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Translating the Arab World:
Contingent Commensuration, Publishing, and the Shaping of a Global Commodity

By

Elizabeth Anne Kelley

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Charles Briggs, Co-chair
Professor Stefania Pandolfo, Co-chair
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Professor Ramona Naddaff

Spring 2014

“Translating the Arab World: Contingent Commensuration, Publishing, and the Shaping of a Global Commodity”

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Abstract

Translating the Arab World: Contingent Commensuration, Publishing, and the Shaping of A Global Commodity

by

Elizabeth Anne Kelley

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Berkeley

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In the dissertation, I explore the translation, publishing, and marketing process of Arabic novels in English. My research examines how translations of Arabic novels are produced as a commodity within a globalized publishing industry and circulate in a highly-charged political context. In the process, these novels—and the individuals involved in making them—produce, resist, respond to, and incorporate ideas and representations of the Arab world in the West or English-speaking world. The dissertation asks what kind of translation is possible in a cultural and political landscape shaped by wars, sanctions, media stereotypes, and histories of colonization. In each of my chapters, I address the specific practices of translation, editing, and branding that produce the novel as a global commodity that serves as an interface between the West and the Arab world. My ethnographic research was primarily conducted in Cairo, Egypt in 2010, where I worked at the American University in Cairo Press, the largest publisher of translations from Arabic to English. While there, I conducted extensive interviews and fieldwork with translators and Egyptian authors.

My research examines the broader context of Arabic novels in English translation as they circulate in the politicized public sphere of the West. How are political and social elements incorporated into the text through lexical items that index cultural ephemera? How do novels as contingently-constructed objects move and circulate? Translation, as I discuss it here, is a process that extends beyond the text to include the creation of equivalence across cultural differences, differing business models and histories, varying concepts of art and literature, as well as material differences that shape the production, circulation, and reception of these novels.

In doing this, my work intervenes in the scholarly literature around globalization, transnationalism, and circulation in two central ways. First, I argue that translation is a kind of scale-making project that works to move between and reconstruct local and global spheres. Second, I argue that translation renders certain elements mobile and other immobile, enabling some aspects (of language, culture, experience, and so on) to circulate while creating others as fixed. In this way, translation emerges as a key site for thinking about the construction of the global and local in the contemporary moment.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In the dissertation, I ask what kind of translation can and does occur of novels from Arabic to English. In the pages that follow, I explore the translation, publishing, and marketing process of Arabic novels in English. I look at how translations of Arabic novels are produced as a commodity within a globalized publishing industry and circulate in a highly-charged political context. In the process, these novels—and the individuals involved in making them—produce, resist, respond to, and incorporate ideas and representations of the Arab world in the West or English-speaking world. I address the specific practices of translation, editing, and branding that produce the novel as a global commodity that serves as an interface between the West and the Arab world. My ethnographic research was primarily conducted in Cairo, Egypt in 2010 where I worked at the American University in Cairo Press, the largest publisher of translations from Arabic to English. While there, I conducted extensive interviews and fieldwork with translators and Egyptian authors. The dissertation asks what kind of translation is possible in a cultural and political landscape shaped by wars, sanctions, media stereotypes, and histories of colonization.

In his essay “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin describes translation as an art that does not work through the creation of equivalencies, but through transformation (1968 [1923]). For Benjamin, translation is a “mode,” or a form, of writing that entails a risk but opens up to possibilities for change, transformation, and reciprocity between texts and languages (72). He argues that translation enables the survival or continued life of a work and even of a language. He suggests that translation is the mechanism through which language change occurs, that “of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own” (75). For Benjamin, the ideal of translation is that of scripture, in the case of “Holy Writ” where “meaning has ceased to be the watershed for the flow of language and the flow of revelation” (82). Indeed, he ends the essay with a discussion of the interlinear translations of scripture as a model of perfect translation. However, this kind of ideal translation is impossible outside the realm of the divine. He notes that “all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages. An instant and final rather than a temporary and provisional solution of this foreignness remains out of the reach of mankind” (76). Translation in actual practice is thus always temporary and provisional.

I begin with Benjamin because his essay was, in many ways, the inspiration for this project. In the dissertation, my subject is precisely these temporary and provisional translations that are produced in the contemporary moment. A far cry from Benjamin’s ideal of the interlinear translation of Scripture, these translations are products of the messy realities of the contemporary human world, constrained by cost-cutting measures and concerns about sales figures, finalized under pressures of deadlines, circulating alongside propagandistic messages that often construct the United States and the Arab world in oppositional, civilizational terms. In this distinctly human context, what kinds of translations emerge? What hope or possibility do they offer, even as their representation and reception may be over-determined and possibilities for transformation foreclosed?

In the chapters that follow, I look at the broader context of Arabic novels in English translation as they circulate in the politicized public sphere of the West. I examine translation choices and how political and social elements are incorporated into the text through lexical items that index cultural ephemera. I examine how novels as contingently-constructed objects move

and circulate, not only how texts are rendered in a new language. Translation, as I discuss it here, is a process that extends beyond the text to include the creation of equivalence across cultural differences, differing business models and histories, varying concepts of art and literature, as well as material differences that shape the production, circulation, and reception of these novels.

These novels were positioned to intervene in political and cultural debates that exceeded their texts. That is, the novels were not constructed merely as texts to be ferried across a linguistic gulf, but as objects that could make legible or commensurable (that is, could translate) a different world. In the dissertation, I examine how these novels and their authors were positioned in media and other discourse in order to do this kind of extra-textual work, how these novels were granted their weighty cultural baggage. At the same time, these novels were produced and circulated as commodities according to particular kinds of market logics. The novels were being translated in the context of a publishing industry concerned with sales, even at academic or non-profit presses. Indeed, the commodification of literature is one of the issues I examine in the chapters that follow, particularly chapter five.

Through all of this, the process of translation emerges as a deeply relational one. I explore how novels in translation forge links across regions, languages, and cultures. This happened discursively, as novels were positioned and framed as an object that promised to intervene in debates about the West and the Arab world. On another level, however, the relationality at the heart of this process was of an intersubjective kind. Translators, editors, publishers, and even authors work with an idea of an imagined reader. Their labors are thus (imaginatively if not practically) intersubjective. But an imagined sense of cohesion can have very practical ramifications in political and other terms. In the chapters that follow, I will examine how the figure of the reader was constructed at every stage in the process. I discuss this most extensively in the final chapter, chapter six where I explore the work this figure of the reader does. However, relations, between authors, translators, editors, publishers, and reviewers, and all the permutations and combinations thereof, were not just part of the process, but actually constitutive of the process of translation. Translation can thus be considered an intersubjective process, one that emerges only through an encounter with difference and with an other.

On the level of languages, Benjamin, too, suggests that translation is a relational process, he notes that translation establishes a relationship of reciprocity between two languages. He suggests that “translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages” (73-74). Translation for Benjamin establishes a relationship between texts and evokes or expresses the underlying relationship among languages.

Benjamin reminds us, however, that translation as a process is always “temporary and provisional” unless we are in the realm of the divine. In other terms, translation entails an inevitable loss. There are some aspects of the text that simply do not make it into the English version while other elements are obscured or truncated. That things are “lost in translation” is a cliché. Yet, as is perhaps the case more often than not, it contains some truth: there was always some loss in the translation. Rather than lament this inevitable loss, or dwell too long on it, the untranslatable became a site of exploration. Chapter four, the chapter that deals most explicitly with the work of translation, examines the strategies translators used to deal with the untranslatable. It was a given that there were untranslatable elements of every text, that some aspects would not be there for the English reader. But, rather than lamenting this inevitable loss, the chapter focuses on the strategies translators used that challenged the bounds of the English language, in particular through the transliteration of Arabic words. As they did so, they also often challenged normative discourse and depictions of the Arab world.

Thus, although translation was a process constrained by its inevitable limits, it was also a creative and generative process. There may have been some loss in translation, but there was far more gain, not only in the most basic terms, that through translation new texts reached an English audience, but also as translators used strategies, such as that of transliteration, to expand the possibilities of what could be said in English. They also generated new depictions of the Arab world, often contesting normative discussions which flattened regional specificities. Thus, these texts intervened in broad political debates and may be considered alongside (at least) two other categories of media: other novels in English and other publications and discourse around and from the Arab world that circulates in the West.

My interest here is in how these objects are materially produced, in the many elements that are either discarded, lost, or somehow made to adhere (such as normative descriptions of the Arab world) to the book in translation as it circulates. In the process, relations are forged across languages and national boundaries, between authors, translators, editors, and readers, and across generic and discursive boundaries, to name just a few. As these novels moved through space and crossed languages, as they passed through the networks of individuals involved in their production, they sometimes served as a catalyst for contact or communication across regional boundaries. Indeed, the novels were framed as crossing civilizational borders, but, paradoxically, they were also called upon to produce or uphold those very civilizational ideas. That is, even as novels from Arabic circulating in English were celebrated as enhancing and enabling cross-cultural communication, they were also positioned as token representations of the Arab world, their authors called on to serve as cultural “ambassadors” to the English-speaking world.

This process was not always smooth, and there were moments when certain elements didn’t translate. At times, these were lexical items or indexical terms embedded in a particular social world. At other moments, the question of untranslatability was broader, more philosophical, suggesting the limits of translating across worldviews, histories, and inequalities of power, wealth, and access. In these moments of incommensurability, rather than establishing a relationship across difference, those differences were reified and became more fixed. In many cases translation was contingent, that is, provisional. My fieldwork was full of instances where individuals with differing experiences, values, approaches, and affective entanglements came together with some kind of a shared endeavor. These moments were not always seamless and did not always result in a harmonious accord across cultures and languages.

Lay rhetoric of translation and cross-cultural communication often depicts an idealized vision of linguistic and cultural contact. This project began by examining these popular depictions of translation as a mode of cross-cultural communication and as a means to improving fraught relationships across languages and cultures. In the process, however, I found that the translations that emerged did so out of contingent processes, ones that were both embedded within and helped to produce a global binary between Arab worlds and the West, coupled with the relations of violence and power that seemed to separate them. In the dissertation, I focus on the pauses, the stuck moments that were often moments of reckoning with incommensurability of one kind or another. My fieldwork illuminates the compromises that were made at every turn, the forms of misunderstanding that persisted and the practices required to produce illusions of transparency and commensurability. I explore how differences of attitude, affect, value, engagement, practice, (what might, in another moment, have been termed simply “culture”) were mediated, but also constructed, activated, or challenged, in the process of translating these novels.

This dissertation takes an ethnographic approach to the process of translating novels from Arabic into English. In the most literal sense, this project looks at how a novel in Arabic is transformed into a novel in English, such that the two material objects can be compared, although, as I will discuss, these material objects emerge out of differing histories and practices. In order to do so, I conducted fieldwork in a publishing house and I draw on discussions from editorial meetings. I also interviewed authors and translators about their translation experiences and practices. I look at how book covers are created and book titles chosen. I examine the choices made by translators and those made by book reviewers. Throughout, I found that decisions were made contingently, provisionally, given logistical and material constraints.

Novels are a global commodity that circulate like many others and according to the logics described by scholars of globalization (Tsing 2004; Ong and Collier 2005; for further discussion, see below). While many objects might undergo some kind of transformation prior to being extricated from one local setting and circulated globally (for instance, new marketing and packaging may be used; in some instances the product itself may change to appeal to local tastes), these transformations are often hidden, obscured, and reside in the realm of trade secrets. In the case of translated novels, however, the process of translation is central to the creation of the commodity itself (although translation, too, is often obscured). In the dissertation, I argue that translation is a scalar process through which some things are rendered mobile and able to circulate beyond the “local” while others remain fixed and immobile. Furthermore, these translated novels are circulated in a political context that lends them a pedagogical value. Novels from the Arab world (those in translation as well as those written by Arab authors more generally) are frequently called upon to translate the (seemingly singular) Arab world for the (also singular) West, to make it legible, understandable, or commensurable to the West. As I will explore at length below, there is a demand that novels from the Arab world do so through an engaging story, with lots of local color so that readers get the “flavor” of the place. This status makes translated novels a valuable site for analysis, both of commodities as they are produced and circulate in the contemporary moment and insofar as these novels are called upon in culturist terms to interpret a whole region for their English-language readers.

Indeed, much more than novels are being translated here. Translated novels hold out the promise of making the world, in all its diversity, legible and understandable to the Western reader. The chapters that follow examine this promise, what it enables and what it curtails, when applied to the region of the Arab world. My study of the translation of novels explores novels that circulate from Arabic to English, from the Arab world to the West.¹ Such a trajectory, however, is not divorced from the inequalities of wealth, power, and access that make it unique, indeed, one of the reasons these novels circulate in this fashion is that they fulfill (or promise to fulfill) a Western desire to learn about the Other.

In this introductory chapter I look at three key examples. The three examples all engage with the political stakes of novels that circulate between the Arab world and the West. The first example is an ethnographic one, drawn from my fieldwork at book fairs. This example stages the kind of gaps, misunderstandings, or incommensurability that I encountered in my fieldwork. I

¹ Although novels may be considered a Western form of cultural production, themselves introduced to the Arab world in the context of projects of modernization and colonial investment in the region, viewing the Arab novel as an import or facsimile of a Western form would flatten the specificities of these novels and the tradition within which they emerge. I will discuss the emergence of the Arab novel below, although I do not treat the subject exhaustively. Furthermore, the importance of translation to this project of bringing novels to the Arab world offers an interesting converse to the situation I examine here. See for example (Allan 2008; Allen 1995; Shalan 2002; Mitchell 1991).

also introduce a non-Western perspective, asking how we might think about issues of translation and cultural understanding otherwise, from within a quite different tradition. The next example, that of the Rushdie affair, is drawn from recent history. I use it to clarify the political stakes of literature and to lay the groundwork for my own project. The final example is textual, drawn from an article in the *New Yorker*. This article typifies the way that novels in translation from Arabic were depicted in English-language public sphere discourse. It provides useful suggestions for how the responsible reader might approach these novels, and in so doing, suggests much about how these readers and novels are constructed, and in relation to what other books and media. In my discussion of these three examples, I cover the basic theoretical groundwork for the dissertation, particularly anthropological approaches to commensuration (and incommensuration), globalization, and circulation. I also discuss the tradition of the novel in Arabic and how translation as a practice is situated in an Arabic context. Thus, in the chapter I outline both the key concerns of the dissertation and the theoretical landmarks that guide the way. I begin however, by clarifying some of the key terms.

Mapping the World: Vocabularies

In his essay “Beyond Occidentalism,” Fernando Coronil notes that geographic terms map the world and serve to fix certain regional boundaries (1996). He notes that even when there is not a clear referent for terms such as “the West” or “the third world,” they are used, and “create the illusion” of representing a “distinct external reality” (1996: 52). Coronil suggests that far from being merely incidental, the geographic terms used to divide up the globe have a proscriptive effect, creating, rather than describing, the regions, borders, and relations that they describe. In this dissertation about the translation of Arabic novels, I must begin with a brief discussion of the terms I will be using. In the dissertation, I will refer to novels written in Arabic as well as some composed in other languages by Arab authors (or authors of Arab-descent) as novels from the Arab world. I use the term “Arab world” to suggest a continuity with the language of use, Arabic. Although I often use the term in its singular form, I recognize that such a term flattens the distinctions inevitable in a region that spans the distance from Morocco to Oman, covering not only thousands of miles of terrain, but areas with differing local histories, traditions, commitments, and even languages.

My fieldwork was based in Cairo, Egypt, where I worked at the American University in Cairo Press (AUCP). As a result the chapters that deal most specifically with this fieldwork are not so much about the “Arab world” in any general sense as they are about “Egypt” in very particular and sited ways. In those chapters, chapters two and three, which form Part One of the dissertation, I examine how “Egypt” was represented in books that were to circulate outside the region (in North America or the United Kingdom, particularly). I explore how local concerns (about modernity, about symbols, about Egypt’s contested past) shaped the way the country was represented in titles and cover designs that circulated elsewhere. Thus, in these ethnographic chapters, the Arab world as an organizing category recedes while Egypt, as a specific ethnographic site, emerges instead.

The three chapters that make up Part Two deal with the process and strategies of translation (chapter four), the circulation of the translated novels in English-language media, particularly how authors are conscripted to serve as cultural ambassadors (chapter five), and the figure of the imagined reader and the public of the novel in translation (chapter six). In these three chapters, I draw on ethnographic fieldwork at book fairs, at the AUCP, and extensive interviews with authors and translators. In addition, I draw on Western (particularly, though not

exclusively, American) media discourse around novels translated from Arabic. In this discourse, the Arab world is often depicted as a singularity and novels are positioned as interpreting it for an English-language reader.

I occasionally use the term “Middle East.” This term has more political connotations and is linked with the history of Area Studies, particularly as it emerged in the universities of the United States after World War II. This political history and the fact that the term is not indigenous to the region is why I rarely use it. When I do, it is in the context of the publishing industry, often in reference to the Middle East edition of a book. I use the term as it was used in my field site with respect to particular domains of distribution. In this case, “Middle East” referred to the bounded, geographic region where a particular edition of a book would be distributed. The term is thus used in the context of distribution networks of a publishing industry largely based in the West. It reflects particular mappings and regional divisions that were applied in the context of this global industry.

At times, I mention the “Muslim” or “Islamic” world. This term indicates a much broader and more diverse area including much of South Asia, Indonesia, and Muslim communities elsewhere. While the “Arab” world is an ethnic or linguistic category, the “Muslim” world is a religious one. Although the two are not contiguous, they are often conflated, particularly in American political rhetoric that frames “Islam” as a problem (see for example Salama 2011). Thus, as novels from Arabic are translated and framed in English as translating the “Arab” world, they are sometimes framed as translating the “Islamic” world too.

The other terms I use are positioned in opposition to these regional terms. I discuss the “West” or occasionally “North America and the United Kingdom.” I use the term “the West” as shorthand to describe the geographic region of North America and Europe. However, as with the term “Arab” world, I recognize that it flattens a heterogeneous set of countries and peoples. As a term, however, it invokes a particular lineage: histories of colonialism, conquest, and the philosophical apparatus used to justify this violence. Further, as Said (1979) and Coronil (1996) have suggested, the construction of the “West” as a stable category has only been achieved alongside the construction of the “East” or “Orient” as its other. This process and history matters very deeply in the context and situations I’m discussing here. Indeed, I will examine how translated novels are often framed in the public sphere in these civilizational terms. Thus, when I use the term the “West,” I do so to indicate this convention and history as it remains relevant and even structures particular engagements and interactions in the contemporary world.

I turn now to the first of three examples I will discuss in this introduction. They each lay the groundwork for the dissertation and frame the interventions I will be making. Each of these three raises questions of politics, literature, and the contemporary world that are central to the dissertation. I begin, however, with an ethnographic example that stages a cultural gap, a situation of not so much a misunderstanding, as an inability to speak and be heard, an impasse that prevented conversation. This example occurred at a book fair in Abu Dhabi. As a professional event of the publishing industry, the scene of the book fair highlights that these novels in translation are produced and circulate as commodities in the realms of global capital.

Why don't you go to the library?

In 2010, while conducting fieldwork in Egypt, I attended the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair (ADIBF), one of several international book fairs I attended as a part of my fieldwork to investigate the translation of novels from Arabic to English.²

Much of the business of these fairs takes place between agents, authors, publishers, scouts, and others at the various booths and over lunch, drinks, or dinner. However, since I had no negotiations to take care of, no business appointments at which to pitch a manuscript or book project, I instead attended the cultural programming and the professional programming. The cultural programming consisted primarily of author talks, readings, and occasionally seminars. The audience for these was at times unclear—and this was reflected in the generally (with a few notable exceptions) low numbers of attendees.

The professional programs, however, were very well attended: almost every session I went to was packed. These programs were largely focused on how Arab publishers could make their works more visible, legible, and commensurable with Western norms of the publishing industry.

One such panel featured two literary agents and a publisher from New York. The panel was dedicated to the figure of the literary agent, a position that does not exist in the Arabic publishing context.³ The invited speakers collectively gave an overview of the way the publishing industry in the United States works, the connections between agents and publishers, and the necessity of having an agent to be published by one of the established New York houses.

They spoke to the difficulties in getting translated fiction published in the United States, and the comparatively low numbers of translations published in the United States compared to other Western nations. The oft-quoted number is that only 3% of all books published in the United States are translations. They offered a rationale for this, explaining that the United States, as a nation of immigrants, has always celebrated the immigrant narrative, stories of assimilation and difference in the melting pot of the country. In this way, they explained, the nation reads about the world. Not as it exists outside, but rather as it can be experienced in the various communities of the country. They recognized, however, that this was not ideal and encouraged publishers and writers to submit works (popular works, those that had been commercially successful in their home market, and preferably successful in another Western market, such as France or Spain) for translation and publication in the United States. And overall, they emphasized that US readers like to read fiction.

During the question and answer session, a publisher and bookseller from Iraq stood up. He was an older gentleman and spoke in painstaking English, although there was simultaneous translation offered (English/Arabic) and almost everyone in the room, including all the panelists, had one of the proffered headsets.

“Readers in the US,” he asked, “Do they prefer to learn history through fiction? But how can they, when it’s fiction? Why don’t they go to the library and learn the history and politics of a country? How can they say they know something about the country from reading fiction? This is fiction! It is not true!” His voice rose, in incredulity and almost outrage, as he spoke.

The literary agents on the panel were puzzled. They paused and looked at each other. Then they mumbled a bit, unclear as to what he was asking. One of them jumped in to say that

² Chapter five deals at greater length with ethnographic material from both the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair and the Frankfurt Book Fair in the context of a discussion of the commodification of literature.

³ Differences between the Arabic and English publishing conventions are discussed further in chapter two with respect to editorial practices.

this wasn't an exact science, that as agents and publishers, they were in the business of making guesses and couldn't guarantee that people would like or not like a particular work.

This however, completely missed the point of what the Iraqi publisher was asking. And so he repeated it, demanding to know why Americans didn't go to the library, why they thought that fiction ("It is not true, it is fiction!" he exclaimed) could educate one as to the culture and politics of a country, why they didn't read the histories of a place?

Finally, after a few moments of baffled stares at each other, one of the literary agents began, in a rather didactic tone, to explain that "Fiction can allow one to experience new places. People look for cultural representation, not necessarily truth." Fiction may be less authoritative than a history book, he continued, but storytelling is an easier way to gain an American reader. And even if the story is not true, there are elements of truth to a narrative. "You can get a sense, a flavor of a place from reading fiction," he explained, "outside of the plot details that might be made up."

This response seemed to highlight, rather than bridge, the irreconcilable differences of these two positions. According to one, literature or fiction could be used instrumentally to learn about a place, almost without trying. The paramount example of this, and one that was explicitly mentioned during the panel was *The Kite Runner*, a book that shaped the session not least because the publisher there was affiliated with the press who had published the bestseller (2003). Through the wild success of this novel, American readers had become familiar with Afghanistan. American readers had read this book and absorbed, not only the story of a young boy, but the experience of living in Afghanistan. It should be noted, of course, that *The Kite Runner* was not only written in English, but that its author, Khaled Hosseini had lived in the United States since he was 15. However, the speakers at the panel did not dwell on these details. *The Kite Runner* had taught Americans what it was like to grow up in Afghanistan. It had provided insight into a land which otherwise seemed resolutely foreign. This was the perspective of the American panelists. They were looking for another *Kite Runner*.

However, according to the other logic at stake, the one espoused by the Iraqi bookseller, being cultured required something quite different. My sense was that he spoke with the understanding that being cultured (*mu'adib* or *muthaqaf*) entailed deep learning, attention to the politics and history of a place, and a knowledge of literary traditions—not just knowledge of the latest bestseller. This way of being cultured included not only a fundamental body of knowledge to be mastered, but also the techniques for further study, in this case, through attention to historical details. Furthermore, in this formation, history as a genre has a very different provenance than it does in the Western/English speaking world.

I do not mean to suggest that the Iraqi publisher would have been entirely unfamiliar with reading practices common in the West, although there may have been quite vast differences in the reading practices he advocated from those described by the Americans on the panel. Considerable labor during the colonial period of the nineteenth and early twentieth century was expended to bring Western forms of knowledge production to the Arab world (see, for example, Timothy Mitchell 1988; Michael Allan 2008). The misunderstanding between these publishers from two different countries did not stem from an unfamiliarity with certain generic norms. The Iraqi publisher's critique of American reading practices did not, I think, grow out of a misunderstanding of the genre of fiction or how novels might be read. The norms of American reading practice may have been unfamiliar to him, but novels have been an important part of Arabic literary production for generations.

Furthermore, it does not seem coincident that the gentleman who raised a critique of the American mode of learning about cultural difference was from Iraq, a country which the United States had invaded twice within the preceding two decades, had enforced sanctions with devastating effects on the local civilian population, and had destroyed substantial segments of the infrastructure.⁴ That the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was not well planned or culturally sensitive has been well documented (see for example, Ricks 2006; Slevin 2003). The question about the means by which Americans learn about other places seems haunted by the brutal consequences of institutional and individual ignorance. A failure of planning in Washington had grave consequences in Baghdad. At this moment, global politics and inequalities seemed very much at stake. The rubble of Baghdad seemed to bear witness to the risk in not living in a way that is easily comprehensible from an American perspective.

My interest in this scene, however, lies in dwelling in this moment where a question has been asked that simply can not be heard. The question he poses, about the uses of fiction and, more broadly, an orientation to or relationship with the rest of the world beyond the American shore, was not taken up by the panelists. Indeed, the response the American literary agent gives was not only condescending, but it missed the point. This was not a scene of outright conflict or dissembling, rather, it was a scene of incommensuration. The question the Iraqi publisher posed was not intelligible to the American panelists.

After a long pause, once it was clear that this was the best, the only, answer he was going to get, the Iraqi man sat down, grumbling a bit as he did. The panelists quickly turned to other questions. The moment had passed. His question remained unanswered, unheard, and the session continued as though it had never been asked. Afterward, as those who had attended the session milled about outside, enjoying the coffee and tea that had been provided, I overheard the Iraqi man in heated conversation. Clearly, the answer the literary agents had given did not seem adequate to him.⁵ This moment was not a moment of understanding or successful communication. Rather, it highlighted the differences that existed between these individuals. Indeed, in spite of the fact that he spoke in English, and despite the headsets and interpreters providing simultaneous translations, the misunderstanding here, the failure of translation, as it were, did not occur at the level of language, but on a more philosophical level.

What would an answer to the Iraqi gentleman look like? What would it mean to listen to him? For starters, it would mean engaging with the tradition from which he spoke, with the vocabularies of literature, translation, and history out of which his concerns emerged. His question challenges the reader to learn about history and politics in order to understand the novel. Indeed, his question places in question the very possibility of a kind of translation that severs novels from their contexts, that renders them mobile objects that can circulate, unencumbered.

⁴ See for example a recent study on the mortality associated with the US war in Iraq between 2003 and 2011 (Hagopian et. al. 2013). See also: <http://www.juancole.com/2013/10/american-population-sanctions.html>

⁵ I attended the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair just a month after beginning my fieldwork. At the time, I was focused on the publishing industry and on the mechanics of translations. With the overly-narrow focus of an inexperienced fieldworker, I didn't think to follow up with the man who asked this question. I didn't think it was immediately relevant to the research I was conducting. I took furious notes on the session and about the encounter afterward, but I didn't introduce myself or speak with this Iraqi publisher outside the context of the session. I simply thought that it wouldn't be relevant to the dissertation. While in retrospect, I might have spoken with him and asked him to further elaborate his concerns and questions, the labor of ethnography, like that of translation itself, is often incomplete and provisional. Rather than regretting a missed opportunity, I see it rather as a kind of artifact of the time and place, of my own sense of the project and sense of what ethnographic work entailed. The fact that that changed over the course of the research suggests only the inevitable development and progression that occurs in the process.

I will return to his question below and will provide a bit of an introduction to the history of the novel in Arabic and how translation has been framed in an Arab context. For now, I want to leave his question as an instigation and a challenge. I turn to another example where literature, a novel, instigated a kind of cultural rupture and became not only a site of politics but of considerable political action as well: the Rushdie Affair.

Literature and Liberal Debates: The Rushdie Affair

The Rushdie Affair offers a productive glimpse of the political stakes of novels, especially novels from or about the Islamic world that circulate in the West. By discussing the Rushdie affair, I hint at the way in which I will consider novels in the dissertation more broadly. In the chapters that follow, I explore how novels in translation are constructed and produced; I look at the process of translation and of book-making, including choices of cover design and titles. However, I also consider how books circulate discursively and how authors and their personal histories are tied to the possible circulation of the novel. Thus, I do not consider translated novels only textually, but as complicated composite objects that are materially and discursively constructed and circulate in particular networks and alongside other figures, such as that of the author. The Rushdie affair provides an example of an instance where it is impossible to consider the text of the novel outside the broader ways in which it was interpreted, including protests, calls to ban the novel, and even threats on the life of the author. The events of the Rushdie affair clarify the way that novels can become political documents and spark political debates. Indeed, the discourse around the novel became a central part of the scandal. Finally, it provides a classic example of the global stakes of literature in the contemporary world.

There are several distinctions that must be made before I begin this discussion. First, unlike some (though not all) of the novels and authors I'll be discussing here, *The Satanic Verses* was composed in English. Thus, it was not a translated novel. Furthermore, it is not an Arab novel, rather, a South Asian or Anglo-Indian one. Although Rushdie was born and raised in India, he went to university, lived, and wrote in England.

Much has been written about Salman Rushdie's controversial *Satanic Verses* and the varying sentiments with which it was received, from celebration and adulation in the West to outrage and cries of blasphemy in Iran, other parts of the Arab world, and among Muslim communities elsewhere. In the Rushdie Affair, the same text was interpreted in vastly different ways by differing groups and with consequently different effects. I will argue that translation, or more particularly a lack thereof, was central to the scandal as what emerged were different and incompatible readings of the novel and understandings of what the response of the government could or should be. I will also examine the way that the response to British Muslim's protests over the novel suggests the limits to liberal tolerance of different ways of life. In this way, the controversy over this novel highlights several fractures through which to explore the question of the politics of literature and how the Arab world is made legible in the West.

In the West, the *Satanic Verses* was primarily celebrated as a post-modern masterpiece. However, Muslim criticism of the novel spurred a very different set of response by the liberal West: these focused on the liberal values of tolerance and free speech. Before I examine these responses, I want to discuss briefly the varied criticism of the novel. In particular, it is worth noting that some critiques of the novel disputed its very claim to be a novel. That is, these readers rejected the text as a novel, reading instead in any number of other ways. For example, in his review of the book, Sayed Ali Ashraf suggested that the text is rightly a blasphemous history, but that Rushdie wrote it "in the guise of a novel" in order to be able to be published (Cited in

Appingnanesi and Maitland 1990: 19). In this reading of the text, the fictional aspect of the novel is merely a pretense, a “thin veil of fiction” used to “vilify the Prophet” (19). Indeed, Ashraf suggests that Rushdie was “preaching an anti-Islamic theory” and therefore “his liberty as a writer ends and he should be treated as anyone producing blasphemous writing is treated” (19). The limits of assuming that the novel is a stable object become clear. What can be regarded unproblematically as a novel in the West might not read so easily as a novel elsewhere.

Other critical responses to the book read the novel quite differently. The responses of the Ayatollah Khomeini and other prominent figures in Iran, such as the President and Hashemi-Rafsanjani of the Iranian Majlis, grappled with the novel as a political document. In their responses, the book is construed as a plot hatched by the intelligence agencies of the Western powers in response to the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Appingnanesi and Maitland 1990: 69). For example, a radio broadcast asserts that it was “published at the request of British Intelligence services by a hireling of Indian origin who lives in England and is known as Salman Rushdie. After publication it was introduced by these very intelligence services as the book of the year in Britain” (71). Crucially, the fact that the book was nominated for prestigious literary prizes in Britain serves to confirm the suspicion that the novel is a part of a much larger plot. Whereas the liberal reader might see the book’s celebration and nomination for literary awards as proof of its virtue, viewed from another (paranoid) light, these same events confirm the truth of the suspicions that it was, in fact, a plot by intelligence agencies. In his Friday sermon, the then Iranian president asserted that “one member of the British royal literary society was forced to write a book” (73). He notes that it is “a fictional novel; it is a story” but understands it as the product of coercion in which “ugly and offensive interpretations” of the stories of the Prophet are depicted (73). Further, he reads the marketing and circulation of the book as a confirmation of the uniqueness of this text among other novels, and as further proof of a plot against Islam orchestrated by the British and American intelligence agencies. These readings position the text as a fraud, as blasphemous, and as a ruse of the intelligence agencies of the West. In doing so, they deny the novel its status as novel. The fatwa calling for the death of Salman Rushdie only emerges within this context. While it might be unfathomable that the response to a seemingly harmless novel would be a call for the execution of its author, this response only emerges when the novel is understood as a part of a plot by the intelligence agencies in Britain and the United States. The fatwa is a political response to what is perceived as a political threat. Rushdie is perceived as a political actor. The text is read and interpellated as a part of a much larger political conflagration and Western response to the Islamic Revolution in Iran. As such, Hashemi-Rafsanjani in the Iranian Majlis asserts that it is “worse than an officially declared war” (Appingnanesi and Maitland 1990: 69). Read as a geopolitical document, the response is a political one. Liberal responses in the West criticized the fatwa for punishing an author for his text, thus disrupting the convention of freedom of speech that has been politically important in Western liberal democracies. However, as I will discuss in chapter five, when literature from the Arab world circulates in the West, the author is often framed as an ambassador and novels are often interpreted autobiographically. The relationship between the author and the text, indeed, the responsibility of the author for the text, is here placed in question.

This example provides an extreme example of not only the multiple ways literature can be interpreted and the very different actions or consequences that follow, but of the political stakes of literature more generally. Before turning to the Muslim reactions in the West, and the response by liberal regimes, I want to dwell, for a moment, on the lack of understanding at the heart of this scandal. Arguably, the Iranian government officials did not read the same text that

secular liberals in the West did. The very different responses to the text grow out of radically different readings of it.

In this dissertation, I want to complicate these positions, rather than reifying the distinctions that separate them. Discussion of this controversy often frames it in exceptional terms: Rushdie's novel itself as an exceptional one and the response to it as similarly exceptional. Rather than examining this controversy as a singular instance, I want to probe how it makes visible and evident the politics that underlie the way in which novels from and about the Arab world are framed in the West. These novels, I will argue, become vehicles that are imbued with particular types of mobility and immobility. In the contemporary moment, novels are, in fact, central to the broader politics of "Islam" versus "the West." In particular, novels are a mode through which the Muslim world is represented in the West and through which differences between the "West" and the "Arab" world are constructed. Paradoxically, these differences are created and constructed largely in spite of, or alongside a rhetoric that celebrates novels as producing and promoting cross-cultural understanding. How might we come up with a unique position to read this geopolitical relation, one that lies at the center of the politics of the contemporary world, and the limits to translation that are produced alongside rhetorics of understanding? I attempt here to do just that, to examine the geopolitical relation between the West and the Arab world by looking at how novels are produced and circulate across and between these regions.

The varied responses to the *Satanic Verses* illuminated the vastly different ways in which the text could be differently interpreted, including as a brilliant, groundbreaking novel, as a false history, or as a piece of political propaganda. The Rushdie Affair, however, was not limited to these differing responses to the novel. Rather, the controversy over the novel (including these questions as to its status as novel) generated massive protests, particularly among Muslim communities. The demand amongst Muslim communities in the United Kingdom that the book be banned and the protests to this effect in turn sparked a great deal of moral handwringing about liberalism, multiculturalism, and the status of minority communities in the United Kingdom. In effect, these protests highlighted the limits of what could be tolerated within a liberal state, that is, the 'Britishness' of these communities was placed in question by their (illiberal) demand that the book be banned.⁶

Translation may, in fact, be more central to the scandal than it appears at first glance. For, the seemingly non-secular demand that the book be banned may, in fact, emerge out of a different concept of secularism than the British one. In their introduction to *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (2006), Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Anuradha Dingwaney Needham note that, unlike in the West, where secularism is taken to be a separation between the state and religion, in India, a secular government is one that protects all religions. They note that this means the Indian government is very involved in matters of religion including "administering religious trusts, declaring holidays for religious festivals, preserving the system of different personal laws for different communities," among others as a part of the mandate to protect the religious freedom of its citizens (Needham and Rajan 2007: 20). While I do not have ethnographic data about the understanding of secularism held by the Muslim protesters who demanded that Rushdie's book be banned, the vast difference between concepts of secularism in India from Britain should at the very least suggest that there may have been a variety of

⁶ For discussion of a similar situation in the context of Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad and how Muslim protests illuminated the limits of liberal discourse and thought, please see Mahmood 2009; Asad 2009; Keane 2007.

understandings of what secularism entails. And indeed, that the misunderstanding that sparked such furor might have had to do with a failure of translation as much as a failure of multiculturalism.

In the context of this dissertation, the British response to the Muslim protests, which revealed the limits of British liberal ideology and practice, is as relevant and revealing as the larger controversy over the novel. Indeed, the way in which a literary text can become central to a particular kind of politics and political engagement is important for my consideration of how Arabic novels circulate in the West.

In thinking about the way in which the Rushdie affair revealed fractures in the facade of British multiculturalism, I turn to Talal Asad who explores the British response to these protests to ban Rushdie's book in the context of debates around multiculturalism. Asad examines the comments made by a Conservative minister of State, John Patten, first in a letter to the *Times* and later in a pamphlet entitled "On Being British" (Asad 1993: 242-243). In his letter to the *Times*, Patten celebrates immigrants from the former colonies for adding "to Britain's wealth of culture and tradition" (Patten in Asad 1993: 242). Asad notes that the singular "culture-and-tradition" is, in Patten's formulation "already in place, an essence that can be added to by foreigners precisely to the extent that there is an affinity between what they bring and what is essentially there" (242). To support his point, Asad notes that the conservative Patten praises Muslim immigrants for being, essentially, "potential Tories": valuing faith, families, hard work, and a respect for the law (242). Patten's comments attempt to flatten and erase cultural differences, instead assimilating Muslim and other immigrants insofar as they enrich the extant British culture and tradition. Or, to frame it otherwise, it welcomes minority subjects so long as they make themselves understandable to the liberal majority.

In his discussion of the various arguments around multiculturalism, both academic and popular, Asad examines the limits to which minority subjects are actually welcome, or, in other terms, the limits to which the British state will tolerate difference. He notes that in Patten's essay "On Being British," and other similar pieces, "what is crucial for the government is not homogeneity versus difference as such but its authority to define crucial homogeneities *and* differences" (267). The government and other authoritative speakers seek the hermeneutic power of definition. The Britishness that Patten elaborates in his pamphlet does not exclude difference, but rather appropriates it by delimiting what kinds of difference are tolerable and what kinds are not. While protesting and demonstrating to demand changes are seen as falling within norms of liberal British conduct, the demand that a book be banned exceeds those norms.⁷ The novel proved a catalyst for a debate around issues central to British identity and of political importance at the time.

The Rushdie Affair is thus instructive as it both illuminates the way in which a novel can be read in multiple and divergent ways and highlights that these incompatible views may exist within the context of a single liberal state. I have discussed this incident as a means of introducing the kinds of concerns I will be addressing in the dissertation and to frame the way in which novels are both political and politicized in the context of contemporary global affairs. I argue, here and throughout the dissertation, that given the broader political context within which these translations are produced, including the public discourse in the media about them, they illuminate the conditions and possibilities of late liberal encounters with alterity.

⁷ Although, as I suggest above, that demand may be reflective of another version of secularism, one that has purchase in India, not England.

I situate the project of translating literature within an anthropological conversation around cultural commensuration. Indeed, I view translation of the kind I explore here as a kind of commensuration. Anthropologists have theorized commensuration as a mode of encountering the other and the liberal subject position from which certain kinds of commensuration are made possible or foreclosed. Elizabeth Povinelli's (2001) consideration of the terms of incommensurability and radical social worlds is an important contribution to this literature. Of particular relevance here are her comments on the social world of late liberalism. Povinelli examines the relationship between minority and liberal subjects and the demand placed upon minority subjects to make themselves legible to the liberal subject. In the dissertation, I argue that translations are often framed as interpreting (making commensurable) the Arab world. I argue that this desire for commensurability grows out of a demand by liberal subjects that the other (minority subjects, or in the cases I examine, the Arab world) make themselves legible to the liberal West.

Povinelli's article is illustrative in staging this encounter. She discusses the theory of public communication (and the public) that grounds liberal democracy. Povinelli traces the Enlightenment (Kantian) concept of the public and civic engagement through scholars of the twentieth century (Habermas and Rawls, for example). She notes that "the power of a particular form of communication [i.e. public communication] to commensurate morally and epistemologically divergent social groups lies at the heart of liberal hopes for a nonviolent democratic form of governmentality" (Povinelli 2001: 326). This point is central to both Povinelli's argument and my consideration of translation in this dissertation. Povinelli here highlights the fact that commensuration, through public exchange, is a key component of liberal ideology. That is, creating consensus or understanding through particular forms of public discourse is deeply embedded in liberal thought. The discourse around translation of novels from Arabic falls solidly within this tradition of creating commensuration via public exchange.

The importance of public discourse as a means and mechanism through which to mediate and metabolize differences across communities is an issue that comes up at several points throughout the dissertation. I will address it most directly, however, in chapter six, where I examine the figure of the reader and the public of these novels. In that chapter, I argue that the public of translated novels stitch together the public of the novel in Arabic and the public of other English-language novels, thus creating a public that bridges cultural differences. Furthermore, I argue that framing these novels in pedagogical terms, as they frequently are (and as I will discuss further below), reframes in terms of a difference of expertise the fact that these publics are composed around cultural difference.

In her article, Povinelli examines how liberal ideologies of commensuration are regularly contradicted by oppressive practices within liberal regimes. She notes that: "democratic nations contain the violent suppression of Islamic fundamentalisms, David Koresh and Move members are burned to the ground, queers are staked out in all senses of the term" (Povinelli 2001:327). Given that suppression and repression occur within liberal democracies, as Povinelli abundantly points out that they do, the question is not, she asserts "how a multicultural or plural nation (or world) is sutured at the end of some horizon of liberal, institutionally embedded communication" (327-328). Rather, the crucial question becomes, "how the incommensurateness of liberal ideology and practice is made to appear commensurate" (328).

Povinelli continues by discussing the work of Richard Rorty and other scholars of liberalism in order to examine the way in which their theories implicate liberalism's Others even as they critique liberal ideologies. Her critique of Rorty (following that of Connelly 1983 and

others) is that in Rorty's framework "Liberals will listen to and evaluate the pain, harm, torture they might unwittingly be causing minority others. Nonliberals and other minority subjects will present their pained subjectivity to this listening, evaluating public" (Povinelli 2001: 329). Thus, even liberal gestures toward equality or tolerance often reinforce distinctions between nonliberal and liberal subjects. Indeed, Povinelli, taking Rorty's discussion as a model for liberal ideologies more generally, pushes the point. She suggests that:

If the message addressing the liberal public might be "begin with the doable," the message addressing radical worlds is "be other so that we will not ossify, but be in such a way that we are not undone, that is make yourself doable for us." And the message conveys the stakes of refusing to be doable, and, thereby, the stakes of forcing liberal subjects to experience the intractable impasse of reason as the borders of the repugnant—actual legal, economic, and social repression. It is in this way that the late liberal diaspora shifts the burden for social commensuration from the place it is generated (liberalism) to the place it operates on. (329-330)

What is crucial in Povinelli's account of commensuration and late liberalism is this shifting burden of social commensuration onto liberalism's Other. While the process of commensuration, Povinelli explains, has been central to the discourse and ideology of liberalism since its inception, in the current moment, rather than commensurating between or across views within a community, the demand is placed on nonliberal or other "minority subjects" (as Povinelli phrases it) to make themselves legible and commensurable to the liberal subject. We may be reminded here of the American publishers at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair who suggested that American readers like to learn about the world through stories of immigration and assimilation, that is, a kind of making intelligible or commensurable without troubling too seriously the assumptions and beliefs of the liberal reader.

The demand and the desire that Povinelli's critique makes evident, that minority subjects make themselves legible for the liberal subject is at the center of what I examine here. It was also central to the debates around the Rushdie Affair. I return here to Talal Asad's reading of the liberal response to Muslim protests over Salman Rushdie's novel. He investigates the language used to describe non-white communities in discourse on British multiculturalism. He notes that "black" as a term for all racial minorities has limits when applied to individuals of South Asian descent. He also asserts that the terms "cultural (or ethnic) minority" are frequently used, but perform a strange marriage of political (specifically electoral) and cultural language. He writes:

For whereas 'majority' and 'minority' relate to the principle by which public policies are made and unmade, 'culture' is virtually coterminous with the social life of particular populations, including habits and beliefs conveyed across generations. One is always born into a culture, and even if one alters one's way of life later, one always belongs to traditions by reference to which one's difference is constructed or elaborated. Belonging to an electoral majority or minority is a matter of being enumerated *ex post facto*. To the extent that the mutually dependent concepts of majority and minority belong to the liberal political system, they presuppose a constitutional device for *resolving* differences. To speak of cultural majorities and minorities is therefore to posit ideological hybrids. It is also to make the claim that members of some cultures truly belong to a particular politically defined place, but those of others (minority cultures) do not—either because of recency (immigrants) or of archaicism (aborigines). (Asad 1993: 256)

Although written in a different moment and given different contextual specificities, Asad's point here has a deep affinity with the claims made by Povinelli as discussed above. This passage

nicely underlines one of the central claims of Povinelli's article on commensuration: that both difference (or incommensuration) and a mechanism to resolve such differences are central to liberal political systems. Povinelli notes that within theories of liberalism dating back to the Enlightenment, public discourse served as a mode of engaging with and metabolizing difference. Asad, in this passage, suggests the same about electoral politics and the potential for minority positions to be resolved. However, Asad suggests that the term "cultural minority" blends an electoral, political vocabulary with a cultural one. He notes that "one is always born into a culture," and, as such, can not change one's cultural affiliation, even if one's political views may shift and change (precisely through the process of debate and discussion that Povinelli references).

This is central to my discussion of novels in translation from Arabic to English. These novels circulate in the public sphere and garner press and media reports insofar as they represent the writing of a cultural other. However, as both Asad and Povinelli point out, the liberal desire to know (about) the Other has its limits. Existing too far outside what can be deemed tolerable can result, within liberal regimes, in severely repressive acts (as both Povinelli and Asad discuss). In the case of novels translated from Arabic, the repression of that which is incommensurate might not come in the form of domestic suppression of protests (Asad's example) or religious communities (Povinelli's), but through wars, invasions, and interventions in the international sphere.⁸

The above discussions of liberal regimes suggest that they contain a mode of metabolizing difference within certain limits. Further, these critiques suggest that liberal regimes regulate difference in ways that may, in fact, be incommensurate with their own ideological grounds. In her work on discourses of tolerance, *Regulating Aversion*, Wendy Brown explores the discourse of tolerance in the west and explores how it constructs liberal and nonliberal subjects (2006). In this discussion, she notes that tolerance is used both domestically and civilizationally: "tolerance is thus a crucial analytic hinge between the constitution of abject domestic subjects and barbarous global ones, between liberalism and the justification of its imperial and colonial adventures" (Brown 2006: 8). She asserts that "tolerance regulates the presence of the Other both inside and outside the liberal democratic nation-state, and often it forms a circuit between them that legitimates the most illiberal actions of the state by means of a term consummately associated with liberalism (8). Brown thus connects domestic and international spheres of action and illuminates the paradox articulated by Povinelli regarding the illiberal behavior often engaged in by liberal states.

With respect to this dissertation, the Arabic novels being translated in English and circulating in the West were often celebrated as tools of tolerance. Translation was lauded as a means to improve cross-cultural understanding, as I will discuss in the following section. Thus, the production and circulation of these novels took place within the context and constraints of particular liberal ideologies of reading, tolerance, and understanding. My attention to translation here considers these broader ideologies within which the novels circulated in a global sphere. I turn now to look at one example of the way that novels were ideologically positioned in public sphere discourse.

⁸ Didier Fassin's work on *Humanitarian Reason* is quite relevant here (2012). In that work, he examines the development of what he calls "the moral landscape of humanitarianism" which is characterized by "the global spectacle of suffering and the global display of succor" (Fassin 2012: ix). The celebration of Arabic novels in translation as a means to metabolize difference emerged at the same moment as the development of humanitarian reason as a means of metabolizing global suffering.

Answers to questions we did not know we wanted to ask

In a 2010 article in the *New Yorker* by Claudia Roth Pierpont, she suggests that reading Arabic literature in translation will aid the Western reader in understanding the countries and cultures of the Arab world (Pierpont 2010). She thus frames these novels in what I will call “pedagogical” terms, as offering something for the English-language reader to learn. The necessity of such understanding is predicated not only on a good liberal curiosity about the world, but also on the suggestion that such knowledge might be politically useful given current events. Thus, even as these novels are being presented individually and independent of any political event, the broader political context hovers at the margins, tinting the way in which the novels are discussed.

The article, entitled “Found in Translation: The Contemporary Arabic Novel,” begins with the following lines.

What do you know about how people live in Cairo or Beirut or Riyadh? What bearing does such information have upon your life? There are, of course, newspapers to keep responsible Americans up to date when trouble looms, and public television or even the History Channel to inform us about the occasional historic battle or archeological discovery or civil war. What else do we need? The ways that people think and work and suffer and fall in love and make enemies and sometimes make revolutions is the stuff of novels, and Arabic novels, while not yet lining the shelves of the local bookstore, have been increasingly available in English translation, offering a marvelous array of answers to questions we did not know we wanted to ask. . . . There is clearly insight as well as information in these books. And then, considering the reduced size and the volatility of the world we share, we might recall the essential lesson of a very old Arabic book that everyone knows, “The Thousand and One Nights”—that stories can have the power to save your life.

In this passage, Pierpont sets up a distinction between the information that “responsible” American readers might have about the current politics or ancient history of the region of the Arab world, in contrast to the concerns of daily life and lived realities of the contemporary, the stuff, she argues, of novels: “the ways that people think and work and suffer and fall in love and make enemies and sometimes make revolutions.” In Pierpont’s formulation, the responsible American reader (that is, the reader of *The New Yorker*) does have some grasp on the history and politics of a place. But this knowledge is not acquired through study or contemplation, as the Iraqi publisher at the Abu Dhabi book fair suggested, but is rather the information culled from news reports and History Channel specials.

The specter of war, or at least violence, haunts much of this passage, from the early reference to news reports that inform readers “when trouble looms,” implying, perhaps accurately, that news coverage of the Arab world focuses almost exclusively on violence and war. Later in the passage, she notes that the world is not only increasingly connected (its “reduced size”) but also, incredibly volatile, suggesting again that there is some risk or threat, that the situation might, literally, explode. Finally, in the last lines of this opening passage she references *The Thousand and One Nights* and its message: “that stories can have the power to save your life,” again suggesting that one’s life is at risk, or at least, the “responsible” reader might expect as much, given news reports of the region.

Pierpont notes that “there has been a concerted effort by forces of intercultural good will, Arab and otherwise, to bring newer Arabic literary works to our attention.” For Pierpont, these new literary works offer the potential to enrich an American understanding of the Arab world.

These translated novels are being celebrated in this passage for their capacity to educate the reader, to provide a ‘sense’ of the culture of a given place. In the terms of Povinelli’s article, the novels here are being called on to make legible a given lifeworld. The form here, that of the novel, is clearly crucial. The implication of the article is that the responsible American reader ought to read Arabic literature in translation, not, we should note, for its literary or aesthetic value, nor for the pleasure of the plots, but rather in order to answer their own “unasked” questions about the region. The primary appeal of Arabic literature, for Pierpont, seems to be that reading Arabic literature in translation offers “a marvelous array of questions we didn’t know we wanted to ask.” Again, in the terms of Povinelli’s critique, demanding of minority subject that their words answer the questions “we didn’t know we wanted to ask” seems to be the ultimate example of the demand by the liberal subject that the Other become legible.

To return briefly to the moment at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair, with which I opened this discussion, the Iraqi publisher challenged readers to do precisely the opposite of the kind of reading proscribed by Pierpont here. Rather than simply reading a translated novel to gain background knowledge of the politics of a place, the Iraqi publisher urged readers to learn about the history and the politics of a place in order to be able to understand it. We may note, however, the similarities between the comments and response of the American publishers there and the terms of Pierpont’s article. At the book fair, the publishers suggested that reading novels can provide one with a “sense” or a “flavor” of a place, much as Pierpont does here.

Articles like this one by Claudia Pierpont were, in some ways, the genesis of this dissertation project. I wanted to explore the way that translation was being constructed in political terms in media discourse, and particularly the work that the notion that fiction in translation can serve to bridge the gap between America and the Arab world was doing in public discourse. In 2008 and 2009 as I was preparing for my qualifying exams as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, I noticed what seemed to be an unusual amount of media attention focused on the translation of novels from Arabic to English. These articles in the media were matched by NGO and foundation support for translation and celebration of Arabic books (for example, the now-defunct Arabic Books Now website run through the British Council), an increase in literary prizes in the Arab world with a focus on translation (the preeminent example being the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, otherwise known as the Arabic Booker), and other such occurrences. What I found striking in all of these varied activities was the singular rhetoric that united them. Translation of Arabic novels into English, it promised, would help to improve cross-cultural communication and would help Americans better understand the Arab world. These novels were discussed as if they could serve a pedagogical function, lending readers a flavor or sense of what life was like elsewhere. I found this rhetoric arresting and wanted to explore not only what the promise of translated literature was, according to these media reports and foundation press releases, but also to follow this process in action and on the ground. I wanted to explore what the process of translating novels from Arabic to English entailed, in order to better contextualize the way it was being framed as the panacea for our global misunderstandings.

This is the frame for my project and my research. I was motivated to explore this liberal demand to make an Other legible through literature. While Povinelli explored this predicament in general terms, I wanted to look at how that might happen in specific instantiations and contexts. Furthermore, my investigation examined the material conditions through which these texts were created and made to perform this task of translation. What I found was that moments of incommensurability—characterized by misunderstandings or incompatibilities between varying

practices or views—emerged at every stage of the process. Often these moments highlighted differential power relations that were reinforced, rather than challenged. In this way, the demand that the Other be made legible sometimes resulted in a concentrated reflection of the self.

Another way of framing this predicament is in terms of the uses of literature. The Western response to the Rushdie Affair criticized Khomeini and the Muslim response more broadly for using literature for political ends, indeed, for reading a novel as a political text. However, in Pierpont's essay in the *New Yorker*, this is precisely the kind of reading she performs. She advocates reading these novels instrumentally and in pedagogical terms, as a way of learning about the region and intervening in the political debates. Indeed, Pierpont suggests that a desire to learn about the region of the Arab world to better understand America's military engagements there is a viable and even valuable reason to turn to Arabic novels. That is, the novels are being positioned in a Western context in political terms, as a means to better understand the geopolitical context of the region.⁹ In a more critical light, one could read these novels in translation as the tools of an imperial project.¹⁰ Pierpont's article is one of many that reveal how novels framed as representing the Arab world become vehicles that are imbued with particular types of mobility and immobility as central to the broader politics of the "West" and "the Arab world."

In thinking about how novels are framed in public sphere discourse and the way that certain elements are rendered mobile or immobile, I draw on literature around circulation and globalization. In particular, Stacy Leigh Pigg's article "Languages of Sex and AIDS in Nepal: Notes on the Social Production of Commensurability," (2001) is a key point of departure for thinking about translation in a globalized world, examining what and how certain terms circulate. In her article, she explores how a vocabulary and set of assumptions around AIDS spread to Nepal through aid and development organizations in an attempt to prevent and deal with the (likely) spread of the disease. Pigg's central concern is on the "communicative difficulties that arise as a template of internationally established knowledge acquires a local life" (Pigg 2001: 482).

Pigg explores the kinds of translation that Nepali AIDS workers are engaged in as they move between concepts in English and their Nepali expression. For Pigg, these moments of translation are central to thinking about the space of the global. She notes that the work of translation on the part of Nepali AIDS workers is "an important practice that creates routes of movement and nodes of connection through which science travels" (Pigg 2001: 482). Pigg explores the process through which a kind of commensurability was produced collectively. She notes that the difficulty in translating both biomedical knowledge about AIDS and information about its prevention was not simply a problem of finding an adequate vocabulary in Nepali through which to express concepts and information produced in English. Rather, ideas and practices around sex and the body (such as the concept of the immune system) needed to be introduced before AIDS could even be rendered in Nepali. Pigg thus demonstrates that it was not

⁹ The way in which novels are framed pedagogically in Western media discourse and how their authors are recruited to serve as literary and cultural ambassadors is discussed at length in chapters five and six.

¹⁰ Indeed, the militarization of cultural objects and knowledge in the context of US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan has been widely discussed. Anthropologists in particular have critiqued the creation of Human Terrain Systems (HTS) which militarized anthropological knowledge (and indeed recruited anthropologists) to better map the cultural layout of particular areas (see for example: Price 2002, Gusterson 2007, Gonzalez 2007). In the reverse of the case I'm looking at here, Peter Van Buren discusses how money was spent to fund the translation of American literature into Arabic rather than on providing clean drinking water or other improvements to the infrastructure of Iraq (2011).

merely a question of translating words from English, but of introducing new concepts through which to think about how the world and individual bodies worked.

I examine the material processes through which translations were constructed, through attention to the material aspects of books, such as their covers, and to the materiality of language in the process of translation. Commensurability often emerged as a useful way of framing what could or could not, was or was not, translated. My interviews with translators often revolved around questions of what could or could not be translated or the limits of translation. Indeed, I explore how the process of translation highlighted the disconnect between differing modes of thought, traditions, and practices. I look at the way in which certain elements (words, images, and so on) are rendered mobile and able to circulate, while others remain fixed.

Other scholars of circulation have attended to questions of language. Charles Briggs, in his article on “Communicability, Racial Discourse, and Disease” (2006) examines how communicative ideologies produce subjectivities in the health and racial spheres. His article examines how ideologies of communication are productive, noting that communicability, or the productive capacity of communication, “stands alongside racialization, medicalization, and other power-laden processes as integral to schemas of hegemony, coercion, and violence” (270). The concept of communicability as Briggs uses it enables, among other things, an analysis of “how access to the production and reception of authoritative knowledge about disease is distributed, and how this communicative process is ideologically constructed in such a way as to make some people seem like producers of knowledge, others like translators and disseminators, others like receivers, and some simply out of the game” (274). The term thus enables Briggs to map the way in which knowledge about health circulates and how individuals are differentially positioned according to hierarchies of class, race, and education. That is, the concept of communicability looks at how ideological constructions of communication are projected onto communicative materialities and subjects, such that we cannot see them apart from “their” supposed place within communicable frameworks.

In the examples discussed above, Pierpont and Khomeini both project communicable models, that is, ideas about how novels are produced, circulate, and are read. And they place them in relationship to the circulation of political and religious discourse. Thus they each construct a map of how novels are made and circulate. They have important consequences for geopolitical materialities, including those associated with violence. Nevertheless, communicable models are never transparent maps of practices. I examine both these broad imaginaries and the details of material practices in publishing. I look at both broad imaginaries and material practices in order to understand and think through these geopolitical relations and the relational production of good liberal “Western” subjects and dangerous, illiberal Arab ones.

My dissertation project owes much to Briggs’ work on communicability as well as his larger oeuvre. His influential article, with Richard Bauman (1990), on the way in which texts are decontextualized and recontextualized, that is, how it is that discourse or speech moves from one context to another, has deeply informed my work. This project performs a similar labor, mapping the way in which texts move and circulate through the process of their translation and publication. As in Briggs’ work on communicability, part of my project here is to map the ways in which power differentially shapes these encounters. In doing so, I explore frameworks of reception and configurations of authorship as they are transformed in the process of translating novels. I do so through an investigation of the materialities that are involved, and how the material forms of these books are made to perfectly mirror the communicabilities, as in a book cover that depicts a symbol of Egypt (see chapter three), and what happens to forms of

subjectivity as competing communicable models collide, even as their differential political, economic positionalities shape practices.

I draw on scholars of globalization and circulation to explore how novels in translation circulate as commodities. Of particular importance to my thinking here is the work of Arjun Appadurai and Anna Tsing.¹¹ Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996) takes globalization as its central concern. He examines how texts, objects, people, theories and techniques flow throughout the globe. This focus on flows has been critiqued (see, for example, Tsing 2000). I draw primarily on his work insofar as he elaborates a theory of the imagination as constitutive of modernity. He examines how people understand and imagine themselves and their surroundings in the globalized world of the late 20th century. For Appadurai, modernity is centrally a capacity of the imagination, or, as he phrases it, the work of the imagination is a "constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (Appadurai 1996: 3). Appadurai examines imagination through the effects on subject formation of two factors, first, the work of various kinds of media and second, the practices and ramifications of migration. In my work on translation, I found the imagination to be a key component at each stage in the process. In most cases, the future reader was being imagined and constructed by an author, translator, editor, or publisher. This future reader is explored in chapter six of this dissertation. However, the figure of the reader, as constructed and imagined throughout the process of translation, haunts the earlier sections. The dissertation as a whole explores the way in which novels move, how they connect and disconnect imaginaries, and how in the process some elements are produced as mobile and other as fixed.

I draw on Anna Tsing for her attention to materiality and her approach to studying the obstacles to flow and connection in her ethnography, *Friction* (2005). In order to ethnographically study the global, she asserts, one must delve into the "sticky materiality of practical encounters" (Tsing 2005:1). Instead of studying global flows, she offers up friction, pointing to the places where circulation is impeded as sites of analysis. Her work is highly ethnographic as she explores the society of the Indonesian rainforest, specifically the Meratus Mountains of Kalimantan and how the local people, foreign logging companies, and environmental activists interact. In this way, she attempts to map precisely the movement between what can be called the global and the local.

I build on Tsing's approach in my exploration of the process of translation as these texts moved from Arabic to English. I focus on the obstacles and the moments of impasse. I argue that these moments did not disrupt what might otherwise be figured as a smooth bridge between two languages, regions, and cultures, but actually constituted it. That is, the process of publishing novels in translation from Arabic was made up of moments of disconnect and disruption, in other words, moments of incommensurability. The final products, these novels now in English, may be seen as the product of a kind of bricolage. These novels were cobbled together by a great many individuals working, sometimes at cross-purposes, to transform them into text.

In the chapters that follow, I shed new light on the work of the work of scholars such as Appadurai and Tsing as I explore how texts are materially constructed and made to circulate. Indeed, I will argue that producing these novels in translation was a contingent one, given material and practical constraints. Furthermore, I examine how these novels circulated in a discursive realm often over-determined by clichéd images of the Arab world. In this way, my

¹¹ These two scholars are, in fact, also in conversation with each other. In her 2000 article on "The Global Situation," Tsing critiques theories of circulation that focus on unencumbered flows, interconnectedness, and sudden transformations. Tsing here is troubling Appadurai's notion of modernity.

work bridges an empirically grounded study of the practices of translation with an attention to the discursive realm within which these texts circulate.

This process of contingent translation included many moments of disruption, incommensuration, misunderstanding, or more simply, gaps. Indeed, my ethnographic notes are full of these moments of hesitation, miscommunication, and misunderstanding. These were moments where interviews stumbled, or discussions at meetings came to a halt. Sometimes the matter was a difference of opinion or another kind of disagreement. But in many cases, there was something more profound at stake. These moments became central to the way in which I consider the whole process. Indeed, these gaps became, I will argue, central to the creation of these novels in translation.

Following Stefania Pandolfo, I examine the productive nature of these pauses and gaps. In her ethnography, *Impasse of the Angels*, Stefania Pandolfo incorporates Arabic words into the English text (1997). These words create a productive space of difference that enables thought and growth. Many of the concepts that she leaves untranslated have to do with gaps or movement of some kind, such as *fitna*, *shetteb*, or *rohs*. The untranslatability produces a kind of gap or rupture in the ethnography, but also a movement mimetic of the concepts they express. In her work, it seems that the repetition of the gap makes it possible for discourse to emerge. The untranslatable is central for Pandolfo's work, as she explores and illuminates that which can not be translated. Translation, as in the sense of *tarjama* which I will discuss further below, is a kind of repetition, a copy, but an always incomplete copy. For Pandolfo, however, it is a repetition that opens up a generative and performative space as well.

I return now, to the moment of rupture at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair that I described above, where the Iraqi publisher asked a question of American publishers that could not be heard. In this case, this question produced a misunderstanding that revealed radically different understandings of literature, history, and reading.

Translation and *Tarjama*: Translation in an Arabic Context

What would an answer to the Iraqi publisher's question look like? In order to consider his question more seriously, I will briefly sketch the history of novels and translation in Egypt and the Arabic tradition. While this in no way will be an exhaustive treatment, it should provide some background within which we might situate his call more seriously. In doing so, I attempt to provide some semblance of the context out of which his comment about reading fiction emerged. Given the broader aims of the project, this is meant as a gesture of other possibilities, other worlds, and other ways of making sense of the social lives of books.

The earliest Egyptian novels emerged during the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century as a part of the intellectual movement known as the "Nahda" or "awakening." This movement included political and religious reformers as well as artists and writers. The first novel published in Egyptian Arabic was *Zaynab* by Muhammad Husayn Haykal (1914). Haykal, like many others of the Nahda generation, such as Taha Hussein, studied and lived in Europe. In fact, *Zaynab* was composed while Haykal was studying in Paris. In her discussion of the novel, Hilary Kilpatrick notes that the novel champions several of the major reform issues of the day, such as women's emancipation, and has a critical attitude toward religious practice (Kilpatrick 1992: 225). She notes that although the book owes much to Rousseau, "the real parallel that *Zaynab*'s plot offers is to the traditional Arabic stories of the 'Udhuri lovers, slightly altered in detail to fit into Egyptian village life" (225-226). Thus, Kilpatrick suggests that this first novel in Arabic was

informed by Western novels, but was equally influenced by traditional genres of Arabic writing. Novels in Arabic have been cosmopolitan, hybrid objects since their inception.

Kilpatrick goes on to discuss the development of the novel, noting that while many writers chose to focus on the short story, the autobiographies of important men of letters contributed greatly to the development of a tradition of the novel (1992: 226). She notes that Taha Hussein's autobiography *Al-Ayyam (The Days; 1929)* was a particularly important example of the autobiographical form and, indeed, is often included among lists of important Arabic novels. Kilpatrick suggests that Hussein's autobiography was the first work of its kind "to reach a wide public" (226). This notion that the autobiography was an uncommon form in Arabic letters was propagated by scholars and writers throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, this notion has shifted in recent decades. Indeed, in his study of the tradition of Arabic autobiography, Dwight Reynolds (2001) suggests that autobiography was, in fact, a central part of the canon of Arabic writing, well before the twentieth century.

In his book, Reynolds examines the various genres of writing that autobiography emerged out of and was in conversation with. Among these was the genre of *tarjama*. And here, the question of translation emerges once again. For the English word "translation" is, in Modern Arabic, "*tarjama*." This sense of *tarjama* as translation or interpretation existed in the medieval term as well, however, in that earlier Arabic, *tarjama* was a genre of writing, a kind of "biographical notice" in Reynold's terms (2001:42). Reynolds explains that "the term *tarjama* thus contains three central and interrelated ideas, that of explanation or interpretation, that of transformation into a different medium, and that of clarification by means of division into sections and labeling." (42). He goes on to describe the genre of *tarjama* as biographical notice as "a representation of a person, to be distinguished from the physical being; it is an inexact, imperfect copy of a life, just as a commentary cannot represent the original text, or a translation represent the Qur'an" (Reynolds 2001: 42). In these last lines, Reynolds compares the kind of biographical information provided in a *tarjama* to commentary on a text, it can not replace the original, but may make their work and accomplishments more familiar to readers. Commentary or translations serve as a kind of supplement to the text, but can never replace or equal it. He suggests that "To reach the original person in a more direct fashion can only be accomplished by reading the original text, that is, his or her works" (Reynolds 2001: 42). In his discussion of the Arabic *tarjama*, Elliott Colla notes that this genre of writing did not inquire into the "inner life of the person" but rather "emphasized [...] the words and deeds of the figure with special attention to how they revealed the moral character of the subject of the *tarjama*, something that could only be reflected in the judgments of his or her peers, students, and community" (Colla 2009: 4). Colla thus suggests that the *tarjama* is always about the broader social community of which one is a member, and indeed, that the judgment of a person's deeds lies with the broader community. *Tarjama*, then, is part of a collective endeavor of community or worldmaking.

In Reynold's discussion of the uses of *tarjama*, he compares it to commentary on the text or, it is worth noting, to translations of the Qur'an. Translation in the Arabic context is shadowed by the Qur'an itself, which stands at the limit of translation. In his *Beyond the Written Word*, William Graham notes that "the character of the Qur'an as the verbatim speech of God given once and for all through a single chosen prophet sets it apart from the Bible in either [Judaism or Christianity]" (1987: 87). The Qur'an as a text is understood to be the very word of God, and as such, is not simply a sacred text, but is the conduit through which contact with the divine is possible. Graham elaborates: "it is the concrete texts, the very words of the Qur'an, that Muslims most directly experience God. Scripture for Muslims is itself the divine presence as well as the

mediator of divine will and divine grace” (87). Theorists of the Qur’an understand it as literally divine speech. It can not be translated because the text itself as it exists in this form exceeds human understanding. For example, Al-Ghazali compares the divinity of the Qur’an to the way in which people call and command animals through specific speech acts but know that these animals do not understand human language fully. He explains that “In like manner, human beings are unable to understand the speech of God (great and mighty is He!) to its inmost depth and to the perfection of its attributes” (Al-Ghazali 1982: 59). It is for this reason that the translation of the Qur’an is effectively impossible. The text itself, as the speech of God, exceeds the possibility of human understanding.

The doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur’an, or *i’jaz* has been taken up in literary studies that examine the Qur’an as a literary document. In the early Islamic period, the *i’jaz* was understood through the doctrine of *sarfa*, or turning away. According to this doctrine, God intervened to prevent the production of a text as literarily complex and poetically impressive as the Qur’an (Abu Zayd 2003: 10). The text itself, while still a divine one, was not understood to be stylistically beyond the realm of human replicability. Instead, the miracle existed in God’s prevention of this kind of replication. Later Islamic scholars, such as Al-Jurjani, disagreed with this viewpoint, and read the inimitability of the text within the stylistics of the Qur’an itself, noting that the Qur’an challenges the Arabs to compose even just one sura that is as magnificent as the verses of the Qur’an. This implies, then, that the *i’jaz* is not limited to the meaning, or content of the Qur’an. Specifically, the inimitability of the Qur’an is not limited to the miraculous tales elaborated within, but rather to the form, and particularly the structure of the text as a whole (16). In order to better study the text, Al-Jurjani advocates attention to the order of the text, the *nazm*, and exhorts a literary attention to the text. In this way, the inimitability of the text has not proved an obstacle to engagement with it, but rather, formed the basis for a long and rich tradition of scholarship and exegesis of it.

In the Islamic context, the Qur’an stands as the limit of translation, as a text that exceeds language. In the essay on translation by Walter Benjamin mentioned earlier, he concludes by describing the interlinear translation of the Holy Writ as the ideal for translation. In the case of Scripture, he asserts, “where a text is identified with truth or dogma, where it is supposed to be ‘the true language’ in all its literalness and without the mediation of meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable” (Benjamin 1992: 82). Although Benjamin and the theorists of the Qur’an diverge in their understanding of the translatability of scriptural texts, they converge in their assessment of a genre of texts, that is, the scriptural, as beyond or outside of literal meaning, providing either the impossible ideal of translation, or simply its impossibility, its limit.

The above discussion has suggested some of the issues that frame any project to translate novels from Arabic. I have merely sketched some of the broader context and tradition from which contemporary novels in Arabic emerge. This glimpse, however brief, should suggest the broader world that is excluded from the production of most novels in translation. Some authors do attempt to recuperate some of these lost layers of meaning and tradition. Chapter Four of this dissertation focuses on precisely how it is that translators, using a strategy of transliteration, address the untranslatable elements of their text.

Transliteration is one strategy of incorporating some aspects of the original text (and context) into the translated novel. However, this strategy was one of many that translators used. And, at times, the context that might have been immediately evident, unavoidable even, to the reader in Arabic simply disappeared from the English text. For example, I spoke with the translator of a novel that takes place during a tumultuous moment in recent (post-Civil war)

Lebanese history. In Arabic, the novel is imbued with the politics of the day. The character's wanderings and happenings are punctuated by important political events. They are invoked by mention of a date or a significant square or location in the city. In English, none of this political context is provided.¹² In the process of reading, one may get a sense of the broader political atmosphere, but the specificities of the debates, the significance of a square, or the ways in which communities were fractured, would remain opaque. Unless, as the translator suggested, the interested reader were to turn to Wikipedia and other sources to fill in the gaps in her knowledge. This, however, was his hope, that the translation would inspire the reader to turn to Wikipedia, to fill in the many blanks in the text. In this hope, the translator offered a model of reading that countered that of the Iraqi publisher. He hoped that through the unexplained details, the reader would become inspired to do further research, to learn and study about what had taken place. In this way, the translation would spark a trajectory of learning that extended beyond reading the book. Translation here is not marked by loss, although clearly, there is loss, but rather, translation stands as an opening onto a new world and way of thinking.

Plan of the Dissertation:

In the previous sections of this introduction, I have mentioned and drawn on each of the chapters. Before I close, however, I will provide a more traditional cartography of the dissertation, laying out the substantive arguments of each chapter in their respective order.

Chapters two and three form Part One of the dissertation. The two chapters in this section work through three case studies. Two of these examples are drawn from my ethnographic fieldwork at the American University in Cairo Press; the third is an analysis of an internet meme that emerged out of a Photoshop scandal. Each of these examples deals with questions of representation, specifically, with how Egypt could be represented in an international sphere. In particular, these were instances where Egypt was being represented in certain kinds of texts or images that circulated in the West.

Questions of scale were central to all three of these instances, particularly in terms of how local concerns, debates, and knowledges translated, or did not, into a global context. I therefore suggest that translation is a project of scale-making. The question of modernity was also central to each of these debates. Indeed, in all three instances, Egypt's status as modern, and how that modernity could be symbolized or represented, was very much at stake. However, as these were representations, the questions was often reflected through foreign eyes, that, is, what will the American reader know about Egypt? Will she think Egypt is modern?

Chapter two, "Designing Egypt," examines one of these ethnographic examples, drawn from my fieldwork at the Press. This chapter introduces my central field site, the editorial department of the AUCP as a transnational and cosmopolitan one. The central example concerns a debate about the title of a book about Egypt. In the chapter, I examine the relationship between reality and representation in a colonial and postcolonial context to explore the nuances of this debate. In the chapter, I also examine the collective project of making a book, exploring the work of the many individuals whose labor is necessary to produce the book but might be invisible once the book has been published.

¹² It was not provided because doing so would be, in practice, impossible. An introduction could have sketched the very basics, but such front matter might be skipped, or worse, intimidate a potential reader. On a more profound level, however, the depth of familiarity a local reader would have about the events in question could not be approximated through supplemental notes or a foreword or afterword glossing key events. For further discussion of the difficulties translating local terms, please see Chapter four.

Chapter three, “Of Memes and Mubarak,” examines questions of representation not through the lens of language, but through images. In this chapter, I examine how a photograph of then-president Mubarak taken at an international gathering was photoshopped when it appeared in a local Egyptian paper. This instance of photoshop sparked a meme with many variations that quickly circulated. I examine this example in the context of representations of Egypt and particularly how these images seem to project an alternative future for the nation. I argue that memes can be considered as contemporary sites of the carnivalesque. The other example I discuss is drawn from my ethnographic work and again involved discussions about a book, in this case, about the cover image. Choosing an image that might symbolize Egypt proved contentious, highlighting concerns about how the nation could be represented.

Part two contains three chapters. These three chapters explore how these novels are translated and how they circulate discursively. Each chapter is organized around a central figure: chapter four focuses on translators, chapter five on authors, and chapter six on readers. As central figures, I draw on the interviews I conducted with translators and authors. However, I also examine how they emerge as figures, how they structure the circulation of the book or, crucially, are structured by it. I examine how authors become cultural ambassadors and how translators are called on to defend their decisions. As for readers, I look at how readers are imagined and constructed throughout the translation process.

Chapter four, “The G in Jihad,” explores the materiality of translation and how translators approach politically-charged terms. The chapter builds on my interviews with translators and examines their strategies for translating the “untranslatable,” particularly idioms and slang. I argue that in the face of untranslatable words that are locally embedded in the material conditions of particular social lives, transliteration as a mode of translating sounds is a strategy that invites readers to explore the sounds of the language in their own bodies. In doing so, it enables a recuperation of the material aspects of the original terms. I continue by exploring the ways in which translators deal with terms that are politically loaded, for example, *jihad*. In this discussion, I examine the ethical relationship translators have to their text and the way in which they translate for a future reader.

Chapter five “Spectacles, Heritage Tourism and the Making of a Literary Ambassador,” analyses the way in which Arab authors are conscripted to serve as literary ambassadors of their countries of origin when their works circulate in the West. The chapter draws on interviews with authors, on ethnographic fieldwork, and on textual analysis of media about these novels in translation, such as book reviews. I also explore the recent history of translation from Arabic to English. I link the commodification of literature to scholarly work on heritage performances and the commodification of indigenous cultures to explore the limits to authorial agency in a global marketplace.

Chapter six, “The Imagined Reader and the Public of the Book,” is composed of three views of the end of the book, that is, the reader or reading of it. The first is the reader, as she is imagined throughout the process of translation and publishing. In this process, I found that the reader was often imagined in concrete terms, as a student, a family member, or even as the self. This concrete and familiar reader is contrasted in the second moment I examine, that of the public of the book as constructed in media discourse. I examine the kind of stranger solidarity that emerges as novels are translated and argue that framing the novels in pedagogical terms enables the public to cohere around a difference of expertise rather than cultural difference. Finally, the third movement of the chapter takes the novel itself as the end, and I do a reading of

Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. Thus, the dissertation ends with a translation, letting the subject of the dissertation speak.

In this way, the dissertation addresses the various stages through which a work in translation is produced and examines how it circulates discursively. Throughout, I shift between material and discursive concerns, between local and global imaginaries, and explore how the temporality of translation is deferred as the future reader is constructed throughout the process. In these chapters, the translated novel is revealed as a composite object that emerges through the collective labor of many individuals. I now turn to my field site of the American University in Cairo Press where I explore this process in action.

Part One

Chapter 2

Designing Egypt: Transnational Identities, Contested Modernity, and how Texts become Books

In the context of translation studies, much literature on translation examines the work of the translator as a solitary endeavor often opposed to the labor of editors or publishers, as for example, in Lawrence Venuti's classic work *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995).¹³ This chapter, and the dissertation more broadly, highlights the collaborative and sometimes circuitous process through which a translated novel is made into an object. Along the way, the text is not the only element that must be translated, images, titles, and other extra-textual elements also move from one linguistic, cultural, and regional context to another. Furthermore, they are ushered across those distances through the work not only of authors and translators, but also the many editors, designers, sales reps, publishers, and others who are involved in the making of a book.¹⁴ In this case, these decisions were made in the editorial department of the American University in Cairo Press. As I will discuss below, it was a place where the West and the Arab world met and, crucially, were co-constructed and constituted.

This chapter introduces the primary ethnographic site where I conducted fieldwork, the American University in Cairo Press (AUCP). The editorial department was a transnational, cosmopolitan space where individuals from around the region and the West worked collaboratively (although not without disagreements) to make books. I contend that in the process, a transnational identity was forged and the space became a site where anxieties about the nation's (Egypt's) status in the international sphere was configured and contested. The chapter explores the work of translation that was involved in the daily activities of the editorial department at the press. I examine how the individuals who worked at the press were cosmopolitan and transnationally-oriented, considering the external reputation and the representation of the country in their editorial and publishing decisions. I argue that decisions about textual elements reveal that translation is a scalar project, operating within the sphere of Egypt, but always responding to the perceived reception frame of the West, including commercial dimensions of how texts will circulate. The individuals involved are positioned betwixt and between, solidly in Egypt and yet looking toward the West.

This liminal position enables certain things to be highlighted, in this case, concerns about modernity. I focus my discussion in the chapter on the editorial conversations about how to title a book of images. I will argue that the stakes of this conversation was actually the making of Egypt in a global context. That is, we were discussing how Egypt, as a nation, could be best represented to a Western audience. The conversation illuminates how it is that certain elements of a text are rendered mobile and able to circulate elsewhere. These conversations were transnational ones, as they considered reception frameworks in the West along with representations of the Arab world. Indeed, these conversations make clear the very possibilities of communication between the West and the Arab world.

¹³ However, this is no longer uniformly the case. Some translation scholars, especially those who are also translators, have written extensively on their negotiations with publishers, editors, and authors. See, for example, Marilyn Booth's 2010 article.

¹⁴ That books are composite objects subject to historically contingent conventions has been well demonstrated by historians and other scholars of the book. See, for example, Adrian Johns *The Nature of the Book* (1998). My intervention here is to examine how translations are composed collectively.

The *Khwaga* Department

During my fieldwork in Cairo in 2010, I worked in the editorial department of the AUCP. The American University in Cairo Press was founded in 1960 and is the largest English-language press in the region. The press publishes approximately 100 books a year, including translations of Arabic literature, academic books, as well as general interest books. In addition, the press maintains a backlist of more than 1200 titles. The press is unique in that it publishes both academic and general interest titles. Most presses either specialize in academic works or in general interest books. Within these categories, publishing houses often specialize further, for example, by focusing on image-heavy art books. The AUCP was a sort of jack-of-all-trades press, publishing literature in translation, scholarly academic works, as well as general interest books, such as coffee table books about the pharaohs that would be sold in tourist shops and at the Egyptian Museum.

My department, the editorial department, was largely made up of foreigners, all of whom were either British or American, other Arabs (non-Egyptians) who spoke English fluently, Egyptian-Americans, or Egyptians who had spent some time living abroad and who also spoke English fluently. Outside of the editorial department, only two foreigners worked for the press (to my knowledge): the director of the press, and the director of sales. Both were European men. The editorial department was thus unique in that it consisted of more foreigners than any other department. This became clear one day when I returned to my desk after running to the cafeteria to buy a cup of tea.

“A package came for you while you were away,” Lena, an Egyptian-American colleague, told me. “Apparently,” she continued, “the delivery guy went downstairs first [to the AUCP offices on the second floor, where several other departments were located], and when they figured out who the package was for, they told him to bring it upstairs, to the *khwaga* department.”

We laughed at this nomenclature for it was true that the editorial department was largely made up of *khwagas*, the Egyptian term for foreigner. The term *khwaga* means “foreigner,” but is usually used to describe someone who has lived in Egypt for some length of time, an expat, not a tourist. Further, it should be noted that while *khwaga* could serve as a generic term for foreigner, it also served in practice as a racial/ethnic marker. The term was almost exclusively used to denote foreigners of Western or Euroamerican heritage (that is, those foreigner who were white or light-skinned). There were many Sudanese refugees living in Cairo while I was there. They, however, would not have been termed *khwagas* even if they had lived in Cairo for many years. *Khwaga* is thus not only a descriptive word but also an indexical term. It is a social marker, locating one in a specific social context. The term could be used disparagingly, as a negative term to describe foreigners, especially in the context of concerns over foreign influence in the country. But, in this case, it was used more endearingly (or so I was assured by my Egyptian friends when I told them this story). Moreover, with these instructions, the delivery man had no trouble being directed (by other people) to our departmental offices. In this way, the pragmatic ramifications of the term’s indexical qualities are clear.

A further complication to this story is that there is no easy translation for “editorial” in Arabic. The editor of a press was usually referred to with the title “*mudir*” which means “director.” While that term is adequate to describe an individual, it does not easily lend itself to a whole department. Historically, the editor has not existed as a position in the Arabic-language

publishing world in the same way that it has in English.¹⁵ Authors have been responsible for their own developmental or substantive editing, and often for copy editing as well. The heads of a publishing house and editors would of course read manuscripts and make some comments on them, but the kind of structured process that has become the norm in English-language publishing did not exist in the same fashion. As a result, novels were often published with typos and other errors that might have been eliminated by proofreaders. More seriously, the lack of an editorial process meant that some texts could have benefited from the streamlining provided by an editor.¹⁶

Setting aside the question of the different editorial processes, pragmatically, referring to the editorial department as “the *khwaga* department” served not only to distinguish the department from other departments based on identity (particularly the large proportion of foreigners working there), but also avoided the complications of naming in Arabic a department without an easy equivalent.¹⁷

The individuals I worked with at the Press were uniquely positioned at the margin of languages and cultures. Either foreigners living abroad, or Egyptians working with foreigners, lived translation was an integral part of daily life. Although the official language of the Press was English, since most of the non-editorial department staff were Egyptian, most conversations took place in Arabic. In the Editorial department this was less true: English was the dominant language. This may have been a result of the nature of our work editing English-language documents or the fact that many of the staff were native English speakers. However, even in the Editorial department, the language of conversation shifted throughout the day, depending on audience and context. In most cases, conversations, especially between native Arabic speakers, took place primarily in Arabic although technical words were often used in English. Thus code-switching was a routine part of the communicative life at the press, on the level of conversation, utterance, or even words.¹⁸

This movement between languages was not limited to the language of conversation, but extended to other forums where the cultural norms and representations were not always stable. This included reading or watching news from a variety of sources, including the BBC and Al-Jazeera, reading blogs, watching current American and Egyptian TV, and passing around

¹⁵ In fact, the distinction between the Arabic publishing model and the English-language one sometimes became an issue for translators. Some translators felt that their role was to be a kind of editor, that in transforming the novel into English, they were justified in removing repetitions of the sort that would have been culled during the editorial process in English. However, authors were often critical of this practice and few translators I spoke with admitted to actually doing this. Rather, several translators expressed their desire to do so, even if they did not act upon it. One translator, however, identified a few titles that he would greatly like to translate, but would only commit to doing so provided the author agreed to substantial editing.

¹⁶ I do not mean to suggest that the English-language process of editing was without flaw or was a superior method. Indeed, there has been considerable criticism of the kind of formulaic fiction that emerges from American MFA programs and the editorial process that follows (see, for example, Elif Bautman’s September 2010 review of Mark McGurl’s study of the rise of the MFA programs in America). However, given that these novels were being translated into English and circulated alongside fiction from precisely these MFA programs and editorial conventions, many of the translators I spoke with suggested that the lack of a comparable process affected how readily novels in translation found a readership.

¹⁷ Although Lena and I spoke in English, it should be noted that these conversations with the delivery man had taken place in Arabic.

¹⁸ In some ways, the editorial department of the Press can be compared to the NGOs that Stacey Pigg discusses in her article on commensurability, in that both groups of cosmopolitan workers navigated between languages and local practices (see Pigg 2001).

YouTube clips and internet memes, some in Arabic, some in English.¹⁹ While most of the time, these cultural references were shared, this was not always the case. Thus the press was a bilingual space where cultural affiliations and affinities were not stable. In this way, the space was a transnational one, like many others in the contemporary moment, where individuals with varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds are brought together through particular conditions of labor production.

In addition to the above description of the department, it is worth introducing the American University in Cairo (AUC) in order to better situate the AUCP. The AUC was founded in 1919 and is the most elite and most expensive university in Egypt.²⁰ In addition to Egyptian students, there is also a large population of study abroad students from other universities, largely in the United States. Many of the faculty and high-up administration (President, Provost, etc.) were also trained in the United States and work closely with the academic community there in their respective fields. Although I was not in a position to ascertain the finances of the university, there was a pervasive sense among the individuals I knew, especially those unconnected with the university, that the AUC was linked with US money and global affairs.²¹ In some cases this linkage was portrayed in a positive light, in other cases, it was the source of vociferous criticism. Although the AUCP operated independently from the university, it was housed in a building on the Tahrir campus and received considerable financial support from the university. This connection to the university, and by extension to the United States, distinguished the AUCP from many other local presses.

Indeed, as an English-language university press affiliated with the United States, the AUCP had a global position beyond that of many local presses. This market included the many English-speaking expats who live in Cairo and the even greater numbers of tourists who pass through the city each day. By publishing in English, it immediately had a larger (global) market share than those publishing houses in Cairo that published in Arabic. For example, this greater access was marked structurally at the Frankfurt Book Fair which I attended in October 2010.²² At the Fair, the AUCP was located in the large English-language hall (Hall 8) along with all other English-language publishers. While the AUCP booth was much smaller than the enormous spaces devoted to large publishing houses such as RandomHouse and Penguin, the position there suggested a high level of global access. In contrast, other Egyptian presses who published primarily in Arabic—even if they did offer some limited titles in English—were located with the Arabic-language houses and presses from the Middle East in a mixed-language hall with other

¹⁹ With respect to TV, Ramadan serials were the major example of the importance of Egyptian television as a shared signifier. Much ethnographic and sociological work has been done on the subject of Ramadan TV serials (see, for example, Abu Lughod 2005; Salamandra 2005). For further discussion of a meme that circulated around the offices of the press, please see the following chapter, “Of Memes and Mubarak.”

²⁰ The tuition for one semester at AUC during the 2013-2014 academic year for a full course load (of 16-18 credits) costs between 64,350LE and 73,125LE. The top 25 percent of undergraduate students receive merit scholarships entitling them to a reduced tuition: 45,052LE to 51,195LE per semester, again for a course load of 16-18 units. The average weekly salary in Egypt in 2012 was 641LE (or 33,332LE per year), considerably lower than even the reduced rate of AUC tuition for a single semester. (see for example: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/71323/Business/Economy/Egypt-average-salaries-grew--in--CAPMAS.aspx>; <http://www.aucegypt.edu/students/finaff/fees/pages/tuitionfees.aspx>; <http://www.aucegypt.edu/students/finaff/fees/Documents/Tuition%20Fees%20%20for%20academic%20year%202013-2014.pdf>)

²¹ This sense was perhaps justified given the large number of American study-abroad students who studied there each semester, and given the fact that the move to the new campus was financed largely through USAID.

²² For further discussion of the Frankfurt Book Fair, please see chapter five.

language and regional groups including certain European languages such as Latvian, Czech, and Bulgarian.²³

Although the AUCP had a larger market share and greater structural access than some other Egyptian presses, when compared to the English-language publishing scene, the AUCP was marginal, both in terms of its location in Cairo and its relatively limited list. It was thus located at the margins of both the English language publishing industry (based in New York or London) and similarly that of the Middle Eastern publishing world, which, while located in Cairo and Beirut (among other places), was predominantly Arabic-language. The AUCP, situated at the limit of each publishing world, served, in some ways, as a bridge between them. Neither wholly in one world nor in another, questions of representation, of how to represent—even translate—one world or form of life to another, were central to the discussions that took place there. In this way, the individuals who worked at the press were involved in a daily practice of commensuration across differing linguistic and professional conventions.

In this chapter, my primary example is drawn from the conversations around how to title a book. The issues that emerged in this conversation, about modernity, for example, or how to create a book that would have relevance outside the Middle East, came up regularly. I have chosen to elaborate this single example, however, as a kind of case study that showcases the complicated issues at play. In this example, we were having a conversation about the title of a book that would circulate in the West. The editors and publishers at the editorial meeting engaged in a particularly transnational labor of debating titles as they would be read or interpreted by future readers in the West. The conversation required the imaginative work of projecting a reception context of the book that was significantly different from its production context. My interlocutors at the press were involved in the complicated work of gauging how the future readers might interpret one title over another. Furthermore, the conversation that ensued also included moments of joking reflection on the contemporary realities of Egypt. In this way, the conversation about a book's title was, in many ways, also about how Egypt could be represented in the West and the kinds of rhetoric that might circulate (and those that could not).

Editorial Meeting

I will begin by describing the general practice of the editorial meeting and will then go on to discuss the specificity of this particular meeting in terms of the issues it raised and intervened in.

It was a Wednesday morning, and, like most Wednesdays, I was seated at the conference table in the meeting room at the Press awaiting the editorial and production meeting. The meeting room, on the second floor of the offices of the AUCP which were on the third floor of the AUC Tahrir campus, was a medium-sized room taken up by a large conference table and lined with glass-enclosed bookshelves. On one half of the room these bookshelves housed the entirety of the AUCP list: all the books that AUCP had published that were still in print. Bookshelves on the other half of the room held the foreign translations of AUCP titles. Most of these translated titles were translations of Arabic fiction and literature, such as books by Nobel-prize winner Naguib Mahfouz or best-selling author Alaa Al Aswany. When I started at the

²³ This location in the English-language hall is even more significant given the position of other smaller presses that focused on translations from Arabic. These smaller institutions, such as the magazine *Banipal*, were grouped by region and located with the Arabic-language publishing houses in Hall 5. I spoke with Margaret Obank of *Banipal*, who lamented their position in Hall 5 rather than with other English-language publications in Hall 8.

AUCP, the offices had just moved from their long-time location in a building across from the AUC campus into a building on the campus.²⁴ One of my first tasks at the Press, in fact, was to populate the bookshelves with the AUCP list titles, and later to ensure that they were more or less up to date and complete.

We met at 9am, clutching our coffees and copies of the current season's catalog in the conference room with a finicky air conditioner.²⁵ With notebooks and pens, and the occasional laptop on which to take notes, reference documents, or check emails, we sat down together and proceeded to review the current state of the Press' projects. Editors would bring up a book that was taking longer than anticipated to edit and needed to be pushed back on the schedule. (Or more rarely, one that was proceeding more quickly than anticipated and whose release date could be pushed forward). We would discuss pricing, cover designs, and title choices. We would debate whether to co-publish a given manuscript that had been offered us by another publisher.²⁶ As the editorial intern, I was there to take notes and write up the minutes of the meeting. The rest of the staff of the meeting were more highly ranked than I: the director of the press, head of sales, editorial director, senior and managing editors, the international rights manager, head of the production department, and so on. These editorial and production meetings were attended by both Egyptians and *khwagas* from various countries.

Designing Egypt

At an editorial and production meeting in April 2010, we were discussing a book that was a new addition to the Fall catalog. It was a book recently pitched by the senior editor.²⁷ The manuscript itself had been previously printed and bound through the website www.blurb.com.²⁸

²⁴ This move took place after the new AUC campus was built in New Cairo, approximately an hour outside the downtown area. This move by AUC out to the desert and away from the crowds, traffic, and pollution of downtown was a controversial one.

²⁵ The catalog was just that, a catalog of the books that were to be released in a given season. Usually, publishing houses operate with two seasons per year, fall and spring. The Fall catalog books are released (in the case of AUCP) between September and January, Spring books between February and August. The catalogs, however, are prepared prior to these dates. The Fall catalog will be released in the Summer, and the Spring catalog in the late Fall or early winter. The result is that at any given time, the work of the publishing house, specifically the editorial department, is almost constantly moving back and forth between the books that will be published in the current season, any stragglers from a previous season that have not been released despite the fact that their release date has passed, and planning for the future season's catalog and schedule. Scheduling concerns include the necessity to spread out releases throughout the season. There may also be other scheduling concerns, for example, at the AUCP, the practice was to release literature (novels in translation) in September and November of the Fall season. At these meetings, having a copy of the current season (and perhaps the upcoming season's catalog as well) was crucial to follow the discussions and to note any changes to release date, etc.

²⁶ Most of the debate about new publications came at a different stage, at meetings of the review committee, which included members of the editorial department and the director of the press, but also faculty from AUC and others who reviewed manuscripts for the press and accepted or rejected them. Those manuscripts which had been accepted or recommended by the review committee were then presented at the editorial meetings and largely proceeded without much discussion.

²⁷ The senior editor at the AUCP functioned as the acquisitions editor and was in charge of acquiring or "chasing" new manuscripts to be published. Although many books to be published by the Press were reviewed by a committee made up of university professors and others, this particular book had not been reviewed by the committee, in part because of its unusual provenance (see below), and in part because it was a relatively late addition to the Fall list. This book had been presented in a previous editorial meeting where it had been decided that the AUCP would publish it.

²⁸ Blurb.com is a website that enables authors to self-publish their own photo books. Blurb provides layout tools and printing/binding services.

The book in this informally-published form was called *Design Reference Egypt*. The book comprised a collection of detailed architectural images of Cairo, such as minarets, mosques, arches, columns, doorways, walls, and so on, that would be helpful as a reference for set designers, video game artists, architects, decorators, interior designers, artists, and others who might find architectural images of Egypt's buildings of relevance. The book was designed as a practical resource, and included over one thousand images of buildings in and around Cairo. These images included large images of an entire building's exterior, as well as details of particular architectural features such as doorways, windows, columns, ornamentation, and so on, each of which had its own section comprised of these detailed views. It was not an architecture or a history book; there were no blueprints or plans of the buildings. Nor was there considerable text explaining the significance of a specific design feature such as a doorway. Each image did include a caption with information such as date, period, style, and location; however, these were more informative than descriptive.

The debate we were having centered on the title. As is industry standard procedure, at the AUCP the decision of what to title a book is made by the publishers, although input and suggestions from the author are considered. Similarly, the cover design must be approved by the author, but it is created by the staff of the publishing house. At our weekly meetings, we often debated the titles of upcoming books and decided on cover designs as well. A variety of perspectives, from a sales and marketing point of view, to production concerns, to any editorial comments, shaped the final decisions.

At this particular meeting in April 2010, we were involved in a lively discussion regarding how to title such a book. It was, as a whole, generally outside the purview of the press. While the press did indeed publish many image-heavy books, they were mostly art books (coffee table books), or books about Ancient Egypt pitched to tourists and sold at Museum gift stores and other tourist sites. This book was to be slightly different. While it might be of interest to a small portion of the general public, the main audience was expected to be professionals using the book as a resource in their work.²⁹ Further, it was to differ from most of the Press' books in that its primary market was to be in North America and the United Kingdom, with some smaller sales in the Middle East, especially in the Gulf region, where architectural and design projects such as the Ibn Battuta Mall in Dubai found ready funding. This too was a marked difference from most of the AUCP list which focused on the Egyptian and Middle Eastern market, including scholars, tourists, and expats from North America and the United Kingdom.³⁰

Thus, even if many of the other books on the list were designed to circulate beyond the borders of Egypt, the assumption was that the individuals who purchased them had some connection to the country—either as a tourist, a long-time foreign resident (a *khwaga*), or as a scholar or student who studied or did research there. In this particular case, the imagined

²⁹ Generally speaking, the only reference titles the Press published were those in its language training portion of the list. For example, there was a lexicon of Arabic-English words that was in progress at the time I worked there. In addition, the Press published several series of books designed to teach MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) and colloquial Arabic.

³⁰ The exception to this was the Modern Arabic Literature (MAL) list which had considerable North American distribution, however, even with this distribution, the sense of the audience for these books remained Egypt, both Egyptians and foreigners. In the United Kingdom, the AUCP had an arrangement with Arabia Books which would co-publish many of the translated novels off of the MAL list. Although the text remained the same, the cover choices of the Arabia versions varied quite widely from the AUCP editions in order to appeal to the commercial market there.

audience was a set of professionals who might have no connection to Egypt other than the specific project they were involved in, for example, designing a set for a Hollywood movie, to be filmed in the deserts of the American southwest, not the sands of Egypt. Indeed, the book would be *most* useful to those who had never come to Egypt, and so had no idea of what the cityscape looked like, but nevertheless were attempting to re-create it for the purposes of a film, video game, or other design project.

At the meeting, our discussion was focused on the title of the book. The original title, *Design Reference Egypt*, was deemed too clunky. It was also dismissed because it did not make clear what the book was to be about. Indeed, the substance of the book itself became a topic of discussion, especially when several titles with the word “modern” were suggested, such as *Sourcebook of Modern Egypt*, *Views of Modern Egypt*, and others along similar lines. Then, Christoph, the director of the press, a foreigner (*khwaga*) who had lived in Cairo for many years, asked:

“What’s modern about this? If it is just pictures of historic buildings, it shouldn’t be called ‘modern.’ Why foreground the present in the title?”

“There are contemporary street scenes, not shots of contemporary architecture, but modern life, street scenes, what it looks like for people who don’t know or come to Egypt,” explained Tom, the editorial director, another long-time foreign resident of Egypt.

One of the Egyptian members of the staff, Sara, suggested instead: *Egypt in the Present*, as these photographs were just that, depictions of the city and its notable architecture in the present. She prefaced it by saying mentioning that we didn’t need to use “modern” in the title, since the word had seemed a concern for the director.

After giving her suggestion, another Egyptian colleague, Ahmed, who was seated next to Sara asked her under his breath: “Are you saying that Egypt can’t be modern?”

This joking rejoinder, muttered quietly between two Egyptian colleagues, is telling. As we sat there in an overly air-conditioned conference room, filled with laptop computers, iPhones and blackberries, with our disposable cups of overpriced Costa coffee, dressed in jeans or business casual attire, the space was clearly a modern one. And yet, Ahmad’s question was valid, especially given that the book was to be sold most prominently outside the country and the region, where perhaps the idea of “Egypt” does not immediately conjure up images of a conference room but rather of pyramids and Pharaohs.³¹ Although the book itself did not include images of the pyramids and did include contemporary street scenes, the images captured historic buildings, not contemporary ones, suggesting that the intended users were more likely to be interested in the historic Cairo than the contemporary or modern one.

The concept of modernity being raised here is both an aesthetic one and a historicist one. Aesthetically, the images in the book did not depict buildings that conformed to a modern (or modernist) aesthetic. Rather, they were historic buildings, many of them medieval, such as those on the recently renovated Al-Muizz street in the historic part of Cairo. Thus, although the pictures were recently taken, they did not represent a modern or contemporary cityscape, such as the nineteenth-century buildings of downtown or the five-star hotels lining the Nile. Rather, they largely depicted medieval buildings from Cairo’s Old City. Thus, they were not modern in an aesthetic sense.

However, Ahmed’s comment “Are you saying Egypt can’t be modern?” points also to a historicist vision of modernity. That is, an idea of political modernity that proceeds along a

³¹ For further discussion of the symbols used to represent contemporary versus Ancient Egypt, please see chapter three.

teleological path of development. I am drawing here on Dipesh Chakrabarty's discussion of how historicist notions of modernity consigned colonized nations to what he calls the "waiting room of history" (2000: 8). Chakrabarty explains, in his discussion of John Stuart Mill's essays "On Liberty" and "On Representative Government," that in these essays Mill suggests that "some historical time of development and civilization (colonial rule and education, to be precise) had to elapse before they[colonized nations] could be prepared" for the task of self-government (8). While Chakrabarty discusses the many ways in which such historicist accounts of modernity have been challenged during anti-colonial struggles and in the postcolonial period, it still circulates nonetheless, even if as a view to be opposed. In Ahmed's comment, I sense an anxiety about being consigned to the waiting room of history. In later sections of this chapter, I will examine the stakes of modernity and representation in Egypt at length, but for now, I merely want to highlight the various kinds of modernity that were raised.

The book we were discussing attempted to make Egypt legible through images of its architecture. The title, too, would be a component of the way the book represented Egypt to individuals who might never have been there. As we continued to discuss possible titles, a number of others were suggested, among them: *Egypt: A Designer's Guide*; *Egypt: A Designer's Reference*; *Egypt By Design*; *Visual Encyclopedia: Egypt*; and *Designing Egypt*. Titles with the word "reference" were dismissed in the end, for fear that the book would be relegated to the reference section of libraries, bookstores, and, crucially, Amazon.com, and would be less "findable" in a search for, say "Egyptian Architecture."

The last title suggested, *Designing Egypt*, garnered considerable discussion. Since the book was a design resource, several of the people in the room thought it was both catchy and a good fit for the content of the book. Then, someone noted that, given the country and the region (and, it might be noted, many of the Press' other publications) it would risk being interpreted as a book about development policies, not about artistic design elements. Design, when it comes to Egypt, often connotes designer economies and neoliberal practices, not architectural features, suggested Amira, a British-Egyptian editor.

"Well," Mary interjected, "If we saw a book called *Designing Japan*, we'd all assume it was about actual designs and designers, not political development strategy."

"But," Ahmed responded, "That is because they have modern design in Japan."

I should pause here to mention that at that very moment, there were two books currently in progress, but not yet printed. Every single individual in the room was, had been, or would soon be involved in their production. The first was a book about twentieth century Egyptian art. It was a large-format art book, heavy with images reproduced from the personal collection of one of Cairo's most prominent art collectors and dealers (Abaza 2011). The second was an analysis and discussion of the works of Hassan Fathy, a twentieth-century Egyptian architect who bridged traditional Islamic architecture and the contemporary style of Le Corbusier in his works (Hamid 2010). I mention these to emphasize not only that Egypt does in fact have a tradition of modern art and architecture, but also that everyone in the conference room present at that moment was in some way involved in the production of books devoted to the subject, and therefore acutely aware of the existence of such. And yet, when someone commented that the difference between Japan and Egypt was that Japan had modern design and architecture, no one argued or dissented in any way. Instead, the point was well-taken and the title removed from the list of titles being considered.

Despite the fact that everyone in that room, if asked, might have acknowledged an Egyptian tradition of modern art and architecture, the distinction between Japan and Egypt that

was made was based on the idea of the imagined reader. It had little to do with any kind of absolute fact regarding contemporary art and architecture, and far more to do with the assumed knowledge base of the imagined reader. In this configuration, the American reader assumes that Egypt is undeveloped and in need of development and economic policies, while being aware of the cutting-edge technical, engineering, and artistic feats of the Japanese. A strange recursion is occurring, here, where the editors at a press in Cairo imagined what readers elsewhere would imagine about Egypt.³²

In these projections, a book called *Designing Egypt* must, given the geopolitical state of the country, refer to development policies, not to visual design. Similarly, anything with the word “modern” in the title might be suspect, for what “modernity” does Egypt inhabit—at least in the eyes of the potential Western reader. And more importantly to the concerns of the book, how do images of Mamluk buildings really represent the face of modern Egypt?

Representation and Reality:

The relationship between representation and reality has been taken up by many scholars in anthropology. In this chapter, I draw on Timothy Mitchell’s work, particularly his early work *Colonising Egypt*, where he writes about the stakes of representation in the British colonial regime in Egypt (1988). In particular, his comments on how Egypt was made legible for the British through particular practices of representation (in colonial exhibitions, for example) are useful in thinking through these questions. It is particularly relevant to the case I explore in this chapter because the work we were engaged in was explicitly about making Egypt legible to a Western reader. In doing so, the editors at the press drew on their transnational orientation in order to produce a work that translated across gaps of language, region, and culture. However it also revealed anxieties around the status of the country as modern, that is, how Egypt was positioned in relation to other modern nations.

Crucial to Mitchell’s discussion of the creation of a disciplinary regime in Egypt is an examination of how Egypt was represented (and therefore made comprehensible) for the British. Mitchell explores this both through a discussion of colonial exhibitions which made Egypt legible to the British in English, and through an analysis of how the process of colonialism reshaped Egypt and the Egyptians. Mitchell relies on Foucault’s understanding of the way in which disciplinary power works not by restricting individuals, but by producing them. Mitchell argues that these same methods which produce a disciplinary structure and disciplined bodies also “generate the modern experience of meaning as a process of representation” (xiii). Meaning, in this framework, is not only tied to practices of representation, but actively derived from them. Without representation, meaning falls apart. He goes on to assert that “In the metaphysics of capitalist modernity, the world is experienced in terms of an ontological distinction between physical reality and its representation—in language, culture, or other forms of meaning” (xiii). Mitchell here delineates an ontological split between the material world and its meaning-bearing representation. Representation, in his discussion, is not simply a reflection of an external world, but actively constitutes it.³³

³² For further discussion of the relationship between the future readers of these books and those involved in their production (authors, translators, and publishers), please see chapter six.

³³ Mitchell is building here upon Heidegger’s theory of representation as advanced in his essay “The Age of the World Picture” (1977). In this earlier text, Heidegger argues that the development of modern science and major shifts in the way in which humans relate to the world around them result in an increased understanding of the world in representational terms. Specifically, “world picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world, but the world conceived and grasped as a picture” (129). More clearly, perhaps, he notes that “the world

The book is far more concerned with the production of the split between “physical reality” and its representation than with the status of the real which might exist outside of a representation. Indeed, in the situation that Mitchell is examining, and building on Heidegger’s theories of the modern age, there is little ‘real’ that is not subsumed by its representation. This, in fact, is the problem of the colonial world—it must be re-made in light of this split between representation and the real.

Although much of the book focuses on the reforms to the Egyptian military, village structures, and schooling, Mitchell also examines the world exhibitions of the 19th and early 20th century in terms of how they brought colonial cities to the metropole. These exhibitions attempted to re-create as exhibits the realities of exotic, colonial life, and he notes that “what most surprised the non-European visitors to the exhibitions was the realism of the artificial” (xiii). The distinction between the representation and the ‘real’ had to be learned, however, which is why non-European visitors to Europe found these exhibitions so curious. Conversely, Europeans who then left the space of the exhibition hall and traveled to the Orient found themselves in a difficult position. He explains that they “went on trying to grasp the real thing as an exhibit. . . . Unlike London or Paris, however, a place such as Cairo had not yet been rearranged in terms of this absolute distinction and set up as an exhibit before the visitor’s gaze” (xiv). For example, the arcades of London and Paris, according to Mitchell, were crucial in the project of re-making these cities into particular kinds of legible exhibitions.

Mitchell begins his discussion of the colonizing process by exploring the exhibits constructed in Europe to represent the colonial world to European spectators. Although the discussions I participated in at the AUCP took place in a post-colonial setting, similar concerns seemed to be at stake. These representations of Egypt were not seen as simply reflections of some external reality translated to a page, but rather, might actually constitute ‘the real’ Egypt for the individuals who consumed them. In this case, the book being discussed that April 2010 morning at the AUCP was to represent Egypt to those Euro-Americans who had not been there. In a very practical sense, it would become Egypt for the purposes of their work, building a set or designing a scene, for example.

Furthermore, one might meditate on the kind of representation and of spectacle that is at stake in these two examples. In Mitchell’s discussion, he focuses on the grand exhibitions of the 19th century. Might we consider the sets of major Hollywood blockbusters to be a contemporary equivalent?³⁴ It is through Hollywood depictions, as well as other mediated images (such as those that appear in news reports), that most people in America learn about and visually experience the region of the Middle East, in the same way that the exhibitions provided a way for 19th century Europeans to travel to distant lands without ever leaving their own city.

picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes a picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age” (130). Crucially, Heidegger argues here that the creation or production of this phenomenon is concurrent with the creation of man as subject: “That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man’s becoming *subiectum* in the midst of that which is” (132). For Heidegger, then, man becomes a subject in the very same moment that the world is conceived of as a representation. Indeed, the world becomes objectified as a representation only insofar as man becomes subjectified as the being who sees or interprets it. Heidegger, here, is discussing the emergence of European modernity. Mitchell, building on this understanding of modernity, explores the attempt to apply or re-create this phenomenon within a colonial setting.

³⁴ Incidentally, the summer before I left for the field, one of the top-grossing Hollywood films was *Transformers 2*, a movie that featured the dramatic destruction of the pyramids in the course of the battle between the Transformers and the Autobots. The destruction of the Pyramids, in the logic of the movie, represents the destruction of the treasured landmarks of human history and suggests the total threat to human civilization posed by the Autobots.

While Mitchell's discussions of the spectacle of representation and the labor required to stabilize the distinction between representation and reality are a useful point of departure, his characterization of modernity has been critiqued. For example, Charles Hirschkind, in his review of *Colonising Egypt*, takes the book to task for its attempt to use Foucaultian disciplinary structures to discuss the construction of meaning (Hirschkind 1991: 283). Hirschkind criticizes this kind of an interpretive endeavor, and argues that the construction of meaning through representation proceeds according to a radically different logic than the construction or application of particular kinds of disciplinary power (280). In doing so, he critiques the very foundations upon which Mitchell's argument is based. While I agree with Hirschkind's critique regarding the differing logics of disciplinary structures of order and interpretive practices of representation, I find Mitchell to be a useful interlocutor because he takes the realm of representation to be the locus of meaning. In Mitchell's dichotomy, the colonial project divests the material world of meaning, and the representational sphere becomes the site of meaning. Further, this distinction is only created, in Mitchell's account, through the application of political and material power. I am less interested in the logic of disciplinary structures of power or the specifics of their application in Egypt, and more interested in the way in which representations function to generate meaning. In this account, representations do not simply reflect some external reality, but rather, they constitute it, or, at the very least, make it legible and intelligible. It is this possibility that I find appealing in Mitchell's framework, given the concerns about representing Egypt that emerged during my fieldwork. These concerns, I will argue, were heightened because the book in question was to circulate outside of Egypt and because arguments about representation, in the politically charged atmosphere of the time,³⁵ were a means of arguing about the country itself.

Webb Keane also critiques Mitchell's work, noting that "by seeing representations as exterior to humans, and for that reason a source of oppression for them, he[Mitchell] also reproduces the very dichotomies that bolster the moral narrative he wants to expose" (2007: 12). Keane highlights the fact that the very terms of Mitchell's engagement are premised upon a kind of modernist split between the modern and non-modern and between alienation and unity (12). Thus, Keane argues, Mitchell's work inadvertently reifies precisely the categories he is critiquing. For his part, Keane works to distinguish his project from Mitchell's. He explains that his work is concerned with how the two perspectives growing out of Marx and Heidegger that he traces in Mitchell's work "have come to project modernity's others and, thus, unwittingly help consolidate a moral narrative of modernity" (12). Although his critique of Mitchell is a useful one, where Keane is particularly relevant to the concerns of this chapter is through this discussion of the moral narrative of modernity. Modernity, particularly a historicist or developmental modernity (although to a lesser extent in the context of an aesthetic one), was frequently framed in moral terms by my interlocutors and as it circulated more generally.

Modernity and Representation:

In Keane's *Christian Moderns*, his central concern has much more to do with the moral narrative of modernity within which the split between representation and reality discussed by Mitchell takes place. Keane's work focuses on the moral trajectory of modernity and the way in which that particular narrative has material effects in the world. Keane explores the moral trajectory of modernity in the context of Protestant missionaries in Indonesia. In the context of

³⁵ In the following chapter, I discuss how representations and symbols that came to stand for the city and nation were highly contested and, I argue, became a site through which the future of the country could be imagined.

my conversations at the AUCP, I found that modernity was not only a fraught concept, but one with several valences. Modernity often connoted a temporal category, located along a trajectory of development. It is this historicist notion of modernity that Keane discusses, particularly as this developmental trajectory becomes infused with a moral force.

Keane begins with a discussion of agency, noting that “For anthropologists and historians, the quest for local agency is often portrayed as an antidote to earlier assumptions about tradition-bound natives and timeless structures or to triumphalist narratives of empire and modernity” (Keane 2007: 3). However, Keane is critical of such celebrations of the concept of agency, as he finds that “The quest for agency often seems tacitly to be informed by the humanist assumption that self-transformation is not only a central fact of history but also a good that exceeds local systems of value” (Keane 2007: 3-4). The idea that self-transformation is an unquestioned good gets to the heart of what Keane describes as the moral trajectory of modernity. Specifically, he notes that there is a “a widespread set of intuitions about historical progress. These intuitions center on the idea that modernity is, or ought to be, a story of human liberation from a host of false beliefs and fetishisms that undermine freedom” (5). Here, then, the question of agency and self-transformation becomes a moral issue as it is linked with increased liberation. The process of modernization, of becoming modern, gains moral force as it is tied to the possibility of liberation from these false beliefs³⁶. He further notes that “modernity is often told as the outcome of a story of moral redemption” (24).

Where I find Keane to be particularly relevant to my ethnographic site and the concerns of this chapter is that he examines the moral force of modernity. Like Keane’s missionaries, my interlocutors at the AUCP were also situated at a frontier, a borderland in which languages met and mixed, but so too did ideas of culture and cultivation, education, and what it meant to be modern. As in Keane’s case, the idea of modernity that circulated (particularly in the context of a developmentalist or historicist modernity) often had moral undertones, suggesting not only a progression or trajectory toward a more modern future, but also a kind of gauge of Egypt in a global sphere where Egypt’s status as modern was under constant reevaluation. In the conversation described above, anxieties over this modernity underlie Ahmed’s joking question of whether the country can be considered modern. This became particularly evident when Egypt was to be represented abroad. In the following section, I explore Egypt’s contested modernity.

Modernity and Representation in Egypt

Concerns about modernity in Egypt have often been expressed through anxieties over how the country was represented abroad. In her discussion of the controversy surrounding the release of the BBC-produced documentary film *Marriage Egyptian Style*, Reem Saad notes the generally accepted styles of representing the country abroad, particularly to the Western world (1998). She explains that:

the ideal image of Egypt according to this group [i.e. urban middle-class Egyptians, a group not unlike my colleagues at the AUCP] is one which shows *hadara* (civilization) and *tahaddur* (being civilized). *Hadara* normally refers to Egypt’s historic (particularly Pharaonic) heritage, with pyramids and the Sphinx as the obvious icons. The category also accommodates the river Nile. *Tahaddur* concerns aspects of progress in the present. The physical aspects of *tahaddur* include mainly the Opera House, traffic flyovers, high-rises, and five-star hotels. (406).

³⁶ Keane draws here on Bruno Latour’s work on the “purification” involved in the project of modernity (1993).

According to this schema, representations of the country ought to fall in one of two broad categories: those that emphasize the great civilization of the past, and those that emphasize the new developments of the present. The film that Saad discusses in the article becomes a point of great public contention because it does not conform to these sanctioned images of the nation.

In her ethnography of travel and tourism to Egypt, L.L. Wynn discusses two divergent groups of tourists: those (often from the West) interested in the country's antiquities, and those (often from the Gulf states) interested in Cairo's thriving nightlife (Lynn 2007). Interestingly, the two images of Egypt Wynn discusses have some affinity with the two appropriate visions of Egypt described by Saad: the Pharaonic and the modern or developed Egypt symbolized by traffic flyovers or the Opera House. Although Saad is discussing two aspects of the image of Egypt exported to the West, while Wynn is focused on the Egypt enjoyed by tourists from the Gulf, for whom the nightclubs of Pyramids road are more iconic than the Opera House, nevertheless, in both cases, the same elements of contemporary Egypt are excluded from these imaginations. It is, in fact, these excluded elements that Saad discusses in her article.

Saad asserts that the film was contentious precisely because it focused neither on the vision of a modern Egypt or on the country's antiquities. Rather, the documentary features a lower-class woman who wears traditional clothing (a *gallabiya*), earns a living by cleaning houses, and lives in a traditional (*balady*) neighborhood in Cairo. Her husband has left her to live with his other wife, and she lives with her three children in a small apartment. In the film, she discusses her own marital problems as well as her attempts to find marital partners for her children (Saad 1998: 403). The response to this portrayal of an Egyptian woman, who is neither westernized (which might be marked visibly through her clothing), educated (which would be audible in her speech patterns), nor of the middle-class (as is clear from her occupation and the neighborhood in which she lives), was vitriolic. The negative press and editorial coverage of the documentary was largely negative. Saad cites newspaper articles that claim that "The conspiracy to destroy Egypt's reputation continues" (404) and declare that "this is not the Egyptian woman" at the center of the film, but rather "a woman who is fallen both morally and socially" (404).

Saad argues that this battle over the reputation of the country, and especially those representations of it that circulate in the West, centers around the "issue of who has the right to represent the nation" (406). The critics of the film, mostly patriotic (even nationalist) urban, middle-class Egyptians want to ensure that only some representations of the country circulate internationally. These images, Saad suggests, conform to the readily circulated images either of Egypt's ancient past (the Pyramids or the Sphinx), or to its contemporary present, through images of luxury hotels or the Egyptian Opera House.³⁷ Saad notes, however, that there is an ambivalence in the attitude towards the West that appears in these critiques. She explains that "the film was considered part of a Western campaign to destroy Egypt's reputation, mainly because it did not portray the civilized Westernized aspects of Egyptian society. . . . People in the West should know that we too have an opera house exactly like them. In this discourse, 'the West' stands for both progress and conspiracy" (407).

³⁷ The Cairo Opera House opened in October 1988. The funds for the building's construction were provided by the Japanese, after Hosni Mubarak's visit to Japan in 1983. The London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra performed there in 2007; their first performance in the Middle East. However, opera in Egypt has a more complicated connection to modernism and projects of westernization. In the late 19th century, the Khedival Opera House opened in Cairo (in a different location than the current Opera House). The earlier Opera House was designed by Italian architects and it was the first Opera House on the African continent. Furthermore, Verdi's opera *Rigoletto* was the first performance there, and his opera *Aida* was commissioned by the Khedive and performed at the Khedival Opera House in 1871. (Said 1994).

Saad's claim that the West represents both "progress and conspiracy" is worth further discussion, although she does not dwell on it. That the West represents progress can be seen as an inheritance of colonial projects to civilize the non-Western world. In Egypt during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, British-influenced projects of development were widespread. Mitchell, in *Colonising Egypt*, discusses precisely these projects to restructure the institutions of the country (such as schools and the military) as well as the physical space of the cities. More recently, however, development agendas are largely generated in the West and applied to various locales in other parts of the world. In these spheres too, the West or Westernization is linked with modernization, development, and progress.

The element of conspiracy is perhaps more complicated and requires more elaboration. In Saad's example discussed above, there was a sense that the film was a part of a concerted effort to destroy the image of Egypt abroad. This sense that foreign actors might have nefarious agendas to harm Egypt may have many explanations, but is certainly widespread. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the ambiguity of the term *khwaga* encompassed a deeply-held suspicion of foreigners who live in Egypt. Similarly, the ambivalence towards the AUC as an institution with links to the United States suggests this sense of suspicion.

Historically, this suspicion can be linked with the colonial struggles for independence, and the post-colonial history of the state, specifically, various Egyptian nationalist movements. After the revolution of 1952, there was a turn to Pan-Arabism under Nasser, and a celebration of the "authentically" Egyptian, with an implicit rejection of the British or Western forms of modernity that had held sway in the preceding decades. However, this era came to a halt with the 1967 defeat to Israel, an event that had lasting repercussions in the country. An increased suspicion of foreigners, especially westerners (or Western states) who might be tied to Israel, was just one of those ramifications. In part this may be attributed to the fact that Western powers were supportive of Israel, and continue to be so. Furthermore, Nasser, following the attacks, explicitly denounced them as being "engineered" by western forces (Kenny 1967).

The defeat in 1967 was redeemed by the victory in 1973, when Egypt re-gained the Sinai Peninsula. Walter Armbrust notes, however, that the military victory in 1973 was accompanied by "the twin shocks of regional power shifting away from Egypt toward the oil-producing Arab Gulf countries, and what many saw (and still see) as economic surrender to the West—forced adoption of a market economy known in Egypt as the *infitah*, or Open Door" (Armbrust 1996: 7). In this way, the very moment where Egypt regained its territorial boundaries and reestablished its military power, marked a moment of defeat in the economic sphere.

Although the events of 1973 were crucial, the shadow of 1967 continued to haunt the country. Hani Shukrallah argues that "the most essential fact about post-1967 Egyptian society and polity is that the crisis of hegemony brought about by the June defeat remains, two decades later, unresolved." (1989: 53). One result is a continued distrust of foreign agendas and foreign intervention in the country, at the same time that the country remains a large recipient of aid from countries such as the US.

To use a more recent example of this kind of conspiracy rhetoric, during the protests of January 25, 2011 and the subsequent weeks, there were several attacks on foreigners in the crowds and on foreign journalists. These attacks were motivated by rumors suggesting that the protests were organized and fomented by foreign agents. In fact, these rumors were likely started by the Mubarak camp and its sympathizers and announcements to this effect were made by officials sympathetic to the regime. Regardless of their provenance, the fact that rumors such as these could inspire physical assaults suggests their continued currency and resentment of

foreigners present in the populace.³⁸ In her work on the riots in India following the assassination of Indira Ghandi, Veena Das notes that although the riots were exceptional, the way in which individuals were targeted bore the traces of everyday enmities (2006: 149). In the Egyptian case, the attacks on foreigners suggest the underlying ambivalence and even suspicion with which foreigners can be viewed in Egypt.

The American University in Cairo: Politics and Literary Prizes

Furthermore, the AUCP and the AUC, as American institutions in Egypt, were often viewed with ambivalence. In her book, *Egypt's Culture Wars*, Samia Mehrez writes about the position of the AUCP with respect to the Cairo literati (2008). Taking the annual Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature (NMML) as her example, she traces the way in which attitudes towards the award were a means of expressing larger criticisms of US foreign policy. The Naguib Mahfouz Medal is awarded annually on Naguib Mahfouz' birth date by the AUCP, beginning in 1996. The prize recognizes a work of new fiction that has been published in Arabic. However, as Mehrez notes, the prize also has an additional function: "not only was it to honour new talents in Arabic literature, but it was to acknowledge and make known established writers whose works have not yet been translated into English" (45). In this way, the prize attempts to both celebrate and legitimize new authors, and to recognize and provide an international backing for more established authors. In addition to a cash prize, the winner receives a contract for his or her novel to be translated into English and published by the AUCP. Although there are now several literary prizes in the Arab world, including the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF, also known as the Arabic Booker), the NMML was one of the first to emphasize translation.

Mehrez discusses the importance of this award within Cairo's literary circles, noting that the AUCP has come under considerable criticism over the years regarding these choices. At times, that criticism has centered on the choice of a specific author. Mehrez discusses the politics of the literary scene in Cairo and reads these disputes in those local terms. However, she also notes a broader geo-political schema at work. Certain writers were quite critical of the prize and of the AUC more broadly, as a way to criticize the foreign policy of the US and the perceived intervention of American money into local affairs. Mehrez, in this book, writes a previously unwritten history of the first NMML. "The first award," she explains, "was intended for Sonallah Ibrahim, one of the [country's] most prominent and 'trustworthy' scribes, in recognition of his highly acclaimed novel *Dhat (Zaat)*" (46). Ibrahim, however, "as a staunch leftist and nationalist, has always had a problematic relationship with AUC as an American institution in Egypt, discreetly declined the award, arguing politely that it should go to younger and less established talents" (46). Mehrez notes that "Even though Ibrahim's discreet refusal represented his personal position towards the American University, it was used by those opposed to the award to represent its 'anti-national' nature, thereby stigmatizing the annual recipients" (46). She also highlights the fact that "the establishment of the Naguib Mahfouz Award dovetailed with anti-American sentiments that were accentuated by the American-led war against Iraq and the US's unwavering support for Israel" (46). This award for literature thus became a ground for expressing critiques of US politics and intervention in global affairs.

I have highlighted these debates here in order to suggest both the importance of the AUCP within the local Egyptian cultural context, and to point out the perceived imbrication of the institution with American policies. While the AUC and the AUCP were probably quite

³⁸ For further discussion of rumors, see the following chapter, "Of Memes and Mubarak"

peripheral to any policy concerns of the US government and military, nonetheless, as institutions in Egypt, they came to stand for the entirety of US foreign policy. In this case, the AUC represented or symbolized America in Egypt. And responses to the AUC and the AUCP became a way of criticizing US foreign policies, such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the US support of Israel.

These concerns about representing Egypt, what the proper image to present to the West ought to be, and indeed, a sense that the West represents both progress and conspiracy can be seen in the ethnographic example shared above. In a meeting in downtown Cairo at the AUC Press, after titles that include the word “modern” were consistently rejected by the foreign director of the press, when one Egyptian staff member turns to another, and mutters under his breath if she is suggesting that “Egypt can’t be modern,” the implication is that Egypt can’t be modern because that would not fit within a particular foreign narrative of what Egypt is: in need of development and the home of antiquities.³⁹ Furthermore, we might note that in the dichotomy delineated by Saad of acceptable depictions of the country, the book under discussion fell solidly within the former. The pictures, though not of the pyramids, were of older buildings, historic architecture, not the contemporary luxury hotels or the Opera House. The book was a resource not for contemporary Cairo, but for historic Cairo.

Our discussion hinged on the imagined reactions of the future Western reader. Throughout our conversation, the intended audience, Western professionals with limited knowledge of and limited access to Egypt, haunted the responses of the entire group. For some of us (who had traveled, lived, or worked in North America or the United Kingdom), this imagined reader might be quite specific.⁴⁰ In other cases, such as those who had not been to the United States, this imagined reader was, I expect, drawn from media representations of Egypt and of the United States, as well as encounters with foreigners and tourists in Egypt. In both cases, however, pervasive assumptions were made regarding what a reader unfamiliar with the country might expect. In particular, there was a sense that readers would not expect modern design, but rather pyramids and camels, or a discussion about designer economies and development policies.

Authoring the Nation

In the earlier sections of this chapter, I have discussed the transnational orientation of the editorial department at the AUCP, have demonstrated the heightened status of representations of Egypt that would circulate abroad, and have explored some theories of the relationship between representation and modernity. Here I explore the way in which the creation of a book cover and title became a process through which ideas of the nation could be articulated.

Anthropological and other scholarly work has considered the use of images in creating identity and in forming images of the other. In their *Reading National Geographic*, Lutz and Collins explore how images of an American other were crafted on the pages of a magazine (1993). They explore how reading about exotic peoples who lived elsewhere helped to cement

³⁹ The paternalism of this foreign view of the country has precedents in the British and French approach to antiquities in the 19th century. See chapter three for further discussion of this subject.

⁴⁰ In my case, for example, I even discussed the feasibility of this book with my husband who works in the video game industry, after there was some discussion in a previous meeting regarding whether there was an audience or market for this book. I asked if such books were used as references by designers, artists, and even programmers, and he assured me that they were and that they had had a similar book for another locale on a project he had recently been working on.

ideas about what was properly American. Leo Chavez, in his work *Covering Immigration*, explores how depiction of immigrants on magazine covers both reflected current debates around immigration and, crucially, helped to shape the terms of those debates. Both these projects, however, begin from the perspective of American media production and how it figures its others (either internal or external to the country). Other work has explored the creation and circulation of media in non-western contexts, for example, William Mazzarella has looked at advertising in India and the way in which the creation of the consumer was linked to the production of national identity (2003).

I explore the creation and production of images and texts that will circulate in the West and will serve as representations of the non-West, in this case, of Egypt. However, since these were being produced in Egypt, as objects, they also emerged out of and were embedded in local debates and entanglements. In the example discussed above, and in those I explore in the following chapter, although the books in question were meant to appeal to a North American audience and to circulate there, the debates about titles and cover designs were grounded in the specificities of local concerns. In this way, these books are hybrid objects that move and circulate across geographic scales and realms. These books are produced in a cosmopolitan context, meant to circulate globally, while still being embedded in particularly local, Egyptian debates. In this conversation, the relationship between the creator and audience required the labor of imagining an other's potential response to an image or text. The liminal positionality of the Press inflected our conversation in unique ways.

The concerns of the Egyptians I knew and worked with centered on the way the country would be represented in the media, in this case, through a book that would circulate in the West. The understanding was that for the Western consumers of that media, this book might in some sense become their definitive idea of Egypt, not simply one among many possible representations of the country. The individuals working at the Press were uniquely posed to raise these concerns, situated as they were in an organization positioned at the margins of both industry, culture, and language. However, their concerns were not unique. Instead, they grew out of a long tradition of Egyptians negotiating with the West and with a Western vision of what or how the country ought to be. As Saad's article on the reaction to the documentary *Marriage Egyptian Style* demonstrates, their concerns were shared by many in similar class positions who policed the boundaries of acceptable representations of the country in film, TV, and other media, creating controversy when these acceptable schema were defied.

These concerns grew out of a colonial history of intervention, first into the antiquities of the land, and later into the governance of the country. During the 19th and early 20th century, Europeans claimed the necessity of intervention in order to protect Egypt's antiquities from the ravages of the present. Throughout this period, and continuing to this day, tourism from the West has provided a major industry for the country. In light of this history, the relationship with the West remains a fraught one, as does the country's own relationship with its past. In the editorial meetings I was a part of, anxieties were expressed regarding the country's status as modern in representations that would circulate in the West. Although these anxieties are deeply rooted in the history of the nation, they seem also to have a political significance. In my conversations at the Press, the representation of Egypt took on the force of the performative. It was not simply a matter of presenting Egypt, but creating it. In this case, the book stood for the country; it would become for the readers not just one image of Egypt, but in fact, *the* image of Egypt. As such, it had a political importance beyond its immediate signification.

Invisible Authors

A final point I want to make in this chapter concerns publishing as an institution and the nature of the book as an object. Although book publishers may be becoming marginal and antiquated in this time of increased digitization, the publishing industry is a culture industry.⁴¹ In a popular imagination, culture producers are often conceived of as individuals, or groups, who create music, media, literature, art, etc. However, all of these individual creators are positioned within particular institutions, the music industry, publishing, and the world of art galleries, for example. In this case, the arguments taking place about the title of a book, the aspect of the material object that most people will interact with (as presumably only a small portion of people who see the book will actually read the text), is determined not by the author, but by the publishing team. Although this was not a literary title, the same happens in the case of literature, especially translated literature, where titles may be changed at the behest of the publisher.⁴²

Thus, the authors of books may not actually determine how they look, feel, or even what they are called. Instead, that labor is performed by the many people involved in the editing and production of the book, all of whom must be considered key producers of culture.

As this chapter should suggest, in thinking about novels as objects, I consider the many individuals involved in their production and the differing commitments they might bring to bear. In doing so, I build on a legacy of scholarly work that looks at the social lives of things and the ways in which they circulate (Appadurai 1986) and work on the production of expertise and on culture industries, such as journalism or advertising. In thinking about novels as object, I also attend to the materiality of objects and how they are constituted.

Within the field of science studies, the process by which an object is constituted has been well-considered, as the creation of scientific facts is central to those conversations. In his *Pandora's Hope*, Bruno Latour examines the way in which soil samples taken from the Brazilian rainforest are abstracted and rendered mobile so that they can be studied in a laboratory in Paris (1999). Indeed, his article focuses on the apparatus necessary to catalog and transport samples (from the maps used to mark the locations from where the samples were taken, to the organization systems used to house the samples). Latour illustrates the massive undertaking involved in the creation and maintenance of a scientific fact. Although in a very different sphere, my work draws on Latour's illumination of the many individuals and mechanisms involved in the process by which knowledge can be abstracted and circulated. In the case of my research, I

⁴¹ The future of publishing is a fraught topic and one that was accompanied by considerable anxiety. My project here is not to prognosticate about how the industry may change. Indeed, I found it fascinating ethnographically, to hear continued exclamations about the way the industry was dying, yet also to see empirical evidence of a thriving industry—both in terms of sales and in terms of the kinds of publishing activities I witnessed. These doomsday prophecies seemed perhaps to emerge out of a nostalgia for an era long past (or perhaps one that never existed). Of course, I don't mean to minimize the changes that have occurred in the industry, increasing conglomerations and, for example, the bankruptcy of a major retailer like Borders have affected the industry. However, rather than signaling the demise of publishing, events such as the recent merger between Penguin and Random House suggest a consolidation that seems well within the norms of the capitalist market structure. Furthermore, the increasing numbers of independent presses (especially those publishing e-books) suggests that the market is not as monopolized as might be suggested by the massive mergers of the big six Houses. All of this suggests an industry that is in a period of change and transition, not one that is fading away. The panic narratives about the death of publishing must thus be examined on other, ethnographic grounds.

⁴² Most of the time these changes occur with the consent of the author or translator, but at the end of the day the publisher decides on the book cover and title. There are frequently differences between the cover choices or titles for North American and United Kingdom editions, for example, a famous example being the title of first book in the Harry Potter series: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* was changed for the US edition to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

examined the process by which the novel in Arabic, as it was translated, edited, published, marketed in English, could be made legible within a Western market and yet remain comparable to the Arabic original. However, whereas Latour looks at the technologies that make the circulation of reference possible through claims of equivalence, I focus on the disjunctures and the moments of disconnect, as in the conversations discussed in this chapter.

The ethnographic (or anthropological) attention to the production of a text has taken place outside the context of science studies. Recent work on the media and other culture industries explores the way in which journalistic texts are produced under a variety of constraints, both of profession and of infrastructure. William Mazzarella's ethnography of the advertising industry, *Shoveling Smoke* (2003), explores the creation of advertising campaigns and how they contribute to the construction of a national identity in India. Dominic Boyer's (2005) work on journalism in the former East Germany (GDR), examines the ethos of journalistic practice. In that work he examines the way in which journalists were formed and how they navigated the constraints of the system, including official censorship.

The notion of constraint is central to Brian Larkin's investigation of infrastructure in urban Nigeria in his book *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (2009). In that work, he examines the cultural life of media in Nigeria, drawing on both ethnographic and archival research to explore the intersection of media (primarily radio and film) and social life from the colonial era until the present. Larkin focuses on the technologies and infrastructures that enable media production, consumption, and circulation. His attention to infrastructure makes possible insights that might be obscured through other approaches. For example, he discusses how the home-grown Nigerian film industry emerged out of the infrastructure created by the video-piracy industry. Specifically, the tools necessary to make and circulate bootleg and other pirated videos also enabled the editing and circulation of new films. His attention to the materiality of media technologies as well as the specificity of media practices serves as a model for an ethnographic approach to the study of media, specifically, and human-technical interfaces more broadly.

Dominic Boyer's *Life Informatic* (2013) continues his ethnographic consideration of the practices of journalists, focusing on the online sector. In this newer work, he reflects on the ways in which anthropology, like contemporary news journalism, is often practiced in front of a screen. In his discussion of the production of online news journalism, he examines how journalists reflect on both the practice of their craft and on the medium in which they work. Like Boyer, my work examines both the practice and the discursive medium through which these texts circulate. Boyer's mode of engagement and his attention to both the practices journalists engage in as well as the discursive, mediated realms their texts circulate share an affinity with my work and engagements here.

Other scholars have examined the materiality of objects as they exist in the world. Webb Keane's theory of materiality and attention to semiotic forms is of particular relevance to my project. In *Christian Moderns*, which I discussed earlier with respect to his understanding of the moral valence of modernity, Keane also attends to both the materiality of language, such as "the sounds of words" as well as the material conditions of texts, including "the perishability of books" (Keane 2007: 5-6). Furthermore, he asserts that "This emphasis on materiality means more than just insisting on the materiality of the world within which signifying practices take place. It means that ideas and the practices they involve have not only logical but also causal effects on one another across a potentially wide range of apparently distinct social fields" (18). Keane terms this a "representational economy" which can situate "words, things, and persons

(along with other agentive beings such as spirits) dynamically within the same world with one another” (19). Keane’s approach provides a way of thinking about the materiality of things and the materiality of language. I draw on this in my investigation of the materiality of the translations of Arabic novels.

In my work on translated novels, I look at the social life of translation in order to illuminate the networks through which the translated texts circulates and the variety of ways in which it is positioned. Furthermore, my focus throughout is on the production of these texts as coherent wholes, and the moments where that attempt fails. I suggest that these texts do not, in fact, cohere straightforwardly or easily. Rather, at every stage decisions about a given image, word, title, cover, and so on, configure the text in varied and occasionally contradictory ways.

The dissertation as a whole investigates the process of creating translations as a contingent, often messy process, the choice of title that I discussed in this chapter forms an important part of that process. As the discussions above should suggest, the process is messy because consensus is not straightforward and because the imaginative labor required is quite extensive. A decision about how to title a book required collaboration across cultural and linguistic borders in minute and specific ways. In the process, the transnational identities were articulated and concerns over the status of the country emerged that shaped how particular books would be positioned as they circulated in a broader international sphere.

In the following chapter, I continue to draw on my ethnographic experience at the AUCP and even on the productive space of the editorial meetings. Many of the issues central to this chapter, such as representations of Egypt and the construction of an imagined Western reader, remain central in the following chapter. However, my focus there is on the production of images and how these representations of the country are a mode of imagining alternative futures for the nation.

Chapter Three: Of Memes and Mubarak: Imagining Egypt's Future

In autumn 2013, as I worked toward finishing my dissertation, I glanced one evening at the Arab world headlines in my RSS feed. I was surprised to see a report that Mohamed Hashem, the founder of Egyptian publishing house Dar Merritt, would be leaving the country to emigrate (to the West, likely to Germany or the United States). Hashem's Dar Merritt is one of the premier independent publishing houses in Egypt. Founded in 1988, the press has since published literary works by many of the younger generation of Egyptian writers. He was known for supporting and cultivating innovative and creative writers. Indeed, the offices of the press, in an older building in downtown Cairo, became a meeting spot for young intellectuals and writers to gather. These salons and conversations about writing and aesthetics often verged on the political. Hashem's political stance was made explicit when, during the January 25 revolution, Hashem opened the offices, located just blocks from Tahrir Square, to protesters. A fixture on the cultural landscape, Hashem's announcement stunned "his friends and a legion of young fans," according to the *New York Times* (Fahim 2013). I too, was surprised to read that he would be leaving. Indeed, I can not imagine the intellectual or writerly scene in Cairo without thinking of Hashem and the Dar Merritt offices.

Hashem's reasons for leaving, however, are worth noting. According to a post on his Facebook page, and as it was reprinted in the *Egyptian Independent*, Hashem said: "The noise of the machinery of dictator-makers is unbearable, and its annoying creak which trivializes the revolution, the greatest value in the lives of Egyptians, and [trivializes] their dreams for civilian rule - not religious, and not military - continues" (2013). The *New York Times* quotes him as saying: "I will refuse, fiercely and until I die, to choose between the bitterness of the military or manipulators of religion. [...] I will emigrate, because I don't find that which expresses the spirit of the great revolution between those conflicting interests. [...] Until we meet at the next revolution" (Fahim 2013). In choosing to leave, Hashem registered his political protest with the state of affairs in Egypt in the years that followed the revolution of 25 January 2011. However, the manner in which he has announced his decision points to a global audience. That is, the audience for his political protest is not simply Egyptians (although clearly, he is speaking to and on behalf of his countrymen), but to the international community as well. His decision to emigrate further places Egypt in a global context. He implicitly compares Egypt, which has become intolerable for him, to another country where he will live. Furthermore, his comments are about his dreams for the country and his disappointed hopes in the revolution. In this way, his critique imbricates concerns about Egypt's future (or at least the outcome of the revolution) in a global context as articulated through social media.

In the previous chapter, I examined how Egypt's status as modern was debated in the context of a future Western reader. Thus, Egypt's modernity was being articulated and formulated in a relational or comparative fashion. Hashem's comments also suggest a concern about Egypt's reputation abroad and anxieties about how the country may be represented in the West. In this chapter, I will continue to explore competing representations of Egypt and will explore how these varying representations indicate differing attitudes toward Egypt's past, present, and future. Thus, the chapter engages with the questions of Egypt's reputation and with the temporality of representations.

This chapter tells a story of a time before that revolution, when Mubarak was still the president and talk of regime change assumed that Mubarak's death would be the precipitating

factor. I have opened with this anecdote in order to frame what follows. The excitement and urgency of the revolution is bracketed here both by my analysis of what came before the revolution and by this current development—the departure of one of the country’s favored sons in protest of a failed revolution. I examine two debates around the representation of Egypt that emerged in September 2010, just a few months before the protests that would end Mubarak’s rule. In both cases, I explore the production and circulation of representations of Egypt. I argue that these images are dialogic and that they enact a new future for the country. In this way, they contributed to the collective semiotic scaffolding⁴³ that supported the revolution. Other scholars have demonstrated that, although figured in Western media as completely unexpected, the protests of early 2011 were part of a tradition of political protest and youth activism. In this chapter, I explore the way in which representations of the nation were contentious precisely because representations were a site where Egyptians debated the future of their nation.

The first instance I explore is a scandal over the publication of a photoshopped image of Mubarak. I trace the publication of this photo, the international and domestic responses, and examine the circulation of a meme parodying this photoshopped image. As it is transformed through photoshop, this image becomes dialogic, and the various versions depict quite distinct images of Egypt, and indeed, of Egypt’s possible future. Further, the variety and scope of these images can be considered in the realm of the carnivalesque—challenging and subverting authoritative discourse through humor, as a means to imagine a different future. The second instance is a set of conversations about the cover of a book published by the American University in Cairo Press. In creating the cover, we debated the status of symbols of the country, particularly those that would represent Egypt through images of its ancient past. In our conversation about how to represent the country, the conversation centered on the kind of future offered by various symbols.

In the context of the dissertation more broadly, this chapter extends the arguments of the previous chapter on the ways that representations of Egypt reveal anxieties around the nation’s status as modern and its role in the broader world. As part of the broader argument of the dissertation, I suggest that translation is a scalar project, of moving between the local and the global. I also examine how certain things become mobile while others are constructed as immobile. In this chapter, I explore how this happens in the context of representations, particularly images. I argue that even as images circulate beyond the bounds of a local context, they do not lose that context. Thus, even as they become ‘global’ objects, they retain the traces of particular and contingent debates. In this way, the categories of local and global emerge not as oppositional but as co-constituted.

Case Study I: Politics and Representation

In early September 2010, Hosni Mubarak went to Washington D.C. to participate in a round of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. During these talks, there was a widely disseminated photo of US president Obama, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, and Jordan’s King Abdullah II walking down the red carpets of the White House. The White House press photo by Alex Wong shows Obama in the lead, flanked by the other world leaders.⁴⁴

⁴³ I use the term scaffolding here as it is used in the context of language and other instructional settings.

⁴⁴ This image has not been included with the dissertation as I could not obtain a license to reproduce it at a reasonable cost. The photo, Getty Images number 103775563, may be viewed here:

At the time, Hosni Mubarak had been President of Egypt since 1981. He also had been suffering health concerns in the previous months. In March 2010, he underwent gallbladder surgery. Later that summer, the leader was hospitalized after he fell ill during a visit with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in Paris. Rumors circulated that he suffered from cancer, although they were denied by the authorities. Similarly, while he was hospitalized in Europe in July 2010, there were rumors that he was in a coma. At the time, I was conducting fieldwork in Egypt. While there, in addition to hearing the pervasive rumors that he was in a coma, I even heard rumors that he had died and the authorities were covering it up. Scholarship on rumors, such as that by Veena Das (2007) or Luise White (2000) suggests that rumors often circulate in situations of inequality (which was certainly the case in Egypt) and where authoritative discourse might be perceived as unreliable. In Egypt at the time, the Mubarak regime's control over information had led to a situation where individuals distrusted authoritative discourse, particularly on the subject of the president's health.

These rumors circulated in an environment where information about this topic was highly restricted. While Egypt didn't censor journalists as robustly as other regimes in the region such as Syria, the health of the president was a relatively taboo topic, and one about which the regime did exert a certain amount of compliance, for example, by jailing journalists who questioned Mubarak's health.⁴⁵ It is worth noting here how the physical body of the president was central to both the rumors that circulated as well as (and perhaps because of) the regime's attempts to control the circulation of information. In this case, the body of the president became a metonym for the country. Of course, given that Mubarak had been president for nearly 30 years, was in his 80s, and there was no clear successor, the regime's emphasis on controlling the circulation about the president's health—especially information that might place in question his capability of effectively continuing to rule—may be understandable. Indeed, while I was in Egypt, when conversations about regime change arose (and they did, with relative regularity), it was usually assumed that Mubarak's death would instigate political change. At the time there was considerable speculation that Mubarak's son Gamal would succeed his father as the president. Thus, these were conversations not so much about Hosni Mubarak's presidency as about the threat of a Gamal Mubarak presidency. Generally speaking, beyond these specific concerns about the health of the president, although there was not the kind of cult around the president that had been cultivated in Syria around Hafiz al-Asad and later his son Bashar al-Asad, depictions of the president in the state media were unflinchingly positive.⁴⁶ This included not only coverage favorable to his positions, but might also include retouching an image to place him (literally) in the best light.

So, it was not without precedent that the state media might edit an image. However, in this case, the kind of adjustment that was made was not simply a matter of retouching or airbrushing the lines on Mubarak's face. Rather, when this picture appeared in the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram* on September 14, 2010, the picture had been altered to place Mubarak at the center of the formation, with Obama and the other leaders walking behind him (See Figure 1). The caption

<http://www.gettyimages.ca/detail/news-photo/egyptian-president-hosni-mubarak-israeli-prime-minister-news-photo/103775563>

⁴⁵ For example, in 2008, the editor of *Al-Dustur*, Ibrahim Eissa, was sentenced to two months in jail for questioning Mubarak's health in his articles. The verdict was upheld in an appeals court, but was denounced by international organizations including Amnesty International and the Committee for the Protection of Journalists.

⁴⁶ In her book *Ambiguities of Domination*, Lisa Wedeen explores the cult of the president in Syria and the 'as if' compliance that is exacted (1999). She argues that the cult works to perpetuate the regime through compliance rather than legitimacy, as I discuss further below.

read “The Road to Sharm el-Sheikh” (where the talks would continue the following week). Egyptian blogger Wael Khalil exposed the doctored photo on his blog. Speaking with *The Guardian*, he said:

I think what’s significant is that *Al Ahram*, the regime’s mouthpiece, is clearly very sensitive about the way Mubarak appears to the general public in the current climate.... People have picked up on the photo because it’s such a good insight into the way the government operates in Egypt; whenever there are problems or failings they simply try and gloss over them – you can see that in this photo, and you can see it in the way they run the country. (Shenkar and Siddique 2010).

Other opposition figures and groups criticized the actions of the Egyptian daily, for example, both the Guardian and the BBC reported that the 6 April Youth Movement said “This is what the corrupt regime’s media has been reduced to.” This incident seemed to confirm an already wary attitude toward the established state media in Egypt. For example, one blogger exclaimed “Al Ahram thinks that we are still living in the Nasserite era⁴⁷ where it can change facts as much it could and nobody will pay attention.” These responses must be taken in the context in which the regime limited the circulation of information about the president, especially his health, as I discussed above.

In response to the widespread (online) criticism of the paper,⁴⁸ both within Egypt and abroad, the paper’s chairman of the board, Dr. Abdel-Monem Said justified the paper’s decision to print the manipulated photo in the following way:

The photo/design ran alongside a two-page feature/analysis entitled “The Road to Sharm El-Sheikh”, and was intended as an illustrative complement to that headline. Co-authored by myself and my colleague Dr. Mohamed Abdel-Salam, this was a hitherto unpublished document and detailed account of the largely behind-the-scenes initiative aimed at re-launching Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, which began with President Barak [sic] Obama’s entry to the White House, leading to the first official session of the jump-started talks between the two parties in the Egyptian Red Sea resort. (Said 2010)

In this statement, the chairman suggests that the photo was “an illustrative complement” to the headline. He proposes, in effect, that it be read as a kind of political cartoon or illustration. He suggests that the photograph was meant figuratively, not literally. He goes on, however, to note defensively that:

We live at a time when the media whether print; audio-visual or online is increasingly resorting to new digital technologies to graphically and visually represent images, stories, notions and ideas. In doing so, the media everywhere is faced with the challenge of defining the often fine lines demarcating between accepted practice and unacceptable departures. This is a legitimate subject for debate, criticism and correction, but should not be a pretext for mutual disparagement among the media of different countries, especially when such denigration comes from the media of the more industrially and technologically advanced societies, towards those which are as yet attempting to keep up with the breakneck speed of the information/communications revolution.

In this way, the Chairman resituates the critique of the way in which this photo was doctored within a broader critique of global inequalities of wealth and access and the digital divide. His comments also construct a complicated relationship between image and reality that is more

⁴⁷ During Nasser’s regime, the media was largely state-controlled.

⁴⁸ I do not know how this picture was interpreted by Cairenes not involved in the blog/twitter scene. This critical reception was predominantly articulated online.

nuanced than his critics who seem to demand a kind of correspondence between truth and image. In the news coverage that followed the scandal, this aspect of the *Al-Ahram* spokesperson's critique was not mentioned. Instead, his defense of the picture on the grounds that it was an artistic and symbolic rendering was recirculated. His attempts to shift focus from the criticism of the paper for pandering to the Mubarak regime and for its blatant manipulation of an image that had already been widely disseminated to systemic issues of inequality of global access and wealth were not subsequently taken up by the international media (for perhaps obvious reasons).

In thinking about the production of this image as well as the response by the editorial board of the newspaper, I draw on Lisa Wedeen's discussion of the *Ambiguities of Domination*, where she examines the cult of Hafiz Al-Asad in Syria (1999). She argues that during her fieldwork in Syria, she found a "politics of public dissimulation" was in operation where "citizens act *as if* they revere their leader" (Wedeen 1999:6). Wedeen here draws on Zizek's understanding of politics and particular kinds of obedience elaborated in his *Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989). Wedeen explores how the political cult of Asad is a kind of domination "based on compliance rather than legitimacy" (Wedeen 1999: 6). She argues, reading Zizek, that the cult is remarkably effective at generating the obedience and compliance necessary for the political regime to maintain control. On the level of the actions of political subjects, an "as if" attitude of reverence is equivalent to a legitimate or real (really-felt) one. She does not collapse that distinction, rather, her work points to the usefulness and efficacy of precisely this politics of the as if in the work of the Asad regime. Wedeen explores the gap between "performance and belief," but makes clear that pragmatically, a politics "as if" nevertheless exacts a certain kind of compliance (Wedeen 1999:82).

In the case of the photoshopped images of Mubarak, Wedeen's discussion of compliance is useful in examining the creation of the image in *Al-Ahram*. While the Mubarak regime did not develop the kind of cult that surrounded Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad in Wedeen's discussion, the photoshopped image published in *Al-Ahram* nonetheless conforms to certain norms regarding depictions of President Mubarak in the media. Furthermore, we may also read the defensive remarks by the editor of the newspaper in the context of these theories of "as if" compliance. Perhaps the photoshopped image can be seen as being published according to a similar kind of "as if" logic as that which governed political participation and representation in Syria. The responses amongst Western media outlets, such as the BBC and the Guardian, unaccustomed to such a political stance, were condescending. The defensiveness of the editor's remarks may stem from a sense that the photoshopped image was mis-read as being a serious act of homage, when in fact, it was meant as a kind of rote compliance or perhaps as a political cartoon. Hence, the editor's explanation that the picture was figurative, to suggest the importance of Mubarak and Egypt in promoting and organizing the peace talks. That this explanation was unconvincing to Western media and bloggers suggests a great divergence in the implicit theories of representation at stake and indeed, in norms of official or presidential representation.

The paper's explanations did not exonerate it in the eyes of the online community nor did it serve to eliminate the scandal from public discussion. However, the response to this blatant use of photoshop was not limited to criticism or commentary (in blogs or mainstream media). Rather, in this age of ever-changing memes, the photo became fodder for a new meme, in which any number of individuals or items were placed in front of the procession world leaders (see figure 2).

A variation of these photoshopped Mubarak (or his face) onto other famous images to show him leading the way to all sorts of victories or discoveries. For example, one labeled "The

Road to Egypt” depicts Mubarak’s face superimposed over Napoleon’s in the painting “Napoleon Crossing the Alps” by Jacques-Louis David (see figure 3). There are several versions of the meme, some in which Mubarak’s face or his whole body are pasted onto other images, so he may be shown leading the running of the bulls in Spain, for example, or, as depicted above, leading Napoleon across the Alps. These images are in some ways ambiguous, they could be read as satire, but also as sincere, expressing a kind of Egyptian patriotism or nationalism or even exhibiting a kind of representational compliance of the sort discussed by Wedeen. Although when they were recirculated, the images were often read in a satirical fashion, I do not know the spirit in which they were composed, or indeed, other contexts of reception where they might have been read quite differently.

The entire incident has even become an entry on the website “Know Your Meme” with a brief description of the original image and the doctored version that appeared in *Al-Ahram*, followed by a selection of notable photoshopped versions (of both varieties).⁴⁹

The meme images can generally be divided into two categories, those which place Mubarak or his face onto other images, and those which place images of other individuals onto the image of the procession of world leaders. It seems that the latter had more currency in Egypt and were more widely circulated in the Egyptian and expat communities of which I was a part. Furthermore, insofar as they project a future for Egypt (through depictions of Egyptians or Egyptian icons), they are analytically richer and will be the focus of my discussion here.

I first learned of this incident from a blog post that collected some of the many humorous images then circulating that was sent to me by a colleague at the American University in Cairo Press. This blog post contained exclusively the images of other people or characters leading the procession of world leaders. When I spoke with my friends and colleagues about the fact of the doctored image, people expressed some surprise, but mostly it was greeted with a roll of the eyes and shrug of the shoulders. The implication was that at a paper with ties to the government, such as *Al-Ahram*, what else could one expect? Mostly, the sense I got was that people were surprised more by how overt the manipulation was than by the fact that a paper might touch up an image to place a government official in a better light. But, my conversations on the subject tended to focus on the witty images that circulated in response,⁵⁰ rather than on the publication of the doctored image itself. Indeed, for a time, these memes were widely circulated and posted on Facebook.

I would like to take these images seriously as providing a critique of the regime and the kind of official discourse and representations that circulated and, crucially, as offering an alternative vision of the future. For example, the image in figure 2 depicts a young Egyptian man leading the world leaders to Sharm el-Shiekh dressed in swimming trunks, tee shirt, sandals, and carrying a towel draped around his neck: the typical attire of someone beach-bound at the Red Sea resort. As an artistic rendering of the road to Sharm, this image, not the one with Mubarak in the lead, is most apt. The image is not only funny but provides a commentary on the limited effectiveness of these world leaders who meet in fancy resorts but are, in the end, unsuccessful at creating any lasting change.

These differing images (the original, the *Al-Ahram* version, and the many posted online as internet memes), each do quite different work. I’d like to pause here to consider these differences. The image in *Al-Ahram* places Mubarak in the center. In doing so, it conforms to norms of presidential representation which highlight strength and leadership. Critical readings of

⁴⁹ The page can be accessed at this site: <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/mubarak-photoshopped>

⁵⁰ It should be noted that these circulated in a broader culture of jokes and humor (see Mersal 2011 for a discussion of the importance of jokes in thinking the revolution).

the image, such as that provided by the blogger Wael Khalil, suggest that the doctored image unduly glorifies Mubarak. The performative work of this image is to assert Mubarak's status as a world leader, indeed, he is shown leading the group. It is particularly important to note that Mubarak is seen leading not only Obama, but the leaders of Jordan and Israel, suggesting not only global importance, but regional prominence, as well. In contrast, in the original image, Mubarak is seen off to the side, at the outer edge and a little behind the others. The photoshopped image thus performs an idea of Egypt as it is embodied by its leader, who is shown to be at the center of world affairs. In doing so, it also suggests a divergence from certain Western, particularly American, ideals, such as a freedom of expression and freedom of the press. In this case, the image privileges the image of the president as a leader over the factual truth of what occurred that day.⁵¹

The parody photoshopped images that circulated in response to this image perform quite a different kind of work. Indeed, the Egypt that these images evoke is quite different. They disrupt the official narrative and official discourse. Rather than showing Mubarak as central, they place images of the everyday in the lead position, as in Fig. 3 above, where a young man is shown at the front of this group of world leaders.⁵² This image literally depicts an Egyptian leading not just Mubarak, but the world (as represented by its leaders). Other versions of this meme depict belly dancers or famous singers (Amr Diab and the like) in the lead. While these personages are not ordinary, their cultural influence is widespread and every day. Part of the humor of these images lies in the juxtaposition of the everyday and the dignified sphere of world politics and diplomacy. These images, where Egyptian youth can be seen literally leading the world, seem to offer a vision of the future, a vision of a possible world where such youth might have more of a political voice than they did in September 2010. I will argue that these images can be understood dialogically and as examples of the carnivalesque.

Beyond the specifics of this representation, however, the creation and the circulation of these images bear witness to the community of individuals who are internet-savvy, adept at photoshop, and familiar with the trajectory of a meme. In short, they demonstrate a continuity with youth in the West whose mode of engagement with world affairs often consists of parody or satire.⁵³ Furthermore, youth involvement in political movements and an engagement with changing forms and modes of media production has been a feature of Egyptian political life for decades (see for instance Fahmy 2011). In doing so, the images perform a different Egypt than that of the *Al-Ahram* photo. They also complicate the explanation given by the director of *Al-Ahram* where he chastised the response to this doctored photo in the Western press, asserting that it "should not be a pretext for mutual disparagement among the media of different countries, especially when such denigration comes from the media of the more industrially and technologically advanced societies, towards those which are as yet attempting to keep up with the breakneck speed of the information/communications revolution" (Said 2010). The circulation, from within Egypt, of this photoshopped meme suggests that some within the country had indeed kept up with technological changes and were adept at the use of digital media

⁵¹ I do not mean to suggest here that privileging of presidential appearance is antithetical to American media practice. Historically, for example, media images of President Franklin Roosevelt avoided showing him in a wheelchair although he relied on one.

⁵² Again, I am focusing my analysis here on the images that place another figure in front of the world leaders at the White House, rather than those which place Mubarak leading another situation.

⁵³ Dominic Boyer and Alexei Yurchak have written about the similarities between late-socialist aesthetics and parodies of official discourse and those of late-liberal parodies of political commentary in their article on "American Stioib" (2010).

technology. While those same individuals might (and in my experience, often did) make their own critique of global inequalities of wealth and access to technology, they also participated in a global youth culture in which internet memes serve as a mode of commentary, humor, and self-expression. Indeed, these images suggest that their participation in this global youth culture conditioned the form through which certain kinds of critiques of the regime were made.

The creation of these two, quite different, kinds of photoshopped images is telling. Indeed, these two groups, the youth who circulated the meme and the editorial staff of a state-sponsored newspaper, illustrate one of the fractures in the country that was to become even more apparent a few months later during the protests that began January 25, 2011. These two images imagined Egypt and its future in radically different ways. According to one, presidential figures demand authority and respect, at least so far as outward comport (or depiction in a newspaper) is concerned. According to the other, everything and anything can be fodder for amusement and critical commentary. The images also imagine different futures for the country. Egypt as represented by its aging ruler versus Egypt as represented by the creative youth of the country.

The Dialogic Image

Scholarship on language and discourse has highlighted the fact that speech is always dialogic. In this section, I will lay out how such scholars have described the dialogism of speech. I will then argue that in the instance described above, the images in question were dialogic just as speech is. I contend that a consideration of images, especially those that are photoshopped and recirculated, must be understood dialogically.

Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that even the most seemingly-authoritative and monolithic utterance is, in practice, always dialogic. Bakhtin's focus was on the utterance, a unit of speech that could be as brief as a "single-word everyday rejoinder" or as expansive as "the multivolume novel" (Bakhtin 1986: 61). In considering the example of the photoshopped images of Mubarak and the meme that circulated in response, I will extend Bakhtin's notion of dialogic speech to the production and circulation of images. I argue that these images are rightly considered dialogic as they exist in conversation with other images and texts.

In his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin elaborates a theory of the utterance (in contrast to words or sentences) as the unit of speech communication (1986). He argues that utterances belong to a particular genre and are coded as such through their thematic content, style and compositional structure (Bakhtin 1986: 60). However, for Bakhtin, language is a social process, and indeed, every utterance has a social or dialogical component; he says that the utterance "is filled with *dialogic undertones*" (92). Later, he elaborates, explaining that "every utterance...always responds...in one form or another to others' utterances that precede it. The speaker is not Adam, and therefore the subject of his speech itself inevitably becomes the arena where his opinions meet those of his partners ... or other viewpoints, world views, trends, theories, and so forth" (94). Bakhtin here articulates the manifold social components of any speech act. The reference to Adam suggests the impossibility of a singular discourse in the world. Whereas Adam was charged with affixing names to things, later speakers do not have that power. Instead, our speech is always responsive and context-bound, emerging in specific moments and always in dialogue with those who have already spoken.

Bakhtin specifically examines cases of official discourse that seek to be monolithic (and indeed, even claim to be monolithic), such as "a scientific or philosophical treatise" (92). Even these seemingly monologic utterances "cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic" (92). He goes on, "after all, our thought itself—

philosophical, scientific, and artistic—is born and shaped in the process of integration and struggle with others’ thought” (92). In these lines, Bakhtin presents a vision of speech as always connected to earlier utterances, any utterance embedded in a limitless chain of utterances extending in both directions ad infinitum. The impossibility of a monologic utterance lies in this understanding of the utterance as embedded in a chain. As a link in the chain, it can not stand alone and is always in some way a reflection of what has gone before, and opens up to what will come after.

To illustrate how speech is dialogic, Bakhtin discusses the case of quoted speech, where the boundaries between utterances are weakened: “the speaker’s expression penetrates through these boundaries and spreads to the other’s speech, which is transmitted in ironic, indignant, sympathetic, or reverential tones” (92-93). Further, he notes that “the other’s speech thus has a dual expression: its own, that is the other’s, and the expression of the utterance that encloses the speech” (93). In speech, then, instances of citation, where one speaks the words of another, reveal the dialogic nature of speech quite clearly. While images may copy or refer to other images, the case of photoshop allows us to consider this kind of citational practice in a new way. In the case of photoshop, especially as in memes, the image is composed of other images, cut and pasted together.

Bauman and Briggs explored the process of entextualization, or how speech or discourse is extracted and made into a text that can then circulate to a new context (1990). The meme is an imagistic instantiation of this same process. Images, here, are texts that circulate in new contexts. Indeed, their humor often relies on the juxtaposition of elements in the image, as in the case of images of an Egyptian youth dressed for the beach leading world leaders through the halls of the White House. Another way of reading these memes and their proliferation would be through Judith Butler’s comments on iterability as elaborated in her *Excitable Speech* (1997). In that text, she explores how performativity is transformed through iteration or repetition.

Scholars have explored the relationship between image and text and there has been some work done exploring the dialogism of images in text (See Janzen Kooistra 1995). However, in the case of the photoshopped images that circulate as a meme, this dialogism is very clearly at work. These images cannot be understood on their own. Rather, they reference and play on the original image as well as the photoshopped version that appeared in *Al-Ahram*. Thus, these images can best be understood as utterances standing in a relationship with other utterances.

The dialogism of these images works in at least two ways. First, the images of the meme contradict and parody *Al-Ahram*’s attempt at creating a monolithic image of Mubarak, one that only depicted him in a positive light, as a strong leader and so forth. These images cite the original image and the parody only works through reference to the original photo and the original photoshop job. Furthermore, in many cases, the images being created combined at least two other images. For example, in figure 3, the image combines both a photo of Mubarak and a painting by Jacques-Louis David. In order to read this image, one must have a familiarity with not only the original photo from the White House, the photoshopped version printed in *Al-Ahram*, but also a basic enough knowledge of European art history to recognize the iconic depiction of Napoleon. Furthermore, to understand the play involved in the title of that meme (“The Road to Egypt”) one must also know that Napoleon, in fact, invaded Egypt in 1798. This marked the first European military invasion in Egypt. The invasion was significant because of the emphasis on gathering historical and archaeological information as well as the military goals. Indeed, the Rosetta Stone was discovered during this expedition. This complicated history is

invoked in the meme. Thus, these meme images are very clearly dialogic and located within a chain of other images and texts.

However, the images can perhaps be read as dialogic in a second manner. In this other mode of reading dialogically, the photoshopped image produced by *Al-Ahram*, and the international response to it, can itself be seen as a critique of Western conventions of truth and photographic authority. The photoshopped image relies on the logic of photographic truth and authority to subvert it to Mubarak's benefit. That is, the creation of the original photoshopped image assumes that conventions of photographic authority will suggest to the viewer that Mubarak is leading the group of dignitaries. Of course, this is precisely what the editor of the paper denies when he claims that the image was an artistic rendering of the situation. In saying that, he denies the conventions of reading and interpreting images that shape the consumption of the text. At the same time, the original (photoshopped) image only works by relying on this logic. It is thus dialogic insofar as it relies on particular conventions of interpreting an image, without which, the image would be illegible and arguably uncontroversial.

Carnavalesque and the Body of the King

In addition to his work on dialogism and speech genres, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque is also useful in thinking through these images. I will argue that these memes constitute an example of the carnivalesque insofar as they not only work through the logic of parodies and inversions, but they also imagine an alternate future for the nation. These images construct a future for the country where Mubarak is no longer central. In the mode of the carnivalesque, which Bakhtin fully explores in his work *Rabelais and his World*, he understands the grotesque and carnivalesque as a space in which official discourse can be parodied (1984). Bakhtin explores Rabelais' novel as a site for this kind of carnivalesque parody, however, he examines the space of the carnival in medieval Europe more broadly. Bakhtin here elaborates an alternative space of discourse, in which the official discourse circulates alongside its parody. The carnivalesque is precisely the space in which the official discourse can be parodied and overturned through a process of circulation, appropriation, and citation.

The carnivalesque is crucial, for Bakhtin, in that it enables the disenfranchised to imagine and enact (even if only for a short time), a different social world. Bakhtin asserts that the carnival "marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal" (Bakhtin 1984: 10). Carnivals were, he says, "the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (9). Speaking of the forms of the carnival's symbols, Bakhtin notes that the "logic of the 'inside out,' ... of the 'turnabout,' of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings" dominates (11). The carnival is thus the site of inversions of the usual social order. The images of the Mubarak meme which place ordinary Egyptians in the center, leading the parade of world leaders, perform just such an inversion. They distort the social norms for humorous purposes.

Bakhtin is careful to note, however, that the parodies that take place during the carnival are unlike modern satires wherein the "satirist places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it" (Bakhtin 1984: 12). In the medieval carnival, the laughter "is also directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world" (12). In the two versions of the meme, we see both kinds of humor at work. The genre of the meme that place ordinary figures in front of a procession of world leaders, falls within the

carnavalesque mode of parody as Bakhtin describes it. In these images, images of ordinary Egyptians were elevated to the status of world leader. These images model an alternative future for the country; however, in doing so they highlight the contrast with the present. They ridicule the paper for having photoshopped Mubarak's image and the Mubarak regime for its control over the circulation of information and images of the president. For this reason, we can say that like the medieval carnival, the humor in these images "is also directed at those who laugh," that is, the Egyptian youth creating and circulated these images. By contrast, those versions of the meme which place Mubarak's face or body in some other context seem to fall within what Bakhtin terms the "modern" mode of satire. They do so by outright poking fun at Mubarak.⁵⁴ But the other images, those which place other people or characters in front of the world leaders, seem to poke fun at the whole situation. Furthermore, these pictures enact the topsy-turvy world of the carnivalesque far more than do images of Mubarak leading a marathon, for example.

Given Mubarak's status as authoritarian leader whose regime relatively tightly controlled the circulation of information about his person (especially as it related to his health) and given the circulation of rumors about his ill-health and possible death, Bakhtin's comments on the carnival king and grotesque realism are illuminating. Bakhtin explores the crowning of a carnival king, usually the clown or a slave. This act of social distortion enables the reimagination of a social world. (And thus, by providing an imaginative outlet, enables the continuation of the status quo).

In the contemporary age, the meme is a new site for the carnivalesque. Memes parody official discourse, often quite explicitly. While it could be argued that not all memes reverse the social order, the many memes involving animals (particularly cats) might suggest an inversion of the social order with respect to household pets. In the case of the meme being discussed here, the images certainly disrupt and disorient the social order. Indeed, by placing an Egyptian youth (or a belly dancer, or a pop singer, and so on) they construct Egypt's place in the world quite differently.

In the section above, I explored the way that memes constructed alternate visions of Egypt's future and critiques of the present condition. I turn now to examine a second case where images became the site where contested notions of the future could be debated. In this case, these debates centered on the status of symbols of Egypt's ancient past. Unlike the case of the meme, where a contrast between the present and future seems to be activated, in this case, the central contrast is between the past and the present. Following Koselleck (1985) and others, however, I argue that the stakes of these conversations about the past were the potential for the future.

Case Study II: Cover Stories

In this second section of the chapter, I examine debates around how Egypt could be represented (or symbolized) on the cover of a book. As in the case of the photoshopped images discussed above, in this case, the terms of our debate suggested different modes of imagining Egypt's future and its role in a global context. Unlike the images of the meme, which project an alternative vision of the future, the conversation that day at the American University of Cairo Press centered on the relevance (and even possibility) of using the Sphinx as a symbol of Egypt. Thus, the conversation addresses the issue of Egypt's future through a consideration of its past.

That the images on magazine and book covers shape discursive norms and possibilities for speech has been thoroughly explored by work in anthropology and cultural studies. In their

⁵⁴ An alternative reading could suggest that these images portray Mubarak, and by extension Egypt, patriotically or nationalistically.

work on the images in the magazine *National Geographic*, Lutz and Collins argue that the magazine “has come to be one of the primary means by which people in the United States receive information and images of the world outside their own borders” (1993:1). They note that “texts and (to a less obvious extent) photographs call up and then reinforce or challenge shared understandings of cultural difference” (1-2). Furthermore, they argue that “the magazine claims to articulate a *national* vision, addressing the concerns and curiosity of all U.S. citizens” (6). That is, Lutz and Collins argue that magazine images construct the nation, as well as its other, through images. Similarly, in his work *Covering Immigration*, Leo Chavez explores the images on magazine covers depicting immigration and immigrants in the latter half of the twentieth century (2001). In that work, he notes that these magazine covers both reflect current debates on immigration and help to construct the terms of these debates. In the case I explore here, our debate around what image should go on the cover of a book opened up a debate around the possibility of symbolizing Egypt and its future.

At an editorial meeting of the American University in Cairo Press in September 2010, we were discussing the title and cover of a book of essays by Alaa Al Aswany to be published in translation.⁵⁵ Alaa Al Aswany is a best-selling author of several novels including *The Yacoubian Building*, all of which have been widely translated (2004).⁵⁶ He is frequently interviewed by the Western (and Egyptian) press, and was a vocal critic of the Mubarak regime.⁵⁷ This collection of his essays was pulled from a selection of those published in a Cairo newspaper, and some had already been picked up and published in translation elsewhere. The Arabic versions had also already been compiled into two separate volumes of essays published by Dar el-Shorouk, a major Egyptian publishing house.⁵⁸ The subject of these essays was the contemporary state of Egypt, focusing particularly on its political situation. The essays provided social and political commentary on Egypt in the current moment.

As we chatted about the book and what should go on its cover, we brainstormed any number of potential cover ideas. Then one of the foreign staff members half-jokingly suggested that we superimpose Al Aswany’s face on the Sphinx, as a reference to an iconic cover of *Time* magazine which had depicted the revolutionary leader Gamal Abdel Nasser in front of the Sphinx (See figure 4).⁵⁹ Others picked up on this idea, Al Aswany in front of the pyramids, Al Aswany facing the Sphinx, having a conversation, Al Aswany and Nasser in front of the Sphinx and the Pyramids. As ideas bounced back and forth, Ahmed, one of the Egyptian members of the group spoke up.

⁵⁵ Please see chapter two for further discussion of editorial meetings at the AUCP.

⁵⁶ I draw on my conversations with the translator of this novel in Chapter 4 and discuss my conversation with the author in chapter five.

⁵⁷ He is also a critic of the rise of political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood. Each of these essays ended with the phrase “Democracy is the solution” as a play on the Islamist call: “Islam is the Solution.”

⁵⁸ Perhaps the two primary publishing houses in Egypt while I was there were Dar el-Shorouk and Dar Merritt. While Merritt was a small, independent press, Shorouk was a bigger, sleeker operation which published more commercial and non-fiction titles as well as literary ones. While I was in Egypt, for example, Shorouk had recently published a collection of short novels (many of them drawn from blogs originally) in colloquial Arabic (rather than the formal Arabic that is used in most literary (and other) writing). One of the most popular of these titles was “Ayza Atagowaz” *I Want to Get Married* (it was published in translation by University of Texas Press in 2010). It was also turned into a Ramadan television serial that was quite popular if not received well critically.

⁵⁹ The transnational makeup of these meetings, as well as the dynamics between Egyptian and foreign staffers, is discussed at length in chapter two.

“But Al Aswany doesn’t write about Ancient Egypt,” Ahmed exclaimed. “Why should he be in front of the Sphinx and the Pyramids? He doesn’t have *anything* to do with them. He is writing about contemporary Egypt, not about Ancient Egypt.”

“But the Sphinx is just a symbol for Egypt, just like the Statue of Liberty stands for the USA, and the Eiffel Tower stands for France. It’s like that, the Sphinx is a symbol of Egypt,” argued Amira, a British-Egyptian staff member.

Mona, another Egyptian member of the staff countered, “But as an Egyptian, I don’t feel *at all* as though the sphinx represents me. It is not a symbol of the Egypt I know and am a part of.”

At this point in the debate, Edward, the Director of Sales interjected “Well, the image on the cover doesn’t really matter. The most important selling point of the book is the author, so his name should be the most prominent feature of the cover design. It is his name that will sell the book. And people outside of Egypt probably won’t recognize his image anyway.”

In our conversation, the same image (or idea of an image) was interpreted in vastly different ways. While for one individual, the Sphinx could function as a straightforward marker of national identity, a metonym for a place, to others in the room, that metonymy did not work. Rather, the Sphinx was an icon that was entirely divorced from a contemporary identity and was rather linked with an ancient past. For the Egyptians in the room, the Sphinx did not represent contemporary Egypt, while for the foreigners, it could do so. This is not to say that all Egyptians or all foreigners would make such claims or assertions, only to note the way in which the conversation fractured at the time.

Furthermore, there was another bifurcation between Egypt and the West that emerged in the debate. Edward, the Sales Director, made the comment that most people outside Egypt wouldn’t recognize Al Aswany’s image. In doing so, he established another boundary between Egypt and the West in the context of this cover image. He suggested that Al Aswany’s image might not be as strong a selling point in a foreign (Western) market because his likeness would be unfamiliar. By contrast, Al Aswany’s image would be widely recognized and his authority as a political commentator, author, and public figure well-established in Egypt. Indeed, Al Aswany’s face was the central image on the cover of the Arabic edition from which these essays were drawn.

Creating an English-language cover thus involved questions of translation that went beyond the translation of the title or any lexical content of the book. Instead, the image to grace the cover of the book was highly-contested and itself revealed quite different interpretations of what might seem to be straightforward images, such as the photo of an author or the image of the Sphinx.

Legacy of the Pharaohs

In the editorial meeting, an old cover of *Time* magazine prompted a discussion about including images of the pyramids or the Sphinx on the cover of a book. That magazine cover is worth further consideration. We did not have a copy of it present that day, so it did not structure the conversation which followed. However, the image is part of a broader discourse of representations of Egypt, which were explicitly at stake in our conversation that September morning.

This cover, dated March 29, 1963 (see figure 4), depicts Nasser superimposed on a larger image of the Sphinx. The pyramids are visible in the background as are three figures shown in profile walking with hooked staffs. The way these figures are posed recalls images of the god

Anubis holding his staff or those of Pharaohs walking with a staff. However, these figures appear to be in modern dress. They are thus a kind of hybrid image—suggesting through the contrast between their modern dress and ancient pose a continuity between modern and ancient Egypt. This continuity with the ancient past is also suggested by the superimposed image of Nasser on the Sphinx. On the one hand, Nasser’s attire (a suit and tie) allies him with the modern West. However, his placement on the Sphinx suggests that he is the new Pharaoh (as the face of the sphinx is commonly believed to be the depiction of one of the Pharaohs). Furthermore, given the angle from which we see the Sphinx, his chin protrudes prominently. By contrast, the angle at which Nasser is shown seems to highlight Nasser’s nose. In so doing, Nasser’s nose seems to supplement the image of the Sphinx, as though in Nasser’s body, the Sphinx can be reconstituted.

In this image, then, the modern life of Egypt was linked in a Western (specifically American) imagination with its ancient past. Indeed, even though Nasser’s picture is placed on top of the Sphinx, the image of the Sphinx nonetheless defines the whole image. In so doing, the cover suggests that contemporary Egypt remains defined by its past.

Defining Egypt primarily in terms of its (ancient) history is not a new practice. For centuries, the sites of Ancient Egypt have been a popular destination for tourists and other visitors to the region (for example, Orientalists in the nineteenth century). Indeed, the tourist industry in Egypt relies upon the legendary ruins of Ancient Egypt as a draw. Tourists stream through the Egyptian museum, with barely a glance at any art produced less than five thousand years ago. The ancient temples at Luxor and Aswan draw tourists, while the vibrant metropolis that is contemporary Cairo remains just a stop-over point for many who pass through on their way to the ruins.

Furthermore, this touristic interest in the pyramids and other ancient sites is a legacy of Orientalist explorations of the country and of colonial intervention in the nation. Elliot Colla, in his *Conflicted Antiquities*, discusses the development of Egyptology and how the rhetoric and representation of Egypt’s ancient past was recruited in specific ways by situated individuals to further their agendas. In particular, he argues that “Egyptology needs to be understood as a particular institution of colonial power and later nationalist power in Egypt” (17). Colla explores how the rhetoric regarding the necessity of external intervention in Egypt emerged out of the practice and concerns of Egyptology. The argument held that foreign intervention and preservation efforts were necessary to better protect Egypt’s ancient heritage. This heritage would otherwise be destroyed, to use the words of the US consul in Cairo during the 1830s George Gliddon, through the “avarice, wantonness and negligence” of the Egyptian government (Gliddon in Colla 2007: 111). Gliddon here constructs the local Egyptian government as not only incompetent but actually dangerous (to the country’s valued artifacts). Comments such as this laid the groundwork for colonial intervention. Indeed, Colla notes, this same logic was later used by Lord Cromer to justify colonial intervention in terms of stewardship and care for the Egyptian people, and, in so doing, “disavow[ed] British agency or interest” in the matter (113).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ In the wake of the protests of January 25, 2011, the fall of Mubarak’s regime, and, more recently, the ousting of Mohamed Morsi in July 2013, concerns have been expressed over the vulnerability of Egyptian antiquities, both in museums as well as at ancient sites. In tone and sometimes substance, these concerns echo the sentiments used to justify colonial intervention. For example, quite recently, an article in the *New Yorker* discusses the concerns of (Egyptian) intellectuals over the welfare of documents in the National Library and the Archives which were now under the administration of the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the author of the article notes that no one he spoke with had “any specific evidence that the Brotherhood had plans to dismantle or interfere with Egypt’s historical artifacts” (Hersh 2013). Thus, it is clear that external (often, though not exclusively, Western) fears about the

In the twentieth century, the relationship between ancient Egypt, Europe, and modern Egypt shifted again. In this case, too, Egypt's past was mobilized for particular political gains. Appeals to a Pharaonic heritage were central in nationalist movements. Donald Reid argues that between 1922 and 1952, "Egyptian Egyptologists 'nationalized' their field" as a part of the "fight to win complete national independence from Britain," in particular gaining control over the Egyptian Museum, the Antiquities Service and excavation projects (Reid 1997:128). At the same time, they "worked to persuade their compatriots to take pride in ancient Egypt as an essential component of modern Egyptian identity" (128). This attempt to cultivate pride in an ancient Egyptian past as a key component of modern Egyptian identity gained prominence during the first several decades of the twentieth century. Reid notes, however, that Pharaonicist nationalism generally "wan[ed] ... before a more populist Arab and Islamic discourse," even as he examines the traces that lingered during the following two decades (129). Pan-Arabism and Islamic discourses became increasingly important in the nationalist and anti-colonial movements of the 1940s and 1950s. The decreasing importance of appeals to Pharaonic heritage can be marked, for example, by the removal of an image of a winged sun from the masthead of *al-Siyasa al-Uсбу'iyya* (Reid:144-145).⁶¹

This brief discussion suggests that in Egypt, the relationship with the country's ancient past has a varied and contentious history. Our conversation at the AUCP that day in September 2010 must be understood against this broader history of European intervention into the country on behalf of its Antiquities and a tourist industry that often ignores the contemporary Egypt while highlighting the ruins of an ancient civilization.

One implication of Mona's critique (that the Sphinx does not represent contemporary Egypt) is that such a symbol would leave no future for the country. It would, instead, reinforce an image of the country as having peaked thousands of years ago. Indeed, precisely this image of the country was advanced in order to justify colonial intervention during the 19th century. According to that rhetoric, as Elliott Colla glosses it in his *Conflicted Antiquities*, "with outside intervention, ancient Egypt could be protected from modern Egyptians; with outside intervention, modern Egypt could be governed wisely and have its greatness restored to it" (Colla 2007: 115). The implication is that without intervention, the legacy of ancient Egypt would be lost entirely, while the modern Egypt would be unruly, undisciplined, a mere shadow of its former greatness.

The specificity of the Egyptian case is worth elaborating as it differs in significant ways from those of other civilizations whose ancient monuments and heritage have been recruited to do particular kinds of political labor in the modern era. For example, in Greece, as Michael Herzfeld explores in his *Ours Once More* (1986), a continuity with the Hellenic past was cultivated in the nineteenth century by Greek nationalists as part of the project of establishing Greek independence from the Ottoman rulers. While there was considerable European attention and interest in the ancient heritage of both nations, the cases offer some illustrative contrasts. In Greece, European intellectuals encouraged the elite of the country in both cultivating a sense of continuity with the ancient past (for example, through language reforms and folkloric projects, see Herzfeld 1986: 15-18) and in overthrowing Ottoman rule in the nineteenth century. By

political direction of the country continue to be articulated in terms of anxieties about the protection of the country's ancient artifacts.

⁶¹ In my ethnographic experience, for example, people very rarely made any reference to a Pharaonic past or heritage, other than as a reference to touristic interest in the ancient sites. Rather, as Reid suggests, claims were frequently made to an Islamic community or practice.

contrast, in the same era, as Colla demonstrates, European interest in Egypt was used to justify colonial intervention (Colla 2007). Whereas in Greece, a nationalist movement could be cultivated around interest in the monuments and ruins of the Hellenic past, in Egypt, the need to protect and preserve the country's cultural heritage was used as a justification for (British) colonial intervention.

Some groups did make political claims on Egypt's storied past, like the Greek nationalist who traced their heritage to a Hellenic past. Connecting the legacy of Ancient Egypt to the development of the West was, in fact, one of the projects of the Pharaonic nationalists of the 1920s and 1930s. Gershoni and Jankowski note that Pharaonicist intellectuals "appear to have felt obliged to show that all humanity, Europeans included, was far more indebted to Pharaonic Egypt than to ancient Greece or Rome for the seeds of progress" (1987: 181). The success of the Greek nationalist movement in the nineteenth century may, in fact, have inspired some of these Pharaonicist efforts. However, although Pharaonism was an important movement during the first half of the twentieth century, its importance and legacy have faded in more recent decades.

Furthermore, although the Pharaonists attempted to create this linkage, in practice, they did not succeed to the extent that the nineteenth century Greek nationalists did. Greece is frequently figured in the West in a (relatively) continuous trajectory with modern democratic traditions. For example, political scholars and learned writers through the twentieth century make recourse to the ideals of a shared Greco-Roman past (for example, the work of Hannah Arendt). Rarely is the pharaonic past so invoked. I do not mean this to suggest that the past of ancient Greece is actually any more present than Egypt's ancient past. Rather, I am highlighting that in contemporary discourse, the legacy of Ancient Greece is more clearly linked with particular modern conventions than is the legacy of Ancient Egypt. In other terms, the Greek nationalists were more successful in establishing and reproducing certain forms of discourse than were the Pharaonic nationalists.⁶²

To return to our conversation on a September morning in 2010, given the context of Egypt as a 'developing' country, with projects to modernize various aspects of contemporary life and space, and governed at the time of our conversation by an authoritarian ruler who held elections that were free in name only, to use an ancient ruin as a symbol of the country would suggest that the country's only value lay in its ruins of a civilization long past, a past with which few citizens expressed a sense of continuity or connection.

Symbols of the Nation

In our conversation at the AUCP, Amira compared the Sphinx to other monuments that function as national symbols (or metonyms): the Eiffel Tower for France and the Statue of Liberty for the USA. This comparison was outright rejected by Mona who dismissed the very possibility of using the Sphinx as a symbol, in large part, as I discussed above, because, as a symbol of the nation, it foreclosed the possibility of the future.

I turn now to address Amira's comment through an exploration of the monuments that Amira chose: the Eiffel Tower and the Statue of Liberty. These monuments are categorically

⁶² To take an example from a non-European setting, in India, there was considerable effort expended as a part of the British colonial endeavor to create a linkage between the ancient heritage of the country and its contemporary or modern incarnation (Trautmann 1997). This comparison is particularly noteworthy because both India and Egypt were colonial mandates of the British. However, the history of their ancient civilization was recruited rather differently in each case. Whereas in India, as Trautmann suggests, British colonial officers worked to highlight and strengthen connections with an ancient past, in Egypt, protecting ancient monuments was a primary justification for British colonial intervention (see Colla 2007).

different from the Sphinx. She did not choose the Parthenon as a symbol of Greece, or the Coliseum as a symbol of Rome. Instead, her examples are both modern ones, constructed in the 19th century. The Eiffel Tower was a feat of engineering when it was constructed and remains one of the tallest structures of its kind in the world.

In his essay on the Eiffel Tower (1979), Roland Barthes discusses the significance and explores the symbolic workings of the Eiffel Tower. He writes through his own (and perhaps broadly shared) distaste for the ubiquity of the tower—within Paris and without. He opens the essay, even, with the story of the writer Guy de Maupassant who famously lunched at the Tower regularly, simply to escape the sight of it (Barthes 1979: 3). Within Paris, the Tower is an inescapable landmark. Importantly for my discussion, however, he explores how it works as a symbol and circulates beyond the city borders. He notes that the tower is “present to the entire world. First of all as a universal symbol of Paris, it is everywhere on the globe where Paris is to be stated as an image” (3). The universal presence of the Tower is central to its work as a symbol. It unambiguously and unequivocally represents Paris. He notes that there is “no schoolbook, poster, or film about France which fails to propose it as the major sign of a people and of a place: it belongs to the universal language of travel” (4). Barthes here suggests that the Tower comes to stand for the city and its people, as a whole. The Tower has become a kind of shorthand for Paris, France.

What Barthes terms the “universal language of travel” is relevant to our conversation in Cairo about the Sphinx. In such a language of travel, Egypt would undoubtedly be represented by the image of the Pyramids or the Sphinx, or perhaps King Tutankhamun’s death mask. Tourism to Egypt, especially from the West, is largely to the historic sites of the Pharaonic era (and to a lesser extent the beaches of the Red Sea). However, in this case, this “universal” language of travel breaks down a bit. While most tourists from the West, and especially from North America, visit Egypt for the antiquities, there is a large tourism industry focused on the beaches of the Red Sea. Furthermore, tourists from other regions, particularly from the Gulf States, may not visit the ancient sites at all. Instead, they visit Cairo for its vibrant nightlife. Thus, while the Sphinx might indicate Egypt in a fairly unambiguous way, even when tourism or travel is concerned, the specificity of the situation is far more complicated than would be implied by Barthes’ suggestion of a “universal language of travel.”

Nevertheless, in most cases of travel and tourism, the Sphinx would clearly indicate Egypt. In this case, however, the possibility of the Sphinx being a symbol of Egypt was contentious only because of the context of the book. If the book had been a travel book, I expect that Mona not would have quibbled with the suggestion to use of the Sphinx to signal the entirety of the country. The issue in this case was that the book was not a travel book. Rather, it was a discussion of the contemporary politics of the nation. As such, Mona’s contention was that the symbol didn’t work. The “Egypt” it signified was not the same “Egypt” being discussed by Al Aswany in his essays. In the “language of travel” where the Sphinx represented “Egypt,” the Egypt it represented was not the same Egypt about which Al Aswany was writing.

Again, the contrast with the Eiffel Tower is germane. In that example, the tower does not represent the ancient heritage of the place, but rather it is the symbol, as Barthes puts it “of modernity, of communication, of science or of the nineteenth century, rocket, stem, derrick, phallus, lightning rod or insect” (4). This barrage of attributes almost all connote science and efforts to tame or conquer nature. Collectively, they depict an enterprising and industrious spirit, exploring new frontiers and forging new innovations. However, Barthes notes that the Tower is not the only symbol of Paris. The other great symbol of the city, he explains, is its cathedral,

Notre Dame. The Cathedral, Barthes argues “forms with the tower a pair, a symbolic couple, recognized, so to speak, by Tourist folklore, which readily reduces Paris to its Tower and its Cathedral: a symbol articulated on the opposition of the past . . . and the present, of stone, old as the world, and metal, sign of modernity” (12). These twinned monuments stand for the city, representing its past and present. What was missing in the conversation about the Sphinx, it seems, was a contemporary counterpart, a monument that pointed to the present of the country, rather than its past.⁶³ Unlike Paris which could be represented by both the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame to reflect different elements of the city, Cairo was reduced to an image of the ancient ruins that lie on the outskirts of the modern city, thus rendering the contemporary metropolis peripheral, even invisible. This, I believe, is why Mona and Ahmed so vigorously protested the potential use of the Sphinx as a symbol of the nation.

Tahrir Square: A New Symbol of the Nation?

If Paris has both the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame, what would Cairo’s Eiffel Tower be? In her article on the response to a documentary about marriage in Egypt (discussed in the previous chapter), Reem Saad suggests that images that symbolize the contemporary life of the city are primarily those of the “Opera House, traffic flyovers, high-rises, and five-star hotels” (Saad 1998: 406). None of those images, however, has the status of an icon that the image of the Sphinx (or the Eiffel Tower, for that matter) does. They all, of course, can suggest a certain kind of modernity, but they are not iconic, nor would they be inextricably linked with Egypt the way the Pyramids and the Sphinx are. Five-star hotels exist in other places as does terrible traffic, these are not phenomena unique to Egypt. Perhaps, however, there is a new image of Egypt that has come to symbolize the nation. The images of Tahrir Square that emerged during the protests of the 25 January 2011 revolution captured a global imagination. These images, unlike those of the Sphinx, highlight Cairo in the contemporary moment, not the remains of an ancient civilization. Furthermore, these images tend to feature not simply an iconic building, but actual individuals, often youth, demonstrating the vibrancy and energy that fueled the protests and enabled political change.

In our conversation at an editorial meeting at the AUC Press, the image, specifically what would be the cover image, became the site of considerable debate. This debate touched on questions of national identity, assumed knowledge, and national symbology. It also was divided along Egyptian/Western lines, in both the individuals at the meeting and in the imagination or projection of future readers.

When I left the Press in late 2010, the latest version of the cover still included an image of the Sphinx. The title and author’s name covered the first half of the page while the Sphinx and Al Aswany faced each other in the lower section of the cover. This cover, however, never made it to print. The book, as published in March 2011, was released with yet another cover image. In this image, the Sphinx did not appear. Instead, Al Aswany’s image, in black and white, is at the top, followed by his name in black letters on a red banner. The remainder of the cover is black with red text giving the title “On the State of Egypt: A Novelist’s Provocative Reflections” (see figure 5). The subtitle of the book was changed in the paperback edition. The title for that edition is: “On the State of Egypt: The Issues that Caused the Revolution.”

Interestingly, the North American edition of the book, published by RandomHouse Vintage, did not include this cover. That edition, which was also published in March 2011, includes an image from the January 25 protests on the cover (see figure 6). The subtitle was also

⁶³ Egypt’s contested status as modern is discussed at length in the previous chapter.

changed from “A Novelist’s Provocative Reflections” to “What Made the Revolution Inevitable.” Given the concerns raised by the Sales Director over whether or not Alaa Al Aswany’s face would be recognizable outside Egypt, it is worth noting that his image was entirely exempt from the cover for the North American edition. Instead, the cover features an image of protesters in Tahrir Square, which has in many ways become a new symbol of Egypt to replace the image of the Pyramids or Sphinx which used to stand for Egypt in a popular global iconography. On the cover, the title and author’s name appear against the clear blue of the sky and take up approximately the top two thirds of the page. The image of protesters takes up the bottom third. The expanse of sky (behind the title and author’s name) seems to suggest open, unhindered possibilities, hope, and activates clichés about “blue skies.” The image below is composed of the bodies of young men, many with arms outstretched. The image depicts a group of protesters who have climbed on a platform, statue, or pedestal, although the structure they are on is obscured. The shot is an active one, no one is posed, no one is looking at the camera. Rather their gaze points in all different direction, for example, two men in the foreground are looking at the ground and seem to be in conversation, another man behind them in the mid-ground looks to the side, while a third looks out to the front (though his gaze does not meet the camera’s). The image is a dynamic and active one. Many of the men have their arms raised, waving, gesturing, or with fists held high. The movement and energy in the photo is arresting. The picture is not only a timely one for the cover of the book, but suggests possibility and action. When combined with the subtitle “What Made the Revolution Inevitable,” the cover projects an image of Egypt as dynamic and in flux, or more forebodingly, as unstable or unruly. Indeed, the image is a disorderly one, with limbs pointing in every direction. The ambiguity of the image, as full of vigor and movement but at the same time unruly, may suggest American concerns about the revolution. On the one hand, the revolution was embraced in the West as a triumph of democracy; on the other hand, concerns about regional instability were expressed in the wake of Mubarak’s departure from the presidency.

Conclusion:

Books and other texts circulate with images, even if only on the cover. Scholars of translation must consider the image as a part of the process of translation because, in fact, the making of the image is a part of the making of the text itself. Furthermore, while the grammar of the translation choices may be different when dealing with images than lexical items, the kinds of considerations that are made in thinking about how images or titles circulate in new contexts highlight some of the recurrent challenges of translation across languages. A consideration of how images might be translated, or circulate in different contexts, sheds light not only on the way in which images are culturally embedded, but also provides a view from an oblique angle onto the non-linguistic aspects of any translation task.

In this chapter, I have examined two instances where representations of Egypt garnered considerable debate and discussion, whether online through the circulation of parodied images or in person through conversation about the possibility of a symbol being used. These representations provided the opportunity and impulse for debate and conversation around Egypt in a global context. Indeed, these representations enabled particular forms of imagining and constructing the future of the nation, in contrast with its ancient past and (then) contemporary present. In doing so, the discourse surrounding these images contributed to the collective critique of the regime that erupted a few months later in the form of massive protests against the Mubarak regime. In this way, they can be considered a kind of discursive scaffolding that

enabled the elaboration of a revolutionary politics. The chapter opened, however, with the spectre of the failed revolution. Following Bakhtin, this suggests that the carnivalesque mode of critique these representations enabled may not have been adequate to radically restructure the social and political world.

In the context of the broader dissertation, the chapter develops a discussion of how in the process of translation certain elements (such as words, images, texts) are rendered mobile and able to circulate, while others are deemed immobile. In this chapter, the image that comes to stand for the country in media that circulates in the West shifts from the image of the Sphinx as it appears in the cover of a Time magazine issue, to the image of the protesters at Tahrir Square during the 25 January revolution. I examine how these images construct the future of the nation in quite different ways.

The next three chapters form Part Two of the dissertation. In those chapters I explore the figure of the translator, the author, and the reader as they are involved in the production and circulation of these novels. The issues central to these last two chapters (Part One), such as representation, constructions of locality and globality, mobility and immobility continue to structure the work but emerge in different configurations as the subject shifts.

Images:

Figure 1: From *Al-Ahram*, September 14, 2010



Figure 2: From a Facebook page, image retrieved from www.knowyourmeme.com/memes/mubarak-photoshopped



Figure 3:

Image from <http://allthegoodnameshadgone.blogspot.ca/2010/09/update-your-history-book.html>



Figure 4:

Time, March 29, 1963

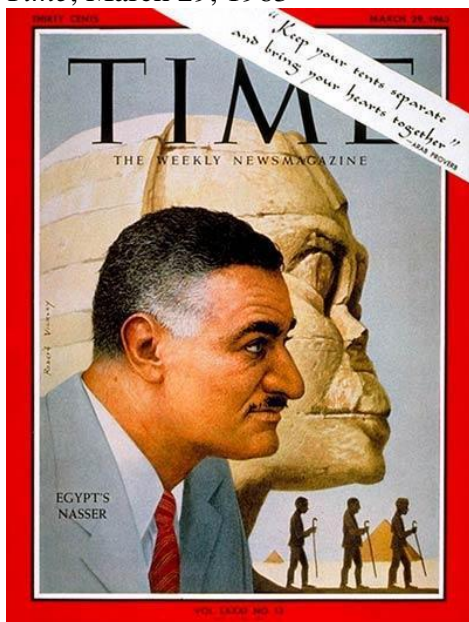
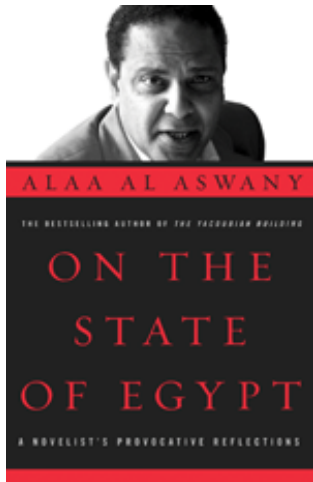
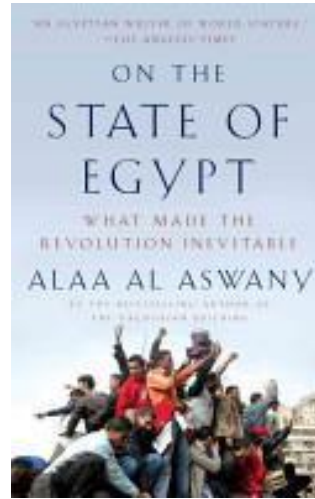


Figure 5:



AUC Press, hardcover edition

Figure 6:



RandomHouse Vintage edition

Part Two

Chapter 4: The “G” in “Gihad”: The Materiality of Language and the Ethics of Reading

Emily Apter begins her book *The Translation Zone* (2006) with a list of 20 theses on translation. The first of these is “Nothing is Translatable,” the last is “Everything is translatable.” This chapter inhabits the space of these contradictory theses and attempts to make sense of how it is that, in the face of the untranslatable, translations nonetheless happen.⁶⁴ Translation is in some ways impossible, and yet, it occurs in spite of this impossibility. In this chapter, I examine this impasse through the context of materiality. I look at how challenges to translation often occur with items that are socially and materially embedded (i.e., that are indexes of some sort) and argue that transliteration as a strategy is often employed in these cases because it works (on the material level of sound) to either locate these objects in a particular cultural context (which is the more obvious and straightforward procedure through which this works), or to embed the translation in the body of the reader (through the production of sound). I therefore argue that while certain kinds of social indexicality may be lost in the translation, transliteration offers a possibility to create new modes of relating to the language. By inviting the reader to grapple with a foreign word or foreign sounds, translators shift some of the labor of translation onto the readers whose task it becomes to create the text. Transliteration is thus a strategy through which translators cocreate a text with their readers. Moreover, through these transliterations, translators also intervene (at an angle, or askance) in particular politically charged debates and encounters.

In the previous chapters of the dissertation, I have drawn from my ethnographic research at the American University in Cairo Press to discuss how certain material elements of books, such as cover images, were constructed in the transnational space of the press. I explored how local debates had material consequences in the covers and titles that were eventually chosen and circulated globally. In this chapter, I continue this consideration of materiality by looking at transliteration as a translation strategy. In this chapter, I focus on translators from Arabic to English and examine what they said about their own practices and the ways in which they tackled particularly thorny issues. I explore the moments where translations came to a halt, and argue that in most of those cases the challenge was not about translating concepts between languages, but was due to the very materiality and social indexicality of language as it is embedded in daily life. The chapter is organized around a single case of a choice to transcribe (that is, spell the word phonetically in English) rather than translate a word. I begin by discussing this choice and examining some of the implications of transliteration and transcription. In order to do so, I draw on literature regarding transliteration from literary, anthropological, and historical sources.

The ‘g’ in *gihad*

Humphrey Davies is the translator of the novel *The Yacoubian Building* by Alaa Al Aswany (2004).⁶⁵ This novel, a bestseller in the region, and a comparative bestseller in translation as well, is set in contemporary Cairo and tells the story of the inhabitants of one

⁶⁴ Apter’s newer work *Against World Literature* (2013) focuses more explicitly on the untranslatable. In that work, she frames her project as one of “activating untranslatability.” In many ways, this chapter shares that project, of taking seriously the untranslatable. However, rather than framing this as a problem of the untranslatable, I seek to explore how it is that translations are nevertheless produced all the time.

⁶⁵ I discussed the cover design of another of Alaa Al Aswany’s books in the previous chapter and I draw on my interview with him in the following chapter.

building. Through this trope, Al Aswany depicts Egyptian life, politics, and class issues.⁶⁶ At some points in the novel, the word *jihad* is used.

Although the OED records several nineteenth-century instances of the word *jihad* as it appeared in English texts, in the wake of September 11th, the word has become more widely used and has developed a very specific set of connotations in English, suggesting violence, terrorism, and even the exemplar of the suicide bomber.⁶⁷ By contrast, in Arabic, the word is embedded in an old, well-established, religious tradition, and has connotations of striving to live a life in accordance with God's will, of struggling to overcome temptation, to live a moral and good life; it has connotations of working to make the society as a whole a more moral and just one, and, in some circumstances, of literal struggle, in a fight or "holy war."⁶⁸ It is this latter usage, one connected with violence and war that has a particular currency in English. This trend is not limited to contemporary English: the OED examples from 19th century texts tend toward the violent as well.

In this chapter, however, I am less interested in the history of *jihad* in English, and much more interested in the specific way that it appeared in the English text of the novel, as it was transliterated. In the novel, *The Yacoubian Building*, the word normally rendered *jihad* in English-language texts, is spelled with a 'g': *gihad*, without translation.

In order to better understand the implications of this choice, let me note that Arabic is a diglossic language, with regional colloquial varieties and a shared, formalized, standard version called Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or *fusha* ("eloquent") in Arabic. Although the colloquial language is increasingly written (and one frequently finds the dialog of a novel composed in the local colloquial), the colloquial has historically been spoken, while the formalized version of the language was the language of writing and official documents. Notably, both formal and colloquial Arabic are distinct from Classical Arabic. In a talk he delivered at the American University in Cairo, translator Humphrey Davies, briefly discussed the relationship between a writer's two languages, colloquial and formal, noting that: "In every novel, no matter how formal the language, the ghost of the writer's colloquial lurks." This, then, is one theory of the relationship between formal and colloquial Arabic.

In modern standard Arabic and in most other spoken dialects, the fifth letter of the Arabic alphabet, "jim," is pronounced as a voiced palato-alveolar sibilant (as in the French "j" in "je," or in English, the "s" in "measure"). In Egyptian colloquial Arabic, this letter is consistently pronounced as a voiced velar stop (a hard-g sound as in the English 'good'). For example, the name Jamal, in Egypt is pronounced, and often transliterated, "Gamal" (as in Gamal Abdel Nasser, the former President of Egypt). This pronunciation is quite unusual among Arabic speakers, and serves to mark Egyptians. Indeed, it is the most obvious feature that distinguishes Egyptian Colloquial Arabic from other regional colloquial dialects. Although there are many regional dialects of Arabic, some of which are (almost) unintelligible to each other, most people throughout the region recognize and understand Egyptian colloquial as a result of wide dissemination of Egyptian films and TV serials. Although media production has shifted in recent

⁶⁶ The novel has been the subject of considerable academic attention. In his *Desiring Arabs*, for example, Joseph Massad discusses the novel's sensationalism and argues that "Al-Aswani's novel will insist. . . that the postcolonial male subject is *stillborn* and that the only kind of subject that emerges through colonial and postcolonial violence (physical, social, economic, and epistemic) is the degenerate, the corrupt, and the sexual deviant" (Massad 2007: 388).

⁶⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, "jihad" (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/101301?redirectedFrom=jihad&>, accessed September 19, 2012).

⁶⁸ Hans Wehr, *Encyclopedia of Islam*

years to other areas of the region (such as the Gulf States), for most of the twentieth century, Egypt was the center of cultural production (films, TV, music, as well as literature—represented in the adage “Cairo writes, Beirut publishes, and Baghdad reads”⁶⁹) of the Middle East. These were then broadly distributed throughout the region, in effect ensuring that most Arabic-speakers are familiar with the sounds of Egyptian Colloquial Arabic. Thus, choosing to transliterate this word as *gihad* rather than *jihad*, serves to locate the word, for those who know Arabic, squarely in Egypt and the Egyptian dialect.

While conducting fieldwork in Cairo, Egypt in 2010, where I was working in the editorial department of the American University in Cairo Press, I interviewed writers, translators and others involved in the production and dissemination of translations of Arabic novels into English, including other English language publishers, journalists and reviewers, and those involved in the administration of literary prizes. The translator of *The Yacoubian Building*, Humphrey Davies was among those I interviewed.

In my interview with him, I asked Humphrey Davies about his use of the word *gihad* as I was curious if he was simply representing the speech of Egyptians, who do say *gihad*, *Gamal*, *higab*, and so on, or if perhaps there was more to it than that. He explained that: “In general, I, when you have transcription in translation, which you always do, because of names, it is always odd to me to see ‘j’ when you know the person would say ‘g’. . . . It’s off-putting to see the wrong letter used. . . .”

However, with respect to this particular case, he noted that: “I used the ‘g’ because I thought that it would be slightly unfamiliar to the reader, and therefore not immediately stimulate their preconceptions about what *jihad* was. To let them see it through this, through what was presented to them, what was there in the book, that was my reason.”

He went on to say that in this instance, the editors had queried him, requesting that the spelling be changed to the widely-used, standard spelling using a “j.” He explained, “You might say, ‘so what’s the fuss, because you would have written “g” anyway,’ because [that is how it is said] but the thing was, the editors questioned that, so my defense was, not only this general defense [that this is how Egyptians would pronounce it], but that in this case, it works better, it is less recognizable.”

In these comments, Davies reveals a relationship to the works that he is translating and to the words (and worlds) that he is translating, down to the phonemes of spoken Arabic, and their graphic representations (graphemes). His consistent policy of using the “g” when transliterating names or things (*galabiya*, for example), demonstrates a commitment to a phonetic representation of actual speech, rather than to a transliteration system based on Modern Standard Arabic that might lose these local variations. Davies embraces a kind of representational closeness, an authenticity that springs from the transcription of Arabic as it is spoken in Egypt.

I argue that Davies is here practicing a strategy of translation that relies on the material sounds of language, and how these sounds may be produced by the reader (audibly, in their own bodies) in order to cultivate a particular mode of reading. In order to make this argument I first elaborate the politics of transliteration at stake in the decision to transliterate, rather than to translate, a word from Arabic to English. Next, I examine the defensive stance of the translator and the complicated way the translator is interposed between two texts. Finally, I will move to a discussion of the relationship between the reader and translator and the ways in which the translator translates with an image of their ideal reader in mind.

⁶⁹ For further discussion of this adage and the literary world it constructs, please see the following chapter.

A Politics of Transliteration, or “If there were a good English word, I would use it”

The challenge of how to render foreign sounds and words in a text is not a new one, and in particular, it is a practice with a long history of use by authors of Arabic texts. Ibn Khaldun, the great Arab scholar, explains in the Introduction to his classic tome, the *Muqaddimah*, that when faced with the task of rendering foreign words in his text, his practice is to “represent non-Arabic (sounds) in such a way as to indicate the two (sounds) closest to it, so that the reader may be able to pronounce it somewhere in the middle between the sounds represented by the two letters and thus reproduce it correctly” (Ibn Khaldun 1967: 31). He explains that his practice differs from the norm, which is for authors to express foreign sounds by “means of the letter which is closest to it in our language” (Ibn Khaldun 1967: 31). He rejects such a course of action, however, as insufficient: “this is not a satisfactory way of indicating a sound but a complete replacement of it” (31). Instead, he proposes a system of approximation where the foreign sounds lie between two sounds closest to it. He notes that this practice was inspired by “the way the Qur’an scholar write sounds that are not sharply defined” by indicating “a pronunciation somewhere in the middle between the two sounds” (32). Ibn Khaldun’s practice is thus to indicate the borders of the target sound, with the task of the reader to mediate between them in pronouncing the word. In this way, he enables the reader to expand his or her own language, through creating sounds in between. Ibn Khaldun opens up the sounds of his own language to incorporate the sounds of another language the way a musician exploring semitones might. In order to do so, however, he shifts the labor to the reader. Rather than representing or approximating the sounds of the other language through some combination of letters and symbols, he directs the readers to explore these sounds in their own bodies. This emerges out of his physical attention to the way in which languages are housed in the body. He notes at the beginning of his discussion that the sounds made in speech are “modifications of sounds that come from the larynx” and that these sounds are “broken up in contact with the uvula and the sides of the tongue in the throat, against the palate or the teeth and also through contact with the lips” (31). Like a child playing with the range of sounds he can make, Ibn Khaldun directs his readers to experiment with their own language in order to approximate the voice of another.

This technique of approximation has been embraced by other translators. Brinkley Messick, in his “Notes on Transliteration,” begins by discussing the strategy taken by T.E. Lawrence toward the transliteration of names and places in his works (2003). Lawrence rejected formal systems of transliteration, according to the preface to his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by his brother A.W., stating that such systems are “helpful to people who know enough Arabic not to need helping, but a wash-out for the world. I spell my names anyhow, to show what rot the systems are” (Lawrence in Messick 2003: 177). Rather than embrace a single system or even a single spelling of a given word, Lawrence varied the spelling to represent the variety of pronunciations found across the Arab world and the impossibility of representing these Arabic words in English. Messick shares the variety of spellings of a few words from Lawrence’s *Revolt in the Desert*, for example “Sherif Abd el Mayen” is also spelled “el Main, el Mayein, el Muein, el Mayin, and el Muyein” (Messick 2003: 178). Messick relates an amusing exchange where Lawrence’s editor writes to notify him of the variety of spellings he has used and to ask that Lawrence unify them. Instead, Lawrence suggests that two additional spellings be used, to more completely suggest the variety of ways the word might be rendered in English. Unlike the carefully considered approach offered by Ibn Khaldun, Lawrence presents the reader with a vast array of possible spellings in an attempt to approximate sounds foreign to the English language. Lawrence’s approach has a similar effect, however, in that it shifts the labor of pronunciation to

the reader who must, in his schema, navigate a variety of spellings. Both Ibn Khaldun and Lawrence differ from systems of formal transliteration in requiring that the reader approximate between two (or more) phonemes in order to read their texts. In this way, Lawrence and Ibn Khaldun rely on and activate the materiality of the sounds of language (even across and within linguistic differences) to enrich the reader's experience of the text. In doing so, they explicitly engage the reader in the project of constructing the text.

Messick explores Lawrence's transliteration practices in the context of his discussion of transliteration and transcription from Arabic into English in Orientalist and ethnographic texts. In that article, he elaborates the difference between transcription and transliteration, explaining that transcription, especially in anthropological practice is "an activity of trained hearing, on the part of the anthropologist, and then writing" (Messick 2003: 182). He is referring to the technique of "text-taking" espoused by Franz Boas and others. In contrast, transliteration is a technique of "reading" rather than hearing and has its disciplinary roots in orientalism and the attempts of Orientalist scholars to "represent the written texts of another language" (182). Formally, we can understand transcription to be an activity concerned with the preservation of sound, while transliteration is more concerned with the conveyance of another written language. This distinction is relevant to my discussion here because the cases I am looking at are ones where the sounds of colloquial speech are transcribed in the context of a literary novel. Thus, these are a kind of hybrid object since they are sometimes written in the colloquial in Arabic (thus they are not simply examples of transcription). The history, here, is worth a pause, too, as techniques of transcription emerge out of an anthropological desire to capture the speech of an other. Furthermore, in some cases, these transcriptions were taken from languages which might have no written tradition. By contrast, the Orientalist tradition of transliteration was one that dealt explicitly with texts and a rich textual tradition. Transliteration (or transcription) as it appears in the novels I discuss here works slightly differently than might be suggested by either of these traditional approaches. It is both an attempt to recuperate the sounds of a cityscape and a lived materiality of language within the context of a literary text that emerges out of and is situated within a long textual tradition.

In examining transliteration and transcription, he notes that "These techniques would seem to raise none of the thorny 'meaning' issues of translation: they do not dramatically carry meaning 'across,' at least not in the complex manner of translation" (180). Instead, these transcribed or transliterated words remain foreign; this "foreign fragment," Messick notes, "nevertheless retains its identity as a fragment of another language. While translation tends to leave the other language behind, seemingly eradicating its physical traces, transcription and transliteration actively preserve such traces and, in the process construct a bridge between two languages, between two worlds, their geographies, temporalities, and metaphysics" (180).

In Messick's schema, transliteration provides two benefits to the translator: first, it seemingly evades some of the more complicated issues of "meaning," and secondly, it does provide a bit of the "flavor" of the original language, incorporating the sounds and textures of Arabic into an English text.

In my discussions with translators, some advocated this practice of transliterating from the Arabic, explaining how they valued closeness to the original text it provided. In the example above, Davies explicitly justified his choice to transcribe *gihad* in terms of its closeness to the sounds of Egyptian Arabic. Transliteration (or transcription) provided a way for him to incorporate the sounds of Egyptian dialect into an English-language text.

Other translators, however, were less fond of the practice, and hesitated, for fear that using too many foreign, transliterated words would exoticize the text, or render it obtuse for readers who did not already have some familiarity with the language and culture of the region. For example, one translator explained:

I don't translate food titles, but I often don't transliterate. I don't put Arabic in. I don't want to make it an exotic text. I grew up reading these novels that had lots of Arabic [...] to exoticize it, I don't know if that's it, but I don't really like it very much. I don't think you need to translate names of food things, I just leave them as they are, like *gibna rumi* in a book that I do will be *gibna rumi*, not "Roman cheese."

The critique that too many transliterations exoticize the English text was one that I heard several translators mention. It is also mentioned frequently in the translation studies literature on the subject. For example, in her article on the translation of the novel *Girls of Riyadh*, Marilyn Booth (2010) criticizes the changes made to her translation by the publisher which served to flatten the specificity of her text in ways that conformed to exoticized images of Muslim women.⁷⁰

Interestingly, in the example above, the translator, while explaining that he avoids transliteration as a rule, gives an example of one instance in which he would use transliteration over translation, that is, in the case of food items. This happened on more than one occasion. In an interview with another translator, he disavowed using Arabic words in English, explaining that they were "absolutely a last resort." He then went on to cite several examples where he did transliterate from the Arabic:

Just before you came, I was wondering what I was going to do about the word *kufr*, and I was thinking I would probably leave it in, because I don't think there is a word [in English]. I don't do it very much, actually. I'm not really in favor of it. It is a last resort, absolutely a last resort. Garments are a big problem; I never know what to do with garments. I still haven't worked out what to do. I used *galabiya*⁷¹ in [his last translation]. I had to; I couldn't find a way around it. I don't know... there's no good word for *galabiya*. Cloak, gown, they're not right. They don't work. *But if there were a better word, if there were a good English word, I would use it.* So it is a last resort, absolutely a last resort. (emphasis added)

In this case, transliteration is described as a last resort, a tactic to which the translator turns when there is no better alternative. However, even as a last resort, the translator is able to name several instances where he did choose to transliterate a word, because there was simply no adequate English word. The translator uses the counterfactual subjunctive mood to express his desire for a word that simply does not exist. For this translator, though, transliteration is not an ideal solution. Unlike Lawrence or Ibn Khaldun, this translator does not frame his use of transliterated words in terms of expanding the vocabulary and phonemic range of the reader, but rather in terms of exigency and lack. If there were a better word in English, if there were even an adequate word, he would use it.

In his essay "Translation, Transduction, Transformation: Skating 'Glossando' on Thin Semiotic Ice" (2003), Michael Silverstein argues against the use of transliterated terms in written works. His critique is that such transliteration is a lazy solution to an intractable problem. The allure of this kind of transliteration is that the descriptions and context from the text will provide the context and indexical information required to understand the meaning of the term. However, the inevitable paucity of contextual and indexical associations of this transliterated term result in

⁷⁰ Please see the following chapter for a discussion of this article.

⁷¹ A *galabiya* is a loose garment worn by men.

a situation where a transliterated term has meaning only in the limited context of a given text. More specifically, he argues that “the borrowed term is . . . now interposed between source-language users of the term and target-language users of it” (Silverstein 2003: 88). Silverstein points to the risk of transliteration not dealt with in the Messick essay. In this case, the risk is that the transliterated word, by remaining a “foreign fragment” (to use Messick’s term) in the English text, will exoticize the translated text, and that text will come to stand between the reader and the imagined world of the translation.

Silverstein is specifically criticizing the use of transliterated terms in ethnographic or anthropological texts where the term becomes associated with the particular anthropologist or ethnographer who uses it, so *kula* is associated with Bronislaw Malinowski, *Gumlao* with Edmund Leach (92). He notes that “there is a kind of Hall of Fame principle organizing such a social system, in which the conceptual labels of other cultures, intendedly transduced so as to get their technical meaning from one’s target-language ethnographic text, become the trophies displayed (the ethnographic text being the pedestal) for those elected.” (92). In the case of literary translation, this is slightly less of a concern, as few readers will associate the translator or author with a given transliterated word. However, the case remains that in literary translation as well as anthropological translation, the borrowed term, the transliterated term, remains interposed between the two languages. The kind of indexical information that can be conveyed through context in a novel is vastly limited compared to the indexical knowledge a speaker of the language would have.

As an example of the pitfalls of transliteration in literary translation, in a recent course I taught, we read Denys Johnson-Davies’ translation of *A Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih (1969).⁷² The word *afreet*, which means “ghost,” or “phantom” appeared unmarked and untranslated in that text along with many other transliterated terms. When I asked my students about their experiences of these transliterated terms, they responded that they had barely noticed them. The terms that were easy to understand in a given context (such as food items or terms of address) they had been able to glean a sliver of meaning from context. For example, that *arak* is an alcoholic drink. But terms like *afreet*, which had a less tangible equivalent, they almost uniformly skipped over. In these cases, the context did not provide sufficient information to endow the transliterated terms with a useful meaning. These transliterated words became holes in the narrative for them, gaps to be skipped over. Messick’s claim that transliteration creates a “bridge between two languages,” did not seem to hold. For these non-Arabic speaking students, the transliterated words were not bridges but holes. Conversely, these same transliterated words, for me, a reader with a knowledge of Arabic, did anchor the book in the specificities of language and the sounds of a place. I read the transliterated words with pleasure as they recalled me to the region and my experiences there. For me, these transliterated words did produce the experience Messick describes; they did provide a bridge between two languages and two worlds. Messick’s discussion of transliteration, then, seems limited to those who may speak the language of the original, or have some familiarity with it, while Silverstein’s critique of it seems to assume that the reader does not already have some familiarity with the language and culture of the place.⁷³

⁷² I discuss this novel at length in chapter six.

⁷³ Interestingly, Silverstein seems to echo T.E. Lawrence’s sentiments on transliteration systems, that they may be helpful to those who already know the language, but not to those unfamiliar with it.

Transliteration, Social Indexicality, and Translation Theory

In the previous section, I discussed some of the potential ramifications of transliterated words as they are present in novels. Here, I discuss how these topics have been approached by linguistic anthropologists and scholars of translation.

In many novels, words that are transliterated in the translated text are those that have no easy equivalent in the target language, such as local foods, clothing, or terms of address. In the same essay where he critiques the practice of transliterating, Silverstein addresses these very challenges under the aegis of “transduction” (2003: 85).⁷⁴ Transduction, for Silverstein, is the process of communicating the cultural ephemera contained in, that is to say, indexed by, the original expression. Silverstein notes that the term ‘transduction’ comes from and is used largely in the domain of energy: transducing energy from one form to another, a process which entails some loss. This metaphor is one he takes seriously. As in the case of moving between languages, in the passage from one form of energy to another, there is inevitably some “slippage.” He notes that:

much of what goes for the ‘translation’ even of simplex words in a text of a language actually constitutes transduction of indexical systems invoked by token usage of the words in the source text. Such source-text indexical values have to be reconstructed in indexical systems of another culture as these can be made relevant to shaping the target text to be doing effectively equivalent ‘functional’ work. (Or we need as transducer an elaborate, though pragmatically neutral, supplementary textual apparatus—like notes—in effect to ‘explain’ the pragmatic particulars that make the original text work so that the target text can also work in ‘like’ ways for those who wish to encounter it.)” (86-87).

To deal with this slippage, and with the cultural information indexed by the term in the source language, then, either footnotes or another “supplemental textual apparatus” is needed to explain the relevant cultural information, or those “indexical values have to be reconstructed in indexical systems” of the target language.

Whether we follow Silverstein and call this “transduction,” or refer to it more generally as a problem of translation, the issue he points to is a crucial one. How is the information about the world that is indexed by specific linguistic forms in the source language to be conveyed to the reader of the target-language text? Silverstein suggests “reconstructing” the indexical systems of one language within the terms of another. This, however, aside from being nearly impossible, is in fact often not an ideal solution in the case of literary translation.

In literary translation, reconstructing a social index in the target language might not provide the most successful translation, precisely because it risks over-particularizing the term. Slang terms, for example, can index class position, age, and education level among other things. Equivalencies of a slang term that indexes a young, privileged individual might be found, however, such terms tend to also be highly localized, indexing not just class or educational position, but also a particular region—even a neighborhood—as well. The risk in using such a term is that in addition to indexing class and educational position, the term also indexes a particular region. In such a case, a character might suddenly sound as though he or she were located not in Cairo, but in LA.

⁷⁴ In the essay, he takes a narrow view of translation, referring to translation solely as the transference of denotation into another language, indeed, he calls it “denotational translation” (Silverstein 2003: 76). This limited view of translation enables him to more precisely describe other challenges facing the translator, in terms that he calls “transformation” and “transduction” (85, 91). For the purposes of this chapter, transduction has to do with the ways in which language is indexically embedded in a social world, while transformation has more to do with changes in form.

In one example of this predicament, a translator I spoke with, Adam Talib, explained that in a novel he was translating, he struggled with the drug vocabulary. He explained that, “If I don’t use drug vocabulary as it is used in English, it will sound very stilted, but if I do use English drug vocabulary then it will make it sound like a 20 year old, like Berkeley college students. And because Shalaby [the author of the book he was then translating] is in his 70s and I’m in my 20s... that is also a factor. I don’t know what to do.” He went on to explain that in one specific case, “crunk might be the perfect word, but I can’t use it.” “Crunk,”⁷⁵ as a translation for the word *hisa* would be ideal, in that it captures various aspects of the way the word is used. However, to use “crunk” would locate it, very specifically, in a temporal and regional context in English. In the end, he chose to use “rowdy” for this term, which has a similar informal meaning, but with slightly less located connotations. He explained his process in the following way: “he [the main character] gets drunk, and I cannot come up with a word in English that doesn’t have a negative connotation, and it doesn’t have a negative connotation in Arabic, or in Egyptian Arabic, when I hear people use it. I want to call it ‘rowdy,’ ‘get rowdy.’”

In this case, as in so many others, the issue is not simply one of finding an equivalent term, because, even if such an equivalent were to exist, it would be indexically embedded in an entirely different social world. So, although in many ways “crunk” is an ideal translation for “*hisa*,” to use “crunk” would betray the novel more than to use the less specific “rowdy,” precisely because “rowdy” is less strongly-rooted indexically in a given location. In this case, a “closer” translation would, in fact, be less successful than one which is slightly less literal.

Other translators I spoke with shared similar dilemmas. Several British translators discussed the possibility of using highly-marked, working-class UK accents (cockney or Liverpudlian to be specific) to translate for characters in novels from a seemingly equivalent class and social position. For example, in a talk delivered at the American University of Cairo, Jonathan Wright mentioned that for “a brief moment,” he had considered using cockney slang to represent the speech of the taxi drivers in the book *Taxi*. “But,” he explained, “It was a very brief moment. It wouldn’t work at all, I don’t think. I mean, the cultural ambience is just not right. So the language had to be fairly standard conversational English. I suppose you could do New York taxi talk, but why bother?” In this case, he argues that the “cultural ambience” wouldn’t be right if he had used cockney slang. In other words, having Cairene taxi drivers speak with a cockney accent would not fit. I understand this case, too, to be an instance where equivalence does not actually provide a good translation. A cockney slang might be an adequate equivalent for the class and labor position of the Cairene taxi drivers. But, rather than proving an optimal solution, such a translation would be too particularly located in the specificities of London (not Cairo)

⁷⁵ From Urbandictionary.com (accessed 9/10/12):

“Crunk:

Some common uses:

1. To get Crunk is To have a good time.
2. Crunk is also thought to be derived from a combination or a portmanteau of the words "crazy" and "drunk", or a combination of "chronic" and "drunk", referring to the state of being both drunk from alcohol and high on marijuana, at the same time.
3. A style of music most commonly made by rap artists from the southern states, aka the Dirty South. Some crunk artists (or groups) are Lil' Jon, Pitbull, Lil' Scrappy, Trillville, and David Banner.
4. Something at a high level, as in volume.

⁷⁵ 1. *Long as everybody get crunk in the drop -- Lil Bow Wow (Bounce with me 2000).*

2. *"We're planning on going to my place and getting TOTALLY crunk!!"*

3. -

4. : *"He got the speakers in the trunk with the bass on crunk." - Mos Def, from "Mr. Nigga" on Black on Both Sides"*

social life. In this case, finding an equivalent of the social position indexed by the original would actually be over-particular and would locate the translation too comfortably in the new language. It would not do for Cairo taxi drivers to speak with a cockney accent.⁷⁶

Theorists of translation have explored this issue in a variety of ways, and often with similar conclusions. For example, in his discussion of vernaculars and slang, Antoine Berman notes that “a vernacular clings tightly to its soil and completely resists direct translation to another vernacular” (2000 [1985]: 285). Berman makes this comment about vernaculars in his essay on translation as the “trial of the foreign,” where he delineates twelve tendencies through which a translation may be gauged and through which it may alter (or “deform”) the original text. He draws on a psychoanalytic vocabulary when he proposes an “analytic of translation” (286). This analytic has two senses, the first “a detailed analysis of the deforming system” and the second “in the psychoanalytic sense, insofar as the system is largely unconscious, present as a series of tendencies or forces that cause translation to deviate from its essential aim” (286). Berman creates a map of the ways in which translation can deform the original text. Although he highlights examples of translations with greater and lesser of these deformations, he seems to be assessing a condition, not providing a vision of a kind of translation that might avoid these deformations altogether.

That said, there are moments in Berman’s discussion where he is quite proscriptive. For example, in the section on “the destruction of expressions and idioms,” one of the twelve deforming criteria, he argues against the search for equivalencies in a translation. He asserts that “To play with ‘equivalence’ is to attack the discourse of the foreign work. Of course, a proverb may have its equivalents in other languages but . . . these equivalents do not translate it. To translate is not to search for equivalences” (295). As in the case of vernacular slang, a proverb may be so locally situated as to be untranslatable through a search for equivalency. Berman advocates a mode of translation that does not proceed by the search for equivalencies. To do so would reduce the impact of the work, risk absurdities, for example when “the characters in *Typhoon* express themselves with a network of French images,” and more profoundly, limit the creative possibility for translation to expand the bounds of the target language (295). The last seems to be his final point, that translation, at best, can enhance the translating language. He advocates a mode of “literal translation” by which he means “attached to the letter (of works). Labor on the letter in translation is more originary than restitution of meaning. It is though this labor that translation, on the one hand, restores the particular signifying process of works (which is more than their meaning) and, on the other hand, transforms the translating language” (297).

This potential to modify and transform the translating language is ultimately what is at stake for Berman in the question of translation. The various kinds of substitutions he discusses lead not only to a poor translation of the original text, but also rob the translated text of this possibility for a radical transformation of the translating language.

Kwame Anthony Appiah brings another approach to the question of localized language that is embedded in particular social contexts. In his essay entitled “Thick Translation” (2000 [1993]) he examines proverbs in order to discuss translation and its limits. While Appiah does not advocate a translation that proceeds via equivalencies, he does assert that “A literary translation [...] aims at producing a text whose relation both to the literary and to the linguistic conventions of the culture of the translation is relevantly like the relations of the object-text to its

⁷⁶ It is worth noting here that the problem relies on the translator’s projections of what the reader’s response would be. As in the examples discussed earlier in the dissertation, the future reader, and her potential reaction to a term or image, shapes the translation and editorial decisions made throughout the publishing process.

culture's conventions" (425). Drawing on a Geertzian model of "thick description," he highlights the necessity for situated knowledge and contextual embedding. He argues that "translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context, is eminently worth doing" (427). Such translation is the "thick translation" of the essay's title. Appiah proposes a mode of translation that relies on situated knowledge and proceeds not by equivalencies or substitutions, but by annotations, footnotes, and glosses that place the translated text in a legible context.

Appiah's vision of a situated translation recalls Nabokov's comments in his essay "Problems of Translation: 'Onegin' in English" (Nabokov 1992 [1955]). In that essay, Nabokov asserts that "the person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text" (134). Nabokov further delimits the problem facing the translator: "can a translation while rendering with absolute fidelity the whole text, and nothing but the text, keep the form of the original, its rhythm and its rhyme?" (135). Using his own translation of Pushkin's *Onegin* as an example or model, he describes the difficulties a translator might face. Where it is impossible to render an exact translation that guards the rhyme and meter of the original, he proposes a solution: footnotes. He ends the piece with this exhortation: "I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity. I want such footnotes and the absolutely literal sense" (143). These copious footnotes, comically hyperbolic in Nabokov's essay, seem in a kind of kinship with Appiah's cry for situated, thick translation. To be sure, Nabokov wants the footnotes to describe all the poetic elements of a text that might be left out in the literal translation, and thereby recuperate them. But, he equally understands that a translation must be situated, and these notes should provide context. This becomes evident in his critique of other translations of the *Onegin*. He declares that:

Anyone who wishes to attempt a translation of *Onegin* should acquire exact information in regard to a number of relevant subjects, such as the Fables of Krilov, Byron's works, French poets of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *la Nouvelle Héloïse*, Pushkin's biography, banking games, Russian songs related to divination, Russian military ranks of the time as compared to western European and American ones, the difference between cranberry and lingenberry, the rules of the English pistol duel as used in Russian, and the Russian language. (137).

In this passage, Nabokov includes the literary context of the work, including French poetry and the works of Lord Byron, but he also includes ethnographic details such as "Russian songs related to divination," the difference in kinds of berries, and the rules of a duel. These details seem to be precisely the kind of context that Appiah too demands of a situated translation. Nabokov, however, has couched his call for footnotes in a seeming impossibility: the creation of the literal text "with absolute exactitude" (134). Although he does not outright claim such translation to be impossible, his depiction of it seems to point in that direction. It also recalls Silverstein's diagnosis of the need for some kind of supplementary textual apparatus. Nabokov, however, pushes this to the extreme. He demands the impossible, footnotes that would adequately ground the reader of the translated text in the literary, historical, and political context of the source text.

This, of course, is impossible. Indeed, Nabokov's description seems to echo Borges' (1962) essay on the *Quixote* and its alternative author, Pierre Menard. In that text, Borges explores the twentieth-century writer, Pierre Menard, and his attempt to write the *Quixote*.

Menard's quest to re-write Cervantes' text requires a process similar to that suggested by Nabokov in his essay on translation. For example, Borges writes that:

[Menard] did not want to compose another Quixote—which is easy—but the Quixote itself. Needless to say, he never contemplated a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable intention was to produce a few pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes (39).

Borges here elaborates an impossible task: that of composing anew a text already composed three centuries previously. The method involved not simply becoming Miguel de Cervantes, which would require the following: “know Spanish well, recover the Catholic faith, fight against the Moors or the Turk, forget the history of Europe between the years 1602 and 1918,” for this was deemed “a diminution” (40). Borges explains: “To be, in some way, Cervantes and reach the Quixote seemed less arduous to him—and consequently, less interesting—than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the Quixote through the experiences of Pierre Menard” (40). While Borges admits the sheer impossibility of this task, he continues the essay, even analyzing the subtlety of the Pierre Menard's Quixote when compared with that of Cervantes. While the example approaches absurdity, I mention it here because it seems to highlight an impasse central to translation, that is, its impossibility. Or, more specifically, the impossibility of the kind of translation that Nabokov demands (which approaches the kind of labor that Pierre Menard engages in), and yet its very necessity.

In spite of these limits to the project and possibility of translation, in fact, translation occurs all the time. The translators I spoke with muddled through, making choices to include or exclude certain elements from the translation. They made choices and then continued. I'll discuss how they explained these choices further below.

To return to the case of *jihad* or *gihad* that opened this chapter, the cultural significance of the word in English and in Arabic is key to the choice of how to render it. In this translation of *The Yacoubian Building*, a novel set in Cairo, which was not merely set in the city, but deeply about the city, the character of the spoken language was preserved in the English through specific instances of transcription. Although technically instances of transliteration, since they are the movement from one written language to another, the translator has chosen to transcribe them, that is, to represent the sound of spoken Arabic, rather than the written word. So, in the English, *jamaa* became *gamaa*, *jihad* became *gihad*. Throughout the novel, many words are left untranslated when no adequate translation was available. While mostly they are objects or items (foods and clothing), there are occasionally terms or concepts (such as *gihad*) and forms of address (*bey*, *radyis*). As Messick notes, these transliterated words don't carry meaning across but rather bring into the English text the traces of the Arabic, in this case, the sound of the Egyptian dialect.

This issue of transcription or transliteration, and the play between the vernacular Egyptian Arabic, the more formal written Arabic, and the English into which it was translated, highlights an issue present in many instances of translation—that more than two languages are at stake. Translations often struggle to represent the multiple languages already present in a source text, (in this case, the formal and vernacular Arabic) as well as the variety of registers of discourse, the class and social positions indexed by particular terms, etc. As Derrida (1985) notes:

one of the limits of theories of translation: all too often they treat the passing from one language to another and do not sufficiently consider the possibility for languages to be

implicated more than two in a text. How is a text written in several languages at a time to be translated? How is the effect of plurality to be ‘rendered’? And what of translating with several languages at a time, will that be called translating? (171)

In the case here, both spoken colloquial Egyptian Arabic and written Modern Standard Arabic are being translated into English. And although English is not diglossic like Arabic, there are multiple registers of English that the translator is constantly negotiating.

In addition to the many registers of a language that one might find within a novel, English, although not diglossic like Arabic, does have different accents. The translators I spoke with who were native speakers of English were either American or British. There are differences between British and American English that are not simply differences of slang terms, nor of spoken accent, but would accent a written account as well. These include lexical choices (“trousers” rather than “pants”) as well as morphological ones (“got” vs. “gotten”). Within the circles of translators, there was discussion around how one might modulate one’s own English so as to avoid sounding clearly British or clearly American. Such a mechanism was referred to as achieving a “mid-Atlantic” English. While some individuals I spoke with felt that this was a viable option, one that allowed the translated text to be more prominent, others expressed their concern that such writing often sounded stilted or unnatural (rather than neutral) as it mixed idioms of American and British English. For example, this is precisely Marilyn Booth’s critique of the changes made to her translation of *Girls of Riyadh* (2007). She notes that the published version “assimilates to cultural usages and clichés of North American and ‘mid-Atlantic’ ways while minimizing a stylistic equivalence that would privilege informal usage and local (Saudi) linguistic practice” (Booth 2007: 201). In this case, local references and register that ground the novel in the specifics of life in Riyadh are flattened. Interestingly, the translator, here, is not describing a translation challenge but rather decrying the changes made to her careful translation by the publisher and author in order to make the novel adhere more closely to a genre (chick lit) and to the expectations of an English-language audience regarding the figure and voice of a Muslim woman. Booth’s article nicely explores the complicated relationship between an author and translator. In doing so, she builds on the historically fraught distrust of the translator epitomized in the classic phrase “*traduttore, traditore.*”

***Traduttore, Traditore* (Translator, Traitor)**

In the example introduced at the beginning of the chapter, Humphrey Davies defends his decision to use the “g” when writing *gihad*, although this spelling is unconventional. His decision for doing so is twofold, first that it provides a closer approximation of the sound of Egyptian spoken Arabic, and secondly that it will be less familiar to the reader. For now, I’d like to dwell on the fact that as a translator, he is called on to “defend” his decisions. Perhaps one might argue that he used the term “defend” loosely. Nonetheless, he speaks in defensive terms, not merely explanatory ones. He must defend (not explain) his decision to the editors who wish to make the text conform to English orthographic conventions. However, this way of framing and justifying his choices was not unique to Davies. Indeed, it was one of many elements shared across the interviews I conducted.

The sense that a translator might have to defend his decisions, that he might be writing from a besieged position is not limited to translation from Arabic to English. In her book *Why Translation Matters*, Edith Grossman, a prominent Spanish-English translator, compares translation to other “interpretive arts” noting that “We read translations all the time, but of all the interpretive arts, it is fascinating and puzzling to realize that only translation has to fend off the

insidious, damaging question of whether or not it is, can be, or should be possible. It would never occur to anyone to ask whether it is feasible for an actor to perform a dramatic role or a musician to interpret a piece of music” (Grossman 2010:12). Translation, alone among these interpretive arts, must fight for its own survival; its practitioners always on the defensive, to ensure that their labors are recognized as legitimate. The most famous adage about translation, a play on the similarity in Italian between “translator” and “traitor,” (*tradduttore, traditore*), would perhaps not be so frequently quoted if it did not express a genuine concern, that the translator will in fact betray the text of the original. So, translators speak from a defensive position, facing attacks from all sides.

Elliott Colla, in his essay “Dragomen and Checkpoints,” argues that translators are writing from a fraught position, primarily because, as readers, we wish they didn’t exist, and that resentment is the sentiment that best characterizes “our vexed relationship to translation” (2009: 1). Translators, he notes, constantly remind us of the fact of our incomprehension and the seeming impenetrability of another language. Furthermore, the translator is actually invested in the status quo (the continued inability for individuals who speak different languages to communicate effectively without the aid of a translator), thus doubling our discomfort with the situation. As Colla puts it “though he is paid to help people communicate, [the translator] has a direct interest in making sure that different parties are never able to communicate without him” (12). Colla goes on, however, to examine the political side to translation, noting that “too often we think of translation as a path to communication, and thus to comprehension, and hence to sympathy and agreement. But [. . .] [t]ranslation is not just how we might understand each other; it’s also how we conduct the business of conflict” (16). He notes that translation was at the heart of the colonial endeavor and has been central to global geopolitical conflicts since at least that time. In these moments, translators are often in a precarious position, literally caught between two worlds and languages. Colla explores three potential roles for the translator: the collaborator, the renegade, and the invisible man (7). In each role, the translator is positioned between oppositional forces, and, as the go-between, is trusted by neither. Colla elaborates on the sense of resentment with which translators and translations are treated noting that:

The conscripted translator, the renegade free-agent translator—each is resented because of the confusion they pose to neat divisions of identity and interest, not to mention claims of self-reliance. The invisible translator is consequently the purest expression of our resentment of translators—the one whose services are begrudged because they are so necessary, because they remind us of the fact that our understanding is borrowed from others. (13-14).

In these lines, Colla suggests that translation causes a kind of existential angst by reminding us of the limits of our knowledge. The general distrust of translators, he suggests, is indicative of this deep discomfort with the fact that translation represents in a very concrete fashion all that we do not know. Colla gestures here toward the scholarship on the invisibility of translators, and the textual conventions through which translators were rendered invisible. In this article, Colla builds on the classic work, *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995), in which Lawrence Venuti explores the systematic effacement of translators in the West. From domesticating strategies of translation to contracts which treat translation as akin to proofreading, Venuti articulates the many ways in which the work of translation has been obscured. In the next section, I turn from these theories of translation to the actual translators I spoke with and how they described their work in an attempt to render their labors quite visible.

The Tasks of the Translator

Translation, like most writing, is a lonely enterprise. And, unlike creative writing in the United States, where many individuals enroll in MFA programs and so have a very particular kind of training (see for example Mark McGurl 2009), there is little of that kind of professionalization in the world of translation, particularly translation from Arabic. This may be changing as there are an increasing number of translation workshops, some of which pair experienced and novice translators to work together. However, the majority of translators I interviewed began translating with little explicit translation training or professionalization.

I interviewed a range of translators, some quite experienced, others rather new. They also included native English speakers and native Arabic speakers, Egyptians, Brits, and Americans, men and women, and older and younger translators. Few were making their living as translators, rather, translation, especially literary translation, was something that they engaged in on the side. For most, literary translation was a labor of love rather than money. Many were academics, some worked in the non-profit arena, others were journalists or other kinds of writers. Those who did make their living as translators all translated other materials (such as governmental reports, Human Rights/UN materials, non-profit reports, and/or non-fiction books) to make the majority of their income; their literary translation work was supplemental. The choice to translate literature was usually inspired by their own interest in the subject or the particular novel, rather than an economic impetus. Rather, the lack of consistent funding and the inability to make a living wage while translating literature were complaints raised by several translators, who expressed that if they could, they would devote much more of their time to translating novels, but that it simply didn't pay the bills.

My findings that generally literary translators were not professionalized explicitly as translators, but rather came to translation with little prior training, and that for most, literary translation was not economically sustainable as a career, were echoed by the translators interviewed for the *Literature Across Frontiers* report "Literary Translation From Arabic into English in the United Kingdom and Ireland, 1990 – 2010" (Buchler and Guthrie 2011).⁷⁷ Although that report focuses on translations that are published in the United Kingdom and Ireland, this local specificity did not limit the relevance of the views of the translators who were interviewed, as they included translators living and residing in the Middle East, North America, as well as the UK and Ireland.

As I spoke with translators about their experiences, there were many common themes that emerged in our conversations. In spite of the lack of shared pedagogy or much opportunity for community with other translators, what emerged in these conversations were several shared practices, challenges, and approaches. This included mundane details, such as the fact that most all translators waited to begin translating until they had read the novel at least once. Many translators also emphasized the importance of one's competence and virtuosity with the English language, noting that while reading Arabic novels was important, it was also crucial to read English-language literature to get the sound of the language right. Along these lines, many translators described their process of leaving the Arabic behind while they examined the English-language draft alone, on its own terms.

During our conversations, we also spoke about substantial issues and challenges faced across translation projects and translators. For example, several translators mentioned to me that one of the challenges of translating Arabic is that the language is incredibly tolerant of

⁷⁷ In some ways, the research conducted for this report serves as a mirror of my own, interested as they were in interviewing translators of Arabic literature about their experiences and practices in the field.

repetitions. An English novel that repeats a word excessively would read as simplistic or foreign (and clunky), whereas the Arabic does not. Although they may have addressed the problem differently in their individual translations, clearly, the problem was a shared one.

The most interesting of these shared stumbling blocks, however, occurred when I asked about the specifics of translations choices, for example, when I asked about how they translated slang, idioms, or one of the many terms that index class, educational, or social position in the Arabic. The examples discussed above, of “*hisa*,” translated as “crunk” vs. “rowdy” and the choice of *jihad* vs. *gihad* may be included in this category. These cases presented not only creative challenges, but also pointed to gaps in cultural knowledge. The issue was often not simply one of vocabulary, but of contextual knowledge. In those cases, my interviews generally came to a halt. Some translators explained their choices on a case-by-case basis, others explained their general strategies, but when pressed, in almost every case, the response was one of frustration, an acknowledgment that whatever they decided was an imperfect compromise, and a declaration that, as one of my interviewees put it, “You do your best. It’s better than nothing!”

In that particular case, the translator Aida Bamia, a Professor Emeritus at the University of Florida, explained:

So you need to know how to convey [the multiple meanings of a given word]. So how far do you go? How much information do you give? Those are the difficult questions. So this is what you come to. You betray the text in some ways, but in exchange for what? Is it better to provide your reader with a mixed understanding, or really bury literature because it hasn’t been translated, or be a little bit betrayed? [pause] *You do your best. It’s better than nothing*, that’s what I say. It’s better than nothing, even if you don’t get the full faithful picture of that society. It still gives you something. (emphasis added)

With these words, Aida Bamia articulates an attitude of compromise toward the project of translation. While she recognizes the impossibility of fully communicating the subtleties of language and the entirety of a social world that are indexed by it, she is nonetheless a defender of the project of translation. In the calculus of translation, she suggests, a bit of betrayal is inevitable, in order to make some part of the literature more accessible.

Many translators articulated similar sentiments, describing how they mulled over particular decisions and choices, never finding an absolute ideal but rather settling for one that was adequate. As one experienced translator (Anthony Calderbank) phrased it: “You have to come to terms with the fact that you could work on it forever, polishing it until it you have a perfect product. In a sense it is about knowing when to stop, really.” Another translator, newer to the field and younger with considerably less experience, echoed this same sentiment: “I have 20 things in my head that I think about for about a year, and then, in the last minute, under pressure of a deadline, I come up with something.” A third translator echoed this same sentiment about puns: “You can wrack your brain for weeks try to find something. I thought of various ways, but they were all regional or limited usage slang. In the end, the pun is not really there. The English reader would not see the connection.” A fourth said, “It’s really something I decide on a case by case basis, but the solution is often far from ideal.”

While many translators, as in the examples above, discussed how long they labored to find a specific English word, others articulated a slightly different relationship with their texts. For example, a former journalist, now translator, explained that for him, the choice of how to render a given phrase was generally straightforward. However, in the act of describing this seemingly straightforward process, he himself staggered. The interview, which had been generally smooth and quite clear, (a joy to transcribe) became halting as he explained:

I find when I translate that I don't see that many alternatives. I don't... It's not as though I have a whole wide range of possible ways of translating this. [pause] At least, [pause] I can see that there are ways, but most of them I just rule out, immediately. So there are many, I... I don't... the... and I suppose what determines it is, is what you might call the voice. Um... you just, I just think to myself, well, he wouldn't say that, or, [pause] cause, most of these, umm, well...

Although the translator notes that he generally settles on a single choice, the difficulty he has explaining it suggests that it is not a process than he can discuss abstractly. Rather, he relies on the specificity of the situation, on an instinct or a sense that another word just wouldn't sound right. In this sense, his practice of translating, although it at first appears contrary to that described by other translators, is actually quite similar. He too must make a choice, and move on. He chooses from "the whole wide range of possible" translations, the single word or phrase that seems to fit. This choice is not necessarily one that is easily justifiable, but rather the one that best captures the voice of the narrator.

This difficulty in describing how a choice was made and specifying the criteria by which a given word was evaluated seemed to be shared across my interviews. And most of them, as in the examples above, articulated a kind of resignation or compromise. For example, one young translator I spoke with described how he had asked older, more experienced translators what they would suggest: "This is the remarkable thing, you ask these people who have much more experience, and well, one, they come up with the same things you do, and then they sort of shrug their shoulders." This shrug of the shoulders, a gesture which I saw frequently in my interviews, is telling. It suggests an acceptance of the challenges and limits of translation.

Translation trades in small betrayals, but, the translators I spoke with suggested, the ends justify the means. And if you're looking for a "perfectly polished" translation, well, you'd never publish anything. The process of translation consists of making provisional, contingent decisions, under material constraints of time, the pressure of deadlines, and the differences between cultures and languages.

My interlocutors emphasized the contingent and provisional nature of these decisions. They were made under conditions of exigency, as deadlines loomed and external circumstances affected the conditions under which these translations were produced. In situations quite the opposite of that described by Nabokov, these were often moments where footnotes were forbidden (as readers, the conventional wisdom goes, do not like to read footnotes in novels). Instead, translators made choices, often quickly, about how to translate something that, in many ways, was untranslatable. These translation choices often took on a particular kind of material fixity when they were published in a book. However, the translators I spoke with highlighted that these choices were often provisional and contingent.

Within translation studies, we might think of this in terms of Benjamin's essay, "The Task of the Translator," which I discussed in the Introduction. In that work, he considers translation as a mode and asserts that the only perfect translation is within the realm of the divine. More specifically, he argues that "all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages. An instant and final rather than a temporary and provisional solution of this foreignness remains out of the reach of mankind" (Benjamin 1968:75). Translation, then, must be seen always as provisional, proceeding on a case-by-case basis. In another register, we might think of speaking in tongues as a kind of exemplar of perfect translation as an encounter with the divine. Other writers and theorists of translation have made a similar point, that after Babel, there is no possibility for a final translation (Steiner 1998).

We may return, here, to the Silverstein article addressed above. At the end of that essay, he notes that because of the cultural ephemera that is indexed in language, there is inevitably some slippage when translating. Thus, creating a perfect translation is impossible in fact. For Benjamin, perfect translation rests in the realm of the divine. Although Silverstein is highly technical in his description of the challenges of translation, he is in many ways in accord here with Benjamin. Both recognize the limits of translation, and the impossibility of achieving a perfect translation in a human realm.

Although some of the translators with whom I spoke were familiar with translation theory, very few of them framed their actions in terms of theory, relying instead on the more colloquial and clichéd phrase “you do the best you can” or its ilk. Furthermore, the justification for a given translation decision often rested not on a generalizable strategy, but rather on the specifics of that particular instance, in which a given word would fit, as in cases where a translator assured me that they had chosen a word because it “just sounded right.” The translators I spoke with often described their decisions in emotional or bodily terms, as based on “instinct” or a “gut feeling.” This imprecise language emerges most in the slippery cases at the limit of translation, where there is no good word in English, where there really is no adequate translation.

I argue that, faced with these impossible cases, translators found recourse in the specificity and materiality of the language as a way out of this impasse which was articulated in bodily terms (as ‘gut’ feelings, and so on). This specificity has to do with the impossibility of a perfect translation. In some cases one might be able to say one translation is better than another, but many of these judgments depend on vagaries of preference and ideology, or indeed of instinctual feeling. There are few absolutes through which to make these decisions, and (as Benjamin might suggest) a perfect translation is foreclosed within this realm of the human. At these moments, the materiality of the language emerges as central to these translation choices. I will argue that translators take recourse in the materiality of language, specifically through practices of transliteration, precisely when faced with challenges and thorny translation issues.

By materiality of language I am referring to the actual sounds and words of language (*parole* in Saussurian terms), especially spoken language (even if it appears on the page). Pitch, tone, accent, and other markers ground language in the materiality of the body and of a physical place. The difference between *jihad* and *ghihad* is not a semantic one: the two words have the same meaning. However, they are embedded in quite different contexts and social worlds. In a linked fashion, translators tended to justify their translation choices of these words through bodily metaphors, it “felt right” or it was a “gut” decision, suggesting that the process of translation itself is a bodily act, not a solely cerebral enterprise.

Furthermore, the words and phrases that seem to be most tangled for these translators are those that index specific class and social positions. While there might be an equivalent word, in terms of content, it would be impossible to find a word that carried with it the indexical relationship to a specific form of life. And so, faced with the impossibility of a ‘perfect’ translation, the translators I spoke with tended to ground their decisions through grappling with the specificity of language and how it is embedded in particular social contexts. Indeed, how language indexes culture. I will return now to the example of this choice of *ghihad* and explore some of these specific and material concerns as articulated by a translator.

The Experience of the Reader

Davies explained that he used the “g” as a matter of course in order to represent more closely the sounds of Egyptian Arabic. When queried about his spelling of *ghihad*, however, he

noted that it was particularly effective because it would be unfamiliar to the reader. In the case of *jihad*, there was something more at stake. Here, he not only represents speech as it is spoken through phonetic transcription, but also explicitly invokes a distance from the readers in English. He wants to ensure that this word is “unfamiliar”, is “less recognizable”, and doesn’t “stimulate their preconceptions about what *jihad* was.” With this single letter, he is creating a distance between *gihad* in the text of the novel, and *jihad* as it circulates in the Western media, political rhetoric, and conservative imaginary. In contrast to the fairly monolithic and singular signification of *jihad* as it circulates in English, *gihad* is a term that is imbued with significance in the context of the text.

In this case, we might note the differently transliterated term (*gihad* rather than *jihad*) is being used to create a difference in English from the politically-charged term *jihad*. In this case, Silverstein’s critique that the transliterated term is interposed between the source and target language users is in some ways reversed: in order to avoid perpetuating a situation in which an over-determined transliteration (*jihad*) has been interposed, and indeed is used in a markedly different way in English than in Arabic, the translator has chosen to transliterate it differently, creating space for the term to be resignified and take on new meaning in the mind of the reader.

Davies’ justification here is that it “works better,” in addition to his general attempt to recreate the sounds of Egyptian Arabic even in an English text, in this case, the foreignness of the ‘g’ might enable to reader to have a slightly more complicated experience with the text. The decision rests on the translator’s image of an English-language reader who has some kind of pre-conceived notion of what *jihad* is, and Davies’ desire not to stimulate the preconceptions of a Western reader.

In our conversation about this choice, Davies elaborates a theory of edification through reading, asserting that “I still think that whatever brings you to the book is far less important than what happens to you when you read it.” Not only does he want to create a distance from any preconceived notions the reader might have about *jihad*, but he also believes in the transformative experience of reading, that through reading the novel, the very concept of *jihad* might be re-signified as *gihad*. In our interview, Davies spoke at length on the subject of the experience of reading and its significance and potential, asserting that “in the end, I don’t think the reasons that bring people to read books are half as important as the experience they have when reading the book.” The difference between *jihad* and *gihad*, then, carries with it the possibility of transforming the world of the reader. Davies’ choice is an ethical one, to adhere closely to the spoken language, while also creating a space for the reader to be transformed (or at the very least for the reader’s idea of *jihad* to be complicated).

The ethical theory of reading that Davies elaborates here is comprehensible within a modern bourgeois understanding of literature and its transformative potential. Talal Asad, in his essay “Ethnography, Literature, and Politics: Some Readings and Uses of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*” discusses the way in which “the assumption that the discourse called literature can fill the role previously performed by religious textuality” is part of “modern bourgeois culture” (Asad 287). Indeed, he argues that “The emergence of literature as a modern category of edifying writing has made it possible for a new discourse to simulate the normative function of religious texts in an increasingly secular society” (287). In his discussion of Rushdie’s text, he notes that “The remarkable value given to self-fashioning through a particular kind of individualized reading and writing is entirely recognizable to Western middle-class readers of

literary novels, but not to most Muslims in Britain or the Indian subcontinent” (288).⁷⁸ Asad explores the wildly different interpretations and responses to Rushdie’s text as (among other issues) the consequence of these varied notions of reading. I am particularly interested here in the correspondence between the way that both Asad and Davies understand the act of reading to be one of self-fashioning, part of a cultivation of an ethical subjectivity.

If we take this as the translator’s theory of reading, one in which through reading a reader might be edified and transformed, the use of the ‘g’ rather than the ‘j’ is significant because it disrupts any pre-conceived notions the reader might bring to the text, and instead allows her views to be shaped in the process of reading. Davies’ inclusion of many words transliterated from the Arabic also serves this same purpose, of creating spaces for the reader to learn a new vocabulary. For him, translation seems to be a part of a process of learning, of education, whereby the reader’s subjectivity is formed through the act of reading.

To return to the choices of transliteration that opened the chapter, here, Davies exhorts the reader to expand his vocabulary, not through finding a medial sound between two more familiar ones, as did Ibn Khaldun, but through a resignification of a word. When faced with the untranslatable, Davies and the other translators I spoke with took recourse in the materiality of language and of their own bodies, in an attempt to create new avenues through which the reader could access the text. In doing so, they expand not only their reader’s imagined worlds, but the very possibilities of the language.

In the next chapter, I move from the work of the translator to the figure of the author, examining how authors become conscripted to serve as ambassadors of their country while their books are transformed into commodities that circulate according to market logics. In this chapter, I explored how strategies of transliteration enable certain words to move and travel. In the following chapter, I look at how even as authors and their stories (both their novels and their personal histories) circulate globally, they may remain tethered to their country of origin in a public imaginary.

⁷⁸ This claim may be suspect, as there was quite a bit of care taken during the British colonial rule in India to inculcate precisely this kind of relationship to reading.

Chapter 5: Spectacles, Heritage Tourism and the Making of A Literary Ambassador

In this chapter, I draw on literature around heritage performances and the commodification of indigenous cultures to explore the limits to authorial agency in a global marketplace. I look at the way that Arab novels and their authors are framed in the Western media as “literary and cultural ambassadors.” I examine how the personal histories of Arab authors are emplotted and made relevant to the marketing of their translated novels. Indeed, the translation and sale of their novels, in many cases, relies on the circulation of particular kinds of stories about the author him or herself. I rely on Anna Tsing’s discussion of “spectacle” in late capitalism, David Scott’s discussion of “conscription,” and his adaptation of Hayden White’s theories of narrative to look at the way these authors become ‘emplotted’ as celebrity authors or literary ambassadors. The chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork at book fairs and on interviews with authors.

In the previous chapter, I examined the figure of the translator and the work of translation, particularly how strategies of transliteration were used to grapple with the seemingly-untranslatable aspects of a text. In this chapter, I shift my focus to the figure of the author, both drawing on interviews with authors and by looking at how authors are framed and depicted in public and media discourse around translated literature. Whereas earlier chapters of the dissertation have examined the production of the book, looking at title choices, cover designs, and translation decisions, this chapter takes the finished book as a material object and examines how it is commodified and framed in public discourse.

I look at the commodification of literature and at how authors themselves are incorporated within this process in the late capitalist global market. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of heritage performances for tourists as a modality of commodifying forms of culture. I then examine literature (in translation) as a cultural export, exemplified by the author as a literary/cultural ambassador. In the process, I discuss two modes of performance or spectacle. The first is that of the heritage performance. The second is the kind of spectacle cultivated by publishers in order to sell books. These spectacles include media and book signing tours by authors. The latter mode of spectacle as a central component to (late) capitalist modes of production has been widely theorized. Similarly, the former kind of performance, that of heritage performances, has been robustly explored by scholars of tourism and folklore. I introduce the literature around heritage performances to frame and complicate my analysis of the spectacle of the literary commodity, particular the phenomenon of authors who are recruited to serve as literary ambassadors of their homeland. I begin with a discussion of heritage cultural performances as a kind of prologue, to frame the later discussion of commodified literatures.

And the Fortune Tellers Were Confused...

I sit on the carpets laid out in the desert, the dunes extending as far as the eye can see, at least in one direction. In the other direction, I am only a stone’s throw away from the highway and a parking lot where the bus that has taken me here awaits. Carpets have been laid out on the sand and low tables arranged in rows to accommodate our large group. The tables have been set and mezze have been provided. As we tuck into the hummus, olives, bread, and other classic Middle Eastern foods, strains of Oud music are piped over the speakers. I’m in the desert for a ‘traditional’ Bedouin experience offered to participants of the symposium I have been attending.

From our hotel in Abu Dhabi, we boarded buses and were driven about an hour into the desert to this large, carpeted space, seemingly randomly placed in the desert sands. After we enjoyed our mezze, we were invited in rows to help ourselves at a buffet of ‘traditional’ foods. These did include a standard Khaleeji rice dish, kabsah. It also, however, included some curried dishes that tasted, to me, more like Indian food than food from the Middle East. Although given the historical trade and labor connection between South Asia and the Gulf, perhaps curried greens are a traditional food of the region.

A stage had been set up at the front of the area, and while we ate, speakers thanked the organizers of the conference and celebrated the gathering. After dinner, we were treated to a performance by a belly dancer. While I am no expert on the matter, I am fairly certain she was Russian or Eastern European. In order to make the evening more interactive, the belly dancer invited audience members to the stage and provided brief lessons. It was an amusing sight.

After dinner, guests were invited to visit the stalls that bounded the carpeted area. There, we could have our hands tattooed with henna or our fortunes told. At another locale, camel rides were being offered. It was less a “ride” than an opportunity to have one’s photo taken while seated on a camel. As I chatted with another woman there, a publisher from Canada, she joked that the fortune tellers would not know what to do with this group, as everyone they spoke with would ask the same question: “What will my next bestseller be?” We chuckled together at this thought. The comment arrested me, for it seemed to skewer not only the publishing industry, but the very nature of the event we were attending. I will discuss it further below, but first want to provide some additional context.

This evening event, offering a glimpse of traditional Bedouin life, was a cultural activity included as a part of the International Copyright Symposium held by the International Publishers Association. The Copyright Symposium was held just prior to the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair in March 2010. The Symposium focused on the theme “Evolving Rights, Emerging Markets” and included panel discussions on topics such as Global Copyright Trends, New Publishing Models in the Internet Age, and the Google Books Settlement. The symposium was the 7th copyright symposium hosted by the IPA, and the first ever to be hosted in an Arab country. The symposium took place at the Intercontinental Hotel, replete with marble counters in the bathroom and glowing alabaster columns in the spacious lobby. The symposium was attended by publishers from around the world. The honor of being the first Arab country to host the Copyright symposium was mentioned on several occasions, and various dignitaries and ministers from the UAE attended the two-day event.

The opening remarks to the conference were given by the Minister of the Economy for the UAE. He asserted that the high status of the UAE in the world economy was reflected in the choice to have the conference there. He discussed efforts to protect intellectual property rights and copyright in the country, noting that the UAE had joined international agreements such as WIPO in 1975. He also noted the strict measures which the country took against pirates or those who violated copyright. He asserted that the UAE was the leader among Arab countries in fighting piracy. He noted that a national campaign for intellectual property was incorporated into the framework of the economic strategic plan, with the aim of raising awareness of intellectual property and its importance.

Other speakers also stressed that the selection of Abu Dhabi by the IPA for the first time in the region showed confidence in Abu Dhabi as a leader in the region, that their commitment to abiding by copyright conventions and standards was clear. At stake in these repeated assertions

was the still emerging status of the Gulf region as a cultural producer, especially in the world of literature and publishing.

Historically, Cairo, Baghdad, and Beirut had been the literary centers of the region. The adage “Cairo writes, Beirut publishes, and Baghdad reads” summarized the triangulated relationship between those cities. This saying is fascinating not only because it provides a characterization of each city (Cairo as creative, Beirut as the home of a culture industry, and Baghdad as cultured), but because it suggests the kinds of regional trade networks that were in place prior to and continued to function even after European intervention in the region. Whereas European colonial accounts would separate Beirut from Cairo or Baghdad, the latter cities being within English protectorates while the former was a French colony, this adage suggests a regional circuit distinct from colonial powers. Instead, it constructs a kind of regional circulation that is not limited by national boundaries. The saying naturalizes a kind of regional cosmopolitanism, where each city had its role in the production and circulation of books. The adage, however, harkened back to an earlier era, before the violence of the past half-century had taken its toll on the cultural production in these locales. Indeed, the saying dates from a time prior to the Lebanese Civil War which disrupted the publishing industry in Beirut, and prior to the Iraqi wars (first, the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, and subsequently, the two American wars in Iraq). While Cairo remained a literary city, it too, was no longer the mecca for writers it had once been.

During these same years, the Gulf states had benefited from increased oil money. Oil revenues had been put to use establishing and improving infrastructure and that same attention had, in recent years, been turned to “culture” as well. An oft-cited example was the Qatari based Al-Jazeera network. Prior to its founding, regional news production had been based in Cairo or Beirut, but, the founding and subsequent success of Al-Jazeera and other gulf-based media conglomerates such as the Middle East Broadcasting Center, MBC (which, although originally headquartered in London, moved to Dubai in 2002) exemplified the Gulf’s increasing importance in the world of media production.⁷⁹

The government of the UAE as well as foundations such as the Emirates Foundation (which facilitates projects that are both publicly and privately funded) have increasingly focused on funding cultural projects.⁸⁰ For example, the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH) has launched a venture “Kalima” (“word,”) to translate books into Arabic, with the aim of translating 100 books a year.⁸¹ Kalima had a large presence at the ADIBF and the display at their booth showed off the many books of world literature that had been translated into Arabic through their efforts.

At the IPA symposium, the repeated affirmations that the choice of the Emirates to host the copyright symposium reflected its status as a leader in the region must be understood in this broader context in which the Gulf states were establishing their dominance in this arena of cultural and media production. Beyond that, these assurances may be read as assertions of status among the other Gulf states with similar agendas, such as Qatar.

An uncharitable rendering of the situation would suggest that the Gulf states were using their oil money to buy themselves culture, in contrast to older, established centers of culture such as Cairo or Damascus which had no need for foundation money to establish their cities as

⁷⁹ See Wright 2014 for further discussion of the development of the Gulf states economically over the second-half of the twentieth century.

⁸⁰ See for example, [http://www.emiratesfoundation.ae/\(S\(4ugu3r45b1t0uo55vy53enur\)\)/English/Default.aspx](http://www.emiratesfoundation.ae/(S(4ugu3r45b1t0uo55vy53enur))/English/Default.aspx)

⁸¹ See, for example, <http://www.kalima.ae/en/Default.aspx>

cultural centers—the centuries of history and heritage had already done so. Of course, this kind of reading was often provided to me by those not from the Gulf region, and one must wonder whether, should Cairo have had equivalent wealth (from oil or other means), these protests about the inability of purchasing culture would have been as quite as vociferous.

Regardless, the recent history of the region bears some further consideration. For example, while at the Abu Dhabi Book Fair, I attended the award ceremony for the Sheikh Zayed Book Award. This award is in honor of Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan, who was influential in the establishment of the United Arab Emirates and has been referred to as the “Father of Abu Dhabi.” In addition to being emir of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed was the first President of the UAE, a role he served in from 1971 (when the country was founded) until his death in 2004. At the beginning of the ceremony, an informational video played, celebrating the life and accomplishments of the eponymous sheikh. The video described how the emirate Abu Dhabi had just been a small, pearl-fishing village for many years. It was only in the latter half of the twentieth century that the Sheikh used wealth from the oil fields to build the town into a prosperous and thriving city. The presentation included many images of the Sheikh and the city in those earlier days. The presentation included words from the Sheikh, noting that where there was now a gleaming city, fifty years earlier, there had been nothing but dust in the desert.

It is in this context that we must understand the comments made about the significance of hosting the IPA symposium in the UAE. Furthermore, it is in this context, in comparison with the long and illustrious cultural histories of other regional cities (such as Cairo, Beirut, or Baghdad, not to mention Damascus, Basra, or Alexandria), that the efforts to establish the Emirates as a leading producer of culture must be understood. Efforts to fund and support the arts, including the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair and the translation program Kalima were a part of this larger project of establishing cultural legitimacy.

Under these circumstances, the comment made by my acquaintance, that the fortune tellers would be startled by the singular question they would be asked that evening (“what will my next bestseller be?”), warrants further discussion.

First, it signals the attitude to the night taken by the participants. While her question was a serious one—if given the chance, every publisher would certainly want to know the title of his or her best seller—she made it in jest. The comment poked fun at her own industry, but in doing so, equally parodied the very event we were attending. She recognized the contrived atmosphere where, rather than offering a glimpse of Bedouin life, the buffet tables, foreign belly dancer, and collection of henna tattoos, camel rides, and fortune tellers provided tourists with a Orientalist fantasy. Indeed, this evening in the desert, offered as a kind of extra experience to conference-goers was a kind of heritage performance of the type that has been written about by scholars of tourism and folklore (see, for example, Kirschenblatt-Gimlett 1998). In these cases, what constitutes an “authentic” experience is often highly contested (Briggs 1996).⁸² Scholarship on heritage performances has examined the complicated event of the heritage performance, exploring how such performances are differently experienced by practitioners versus viewers and how tourists change the dynamics of such a performance. Thinking more broadly about indigenous cultural production and the ways in which it circulates beyond the bounds of a particular community, scholars such as Fred Meyers have explored how art forms designated as Aboriginal are commodified and transformed into instances of “high art” in the West (Myers 1991; 1994). Other work on the sale of heritage artifacts or jewelry to tourists (for example,

⁸² For further discussion of the representation of the Arab world, especially its representation to the West or a Western audience, see chapter 3: “Of Memes and Mubarak.”

Evans-Pritchard 1987) points to the mode through which cultures are commodified and packaged for mass consumption. The performance that night in Abu Dhabi can be considered in light of this scholarly work on the commodification of (traditional) cultures.

Although the kind of spectacle we were presented with seemed unique, it was clear that it would be repeated again the following night for another, interchangeable audience. The elaborate production that seemed to consciously recreate an Orientalist fantasy of a night in the desert also provided a strange contrast to the rhetoric of the event during the day, which foregrounded the modernity and development of the Emirates, as demonstrated by their adherence to international copyright protocol, for example.

My interlocutor's comment about the fortune tellers set up an implicit comparison with all the other nights and all the other people whose fortunes might be told on these same carpets. However, rather than recalling some lost Bedouin past or the magic of the *Arabian Nights* (itself a cultural agglomeration), the other fortune-seekers would be other business people, conference attendees, and tourists similarly bussed out to this spot in the desert on another evening.

Furthermore, the question "what will my next seller be?" typifies an aspect of the publishing industry that is frequently hidden under the massive ad campaigns and the machine that is the marketing industry. At heart, publishers don't actually know what will sell and what people want. Of course, sales of many books that are within a well-established genre or are written by a well-established author can be relatively accurately anticipated. But the best seller? That is a phenomenon that cannot always be predicted. Although publishers look for manuscripts that will appeal to various audiences, the work is necessarily often reactive rather than prescriptive. For example, after the success of Steig Larsson's Millennium Trilogy, there was a rush to translate and publish other Swedish crime fiction, for example, an article in the *New York Times* notes that "Publishers and booksellers are in a rush to find more Nordic noir to follow Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy" (Bosman 2010).⁸³ However, none of these other Scandinavian noir writers found the commercial success of Larsson's books.

My interlocutor's comment at the ADIBF highlights the capricious nature of the publishing industry. Given our attendance at a relatively contrived spectacle, albeit one that fell within the genre of heritage performance, it is precisely the cultivation of spectacle that publishers engage in in order to sell a book. Indeed, the creation of a spectacle can gain an author a contract, or even create a bidding war between houses eager to publish the next big thing. The comparison and contrast between these two kinds of spectacles, the first, an example of heritage performances for tourists, the second, the kind of spectacle necessary to sell a commodity in a late capitalist global economy, is the focus of this chapter. I will examine how authors are conscripted to serve as representatives for their nation in order to sell books that promise (according to the media buildup and jacket text) to translate a foreign land for the American reader.

⁸³ For example, Julie Bosman writes in a June 15, 2010 article in the *New York Times* that: "Only months after the American publication of 'The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo' in 2008, Jessica Case, an editor at Pegasus Books, took an interest in Ms. Lackberg, a raven-haired former economist who is a best-selling author in Sweden but a virtual unknown in the United States. The publisher gave Ms. Lackberg a hefty advance — "one of the highest advances we've ever paid," Ms. Case said, though she declined to be more specific — and carefully planned the American debut of the first book, "The Ice Princess," for this week."

What do Publishers Want?:

At a panel at the 2013 London Book Fair⁸⁴ entitled “What do Publishers Want?” Jane Lawson, the editorial director of Transworld, a commercial imprint of Random House [and that has published books such as *Brick Lane* and *The Solitude of Prime Numbers*,] explained that she was looking for “a platform”:

When I pick up a book, first of all I say, is there a voice, is there a story, are there good characters, and most importantly, is there a pitch. ...I’ll be looking for authors who perhaps speak English. We are very publicity focused, we are very social media focused, so, if we can bring an author over to the UK and they can enchant an audience speaking in English, and blog, and write pieces for the Guardian and the Times, wherever, we’ve got ourselves a platform. I think the most important thing to say is that we’re looking for books that we love, but we think that we can sell, that have what we call the platform.⁸⁵

These comments suggest that no book itself is sufficient to warrant publishing in translation. Instead, one needs a platform, including enchanting author engagements and cross-media promotions and appearances (in person or print), in order to sell the book. In her comments cited above, Lawson makes explicit that the author should be conversant in English, even if their book is being published in translation. In these cases, the book and the author dissolve into a single entity: the platform. Or, to use other terms, the commodity that is being packaged and sold is not simply the book itself, but the book and author together.

In approaching the literary commodity that is produced through this process of translation, scholarship on spectacle is relevant. Guy Debord, writing in his *Society of the Spectacle*, asserts that “the spectacle is the leading production of present-day society,” suggesting that it is not supplemental to the product, but rather, the aim of production itself (Debord 2002 [1967]: 7). Indeed, he claims that “the spectacle aims at nothing other than itself” (7). The capitalist system, he argues, relies on the creation of spectacle for its continuation. Further, the spectacle is a consequence of the commodity. Debord notes that commodity fetishism “attains its ultimate fulfillment in the spectacle” (11). The spectacle is thus linked with the process of abstraction central to commodity fetishism.

Debord’s notion of the spectacle as the progression or development of commodity fetishism is germane to the comment by the publisher Jane Lawson regarding the “platform” of a book. The commodity being marketed does not consist of the book itself, rather, the spectacle that is cultivated (which is, in fact, the totality of the commodity) includes the author, too. For Debord (following Marx), the worker’s alienation from his own labor was central to the fetish of the commodity. There seems to be something slightly different at stake here, however, where it is not simply that the laborer is abstracted from his own labor, but rather the author (or laborer) adheres to the product of his labor, indeed, the author and book are fused together in a total platform.

Other scholars have written about the way in which authors are packaged along with their books. Within the context of Arabic literature in translation, Marilyn Booth (2010) has discussed the creation of the “author-celebrity,” and explored how such a presence enhances the spectacle

⁸⁴ I did not attend this book fair or panel discussion. For discussion of book fairs more generally, please see Moeran 2010. For the purposes of this chapter, I watched the youtube clip of this panel.

⁸⁵ I was alerted to this panel through a blog on Arabic Literature in English. For further information and to watch the video of the entire session, see: <http://arablit.wordpress.com/2013/05/19/what-do-publishers-want/>

surrounding the launch of a particular title.⁸⁶ Booth describes the “marketing of an authorial persona” that “frames the text’s reception by readers” (2010: 150). Similarly, the generation of a spectacle is central to industries besides publishing. Anna Tsing’s comments on spectacle are particularly germane to this context as she examines the importance of spectacle in late capitalism and the way in which the adventures of charismatic business leaders become the metonym for the trajectory of their companies. In her ethnography, *Friction*, she examines the process by which companies create elaborate spectacles in order to garner investments. She understands these as “simultaneously economic performance and dramatic performance” (Tsing 2005: 57). The companies perform a particular spectacle in order to gain financial support, indeed, these companies “draw investments through drama” (Tsing 63). She notes that “the importance of drama guarantees that it is very difficult to discern companies that have long-term production potential from those that are merely good at being on stage” (63-64).

As in the case with the publishing industry, in the mining industry, drama and spectacle are not secondary to the work of a company, but indeed, are key to the business life-cycle and the very possibility of success. Tsing names this phenomenon “spectacular accumulation” in explicit contrast to theories of late capitalism that focus on flexibility and flows. Instead, Tsing argues, we should attend not to the flexibility, but to the spectacle. For, it is precisely through specific kinds of spectacles that certain stories can be told and certain kinds of capital can be accumulated.

Crucial to this spectacular accumulation is the telling of specific kinds of stories. In her discussion of the mining company Bre-X which was very successful at cultivating buzz and generating interest, but failed, spectacularly, at actually mining anything. Tsing examines the narratives that surrounded the company. She details the many iterations of the same narrative that cast the founder of the company as “a brave man” who “is hacking his way through the jungle, alone and surrounded by disease and danger. There is nothing there but mud, malaria, leeches, hepatitis, and the pervasive loneliness of the jungle trek. But one day ... he discovers gold!” (65; ellipses in original). This clichéd story became the basis upon which the company garnered investment, drew publicity, and created a “buzz” in the media as well as financial community and enabled the company to survive. For Tsing, this example is particularly compelling because it highlights the importance of spectacle as opposed to substance. The company in question managed to garner massive investments but never delivered any product. The mining prospects they were selling turned out to be a mirage.

In the example Tsing discusses, the charming and cavalier exploits of the company founder become central to the success of the company itself. The stories work metonymically: the founder is brave, and by extension, so is the company. In the case of translated literature, this same kind of metonymic relationship between author and book is often found in publicity or press materials. The book is sold based on the story of the author.⁸⁷ The spectacle necessary to sell the book relies on the creation of a suitable hero, in this case the author. The novel recedes in importance while the figure of the author becomes central.

⁸⁶ I discuss Booth’s article at length throughout this chapter and I draw on my interview with her as well. I am using her article as both a theoretical source and an ethnographic one. Indeed, this chapter engages with, thinks through, and sometimes responds to many of the issues and questions she discusses there.

⁸⁷ This phenomenon is not limited to translated literature or literature from the Arab world. It is now commonly known that J.K. Rowling wrote the first draft of *Harry Potter* while unemployed and on welfare. However, in that case, the story of the author’s life became a part of the mythology of the novel, rather than a reason to read it.

Although a similar metonymy is created linking the founder to his company and the author to his book, this is in fact a key point of difference between the two industries. In the context of publishing and novels in translation, the author and the book are conflated. The two together form a platform, neither on its own is adequate. In this way, generating a buzz about a book by means of author signings, a blog, a social media campaign, and the like is not supplemental to the sale of the book but deeply intertwined with it. In the case of authors in translation, the buzz around a book and the buzz around the author are often indistinguishable. As in Debord's formulation, the spectacle is a part of the commodity, it does not simply surround it.

This may be a facet of the publishing industry in the contemporary era. Authors are made into celebrities and their biographies become bound up with the stories that they write.⁸⁸ However, in the case of Arab literature in the West, this marriage between author and book (or character even), is often bound up with global current events. The author may be called on to interpret his or her country for the Western reader, to make it legible to a new audience. In some cases, the author might be subject to a voyeuristic demand to explain what life was like under a dictatorship, as Iraqi author Abbas Khider was. I will discuss Abbas Khider and his resistance to demands from critics, journalists, and readers to explain his experiences as a refugee and political prisoner. Before I do so, I will present the theoretical framework through which I approach this phenomena, as authors are conscripted to serve as ambassadors of their country and as their personal histories are emplotted according to specific narrative conventions.

Conscripted Authors:

In Talal Asad's essay "Conscripts of Western Civilization," he asserts that "social and cultural variety everywhere increasingly responds to, and is managed by, categories brought into play by modern forces" (1992: 333). The term "managed" seems particularly apt in this case, where these novels are carefully framed and introduced in specific ways as they are brought into the American market. As I will suggest in the examples that follow, however, this management is not one-sided on the part of the West, but rather, authors themselves are responding (and resisting) this management in considered ways.

Asad goes on to explain that "a new world has been forcibly created as a consequence of the West's imperial adventure, and [...]the categories (political, economic, cultural) in terms of which that world has increasingly come to live have been put in place by characteristic modalities of modern power" (340). Asad is speaking historically and broadly. However, his essay is useful in that it emphasizes the constraints not on the agency of a given actor, but on the framework within which they act. In the cases he is discussing that framework was one that emerged out of the European colonial project and now delimits the very categories within which individuals around the world are able to choose. For example, he cites Indonesian nationalist, Soetan Sjahrir, writing in the 1930s, who says the West taught Indonesia a "higher form of living and striving" and argued that "the East must become Western" (345). Asad asserts that "what we have here is not the West being chosen but a Western choice—the desire for unlimited improvement which is at once the precondition and the aim of collective discipline" (345).

The distinction Asad draws between choosing "the West" and a "Western choice" is crucial. It highlights that the speaker was not choosing the West in contrast to an Indonesian or

⁸⁸ Again, I do not want to suggest that this is specific to the case of literature in translation or from the Arab world. I will, however, suggest that authors from the Arab world are politicized, perhaps more than might occur in other circumstances.

indigenous alternative. Rather, the very conditions of his speech were Western insofar as they emerged out of a set of moral evaluations that Asad characterizes as typically Western. More precisely, he argues that “the West has become a vast moral project, an intimidating claim to write and speak for the world, and an unending politicization of power” (345). In the current moment, this claim to “write and speak for the world” has seemingly been reversed, and the demand is placed on the (non-Western) world to write and speak to the West.⁸⁹ But, as the experiences of the authors I interviewed will suggest, only insofar as they remain legible to the West and write within particular constraints. Furthermore, the very terms of their resistance are, Asad would suggest, already Western. The Barthesian desire to protect the freedom of the reader from a monolithic or instrumental reading of the text suggest that a specifically Western understanding of reading (and a moral project that goes along with it) has been internalized. To paraphrase Asad, while these authors may be resisting the West, the very terms of their resistance are Western ones.

In his book *Conscripts of Modernity*, David Scott draws on Asad’s discussion of conscription (2005). Specifically, the book provides a close reading of CLR James’ history and biography of Toussaint L’Ouverture, *The Black Jacobins*. He asserts that in thinking about postcolonial history, one must examine “the problem of modernity, where modernity is understood in the Foucauldian sense of a positive structure of power, a historical formation of certain constitutive and productively shaping material and epistemological conditions of life and thought” (105-106). Relying on a Foucauldian sense of power enables Scott to explore the biography of Toussaint L’Ouverture as a conscript, not a volunteer. That is, as shaped by powers and historical forces beyond his control. The notion of conscription enables Scott to examine the broader circumstances within which L’Ouverture acted and the ways in which his choices were constrained. The notion of conscription helpfully shifts focus away from concepts of agency to the broader social forces at work and within which L’Ouverture acted.

Scott’s work, however, is not simply a reading of L’Ouverture as a conscript of the West and its modernity. Rather, he discusses the 1930s history of L’Ouverture by C.L.R. James. Scott describes this book as one of “the great inaugural texts of the discourse of anticolonialism” (9). Scott describes the book as “a revolutionary epic” (10), introducing the language of emplotment with which he will explore not only James’ biography, but the situation of postcolonial history more broadly. Scott makes much of 6 paragraphs which were added to a chapter entitled “The War of Independence” in a revised 1963 edition of the book. In those paragraphs, C.L.R. James meditates on tragedy, thus, Scott suggests, casting the story to follow in a new light, not an epic, but a tragedy.

The paragraphs that open the 1963 edition “are an explicit consideration of the tragedy of Toussaint Louverture specifically , and through him ... the larger tragedy of colonial enlightenment.” (11). In his discussion, Scott relies on Hayden White’s theories of historical emplotment in his *Metahistory* (1973).⁹⁰ This, in fact, is Scott’s intervention: his critique is that post-colonial histories are emplotted in a fashion that is out-of-joint with the times. Scott, after James, asserts that the problem with contemporary postcolonial theory is that the answers it poses are answers to outdated questions. That is, the questions and problems that motivate

⁸⁹ For further discussion of the liberal demand that the Other make herself commensurate, please see the introduction to this dissertation.

⁹⁰ Hayden White argued that histories were not written impassively, but rather emplotted according to particular story arcs. He identified four central stories: the tragedy, comedy, romance, and satire. Each was linked to a particular ideology and typified by the work of a specific historian.

postcolonial theories, according to Scott, are the questions of anti-colonial national movements (105). Scott argues that the questions must change in order for the postcolonial answers to become more relevant. Through a focus on emplotment, and by providing a sense of how one might emplot the story of Toussaint Louverture as a tragedy, Scott is able to highlight the ways in which Louverture's actions were constrained by larger social forces, in a word, the way in which he was a conscript of modernity, rather than a volunteer (19).⁹¹ Emplotting *The Black Jacobins* and the story of Toussaint Louverture thus enables Scott to draw attention to the circumstances under which Louverture acted, and to examine the salience of his story in the contemporary, postcolonial moment.

Although Scott's discussion focuses on the emplotment of historical narratives, and here he relies upon Hayden White,⁹² I find it useful to examine the emplotment of contemporary narratives, specifically, the narratives of novels in translation. By this, I do not mean the plots that each novel follows, but rather, the way in which these novels are emplotted in the broader public sphere. That is, the narrative arc that surrounds fiction from the Arab World as it circulates in the West often coheres according to a stock trajectory. In these cases, the plot that structures these meta-textual stories is that of the romance. As a genre, the romance is concerned with the adventures of a hero who (generally) triumphs over adversity. In the marketing of Arab fiction in English, the story of the novel and the author are often conflated, and an emphasis is placed on the struggles they faced in their development (coming in to English, for example, or avoiding prison, etc.) and their ultimate triumph over adversity. When the novel itself is the focus of such discussion, the obstacles faced tend to be censorship, inadequate translation, and the like.

For example, in her discussion of the translation of *Girls of Riyadh*, Marilyn Booth (2010) discusses the way in which reviews discuss not only the story in the book, but the story of the book as well. She cites, for example, the jacket text which begins:

Girls of Riyadh was released in Lebanon in Arabic in September 2005. The novel, recounting forbidden details about the private lives of four young women from Saudi Arabia's upper classes, immediately became a sensation all over the Arab world. Hundreds of articles were written about it, politicians and pundits debated it publicly, online chat rooms were crowded with people hotly discussing it, and it sold more than a hundred thousand copies in the first several months... (Booth 2010: 161-162).

The book jacket thus frames and introduces the story of the novel and its release in its native tongue as relevant to potential readers of the novel in translation. The book is marketed in English on the basis of the extra-textual story of its own circulation in Arabic.⁹³

In this case, the author, too, becomes emplotted in a specific narrative way: Booth notes that Alsanea, the author, is framed as the hero of this narrative, as a "brave lone voice" speaking out for women's rights and women's writings. In her article, Booth discusses the limited truth of

⁹¹ Scott is emphasizing this as a counter to critiques of James which criticize him for being elite and overly Eurocentric in his discussion of Toussaint Louverture. For Scott, however, Louverture's elitism is impossible to consider outside or apart from the broader conditions of European colonialism. Scott asserts that "modernity was not a choice New World slaves could exercise but was itself one of the fundamental *conditions* of choice" (19).

⁹² In turn, in his discussion of emplotment, White relies on Northrop Frye's discussion of literary genres: romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire.

⁹³ This is not unique to literature in translation, per se. Indeed, books may often be promoted on the basis of a story about the work, rather than the substance of the work itself. However, as I have illustrated above, in the case of literature from the Arab world, the author and their work are often conflated and recruited to serve as a representative of an entire country, culture, or religious group.

these claims. For my purposes, however, it is worth noting the creation of the “author-celebrity” as a publicity figure which is then emplotted according to generic conventions.

In the section above, I discussed the concept of the spectacle in Anna Tsing’s work. Tsing described the founder of the company Bre-X and the way in which he was chronicled in the media as a metonym for the company. His story, emplotted along an epic (or romantic) line, was one of adventure and bravery. The creation of the celebrity-author effects a similar kind of emplotment, usually one of the epic, as I will demonstrate below with.

I turn now to examine the way in which links between an author and his characters and between events in a novel and those current in the news are constructed in the text of a book review. The conflation of a novelist with his character and the events described in fiction with those reported on the news is a crucial way in which novels about faraway places are constructed as relevant and necessary for Western readers. The pedagogical value of literature as it is constructed here consists in teaching readers in the West about another form of life. Indeed, literature is held up as making Others commensurable. As in the case of the Claudia Roth Pierpont essay discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, one of the key sites where literature is constructed in this fashion is the book review. In the following section, I explore how an author is reviewed along with his novel, and the author (more than the novel), is lauded for serving as a literary and cultural ambassador.

Literary Ambassadors:

When novels translated from Arabic or written by Arab authors are discussed in forums such as the Book Review sections of major newspapers, the books and their authors are often lauded as serving as literary and cultural ambassadors. Using the epitaph of “literary” or “cultural ambassador” to introduce a translated novel to a new readership practically ensures that the book will be read for its sociocultural context as much as for its literary content. For example, in a 2011 review of *Anatomy of a Disappearance* by Libyan author Hisham Matar, he is described as “uniquely poised to play the role of literary ambassador between two worlds that have long been locked in mutual suspicion and ignorance” (2011). This sentence relies on an assumption of static civilizations (“two worlds”) that ignores the history of connection and intersection between the West and the Arab world. Instead, the reader of the review is primed with the idea that the West and the Arab world are literally two separate worlds and that the gap between them is full of misunderstanding. In this section I will discuss this particular book review at length as a case-study of the way in which Arab literature is framed in media discourse in political terms.

In his review in the *New York Times*, Robert Worth frames the novel in the context of the events of early 2011. Indeed, before introducing either the author or the novel, the reviewer begins with a discussion of the Arab spring. The review begins with the following lines:

Ever since a Tunisian street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire last December, people around the world have been asking how a new generation of Arab rebels learned to do what their parents could not: resist and even defeat a brutal police state. But a darker corollary soon arose. Why did it take so long? Why did the earlier rebellions fail? And how much damage has been done to the fabric of the societies that are now struggling, at the cost of so much blood, to reinvent themselves? For Western readers, what often seemed lacking — as in Iraq in years past — was an authentic interpreter and witness, someone who could speak across cultures and make us feel the abundant miseries that fueled the revolt. No one plays this role, in my view, as

powerfully as Hisham Matar, a novelist who left Libya at the age of 9 and later emigrated to Britain (2011).

Although the novel is not focused on the events of the Arab Spring, the review thus presents it in the context of the political and social upheaval of the time. In these lines, there is a slippage in terms of both time and place—between Tunisia and Libya, and between the events of 2011 and those that had occurred in decades past. The reviewer poses a series of questions about the uprisings of the Arab Spring and their limitations, and suggests that the author can provide those answers to Western readers. The novel, it should be noted, does not address these questions directly. The author, Hisham Matar, is introduced along with several choice items of his biography before the title of his novel is even mentioned, suggesting that he is the true subject of the review. Indeed, before either Matar or his work is named, the reviewer has already introduced them as interpreting the Arab world for the Western reader. Before we get any information about the author or the novel, the name mentioned in the first line of the review is that of Mohamed Bouazizi. The reader is thus primed to link Hisham Matar with Mohamed Bouazizi, although the connection is tenuous at best.

While the novel seems to be based in the facts of Matar's life, in the review, there is an almost complete slippage between the author and narrator.⁹⁴ The tale is taken as truth, and indeed, the reviewer laments that the novel "suffers the disadvantage of being upstaged by reality." The image accompanying the review is a shot of scattered photographs of prison cells and bodies. The caption informs us that this photo depicts: "Torture victims in pictures found at a police station in Zawiyah, Libya in April." This image further situates the novel in the political context current when the review was written.⁹⁵ Furthermore, it underlines the complete conflation of the novel with historical and current events. The novel deals with political prisoners and torture; the image accompanying the review suggests to the reader that the novel is a faithful rendering of these topics. In the review, the historical and political specificity that separates Tunisia from Libya, and uprisings and protests that occurred in years past from those of 2011 are occluded. Instead, the West (and its readers) are presented with a vision of a monolithic Arab world, which is being kindly translated by this particular novelist.

The fact that Matar left Libya at the age of 9 does not seem, for the reviewer, to impact his ability to serve as a cultural interpreter. Indeed, the fact that he writes in English leads the reviewer to distinguish him from other Arab writers as being particularly well-suited to serve as an ambassador because he is not "hampered" as other Arab writers are "by censorship, inadequate translation, or their own blunt political agendas." What those "blunt political agendas" might be is left unsaid.

In addition to mixing current events and the events of the novel, the reviewer indiscriminately discusses Matar's own autobiography and the events from Matar's first novel, *In the Country of Men*, as well as the novel that is the ostensible subject of the review, *Anatomy of a Disappearance*. (Indeed, a critical reading might suggest the reviewer wanted to write about

⁹⁴ The conflation of author and narrator is not limited to Matar's work. In Marilyn Booth's 2010 article referenced above, she discusses the "tendency among readers (female and male) to conflate female authors and their female fictional protagonists" (154). Booth understands this as a gendered action. However, it seems here to be operating even in the case of a male author, suggesting that while questions of gender may well be at stake in this phenomenon, they may not be sufficient to explain it.

⁹⁵ There is something uncanny here in these photos. They stage a kind of doubling (the photo is of photos) that seems to echo the way in which the novelist's life is being framed by his work, or vice versa. Furthermore, these photos seem to represent iconically the kind of distancing and framing that is taking place in the review with respect to novels and historical events.

Matar's first novel, rather than his second.) The reviewer informs us that both novels are narrated from the perspective of boys "living in the shadow of a powerful dissident father." Although the reviewer does mention the artistry of this narrative choice, the review focuses on the figure of the father and makes frequent references to the author's own father who was imprisoned by Qaddafi in 1990. For example, Worth notes that Matar's first novel:

has the urgent spontaneity of a 9-year-old's perceptions, and the claustrophobic intimacy of an only child's intense bond with his desperately lonely mother. Matar uses a supple literary voice that conveys his narrator's childish confusion about what is taking place around him (his alcoholic mother's "medicine," for instance) while letting us glimpse the darker adult realities. Those realities include his father's subversive political meetings, clumsily disguised as business trips, and his mother's bitterness about being forced into marriage and childbirth at the age of 15.

In these lines, although there is a discussion of the literary elements of the novel, the review continually highlights the political events that frame the novel.

The trope of a child narrator is hardly unique to Matar. However, the emphasis on the sociopolitical context and the consistent references to the author's own biography are not common to the book review genre. For example, we might contrast this to the *New York Times* book review of the novel *Room*, by Emma Donoghue (2010). That novel is also narrated from the perspective of a child and deals with themes of imprisonment, the intimate relationship between mother and son, and the absence of a father. However, those details are not interpreted autobiographically or linked to events in the news. Rather, the beauty and skill of the writing is elaborated, as in this section of Aimee Bender's review:

Through dialogue and smartly crafted hints of eavesdropping, Donoghue fills us in on Jack's world without heavy hands or clunky exposition. The reader learns as Jack learns, and often we learn more than he can yet grasp, but as with most books narrated by children, the gap between his understanding and ours is a territory of emotional power.

Nowhere in the review does the reviewer ruminate on whether the novel is grounded in truth or in the life experiences of the author. Nor does the reviewer expand out from the events of the novel to interpret cases of domestic violence or child abuse then current in the news. In contrast to the review of the novel by Matar, in this review, the book is presented independently, not as a tool to better understand a new region or to better interpret the events on the news.

While the reviewer does praise Matar for his beautiful and elegant prose, much of the review alternates between a discussion of recent events in the region and the events of the novel, ensuring that readers will understand the two to be linked. Arguably, such a review makes the novel relevant and interesting to readers who might otherwise be uninterested in a novel by a Libyan author. It also, however, reduces the novel to being a cultural artifact, representative of its culture and interesting primarily as such.

Hisham Matar is not the only Arab author who has been described as a "literary ambassador" and whose work has been called to inform the Western reader about the culture of the Arab world.⁹⁶ I will explore this pressure to serve as cultural ambassador at greater length below by discussing the case of an Iraqi writer, Abbas Khider.

⁹⁶ For another example of this kind of reading, please see the anecdote in the introduction regarding the American literary agents and publisher at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair who advocated that literature be read in precisely this fashion.

“What was it like to be in prison, to be on the run in four countries?”

In October 2010, I attended the Frankfurt Book Fair (FBF) or the “Buchmesse.” in Frankfurt, Germany. The FBF is the major event of the global publishing industry, drawing publishers from across the world. It is the biggest book and media fair in the world. Although the fair traces its heritage to book markets that occurred in the 15th and 16th centuries, beginning shortly after Gutenberg invented movable type, the current incarnation of the fair dates to 1949. For the last 60-odd years, the fair has been an annual event gathering people in the book industry from around the world.⁹⁷

The fair is held at the exposition grounds in Frankfurt. The exposition grounds include 8 halls, each an enormous, cavernous space. The halls are organized by language group or region. The English-language publishers were housed in Hall 8. The Arabic-language publishers were housed in Hall 5. While English-language publishing took up the whole of Hall 8, Arabic publishers shared their hall with those of other countries. In 2010, publishers from Eastern Europe, such as Latvia and the Czech Republic, were located in the same hall as those from Egypt or the Emirates. In addition to booths or exhibits for a given publishing house, some major literary agencies have booths (such as the Wiley Agency, one of the preeminent literary agencies in the world), as do cultural foundations (such as the Dutch Foundation for Literature), or even a country (as the Latvian Booth).

Many of the business activities of the fair are the one-on-one or small group meetings that take place between publishers (selling translation or distribution rights, for example), between authors and agents, agents and publishers (pitching a manuscript, for example). A tour around the relevant Hall is also a necessary part of any trip to the Fair to get a sense of what other publishers might be doing for that season. Many publishers have their own parties or receptions where they can connect with others in the business. It is much like any industry fair in these ways, with companies showing off their wares, celebrating recent launches, and individuals hobnobbing with colleagues from across the field.

In addition to these kinds of events and meetings that are scheduled by individuals or companies, the Fair itself runs an extensive program of lectures, panel discussions, and presentations. In the section of the fair devoted to cook books, there were cooking demonstrations. In the section on educational books and software, there were displays of games and educational software, of textbooks and workbooks for schoolchildren. In one of the German language areas, I went to a brief fashion show hosted by the publisher of a book providing images and instructions on the variety of ways to wear a hijab (that is, ways of layering, twisting, and braiding scarves for fashion, while remaining modestly attired). In my visit to the fair, however, I focused on the presentations relevant to world literature in translation.

I attended several such events at the Weltempfang, or Center for Politics, Literature, and Translation. This Center was located on the lower level of one of the smaller halls. It consisted of a stand with some flyers and brochures laid out, a few tables and chairs where meetings could take place as well as an area marked off by a curtain and some posters that was used as a stage. There was a space at the front with microphones for the presenters or panelists. There were chairs arranged in front of this area for viewers to listen to the various programming. However, few of the events that I attended there were very crowded. Indeed, the entire hall was less

⁹⁷ These details were taken from the book fair’s website, see: http://www.buchmesse.de/en/fbf/general_information/. For a more scholarly discussion of book fairs and their importance in the publishing industry, please see Moeran 2010.

crowded and the energy level was much lower than in the English language Hall 8 or in other major halls, such as the German language Hall 3.

On the last day of the fair, I attended a panel organized through this rights centre entitled “Change of Perspective: Iraqi Writers Under Saddam Hussein.” The panel brought together two writers who had left Iraq and lived in exile in Germany. One of the authors on the panel, Abbas Khider, spoke about his novel and his experience as an Iraqi writer living in Germany and writing in German. He explained that at first his works were discussed in the media primarily in terms of their context, “even critics just wrote about the context, the [American] presence in Iraq.” He said that as a non-native speaker (and writer) of German, he faced the assumption that he could “tell stories, but not write high literature.” The media and critical response to his works focused on his personal experiences. “People want to know,” he said, “what was war like?” They would ask “You were imprisoned for 9 years, what was that like? Are you on the run from 4 countries, still? Can you talk about this?” Khider described waiting for years, refusing to discuss his personal experiences. He noted that it was only after his works had won literary awards and after his continued resistance and refusal to speak about his experiences as a prisoner in Iraq and as a refugee, did critics and others begin to examine his works on a literary level. By consistently refusing to speak to these issues and indulge this curiosity in his past, critics and readers were forced to address his works as literature: “to focus on this as literature,” in contrast to some kind of documentary fact. Khider explicitly framed his actions as a refusal to engage, in order to subvert the conversation that had developed around him and about him. In doing so, he succeeded in being read and recognized critically as a writer of literature, not just a teller of stories. He implied that doing so enabled him to win the awards that he had.

Khider’s novel *Der Falsche Inder* has recently been translated into English. A press packet released by the German publishing house, Edition Nautilus, includes a piece by journalist Hubert Spiegel on Khider’s novel and being granted the Adelbert von Chamisso Award in 2010. In this short essay, Spiegel explains that:

In the novel, we only learn a little about the time [the character] Rasul Hamid spent in prison, for although he presents himself as a prolific writer, he wrote very little about this phase of his life later on. Just a few sentences are enough for him to describe the consequences of imprisonment and torture: panic attacks, sleep disturbances, nightmares – »I might have left prison behind me, but it still existed, deep in my soul«. ... »I can no longer sleep. I only lie down sometimes in the morning. In prison it was dark. For two years, I couldn’t see the sun. I was tortured with electric shocks. Prison has gone, the darkness has remained.« Unlike the first quotation, these sentences are not from the novel, but from a short interview that the author gave last year. Occasionally fiction and reality, novel and autobiography meet in such a hard and direct way and in circumstances hardly imaginable.

In these lines, Spiegel directly conflates the words of the author with his character. Indeed, the piece is written to present both quotes as though from the novel. Only at the end of the passage do we learn that the second quote was not from the novel, but from an interview with the author. Regardless of whether the author is speaking or his character, the passage suggests that the reader can learn about the reality of life in prison through the novel. Indeed, the passage suggests that, given the apparent similarities between the author’s experiences and his character’s, a reader could be forgiven for reading this novel as memoir rather than fiction.

Although in his talk at the Frankfurt Book Fair, Khider described his refusal to discuss his personal life and experiences, instead emphasizing his writing as fiction, the success of this

refusal may be questioned given the kind of press material about him and his book being released by his publishing house. Thus, I consider Khider a kind of conscript of Western literature, in the terms discussed above. Khider was not alone in expressing concern over the way in which his personal experiences and background became a key point of interest for critics, journalists, and readers interested in his books. Many of the authors I spoke with made similar comments. Given the comparative inefficacy of these protests, I find the idea of conscription helpful in thinking about the predicament that Kheider describes. I turn now to my conversations with other authors, many of whom expressed concerns about how their books were read or how they were being positioned in Western media accounts.

Conversations with Authors

In my interviews with writers, many of them expressed their displeasure with the kinds of readings they felt readers in the West were doing. In particular, they criticized the way in which their works were being read in the West for what they termed “sociological” or “anthropological” reasons.

I met Ahdaf Soueif to discuss her experiences as an author and translator at her apartment in Zamalek, a leafy, upscale Cairo neighborhood on an island in the Nile. Soueif, a British-Egyptian author of novels such as the Booker Prize winning *The Map of Love* (1999), splits her time between Cairo and London. We met on a Saturday morning in July. I was ushered into her apartment, which featured high ceilings and large windows and we sat on ornately carved wooden couches in the sitting room. We ate tea and pastries. We spoke of translation generally and Soueif’s work as a translator of Mourid Barghouti’s *I Saw Ramallah* (2000). We spoke of her translations of her own novels and stories, the process of writing in Arabic versus English, her work as the organizer of PalFest, of the reception of Arab literature (in translation or not) in the West, and the perils of translating from Arabic. As we got to these last topics, she voiced her concerns over the reception of Arab literature in the west. She noted that there was a tendency for such books to be read as sociological or anthropological documents, rather than as a literary or aesthetic ones. This was particularly a matter of concern when the translation wasn’t masterful, and might reinforce and reify assumptions about “the culture” of the “Arab world.” As she said this, I noticed that my digital voice recorder had run out. I switched out the batteries and we continued. A seasoned interviewee, however, Soueif kindly rearticulated her sentiments on the subject, ensuring that I had the quotes I needed. She explained that:

Arabic literature in translation in English is being read for social and anthropological purposes. I think that matters. If somebody was just picking up a book in order to enjoy it, and didn’t enjoy it and found sort of things that were weird about it, then they would put it away and pick up another book. And that is fine. But if they pick it up and they make assumptions about a people and a culture, because of what they are reading in translation, then I think that is very serious. And in our current situation, which has been going on for years, and where the Arab world, and Arab culture, and Islam and all the rest of it is very kind of targeted, so, that’s why I think it is very serious.

Soueif went on to detail several examples of poor translations and how they exacerbated the situation. For example, in one translated novel she recalled a phrase that in Arabic read “when I was younger, before death became as familiar to me as a passerby on the street,” was rendered in English as “in the past, and before I saw corpses on every street corner.” She suggested that in making the metaphor of meeting death on the street concrete through the use of the word “corpse,” the translation implicitly confirmed stereotypes about death and violence in the region.

In particular, she noted that rather than focusing on the aging narrator's experience of mortality, the translation implied that there had been an increase in actual deaths in the narrator's daily life. Soueif expressed concern that given the political (or anthropological) interest in the Arab world that might drive some readers of literature in translation, poor translations (as in the example above) could serve only to confirm stereotypical images of the region.

What Soueif terms an "anthropological" interest in novels in translation, Iraqi novelist Sinan Antoon describes as a "forensic" interest, as he explained in an interview with *The National* newspaper:

I don't want to be the native informant.[...] There is increased interest in the Arab world. But I call it forensic interest. For the most part it's bad, because it's assumed that novels and poems are going to explain September 11 to you. For example, I got a phone call from someone who says, 'I want you to speak about agriculture in Iraq'. I was like, 'Why would I know anything about agriculture in Iraq?' But it's assumed that as an oriental subject I would just know everything about my culture and civilisation. I am against that kind of [forensic] interest, and I am always in support of writers who debunk that kind of interest and confuse the reader."

Antoon made these comments in regard to the way in which his work in particular and Arab literature in general, was being read in the West. The continued relevance of his critique is highlighted by the book review of *Anatomy of a Disappearance* discussed above. In that text, the author was called upon to serve as an ambassador, or, as perhaps Antoon would term it, a native informant, to interpret his country of birth to an outside audience. Indeed, the review begins by explicitly linking the novel to the events of the Arab Spring and claims that the novel ought to be read for its ability to interpret the culture of the Arab world for a Western reader. Similarly, Abbas Khider, in his comments made at the Frankfurt Book Fair, expressed a similar sentiment when he said that he insisted on talking about his writing rather than his personal experiences.

Both Soueif and Antoon use a vocabulary that implicates anthropology: Soueif with her comments about an "anthropological" interest that readers bring to translated novels, and Antoon's refusal to be "a native informant." At times, anthropologists and others do apply this kind of reading to works of literature. It is not unusual for a novel to be assigned in a university anthropology course. In this context, the novel is most often used to illustrate some elements of a culture or to provide students with a richer image of a particular social world. In this way, novels are incorporated a cultural and anthropological documents within the pedagogical canon in Western universities. However, the kind of critiques made by Antoon and Soueif were not aimed only at the content of a course syllabus. Rather, their critique was aimed at a more general kind of audience. In fact, anthropologists may not be the ones advocating reading these works for their cultural value. However, anthropology's tangled history with the region and with projects of cultural understanding can render it suspect. The complicity of anthropologists with colonial endeavors in Africa, India, and the Arab world has been well documented (see Stocking 1993; Asad 1973). As the discipline of anthropology grappled with this history, anthropologists considered the limits of ethnographic knowledge and wrote through their own complicity or implication in particular kinds of colonial histories (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Abu Lughod 1986). In more recent years, the approach to these issues has been more measured and less self-flagellating. Scholars both within and outside anthropology have critiqued the legacy of colonial modes of approaching the world as they linger in academic and other texts (Chakrabarty 2000; Mignolo 2000). The historical entanglement of anthropology with colonial endeavors, however, is less important here than the way in which the discipline is being framed in popular terms as

still invested and engaged in these kinds of projects. In my interviews, writers criticized what they saw as an ‘anthropological’ approach to literature. The fact that anthropologists were not (usually) the ones recommending such an approach seems secondary to the fact that the discipline is being framed in these terms. Of course, the fact that I was conducting these interviews may have activated a sense of the anthropological in these individuals’ minds and certainly presented them with an opportunity to voice concerns that they might not have raised had I introduced myself as a journalist or as a scholar of literature, for example.

Many of the authors I spoke with critiqued the way in which they felt their works were being read in the West. However, several of them went further and described the ways in which they subverted these readings in an explicit fashion. Sinan Antoon gestures to this when he says that he is “in support of writers who debunk that kind of interest and confuse the reader.” It is worth noting that he is not only supportive of an educational project to “debunk” misconceptions about the region, but that he is also supportive of attempts to actively “confuse the reader,” thus emphasizing his view that literature not be read pedagogically to better understand a place. Abbas Khider, whose comments at the Frankfurt Book Fair were described above, articulated his understanding that by refusing to speak about his personal life he was effectively able to shift critical attention to his literary works.

Another author I spoke with, Mona Prince, framed her resistance in slightly different terms. We met one evening at a café in downtown Cairo. Over beer and lupine beans, we spoke about literature, her writing, teaching undergraduates (she is a Professor at Suez Canal University⁹⁸), and her experiences in America at the Iowa Writers Workshop. Regarding her own novel, which was then in the process of being published in translation by AUC Press, she explained to me that “I wrote a book about love, so that people could read about a universal theme. I wanted to avoid the big issues of the Middle East, the politics, etc. I wrote a novel about feelings. This sort of a universal theme can be read anywhere in the world.” Prince’s humanistic vision of a universal literature is explicitly contrasted with the regional specificity that could ground a novel not focused on such broad themes. In our conversation, Prince implied that had her work dealt with the “big issues” of the region, it would have had a more limited readership, or been read for targeted purposes. Her response, her solution, was to write a novel that had universal appeal and relevance. She thus framed emotions as having a kind of mobility that politics did not. She framed her choice in terms of resistance and refusal. By writing about love, she resisted the pressure (or possibility) that her work would be read primarily as a political or sociological document, rather than as a novel.

The very commercially successful Alaa Al Aswany, the author of *The Yacoubian Building*, a best-selling novel in Arabic and in translation, expressed a similar sense of the ways in which literature by Arab authors might be read in the West. I discussed the translation of Al Aswany’s novel in the previous chapter and the choice of cover design for one of his nonfiction books in chapter three. His novels have been translated into many languages and he is represented by the Wiley literary agency, one of the top literary agencies in the world, which represents an extensive list of writers including Martin Amis, Dave Eggers, Mary Gaitskill, Azar Nafisi, and the Estates of Roberto Bolano, among many others. He is also frequently interviewed by journalists. Indeed, I met with him in his office (where he practices as a dentist) and the

⁹⁸ Prince was suspended from university and under investigation in May 2013 over accusations from a student that she had expressed untoward sentiments toward Islam. This action by the university has been widely criticized.

interview lasted for one hour, after which time I had to leave, as his next appointment had arrived. Incidentally, she was also a white (foreign) woman, another *khwaga*.⁹⁹

In the course of our conversation, Al Aswany explained that he felt that much Arabic literature was translated for the content of the story and not its art. First, he mapped out the field of publishing for translations of Arabic. He asserted that much Arabic literature was published not by experts in literature, but by Orientalists, or area specialists. He claimed that:

“many of them are not coming from the literary field, they are coming from Anthropology or Oriental studies. Accordingly, they choose . . . the work to be translated according to the content and not the art, they don’t care about the art, they care about the content. So, . . . if I write a very bad novel, but about a veiled, Palestinian girl who fell in love with an Israeli soldier, and they made love together, and the father of the girl is a Hamas leader, and he killed the girl, his own daughter, and her lover, and with their blood on his clothes, he makes the morning prayers. This nonsense could be translated into 100 languages, because you are using the stereotypes. . . . There are barriers, real barriers, between the artist and the audience, between the artist in the Arab world and the audience abroad.”

Al Aswany here is articulating his understanding of the kinds of stories that would be easily translated out of Arabic. Specifically, those that conform to stereotypical images of Arabs and the Arab world would be quickly translated, he says. In his example, he refers to one of the most fraught but also iconic, sites of discourse around the Arab World: Israel-Palestine. He also articulates a desire among academics (but not only academics) to fit Arabic literature within specific conventions, for example, the “nonsense” story he tells that would be translated into “100 languages” demonstrates Al Aswany’s view of what would be seen as interesting to a Western reader. In Al Aswany’s tale, the woman wears the hijab, her father is a leader of Hamas, which is considered a terrorist organization by the US government, in spite of its legitimate role within the Palestinian government, and the many humanitarian activities in which it is involved. Further, this father-figure kills both his daughter and her lover, the Israeli soldier. This act of violence is connected, in the story, with his religion and religious practices, as he says his morning prayer stained with the blood of his daughter and her lover.¹⁰⁰ This is Al Aswany’s view of what can travel, of what kind of story might circulate beyond the region of the Middle East, and beyond the comparative ghetto of the university press translation programs. If a writer does not write such a story, then, Al Aswany asserts, there are many “barriers” that separate him from the Western reader. In telling this story as a contrastive example, Al Aswany explicitly positioned himself and his writing in opposition to this kind of work, to this kind of story. He evaluates such a story as “nonsense” and dismisses it, refusing to write something so banal.

While Al Aswany’s characterization of the academic attention to Arabic literature as being entirely motivated by content and the confirmation of stereotypes may no longer be the case (if it ever was), it is nonetheless a useful example of a commonly held view among this community of writers. Furthermore, Al Aswany’s claim that novels in Arabic are translated for their content and not their art must be considered in the context of the book reviews, of the type discussed above, written about literature by Arab authors or in translation from Arabic. Like

⁹⁹ *Khwaga* is an Egyptian term that means foreigner. For further discussion of the term, please see chapter two.

¹⁰⁰ Al Aswany told this story as an example of the kind of book he would not write, because it adhered too closely to the voyeuristic desires of the Western reader. However, in casual conversation with some of my other interlocutors, one jokingly asked “but isn’t this exactly the kind of novel Al Aswany writes?” This comment suggests another possible evaluation of Al Aswany’s writing and the kinds of stories he tells.

several other writers I spoke with, Al Aswany critiqued anthropology as a discipline. Specifically, he was critical of the institutional constraints on translated Arabic literature, such as the fact that most literature translated from Arabic is published by university presses or other small, independent publishing houses, without the marketing or design resources that a major mainstream publisher might have.

The authors I spoke with consistently decried the ways in which their works were read for “sociological” rather than “literary” purposes. These terms “literary” versus “sociological” are weighted and suggest a Kantian division between the realm of aesthetics (the literary) and that of politics (the sociological). In countering the politicized readings of their texts, the authors I spoke with seemed to reify these Kantian categorical distinctions, advocating that their works be read for their literary value, rather than for political purposes. Considerable work has examined attempts to purify the aesthetic realm from that of the political as a project of modernity (See for example Bauman and Briggs 2003).

In his discussion of hierarchy, Arjun Appadurai examines the concept of the “native” as it is used in anthropology (1988). He notes that the term is used to describe individuals from places that are, generally speaking “distant from the metropolitan West” (37). Furthermore, he points out that the anthropologist rarely writes about herself as the native of any particular place. Indeed, he suggests that “proper natives are somehow assumed to represent their selves and their history, without distortion or residue” (37). Appadurai terms this way of conflating a person and a place as a kind of incarceration (37). The critiques made by the authors I spoke with regarding the ways in which their work was read and discussed as it circulated in the West are examples of natives (in this gross anthropological sense) criticizing precisely this incarceration. Whereas authors in the West, such as Emma Donoghue discussed briefly above, are granted the creative freedom to construct imaginary worlds without being called on to locate them in the specificity of their experience, authors from the Arab world (and their work) are consistently called upon to speak for and on behalf of their entire culture and civilization.

Avery Gordon, in his work *Ghostly Matters*, provides another way of configuring a similar limitation (1997). Gordon discusses the distinction between simple and complex subjects, noting that while complex subjects are understood as unique individuals with different histories, desires, and attachments, simple subjects are defined on the basis of a single category (such as race or class). Simple subjects are not figured as having individual (and conflicting) histories, desires, or attachments; rather, the group is viewed as homogenous. It thus becomes possible to make assertions on behalf of the entire group of simple subjects, while the same assumptions would not be made about a group of those figured as complex subjects. In the context of this chapter, the authors I spoke with suggested that readings of their work figured them as simple subjects (representatives of a particular place) and denied them a more complex subject position.

Both Appadurai’s notion of natives incarcerated by culture and Avery Gordon’s distinction between simple and complex subjects are germane here. However, the way in which these authors and their novels are being recruited to explain the Arab world to the West, and indeed, their varied responses to this demand, from refusal to discuss one’s personal life to making certain choices about what to write, is not fully encompassed by either Appadurai or Gordon’s terminology, hence my turn to the notion of the conscript.

The Death of the Author

Forty-five years after the publication of Barthes’ essay “The Death of the Author,” (1977) it is remarkable to hear these authors proclaiming the correct (or, more specifically, incorrect)

way of reading their books. In that essay, Barthes reminds us that in reading, we make the text our own. We as readers are free to interpret and explore as much as we'd like. Interestingly, however, it is precisely this freedom that the authors I spoke with were guarding. They rejected the crass autobiographical interpretations of their works, the prurient interest in their lives, and the reductionist political readings of their novels. It was precisely these kinds of interpretations of literature that Barthes railed against in that essay.

In "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes examines what is meant by "the author" in the late 20th century. He notes that historically, there has been a tendency to explain works of literature in light of biographical facts of the person "who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person the *author* 'confiding' in us" (Barthes 1977: 143). In contrast, Barthes understands the contemporary writer not in the terms of a grand author, but as a scriptor who "is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate" (145).

The author, Barthes suggests, is superseded by the scriptor, who stands in a radically different relationship with the text. The two (scriptor and text) are contemporaneous and emerge simultaneously. Further, the scriptor is less central than the author was with respect to her text. This vision of the writer is in explicit contrast with the romantic vision of the author who is inspired and expresses himself in a text. In Barthes' assessment, the text is predominant and encompasses the writer. Instead of the author as the organizing figure, for Barthes, the reader in the post-modern world has become the central locus. He notes that the text is multiple and manifold "made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader" (148). The reader, according to Barthes, replaces the figure of the author. Barthes presents a vision of the postmodern in which the centrality of the author is replaced by the centrality of the reader.

In this Barthesian figuration, the author stands for a monolithic, orthodox reading of the work, while it is the scriptor who enables a dialogic and creative reading that embeds the text in a network of other texts. However, in my conversations with authors, their critique of the ways in which Arabic literature was reviewed and discussed in mainstream media in a flat, singular fashion echo not the attitude of Barthes' authors, but rather his scriptors. Even as they proclaimed a proper way of reading their work (or rather, criticized an improper one), they did so in order to critique a very monolithic reading offered up in the media. Indeed, the authors I spoke with seemed to be advocating a freedom and creativity in reading that was foreclosed by the reviewers and publishers looking to sell copies.

In his *S/Z*, Barthes, published a few years after his essay on the author, Barthes distinguishes between "readerly" and "writerly" texts (1970: 4). He privileges the writerly text, asserting that "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer but a producer of the text" (4). He suggests that in the case of "readerly" texts, there is a separation between the producer and consumer of text such that the reader "is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*" (4). In the writerly text, by contrast, the reader is involved in the creative process of making the text. Indeed, he argues that "the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world . . . is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system . . . which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages" (5). In these lines, Barthes suggests a dichotomy between literature which is produced by the reader

and that which is merely consumed by the reader. In the conditions of the late-capitalist global marketplace, where spectacle is everything, the authors I spoke with seemed, in contrast, to be promoting the idea that readers could still be involved with the text, could make it their own; that a reader could read a novel “as literature” rather than “as sociology” or “forensically.”

From the perspective of the publishing industry, of course, books are meant to be consumed. Publishing is a business built on the sale of books; the very industry necessitates creating a commodity out of a story. Barthes’ commentary on the limited way in which many texts are read and his dream of the writerly text remains as intangible as it is in his own work, where he notes that we can only find a writerly text “by accident, fleetingly, obliquely in certain limit-works” for “the writerly text is not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in bookstores” (4-5). This, then, seems to be one of the central, but intractable paradoxes at work in this situation. Authors rely on publishers to make their works available to their readers, yet the very work of publishing requires the transformation of the work into a commodity that may fundamentally alter the work itself, shifting it from a ‘writerly’ to a ‘readerly’ text. There is nothing unique about translated literature, here, either. Most literary authors could likely complain that the publishing industry is more focused on popular literature than that of a literary caliber. Yet, as the discussion of the book review of Hisham Matar’s novel suggests, Arab authors, or those translated from Arabic, face this dilemma doubly. Not only are their works commodified in order to be sold, but they become instruction manuals to serve political purposes. Further, the authors themselves are conscripted to serve as ambassadors, to make their homes and worlds commensurate for a Western audience. I now provide some background on the recent history of translations of Arabic novels into English. In particular, I look at essays written in 1991, 2001, and 2010 to suggest the continuities in the way that Arabic novels have been framed in the English-language public sphere over the last several decades.

Embargoed Literature?

In recent years, as the book review of Hisham Matar’s novel suggests, and as the title of the panel on which Abbas Khider spoke (Change of Perspective: Iraqi Writers Under Saddam Hussein) implies, the politics of the region frequently haunt discussions of Arabic literature in translation. I now turn to several essays discussing the state of Arabic literature in English translation at various moments in the last several decades to examine the history of the current linkage of politics and literature. This will provide a deeper context within which to situate the kinds of pressures placed on contemporary Arab authors and the way in which their books are commodified.

In his essay published in *The Nation* titled “Embargoed Literature” (1990), Edward Said recounts an experience where a publisher solicited a list of novels that Said would recommend be translated from Arabic, only to ignore and dismiss all of them. When Said inquired why none had subsequently been translated, he was told that “Arabic is a controversial language” (Said 1991: 97). What this phrase clarified for Said was “that Arabs and their language were somehow not respectable, and consequently dangerous, *louche*, unapproachable. ... For of all of the major world literatures, Arabic remains relatively unknown and unread in the West” (97). Later in the essay, Said clarifies that not only is Arabic literature relatively unknown (and he discusses several factors limiting its reach) but that it is plagued by stereotypes and limited assumptions about the region. Specifically, by the time he was writing, he argues that the availability of Arabic literature was not the problem. Indeed, he notes that “some truly first-rate literary work has gone unnoticed and unreviewed” (98). The latter half of the article, in fact, is dedicated to

highlighting several then-recently translated texts that had received little critical attention in mainstream press. Said suggests, speaking more generally, that it was “as if indifference and prejudice were a blockage designed to interdict any attention to texts that do not reiterate the usual clichés about ‘Islam,’ violence, sensuality, and so forth. There almost seems to be a deliberate policy of maintaining a kind of monolithic reductionism where the Arabs and Islam are concerned” (98). Here Said comes to the crux of his argument, that we must interpret the treatment of Arabic literature in the mainstream press in a more critical fashion, as a (perhaps unintentional) strategy that maintains an uncomplicated image of the Arab world in broad, stereotypical terms. In the essay, Said suggests that classic Orientalist stereotypes were perpetuated both through the publication of novels that seemed to conform to the pat images of Arabs and through the lack of media coverage of any works that confused or complicated those stereotypes.

In this essay, the central example Said discusses is the case of the Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz, recipient of the medal in 1988. Said uses Mahfouz as a case example to illustrate the treatment of writers of Arabic by the American publishing industry specifically and culture industry more broadly. His discussion of Mahfouz provides a useful comparison with the current examples discussed above, because just as the current authors I spoke with and those mentioned above were marketed according to their “platform,” this is equally true in Mahfouz’s case, since the impetus for the publication of his books was his receipt of the Nobel Prize.¹⁰¹

Said describes the response in the US media and among US publishers to Mahfouz’s Nobel win. He notes that although Doubleday introduced some of Mahfouz’s works to the American public, “with one exception, the translations were exactly the ones that had been available all along in England, some quite good but most either indifferent or poor. Clearly the idea was to capitalize on and market [Mahfouz’s] new fame, but not at the cost of a retranslation” (98). In this case, rather than undertaking the expense and labor of soliciting new (and higher quality) translations of these novels, publishers chose to repackage translations that had already been published, many of which were of questionable quality. This represented a lost opportunity to improve the caliber of translations available.

Said then turns to a discussion of the press coverage of Mahfouz, his Nobel Prize, and his novels. He notes that although articles profiling Mahfouz appeared in mainstream American magazines, “in effect, they were the same article rewritten over and over. Each talked about his favorite café, his modesty, his position in Israel, . . . his orderly and extremely uninteresting life. All of the authors [of the magazine profiles] were innocent of both Arabic and Arabic literature” (98). This discussion of the press’ response to Mahfouz is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, it highlights the shallowness of the portraits of Mahfouz that did appear in mainstream media sources. The similarity of these articles in their address of the same set of topics and use of similar tropes, highlights the flat, one-dimensional way in which Arab writers, and Arab literature more generally, was discussed at the time. The particular tropes are noteworthy, too, such as the glamour of writing at a café. Furthermore, this particular café, Naguib Mahfouz’s favorite, is now a mandatory stop in any tour of the old city of Cairo. The café is nestled amongst the labyrinthine alleys of the old city, in the shadows of a historic mosque. It is a place where

¹⁰¹ The situation may be slightly more complicated, in fact. While Said discusses the rush to publish Mahfouz’s works in the United States, many of his works had been previously translated by the American University in Cairo Press and circulated (either by the AUCP or through publication agreements with other English-language publishers) in the United States and the United Kingdom. Mahfouz credited these translation efforts with bringing him and his works to a broader audience on the world stage. He said that he didn’t think he would have won the Nobel without the AUCP translations of his novels.

you can sit all day or night, smoking shisha and drinking tea. It is a kind of Orientalist cliché. As he continues, Said uses the phrase “his orderly and extremely uninteresting life,” a turn of phrase that seems to confirm or affirm to the reader that this author is not a terrorist or involved in any suspect activities, but rather an ordinary man who happens to be an extraordinary writer. It also adheres to a stereotype of the amateur writer who has a day job and writes literature in the evenings, other examples include Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Wallace Stevens. All these elements combine to create a portrait of Mahfouz that is exotic in a familiar and unthreatening way.

The second issue of note raised by Said in this discussion is the lack of knowledge about Arabic or Arabic literature required to write about it. Said notes that the authors profiling Mahfouz had little knowledge of the Arabic language nor any broader grounding in Arabic literature. Although in recent years this has changed somewhat, the fact still remains that most book reviews of Arabic literature are written by someone who does not read Arabic, and may not have a broader sense of the trajectory of Arabic literature.¹⁰² This was a common comment that arose in my discussions with translators and writers. In our interview, Marilyn Booth noted it, and she discussed the issue at some length in her article on her translation of *Girls of Riyadh*. In the article, Marilyn Booth notes that reviews of the novel in English were often written by those with little knowledge of Arabic or its literature (2010).

Hosam Aboul-Ela, writing 11 years after Said, details the state of Arabic literature in the American market in his essay “Challenging the Embargo: Arabic Literature in the US Market” (2001). In addition to providing a handy discussion of the state of translations from Arabic in the very early 21st century, the essay is of particular interest because of its publication date: it was published in the Summer 2001 edition of the *Middle East Report*. The defining event of the following decade with respect to the relationship between the West and the Arab world was to occur only a few short weeks later. Aboul-Ela’s essay thus gives us a view of the state of translation just prior to the events of September 11, 2001. When I spoke with writers almost a decade later, many of their comments were shaped by the response to 9/11 and the political and military events that followed. Aboul-Ela’s essay, then, is a barometer or measure of the situation of Arabic literature in translation prior to this key moment.

What the essay suggests, however, is that Arabic literature in translation was read and interpreted to shed light on political situations well before the events of 9/11 made Arabic language skills and knowledge of the culture a prominent and pressing issue of national security. Aboul-Ela described the pressure to conform to stereotypical images of Arabs and Arab culture, particularly with respect to gender relations. He also laments the lack of support for translations of innovative or experimental fiction. Aboul-Ela summarizes the situation as such:

the mainstream American publishers shows a strong preference for the more traditional face of Arabic literature. The text presented to the publisher may be an apolitical bit of social realism, a politically committed text or a novel that reinforces Western presuppositions about the misogynist Arab, but it cannot by any means engage in any sort of formal experimentation, or in any other experiment that alters the current perspective on Arabs in the US. (44)¹⁰³

¹⁰² For example, the book review of the novel *Anatomy of a Disappearance* by Hisham Matar was written by a journalist with extensive experience in the Middle East. While this clearly suggests that there is now an attempt to solicit reviews from readers with some knowledge of the region, it also illustrates that those readers do not necessarily have substantive knowledge of the Arabic literary field.

¹⁰³ The criticism that avant-garde or experimental literature was not translated into English is not unique to the case of Arabic.

Aboul-Ela's article suggests that the situation had not changed considerably since Said wrote a decade earlier. According to both Said and Aboul-Ela, American publishers were looking for a very specific kind of story when publishing Arabic literature in translation well before the events of 9/11 or the (2003) invasion of Iraq.

In the intervening years, that pressure to present a singular or flat image of the Arab world has not lifted. Marilyn Booth (2010) also points to the link between fiction from the Arab world and the non-fiction titles published by policy wonks about US foreign policy in the region. In a situation such as this, where publishing interest in fictions seems to smoothly grow out of political discussions of a region, when those novels are discussed in the media, they may be framed as just another cultural document providing insight on a region, as in the review discussed above. Interestingly, the case that Marilyn Booth examines in her article is the translation of a novel, *The Girls of Riyadh*, written by a Saudi woman which explores the lives and loves of women in the titular Saudi city. While the case that Booth examines may seem to provide a counter to the critique Said and Aboul-Ela make regarding the perpetuation of stereotypes about misogynistic males since the book centers on the lives of well-educated young women, in doing so, however, it does seem to promise a glimpse behind the veil, into the seemingly-exotic world of wealthy Saudi young women.

Booth's article about the translation of the contemporary novel *The Girls of Riyadh*, Aboul-Ela's article about the state of Arabic literature in translation in 2001, and Said's 1991 article about the state of Arabic literature in English at that earlier moment all note a set of stereotypes and assumptions that frequently shape the reception of Arabic literature in English. Furthermore, they all note the ways in which global politics, particularly the politics of the Arab world and the West's investment in the region, weighed upon the translation of Arabic literature.

Marilyn Booth also notes that there has been increased interest in translation from Arabic following the "market dominance of books by US foreign policy pundits on 'Islam' and Middle East-US politics, juxtaposed with the terminology of the 'war on terror'" (155). She notes in an aside that she has been asked on multiple occasions by publishers whether she could suggest "any novels from Iraq" they might publish (155). She goes on to note that "Iraq and Saudi Arabia are at the top of publishers' desiderata lists, but hardly for literary reasons" (155).

In my experience, this desire to publish literature from Iraq is still present. One result was the publication of novels of dubious quality: in an interview with a publisher of Arabic fiction, we discussed a then recently-released translation of an Iraqi novel. In our discussion, the publisher suggested that the novel had been chosen largely on the provenance of the author rather than a thorough review of the book. As the translator worked, it became clear that the first section of the book was considerably better composed and cleaner than the second half. As my interlocutor put it "I think the translator ran out of steam a bit on this one. And the author maybe, too." As a result, the end product was not particularly noteworthy, thus potentially confirming negative evaluations of Arabic literature as a whole. Given this broader context of the situation of literature translated from Arabic to English, I argue authors of Arabic novels are conscripted and themselves and their personal histories emplotted according to specific narrative conventions.

Conclusion

Ahdaf Soueif may, for the purpose of this chapter, serve as a key example of the author-celebrity. In addition to her novels, she writes opinion pieces for global news outlets, she has started an annual literary festival, PalFest, that brings contemporary authors to Palestine. She

also gives lectures at universities around the world. While I was doing fieldwork in 2010, she spoke in Cairo at the AUC at least once. Indeed, it was while she was in town for her lecture that I interviewed her. Her professional activities in the public sphere, aside from her writing, make her a quintessential author-celebrity.

She also attended the Copyright Symposium prior to the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair in 2010, which I discussed earlier in the chapter. Soueif delivered the author keynote address at the beginning of the conference. Her remarks were a bit disorganized as her travel plans had been disrupted by an emergency landing in Oman. However, she is a charming and engaging speaker. She began by noting that while she said she was honored to speak on behalf of writers and authors, she was a bit taken aback to be talking about such a serious and technical subject and that she didn't have much to say on questions of copyright. She said that the care for the product, the care for words, and the need to make a living had to be balanced. She shared an anecdote: once at a book signing event someone gave her a copy of one of her books to sign that was an edition she didn't recognize; it was clearly pirated. She was somewhat touched and flattered over the trouble that had been taken, and of course, she signed the book without question.

She continued, explaining that she felt herself to be a bit of a "Specimen author," that she was there at the symposium "as Exhibit A to remind and exemplify for the audience of publishers what it is that starts the process of becoming books and what it is that needs to be protected." So, she would talk about herself as an exhibit of a fiction writer (not an academic one). She then asked "what is it that makes a writer? What creates a writer? To what can I trace an interest in narrative?" In order to answer the question, using herself as specimen A, she explored her early exposure to reading and a love of books. She described happy mornings spent at the public library. She was given the Lane translation of *Arabian Nights* to read at age 6. And so it went.

The moments early in her speech, before she launched into her own narrative story of her development as a reader and as a writer, seem to lay bare precisely this process of conscription and the work of the spectacle. Soueif neatly described the experience of being the "specimen author," of feeling like she was being held up under the microscope. This metaphor is telling. She did not frame her experience as being the representative or spokesperson for a group, but rather the "exhibit A" or test-case. This suggests something of the relationship between publishers and authors. The author is to the publisher as the mouse is to the scientist: necessary but replaceable, and this from a Booker-prize winning author, no less.

In these circumstances, where authors are pawns in the larger game of global capital, they are conscripts of these market forces. As the discussion above suggests, Arabic novels are frequently read for their sociological value, and the lives of the authors often become fodder for media discussions as much (or more so) than the book itself. Indeed, the author may be conscripted to serve as the "literary ambassador" of his or her country in a spectacle that will generate a "buzz" about a book in order to sell copies.

In the following chapter, I turn from the figure of the author to that of the reader. As in my discussion here of authors, I examine how the figure of the reader is constructed in media discourse through a discussion of the public in which these novels circulate. I also examine how authors, translator, editors, and others involved in the publishing process imagine the reader, and how this imagined reader comes to shape and structure the final book.

Chapter 6: The Imagined Reader and the Public of the Book

In this chapter, I examine the figure of the reader and the public of the book. The dissertation thus far has been concerned with the creation and circulation of novels in translation. I have mapped the novel as it is produced and circulates, but in the process, have demonstrated how the novel is not a stable object, but rather fractured and fragmented, shaped by contingent and provisional decisions that shifted between seemingly local concerns and broader issues of global geopolitics. In the process, these terms, the local and the global, have been destabilized and reconfigured. In chapters two and three, I examined the production of translated novels through editorial debates around titles and covers, showing how translated novels were produced in a transnational context and bore the traces of both local concerns about representation and modernity in the final product. In chapter four, I addressed the process of translation, focusing on how translators used strategies of transliteration when faced with untranslatable elements. I suggested that transliteration provided translators with a mode through which to expand the language of the translation, challenge the reader to do a different kind of labor, and in some cases, circumvent or subvert the use of terms over-determined by media depictions of the region.

In chapter five, I examined the circulation of these books, looking at the way that authors are positioned globally. In particular, I suggested that authors are often conscripted to serve as ambassadors of their country of origin and that their personal stories become central to the way their books are sold. In that chapter, I explored how these novels are covered in the media through an analysis of book reviews. Throughout, the endpoint of the process has been focused on the eventual reader of the book. I turn now to examine what comes next, the book's reception. After the book is published and printed, after the book fairs and reviews, what happens to this text? Where and how does it circulate and for whom? This last bit, the question of who, exactly, reads these books, is a key question.

Here, I stage this question three ways, each of which addresses the question of what comes next and of who and how the books may be read. Furthermore, each of these moments is imaginative or constructed discursively, which is not to say they do not have concrete effects, for indeed they do. These three moments provide alternative, sometimes oppositional, responses to the question of what comes after the translated novel has been published. In these final pages, I will examine the public of the book and the future reader as these were configured throughout the process of translating novels from Arabic to English. In bringing together the figures of the reader and of the public, I suggest that both are constructed through the work of the imagination.

First I consider how the future reader of these texts was constructed by publishers, translators, and occasionally authors. I examine these constructions as they were projections of a self-other split and where sometimes the reader seemed to be a reflection of the self, while at other times the reader was framed in oppositional terms (as an other). In particular, I examine how these imagined readers were always concrete, based on the specificity of a student, a friend, or even oneself.

The second mode of readership I explore is the kind of discursive public created by these novels. I argue that the grounds upon which a public is formed through assumptions about stranger solidarity are profoundly unsettled in the case of translated literature because translated literature forms publics across cultural difference. However, I argue that framing these novels pedagogically refigures the public in terms of expertise and a difference of expertise rather than culture.

Finally, I turn to the novels themselves and do a reading of a translated novel, allowing, at last, the novel to speak. Throughout the dissertation, I have studied the novel as a material object that is constructed and circulates in the world. I have not, thus far, analyzed novels in order to make my argument. Instead, I have looked at novels as anthropological objects, using ethnographic methods to explore how the novel was embedded in and emerged out of particular networks, communities, and practices. Here, however, in the final pages of the dissertation, I take the text on its own terms and, following W.J.T. Mitchell, ask these questions (of the self and other, of cultural and linguistic differences between Arabic and English, between the Arab world and the West) of a novel. The novel I've chosen, *A Season of Migration to the North* is a classic of contemporary Arabic literature. It is a novel that engages with many of the themes of this dissertation in a literary fashion. Before I discuss that novel, however, I will first elaborate on the complicated figure of the reader that emerged in my research.

The Imagined Reader

The future reader has been an important figure throughout the dissertation. I considered the future reader of the book in the context of translation decisions (as in the discussion in Chapter 4 on the transliteration of *jihad* or *gihad*). At other moments, I have explored how my interlocutors at the press imagined how this future reader might interpret a given cover image or title (as in chapter 2, in our discussions about titles such as *Designing Egypt*). Similarly, I have discussed the uncertainty of the publishing industry and the inability to guarantee a bestseller (as in Chapter 5 where a publisher joked that the fortune tellers would be confused by the fact that all the publishers there would ask them the same question—what will my next bestseller be?). As these examples suggest, when my interlocutors spoke about the future reader of the book, they often did so in hypothetical terms. In many instances, the way they described the future reader seemed to draw on either a generic conception of the audience or on a token individual who could stand in as the prototypical example of the reader. For example, one translator I spoke with said that his ideal reader, the reader he had in mind as he translated, was his partner's mother—a middle-aged American woman who was educated, worked as a librarian, and read international literature, but, importantly, knew no Arabic nor did she have any particular attachment to the region. This then, was his imagined reader.

Thus far, the figure of the future reader has haunted each chapter, appearing in various guises as a mirror or a foil (or sometimes both) for my interlocutors. As I was conducting research for this project, I kept thinking, with my interlocutors, about these future readers. Who were they? For whose benefit was this labor? To answer that question, I briefly considered conducting further fieldwork with readers of Arabic literature in translation.¹⁰⁴ Of course, in many ways I did conduct fieldwork with these readers. I was in a book club in Cairo where we read Arabic literature (mostly in translation). I taught translated literature in my undergraduate classes at Berkeley. I spoke about these novels in translation with my friends and family. And translators, authors, editors, publishers, and journalists are all readers, too. Arguably, they are readers first and foremost. Nevertheless, this chapter does not draw on the ethnographic specificity of these encounters with readers. Rather, I explore the work that the figure of the imagined reader, the future reader, performed in the production of these texts. The reader was, in some sense, a floating signifier, ready to be filled in any number of ways depending on the

¹⁰⁴ In her *Reading the Romance* (1991), Janice Radway examines both the reader as imagined in the process of writing and publishing books as well as doing fieldwork with readers. Later stages of this project may include more fieldwork with readers in order to speak to reader response and reception contexts.

context, situation, or speaker. As an imaginary figure, projected into the future, the imagined reader was an empty vessel to be filled differently or distinctly by each person I spoke with.

The temporality of the novel is important here. The labor to produce these novels, from editorial choices about the title to the work of translation, was future-oriented. The future reader was not only the intended recipient, but as a figure, the reader stood for the endpoint or goal of the entire process of translation and publication. If we return here to the Benjamin essay, “The Task of the Translator,” he understands translation as a process that spans time as well as (linguistic) space (1992). He notes that “a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life” (1992: 73). Translation for Benjamin is the mode and means by which a work of art survives into new eras. The work of translation is thus always deferred. On a more concrete level, the fruits of the labor of translation are also deferred, put off until some future reader will pick up the novel and digest it. Indeed, the metaphor, which is not unique in studies of media creation and reception, is that of the circuit which is not closed until the finished novel is read by a reader. The length of time that may pass before that eventually happens, however, is quite great. And, more significantly, the translation and editorial labor is completed before the future reader ever has a chance to read it. That is, there is no contact between the editor or translator and reader of the book, particularly not during its production.¹⁰⁵ Again, I do not mean to suggest that this situation is unique to translated novels. It is, rather, a feature of much or all media production. However, this separation between the producer and recipient is a feature that structures the process of translation and the production of these translated works. In my ethnographic work, I found that translators, editors, and others involved in the production of translated novels continually considered the future reader. Their constructed or imagined readers influenced the works that were eventually produced.

Crucially, this figure of the reader was most frequently either a mirror of the self or a foil for the self. In many cases, my interlocutors depicted the future reader as a novice to be welcomed into the field. In several cases translators who worked in academia or in teaching roles elsewhere explained that their image of the reader was that of the student. In some cases, the whole endeavor was motivated by these students, as when translators chose a book to translate precisely in order that they could teach it in their university courses. At these moments, the image of the reader was the image of the student, especially for individuals who worked in academia or were in teaching roles elsewhere. In the case of the imagined-reader-as-student, the reader was positioned differentially from my interlocutor, often in a position of being less informed, less knowledgeable about the region, its customs, and its language.

It is this reader, the reader who knows little about the region or culture of the Arab world, who seems to be the intended recipient of the public sphere discourse around these novels. For example, in the Claudia Roth Pierpont essay discussed in the introduction to the dissertation, the reader of Arabic fiction in translation reads to learn “the answers to questions we did not know we wanted to ask” (Pierpont 2010). In this case, the use of the first-person plural pronoun “we” suggests that Pierpont herself is like the other potential readers of which she writes, ready to learn about the Arab world, its cultures and traditions, and how it is that Arabs live. Similarly, in the book review of Hisham Matar’s novel discussed in chapter 5, the author is figured as an

¹⁰⁵ In practice, there might be such contact, as in the example of a translator who translates the book in order to teach it in a course. However, even in that context, the labor of translation has been completed well before it can be assigned in a course. There is still a considerable temporal gap. More significantly, in the process of translating the book, there is no such contact.

ambassador who will introduce the region of the Middle East to the reader and explain to him or her the particularities of the Arab spring. The potential reader of Arabic fiction in translation is thus figured as a novice or initiate.

Although both translators and journalists/book reviewers might have depicted the future reader as someone who could, in reading these novels, learn about the region, the translators also challenged and subverted this liberal project. In chapter four, I examine the choice to transliterate *jihad* as *gihad*. In that case, the translator explains that his decision to use the “g” would be less familiar to the future reader, thus enabling the reader to have an encounter with the text not over-determined by the descriptions of jihad that often circulate. In this way, translators worked to shape the experience of the reader in ways that did not always correspond with the broader discursive norms. Indeed, as in the case examined in chapter four, translators sometimes framed their efforts as explicitly counter to broad public sphere discourse about the Arab world that circulated in the West.¹⁰⁶

In my conversations at the Press, the reader was often imagined as an individual who knew little about the region or its cultural dynamics. For example, in chapter two, the choice of a title was debated in terms of how a future reader might interpret it. So, individuals at the Press asserted that “when it comes to design and Egypt, people think about designer economies not art or architecture.” In that chapter, I focused primarily on how the discussions around representing Egypt pointed to tensions about Egypt’s status as modern. The imaginative work in choosing a title involved individuals in Egypt projecting how an American reader would respond to a particular term as it might be used in reference to Egypt. The work of publishing these novels in translation required a kind of gymnastic imaginative labor, which jumped back and forth between a North American and an Egyptian outlook. As it did so, local commitments and concerns sometimes faded away (as when the modernist tradition of Egyptian art was ignored completely) while at other moments, concerns that were important to the staff at the Press came to the fore, even if the potential reader might have been unconcerned about that issue (as in the debate about what symbols could represent the country discussed in chapter three).

At other moments in these editorial meetings, the imagined reader would be figured more locally as a Cairo resident, perhaps an American exchange student studying Arabic at the AUC. Indeed, this local demographic was precisely the audience for many of the press’s publications. For example, I was involved in conversations about the cover art of a novel by an Egyptian author that was to include an image by a popular Cairene artist. In that case, the assumption was that (some) readers would be familiar enough with the Cairo cultural scene to recognize the work of the artist (even as others might not). By using the work of a local artist, the AUCP wanted to support local cultural production, but also wanted to position their books within that cultural scene and to appeal to consumers who would be familiar with the contemporary literary and arts scene in Cairo.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, of course, the cover had to be legible to readers unfamiliar with the artist’s work.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Another instance of a translator working to counter stereotypes about the Arab world through her translations can be found in Marilyn Booth’s 2010 article on her translation of the Saudi novel *Girls of Riyadh*. That article was discussed in chapter five.

¹⁰⁷ In this case, the situation was complicated by the fact that the picture included an image of bare breasts. The negotiation also included concerns about offending the sensibilities of other local readers. In the end, another image by the same author was chosen in order to avoid any concerns over modesty.

¹⁰⁸ The AUCP had an agreement with Arabia Books in London which published and distributed the AUCP’s list of Arabic literature in translation. When those titles were released in the United Kingdom under the Arabia imprint, their covers almost always differed from the AUCP version. In my interview with someone from Arabia Books, I

In another instance of this negotiation between local and global audiences, the AUCP had Middle East rights for a translated novel being published in the United States. As is industry practice with such co-editions, the AUCP would receive the files from the US publisher and we'd print the book with our logo and copyright information. In some cases the title would be changed, in others, sections (especially the front matter) could be added or subtracted, thus slightly changing the pagination of the finished book.¹⁰⁹ In some cases a new cover would be designed, while in others the cover would be the same for both the Middle East and North American edition. In this particular case, the novel was written by a well-respected Egyptian author. The literary novel grapples with questions of history and violence, on both large scales (the massacre at Deir Yassin in Palestine) and small (the author's life, as she writes her autobiography in the novel). The novel is experimental with several beginnings and two central narrators (the author and a university professor in the midst of grading papers).

The cover that the AUCP first received from the American publisher included an image of a veiled girl peeking out from behind a column. The girl's face is only partially visible, part of one eye is obscured by the hijab, the other side of her face obscured by the column. The cover is a stereotype of the kind of cover one often finds on the cover of novels and memoirs written by or about Arab women. The fact that the novel deals seriously with questions of aging and the passage of life and that the two narrators (both women) are highly educated (one a novelist, the other a professor of history) is not even hinted at by this cover. When we received it at the AUCP, there was no discussion about whether such a stereotypical and moreover, irrelevant, cover would grace the Middle East edition of the book. Instead, it was dismissed by the editorial director immediately, with the words "not a cover to be emulated." The AUCP edition had a different cover altogether.¹¹⁰ The decision to change this cover was made to better suit the audience of the book which, in this case would be local to the press. The implication was that such a stereotypical cover would be unacceptable, even offensive, to Middle Eastern readers. Unlike the projection of the future reader who was quite other to the editors at the press, this image of the reader was familiar, local, and even sometimes based on him or herself and his or her experiences.

In fact, this was one of the critiques of the AUCP that I heard: their books were too local. One translator, for example, said: "I do feel that the specialized presses [such as AUCP] are, in a certain way, preaching to the choir, the only way people are going to seek these books out is if they are already interested in the Middle East." He went on to say "I don't like the idea of writing for such a narrow audience." Critics, such as this translator, suggested that because of choices of cover image, translation styles, and the inclusion of many transliterated terms, the novels published by the AUC were aimed more at this local audience of students (who could make sense of the transliterated words, for example), rather than at a general Western audience, thus limiting their potential circulation. This was effectively the rationale the representative

was told that the covers were redesigned to better appeal to the UK market. She suggested that the AUCP books were too locally grounded in Cairo in part because of the policy of using an image by a Cairene artist on the covers. She further implied that the covers didn't look "commercial" enough, that they wouldn't blend in a bookstore. I took this to mean that the covers might somehow mark the novels as translated or foreign even before a potential reader had a chance to read a single page.

¹⁰⁹ In some cases, the printing of these books was handled by the original publisher and the finished books were shipped to Egypt. In other cases, as in the case of this novel, the books would be printed in Egypt, which was often less expensive.

¹¹⁰ Incidentally, I don't believe that this cover made it to the final version of the US book, either. When I looked on Amazon, the cover image is not the one circulated to the AUCP.

Arabic Books gave for changing the covers for their editions (see note 109 above). In this way, the AUCP was figured as a “local” press in contrast to the presses that were imagined as having a more “global” reach.

The conversations I had at the Press, however, suggested that the situation was more complicated than such a critique would imply. Rather, the individuals there seemed to be balancing these different audiences, wanting to be inclusive to readers who might not be familiar with a given term, while also locating the text clearly in the region for the informed reader. Similarly in my conversations with translators, they attempted to balance the desire to keep the book locally specific, while also making it accessible to readers unfamiliar with Arabic and the Arab world (see for example, my discussion of transliteration in chapter four).

Speaking with translators about their imagined reader was particularly illuminating. Some translators I spoke with suggested that their ideal reader, the reader whom they had in their minds as they wrote was, in the final analysis, themselves. Usually it was a younger version of themselves, reading translated literature on the way to learning the language (to becoming a translator, even). Sometimes this was framed in terms of the necessities of the process: as translators, they were not only close readers of the Arabic text, but the first reader of the English text. So, one translator said to me “I’m the reader, I’m the one who’s reading it,” in the context of gauging whether the English translation sounded natural and idiomatic.

In much of the public sphere discourse around translated literature from the Arab world, these novels are celebrated as offering the possibility of learning about individuals who live in another way. For example, at the panel described in the introduction, the literary agents suggested that Americans like to read about the world in narrative form (for example, learning about Afghanistan by reading *The Kite Runner*.) Or, as I suggested above, in Claudia Pierpont Roth’s article on literature translated from Arabic where she suggests that reading these novels will help the American reader learn about the lives of others.

Thus, translated literature promises, or seems to promise, the possibility of creating a connection with an other, with another form of life, or at least rendering another form of life intelligible. In this context, then, it is significant that the translators suggest they are translating not for another, but for themselves. In this case, the bridge or connection seems to be embodied literally in the person of the translator, who metabolizes one text in order to produce another that can circulate elsewhere. It may be worth recalling, here, what Walter Benjamin noted about the process of translation: that it is “charged with the special mission of watching over the maturation process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own” (1992: 75). This process happens through the labor of the translator, who tacks back and forth between these (at least) two languages and texts in the process of creating a new text that can circulate to new audiences and readers.

This balance, between the reader knowledgeable of the language, region, and culture and the novice who was unfamiliar with the region, was central in the depictions of the reader that I came across. In both cases, however, whether the reader was figured as knowledgeable or not, the reader was imagined in fairly concrete and specific terms. The imagined reader was not some abstract conception but a specific and familiar one, even, perhaps especially, when the imagined reader was, in fact, the individual translator, author, or editor him or herself.

In the next section, I will consider a question of readership that is less intimately constructed: the public of the book. Readers, as members of a discursive public, were not constructed as intimates but as strangers. I will argue that the kind of public that was forged through the translation of Arabic novels reframed cultural difference in terms of expertise.

The Public of the Book: Stranger Sociality and Reading Pedagogically

In his article on “Publics and Counterpublics,” Michael Warner (2002) examined the place of publics in the liberal social world. In his discussion of publics, he suggests that the creation of a sense of stranger sociality is necessary for the constitution of a public. Other scholars, such as Benedict Anderson (1991), have similarly examined the way in which shared reading practices can create links of solidarity across a national sphere.

In his article Warner explores the creation of a sense of stranger sociality that is central to the creation of a discursive public. I will argue that the public of translated literature challenges the bounds of stranger sociality that Warner describes and requires that we reconsider the imaginative labor necessary to constitute a public. I will argue that while much public sphere discourse about the Arab world that circulates in the West frames the Arab world as different or Other, translated novels attempt to create a public across cultural and linguistic borders. In so doing, they challenge certain norms of stranger solidarity. I argue, however, that these novels circulate easily precisely because of the public sphere discourse which frames them pedagogically. By framing novels in this fashion, as able to teach Western readers about the culture of the Arab world and the lives of its inhabitants, public discourse around these novels refigures cultural differences in terms of differences of expertise. Rather than creating publics around and across cultural and linguistic differences, then, these novels are figured as educational. Differential levels of knowledge and expertise are routine within Western discursive publics. In this fashion, public sphere discourse about novels in translation works to make the novels legible according to norms of Western discursive publics.

Warner examines the creation of publics and describes how they are constituted through texts. He notes first that a public is brought into being through discourse: “it exists by virtue of being addressed” and that public speech is “both personal and impersonal” (50, 57). Public speech is personal insofar as we recognize ourselves as its audience; it is impersonal insofar as we recognize that “the speech was addressed to indefinite others; that in singling us out, it does so [...] in common with strangers” (58). This slippery sense of being particularly addressed and yet not addressed in particular seems to capture something of the construction of the reader that emerged in my fieldwork. The reader was at once the self and the Other, at once familiar and foreign.

In his discussion of how publics are constituted and draw their readers, Warner notes that publics rely on “preexisting forms and channels of circulation” (75). Indeed he says that a public “appears open to indefinite strangers, but in fact selects participants by criteria of shared social space (though not necessarily territorial space), habitus, topical concerns, intergeneric references, and circulating intelligible forms” (75). Thus, he points out that publics are not as open and accessible as they might initially appear—and indeed, this distance between the appearance of openness and the actual constrictions on membership is key to the creation and maintenance of a discursive public. Furthermore, in discussing the public created by the magazine “The Spectator,” he asserts that “Although the language addresses an impersonal, indefinite, and self-organized expanse of circulation, it also elaborates (and masks as unmarked humanity) a particular culture, its embodied way of life, its reading practices, its ethical conventions, its geography, its class and gender dispositions, and its economic organization” (76).

Warner here suggests the constraints at work on the creation of a public. Publics contain within them their own limits, through the conventions (of circulation, reading, ethics, etc.) that they naturalize. He notes that “Strangers are less strange if you can trust them to read as you read, or if the sense of what they say can be fully abstracted from the way they say it” (83). This

is the crux of the issue. Publics, as Warner discusses, are constructed through creating links of solidarity with innumerable strangers. This solidarity is only possible when these strangers are assumed to be like you, similar in habits, attitudes, beliefs, and practices. This stranger sociality is only accessible to the group of individuals who share these capacities.

In the case of novels translated from the Arab world, what kind of stranger sociality emerges? What kind of a public emerges, and what kind of stranger sociality is at stake? The sociality of a translated novel may not, at first, appear that distinct from other novels. However, in the case of Arab literature in English, these texts are often framed in pedagogical terms, as translating not just a novel, but rather an entire worldview or way of life. This kind of translational work shifts the idea of stranger sociality that emerges. The promise, as celebrated, for example, by Claudia Roth Pierpont in her article in the *New Yorker* (discussed in the introduction and again above), is that the public of translated novels will include Arabs and Western readers who, in reading these novels, will learn how it is that Arabs “think and work and suffer and fall in love and make enemies and sometimes make revolutions” (Pierpont 2010). This demand places quite a burden on the text, to make an entire region and culture legible to the Western reader.

Translated novels stitch together at least two publics, those of the original novel and those of novels in the target language. This unifying work is quite contrary to the norms of stranger sociality in public discourse, where cultural differences are alternatively erased or reified. Pierpont’s call on literature to provide such a space for the cultivation of a sociality with a stranger who might not be like, but rather unlike the reader must be placed in the context of other public discourse about the Arab world that circulates in the West. Indeed, unlike in the case that Warner examines, where counter-publics existed outside the bounds of particular discursive publics, in the case of translated literature, the public being constructed is necessarily constituted by a public that exceeds the norms of (Western) public discourse. I will turn now to an example of the way in which the Arab world is figured in Western public discourse.

I take as an example a 2006 article from *The Economist* on the subject of the jinn. In this article, there is no creation of cross-cultural stranger sociality. Rather, the Western reader is made to feel that the Islamic world is entirely foreign. Indeed, the reader and the author of the article are constructed in opposition to its subject: Muslims and the concept of the jinn. This article describes jinns and the importance of jinns within an Islamic tradition. However, the article is laced with an entirely sardonic skepticism. The skepticism and intractability of the correspondent’s view is most evident in the concluding line: “There did not appear to be anything there.” The phrase encapsulates much of the tone of the article and provides the final dismissal of the phenomenon of the jinn.

In the *Economist* article, the author remains nameless throughout, and only occasionally does “your correspondent” intrude into the otherwise (unowned and unauthored) text. This nameless assertion, however, only further highlights the assumptions at stake in that text. In particular, the assumption that the reader of the text can be adequately represented by the spectral figure of the correspondent. The fiction of *The Economist* relies on the shared sensibility of the writer and reader. In *The Economist*, the reader is meant to experience the news as though he is there, and can assume that the writer behaved as he would and vice versa. This fiction is so complete that the identity of the correspondent is irrelevant precisely because *The Economist* operates in the public sphere and speaks to the anonymous (but familiar) stranger who constitutes the public of the text.

The fact that the correspondent and the reader can be assumed to share a single world-view and understanding enables the correspondent to make certain assertions that connect the reader to the correspondent, united and strengthened in their recognition of the complete alterity, the otherness, of those being interviewed. The jinns, or rather, a belief in jinns, poses a limit beyond which the correspondent and the reader cannot step and which, it seems, can only be made comprehensible through a sort of ridicule.

The article begins with an act of scene-setting. The correspondent describes a hill outside Qardho in northern Somalia, on which lies “a pit, a kind of Alice in Wonderland rabbit hole, which is said to swirl down into the world of jinn” (2006: 89). The first mention of the subject of the article—the jinn—is preceded by an allusion to Alice in Wonderland. The author thereby situates the jinn within, or alongside, the imaginative universe of Lewis Carroll. By placing Alice before the jinns, he provides not only a clue to the tone of the article (indulgent skepticism) but also guides his reader, proffering a way in which jinns can be understood, made comprehensible and commensurable. That is, in the Western canon similar figures lie within the realm of fiction and fantasy. The jinn are, he seems to be implying, as real as the Cheshire cat, and just as frightening. More forebodingly, those who believe in the jinn, like adults still afraid of childhood stories, need not be taken seriously either.

The following section of the article provides background on the Qur’anic basis of the jinn, the traditional understandings of the jinn, and lingering controversies regarding their place and existence. While the article provides details as to the jinn, it fails to make comprehensible this strange phenomenon nor does it offer any insight into the forms of life within which an acknowledgement of the jinn is situated. For example, after glossing the story of the creation of the jinn as it appears in the Qur’an, the correspondent recounts the story of a Ugandan woman who was beaten and then shot upon the suspicion she was a jinn. This story is placed to elicit the maximum amount of shock and moral abhorrence from the modern liberal reader. We are meant to sympathize with the calls, following the death of this woman, for the Ugandan government to “deny the existence of jinn” on the basis of a shared concern for human rights (89). The correspondent explains however, that such a declaration “would be divisive. Although a few Islamic scholars have over the ages denied the existence of jinn, the consensus is that good Muslims should believe in them” (89). In these early paragraphs, then, the Western reader is led to dismiss the jinns in two ways: first as creatures of fantasy, next on the basis of appeals to human rights to prevent further violence on account of these creatures. The article is thus structured to prevent a meaningful engagement with the jinns. The correspondent continues:

In Somalia and Afghanistan clerics matter-of-factly described to your correspondent the range of jinn they had encountered, from the saintly to the demonic; those that can fly, those that crawl, plodding jinn, invisible jinn, gul with vampiric tendencies (from which the English word ghoul is taken), and shape shifters recognizable in human form because their feet are turned backwards. Occasionally the clerics fell into a trance. Afterwards they claimed their apparently bare rooms had filled with jinn seeking favours or release from amulet charms. (89)

This detailed account of the many and varied types of jinn reads vaguely like something out of a Borges story and further places the jinn within the realm of the fantastic. The way in which the interlocutors are described exacerbates this impression: they “matter-of-factly” describe the jinn (89). This word deserves attention for it highlights a gap between the expected manner and subject of description. That is, it is only worth noting that something was expressed “matter-of-factly” if the subject is, in fact, not matter-of-fact at all. The correspondent thus depicts the

clerics as describing jinn in a manner that is noteworthy to him, precisely because it is not noteworthy (but matter-of-fact) to them. A similar sort of distance between the correspondent and the interlocutor appears in his use of the verb: “claim” to describe their “apparently bare rooms...filled with jinn” (89). The weak verb highlights the suspicion and skepticism of the correspondent.

Another passage draws on stereotypical Western images of Arab women, when the correspondent relates that: “sometimes women turn supposed jinn possession to their own advantage and become fortune-tellers. Among the most popular questions asked of such women is: ‘Will my husband take a second wife?’” (90). Thus, the correspondent activates a Western notion of the oppressed Muslim woman who must be liberated from her polygamous husband (and religion). The jinn possession is again dismissed with the adjective “supposed.” Like the earlier anecdote about the Ugandan woman killed because she was suspected of being a jinn, this line confirms Western suspicions of Arab barbarity and (religiously-motivated) violence. The article continues in this vein, dismissing any real engagement with the subject and creating a chasm between the rational (Western) reader and correspondent versus the irrational Muslims who believe in the jinn.

In the context of public discourse such as this which reifies and exacerbates culturalist notions of difference, novels are promised as an appealing and educational alternative. Translated novels promise to depict the perspective of an Other in such a way as to make engagement possible. These publics must thus be understood counter to other forms of public discourse about the Arab world, such as the article in the *Economist* discussed above. Rather, the publics of translated novels are formed around and across notions of difference.

This public forged across difference can be understood in the context of late liberal debates around multiculturalism and the limits of the liberal order. I turn here to Elizabeth Povinelli in her survey of incommensurability discussed in the Introduction, where she explores the demand placed on minority subjects to make themselves legible for the majority, to perform their alterity such that it may be metabolized within a liberal regime of tolerance (Povinelli 2001). The public discourse around novels translated from Arabic suggests that they can serve precisely this kind of function, to make legible for a liberal subject the lifeworld of the Arab world. In this case, the process of translating and publishing these works mediates the Western encounter with the Arab world. As I have attempted to show throughout this dissertation, however, this process of creating understanding, in other words, of translation, is one that operates contingently and incompletely.

The dynamics of how such an encounter happens is the subject of Povinelli’s *Cunning of Recognition* (2002), where she discusses multiculturalism and the struggle for recognition. In that work, she notes that “the generative power of liberal forms of recognition derives not merely from the performative difficulties of recognition but also from something that sociologists and philosophers have called moral sensibility, of the social fact of the feeling of *being obliged*, of finding oneself under an obligation to some thing—or to a complex of things” (4-5). In Povinelli’s discussion, she explores this moral sensibility as it comes in contact with cultural difference, as liberal subjects grapple with competing agendas. Povinelli stages it in these terms: “on what basis does a practice or belief switch from being an instance of cultural difference to being repugnant culture? How does one calibrate difference across cultural distinctions in order to decide what counts as evidence of continuing culture as opposed to what counts as evidence of criminal conduct” (4). Here, Povinelli illustrates the competing forces that contemporary subjects grapple with as they navigate the terrain of a multicultural social world.

In the case of translated literature, the public of that literature is, like the liberal subjects Povinelli discusses, potentially caught between conflicting desires and beliefs. I have relied on Povinelli here as she is helpful in staging the complexity of the situation. She does not dismiss the subjects of liberalism, but rather takes seriously their predicament. She notes that there may be “irresolvable cleavages, not simply between two social groups but within one of them which, prior to encountering radical alterity, was tacitly accepted and experienced as a social collectivity” (5). Here, Warner’s discussion of publics and the kind of stranger sociality that they rely on is relevant. The situation Povinelli explores is one where, in effect, stranger sociality dissolves. The nation ceases to cohere as a collectivity. In Warner’s terms, stranger sociality can no longer be relied upon in the face of radical alterity. Translated literature might provoke, in some readers, the kind of responses Povinelli explores. At the very least, the public of translated literature attempts to be more broadly focused than the public of, for example, some English-language publications (such as *The Economist*). In doing so, the kind of stranger sociality that is usually at the heart of a discursive public ceases to be so reliable. Indeed, the public of a translated novel, like the nation as Povinelli discusses, might be faced with the impasse of cohering around and in spite of an encounter with difference.¹¹¹

Translated literature might be a site of conflict precisely because it is so often framed in pedagogical terms. One of my acquaintances in the publishing world suggested that translated literature would be limited to the margins so long as “the books are sold in the realm of the ought.” This “realm of the ought” suggests that individuals reading translated literature might do so out of a sense of obligation (or, in the case of a university course, an actual obligation) rather than interest or pleasure. Michael Warner, in another essay, discusses the conventions of critical reading through an analysis of “Uncritical Reading” (2004). He notes that although critical reading is uniformly lauded within the academy (and indeed, teaching critical reading skills is a continued justification for English departments), the actual practices of reading, especially those of students, often fall outside the realm of critical reading. He begins by noting, for example, that “students who come to [his] literature classes [...] read in all the ways they aren’t supposed to. They identify with characters. They fall in love with authors,” and so on (Warner 2004: 13). Warner goes on to explore the history (or rather, peculiar lack thereof) of practices of critical reading. My point in bringing it up, however, is to suggest that translated literature, when sold in this realm of an ought, may circulate outside and beyond the kind of reading that individuals engage in for pleasure. Indeed, the pleasure one takes in reading it may be experienced contra the way in which the book is introduced and framed.¹¹²

At the same time, a reader’s desire to take pleasure in reading, to be caught up in one book or twenty, is the hope that fuels the publishing industry. In the introduction, I discussed a scene of literary agents discussing the American literary marketplace. In their presentations, they suggested that Americans want to read a good story. Indeed, they suggested that that is how Americans like to read about the rest of the world, through fictional stories full of exotic details that lend a sense or a flavor of the place to the American reader. This kind of reading, uncritical though it may be, is in some cases the engine of commercial translation, ensuring that new books are produced that can introduce the Arab world to the West.

¹¹¹ Talal Asad’s essay “Reflections on Blasphemy and Secular Criticism” provides another engagement with these concerns. In that essay, Asad explores blasphemy and other constraints on speech in the context of the secular West (2008).

¹¹² As I have discussed elsewhere in the dissertation, the pedagogical presentation of these novels did not occur without controversy or opposition. Indeed, many individuals I spoke with critiqued the way Arabic novels circulated in the West. See chapter five for a discussion of how authors made these criticisms.

Central to the rhetoric around these translated novels is its pedagogical promise. Media depictions of these novels (as discussed throughout the dissertation) frequently frame them in pedagogical terms, as offering a glimpse of what life is like in another part of the world. The public that these novels thus create is not simply a kind of stranger sociality that coheres around shared norms. Rather, in these cases, a public is forged across and around the notion of difference. Linguistic difference (via translation), to be sure, but often a sense of cultural difference was central to the public created when these novels circulated in the West. The pedagogical promise of these novels, however, served to refigure this cultural and linguistic difference in terms of expertise. In doing so, it transforms a difference which could not be easily metabolized without challenging the norms of stranger sociality into one that is legible within the norms of Western public discourse, that is, through the difference of expertise.

It is worth noting that this pedagogical framing is distinct from other novelistic publics. The public of most American novels is not constituted around the idea of reading to learn about a given culture. If there is a pedagogy, it is more frequently framed in terms of learning about the self or the human condition more generally. In the case of novels translated from Arabic, the pedagogy is quite different. It is not universalist but particular. It is not about the human condition so much as a way of life. For example, in chapter five, I discussed the book reviews of two novels, one by an Arab author, the other by an Irish author. Whereas the book by Hisham Matar was explicitly framed as offering a way for American readers to learn about Libya and its cultural and political background, the review of Emma Donoghue's novel made no such suggestions. Rather, it was framed in more general terms as exploring questions of human psychology and suffering.

The pedagogical promise, I would argue, is central to how this cross-cultural public can be forged. There is a kind of bait and switch at work here. The public that these novels thus create is not simply a kind of stranger sociality that coheres around shared norms. Rather, in these cases, a public is forged across and around the notion of difference. The difference in culture (between the West and the Arab world, between daily life in New York and Cairo) is, through a rhetoric of pedagogy, figured as a question of expertise. That is, some readers are novices in contrast to others who are learned, either as 'natives' or as knowledgeable about the culture of the Arab world. In this way, the promise of a pedagogical reading of these books refigured a cultural difference that could not be metabolized into terms that did enable the formation of stranger solidarity. That is, a difference in levels of expertise is completely normative within discursive publics. It is routine that a public will consist of strangers who have differing levels of familiarity and expertise with the subject. By framing novels pedagogically, media discourse enables novels from the Arab world to circulate according to norms of western public discourse.

Rather than posing a deep challenge to the kind of stranger solidarity upon which discursive publics are built, these pedagogical framings enable the public that emerges to be built around a difference that is easily metabolizable within western norms of discursive publics. In this way, they provide a mechanism for novels in translation to be incorporated within the norms of Western discursive publics.

What Do Novels Want?

In the previous two sections, I have addressed the question of who reads these books in two ways, first, by examining how readers were imagined during the process of publishing the book, next by examining the kind of discursive public within which these novels circulated. In this section, I address the issue from a different perspective, that of the novel itself.

The dissertation thus far has explored the production and circulation of these novels as it would any other commodity. Indeed, my argument throughout has, in part, been that novels are a global commodity like many others in the contemporary world. I'd like to turn now, however, to consider the question differently. Rather than speaking about these novels, in this chapter, I want to speak to and with these novels. I do so using an approach inspired by art scholar W.J.T. Mitchell who advocates the study of images from an oblique angle in his book *What Do Pictures Want?* (2005). He notes that those disciplines which attend to the study of images, such as art history, visual studies, and cultural studies among others, have robustly examined the way that images are produced and have asked "what pictures mean and what they do" (28). He turns his attention instead to ask "what pictures want" (28). The 'want' in question here is both desire and lack.

In framing his query in these terms, Mitchell critiques scholars who have investigated images as a strategy of political intervention. Mitchell critiques such scholars for giving images too much sway, too much power. The risk in this approach, he suggests, is that it is "both easy and ineffectual" since "scopic regimes can be overturned repeatedly without any visible effect on either visual or political culture" (33). He advocates an alternate approach, inviting images to speak, viewing them as in a subaltern position, rather than outright attacking them. Such an approach, he argues, "opens up the actual dialectics of power and desire in our relations with pictures" (34)

In this final section of the dissertation, I explore this in the context of the novel. What happens when we let the novel speak? When we ask the novel what it wants? In this case, the novel I am going to query is the classic Sudanese novel *A Season of Migration to the North* by Tayeb Salih, translated by Denys Johnson-Davies (1969). Davies was one of the earliest contemporary translators of Arabic literature. In his memoir, entitled *Memories in Translation*, Johnson-Davies tells the story of translating this novel by Salih (2006). Davies had been friends with Salih for several years and had already translated some short stories and another novel by Salih when he wrote *Season*. Davies recounts that "every few days at my office I would receive a sheaf of papers, a further episode" written out in longhand (2006: 84). Thus, the translation was finished at almost the same time as the novel. The novel was published in translation in 1969 by Heinemann as a part of its African Writers Series.¹¹³

The novel itself, originally published in book form in 1967 (the novel came out in serial form in the Lebanese magazine *Hiwar* the previous year), explores the post-colonial relationship with the former colonizer. The novel draws on Shakespeare's *Othello*, indeed, Sa'eed explicitly compares himself to Shakespeare's character, saying to one of his conquests "I'm like Othello—Arab-African" (33)¹¹⁴. The novel is also a kind of inversion of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In this case, however, it is the Sudanese characters who voyage to the heart of England. In her introduction to the text, Laila Lalami suggests that whereas Conrad's Kurtz "attempts to connect with his emotions and reject his intellect, [Salih's character] Mustafa Sa'eed rids himself of any emotion and clings with all his might to his intellectual powers" (xii). However, like Kurtz, his attempt to do so ends in tragedy. In her discussion of both novels, Gayatri Spivak suggests that "if Conrad's novel is about civility and the savage, Salih's novel obviously shuttles between its displacement: modernity and tradition" (Spivak 2003: 58).

¹¹³ In his *Postcolonial Exotic* Graham Huggins discusses the impact of the Heinemann African Writers Series on both African writing and on its dissemination elsewhere (2001: 51-53).

¹¹⁴ At another moment, however, he disavows this connection, stating: "I am no Othello" (79)

I've chosen to discuss this novel because it is so deeply concerned with the questions at stake in this conclusion and the dissertation more broadly. The novel is structured around a series of dualities, between Self and Other, between these two characters (who, as Geesey (1997) has argued, are oppositional models of postcolonial integration), between East and West, between north and south, between English and Arabic. Gayatri Spivak examines these dualities in her discussion of the novel, suggesting that dualities of masculine and feminine, tradition and modernity, and even colonial and anticolonial are challenged in the work. She suggests that "the rhetoric of Salih's novel gives us a critique of colonialism and anticolonialism as traffic in the reproductive politics of sexual difference (2003: 79).

Orientalist representations and expectations are a central concern of the novel. They have also been central to the subject of this dissertation—the production and circulation of Arabic novels in translation. Many of the authors I spoke with directly challenged the way in which their works were being read in ways they understood as Orientalist. I have discussed in the introduction and here in the conclusion the pedagogical framing for many of these novels. In these chapters I have placed them in the context of liberal theories of multiculturalism and recognition and norms of the Western public sphere. Here however, I explore this same subject through the novel itself.

The novel begins with the unnamed narrator's return to his natal village after earning his doctorate in English poetry in England. As the villagers greet him and celebrate his return, he notices a new face. This stranger, Mustafa Sa'eed, sparks the narrator's curiosity, but Sa'eed is reluctant to talk about himself. However, after drinking one evening Sa'eed recites poetry in English to the narrator's astonishment. After the narrator's persistent inquiries, Sa'eed reluctantly tells him his story.

Sa'eed's story, also told in the first person, is the tale of a young man from Khartoum who, after excelling in the local school run by English missionaries, goes to Cairo, then London to further his studies. In London, he studies economics and lives as a charming womanizer, who thrills his conquests with exotic tales (many of them false) of his life in Africa. Many of these romantic entanglements end badly for the women involved, for example, two women commit suicide after their relationship with Said comes to an end. None, however, is as disastrous as his relationship with Jean Morris. Sa'eed murders Jean Morris, and is sentenced to seven years in Old Bailey. After his sentence has been fulfilled, he returns to the Sudan, settling in the narrator's village. There, he marries a local woman, has two children, and lives a quiet life. The narrator is confused by the double life of Mustafa Sa'eed. This mystery is only compounded when Sa'eed disappears and leaves the narrator as his trustee.

The novel is told in the first-person and moves back and forth in time. Mustafa Sa'eed also tells his story in the first-person. This second narrative is embedded in the text. Even after his disappearance and death (whether by suicide or accident is left ambiguous), his story continues as the narrator recounts his encounters with individuals who knew Sa'eed and, occasionally, through Sa'eed's voice. In this way, although their lives were separated by 30 years (Sa'eed was a generation older than the narrator), their stories unfold apace in the novel.

In the novel, Sa'eed describes the Orientalist preconceptions he finds in the people he meets in England and his response. He describes one of his lovers as "yearn[ing] for tropical climes, cruel suns, purple horizons. In her eyes I was a symbol of all her hankerings" (1969: 27). Here, we see Sa'eed as he is reflected in his lover's gaze. He is transformed into a symbol, made to represent the region of his birth. Another of his lovers is described thus: "It was my world, so novel to her, that attracted her. The smell of burning sandalwood and incense made her dizzy;

she stood for a long time laughing at her image in the mirror as she fondled the ivory necklace I had laced like a noose round her beautiful neck” (30). These lines have a more sinister tone, hinting at what will befall Mustafa Sa’eed and the women who love him. The ivory noose that encircles her neck suggests not only the fate of this woman, but also the tangled and violent history of Africa and England.

As these lines suggest, Sa’eed’s lovers were drawn to him because he was exotic and fulfilled certain fantasies and stereotypes that they had. However, Sa’eed also participates in the construction of these fantasies. For example, at another moment, he describes more explicitly how he played on (and preyed on) the Orientalist fantasies of another of his conquests:

Such a woman—there are many of her type in Europe—knows no fear; they accept life with gaiety and curiosity. And I am a thirsty desert, a wilderness of southern desires. As we drank tea, she asked me about my home. I related to her fabricated stories about deserts of golden sands where non-existent animals called out to one another. I told her that the streets of my country teemed with elephants and lions and that during siesta time crocodiles crawled through it. Half-credulous, half-disbelieving, she listened to me, laughing and closing her eyes, her cheeks reddening. [...] There came a moment when I felt I had been transformed in her eyes into a naked primitive creature, a spear in one hand and arrows in the other, hunting elephants and lions in the jungles. This was fine (33).

In this scene, Sa’eed describes how he self-consciously evokes and elaborates particular stereotypes and fantasies about Africa and the East. He describes himself as transformed in his lover’s eyes into a “naked primitive creature.” Sa’eed himself is transformed to suit his lover’s fantasies. Yet, he is complicit in the project, and indeed consciously cultivates these fantasies, telling stories full of invented creatures. Later in the book, a former friend of his meets the narrator and tells him about Sa’eed, noting that “women fell for him like flies. He [Sa’eed] used to say ‘I’ll liberate Africa with my penis’” (100).¹¹⁵ With these words, Sa’eed evokes and distorts the anti-colonial struggle for independence (and the earlier struggle for colonial domination). In Sa’eed’s case, however, he is liberating the continent not through political struggle, but through his romantic conquests which are no less violent or deadly.¹¹⁶ Indeed, in another passage taken from his trial for the murder of his wife, Sa’eed connects his life and actions with a broader story of colonial violence:

‘Why have you come to my country to lay waste and plunder?’ It was the intruder who said this to the person whose land it was, and the owner of the land bowed his head and said nothing. So let it be with me. In that court I hear the rattle of swords in Carthage and the clatter of the hooves of Allenby’s horses desecrating the ground of Jerusalem. The ships at first sailed down the Nile carrying guns not bread, and the railways were originally set up to transport troops; the schools were started so as to teach us how to say ‘Yes’ in their language. They imported to us the germ of the greatest European violence, as seen on the Somme and at Verdun, the like of which the world has never previously known, the germ of a deadly disease that struck them more than a thousand year ago.

¹¹⁵ In her discussion of this, Spivak suggests that the original Arabic is more nuanced than the English. In the Arabic, “penis” does not appear, only a series of dots, whereas elsewhere in the book, a woman (who for Spivak stands for the modern) is able to say the word “penis.” She suggests, therefore that “the gender division of freedom of speech between tradition and modernity is made rhetorically unclear in the translation” (Spivak 2003: 61).

¹¹⁶ Critics have cautioned from reading too much into these lines, suggesting that reading Sa’eed’s romantic exploits as a colonial vendetta serves to perpetuate the very stereotypes that Salih is troubling in the novel (See Geesey 1997: 129).

Yes, my dear sirs, I came as an invader into your very homes: a drop of the poison you have injected into the veins of history. 'I am no Othello. Othello was a lie. (79).

In these lines, Sa'eed links his deeds with the history of Europe and Africa, with the histories of colonialism, imperialism, and war that have framed the encounter between individuals from these places. He provides an indictment of European investment and invasions in Africa and the Middle East. In doing so, however, he also provides an excuse for his own behavior. He suggests that his actions were somehow inevitable given the historical circumstances. Furthermore, as a courtroom plea, it works by activating in the listeners a sense of guilt over European (and particularly British) colonial interventions in other parts of the world. In doing so, however, Sa'eed performs (again) the stereotype of an Oriental or African subject with little free will. That is, by placing his actions in the larger colonial and historical framework, Sa'eed abdicates individual responsibility for his actions. In so doing, he confirms and conforms to reductionist visions of colonized (or formerly colonized) peoples as weak or unable to govern themselves. Sa'eed here, as in his encounters with English women, seems to be performing a role that has already been outlined for him.

In considering Sa'eed's situation and Salih's literary treatment of it, Homi Bhabha's notes on the "Other Question" are quite relevant (1994). In that piece, he suggests that one of the central features of colonial discourse is its "fixity" (37). Bhabha notes, however, that this fixity is paradoxical in that it seems always to be degenerating. Stereotypes, which Bhabha identifies as the primary discursive strategy of this colonial discourse, are similarly paradoxical in that they are characterized, he argues, by ambivalence. They are characterized by a "knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place,' already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (37). Salih, in this novel, seems to stage this colonial discourse through the character of Mustafa Sa'eed and his encounters in England.

With this beginning then, what happens when we ask the novel what it wants? Following Mitchell (and Lacan), I will consider want here as both desire and lack. What does the novel want?

The novel demands a liberal, cosmopolitan, Western reader. But, at the same time, it repels and shocks that reader. Mustafa Sa'eed's exploits in England stage the western (white) fantasy (but also nightmare) of the white woman coupling with the black man, what Bhabha refers to as the "fear/desire of miscegenation" (1994: 39). This trope is not only present in the Othello tale (a tale which structures Salih's text), but historically was used to justify violence, beatings, and often lynching in the American south. The story thus engages with a theme that has endured in Western life and art for centuries. It does so, however, in a manner that seems designed to provoke a kind of shock, as the Western horror-fantasy about the violence of the black man is, in some ways, confirmed and actualized through the character of Mustafa Sa'eed.

At the same time that the novel demands readers familiar with Western cultural norms and fears, it also demands a Sudanese or Arab reader. The novel provides a complex vision of Muslim life, for example, several characters have a frank debate about sex, sexuality, and the practice of female circumcision. The local concerns and habits of the village inhabitants are raised and we see the variety of debates and discussions that emerge around local issues, such as the distribution of water. In so doing, the flattening stereotypes that frame Sa'eed's experience in London are challenged. Indeed, the depictions of village life are far more nuanced than the overwrought scenes of life in London. Furthermore, in Johnson-Davies' translation, there are many transliterated words that are not glossed or explained. These words demand a reader familiar enough with the Arab world or Arab literature to make sense of these terms. They

situate the novel in the everyday of the village on the Nile, its geography full of wadis and the habits of its inhabitants as they drink arak and the like. In so doing, the novel resists the very stereotypes of the Orient that it engages with. Whereas some of the segments of the book set in the West are over-determined by Western fantasies, fears, and stereotypes, the scenes in the village along the Nile present a more complicated image of life. This bifurcation is central to Mustafa's character, who behaves differently depending on his locale. In England, he inhabits a particular persona which in many ways conforms to the expectations of the individuals he meet. When in the village, he conforms to their norms, marrying a local girl and having children, for example. Unlike the narrator, who attempts to combine the two cultures of his experience, Mustafa separates them completely, he even separates them physically by building a room (with no windows) where he keeps all the traces of his former life hidden. The novel thus goes beyond stereotypes or essentialist visions of particular cultures to depict a nuanced vision of Sudanese life.

The novel wants readers, or better listeners as the story is figured as an oral narrative. This, perhaps, is the most basic desire (and lack) of any novel. Beyond that, this novel seems to want something more than just a reader, it wants, perhaps, a reader who will not read it with these stereotypes and orientalist fantasies that framed Sa'eed's encounters in England. The novel does not want to be a native informant (in Sinan Antoon's formulation as discussed in chapter five). The novel wants to be taken on its own terms, and yet, recognizes that this is impossible. Thus, the novel stages an impossibility. The metaphor of the disease that has spread from Europe to Africa, the disease of colonialism, is woven throughout the work. Perhaps the work wants a way out of this impasse, a way to avoid repeating and restaging history. However, the novel suggests that this is impossible, that we are doomed (or imprisoned) by our history.

The novel ends with the narrator plunging into the Nile, swimming in anger, but contemplating letting his body be taken by the current. The scene is thus an echo of Mustafa Sa'eed's demise as he, too, was drowned in the Nile. In the last pages, the narrator finds himself caught "half-way between north and south," drowning in the current (138). He is "in a state between life and death" (139) and it is not ultimately clear whether he is saved or if he perishes. What we have, however, in the final lines, is a plea for help.

"Though floating on the water, I was not part of it. I thought that if I died at that moment, I would have died as I was born—without any volition of mine. All my life I had not chosen, had not decided. Now I am making a decision. I choose life. I shall live because there are a few people I want to stay with for the longest possible time and because I have duties to discharge. It is not my concern whether or not life has meaning. If I am unable to forgive, then I shall try to forget. I shall live by force and cunning. I moved my feet and arms, violently and with difficulty, until the upper part of my body was above water. Like a comic actor shouting on a stage, I screamed with all my remaining strength, "Help! Help!" (139)

The novel ends with this fraught scene, where the narrator has made a choice but may nevertheless still perish.¹¹⁷ The last lines demand something from the reader. Indeed, they call us to help, even as we are unable to intervene. In these last lines, the book demands that the reader hear the narrator's cry, and in so doing, bear witness to his story. The reader is left uncertain of the narrator's fate.

¹¹⁷ Gayatri Spivak reads this ending as "a rejection of the heavy postcolonial thematic, marked by sexual difference, that is the legacy of *Heart of Darkness*" (2003: 79).

What does the novel want? In these last pages, the novel seems to ask the reader to metaphorically save the narrator by considering his struggle outside the constraints of colonial versus anticolonial, tradition versus modernity, masculine and feminine, East and West. The novel asks of its readers that they choose, with the narrator, to live. It is significant that the narrator wants to live for “a few people” and in order discharge specific duties. That is, he articulates specific and concrete, even local, reasons for his choice, not grand or philosophical reasons about the meaning of life. Here then, Salih seems to suggest that in the face of crushing cultural stereotypes and broad discourses of difference, one must take recourse in the specificity of individual relations and obligations.

In this last chapter in the dissertation, I have examined the figure of the reader in three different ways. First, I explored how readers were imagined and constructed during the process of making the novel in translation. I suggested that the imagined readers have a real effect on the translation and editorial decisions made in the process. I next turned to the question of the discursive public within which these novels circulate. I argued that unlike other public discourse which frames individuals from the Arab world as culturally other and thus outside the bonds of a collective public sociality, framing the novels in pedagogical terms incorporates these novels into Western discursive publics by refiguring cultural difference as a difference of expertise. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I have examined a novel and asked of it some of the questions and issues that emerged in the dissertation.

Conclusion

In the dissertation, I have examined the process by which Arabic novels are published in English translations. By looking at how novels are edited and published, how translations are composed, and how the novels circulate in public sphere discourse, I have illustrated that what is being translated is not simply a text, but also images and histories. I have argued that translations were produced contingently, as compromises were made under the constraints of deadlines. I have examined how novels circulated as global commodities like any other. At the same time, I have explored how these novels were called upon to do particular kinds of pedagogical work, to translate or make legible for the Western reader the world of the novels. I have demonstrated that novels are composite objects that are produced by many hands. They bear the traces of the various individuals who have worked on them.

In these final pages, I will briefly discuss how a handful of themes emerged at different moments in the dissertation. This conclusion is provisional and fragmented, meant less as an ending than a beginning. Indeed, it is in some ways an alternative map of the dissertation, one organized thematically rather than sequentially.

Circulation and Globalization:

My work intervenes in the scholarly literature around circulation and globalization in two central ways. First, I argue that translation is a kind of scale-making project that works to move between local and global spheres. Second, I argue that translation renders certain elements mobile and other immobile, enabling some aspects (of language, culture, experience, and so on) to circulate while creating others as fixed.

Translation as a Scale-making project: Local versus Global

The production and circulation of these novels in translation entailed constant movement across differing scales. I explore how the project of translation require this scalar movement, and in the process, local debates and concerns that might be irrelevant or invisible to the final reader, nonetheless came to shape the final product. For example in chapter three, discussion of an image on the cover of a book became the site for a conversation about what kinds of images could symbolize Egypt. As I discuss in that chapter, what was at stake in this conversation about the Sphinx was Egypt's contested history and the uneasy legacy of Ancient Egypt in contrast to contemporary Egypt. This seemingly local debate structured the design of the cover in ways that might have been invisible to the final reader.

Similarly, in chapter four, where I discuss the work of translation, I focus on the strategy of transliteration. Transliteration lifts the local term and embeds it in the text, thus enabling it to circulate beyond the bounds of the local language and into a new context. In chapter six, I explore the figure of the reader as the reader was imagined throughout the process of translating or publishing the novel. I found that at times this reader was figured in local terms, although making a book accessible to a foreign (more 'global') reader was also a concern. The staff at the press balanced these two as they worked to publish these books. However, there were some who said that the press was too local, too focused on a Cairo audience, in contrast to publishers based in the United States, which were deemed to be more able to attract a broad, global audience. This critique is worth mentioning because it reiterates a classic differential between the West, which is constructed as able to extend beyond its local context, and the Arab world (like other sites

from the non-West), which is constructed as bound by its local context and unable to move beyond it. In doing so, the AUCP was constructed as publishing only locally.

Thus, issues of the local and global emerged throughout the dissertation, in different configurations and terms, and with differing stakes. Another issue related to elements of circulation and globalization that emerged in the dissertation had to do with immobility and mobility.

Mobility and immobility:

Translation is, by its nature, a process of transforming and transferring something. Indeed, the word in English is taken from the Latin “to carry across.” Movement and mobility is thus central to the process. In the chapters of the dissertation, however, I explored not only the elements that moved and were able to circulate, but those that were rendered immobile and stuck. Such moments were central to my thinking about the process as a whole.

In chapter four, the transliterated words can be read as mobile objects, able to circulate, while the rest of the language remains stable and unmoving. However, this mobility is, in some ways, predicated upon a kind of immobility: the transliterated words cleave so tightly to their referents that they can’t be unstuck and must thus be carried as a whole into the new language. Thus, in the chapter I explore how terms that are deeply indexical are the ones that tended to move, in an attempt to carry the indexical context with them.

In chapter five, I examine how Arab authors become tied to their country, called on to act as an ambassador. Although they might move bodily around the globe, they often remained tied or bound to their country of origin, their work introduced and framed as interpreting that nation for a Western reader. In other cases, their personal history (especially of oppression) defined the way they were portrayed in the Western media. In this case, too, although they might be mobile in body, their stories were emplotted along specific narrative trajectories. In chapter six, as I discussed in the section above, the AUCP was at times framed as a local press, thereby fixing its books in Cairo and foreclosing (rhetorically) their circulation or movement in the North American or European markets.

In the earlier chapters that opened the dissertation, some images were rendered mobile and able to circulate beyond Egypt, to represent the nation, even, while others were fixed. In the case of the memes I explore in chapter three, the mobility of a photoshopped image itself generated new images as a meme emerged quickly and spread rapidly.

In these ways, the dissertation has examined how mobility is constructed differentially in the process of translation, as certain ideas, words, and images are able to move, while others remain fixed or tethered to their point of origin.

Materiality:

Materiality has been a central analytical lens through which I have approached this project. I look at the material aspects of books, elements such as cover images, title choices, cover designs, that shape the circulation and reception of the novel. Indeed, I found that even when the text remained the same, these external, extra-textual aspects might change quite radically between editions, as I discuss in chapter three with respect to the various covers of a book by Alaa Al Aswany and in several different examples in chapter six. On the level of language and the text itself, materiality has been central to my analysis. I explore transliteration as a strategy that works materially and in an embodied way. Thus I explore how materiality is central to both the extra-textual and textual elements of the novel in translation.

I also, however, explore how these novels circulate in realms of discourse, how they are written about in book reviews or promoted in materials released by publishing houses. Thus, my analysis joins the material with the discursive, examining the material choices, constraints, and conditions that structure particular kinds of discursive placement.

Temporality

The temporality of translation is never instantaneous or even contemporaneous, but rather is deferred. I discuss this most explicitly in chapters four and six where I examine how translators imagine their future readers. I suggest that translators work with an image of the reader in their mind and their choices are often guided by how they imagine the future reader will interpret or understand a particular word or phrase.

In the earlier chapters of the dissertation, temporality of a different kind is at stake. In those chapters, I focus more on Egypt and how the country could be represented in books that circulated in the West. In those conversations, how to represent the country also became a conversation about the country's past, present, and future. These representations did not only construct the country so that it could travel geographically (to the West) but also assumed or refuted particular histories or pasts.

Representation, Spectacle, and Orientalism:

Representation has been a central concept in the dissertation. Translation itself is a kind of representation. However, in the dissertation I have examined representation outside of the act of translation. The first two chapters centered on questions of representation and how Egypt might be represented. I explore how symbols came to stand for the nation or, conversely, were rejected. In chapter three, I look how a photo was photoshopped and subsequently became a meme. The meme images playfully disrupt conventional representations of the president and other world leaders.

In other chapters, I look at how the novels themselves are represented as they circulate in the West and are covered in book reviews and other media. This discourse around the novels represents and frames them, often in pedagogical terms, as offering to teach something to the reader. This representation of the book constructs fiction in terms of

A related concept to representation is that of spectacle. In chapter five, I explore spectacle in the context of the novel as a commodity. As such, the translated novel is often accompanied by a particular kind of spectacle that links the author and his personal story to the novel, creating a hybrid object of the two. In that chapter, I also examine heritage performances as a particular kind of spectacle that works by commodifying particular cultural moments. At other moments, as in chapter three and my discussion of memes, spectacle emerged outside the context of the commodity. The meme became a kind of spectacle where a particular kind of creativity could proliferate. In chapter two, I consider Hollywood films as spectacles in some ways comparable to the world expositions of the nineteenth century described by Timothy Mitchell (1991). Thus, the concept of spectacle has emerged throughout the dissertation in a variety of configurations.

In the context of these spectacles and representations, it is worth noting that quite often “what” is being represented was somehow “the Arab world” as it would circulate in the West. Said's concept of Orientalism is productive here as a way of thinking about how these representations were constructed and circulated in the West. In his 1979 book, *Orientalism*, as well as later work, Said suggests that Orientalist depictions of the Arab world reflect a European image of its other, and cannot be taken as realistic representations of the region. Although I do

not argue that the contemporary translations being published are merely reflections of the West's Other, I do suggest that as they circulate, they are sometimes framed in reductive terms that gloss over specificities of place or cultural nuance. However, as chapter four suggests, there remains the possibility and the hope that in reading the novel, the reader will be transformed.

Cultural Understanding, Commensurability, and Contingency:

In the dissertation, I suggest that translated novels were often promised as supporting improved cultural understanding or even creating commensurability across cultural differences. I argue that such understanding was produced contingently and under material and temporal constraints. The novels were made through a process that was provisional and contingent and did not necessarily result in any kind of broad or lasting cultural understanding. Indeed, one of the interventions I have made in the previous pages was to demonstrate how these novels were composite objects. Far from being some kind of key or cypher that could create understanding across cultural differences, the novels themselves were unwieldy objects that brought together the work of translators, editors, authors, and publishers, all of whom had concerns and considerations that shaped the final text.

Translation and its limits:

Finally, I end with translation because it has been the primary organizing topic of the dissertation. In each chapter, I discuss how texts, words, images, symbols, and ideas (to name just a few) can be translated. In some cases, I explore the limits to translation, as in chapter four where I discuss how translators took recourse in strategies of transliteration when faced with untranslatable words. Indeed, throughout, translation has been haunted and circumscribed by its limits, by the elements that remain untranslated, by those rendered immobile and prevented from circulating.

But translation was also a creative and generative process, bringing new books into the world and initiating new conversations. Even as I discuss the limits to translation and demonstrate how translations were circumscribed by market logics or pigeonholed by certain political views, they were also productive, establishing new publics and forms of readership, challenging the bounds of a language, and shifting the kinds of discourse around the Arab world that emerged.

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