et al. 2018). Alsarsour et al. (2018) built DART, a dataset of about 25,000 crowd-sourced annotated tweets. TAC follows a similar approach using a multi-task architecture (§4.2) for semi-automatic annotation on five levels.

- Word classification into three classes - *arabizi* (TA and MSA words), *foreign* (non-Arabic code-switching), and *emotag* (smileys or emoticons).
- Encoding in CODA* (Habash et al., 2018).
- Tokenization, words split into morphemes.
- PoS tagging, adhering to the PATB guidelines (Maamouri et al., 2009).
- Lemmatization in CODA*.

All annotation levels were produced semi-automatically, detailed in Gugliotta and Dinarelli (2020) and Section 4.2, where we explore how the multi-task architecture benefited from leveraging the MADAR corpus. MADAR, a parallel corpus, encompasses 25 Arab-city dialects, along with existing English, French, and MSA parallel sets (Bouamor et al. 2018).

Social media’s advent has facilitated the corpus construction through web-data extraction. However, TA still lacks large and consistently annotated corpora to explore innovative automatic processing methods (Gugliotta and Dinarelli 2020). Research efforts has been on multi-dialects, mainly Saudi, Gulf, and Egyptian Arabic, with less emphasis on Maghrebi dialects, particularly TA (Guellil et al., 2019: 9). Although there are corpora that include or focus on TA, freely available Tunisian corpora are limited in quantity.

TAC corpus is readily available for free download.¹⁴ It captures a snapshot of TA in Arabizi and its evolution over the past decade. The corpus selection adheres to specific criteria (Gugliotta and Dinarelli 2020):

- a) Text mode: informal writing;
- b) Text genres: forum, blog, social networks;
- c) Domain: CMC;
- d) Language: TA in Arabizi;
- e) Location;
- f) Publication date.

Metadata extraction recorded the publication date, user’s age, gender, and provenience. TAC’s creation involved a semi-automatic annotation (§4.2), aiming to achieve consistent linguistic annotation. Table 3 displays some statistics from the data collected in TAC.

The applicative corpus goals involve developing NLP tools for processing TA Arabizi, facilitated by the multi-functional annotation levels in TAC. This enables comprehensive and systematic studies of TA and its Arabizi encoding, contributing to the dialectological domain where the initial research questions were addressed.

¹⁴ TAC corpus is available at: <https://github.com/eligugliotta/tarc>.

Table 4

TAC Data information

Total:	sentences	Tokens Classification		
	4,790			
Text Genres:		<i>arabizi</i>	<i>foreign</i>	<i>emotag</i>
Forum	756	6,022	5,874	13
Social Networks	3,154	11,833	3,624	598
Blog	366	5,988	674	7

4.2. Corpus Collection Incremental Semi-Automatic Procedure

To streamline corpus collection process for human annotators, deep-learning techniques were employed, implementing a semi-automatic annotation procedure (Gugliotta et al. 2020). Specifically, a multi-task sequence-to-sequence neural architecture based on LSTM Recurrent Neural Networks (RNN) (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber 1997; Sutskever et al. 2014) was utilised. This system can handle one or more input sequences, automatically adapting to the number of outputs based on the data format, making it versatile for various phases of the annotation procedure with different levels of annotation available.

Figure 1 illustrates the multi-task system, instantiated to take one input (x in Figure 1) and generate three different outputs (\hat{o}_1 , \hat{o}_2 , \hat{o}_3). Figure 1 highlights an essential aspect of the model: learning jointly and sequentially to generate multiple outputs allows the system to factorize information between annotation levels. Training on different tasks simultaneously, the model learns from each level, leading to mutual improvements across all the generation levels. This inter-task learning enhances the overall performance and effectiveness of the annotation procedure.

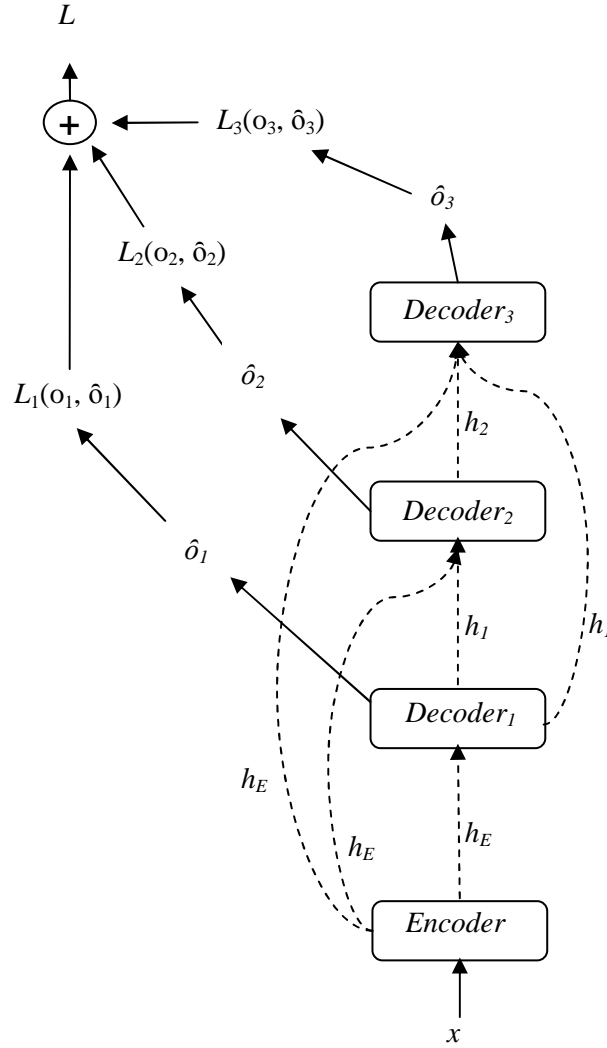


Figure 1. Multi-Task Architecture high-level schema

The iterative semi-automatic procedure for TAC (Gugliotta and Dinarelli 2020) initially lacked annotated data. We chose to manually transliterate three TAC blocks into Arabic-script. The accuracy was around 65%. To address the challenge of Arabizi data’s spontaneous nature during transliteration, we introduced 2,000 sentences (not-spontaneous Arabic-encoded Tunisian data) from the MADAR corpus. This involved semi-automatic annotation with the intended levels: Classification, Tokenization, and PoS tags, before continuing with the other data blocks.

Subsequently, the semi-automatic TAC annotation procedure started. Global results, including Lemmatization, can be found in Gugliotta and Dinarelli (2022). The table below displays experiments involving the last TAC block (seventh) and mono-task experiments.

Table 5

Last step of the semi-automatic procedure used for TAC annotation compared with mono-task results

Task	Train. Tokens	LSTM			
		Class	Arabic	Token	PoS
Corpus: MADAR_{Arabizi}+TAC					
Step6	46,197 (33,806)	96.5%	83.3%	81.94%	81%
Step6 - Arabic only	46,197 (33,806)	92.8%	79%	-	-
Step6 - Token only	46,197 (33,806)	-	-	95.4%	-
Step6 - PoS only	46,197 (33,806)	-	-	-	86.2%

Table 5 displays the number of tokens used for training the model for each specific step (TAC corpus tokens are shown in parentheses, while the rest belongs to MADAR). According to the observations made by Gugliotta and Dinarelli (2022), the transliteration task in Arabic-script, using Arabizi as input, is the most ambiguous annotation task. To mitigate data scarcity and reduce ambiguity, the MADAR data were also annotated with an Arabizi script level. This helps improve the prediction of Arabic script from Arabizi. Consequently, ‘Step 6’ represents the last annotation stage for data block 7, achieved by concatenating MADAR and TAC data.

In Table 5, we present results for a proof of concept in a mono-task setting, beyond the Arabic-script encoding (Arabic only in Table 5) where Class information is used. Predicting Arabic-script from Arabizi (plus Class) achieved 79% accuracy, slightly worse than the multi-task setting (83.3%). However, predicting Tokenization from Arabic-script only (Token only in Table 5) resulted in 95.4% accuracy, significantly better than the multi-task setting (81.9%), indicating the impact of Arabic script encoding errors. For PoS tagging (PoS only), the accuracy reached 86.2%, more than 5 points better than the multi-task setting, considering the challenges of predicting two previous annotation levels. Overall, the system is mainly affected by the ambiguous Arabizi to Arabic-script transliteration.

5. Analyses

5.1. Background

We examined the definiteness marker in CODA* to ensure its semantic and syntactic accurate placement in Tunisian sentences encoded in Arabizi. TA, like MSA, uses a single definite article, */al-/. When preceding nouns starting with a coronal phoneme,¹⁵ it assimilates, leading to gemination of the noun’s initial, as in (15), with an original Arabizi phrase from TAC followed by our translation.

- 15) *Inchalla cycle ejjay wala eli ba3dou*
 /nšālla cycle əž-žāy walla əlli ba‘du/
 God willing time the-next or the one after:that
 ‘God willing next time, or the time after that’.

Example (15) highlights how TA phonological characteristics are mirrored in Arabizi, presenting challenges for automatic processing. In the multi-tasking system, this complexity leads to imprecise outputs in transliteration, subsequently affecting tokenization and PoS-tagging (Section 4.2). To mitigate these inaccuracies, manual corrections are implemented iteratively and added to the training data, offering the system accurate learning examples (see §4.2).

To ensure data corrections, we analysed definiteness in TA, revealing a continuum (Table 1). However, while reviewing automatic annotations, we identified nominal phrases deviating from the prototypical categories, as shown in (16-17).

- 16) *ennes tamel fel fazet*
 /ən-nās ta‘məl fīl-fāzāt/
 the-people do in:the-things
 ‘People do things’.

Example (16) exhibits generic names with definiteness marks, posing no processing issues as the system recognises, transliterates, and morphologically annotates the text accordingly to CODA. Conversely, difficulties arise when nouns are specific or contextually defined but lack definiteness marks, as in (17).

- 17) a. *fī zit eldejfi*¹⁶
 ↓/fī zīt əd-dāfi/
 In oil the-tepid
 ‘In the tepid oil’.

¹⁵ These in TA are /t/, /ṭ/, /d/, /ḍ/, /r/, /z/, /s/, /š/, /ṣ/, /ḍ/, /ṭ/, /l/, /n/ and /ž/.

¹⁶ Having found other similar cases for the same user, we leave open the hypothesis of cases of the user’s idiolect.

- b. *fī zīt eldeifī*
 */fī zīt (əl)li dāfi/
 In oil that one tepid
 ‘In the oil which is tepid’.

In Tunisian, modifiers of a definite noun are also definite, but here only the modifier *dāfi*, ‘tepid’, has the marking, while the noun *zīt*, ‘oil’, seems lacking it. Considering Arabizi’s tendency to graphically represent article assimilation, we considered an alternative. The proclitic element preceding *dāfi* might be a relative pronoun, *illi*.¹⁷ In this case, the sentence would result as in (17b).

Neither (17b) or (17a) are completely acceptable, if we consider that the head of a relative sentence in TA is generally definite. However, in TAC it is possible to encounter relative sentences apparently with generic heads (see also Mion 2014: 69; Marçais 1952: 504), as in (18).

- 18) *fī jarayéd elli na9raw*
 ↓/fī žrāyəd əlli naqrāw/
 In journals that we:read
 ‘In the journals that we read’.

However, such occurrences are rare; it is more likely that the nouns *zīt* and *žrāyəd* are definite but lack graphic traces of the definiteness marking due to assimilation. The nominal phrase is preceded by the preposition *fī*, which tends to absorb the initial phoneme of the definiteness marking */al-/, while /l-/ assimilates to the initial of the noun *zīt*, a coronal phoneme. Arabizi, a hybrid system reflecting Tunisian phonetics, incorporates orthographic features like *arithmographemes* – digits used as graphemes selected through analogical substitutions with Arabic graphemes. By observing similar cases, dedicated analyses were needed to identify potential causes of mismatch between definiteness traits and marking, to improve text transliteration and annotation. These analyses are discussed in the following sections (5.2 and 5.3).

5.2. TAC-based Analyses

In a preliminary analysis phase, we decided to examine the first 15,000 TAC tokens, containing 1,036 nouns. We categorized these nouns into generic and specific. In TA, non-articulated nouns are considered definite if they:

¹⁷ Among the variant of *illi* there is *li*, if preceded by a word ending with vowels.

- a) Present the possessive pronouns, i.e.: /ʒīb-u manqūb/, lit.: ‘His pocket (is) holed’.
- b) Are preceded by the vocative particle (/yā/), i.e.: /yā žmā‘a/, lit.: ‘Hey group’.
- c) Are proper nouns, i.e.: /tūnəs/, ‘Tunis’.
- d) Are in the Construct State, i.e.: /rūḥ əl-lūz/, ‘Almond essence’ (litt. ‘The spirit of the almond’).

With the aim to identify non-prototypical NP for both generic and specific categories, we observed the following percentages: in 25% of the sentences NP is generic, but is preceded by a definite article.

- 19) *awel mara nozi nilbes robe fel chté*
 /āwwəl marra nūzi nəlbəs robe f-əl šita/
 First time I:dare I:wear dress in-the winter
 ‘It is the first time I dare to wear a dress in winter’.

In 74% of the sentences the NP is specific but lacks explicit marking.

- 20) *elli y3ichou fi bled*
 /əlli y‘išu fi blād/
 REL they:live in country
 ‘That ones who live in (the) country’.

Observing 25% of the articulated generics category, like the sentence in (19), we found that these are primarily idioms. Non-articulated specifics present challenges for high accuracy in NLP tasks, comprising 19% of the observed data. Within this subset, 32% exhibits typical Arabizi encoding behavior, where article assimilation resulting in gemination is not always represented. The remaining 68% of non-articulated specific nouns can be attributed to other summarized cases. Idioms, as in (21).

- 21) *klem 3lik w ma3na 3la jarek*
 /klām ‘līk w ma‘na la žārək/
 Words on:you and meaning on neighbor:your
 ‘I speak to you but I refer to someone else’.

Definite generic phrases may appear as indefinite specific phrases, where *klem*, ‘words’, lacks the definite mark despite its specific referent in the context. Some non-articulated specific nouns results from typing inattention common in CMC writing. Additionally, several non-articulated (but specific) nouns are due to relative adjectives. In TA, a superlative structure is expressed using an relative adjective (on the ‘*af‘al*’ form) followed by a bare noun (22).

- 22) *konna a7la couple t7attét a3lina el 3ine*
 /kunna āhla couple t̥aʔt̥it ‘alīna əl īn/
 we:were the:best couple direct at:us the envy
 ‘We were the best couple to direct envy at’.

Particular structures connected to quantity semantics (23).

- 23) *9ad ka3bet ma9roud*
 /qadd ka‘bāt maqrūd/
 same size units maqroudh
 ‘The same size as Maqroudh units’.¹⁸

- 24) *chweya 7achw*
 /šwəyya ʔaʃu/
 little bit filling
 ‘A bit of filling’.

As seen in (23-24), in TA, nominal elements quantify nouns. We investigated specialized quantifiers for countable and uncountable elements like liquids, powders, and gases, and whether their presence leads to different structures based on specificity or genericity of the quantified nouns. In the definiteness continuum scheme (Figure 1), we observed a de-numeral element, *wāḥəd*, functioning as an indefinite pronoun or adjective, reinforcing noun genericity. In post-nominal position, it acts as a noun modifier with the original semantic trait of unicity. For example, we provide two sentences, each showcasing a different *wāḥəd* usage.

Sentence (25) illustrates the indefinite function of the pronoun *wāḥəd*, serving as the head of a reduced relative clause. In contrast, sentence (26) demonstrates *wāḥəd* employed as a numeral adjective with its original quantifier meaning.

- 25) *nlawwej 3la we7ed rajel*
 /nlawwəʒ ‘la wāḥəd rāʒəl/
 I:look for someone man
 ‘I look for someone (who is a) man’.

- 26) *nlawwej 3la rajel we7ed*
 /nlawwəʒ ‘la rāʒəl wāḥəd/
 I-look for man one
 ‘I look for (only) one man’.

¹⁸ *Maqroudh* is a typical Tunisian sweet.

The usage of *wāḥəd* as an indefinite pronoun is more prototypical for referents with the [+human] feature. However, for [-human] nouns, the situation is more complex, as illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6

Definiteness & quantity continuum in TA

++ GENERIC	+ GENERIC	+ SPECIFIC	++ SPECIFIC
—————→			
<i>I look for someone (who is) a man</i>	<i>I look for (only one) man</i>		
/nlawwəʒ 'la wāḥəd rāʒəl/	/nlawwəʒ 'la rāʒəl wāḥəd /		
<i>Every apple is good</i>	<i>Every morning I eat a unit of apples</i>	<i>Tomorrow I will eat a unit (of) the apples</i>	<i>Tomorrow I will eat a unit (of) the apples this</i>
/kull tuffāḥa bnīna/	/kull šbāḥ nākəl ka'ba tuffāḥ/	/ğudwa bāš nākəl ka'bət əl-tuffāḥ /	/ğudwa bāš nākəl ka'bət əl-tuffāḥ hādi /

However, TA employs the *ka'ba* quantifier to define the uniqueness of elements. For example, in *kull šbāḥ nākəl ka'ba tuffāḥ* it selects a unique apple from a set characterized by a [-human] feature, and functions as a first element in an appositive structure with the plural noun *tuffāḥ*.¹⁹ In specific contexts, *ka'ba* modifies the noun to express partitivity, as seen in *ğudwa bāš nākəl ka'bət əl-tuffāḥ*.²⁰ Furthermore, in ++specific contexts, TA can also reinforce specificity with demonstrative elements like *hādi* (fourth sentence of Table 6). To further examine quantifier behavior, we conducted a dedicated survey outlined in the following section (5.3).

5.3. A Survey on Tunisian Quantifiers

From the previous paragraph, the structure [*ka'ba*[(DEF-)[N]]] is unacceptable in Tunisian Arabizi if the noun is [+human]. Instead, some quantifiers help select a quantity of elements in a set with similar physical features (as for collective nouns), excluding human beings. Instead, [+human] nouns can be quantified employing the universal *kull* 'all' or its opposite *ḥadd* 'nobody' (31-33); indefinite adverbs like *barša* 'a lot' (27), and numerals.

¹⁹ The structure is [*ka'ba*+n.PL].

²⁰ The structure [*ka'ba*[(DEF-[N-PL]])] coincides with the Construct State's one: [N[(DEF-[N]])]. We express a doubt on the grammaticality of the former, as noted in Massaro (2022).

As mentioned earlier (sections 5.1, 5.2, and Table 6), definite nouns [+human] can be accompanied by reinforcers (R), like *wāḥəd* for ++*generic* nouns or demonstrative adjectives, like *hāda*, for ++*specific* ones, as outlined below. In affirmative sentences:

- 27) *barša a bād təsraq* *quantifier*
 many people they:steal
 ‘Many people steal’.
- 28) *nlawwəž la wāḥəd t̄bīb* *pronoun*
 I:look for one doctor
 ‘I look for one (who is a) doctor’.
- 29) *wāḥəd t̄bīb yḥəbb...* *pronoun*
 One doctor he:want
 ‘One (who is a) doctor wants...’.
- 30) *yxaddmu t̄bīb wāḥəd* *quantifier*
 They:hire doctor one
 ‘They hire (only) one doctor’.

In negative sentences:

- 31) *mā famma ḥadd t̄bīb* *pronoun*
 not there is nobody doctor
 ‘There is nobody, who is a doctor’.
- 32) *mā fammā-š wāḥəd t̄bīb* *pronoun*
 not there is-not one doctor
 ‘There is not (someone who is) a doctor’.
- 33) *mā famma ḥadd* *pronoun*
 not there is nobody
 ‘There is nobody’.
- 34) *mā fammā-š wāḥəd kbīr*²¹ *pronoun*
 not there is-not one big
 ‘There is not a big one’.
- 35) *mā fammā-š t̄bīb wāḥəd*²² *quantifier*
 not there is-not doctor one
 ‘There is not (only) one doctor’.

²¹ The sentence, without the second part of the circumfix negative mark /š/, is not correct.

²² The whole sentence is /mā fammā-š t̄bīb wāḥəd famma barša/, ‘There is not (only) one doctor, there are a lot’.

Wāḥad can also be used in interrogative sentences, as a pronoun (36) or as a quantifier (37).

36) *mā fammā-š wāḥad ṭbīb?* *pronoun*
 not there is-not one doctor
 ‘Is there not (someone who is) a doctor?’.

37) *famma ṭbīb wāḥad?* *quantifier*
 there is doctor one
 ‘There is (only) one doctor?’.

Observing the examples, *wāḥad* seems to function as a genericity reinforcer solely in pre-nominal position, being an indefinite pronoun meaning ‘(some)one’. here, it heads a reduced relative clause, as in (28-29), (32), (34) and (36), where *ṭbīb*, ‘doctor’ is a predicate. Instead, in post-nominal position (typical adjectival position), it functions as a numeral, conveying ‘(only) one’, as in (30), (35), and (37). Therefore, generic reinforcement follows the [R[CP \emptyset [N_{+human}]]] structure.

Specific DPs, reinforced by demonstrative adjectives, present a [DP[N_{+human}]][DP_R]] structure (see Brugè 1996:19), as in Table 6 and in (38):

38) /ḡudwa bāš nqābəl l-a bād hāḡūma/
 tomorrow will I:meet the-people these
 ‘Tomorrow I will meet these people’.

Regarding quantifying [-human] nouns, different quantifiers are employed for nouns with [+countable] or [-countable] features. To examine quantifiers adhering to semantic categories and the generic-specific continuum in TA, a survey gathered additional data beyond the corpus. Sixty sentences featuring countable and uncountable nouns with quantifiers were rated by informants on a 1-5 scale (1 for ‘not acceptable’ and 5 ‘very acceptable’). Sixty-four informants participated, with fifty-three proving partial responses, totaling one hundred and seventeen informants. For instance, the first sentence of the survey and its results in Table 7 indicates that 89.69% of informants deemed it ‘not acceptable’ due to the absence of definiteness marking for ‘doctor’ and the demonstrative reinforcer ‘this’.

Table 7

Sentence: ‘There is not this (Ø)doctor?’. Command translation: ‘Please choose only one among the following: /1/2/3/4/5’

ما فمّاش هاذا دكتور؟ من فضلك اختر واحدا فقط مما يلي:	COUNT	GRAND PERCENTAGE	TOP 2
①	76	64.96%	89.69%
②	11	9.40%	
③	5	4.27%	5.15%
④	1	0.85%	
⑤	4	3.42%	5.15%
VALID TOTAL	97		100%
NO ANSWER	4	3.42%	
NOT VISUALIZED	16	13.68%	
GRAND TOTAL	117		100%

Based on the survey, our initial conclusions on Tunisian quantifiers, in Table 8, classify them into three classes based on the traits of the quantified noun. The first class comprises quantifiers primarily used for uncountable nouns. For instance, *ħafna* ‘handful’ is suitable for nouns like ‘flour’ or small countable elements, like ‘almonds’, but not for ‘tomato’. *Rašfa* ‘sip’ is exclusively used for liquids for drinking, while *kīla* ‘measure, portion’ and *kās* ‘glass’ are specific to quantifying uncountable nouns. However, not all uncountable elements can be quantified by the latter two nouns; for instance, *kīla* is unsuitable for ‘milk’, and *kās* is unsuitable for ‘soup’.

Table 8

Quantifiers classes identified through the survey. A stands for ‘acceptable’, NA stands for ‘not acceptable’

	QUANTIFIERS +	N[-countable]	N[+countable]
1	<i>ħafna</i> (handful)	A	A / NA
	<i>rašfa</i> (sip)	A	NA
	<i>kīla</i> (measure, portion)	A / NA	NA
	<i>kās</i> (glass)	A / NA	NA
2	<i>ka’ba</i> (unity)	NA	A
	<i>ħużẓīna</i> (dozen)	NA	A
	<i>kamša</i> (handful)	A / NA	A / NA
	<i>škāra</i> (sack)	NA	A
3	<i>qaṭ’a</i> (piece)	A	A
	<i>ħākū</i> (pack)	A	A / NA
	<i>tarf</i> (part)	A	A
	<i>šab’a</i> (a lot)	A	A

The second category includes quantifiers applicable to countable nouns like eggs and apples, but not for ‘shoes’ (*šabbāt*), which has a specific quantifier *fard*, ‘pair’. For precise quantification, we already knew about *hāra* ‘4-units’, typically used for eggs, and *ṭuzzīna* ‘dozen’. The survey confirmed that *ṭuzzīna* is also used for other countable items like ‘apples’ or ‘cigarettes’. However, the survey revealed that *ka‘ba*, ‘piece’, cannot be used for ‘book’ (*ktāb*).

The third includes elements usable with both types of nouns, like *qaṭ‘a*, ‘piece’ or *ḥākū*, ‘packet’, *ṭarf* ‘part’ and *šab‘a* ‘a lot’. *qaṭ‘a* is widely acceptable for quantifying nouns like ‘land’ or ‘cheese’, which beside being uncountable, are not collective nouns. Similarly, *ṭarf*, *šab‘a* and *ḥākū*. The latter is suitable for ‘milk’, commonly sold in packs, as for ‘cigarettes’, but not for ‘books’ or ‘eggs’. Instead, *šab‘a* is acceptable for ‘books’ and ‘cigarettes’, suggesting it may still be related to its lexical meaning. Similarly, *škāra* ‘sack’ (second class), is used with nouns of objects stored in sacks.

Conclusions

This article presents statistical analyses on the morphological realization of definiteness in TA encoded in Arabizi. We discussed definiteness from a semantic and syntactic perspective, focusing on TA in particular. We introduced TA data in §3 and analyzed its behavior in accordance with the observations made in §1. In §4, we described the data used for the analyses, detailing the methodology used to construct the corpus and demonstrating its value for automatic processing of TA. Our analyses in §5 were based on corpus data, and we drew conclusions from a survey that assessed the acceptability of specific sentences in TA. Further investigation is planned to explore the interconnection between definiteness and nominal quantification in TA through an additional survey.

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AL-CHAKHS (LE PERSONNAGE DESINCARNE). OPERETTE LIBANAISE. AUTEURS-COMPOSITEURS : LES FRERES RAHBANI, VEDETTE : FAIROUZ

Abstract. With their genuine colloquial Lebanese, their tenacious commitment to preserve Lebanese popular traditions and folklore, the Rahbani Brother's theatre managed to save a precious heritage and helped make their diva interpreter Fairouz one of the most famous 20th century singers in the Arab World. Her short songs combined traditional and popular musical influences, setting them apart from the long repetitious songs in the colloquial Egyptian that were the order of the day. While the Rahbani Brothers' musical theatre was conceived and performed in colloquial Lebanese, most of the research on the topic carried out so far is in Arabic and their works have become vulnerable to misrepresentations by Western scholars. This article aims into illustrating and partially translating one of the Rahbani's operetta, namely, al-Chakhs / al-Shakhs (The Puppet Person).

Keywords: Rahbani Brothers, Fairouz, Al-Shakhs, Lebanese Theater, Lebanese operetta

1. Introduction²

eš-Šaḥṣ est le premier volet d'une série d'opérettes³ satiriques Raḥbāniennes dénonçant la bureaucratie, l'injustice, la tyrannie et les régimes totalitaires⁴. Cet appellatif

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² Dorénavant al-Chakhs, Raḥbāni et Fairouz seront transcrits *eš-Šaḥṣ*, Raḥbāni et Fayrūz. Quant aux noms propres et vocables qui changent selon la source à laquelle nous avons fait référence, nous avons essayé de respecter, dans la mesure du possible, le code d'équivalence phonologique de la version théâtrale (VDL612/613).

³ Il ne s'agit pas d'une comédie musicale ou lyrique (مسرح غنائي) tout court, comme il plait aux chercheurs arabes de l'appeler, mais d'un genre "théâtral musical" qui se situe entre l'opéra bouffé et l'opérette, dans lequel les couplets chantés alternent avec le parler, mêlant comédie, chant, instruments et danses classiques et folkloriques.

n'est pas fortuit : synonyme de « statue », il évoque le Pantin, le personnage désincarné sur la scène hispanophone contemporaine (v. Breton 2017, pp.11-31). Musawwih (2006, p.386) le décrit comme « ألدات الشبكية والهيئة الصلبة التي لا تتزعزع » (l'Essence fantomatique, d'aspect dur et inébranlable). Le mystérieux Personnage est anonyme, Autorité suprême qui gouverne un royaume anonyme. Il cherche le bien de son peuple, mais ses ministres et fonctionnaires sont arrivistes et corrompus.

2. eš-Šahš

Présentée à la Foire internationale de Damas, puis au Festival de Baalbeck (en 1968), au Palais des congrès de la Jordanie (1982) ; mais au El-Balloon Theater en Egypte (1982), l'égyptien remplace le libanais et 'Afāf Rāḍī⁵ remplace Fayrūz. L'année 1979 vit la rupture artistique Fayrūz-les frères Raḥbānī⁶ ; c'est Ronza⁷ qui va la remplacer en 1980.

Auteurs-compositeurs : les frères Raḥbānī : 'Āṣi et Maṣṣūr er-Raḥbānī ; Acteurs principaux : Fayrūz, Naṣri Šams ed-Dīn et Antoine Kerbāj ; mise en scène: Šabri 'š-Šarīf; les danses sont assurées par le groupe national libanais: *al-firqa 'š-ša'biyya 'l-lubnāniyya*.

2.1. Intrigue

Sur la place publique où les vendeurs étalent dès l'aube leurs produits, inspectés par un Sergent avide, le Gouverneur, délégué local du Personnage arrive et ordonne au Sergent de déblayer la place, annonçant la visite exceptionnelle du Personnage.

Les vendeurs s'en vont, mais sur cette place vide, une vendeuse de tomates (Fayrūz) se présente innocemment, à l'insu de tout ce qui se passe, chantant et exposant les tomates de son chariot. Le Sergent l'invite à dégager. Mais elle ne comprend pas pour quelle raison et où elle doit aller.

⁴ Il s'agit de : *Hāla we-l-Malik* (Hāla et le roi, 1967), *Jbāl eš-Šuwwān* (Les montagnes de Silex, 1969), *Ya 'iš Ya 'iš* (Longue vie à son excellence ! 1970), *Šahh en-nawm* (Bon réveil, 1970), *Nāṭūrit le-mfātīḥ* (La gardienne des clés, 1972), *Nās min wara'* (Des gens en papier, 1972), *Lūlū* (Loulou, 1974) et *Petra* (1977).

⁵ Voir Afaf Rady – *Al Shakhs*.Mp4. ci-dessous: Référence électronique.

⁶ « En 1978, c'est au London Palladium que Fairouz et les Raḥbani présentent un grand concert et dans l'année qui suit, ils en présentent un, à Chardja (al-Shariqah – Emirats Arabes Unis); suivra le mois de mai de cette même année 1979, un concert mémorable à Paris, à l'Olympia où Fairouz va chanter sous la direction de Assy pour la dernière fois. Après ce concert, ils mettent fin à leur collaboration artistique ainsi qu'à leur vie commune. » (Achkar 2021, p.42 et Abu Murād, 2002, pp. 645-654).

⁷ Il s'agit de Aida Tomb (Beyrouth, 1958-). Voir Abu-Murād, 2002, *al-Masraḥ al-lubnānī*, pp. 645-648. Voir Ronza – *al-Shakhs*.Mp4. Ci-dessous: Référence électronique.

Le Personnage arrive en grande pompe dans l'embarras de tous. Le chant simple et spontané de la vendeuse de tomates explose. Son chant plaît au Personnage, mais, faute d'autres engagements, il doit quitter.

Le Gouverneur accuse la vendeuse d'avoir gâté la cérémonie. Il ordonne au Sergent de l'interroger et de l'arrêter. Elle en appelle à la loi. Le Sergent confisque son chariot jusqu'au procès. Elle sera accusée d'espionnage, et présentée au tribunal.

Ne pouvant payer un avocat la vendeuse se défend seule au nom du peuple. La cour l'accuse d'avoir été payée par quelqu'un pour gâter la cérémonie. Elle juge la vendeuse coupable, lui confisque son chariot qu'elle propose aux enchères.

Soudain on voit Le Personnage mystérieux, promeneur solitaire, loin de son palais et de ses gardes. Elle l'invoque, mais il ignore tout de l'affaire et revient vite au palais de peur qu'en son absence le Gouverneur et le Sergent ne mettent à manigancer quelque chose contre lui aussi.

2.2. Acteurs principaux

La remise en question de l'illusion référentielle perçue comme vaine et mensongère fait éclater la triade acteur corps personnage. Raison pour laquelle les acteurs de *eš-Šahš* n'ont que des appellations formelles ; ils sont identifiés selon leurs fonctions et leurs statuts dans l'acte théâtral.

Fairouz [Fayrūz]	La vendeuse de tomates	<i>biyyā'it el-banadūra</i>
Antoine Kerbaj [Kerbāj]	Le Personnage	<i>eš-Šahš</i>
Nasri Chams ed-Dīne [Našri Šams ed-Dīn]	Le Gouverneur local ⁸	<i>el-Mutašarrif</i>
William Haswani [Hešwāni]	Le Sergent	<i>eš-Šawīš</i>
Philémon Wehbi	L'avocat sans clients	<i>el-muḥāmi</i>
Joseph Nasif [Našīf]	Un vendeur de pommes	<i>biyyā' teffāḥ</i>
Huda Haddad [Heddād]	La femme de service	<i>el-ḥādmi</i>
Marwan Mahfouz [Merwān Maḥfūz]	Un épicier	<i>dekkanji</i>
Elie Choueri [Šwayri]	Un vendeur de légumes	<i>biyyā' ḥudra</i>
Siham Chamas [Sihām eš-Šemmās]	La voisine	<i>el-jāra</i>
Michel Hajj [el-Hajj]	Le Juge	<i>el-'ādī</i>
Antoine Khalifa [Ḥalīfi]	Le secrétaire du tribunal	<i>el-kātib</i>
Melhim Barakat [Melḥim Barakāt]	La partie civile	<i>el-mudda 'i l-'āmm</i>

⁸ *al-Mutašarrif*: du turc ottoman *Mutesarrif*, dérivé du participe actif du verbe arabe *tašarrafa*, signifiant « agir sans restriction », « avoir le droit de disposer (sur quelqu'un ou quelque chose) ». Le rang ottoman de *mutasarrif* a été établi dans le cadre d'une réforme de 1864, et son titulaire était nommé directement par le sultan. Le district administratif sous son autorité était officiellement appelé *Mutasarrifate* dans le cas du Mont-Liban ou Chypre. Cette unité administrative était parfois quasi autonome ; par exemple, celle du Mont-Liban était gouvernée par un sujet chrétien ottoman non libanais et bénéficiait de la protection des puissances européennes. Les communautés religieuses du district étaient représentées par un conseil qui traitait directement avec le gouverneur.

2.3. *Premier acte*

La scène principale se déroule sur la place publique d'un village anonyme libanais, où les vendeurs étalent dès l'aube leurs produits et chantent :

– « Allez, lez, lez, lez ! / Ta porte est grande comme le monde entier... / Allez, lez, lez, lez ! / Le soleil se lève et Dieu pourvoira. / Jamais Tu ne refuses. / Jamais ne nous contentons, / Ô mer de largesses la plus vaste »

Ils sont inspectés chaque matin par le Sergent qui contrôle avec fierté, curiosité et avidité leurs marchandises en chantant lui aussi.

Il contrôle d'abord les listes des prix que les vendeurs n'ont pas exposées et les menace :

– « A l'avenir, scandales à bannir ! / Vos listes exposées, / ou cent livres à payer ! / Moi, je n'ai rien dit, / mais qui rien ne dit, / un beau jour, il devra dire ».

Pour lui faire plaisir, ils lui offrent une pomme, un concombre, une belle poire, une laitue, un coing, qu'il empoche dans la plus grande discrétion et « dignité » disant :

– « Non jamais ! ».

Une belle employée se présente en chantant :

– « Ma patronne m'a envoyé / chercher un kilo de concombres / et elle m'a recommandé / qu'ils soient petits et tendres. »

Le vendeur de concombres amoureusement lui répond en chantant :

– « Et ta patronne ne t'a pas dit / que désormais tu as mûri?... / Ta maîtresse t'a dit prends garde aux vendeurs, / mais elle ne t'a pas dit de tes yeux la splendeur. / Tourmentés comme toi sont les vendeurs, / ils meurent sans te voir. / Ils vivent pour te voir. »

Les vendeurs dansent avec elle et chantent. Le vendeur de concombres y ajoute :

« Ô pomme, la plus précieuse, / d'un jardin lointain, / cueillie d'une fête joyeuse. / Sur cette place tu vins. / Fleur exhalant parfum, / Hironnelle des tuiles, / volant d'un logis / à l'autre logis. »

Soudain, cette vie quotidienne s'interrompt. Le Gouverneur, délégué local du Personnage arrive et ordonne au Sergent :

– « Vite! Libérez-moi cette place ! »

Il annonce la visite exceptionnelle du Personnage. Les vendeurs s'en vont en disant :

– « Seigneur Gouverneur, Dieu nous est témoin, nous n'avons encore rien vendu... Pitié, Seigneur Gouverneur, où est-ce que nous pouvons nous mettre et étaler nos produits ? La matinée ne fait que commencer ! Laissez-nous un peu de temps, pour vendre quelque chose. Nous avons des enfants et nous voulons vivre. Nous sommes simples et pauvres. Partout où nous allons, d'une manière ou d'une autre la pauvreté nous suit et les gardes nous poursuivent. Laissez-nous un peu de temps Seigneur Gouverneur ! ».

Le Gouverneur est sensible, mais la loi est la loi. Il s'adresse au Sergent :

– « Celui qui a fait la loi semble avoir mis son cœur de côté quand il la faisait ! Sergent ! le Gouverneur n'aime pas la justice, il préfère la clémence !... La clémence est plus belle. Certes ! Parce que la justice t'aurait demandé pourquoi tes poches sont pleines. Tu sais ? ... Pour garantir la tranquillité et la sécurité de l'Autorité, débrazez la place ! ».

Au lieu des vendeurs, le Comité d'accueil se présente sur la place publique. Sa Présidente expose son programme : décorations, délégations, associations, personne au centre de la place. Ceux qui salueront l'Autorité, ce sont le Gouverneur, la Présidente du Comité, le chef des délégations. Après les salutations, le groupe des danseurs s'exhibera pour lui. Et après la cérémonie d'accueil, seront invités au banquet parmi d'autres, le Gouverneur et le Sergent.

Sur cette place vide, prête à applaudir le Personnage, une vendeuse de tomates (Fayrūz) se présente innocemment, à l'insu de tout ce qui se passe, chantant et exposant les tomates de son chariot :

– « J'ai des tomates, / des montagnes viennent mes tomates, / jamais traitées, / ni frelatées ; / des montagnes viennent mes tomates. »

On la prévient :

– « Jeune fille, il faut quitter la place. / Interdit d'être sur la place. / Jeune fille va-t'en ! / Va-t'en ! / Va-t'en jeune fille ! »

Elle procède sans comprendre ce qu'ils disent. Le Sergent attendri, mais ne pouvant pas abandonner sa position l'invite à dégager. Mais elle ne comprend pas pour quelle raison et où elle doit aller. On lui pousse son chariot et elle proteste :

- « Mais Sergent, doucement, / doucement avec le chariot ! / Sergent va doucement ! Attends ! »
 – « Allez, toi et ton chariot, dégage ! / Sur la place personne ne doit rester ! / Il faut t'en aller. »

Le Personnage arrive en grande pompe dans l'embarras de tous. Ils l'accueillent en chantant :

- « Nous t'attendions nous t'attendions, / pour la fête la place est prête, / Ô épée miséricordieuse, / Ô lune d'argent qui nous venez de si loin, / Ô fleuve de nuit et de poésie, / Ô livre de rosée et de feu, / pour notre foyer, hôte prestigieux, / lauriers sous ton pied glorieux!... »

Le gouverneur ajoute :

- « Nous t'offrons nos plus nobles sentiments. / Nous levons nos verres à cet antique attachement... »

Tout le monde se met à danser la *dabkeh*⁹ folklorique au rythme¹⁰ du chant simple et spontané de la vendeuse de tomates qui se lance en chantant : « Des cimes, la brise descend »

<i>Jabaliyyi n-nasmi jabaliyyi</i>	جَبَلِيّی النَّسْمِي جَبَلِيّی	Des cimes, des cimes la brise descend
<i>We-l-mal' a t-tayyib t̄ayib</i>	وَالْمَلْقَى الطَّيِّب طَيِّب	Rendant l'accueil bien plus plaisant.
<i>Reddi l-jadāyil ya šabiyyi</i>	رَدِّي الْجَدَائِل يَا صَبِيّی	Rejette en arrière tes tresses, jeune fille !
<i>Wuṣlu, wuṣlu l-ḥabāyib</i>	وَصَلُّوا وَصَلُّوا الْخَبَائِبِ	Voilà les bien-aimés qu'on attend.
		(bis)
<i>Jabaliyyi n-nasmi w-mertāḥa</i>	جَبَلِيّی النَّسْمِي وَمِرْتَاخَه	Des cimes, la brise légère s'envole,
<i>W-basṭit li-l-ḥubb jnāḥa</i>	وَبَسَطَتِ لِلْحُبِّ جَنَاحَا	Éploie ses ailes, l'amour prend son vol.
<i>We-ṣ-šabiyyi</i>	وَالصَّبِيّی	Et la jeune fille,
<i>'ind el-māyyi</i>	عِنْد الْمَيّی	Près de la fontaine,
<i>Tur'uṣ we-t-ṭīr es-sāḥa</i>	تُرْقِصْ وَطَيِّرِ السَّاحَه	Danse et la place s'envole.
<i>Sa'alu sa'alu</i>	سَأَلُوا سَأَلُوا	Ont demandé, demandé
<i>Ṭallu sa'alu</i>	طَلُّوا سَأَلُوا	Ont paru, et demandé.
<i>'ahlak 'annak</i>	أَهْلَكَ عَنَّاكَ	Tes parents, de toi,
<i>Ṭallu sa'alu</i>	طَلُّوا سَأَلُوا	Ont paru, et demandé.
<i>We-šabiyyi</i>	وَالصَّبِيّی	Et la fille,
<i>Lli-melhiyyi</i>	اللي ملهِيّی	Si ravie,

⁹ دبكة «sorte de danse ... où les danseurs se forment en demi-cercle, se tiennent par la main ou le bras, et sont conduits par un chef qui indique les mouvements à exécuter ; la cadence est marquée par le pied qu'on pose en force sur le sol ; on s'accompagne en chantant. Le sirtò des grecs modernes est une sorte de *dábke*. » (Barthélemy 1935 : 231).

¹⁰ Ce rythme, très commun dans les opérettes et le théâtre musical raḥbaniens, est le *bayāti – dukāh*. (Musawwih 2006, vol.1, p.396).

'ahadetha n-nasmi l-jabaliyyi	أحدثها التَّسْمِي الجَبَلِي	La brise des cimes l'a emportée,
Jabaliyyi n-nasmi jabaliyyi	(bis)	(bis)
Jarraḥni mbāriḥ mawwālak	جَرَحَنِي مَبَارِح مَوَالِكَ	Hier ton <i>mawwāl</i> ¹¹ m'a blessée,
Ḥabberni kif ḥwālak	خَبَّرَنِي كَيْفِ أَحْوَالِكَ	Comment tu vas ? Dis-moi !
Waynma bterḥal	وَيَنْمَ بَتْرَحَل	Où que tu ailles,
Waynma btenzal	وَيَنْمَ بَتَنْزَل	Où que tu sois,
'ana maktūbi 'ala bālak	أَنَا مَكْتُوبِي عَلَى بَالِكَ	Je ne quitte jamais tes pensées.
Katabu katabu	كَتَبُوا كَتَبُوا	Ils ont écrit et écrit.
Seḥru katabu	سَيَّهَرُوا كَتَبُوا	Ils ont veillé et écrit.
We-lli 'eš'u	وَالَّذِي عَشَقُوا	Et ceux qui s'aiment,
Seḥru katabu	سَيَّهَرُوا كَتَبُوا	Ont veillé et écrit.
We-be-ṣ-ṣubḥiyyi	وَبِالصُّبْحِي	Et de bonne heure,
S'āl 'lavyi	اسْأَلْ عَلَيَّ	Rappelle-toi de moi,
We-b'atli n-nasmi j-jabaliyyi	وَابْتَعَثَلِي التَّسْمِي الجَبَلِي	La brise des cimes envoie !
Jabaliyyi n-nasmi jabaliyyi	(bis)	(bis)
Ya ṭayr el men 'endun tāyir	يَا طَيْرُ الْكَ مِنْ عُنْدُن طَائِرِ	Ô oiseau, toi qui arrives de leurs lieux
Ya mḥammal be-l-bašāyir	يَا مَحْمَلٌ بِالشَّائِرِ	Ton vol est plein de messages heureux
Neḥna nṭarna	نَحْنَا نَطْرْنَا	Anxieux nous attendions
We-ṭhassarna	وَتَحَسَّرْنَا	Inquiets nous étions
We-l-farah 'indun dāyir	وَالْفَرَحُ عِنْدُن دَائِرِ	Mais, eux, ils fêtaient heureux.
Ya ḥajal ya ḥajal	يَا حَجَلُ يَا حَجَلُ	Ô perdrix, ô perdrix.
'ellun ya ḥajal	قُلْن يَا حَجَلُ	Dis-leur ô perdrix.
Ma mnensāhun	مَا مَنَسَاهُن	Jamais, nous ne les oublierons.
'ellun ya ḥajal	قُلْن يَا حَجَلُ	Dis-leur ô perdrix.
We-b-'inayyi	وَبِعَيْنِي	Dans mes yeux,
Fī ḥabriyyi	فِيهِ خَبْرِي	J'avais une nouvelle
Sara'etha n-nasmi l-jabaliyyi	سَرَقَتْهَا التَّسْمِي الجَبَلِي	Que la brise des cimes a dérobé.
Jabaliyyi n-nasmi jabaliyyi	(bis)	(bis)
Reddi l-jadāyil ya ṣabiyyi	(bis)	(bis)

Son chant plaît au Personnage. Il lui tend même la main, mais, faute d'autres engagements, il chuchote à son délégué qui annonce :

– « Sa Seigneurie le Personnage vous remercie. Il doit poursuivre sa démarche. »

Mais le Gouverneur lui rappelle qu'un déjeuner est organisé en son honneur.

– « Désolé, la prochaine fois ! ».

Le Gouverneur, pour se disculper annonce :

¹¹ « Court poème d'un seul couplet et généralement d'une seule rime, chanté par une seule voix sans accompagnement d'instrument » (Barthélémy 1936, p.807). On attribue la paternité de ce genre à des chanteurs de Bagdād. « Les *Mawwāl* que l'on retrouve dans les autres pays arabes : en Syrie, au Liban et en Egypte notamment sont, soit une transposition du *Mawwāl* de Bagdād, soit une imitation de celui-ci » (Jargy 1970, p.36).

– « C'est peut-être la jeune-fille qui l'a fâché ? ».

Il ordonne à son Sergent de juger la vendeuse de tomates, qui à son avis, a gâté la cérémonie.

Le Sergent annonce à la vendeuse :

– « Ordre nous a été donné ... L'ordre de t'interroger, de recueillir tes aveux et puis de t'arrêter. »

– « Pour quelle raison ? »

Et le Sergent de répondre :

– « Tu as gâté la fête. Tu l'as perturbée ; tu as gâté l'accueil ; le Personnage s'est fâché, il a écourté son voyage et n'a plus proféré un seul mot. Nous devions déjeuner avec lui, nous étions invités, les choses ont mal tourné et nous n'y sommes pas allés. »

– « Mais moi j'ai chanté pour et j'ai vu qu'il se divertissait ! »

– « Eh bien maintenant tu chanteras en prison. »

– « C'est si facile que ça de m'envoyer en prison ? Sergent, il y a une loi ! »

– « Il y a une loi ! C'est toi qui devais savoir qu'il y a une loi quand tu as gâté la fête. Et au nom de la loi, ouvrez les registres, nous devons commencer l'interrogatoire. »

Le Sergent poursuit :

– « L'interrogatoire veut savoir : qui t'a payée ? Pourquoi tu es venue ? Pourquoi tu as salué ? Pourquoi tu as marché ? Pourquoi tu es revenue ? Pourquoi tu es restée ? Pourquoi tu as gâté la fête?... Il n'y a personne qui n'ait pas quelqu'un derrière lui. Ecoute-moi et avoue ! ».

Elle avouer en chantant :

– « Vendeuse je suis, et vivre ai besoin ; / ma famille est simple et dans le besoin. / Ce chariot et rien / d'autre fait vivre tous les miens. / Sergent, Sergent, écris bien : / vendeuse je suis et vivre ai besoin. ».

– « Ça ne va pas, ça ne va pas ! / Ce n'est pas une déposition, / une déposition utile, / utile à l'enquête. / On doit pouvoir s'en servir dans l'enquête ; / utile, elle doit être utile, utile. »

– « Vendeuse je suis, et vivre ai besoin ; / ma famille est simple et dans le besoin. / Ce chariot remorque des frères derrière lui, / oisillons qui d'ails n'ont point ! / Sergent, note bien ! / Sur le registre écris bien : / oisillons qui d'ails n'ont point. »

Mais les gardes écrivent :

– « Vendeuse je suis et vivre ai besoin. / Ils m'ont dit, contre la fouille de prendre soin, / de gâcher l'accueil / et qu'ils me paieraient bien ! »

La vendeuse proteste :

– « Ce n'est pas juste ! / Ce n'est pas juste ! / Je refuse de signer. ».

Le Gouverneur demande au Sergent la déposition de la vendeuse et voilà ce qu'il lui convient de lire :

– « Vendeuse ne suis / et de légumes, point. / Une récompense ils m'ont mise dans la main. / Ce chariot est une mise en scène. / Il y a autre chose derrière cette mise en scène. »

Il ordonne de l'arrêter provisoirement et d'avouer devant le juge. Mais elle se défend en disant :

– « Pourquoi vous m'arrêtez / et d'avance m'emprisonnez ? / Et si raison se trouve, / demain le juge va m'innocenter. »

– « Très juste ! Nous pouvons ne pas t'arrêter maintenant, mais à condition que quelqu'un se porte garant pour toi... Quelqu'un qui soit riche, / quelqu'un de très important ; / une de ces personnes qui donnent des réceptions ; que l'on invite à leur tour à des réceptions ; / de ces gens qui font des voyages en bateau ; / de ces gens qui fréquentent les métropoles ; / quelqu'un de grand, quoi ! / Quelqu'un d'important. »

– « Quelqu'un d'important ne se porterait jamais garant. Mais moi, j'ai quelqu'un qui garantit pour moi... Mes petits frères, / mes petits frères. / Je dois encore les nourrir ; / la nuit il faut les couvrir, / le matin les réveiller, / le soir les mettre au lit. / C'est eux qui à cette terre me lient, / qui sur cette terre sont ma garantie. / C'est eux, c'est eux, c'est eux ma garantie. / Ma vraie prison, ce sont mes petits frères / et entre l'amour et la faim, / ma maison et ses murs de larmes sont ma prison. »

Touché par son discours, le Gouverneur ordonne à son Sergent :

– « Sergent, vu qu'elle a des petits frères, remets-la en liberté sous caution. »

Le Sergent ordonne :

– « Ce qu'a dit le Gouverneur, tu l'as entendu? Il nous faut une garantie. Tu nous laisses ton chariot et les légumes qui sont dessus, et tu peux t'en aller jusqu'à ce qu'on te dise de te représenter. »

Il confisque son chariot jusqu'au procès, en attendant le jugement. Quant aux légumes, le Sergent rassure la vendeuse :

– « Ne crains rien, ils sont au frigo. »

L'acte de convocation est transféré au tribunal, les journaux ont critiqué la conduite de la jeune vendeuse. La vente est interdite sur la place comme sur toutes les places. Ceux qui sont du côté du pouvoir ont déjà témoigné.

Une vieille femme lui raconte les complicités qui existent entre gouverneurs, gendarmerie et juges et lui conseille de se procurer un bon avocat.

Voilà l'avocat sans clients qui se présente sur la place, mais la vendeuse ne lui propose que des tomates. Après avoir consulté le philosophe Deleuze, avocat de l'au-delà, en un langage professionnel incompréhensible et comique, il lui répond :

– « Celui qui paie en tomates n'obtient qu'une salade ».

Les vendeurs arrivent sur la place vide, la veille du procès avec leurs chandelles en chantant et l'invitent à rester tranquille, car il faudra plus d'une audience pour la juger. Dans dix ans on n'aura même pas encore prononcé un arrêt :

– « L'amnistie arrivera, elle est au-dessus de la loi ; elle est comme le vent, comme la neige et quand elle arrivera, combien de condamnations la loi aura déjà accumulées, combien d'amendes... Et l'amnistie les lui balaira ... Demain les choses s'arrangeront, cette nuit, mettez-vous à chanter. Allez ne vous faites plus de soucis pour vos chariots, l'important c'est que la place soit pleine ».

Ils se lancent ensemble, chantent avec elle en dansant et expriment leur solidarité, conscients qu'elle n'est qu'un bouc émissaire.

La solidarité des vendeurs l'encourage et elle se lance en chantant « Je suis l'oiseau du soleil, la fleur de la liberté »

'ana 'aṣfūrit eš-šams,	أنا عصفورة الشمس	Je suis l'oiseau du soleil,
'ana zahrit el-herriyyi,	أنا زهرة الجريي	La fleur de la liberté,
'ana wardit el-masāfi,	أنا وردة المسافي	La rose de l'espace,
marba l-ḥafāfi,	مرّبي الحفافي	Sur talus, a pris place,
maktūbi 'a drāj,	مكتوبي ع دراج	Gravée sur les marches,
w maktūbi 'a jsūrit el-mayyi.	ومكتوبي ع جسورة الميّي	Inscrite sur ponts d'eau enjambée.
'ana zahrit el-herriyyi,	أنا زهرة الجريي	Je suis la fleur de la liberté.
'ana 'aṣfūrit eš-šams,	أنا عصفورة الشمس	Je suis l'oiseau du soleil.

<i>Ḍawwu 'nadīl el-maḥabbi</i>	ضَوُّوا قَتْدِيلَ الْمَحَبِّي	Allumez la lampe de l'amour,
<i>'abl ḥbūb er-rīḥ,</i>	قَتِيلُ هُبُوبِ الرِّيحِ	Avant que vent ne mugisse,
<i>'abl el-manāyir ma tḏī'</i>	قَتِيلُ الْمَنَائِرِ مَ تَضِيْع	Avant que phares ne disparaissent,
<i>w yenmaḥa z-zīḥ.</i>	وَيُنْمَحَى الرِّيحِ	Horizon ne s'éclipse.
<i>W elli meswaddīn</i>	وَاللِّي مَسْوَدِّينَ	Ceux à la peau tannée
<i>'a hawa le-bḥūr</i>	عَ هَوَا الْبُحُورِ	Par la brise marine
<i>yḡarr 'u l-marākib,</i>	يُغَرِّقُوا الْمَرَائِبَ	Qu'ils fassent couler les navires,
<i>yḡarr 'u le-bḥūr.</i>	يُغَرِّقُوا الْبُحُورَ	Fassent sombrer aux marines.
<i>Dawwu 'nadīl el-maḥabbi</i>	ضَوُّوا قَتْدِيلَ الْمَحَبِّي	Allumez la lampe de l'amour
<i>'ala byūt en-nās,</i>	عَلَى بُيُوتِ النَّاسِ	Sur tous les logis,
<i>'abelma yenhadd el-ward</i>	قَتْلَمَا يَنْهَدُ الْوَرْدَ	Avant que roses ne se rompent
<i>w yūsa 'el-byāb.</i>	وَيُوسِعُ الْبَيَاسَ	Et sécheresse n'ait sévi.
<i>W elli 'a le-bwāb</i>	وَاللِّي عَ الْأَبْوَابِ	Qui somnole sur sa porte
<i>yeṭla 'u mn en-nawm,</i>	يَطْلَعُوا مِنَ النَّوْمِ	Sorte de son sommeil,
<i>ykassru le-bwāb</i>	يُكْسِرُوا الْأَبْوَابَ	Brise toutes les portes,
<i>w yethabbaṭ en-nawm.</i>	وَيُثَبِّطُ النَّوْمَ	Brise le sommeil.
<i>Ṭeli ' eḏ ḏaw</i>	طَلَعَ الضُّوْءُ	Le soleil s'est levé
<i>'a s sahl ele kbīr,</i>	عَ السَّهْلِ الْكَبِيرِ	Sur la plaine infinie,
<i>w ṭārit es-sama</i>	وُطَارَتِ السَّمَاءُ	Le ciel envolé
<i>'a jnāḥ el-'aṣafīr.</i>	عَ جُنَاحِ الْمَصَافِيرِ	Sur les ailes des oiseaux, fuit.
<i>Trukūni, trukūni,</i>	اَتْرُكُونِي! اَتْرُكُونِي!	Laissez-moi ! Oh, laissez-moi !
<i>trukūni, ḥallāni ṭīr.</i>	اَتْرُكُونِي! خَلُونِي طَيْر...	Oh laissez-moi donc voler !
<i>'ana 'aṣfūrīt eš-šams,</i>	أَنَا عَصْفُورَةُ الشَّمْسِ	Je suis l'oiseau du soleil,
<i>'ana zahrit el-ḥerriyyi,</i>	أَنَا زَهْرَةُ الْحَرِّيِّ	La fleur de la liberté,
<i>'ana wardīt el-masāfi,</i>	أَنَا وَرْدَةُ الْمَسَافِي	La rose de l'espace,
<i>marba l-ḥafāfi,</i>	مَرْبَى الْحَفَافِي	Sur talus, a pris place,
<i>maktūbi 'a drāj,</i>	مَكْتُوبِي عَ دَرَجِ	Gravée sur les marches,
<i>w maktūbi 'a jsūrīt el-mayyi.</i>	وَمَكْتُوبِي عَ جُسُورَةِ الْمَيِّ	Inscrite sur ponts d'eau enjambée.
<i>'ana zahrit el-ḥerriyyi,</i>	أَنَا زَهْرَةُ الْحَرِّيِّ	Je suis la fleur de la liberté.
<i>'ana 'aṣfūrīt eš-šams,</i>	أَنَا عَصْفُورَةُ الشَّمْسِ	Je suis l'oiseau du soleil.

2.4. Deuxième acte

La scène s'ouvre avec le chef des balayeurs qui chante :

<i>Min zamān b 'īd b 'īd</i>	مِنْ زَمَانٍ بَعِيدٍ بَعِيدٍ	Il y a bien longtemps, longtemps
<i>Ḥabbayt bnayya ḥelwi</i>	حَبَّبْتُ بِنْيَةَ جِلْوِي	J'ai aimé une belle jeune fille.
<i>Teba tkannis 'eddām el-bāb</i>	تَبَقِي تَكْنَسُ قِدَامَ الْبَابِ	Qui balayait devant sa porte
<i>W-teḏḥak deḥki ḥelwi</i>	وَيَضْحَكُ ضِجْجِي جِلْوِي	Et souriait d'un beau sourire.
<i>W-'eb 'a 'a bayta rūḥ</i>	وَأَبَقِي عَ بَيْتِي رُوحَ	J'allais jusqu'à sa maison,
<i>'ū 'af 'a s-sakt 'bāla</i>	أَوْقَفُ عَ السَّكْتِ قَبَالَا	Je me postais en silence,
<i>W-ḥiyyi tkannis 'eddām el-bāb</i>	وَهَيِّي تَكْنَسُ قِدَامَ الْبَابِ	Elle balayait devant sa porte
<i>W-teḥki 'eṣṣa l-ḥāla</i>	وَتَحْكِي قِصَّةَ لِحَالَا	En se racontant une histoire.

<i>W- 'ala kitr el-mašāwīr</i>	وعلى كتر المشاوير	Et je suis venu tant de fois,
<i>Hubba nağnašli 'albi</i>	حُبًا نَعْمَشَلِي قَلْبِي	Son amour a blessé mon cœur ;
<i>Šurna nkannis 'ana w-hiyyi</i>	صُرْنَا نَكْنَس أَنَا وَهِي	Nous nous sommes mis à balayer
<i>Taht d-drāj el-maḥabbi</i>	تَحْت أَدْرَاجِ الْمَحَبِّي	Ensemble, sous les marches de l'amour.
<i>Lākin bi-hawni yawm</i>	لَكِنْ بِهَوْنِي يَوْم	Mais un jour, elle s'est éloignée,
<i>Hajaretni el-ḥelwi w- 'esyit</i>	هَجَرْتَنِي الْجَلْوِي وَقَسَيْت	La belle m'a quitté et oublié ;
<i>Taraketli l-mekensi hdiyyi</i>	تَرَكَتْلِي الْمَكْنَسِي هَدِيي	Elle m'a offert son balai,
<i>W-be 'dit 'anni w-nesyit</i>	وَبَعَدْت عَنِّي وَنَسَيْت	Elle m'a quitté et oublié.
<i>Dāyir halla 'kannis</i>	دَايِرْ هَلَقْ كَنْس	Maintenant, je viens balayer
<i>Bi-sāḥāt ktār</i>	بِسَاحَاتِ كَثَار	Sur tant de grandes places ;
<i>W- 'etzakkar el-ḥelwi</i>	وَأَتَذَكَّرُ الْجَلْوِي	Me rappelant la belle,
<i>'ala bāb ed-dār</i>	عَلَى بَابِ الدَّارِ	Sur sa porte, sans cesse.

Alors la vendeuse lui demande :

- « Holà chef des balayeurs ! Quelle heure est-il ? »
- « Pourquoi tu veux savoir l'heure ? »
- « Au lever du jour, on doit me juger. A quelle heure se lève le jour ? »
- « Quand les balayeurs arriveront, le jour se lèvera »
- « C'est grâce à vous qu'il se lève ? »
- « Bien sûr ! Il arrive et il s'arrête en dehors de la ville, on lui astique le trottoir et on lui nettoie les places de peur qu'il ne se blesse. »

Les balayeurs se lancent en chantant :

- « Nos balais sont aussi rapides que les chevaux... »

La place est prête au passage des ouvriers, des fonctionnaires, des élèves, des commerçants et des citoyens. Les balayeurs ont aussi leur morale. Ils balaient aussi l'injustice.

Le Gouverneur, déguisé, se promène pour capter l'humeur des gens¹². La vendeuse qui avait passé la nuit sur la place, le reconnaît à sa voix et le supplie de l'aider, mais lui, à regret s'excuse :

- « Non, ma fille, non ! Je suis opprimé ; je suis une porte, une porte épaisse : on siège derrière moi et on me jette les gens à la figure. Que veux-tu que je fasse ? J'ai subi des pressions. Ceux qui sont au-dessus de moi m'oppriment et moi, j'opprime ceux qui sont en-dessous. Et vous,

¹² Ce code de conduite nous rappelle le déguisement du Calife Haroun al-Rachid (765-809) pour se mêler au peuple, d'après les *Mille et Une Nuits*. Son règne coïncide avec l'apogée de la dynastie des Abbassides et le règne de Charlemagne (742-814). Obscurci par les révoltes fiscales, les échecs diplomatiques et les révolutions de palais, le Calife va laisser peu à peu son pouvoir tomber aux mains des ministres et des conseillers.

vous êtes les derniers. Vous êtes les fondations et ce sont les fondations qui soutiennent l'édifice. Réjouissez-vous parce que la Providence vous a choisis pour être les fondations de l'édifice. »

Bref, il doit justifier publiquement l'échec de la cérémonie et il lui faut un bouc émissaire.

L'avocat sans clients la supplie de le charger de l'affaire tant que les tomates sont encore fraîches.

- « ...Mais tu dois attendre la fin de l'audience. Tu les auras après. »
- « Pas même un petit panier d'avance ! »
- « Mais si on me les a confisquées ! »...
- « Le philosophe dit : aujourd'hui on paie comptant et demain on fera crédit. ... Ma fille, écoute-moi ! Charge-moi de l'affaire tant qu'il fait encore frais ! Quand le soleil sera plus haut le prix du procès le sera aussi !

La vendeuse décide de se défendre seule au nom du peuple.

La cour arrive, la balance de la justice se lève, les colonnes de la justice se dressent ; le juge et ses conseillers ont déjeuné. Le procès commence, au nom du peuple on annonce :

- « l'audience est ouverte... »

Le chef d'accusation lui reproche avec témoignages à l'appui : d'être récemment arrivée en hâte à la réception de bienvenue du Personnage et d'avoir, de façon provocatrice, enfreint le protocole, d'avoir dérangé le Personnage qui a écourté la fête, a annulé le déjeuner, et personne n'a mangé.

La vendeuse déclare :

- « Je suis venue comme ça, ils m'ont traînée comme ça. Je ne sais pas ce qu'ils ont dit et comment ils sont arrivés. Je suis innocente. »

Elle conclut en disant qu'elle voudrait un accord à l'amiable, mais si le juge n'est pas content, alors ça ne sert à rien de parler. Le juge appelle les témoins oculaires, les commerçants, le Comité, le Sergent et les gardes. Vu qu'il y a de nombreux témoins, pour que l'audience ne se prolonge pas trop, il les fait témoigner tous ensemble. Puis il invite les procureurs qui interpellent la vendeuse :

- « Jeune fille ! Quand tu as su qu'il était interdit d'être là, pourquoi n'as-tu pas quitté la place ? »

– « Je me suis dit : regarde le Personnage pendant qu’il passe sur notre place... Je n’étais pas la seule à regarder ! ... Moi, je me suis approchée, je l’ai salué, je lui ai souri et j’ai chanté pour lui... »

Le juge leur demande :

– « Pourquoi est-ce que le chant est un outrage ?... »

Les procureurs répondent :

– « Le chant en soi, n’est pas un outrage, mais quand nous connaissons le motif pour lequel elle a chanté, alors l’outrage tombera. »

La vendeuse répond :

– « Tout le monde dansait et chantait... J’ai chanté pour lui, parbleu ! Qu’est-ce qu’il y a de mal à ça ?... »

Le juge invite le Ministère public, qui l’accuse lui aussi :

– « Monsieur le Président, messieurs les conseillers. A la base, il y a les motifs : Le respect prévalait chez les gens. Ils ont chanté avec sentiment et respect. Mais la jeune vendeuse a chanté pour une autre raison, elle a chanté sous le charme de la rébellion ... C’est-à-dire que le motif est suspect et le tribunal doit juger la fille avec fermeté et lui donner une leçon. »

La vendeuse s’adresse au juge :

– « Je demande qu’on me reconnaisse innocente, que ton affection me protège, qu’on me rende mon chariot et qu’on me renvoie chez moi. »

Le juge appelle l’avocat de la défense ! La vendeuse lui annonce que faute de sa misère personne n’a accepté de la représenter.

– « Mais, vendeuse ! L’avocat est nécessaire, parce que la loi a des méandres, des espaces offerts à l’interprétation. Toute seule, tu seras perdue, tu seras prise au piège de la loi ; la loi est une ville d’acier ; seuls y règnent la nuit, la soif et le froid. Tu as besoin d’un guide et le guide, c’est l’avocat : il est la chauve-souris de la loi, vêtu de noir et paré du long châle. »

La cour doit prononcer la sentence. Silence ! crie l’annonceur. Tout le monde se lève. Seul le juge reste assis, avec son Code pénal exposé comme libretto, il joue

sur son *qanoun*¹³ et ses conseillers énoncent la sentence en chantant un genre populaire syro-mésopotamien en arabe standard, pour rendre plus officiel leur verdict, mais aussi pour se moquer de l'équité judiciaire.

La cour juge la vendeuse coupable, lui confisque son chariot qu'elle propose aux enchères et empêche les vendeurs d'étaler leurs marchandises sur les places publiques. C'est au Sergent que revient l'exécution de la sentence.

Le public chante :

– « Vive la justice! Vive la justice! Vive, vive la justice! »

La vendeuse leur chante :

– « Nous avons grandi ensemble, / ensemble nous avons marché / et ensemble nous avons passé nos nuits. / Se peut-il que la séparation efface nos noms?... »

Dans la deuxième scène de la deuxième partie, les vendeurs se précipitent sur la place, curieux de savoir ce qui s'est passé et de savoir ce qu'ils pourraient faire. Vaincue, mais rebelle, elle leur annonce que ce que le pouvoir a décrété contre les pauvres fait loi.

La vendeuse leur raconte avec ironie et simplicité les mystères du procès :

– « Que voulez-vous qu'il soit arrivé? L'homme a été battu. Son bon cœur est devenu fer et or. Ce qu'écrivent les puissants est écrit sur les gens. Bref tout était déjà écrit ... L'arrêt n'est pas contre moi, il est contre vous. Quand ils m'ont jugée, c'est vous qu'ils ont jugés, quand ils m'ont chassée, c'est vous qu'ils ont chassés...

– « Et tu ne leur a pas dit que nous avons des enfants ? »

– « Ils savent bien que les gens ne sortent pas d'un rocher et que les enfants qui s'ébattent dans les rues ont des parents. Et ils leur demandent quand même s'ils ont des parents ? Or, leurs parents, c'est nous et nos semblables ; nous ne pouvons pas les envoyer à l'école et comme ça, nous continuerons à naître vendeurs et eux, gouvernants... »

– « Alors, faites-nous partir ! Chargeons nos enfants sur nos chariots et que les gens voient que les vendeurs s'en vont ! On verra bien s'ils survivent sans nous. »

¹³ Le *qanoun* (en arabe *al-qānūn* القانون) dériverait du grec « κανόν » (signifiant « la mesure / la règle »), est un instrument à cordes pincées de la famille des cithares sur table. On lui attribue une origine grecque ou assyrienne. Le choix de cet instrument pour énoncer la sentence n'est pas fortuit : le mot arabe *qānūn* veut dire aussi « loi / droit » et le Code de Hamourabi est babylonien.

– « Si toi, tu t'en vas, un autre marchand de fruits et légumes arrive ; c'est un fait qui naît du besoin, de l'attrait du travail et de l'appât du gain. Il s'arrête sur le trottoir et attire le chaland. »

Les vendeurs veulent savoir comment ça s'est passé au tribunal :

– « Les toges noires sont entrées, tout le monde s'est tu et s'est levé. Les deux plateaux de la balance étaient parfaitement alignés ; nous avons attendu que le juge prenne la parole. La justice est plus lourde que le rocher. On a ouvert le procès au nom du peuple... A ce moment-là, je me suis réjouie et j'ai dit : 'voilà ! Ils vont me déclarer innocente. Ils se sont mis à parler, ils ont ouvert les sceaux et ont parlé ; et aucun mot n'est tombé à terre, tous sont tombés dans les sceaux. Et moi, pauvre ingénue - qui de toute ma vie n'ai jamais fait de mal à une mouche - j'ai trouvé en face de moi une foule d'ennemis que je n'ai jamais vus de ma vie. Ils se sont levés, se sont mis à parler avec énergie ; ils m'ont précédée et moi, je les ai précédés. Le juge a frappé sur la table ; l'avocat de la partie civile s'est mis à lancer des imprécations et à demander qu'on me mette en prison, car c'est lui qui accuse ; et en revanche, la partie civile s'est révélée parente du droit public. Et nous qui pensions que le malveillant c'était le sergent !... La sentence est tombée et le chariot sera vendu aux enchères ! »

La vente aux enchères commence. Le Sergent annonce :

– « Acheteurs, réunissez-vous autour de moi, l'endroit n'est pas très grand ! C'est ce chariot qui doit être vendu. Allez courage ! Commissaire-priseur, commence la vente ! Mets le chariot aux enchères ! »

La vendeuse proteste :

– « Et qui touchera le prix de la vente ? »
– « C'est le gouvernement qui le touchera. »
– « Et pourquoi c'est le gouvernement qui le touche ? Il n'a pas d'enfants lui ! »

Le Sergent lui répond que les directeurs, les employés... la police, les gardes et lui-même sont ses enfants. Elle proteste, disant que ce chariot est tout ce qu'elle possède.

L'enchère du chariot s'arrête à cent livres ! La vendeuse apostrophe alors celui qui a payé le chariot :

– « Et pour cent livres, tu veux acheter toute notre vie ? Ce chariot est l'œuvre de mon père. Il s'en est servi pour vendre. Moi, je l'ai utilisé pour vendre et il fait désormais partie de la famille. Et tu voudrais le prendre pour cent livres ? »

Attendri par les paroles de la vendeuse, il lui promet de le lui rendre, si le soir même elle lui rembourse les cents livres qu'il a payées.

Soudain on voit le Personnage mystérieux, promeneur solitaire, loin de son palais et de ses gardes. Elle l'invoque et lui répond. Or, comme elle n'avait jamais entendu sa voix elle lui demande étonnée :

- « Je pensais que tu ne parlais pas ! »
- « Quand il y a beaucoup de monde, je ne parle pas, parce que chacun comprend ce qui lui convient. Mais quand je suis seul, je parle, certes, je parle. »

Elle lui demande de lui prêter cent livres pour reprendre son chariot.

- « Absolument pas. Je ne porte pas d'argent sur moi... C'est moi qui suis devenu tout l'argent et l'argent ne porte pas d'argent. Toi, qui es-tu ? »
- « Je suis la vendeuse de tomates. »

Le Personnage ignore tout de l'affaire. Il lui parle des tomates et de sa jeunesse, lui demande pourquoi autrefois les tomates étaient meilleures, plus économiques, plus petites et plus goûteuses. Elle lui demande alors, si la jeune fille qui a chanté pour lui le jour de l'accueil, l'a dérangé.

- « Absolument pas ! Absolument pas ! Elle m'a ému... »
- « Cette fille, c'était moi. »
- « Ils t'ont payée ? »
- « On m'a condamnée, on a vendu mon chariot !... Et on a interdit de vendre sur la place ; on a chassé les vendeurs de légumes. »

Le Personnage est un être humain comme tout le monde, il aime la lumière, mais tous assombrissent les pièces, estropient ses ordres... Autrefois les gens s'asseyaient sur les bancs. Tout le monde désormais veut occuper un siège et il n'y a pas assez de sièges pour tout le monde.

- « Oui, moi je pense aux problèmes de tout le monde, mais personne ne pense aux miens... je ne les laisserai jamais te faire du mal, mon enfant, je donnerai l'ordre de te rendre ton chariot et de vous autoriser à vendre sur la place. »
- « Mais j'ai peur que tu ne donnes l'ordre, et qu'ensuite, celui-ci ne prenne un autre chemin... Et que le Gouverneur et le Sergent ne se mettent à manigancer quelque chose contre moi. »
- « Tu m'as fait peur. Il y a longtemps que je ne me promène pas et maintenant, cela fait deux heures que je me promène. Peut-être qu'en mon absence ils manigancent quelque chose contre moi aussi. »

La vendeuse conclut l'opérette par une chansonnette que l'on entend souvent dans la bouche des Libanais :

<p><i>Jīna la ḥellāl el-`eṣaṣ</i> <i>Ta nḥell `eṣṣetna,</i> <i>We-l`īna fī `endu `eṣṣa</i> <i>Ya-maḥla `eṣṣetna.</i> <i>Qell wāḥid `endu `eṣṣa,</i> <i>W-qell `eṣṣa `elha `eṣṣa,</i> <i>We-byehlaṣ el-`umr</i> <i>W-ma bteḥlaṣ el-`eṣṣa.</i></p>	<p>جينا لجالال القمص ت نحل قصتنا ولقينا فيه عندو قصة يا محلا قصتنا كل واحد عندو قصة وكل قصة لها قصة وبيخلص العمر وما بتخلص القصة</p>	<p>Nous sommes venus chez celui Qui résout les problèmes. Et nous avons constaté que Pire est son problème. Chacun a sa propre histoire Et toute histoire a son histoire. La vie s'achève, mais Ne finira plus l'histoire.</p>
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NARRATIO BREVIS IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA: FROM THE FIRST *ITTIGĀHĀT* TO THE RECENT PRODUCTION OF ḤALDŪN AL-DĀLĪ

Abstract. Narratio brevis, in the renewed form of the short story (SS), gained the spotlight in the Arabian Peninsula and played the role of cultural *rendez-vous* or *multaqā* in Arabic. Michalak-Pikulska noted that the short story (*qiṣṣa qaṣīra* QQ) expresses the awareness and sense of injustice suffered in many contexts. In addition to this, Ramsay and Bū-Ša‘īr summarized some main tendencies of the short story, spanning from (magical) realism to folklore, up to (refuse of) modernism. War and conflict are of course found in the Kuwaiti narrative, triggered by the Gulf War events. Al-Ḥarrāṭ individuated the rise of a new sensitivity (*ḥassāsiyya ḡadīda*) as the underpinning factor for the QQ, and he also defined it a phenomenon of transgeneric writing (*al-kitāba ‘abra al-naw‘iyya*). Taking into due account all the above, and the historical factors that framed the literary production, this paper traces the main steps and literary developments of the SS in the Peninsula and focuses on the recent production of Khaldoun al-Dali (Ḥaldūn al-Dālī), a young Yemeni writer who is author of very short stories. The aim is to provide an overall but representative outlook of the literary developments, after al-Faraḡ the Kuwaiti pioneer of SSs in the area.

Keywords: short story, very short story, Arabian Peninsula, Yemen

1. Debates and developments

The literary virtue of *aurea brevitatis* (golden brevity), together with its stylistic value and importance as innovative intellectual behavior, has always been recognized since the classical Greek and Latin ages.

Plato, in his *Protagoras*, distinguished between the effective brevity of the Spartans (βραχυλογία τις Λακωνική) and the wordiness (μακρολογία) of the

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Athenians Sophist philosophers². Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* connected the idea of brevity in exposition with successful persuasion and ethics. Cicero dedicated wide space to the importance of *brevitas* in his *De inventione*³, considering it essential both for the storytelling (*narratio*) and its organization (*partitio*). Quintilianus too, master of rhetoric, praised brevity in his *Institutio oratoria*⁴, where he took up the argumentations that already appeared in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the oldest Latin treaty on rhetoric of uncertain discussed authorship.

Brevity also characterized the poetry of eminent classics, like the Greek author Callimachus and the Latin Catullus. The latter in particular was an eminent representative of the so-called νεώτεροι or the younger ones among poets, and their *ars* (art) resulted from *labor limae* (meticulous finishing) and *brevitas*, instead of alignment to the canons of traditional schools or literary circles. Such voluntary misalignment has represented the most precious ally of philosophy, rhetoric, and artistic writing across many different eras and civilizations up to today.

In the Arabian Peninsula-the target area of this paper-brevity in writing gained the spotlight during the twentieth century with its first *ittiġāhāt* (tendencies) and remains still productive with many recent developments.

Specifically considering that area, Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Abdallāh wonders if the short story is to be considered a genre without roots, which does not deserve analysis nor studies, as a “satanic plant that has no form and no fruit to be hoped for” (1985: 185)⁵. He answered by defining the short story as an interdisciplinary artistic creation across psychology, literary criticism and sociology. All these concepts reinforce the idea that a connection exists between literature, society, and the writer’s expression of his experience of interacting with others, and such connection is fundamental.

First of all, it must be recognized that in the Peninsula the short story appeared later than in other Arab countries, only at the beginning of the 20th century.

As for the causes of such delay, they have been traced in cultural backwardness and in the lack of means of cultural production, as well as in a tribe-centered society, with no weight for the individuality and expression of the subject, which is the fulcrum instead of the short story.

Various scholars and literary critics have identified some causes of the delay in the appearance of the short story, by comparing it with other genres. Al-Ṭālib (1977: 360-405) compared it with the typology of *ḥikāya* and identified the major difference between the fluidity of the first and the greater technical discipline required for the writing of the second.⁶

² See *Protagoras* 343.b

³ See *De inventione* I, 27-31

⁴ See *Institutio oratoria* IV.2, 34-67

⁵ كالنبات الشيطاني لا شكل له، ولاثمر يرجى منه

⁶ انسيابية الحكاية وانضباط القصة.

The critic Nūriyya al-Rūmī (1982: 256-239) believes that a decisive factor has been the increase in the level of education in the area, thanks to the creation of non-religious schools. Another decisive factor was, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the influence of the press and magazines, such as *al-Hilāl*, *al-Ahrām*, *al-Manār*, whose echo spread also in the Peninsula, thanks to the experiences of travelers and merchants or thanks to some intellectuals from Hijaz and Iraq.

The increase in education and the circulation of magazines together, paved also the way for translation, thanks to which, in the words of Gibb (1963:160):

“In addition to journalism and original writing, a vital part in the development of modern Arabic literature was played by the translation of western literary works. These served not only as exercises in expanding the range of Arabic literary expression, but also as models, since not a few translators tried their hands at original compositions of the same kinds.”

The explosion of this new genre, however, occurs with the cultural renaissance that followed the Second World War in the period 1940-1980, following the discovery of oil, which in this region paved the way for the transformation of people from merchants, sea captains and divers, to workers in companies, institutions and ministries.

Regarding the connection of the SS with possible ancestors in the context of Arabic literature, Yūsuf al-Šārūnī noted that anecdotes and short narratives already belonged to the Arab literary tradition: *mağāzī*, *aḥādīṭ*, *maqāmāt*, folk literature in general. In addition to these, stories with a religious and moral background (2001: 42-43) were attested. Therefore, it cannot be said in absolute terms that the short story did not already exist because, to put it in the words of Al-Šārūnī, it would be like saying that houses did not exist, only because perhaps they did not exist in the same shape in which we later came to know them. The common idea is the one of ‘refuge’, which is also represented by a cave (ibidem: 10)⁷

The form of the short story is the prose, with wide space for both narration and dialogue. Since these are also typical characteristics of the novel, what is the difference between the two genres? Al-Šārūnī argues that the difference (ibidem: 52) is the same that exists between the cat and the tiger. It is a difference in quantity and size, measurable in the number of pages.

The main feature of the short story is that, thanks to the brevity, present, past and future intersect, while in the novel we find an ordered temporal sequence. The novel is a representation from the source to the estuary, while the short story is instead a depiction of a unique vortex on the surface of the river (ibid: 53)⁸.

⁷ وهذا شبيه بقولنا تماما ان الاقدمين لم يعرفوا البيوت، بمجرد انهم لم يسكنوا العمارات او الدارات التي نسكنها اليها، فكما ان تحديد المأوى هو كل ما يحمي الانسان... بحيث ينطبق هذا المعنى على الكهف

⁸ الرواية اذن - كما يقال - تصوير من المنبع الى المصب، اما القصة القصيرة فتصوير دوامة واحدة على سطح النهر

Furthermore, the novel presents winning themes and characters, while the story expresses loneliness and isolation. If the novel deals with the development of the characters in a temporal key, the short story observes them from a chosen angle, it does not offer a global vision.

Sabri Hafez assigned a hybrid origin to the short story. The delayed development of the story in the Arab world is not so late, but it is a distance of only two or three generations and the Arab art is not born for simple emulation.

“The emergence of a new literary genre is part of a lengthy and intricate process that changes people’s understanding of their society and their perceptions of themselves before changing the discourses that process their experience.” (Hafez 1993: 271)

The themes that take up the greatest field are that of identity and rights, the status of citizens and colonization, testifying to the strong impact played on the story by lived reality.

As for the main character of the short story, ‘Aṭīyya defined him as *al-rağul al-ṣağīr*, reiterating the anti-heroic tendency (in comparison to the novel, for example) and the weight of the individualistic dimension, therefore extremely modern (‘Aṭīyya 1977: 5-7).

Nūriyya al-Rūmī (1982:240) states that the first short story was published in the magazine al-Kuwait and was authored by the poet Khaled al-Farağ with the title “Munīra” in the number 6/7 of 1930 volume 2, pages 208-218. This contrasts with what Muhammad Hasan Abdallah affirms, who recognized as the first story the one published in the number 4, year 1947 of al-Bu‘ta, a Kuwaiti magazine. The title was “*Bayna al-mā’ wa as-samā’*”, Between water and sky “, signed by Walad ‘Arib as stage name of the real Khaled Khalaf.

2. Selection of short stories representatives of the Peninsula

Emirates

The pioneers expressed reformist ideas against the social condition, denounced general ignorance and expressed against backward systems of relationships and traditions based on backward thinking. It is true that, among the countries of the area, the Emirates offer a rich production of short stories, and its tendencies have been schematized in four main ones by al-Rašīd Bū-Ša‘īr (Bū-Ša‘īr 1998: 33):

1. *al-ittiğāh al-rūmansī*, the romantic tendency, exemplified by the works of Šayḥa al-Nākhī, ‘Abd al- ‘Azīz al-Šarḥān and Su‘ād al-‘Uraymī;
2. *al-ittiğāh al-wāqi‘ī*, the realist tendency, typical of Muḥammad al-Murr and ‘ Abd al-Ḥamīd Aḥmad;

3. *al-ittiġāh al-ramzī aw al-usṭūrī*, the allegorical or mythical tendency, as in ‘Abdallāh Ṣaqar, Maryam Ğ. Faraġ or Salmā M. Sayf;
4. *al-ittiġāh al-wuġūdī*, the existentialist tendency, as in the stories of ‘Alī Abū al-Rīš.

Many Emirati women distinguished as authors, and taking up the previous classification, with reference to the realist trend, Michalak-Pikulska (2013: 157) points out that the main themes are that of suffering and pain, despair, sadness and disappointment. In particular, when the SS deals with the events of arranged marriage, and consequently the lack of respect for the will of women, the denial of freedom of expression and opinion for young people and the marginalization of their aspirations.

Maryam Ğum‘a Faraġ wrote *al-Ġāfa wa-1-Maġnūn*, *The acacia and Maġnūn* from 1994, which falls within the trend of magical realism for the symbolism linked to the name of the characters and their stories, modeled on Arabic folk literature. Acacia is the strongest plant in the desert and also gives off a pleasant scent, emblem of feminine charm; Maġnūn is instead the madman of love, bewitched by the charm of the woman. The story of Faraġ tells the story of two young people from two different tribes. Al-Ġāfa, the acacia, is symbolically the name of the woman, in front of the charm of which Maġnūn is unable to hold back his feelings, contravening the endogamous custom as the law of the tribes. Al-Ġāfa generates a son and, despite the slander of the people, she will try to strengthen his bond with him by educating him with epic tales set in the desert, based on a sense of honor and blood bond. The boy will be so deeply involved and exalted by these narratives that he even asks his father for a duel, as in the style of a perfect warrior.

Salmā Maṭar Sayf is the author of *al-Ṭu‘bān*, *The snake*, contained in the 1991 Hāġar collection. Abū Šu‘ayr’s definition of magical realism or *al wāqi‘iyya al-siḥriyya* (Abū Šu‘ayr 1998:45-49) particularly fits the tale (Ramsay 2003: 379-381), which is grafted on the popular beliefs of the area, as well as superstitions that resist despite the forced modernization of society. The snake in question is the one in which the protagonist transforms himself, after a talk with the gardener of his villa. The man is overwhelmed by the sufferings of love and exchanging a brief dialogue with the gardener discovers that the worker is living a pleasant relationship. The protagonist manages to convey his discomfort and his pessimism to the gardener, causing him a crisis and making him lose his serenity, so that the initial dialogue turns into a quarrel. The quarrel and the story end with the transformation, of the protagonist into a snake, who takes refuge in some crevices of the ground in a skillful and shy way like a spirit, a *ġinn*, having by now lost all human semblance. This leaves a sense of vagueness and incompleteness, in the frame of alienation exemplified by the gardener, disoriented after the dialogue with the protagonist.

Oman

Omani writers, especially men, express their pride about ancient times and traditions. Ḥamad ibn Rašīd ibn Rāšīd is interested in historical events and Omani cultural heritage as sources of awareness and patriotism. This interest emerges from the collection *Zaġārīd aṣ-ṣahīl*, “The neighing of horses” from 1990. A story in this collection is titled ‘Azzān, from the name of the son of a fighter against Portuguese domination, who died in battle.

Al-naḥla al-ṣaġīra, “The little palm” is another story, where nature frames events and characterizes identity. This mirrors the structure of the preambles of pre-Islamic poems. A grandfather tries to pass on the secrets of palm cultivation to his young grandson, taking care that the ancient wisdom is not lost. The palm is a symbol of wealth, affection and has a high identity value, which seems to be unbearable by any modern alternative.

Attachment to the homeland is historically motivated as a heroic struggle against the Portuguese, who controlled Oman from 1507 until the Omani *reconquista* at the times of Imam Nāṣir ibn Muršīd. The first step was regaining possession of the two ports of Maṭraḥ and Šūr, then definitively of the fortress of Muscat, until the defeat of the Portuguese in 1650.

‘Alī al-Kalbānī deals with religious and nationalistic themes together. The collection *Širā’ ma’a al-amwāġ*, “Fight with the waves”, dates back to 1987. The story that gives the collection its name is the story of two brothers in a quarrel, due to the disagreement between their respective wives. The brothers, however, find themselves working together on the same fishing boat, including on the eve of the great Islamic festival of *al-Aḏḥā*, when a storm – later interpreted as punishment for violating the sacred family bond with hostile mutual feelings – causes the boat to pitch heavily. The brothers, shipwrecked, find themselves falling into each other’s arms, finally reconciling because they are happy to have been saved with the arrival on the coast. The sea – probably to be read as the hand of the almighty God in this case – is the master of the lives of the Omanis, and only the union and cooperation among human beings can put a stop to the constant existential precariousness.

Despite the monotony and misery that emerge from this and from other pictures of Omani life painted in the SSs, it is however clear that the sea and the desert, with their palm trees and fish, certainly offer more sustenance to the body and especially to the soul than oil, which is an unreliable resource, and cannot last forever.

Kuwait

In Kuwait, Michalak-Pikulska (1991: 84) assigns to the short story the role of claiming individual freedoms, especially for the woman regarding the choice of

profession, social role and husband. Concerning women status, Dianu (2002: 69-84) reminds us that two important women's organizations were founded in Kuwait in 1963, namely the Women's Cultural and Social Society (WCSS, formerly known as the Cultural and Social Society, CSS) and the Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS).

A typical expression of women claims is found in the writings of Laylā al-'Uṭmān: *Imra'a fī inā'*, *A woman in a trap* from the *Al-Raḥīl, The departure* collection; *Fī al-layl ta'tī al-'uyūn*, *Night Visions* from *Al-ḥubb la-hu ṣuwar, Representations of love* 1992; *Fātiḥa taḥtār mawtaha*, *Fatiha chooses her death* in 1987; *Ḥālat ḥubb maḡnūna*, *The condition of love is crazy* from 1990, in *Yawmiyyāt al-ṣabr wa-l-murr, A Diary of Patience and Bitterness* or *Al-ḥawāḡiz al-sawdā, Black Checkpoints*.

In Al-'Uṭmān's work, women express conflicting feelings, they are often prey to anxiety and these moods sometimes lead them to commit crimes. Women rebel against the psychological and physical conditions imposed, the cause of their pains. However, they are unable to completely free themselves although they are no longer submissive as before the rebellion was enacted. The main characteristic of the author's story is a deep sense of isolation, experienced as a consequence of the disintegration of human relationships. The SSs as a whole express particular individual situations and subjective points of view, which give a poetic quality to prose writings, rich in existential reflections. Laylā al-'Uṭmān (1979) with *Min milaff imra'a*, *File of a woman* narrates episodes of violence and opens the way to the so-called 'murder literature' in Kuwait (Tijani 2009: 51).

The protagonist is an unnamed 14-years-old girl, who confesses before a court of being involved in the killing of her husband. In retracing the dynamics and motivations, she claims to have been forced into marriage with the seventy-years-old man, three years earlier. She reports that the worst came when she realized the man was sexually inactive. This fact, together with other reasons, led her to kill him.

Saudi Arabia

Layla al-Uḥaydib published, among other collections, *Qamīṣ aswad ṣaffāf*, *Transparent Black Shirt* in 2018. The writer has mainly dealt with the themes of repression and revelation, analyzed according to the experience of the female soul. The first, as a violation suffered by the woman on her personality, the second as a feeling of redemption that would induce her to show the traits of her subjectivity, due to the strong desire to succeed in enhancing her condition.

The very title of the collection *Transparent Black Shirt* evokes, with the black color, the suggestion and depth mixed with a sense of gloom; transparency, on

the other hand, symbolizes emotionality. Both characteristics are part of the woman's soul, who is sometimes devoted to full concealment, sometimes resorts to veiled tricks to conceal her moods in a society that does not allow her to conquer her space.

In the tale *Al-ğasad*, *The body* the heroine complains that the role of the female figure has been reduced to that of a machine controlled and calibrated for specific roles, obviously at the service of man. Ultimately, by pressing a specific button, it responds to certain functions, without being able to oppose any force and remaining powerless in front of what is programmed. The woman has become a machine with precise activities and timings to perform: at home, at work and in the context of a relationship. Her body is expropriated (*inḥilā' al-ğasad*) and alienated from her soul and will. The body is there for others and no longer belongs to her.⁹

3. Today's Yemen by Ḥaldūn al-Dālī

Moving to our times, Ḥaldūn al-Dālī (1984) is a young Yemeni writer, who has taken up the legacy of the short story and embarked on the path of the very short story. He published in 2018 the collection "Pile of Tears", *Rukām al-dumū'*. The title expresses the suffering and the difficulty of collecting the signs of suffering. The idea of pile refers to solid materials suitable to be piled up on top of each other and, sometimes, falling from the top to the bottom. The tears, however, are liquid in nature, which cannot be stored in a pile, but only in containers if necessary. "A Pile of Tears" are indeed texts that have fossilized in the hearts of the Yemeni people and in the eyes of every Arab. The author stated¹⁰ :

"It is a pile of sorrows and torments that it is impossible for humans to predict or imagine [...] A miserable condition, which is marked by hostilities, attacks, and injustice. The reality of the Yemeni man's condition is that he lacks the minimum for a decent life that guarantees his dignity and freedom, in principle declared the bare minimum in every Holy Book."

In Al-Dālī's writings, never translated until today, we hear a calm human voice that tells us, without hesitation, our daily pains, aches, and national concerns, as a besieged tormented human being suffering from war, oppression, and injustice. The stories are filled with feelings and emotions: love, sadness, anger, and disappointments. The pile of tears is not stored in boxes but in the writer's heart only. Such a pile equals an incomputable sorrow, and the tears are those shed by Yemeni people because of their countless tribulations. Injustice is Yemen's

⁹ هكذا صار مجرد "ماكينة" مضبوطة المسار والعمل والمواقيت؛ في المنزل وفي الوظيفة وفي العلاقة البينية. استلاب تام وغربة كاملة عن الجسد. كأنما هو لآخر.. لآخرين: "الجسد الذي لا يخصني

¹⁰ Al-Dālī words, when cited in this article, refer to an interview he released to me in October 2022.

permanent condition, as Al-Dālī suggests. Despite this, he deeply loves his homeland and hopes for security, stability, and peace.

For the first time a selection of four very short stories is translated here below, the most eloquent of both Al-Dālī thinking and the country's reality, as he reveals it to us.

Humanity, short story nr. 8

إنسانية

تحاشيتها، لكنّها أصرّت التّنازل في مَسَامَاتِ جِلْدِي.. أرَدْتُ التّصلّ مِنْهَا؛ جَذِبْتَنِي نحوها بحنوٍ...
كُلَّمَا قَطَعُوهُ التّام: ذاك الشريان الذي يصل جذورها بدمي.

"I avoided her, but she insisted on procreation in the pores of my skin. I wanted to get rid of her; She pulled me towards her with tenderness... Every time they cut it, it healed: that artery that connects its roots with my blood."

Humanity is a feminine force, the mother of humankind, (she) who never abandons her beloved creatures, and never dies in the hope of her oppressed children. This text embodies an outcry in the face of confusion and loss experienced by contemporary men, and it portrays the soul in a beautiful and discreet manner. This soul is representative of the Yemeni one that (hopefully) has not been affected by malignity yet. Perhaps this very short story looks for human harmony in times of oppression, death, consumption, ruin and poverty. It may be considered a call to push man to be in harmony with himself and his society. The story wishes a world of individuals in harmony with themselves and their humanity, and the hero of our story is probably one of those who cannot abandon their humanity and their conscience, despite his living in a distorted society. He is still connected to mankind's humanity by an artery that arrives in his blood. Perhaps the hero of this story wishes for a revolutionary change in order to free himself first and liberate mankind after, and this liberation can only happen by returning to the best human nature represented by the human spirit and his true noble values.

A second text that exemplifies Al-Dālī thoughts is 'Humiliation'.

Humiliation, short story nr. 9

مَهَانَةٌ

جَلَسَ أَمَامَهَا، نَظَرَتْ إِلَيْهِ شَرّاً.
سَأَلَهَا: أَمَا مَرَّ بِكَ...؟!
بَعْدَ صَمْتٍ.. أَفْصَحَتْ،
أَشَارَتْ إِلَى كِسْرَةِ خُبْزٍ بِيَمِينِهَا: "هُوَ ذَا"
لَمَسَهَا بِيَدِ رُؤُومٍ، تَنَحَّى جَانِباً... بَكَى جَبِينَهُ!

He sat down in front of her, and she looked at him scornfully.
 He asked her: "Has it happened to you that..."
 After a silence... she revealed,
 She pointed to a piece of bread in her right hand: "Indeed, here it is!"
 He touched her with a merciful hand, stepped aside... He cried about
 his cowardice!

The writer depicts with maximum respect and delicacy the outcome of the most disrespectful and obscene act, which humiliates not just one person, but two at the same time. Misery, old age (of the man), helplessness, girlhood and violated integrity (of the woman) are all included in a few half lines of writing. Misery has distorted the Arab values of the proud and vengeful man, the warrior who defends his *hurma*; the woman here does not cry on her brother who died in the battle, nor for her husband. Both the man and the girl mourn themselves, with no rite to celebrate, no remedy, and no revenge for their humiliation. Most of the texts of "Piles of tears" depict the situation in Yemen as extremely tragic. These texts are characterized by extreme realism that relies on lived events, as the key for explaining the tragedy of both the man and the homeland together, and the struggle against the cruelty of injustice and the tragedy of war, disease and ignorance.

Inkisār, Fracture is the title of the story nr.18, which deals with the violence of mismanaged power in Yemen:

انكسار
 أَسْمَعُ الصَّدَى، كَأَنَّهُ الْعَوِيلُ.
 أُطِلُّ مِنْ نَافِذَتِي جَزْوَاعاً..
 الشَّوَارِغُ عَلَى امْتِدَادِهَا، تَعْصُ بِجَنَاحِ مُتَقَحِّمَةٍ..
 أَفْرَكُ عَيْنِي مُحْمَلِقاً.
 اللَّهْبُ الْأَسْوَدُ يُعَانِقُ السَّمَاءَ، يَتَّحِبُّ مَعَ نَعِيقِ الْغُرَيَّانِ، فِيمَا الذَّنَابُ تَزْهُو بِالْعَوَاءِ حَدَّ الْغَنَجِ...
 تَقَدَّمَ (سَيِّدُ الزَّنَانَةِ) نَحْوَ الْعَرْشِ الْمُبْجَلِ، مَحْرُوساً بِالْأَفَاعِي وَالذَّنَابِ وَالتَّمَاسِيحِ الْمَعْمَمَةِ بِعَمَامَاتِ
 سُودَاءَ، لِيَشْهَدَ عِيدَ النُّحْرِ السَّنَوِيِّ..
 بِهِلَعٍ أُغْلِقُ النَّاظِدَةَ عَلَى الْمَشْهَدِ... أَسْتَدِيرُ... يُفَاجِئُنِي، الْمُهَرَّجُونَ بِزَخَّاتِ الْكَلَّاشِينِكُوفِ..

I hear the echo, as if it were howling.
 I look out of my window, frightened.
 The streets are littered with charred corpses.
 I rub my eyes, dazzled.
 Black flames embracing the sky, weeping with the croaks of crows, while
 the wolves howl arrogantly...
 He (the master of the inner prison) advanced towards the glorified throne,
 guarded by snakes, wolves and crocodiles with black turbans, to witness
 the annual Sacrifice Feast...
 Horrified, I close the window on the scene... I turn... It surprises me, the
 clowns with Kalashnikov shots.

The title of the story, *Fracture*, signifies what people live in Yemen, because of the vile war. Commented the authors when I interviewed him:

“It is the fracture of souls... the fracture of hearts... the fracture of love... the fracture of childhood... the fracture of all the beautiful things in the homelands of goodness, kindness, and jasmine smell. And if we search in all the papers of our tragedies that we live in, we will find the fracture present in every detail. The condition referred to is one in which pain overtakes us, we remain silent and listen until the voices in our ears become an echo of the pain of others, and in fact it is nothing but the echo of the pain dwelling in us... an echo in which cries, crying and wailing resound... How can a person of blood and flesh remain deaf to this wailing?!”

In ‘Fracture’ the sight from the window is horrific and unbelievable, because of the ugliness and cruelty of what is observed. So, there is a need to alert all the visual energies to hold the truth of what appears in front of us. Are the bodies on the street the ones of the neighbors, friends and comrades, mothers, fathers, or brothers? For this reason, the protagonist rubs his eyes many times, observing a fire that is starting to eat everyone. The charred corpses and the destroyed houses emit smoke and flames, symbols of the extent of the disaster. In addition, the croaks of crows are heard, as typical signs of ruin, destruction and death. “Human wolves” probably continue to kill and love blood, and of course are proud because they stand above the dead bodies and the ruins. They are the criminals who are happy with their crimes. The writer describes how happy those wolves feel: humans-wolves celebrate the annual sacrifice with blood, smell its odor, and get drunk with it.

Al-ḍaw’ al-azraq, Blue light is the title of the short story nr. 25

الضوء الأزرق

قالت له:

لماذا تصر أن تعود للصفحة الأولى مجدداً؟

أخاف عليك..، ويخالج، قلبي حزن لم يهتد إلى كنهه...!

آه يا سيأ...!

ليتك، تخافين على نفسك أكثر، فدقات قلبك محسوبة..

ما أخاف إلا من سيل تلعتي، وأنا

أراهم يمسخون بأختامهم السرية، تلك الصفحات المضبوطة، التي كتبناها بالدم، على وارفات نخيلك..

She told him:

Why do you insist on going back to the front page again?

I am afraid for you...and my heart is overwhelmed by a sadness whose essence it has not been able to discern

– Oh, Saba people!

I wish you were more afraid for yourself, your heartbeats are counted

I am only afraid of the flow of my creek

I see them wiping their secret seals, those luminous pages, which we wrote with blood, on your palm leaves...

The main concern here is the behavior of Yemenis betrayers, who may overwhelm their fellowmen, like the waters of a creek that flow from the top of a hill to the bottom of a valley, and destroy everything they meet along the path. The betrayals are trying to cancel all the gains of the revolution, unity and republic that free people conquered and put in pages written with their pure blood, throughout the country.

We understand from the reading of the four short stories analyzed above that al-Dālī succeeded in denouncing the unfortunate condition of his country and the hopeless precariousness of the population.

When I asked him about the advantages of choosing the very short story, compared to the short story or the novel, he provided me with an illuminating answer:

“We live in an era of creative magic. Unlimited creative cosmopolitanism. [...] The revolution of communications and electronic communication gave us a strange and magical world, [...] highly intertwined and interaction. Will – or was – the creative writing of the very short story a witness to this strange world in which we live”.

He also added that, a part the specific Yemeni case, he considers the very short story both the most appropriate space for the “universal”, *kawnī* or “cosmopolitan”, *kūsmūbūlītānī* creative writing, and the most suitable tool for talking about “this era full of novelties and strangeness”. al-Dālī thinks that the art of the very short story is an inevitable result of globalization and the “age of speed”, due to its tendency towards condensation and reduction in literary expression. It is true that the very short story has gained more space recently, but it also raises many important issues. For example, the definition of the art of the very short story, its artistic features, its pillars and techniques. I will conclude with the words of al-Dālī who told me:

“It is known that the very short story is full of diversity and transformation, and is capable of generating surprise, and is unique in its linguistic deviations. Its astonishing artistic ambushes, its stylistic formulation, its aesthetic intensity swarming with suggestions, images and symbols <made possible> by adopting

a condensed style, rich in suggestion, and characterized by aesthetic fluidity that is revealed by the coherence of the sentence, within the worlds of the construction of the text, with a central objective unity around which the meaning revolves, thus provoking the reader, who in turn responds to his aesthetic flow.

The immediacy of a very short text is then considered more appropriate for depicting the precariousness of life in precise contexts – like today’s Yemen in Al-Dālī writings – which are subject to sudden changes within the same very short time of telling a very short story, and without many hopes left for the improvement of life conditions in the near future.

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III.
BOOK REVIEWS

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ZAHRA ALI. 2020. *Féminismes islamiques (deuxième édition)*. Paris: La Fabrique éditions. 234 pp. ISBN: 978-2-35872-190-5

Zahra Ali brings together the most relevant scholars, researchers and activists in what is called Islamic feminism in a second edition of this volume that captures the latest developments in the field. The work starts with two fundamental desiderata: the need to decolonize the reading and understanding of feminism in the Islamic space and to place it in the continuation of efforts to reform Islamic societies by reinterpreting its fundamental sources. In the introduction to the book Zahra Ali draws attention to the danger of generalization in approaching the Islamic world and the social status of Muslim women who live in a variety of environments each of them contextualized politically, economically and culturally. The editor warns that the articles making up the volume are in clear rupture with the orientalist and racist vision that characterizes the controversies about women in the Islamic world. Islamic feminism as conceptually described by the authors of this volume develops within the Islamic religious system by strongly challenging the patriarchal dimension of the reading of the Koranic text, overturning several general lines present in the common perception, Western and Islamic alike. Thus, Islam is antinomic with the emancipation of women, as are all patriarchal systems, and the struggle for equality between the sexes can only be waged by removing religion (p. 12). Islam is also a static, dogmatic and sexist reality, and feminism can only be an avatar of Western modernity (p. 12).

The militants of this movement are placed in the continuation of the efforts to reform Islamic society at the end of the 19th century, emphasizing the role of the effort of interpretation (*iğtihād*) and denouncing the sacralization of the views of the ancient theologians. Feminists emphasize the difference between Islamic law (*fiqh*), historically elaborated by theologians (and, therefore,

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subject to historical context and the human dimension of interpretation) and the *šarī'a* (the way) which enunciates a set of higher principles of the Islamic religion. Islamic law is also the field that can and must be reformulated through a continuous *ijtihad* and a non-patriarchal and non-contextual reading of the Qur'anic text. This is the main desideratum, but also the main direction of study and action of Islamic feminism through its best-known voices: Amina Wadud, Margot Badran, Asma Lamrabet, Asma Barlas, Malika Hamidi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Zainah Anwar, Omaira Abou-Bakr and others.

The manifestations of feminism in the Islamic world, from its timid beginnings at the end of the 19th century to the present day, have demonstrated “a porosity of boundaries between secular and religious activism, especially since the intellectual tools and type of engagement of feminist activists are most often diverse and hybrid, difficult to define as secular or religious” (p. 23). Feminisms in the Islamic space are in line with the critique of hegemonic feminism of the North American type and call for the recognition of the plurality of ways of women's emancipation, thus following the line of research opened by Chandra Mohanty who questioned the “universality” of the category “woman” as characterized by a common consciousness beyond economic, social and political realities (p. 23).

In her article, *L'islam au-delà du patriarcat: lecture genrée et inclusive du Coran*, Amina Wadud draws attention to the principles of equality and social justice on which the Qur'anic text is built, appealing directly to them and rejecting interpretations of Islamic law (*fiqh*) that are the products of theologians and tributary to the patriarchal social contexts of the time. Amina Wadud finds in the Qur'anic text the foundations of the notion of pluralism, but also the intrinsic warning against possible deviations from the message conveyed. “The noblest of you, men and women alike, is the most pious in the sight of God,” the Qur'anic text (49:13) paraphrases, emphasizing the notion of *taqwā* or moral integrity. The Qur'anic text's references to men and women as beings equally responsible to God are highlighted by the author (40:40) who demonstrates how the patriarchal society in which Islam emerged imposed its pre-existing characteristics on the new system. “After the Qur'anic revelation, to what extent have Muslim thinkers and theologians succeeded in overcoming the patriarchal limits of pre-Islamic society and applying the principle of social justice to women in harmony with the Qur'anic text?” asks Amina Wadud rhetorically. Amina Wadud proposes the notion of *mu'āwada* – defined as a relationship of reciprocity between persons (p. 42) that implies mutual knowledge (*ta'ārafū*, 49: 13), but also mutual support between members of a family or community – as a response to the patriarchal order in which the Qur'anic text has been read. Moreover, Amina Wadud associates the idea of male superiority with a serious deviation from the Qur'anic norms, more specifically with the ideas of *širk* (the association of another entity with God) and *istikbār* (the devil's pride in disobedience to God). In the author's view, the Qur'an is a reforming text

which, in the historical context of revelation in a society marked by anarchy and patriarchy, set out to put an end to social, political, economic and moral imbalances, including those whose victims were women (p. 45). The fundamental idea of gender equality implicitly follows from the Qur'an's worldview, the author believes, but this reading simply did not find a place in the traditionally and historically male-dominated society of oriental medieval Islam. The author also appeals in her demonstration to secondary texts, the prophetic hadiths, which reiterate and reinforce the idea of equality between the sexes, but also in general the notion of balance and fairness in the treatment of other members of the community (p. 46). I would note here, as in other parts of the article, a lack of care and consistency with the Latin transcription of the Arabic text², which makes its content difficult to understand in places.

In her article, *Féminisme islamique: qu'est-ce à dire?*, Margot Badran very usefully summarizes the main set of arguments on the basis of which this current is formulated in the Islamic space (p. 61). Thus, the Koran explicitly upholds equality between all human beings, while patriarchal ideologies and practices have undermined the implementation of this principle, which is the basic social vision of the Qur'anic text. The Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that was consolidated in its classical form during the ninth century was strongly influenced by the patriarchal conceptions and behaviors of the time. Hadiths were, in turn, used haphazardly to support the paternalist view of Qur'anic norms, not to mention that some of them fall under the specter of inauthenticity. As for the working and research methods of Islamic feminism these are the classical ones applied to the Qur'anic text, *iğtihād* and *tafsīr*, in addition to the tools and methods of modern sciences: linguistics, history, literary analysis, sociology, anthropology and others (p. 62). In the same way, Margot Badran reveals the three hermeneutical methods used by Islamic feminism: a re-reading of Qur'anic verses in order to correct historical misinterpretations (e.g., verses that speak of the creation of the world and the Garden of Eden episode on which successive theories of male superiority have been built); the citation and highlighting of those verses that unequivocally affirm the equality of men and women; the contextualized reading of verses that evoke gender difference and that have been intensively exploited to support, legitimize and legalize male dominance in Islamic society (p. 63).

² p. 46, in author's transcription: (...) inna li-rabbi ka 'alayka haqqan wa li-ahluka 'alaka haqqan wa li-nafsi-ka alaka haqqan, fi'ti kulla dhi haqqan haqqahu.

The Hadith to which the author refers is as follows:

(...) قَالَ إِنَّ لِنَفْسِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا، وَلِرَبِّكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا، [وَلِصُنِّيكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا] وَإِنَّ لِأَهْلِكَ عَلَيْكَ حَقًّا؛ فَأَعْطِ كُلَّ ذِي حَقٍّ حَقَّهُ

<https://dorar.net/hadith/sharh/15223> :(...)

Fa-qāla 'inna li-nafsi-ka 'alay-ka haqq^{am} wa-li-rabbi-ka 'alay-ka haqq^{am} wa-li-ḍayfi-ka 'alay-ka haqq^{am} 'inna li-'ahlī-ka 'alay-ka haqq^{am} fa-'a'ṭi kulla dī haqq^{am} haqqa-hu (our transcription).

At the beginning of her article, *Entre refus de l'essentialisme et réforme radicale de la pensée musulmane*, Asma Lamrabet quotes Einstein's saying that it is easier to disintegrate an atom than to demolish a preconceived idea. For the same is true of the stereotypical view of 'women in Islam', a phrase that the author dismantles as a conceptual legacy of the Orientalist and postcolonial Islamic worldview, but also part of current geopolitical strategies (p. 69). The plurality and diversity of the Islamic world translates into an undeniable diversity of the "Muslim woman" that only a hermeneutic vision limited by the conceptual framework of Western feminism can view in a monolithic and uniformizing manner (p. 71). The author draws attention to the need to maintain a balance in the approach to Islamic feminism between Western hegemonic tendencies and those of the religious extremist rigorist ideologies of the Islamic world, as each of these two rejects the existence of the other. The discussion about women in Islamic societies has to start from within the Islamic tradition long 'anchored' by patriarchal readings of religious texts (p. 73). The only recurring criterion of judgment in the Qur'anic message is the degree of piety and honesty of acts committed by men and women alike, according to Asma Lamrabet; while Muslim scholars, as with other monotheisms, have built their theological argument on philosophical and metaphysical theories, partly reproductions of earlier religious interpretations, which have enshrined the dictum that "women were created from and for men" (p. 77). In this context, making the fundamental distinction between *šarī'a* (the teachings of divine revelation) and *fiqh* (Islamic law, human and social construction), the author believes that the latter must be subject to change, in accordance with the vision of the early jurist founders of the schools of interpretation, which translates into a continuation of *ijtihād* (p. 80). The author asks rhetorically what happened to the writings of the 300 women of the third century of the Hejira indexed by the historian Ibn Ḥağar (1372-1449) who studied religious texts and produced interpretations of them in harmony with the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an. Muslim women need to resume the habit of studying religious sources and producing knowledge in an attempt to deconstruct a strictly masculine and patriarchal approach to them (p. 81).

A remarkable contribution to this volume is the article *Femmes musulmanes et oppression: lire la libération à partir du Coran* by Asma Barlas, which addresses what she calls in feminist terminology *textual-sexual* oppression. In the context of the specificity but also the diversity of the Islamic world, Asma Barlas believes that Western feminism cannot be applied and cannot have any results, so the process of female emancipation in Islam must happen as a phenomenon intrinsic to the Qur'anic text and its re-reading. The contextualization of a reading, as we know, gives it certain particularities, and the fact that the Qur'anic text has been interpreted as unfavorable to women is due to "the contexts and methods of reading", Barlas explicitly states. The patriarchal reading of the Qur'anic

text, unfavorable to women, can be explained by the conservative reading produced by a group of medieval theologians with the support of the state, which was involved from the outset in defining religious knowledge (p. 90). A masculine society, therefore, deeply concerned with political continuities and power, in which men interpreted in a conservative key texts that were perhaps far too reformist for the reforming capacity of the society of the time. Recognizing the theological difference between the Discourse (the revealed text) and its terrestrial realization, Barlas finds no fault whatsoever in the Qur'anic text and draws attention once again to the confusion that is (perhaps intentionally) being made between the Qur'an and its exegesis. The former is of divine origin, Barlas asserts, the latter is the work of Muslim men (p. 91). Barlas also warns against the danger of considering any reading of a text as legitimate, appealing to hermeneutics understood here as the method and critique of textual interpretation. In fact, the Qur'an itself draws attention to the multitude of readings to which it will be subjected and to their lack of correctness (p. 93). Invoking similar research, Barlas points out that Islam readily incorporated pre-existing misogyny into society by shaping the discourse on gender and women for centuries to come; likewise, the author notes the religious continuities with earlier monotheisms, Judaism and Christianity, especially since early exegetes of Islam included Christian and Jewish converts (p. 94). One of the examples of contamination between monotheisms that Barlas highlights is the episode of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib which does not appear as such in the Qur'an, but is a borrowing from the biblical tradition (in the Qur'an, the two beings Adam and Eve are created from a single *nafs*, and Eve is in no way culpable for the banishment from heaven and there is no original sin associated with her as in the biblical tradition). Another idea that merits attention is the influence that colonial policies have had in exacerbating anti-feminine social practices in Islamic societies, given that the space traditionally occupied by women is seen as the last bastion of identity resistance to the cultural invasion of the West. The struggles for national emancipation in fact reinforced the traditionalist specificity of Islamic societies to the detriment of women's rights, which the colonizing West was making itself the flag bearer (p. 96). However, in the spirit of balance to which she has accustomed us, Asma Barlas draws attention to the misinterpretation by which the West is blamed for the injustice inflicted on women in Islamic societies. Returning to the hermeneutics of the Qur'anic text – the key to an equitable and non-patriarchal reading of it – Barlas notes that the principle of male superiority held by classical Islamic theology is in blatant violation of the principle of the oneness of God, *at-tawhīd*, which underpins Islam. This principle refers to the fact that God's power and sovereignty are indivisible, thus theories of male superiority that portray men as either superior to women, having the right to decide for them, or as intermediaries between them and the divinity, must be rejected altogether as anti-Qur'anic (p. 100). Among the Qur'anic attributes of God is *al-'adl*

(The Just or Authorized and Straightforward Judge of Dealing Justly), who does injustice (*zulm*) to no one, so it is impossible that inequality, discrimination and hatred are divine emanations. The Qur'anic text is not built around a biology of sexual differences and the roles that flow from this dichotomy, Barlas believes quoting Thomas Laqueur, but rather this image is the product of Western secularism that has biologically legitimized women's inferiority. This is why Western feminism faced a different situation in a binary society characterized by phallic thinking (pp. 102-103). In fact, it should be noted, Barlas believes, that the only distinction that the Qur'anic text makes between men and women refers to their ethical-moral qualities³, without making associations between sex and its social meanings (gender). Noting that the Qur'anic text is among the rare texts that directly address women and men, Barlas insists that the struggle for a non-patriarchal reading of the Qur'an will prove a difficult process because in the current political contexts the states of the Islamic world jealously guard their monopoly on religious knowledge and are not at all willing to endanger their position and privileges (p. 108).

Egyptian scholar Omaila Abou-Bakr's article, *Le féminisme islamique et la production de la connaissance: perspectives dans l'Égypte post-révolutionnaire*, enriches the perspective on the process of Muslim women's empowerment and reminds that the main objective of the Islamic feminist project is to eliminate theological patriarchy from the Islamic tradition in order to create a space for women to develop and give voice to a discourse based on justice and equality ('*adl* and '*musāwāt*'). The author identifies the main lines of action of the feminist project, which already benefits from a favorable academic context in which Muslim women have begun to do theology. Drawing on a transnational network, Muslim women scholars are claiming the right to revisit Islamic jurisprudence in order to change family codes and thus improve the situation of women in Islamic societies (p. 175). Another important line of research is history, which must bear witness to the many Muslim women who acted in the public sphere and participated in shaping religious principles in pre-modern times. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, she advocates the study of the cultural history of the Islamic tradition by analyzing various types of texts beyond the religious, such as historical chronicles, biographies, memoirs, treatises of all kinds. According to this theory, any text refers explicitly or implicitly to another text, either in the form of a *refutatio* or in the form of its acceptance (pp. 176-178). As a rule, texts produced in the same epoch (perhaps even at some distance in

³ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ. Yā'ayyu-hā n-nāsu 'innā ḥalaqnā-kum min dākār^m wa 'unṭā wa ḡa'alnā-kum šu'ūb^{an} wa qabā'ila li-ta'ārafū 'inna 'akrama-kum 'inda llāhi 'atqā-kum 'inna llāha 'alīm^{an} ḥabīr^{an} (Qur'an, 49: 13). O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware. (translated by M.M. Pickthall, <https://legacy.quran.com/49/13>)

time) dialogize even when they ignore each other. The author confronts relevant texts from the 15th century: the biographical dictionary of Šams ad-Dīn as-Saḥāwī which includes a number of Muslim women teachers of hadith described by the formula *dātu ‘aqlīn* (rational, having mind, being wise) and the works of the theologians Ibn **Katīr** and as-Suyūfī who insist to the point of obsession on the concept of the subordination of women to their husbands (p. 177). Hard to believe that these texts are not in fact dialogues and that they do not express a particular reality of the time. Of course, the idea of the existence of a discursive conventionality is not to be dismissed in a society known for the formalism of its classical literary production, as the author states (p. 179). I note, as in previous cases, a certain lack of attention as regards the Latin transcription of the Arabic text (I will refer specifically to the wrong vocalization *taḥta riyāsati-hum* on page 182, where grammatical correctness would have required the use of the genitive case for the affix pronoun -hum, in the form -him: *taḥta riyāsati-him*).

The texts by the researchers Ziba Mir-Hosseini (*Le projet inachevé: la quête d'égalité des femmes musulmanes en Iran*) and Malika Hamidi (*Le féminisme musulman en Europe: "activisme textuel" et engagement transnational*), as well as the interviews with Muslim activists of this cause, are also very comprehensive for the phenomena described. A universe in motion and a much-needed social recovery project that aims to correct mistakes where they have been made in patriarchal interpretations of Islamic religious texts.

This volume can be extremely useful for scholars interested in the project of feminism in Islamic societies, but especially for those outside the field for whom the generalization and standardization of Islamic realities has so far been the handiest key to interpretation. This volume will help them discover a plural and by no means uniform world. The volume does not deal with the history of the modern Western-inspired feminism that has marked part of Arab and Islamic societies, especially in the first part of the 20th century through personalities such as Hudā Ša‘rāwī, Nabawiyya Mūsā or the more recent Nawāl as-Sa‘adāwī.

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More than Just Labels Relating TAFL to CEFR Levels is a volume edited by Professors Giolfo and Salvaggio that brings together contributions from distinguished scholars with the aim to find answers and, more important, to raise awareness about the question of whether to relate the teaching of Arabic to European standards.

The need for such a volume and for contributions from specialized scholars in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) aligns with the current European trend of harmonizing language teaching with the reference scales of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Arabic is no exception to this trend. As José Noijons, an expert for the Council of Europe's European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), states in the foreword of the volume, initiatives in Arabic language pedagogy that aim to achieve a theoretically valid and effective application of CEFR principles in teaching Arabic as a second or foreign language are highly welcomed (Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023:12).

In the volume's introduction, the two editors pose what is arguably the most critical question regarding the suitability of the CEFR framework for Arabic teaching. There appears to be a consensus that the grammar-translation method of teaching Arabic is no longer aligned with contemporary pedagogical trends. However, proposals for addressing the intrinsic incompatibility arising from Arabic's unique linguistic situation diverge significantly. As Giolfo and Salvaggio note, "For some it is TAFL that should be rethought in order to adjust to CEFR standards, whereas for others it should be the other way around: CEFR principles should conform for the peculiarities that distinguish the Arabic language from other commonly taught languages (Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 13). The authors propose an even more radical approach, suggesting that Arabic could

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be considered a unique language and warranting its own dedicated framework. This “Arab framework”, they posit, “could be applied also to other languages that claim the ‘same uniqueness’ as Arabic” (Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 14). Nevertheless, the two scholars emphasize that regardless of the chosen approach, the most crucial aspect is to make this decision with full awareness of the ideological implication involved and with a readiness to develop teaching strategies that are coherent with the theoretical choice made.

The volume comprises eight articles by prominent scholars in the field, beginning with a contribution co-authored by the editors and Professor Giuliano Lancioni (Roma Tre University) titled “CEFR-based TAFL. Syllabus, Lexicon, Variation”. This article is structured in six parts, with the first dedicated to the history of Arabic teaching in Europe. The second part addresses the challenges in framing Arabic teaching, particularly highlighting “the elephant in the room, the diglossic nature of the Arabic linguistic system” (Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 26). The third section, “Towards a CEFR-based Arabic syllabus”, presents considerations regarding the most appropriate Arabic variety for the lower CEFR level, A1, and discusses the categories of Arabic language learners for whom it should apply. The subsequent part emphasizes the importance of a corpus-based and CEFR-oriented grammar for developing comprehensive linguistic competence. In the fifth part, the authors pose a crucial question: “Can variation be taught?” (Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 37). This inquiry raises awareness of the reality of contemporary Arabic, which appears to exist in a state of infinite variability due to phenomena such as code-switching, code-mixing and code-shifting. Given the difficulty in teaching this linguistic continuum, the authors suggest in the final part that it might be beneficial to introduce intermediate forms in teaching. These forms would act as a “glue” alongside clearly characterized varieties, potentially enhancing authentic proficiency in Arabic.

Rasha Soliman’s article, titled “Knowledge of Arabic Variation as a CEFR-Based Sociolinguistic Competence Principles to Inform Arabic L2 Teaching”, forms the second contribution to the volume. Soliman posits that Arabic “has two linguistic variation qualities that cannot be ignored; these are diglossia and dialectal variation” (Soliman in Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 47). The paper examines the impact of linguistic variation realism on Arabic learners, particularly in the Higher Education (HE) context. To illustrate her points, Soliman presents screenshots of WhatsApp exchanges between students from the University of Leeds, where the teaching focus was predominantly on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and Arabic L1 speakers. Her observations reveal that Arabic L1 speakers naturally and progressively incorporate more dialectal elements in their communication, representing just one aspect of the linguistic variation that Arabic L2 learners must navigate. The author then correlates Arabic variation with the CEFR’s value of comprehensiveness, specifically focusing on how the Framework addresses plurilingualism and the achievement of awareness and comprehension of multiple

varieties and registers. In the final section, Soliman outlines fundamental principles of L2 learning that should be considered when integrating variation into L2 teaching. She draws upon the principles presented in *Introducing second language acquisition* by Muriel Saville-Troike and Karen Barto, attempting to apply these to Arabic language pedagogy.

The paper “Entering the House through the Proper Door. The Integrated Approach to Arabic Instruction” is, as anticipated, authored by Munther Younes, the originator of the Integrated Approach. Younes addresses the unique linguistic situation of Arabic, which he characterizes as “abnormal”, and elucidates how the Integrated Approach selects appropriate forms for instruction in Cornell University’s Integrated Program and *‘Arabiyyat al-Naas* text-book series. The author’s objective is to enable students to communicate effectively without sounding overly formal and artificial, nor too informal and thus geographically restricted. Younes examines the selection of appropriate forms from the perspective of phonology, morphology-syntax and lexicon. Throughout the paper, he presents arguments supporting the Integrated Approach as the optimal pedagogical solution for teaching Arabic.

The next paper is written by Annamaria Ventura from University of Bologna and is titled “CEFR for Arabic Based on a Diglossic Switching Model”. Ventura explains the distribution of CEFR’s skills between the Arabic varieties and presents what she terms a “diglossic switching” (DS) model. This model incorporates a preparatory level, which the author designates as A0. The DS model aims to encompass the full spectrum of linguistic variation, including diastratic, diamesic, diaphasic and diatopic varieties, to achieve a balanced representation of sociolinguistic variation. The A0 preparatory level together with a phonetic and phonological switching model, a morphological and syntactic switching model and a semitistic or Semitic studies transcription model constitute the DS “that can be used as the basis for the application of the CEFR to Arabic learning, teaching, and assessment” (Ventura in Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 122).

Letizia Lombezzi’s paper, “Standard-ology, Dialectology, and TAFL from Ideology to Concrete Applications”, advocates for a “recognition of reality” and the transcendence of the “Standard-ology vs Dialectology” dichotomy. Lombezzi posits that standard-ology overestimates the utility of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), while dialectology overemphasizes the reciprocal diversity of Arabic registers by focusing on the identification of micro-varieties (Lombezzi in Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 139). The author proposes the implementation of an integrated approach inspired by CEFR and argues against commonly promoted concerns, such as those related to the mixing of Arabic varieties, suggesting that a more holistic view of Arabic language teaching is necessary.

“Pre-A1 Level in Light of the New CEFR Companion Volume and TAFL Theories” is an article written by Andrea Facchin that examines the introduction of a pre-A1 level in the new Companion Volume of the CEFR and its implications

for the field of TAFL. Facchin initially explores the relationship between the CEFR and Arabic, reviewing scholarly interpretations from recent years. Subsequently, he focuses on the pre-A1 level presented in the new CEFR Companion Volume, correlating it with TAFL theories on novice learners to propose an implementation model for Arabic. The author's methodology involves analyzing pre-A1 level descriptors and interpreting them within the context of Arabic's complex sociolinguistic landscape. Consequently, Facchin develops detailed descriptors for the Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) literacy acquisition phase, emphasizing the "unique features of its teaching practice, such as goof pronunciation, phonological awareness, letter progression and the use of diacritics" (Facchin in Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 172).

Kassem Wahba's paper, "Advanced Levels of Proficiency and the Goals of Arabic Language in Higher Education", focuses on the acquisition of advanced language abilities. It examines the current status of Arabic in higher education and presents a theoretical framework for attaining advanced proficiency in foreign languages, with a particular emphasis on Arabic. Wahba offers a comparative analysis of the goals for advanced Arabic proficiency in Medieval Islam versus contemporary times, where communication is the primary objective. The author illustrates the language skills of an educated native speaker, concluding that their competence is predominantly influenced by the literary variety. However, Wahba notes a recent shift: "in the last few years the reading and writing of the L variety became an active skill and reading and writing in the H variety became a dormant skill under the influence of the various means of social media" (Wahba in Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 195). The author analyses the challenges of achieving advanced L2 abilities in Arabic programs and observes that the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines do not accurately reflect the reality of Arabic. Wahba also considers the diverse missions and goals of Arabic programs acknowledging the challenges this diversity poses for developing a unified curriculum. He notes the existence of programs with more communicative goals and those with broader humanistic educational objectives. In conclusion, Wahba advocates for a synergy between these two categories of programs, suggesting that this integration is necessary for achieving advanced abilities within a humanistic framework.

In the last contribution, "Teaching Arabic in Context Language as a Means to Sample the Culture beyond the Official Curriculum", Feras Alkabani, from University of Sussex, begins by addressing the disparities between teaching European and non-European languages in relation to the CEFR. Alkabani presents an innovative approach to address the multifaceted challenges of teaching Arabic within the CEFR framework. The author's solution involves implementing extracurricular activities that complement linguistic instruction with cinematic and cultural experiences. This approach "enabled the students to bridge the gap between MSA and the regional dialects and thus enabling them to be more flexible in their use of the different registers of the language" (Alkabani

in Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 228). To demonstrate the broader applicability of his project, Alkabani includes a sample module in his paper. This module aims to ensure a „more inclusive and more interdisciplinary teaching and learning experience for the students” (Alkabani in Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 235).

In conclusion, *More Than Just Labels Relating TAFL to CEFR Levels* edited by Professors Manuela E.B. Giolfo and Federico Salvaggio represents a significant scholarly contribution to the field of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL). This volume offers a comprehensive array of perspectives on the challenges and opportunities inherent in aligning Arabic instruction with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The diverse contributions effectively bridge theoretical frameworks with practical applications proposing innovative solutions to persistent challenges in Arabic language pedagogy. As the editors note in their introduction, the volume’s primary objective is not to provide definite answers to fundamental questions concerning TAFL and its correlation with CEFR, but rather to “raise awareness of the ideological and methodological implications that the choice to link (or not to link) TAFL to CEFR inevitably entails” (Giolfo, Salvaggio 2023: 14). The volume succeeds in its purpose, effectively raising awareness of the complex implications involved in relating TAFL to CEFR and providing valuable insights for scholars and practitioners in the field. This work thus stands as a valuable scientific resource for researchers and educators engaged in the ongoing development and refinement of Arabic language instruction.

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