

AL NOOR

SPRING 17
VOLUME 10
NUMBER 2



THE BOSTON COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATE MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES JOURNAL



Artists in the Political Arena

Poetry in Israel and Palestine | Syria Satire | Christian Music in the Middle East



ISSN 1946-8334

AL NOOR | THE BOSTON COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATE MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES JOURNAL

VOLUME 10 • NUMBER 2 • 2017



≈ MISSION STATEMENT ≈

Al Noor, The Boston College Undergraduate Middle Eastern Studies Journal, aims to: ♦ Facilitate a nonpartisan, unbiased conversation within the Boston College community and beyond about the Middle East. ♦ Provide a medium for students to publish research on the Middle East and Islam. ♦ Promote diverse opinions and present a comprehensive view of the myriad of cultures, histories, and perspectives that comprise the Middle East. ♦ Be considerate of the complexity of the region while pursuing the utmost objectivity.

EDITORIAL STAFF

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Catherine Cole '17
Hagop Toghramadjian '17

MANAGING EDITORS

Anastasia Horn '18
Reed Piercey '19
Tommy Toghramadjian '19

WEBMASTERS

Jaq Pyle '20
Leena Rijhwani '20

LAYOUT EDITOR

Lilah Butler '20

HEAD OF DISTRIBUTION

Kyle Costa '20

EDITORS

McKenna Madden '20
Rebecca Reilly '19
Jess Zottlemeyer '20

Cover Photo Credits: Harshini Karunaratne, 2017.

The information provided by our contributors is not independently verified by *Al Noor*. The materials presented represent the personal opinions of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of *Al Noor* or the Boston College community.

The contents of this journal were developed under a grant from the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (UISFL) Program, U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and should not be assumed as an endorsement by the Federal Government of the United States.

Al Noor, The Boston College Middle Eastern Studies Journal,
Volume 10, Issue 2, Spring 2017

Copyright © 2017 by Trustees of Boston College

Printing: Universal Wilde, Westwood, MA

Funding for this publication is provided by the Institute for Liberal Arts at Boston College.

ADVISORY BOARD

Kathleen Bailey, *adjunct associate professor of political science and associate director of the Islamic Civilization and Societies Program*

Ali Banuazizi, *professor of political science and director of the Islamic Civilization and Societies Program*

Nasser Behnegar, *associate professor of political science*

Sheila Blair, *Norma Jean Calderwood co-chair of Islamic and Asian art*

Jonathan Bloom, *Norma Jean Calderwood co-chair of Islamic and Asian art*

David DiPasquale, *professor in political science and Islamic Civilization and Societies*

Ann Lucas, *assistant professor of ethnomusicology*

James Morris, *professor of theology*

Dana Sajdi, *assistant professor of history*

Franck Salameh, *assistant professor of Near Eastern studies*

THANKS

Special thanks to those who helped to make this publication possible:

David Quigley, *provost and dean of faculties*

Ben Birnbaum, *editor of Boston College Magazine and special assistant to the president of the University*

Mary Crane, *Thomas F. Rattigan professor of English and director of the Institute for Liberal Arts*

Peter Marino, *director of finance and administration for the Center for Centers*

Susan Dunn, *fiscal and operations administrator for the Center for Centers*

Ana Berreondo, *fiscal and events assistant for the Center for Centers*

Visit us online at www.bcalnoor.org.

Mailing address: 10 Stone Avenue, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We're delighted to introduce a special issue of *Al Noor*, one dedicated to the art and artists of the Middle East. The poets, producers, and performers highlighted in these pages are widely lauded for their aesthetic achievements. The essays and interviews published here, however, approach their art from a different angle. Our contributors ask: how is the art of the Middle East connected to the region's politics? In what ways does this art reflect political events? In what ways does it drive political events?

We invite you to keep these questions in mind while you explore this issue. As you read, you will discover the stories of dissident satirists in Syria, musical bridge-builders in Iraq, and poetic attempts to find humanity in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. You will learn that art in the Middle East is a way of channeling both outrage and outreach. These stories are not just about music or photography—they are about the ways we organize our societies and react to political and cultural upheaval.

In "Voice of Devotion," the *Al Noor* staff interviews Nizar Fares, a star Lebanese singer, expert musicologist, and leader of refugee relief initiatives in Iraq and Turkey. As Dr. Fares guides us through his experiences as a musician and a humanitarian, he touches on the trials of Christians in the Middle East, their contributions to the region's music, and their suffering at the hands of the Islamic State.

In "Poetic Justice," Muriel Leung analyzes the work and career of one of Palestine's most beloved poets, Mahmoud Darwish. In doing so, Leung traces the way he used art both to humanize Israelis and to decry their treatment of Arabs, delving into a key selection of poems that outline Darwish's vision of a return to an "Andalusian" form of coexistence.

In "Pehlواني," Harshini Karunaratne offers us the chance to experience the drama and excitement of traditional Pakistani wrestling in Dubai. Her lens captures the spirit of spontaneous community that has developed around

this sport, bringing us ringside with the wrestlers in the dusty market where they compete.

In "Hanging By A Thread," previous contributor A.J. Naddaff returns to *Al Noor* with an interview of Rafat Alzakout, creator of the Syrian video series "Top Goon." Naddaff's questions and Alzakout's answers illuminate satire's potential to awaken the conscience, frighten those in power, and provide a war-stricken nation with an outlet for its people's frustrations.

In "Instruments of Exchange," Cameron Verbeke traces the impact of Middle Eastern music on the music of the West, from the preservation of ancient music theory techniques to the Middle Eastern influences in modern rock 'n roll, hip hop and heavy metal.

But this issue of *Al Noor* is not solely about art. To round out the journal, Frances Fitzgerald presents "The Empire Strikes Back," a lucid and striking essay about the way Turkish politicians appropriate history, changing their interpretation of it to fit their shifting goals and alliances.

As a final note, this issue of *Al Noor* marks the end of our stint as editors-in-chief, and we'd like to take this opportunity to thank our dedicated staff and the Institute for Liberal Arts at Boston College, without whom none of this would be possible. While we're sad to leave after spending a combined eight years working for *Al Noor*, we are confident that the journal will flourish in the able hands of Thomas Toghramadjian next fall.

As always, please visit our website, www.bcalnoor.org, where you can view a complete archive of our past content. We also hope you visit our Facebook page (*Al Noor Middle Eastern Studies Journal*), and send questions and suggestions to eic@alnoorjournal.org.

Catherine Cole '17
Hagop Toghramadjian '17
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF



TABLE OF CONTENTS

6 Voice of Devotion: The Connection Between Ministry and Music

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. NIZAR FARES

by the Al Noor Staff

12 Poetic Justice

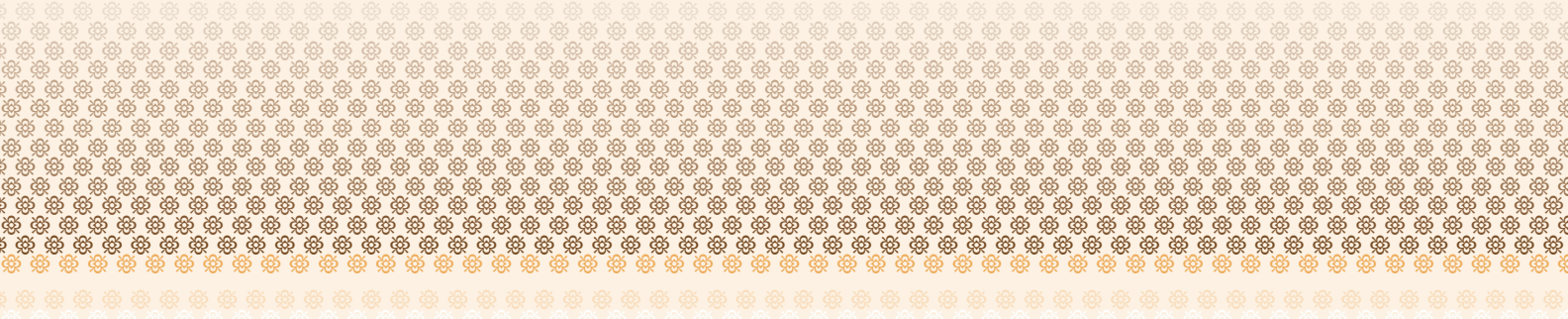
MAHMOUD DARWISH'S VISION OF PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI
COEXISTENCE IN THE HOLY LAND

by Muriel Leung

22 Pehlwani

A PHOTO ESSAY

by Harshini Karunaratne





30 The Empire Strikes Back

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN CONTEMPORARY TURKISH POLITICAL
DISCOURSE

by Frances Fitzgerald

36 Hanging By A Thread: Dissident Puppeteers in Assad's Syria

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAFAT ALZAKOUT

by A.J. Naddaff

42 Instruments of Exchange

THE IMPACT OF THE MIDDLE EAST ON WESTERN MUSIC

by Cameron Joseph Verbeke



Voice of Devotion: The Connection Between Ministry and Music

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. NIZAR FARES

The Al Noor Staff

N

izar Fares can scarcely walk the streets of his native Beirut, Lebanon, without being approached and embraced by well-wishers. After all, the popular singer boasts almost 70,000 Facebook followers, and is a past winner of *Studio El-Fan*, the prestigious Lebanese equivalent of *The Voice*. But Fares is beloved for more than just the usual flashy pop hits and music videos. Unlike some of his fellow stars, Fares is best known for his religious songs; for most of his career, he has devoted his voice exclusively to Christian music. He has done so since 1999, when he experienced a life-changing awakening of faith while imprisoned by Libyan dictator Muammar al-Gadhafi. Fares' faith informs more than just his music. He regularly travels to the Middle East, directly distributing food, clothing, medicine, and other supplies to the neediest refugees of the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. When he's not tending to the displaced directly, he's on tour to raise

money for them, maintaining an intensive performance schedule that takes him to Australia, Canada, Europe, and around the United States.

In the midst of these efforts, Fares has also managed to pursue a successful academic career, earning a PhD in musicology from Holy Spirit University in Kaslik, Lebanon. He immigrated to the United States in 2013, and after brief stints at Tufts and William and Mary, he has served for three semesters as director of Astaza, Boston College's Middle Eastern music ensemble.

Al Noor sat down with Dr. Fares this spring, enjoying a wide-ranging conversation that touched on music, the Middle Eastern refugee crisis, and the status of Christians in the region.

A Discussion with Nizar Fares

Describe, if you can, the contributions and role of Christians in the music of the Middle East.

Nizar Fares: Early Christian religious music impacted early Arabic music, and the other way around as well. Some of the most well-known melodies in Arabic music are based on Christian songs. This makes sense—after all, the birthplace of, Christian music started in our countries, in our area. The first Christian music dates to 4th century and was composed by St. Ephraim of Syria. Until today, we sing those songs in our masses, especially in the Maronite masses and in the Syrian Catholic and Syrian Orthodox ones. And if you go to the Melkite and the Greek Orthodox Church, you hear a lot of Byzantine music. The Byzantines used the same scales that were used in classical Arabic music.

The only difference between Byzantine and classical Arabic scales is the progression of the scale itself, so how you sing the progression when you take a scale and you do an improvisation,

or you chant the text of the scripture. How you do it in the Byzantine way is a bit different from the Arabic music, but the scale itself is the same.

You should know that Arabic music is a mix of many cultures. I mean, the *futuhat al-Islamiyya*, the Islamic conquests, conquered a lot of countries and they adopted their music and they annexed it all. They incorporated many influences into Arabic music. So you can see easily some old Arabic tunes that are similar to some Christian church music.

What about the popular music of today?

Nizar Fares: Popular music and Christian religious music have always been very intertwined. In the fourth century, for instance, Saint Ephraim knew that people were away from the Church, they weren't engaged. So he took a lot of the best-known folk music and he applied to church. So this is why, for example, I could sing for you a tune, which we sing every Sunday in the Maronite church. It's only three or four notes, which means that it is very archaic, very old. And, if you apply it a rhythm, a dancing rhythm, you will dance dabka on it. It shows you that it is essentially a form of folk music applied into the church. So there's a lot of music taken from pop music into the church and vice-versa.

Are there individual figures who help exemplify Christians' contributions?

Nizar Fares: Individual Christians have had a major impact on modern Arabic music. Nowadays you don't hear about it, but they did. Especially during the Renaissance of Middle Eastern music, which started around 1871. Christians contributed to this Renaissance with more than just their music. We also had a lot of poets who were fundamental to the revival, the *nahda*, of Arabic literature, from Nasif al Yaziji to Boutrous al-Bustani, from Mikha'il

“[Growing up in Lebanon] gave me a bigger responsibility...to accept other ideas, religions, thoughts, and worldviews.”

Na'ima, to Khalil Gibran. The Christians of the 19th century started seeing the Arabic language from a different angle.

It's the same with regard to music. Some of these contributions are hidden; for example, in 1942 the Christian oud player Farid Ghoussum composed a song for Egyptian diva Umm Kulthum, "Iftha Wadda Habibi." It was aired once, but because he was Christian it was stopped from being aired again. Until now we can't find any copies of this song.



Nizar Fares is a well-known Lebanese singer. Nizar Fares, 2017.

But the musical contributions of Christians are often very much out in the open. You also have a lot of Christians who were major, very well-known singers. For example, we can talk about Fairouz, we can talk about Wadi al-Safi, who passed away only five years ago. I had a personal relationship with him, and he gave me many of his compositions. I'm actually working on one right now. He had a tremendous impact on the Arabic community, not only in Lebanon but all over the Middle East. And the list could go on. As Christians, we had a big impact on Arabic music.

Jewish people also had an important impact on Arabic music. We cannot, for example, mention Arabic cinema without mentioning Leila Mourad and her family. Haga Ghariba, a song we're playing now with the BC ensemble, was composed by her brother, and the Mourads are known as a Jewish family. So there is a lot of impact from minorities on Arabic music.

How did growing up in Lebanon shape you and your worldview?

Nizar Fares: As a matter of identity, I have a very diversified identity within my family. I mean, we have a lot of religions in our family. You know, my grandmother is from one religion, my grandfather is from another religion, and my mom is another religion, so I became this mixture. But also it added on

my identity and it gave me a bigger responsibility. A bigger degree of acceptance, you know, to accept other ideas and other religions and other thoughts and worldviews. We are a very diversified country in Lebanon, which is also reflected in its nature. Lebanon has 26 microclimates, for example, and it is such a small country that all these climates coexist side by side. This affects the spirit of the people. People are joyful. They are very open-minded, very accepting, and very tolerating.

Why did you move to the United States of America? In what ways do you think being an immigrant has changed you?

Nizar Fares: Well, I'm still the same, in Lebanon or elsewhere. I'm the same person but with more exposure. Here, you can choose where to live and how to live your life. I can choose how to raise my kids. I can take them to church, I can surround them with church people, and I can shape them. I mean, life can shape them in the end, but I can help. And you can also leave them and they will grow as society would, but I think I have a responsibility as a father. If I don't teach my kids, somebody else will teach them. They are a sponge and they receive everything. So, since I have that choice, I'm happy to be in a place where I can conduct my life as I want.

How do you view the long-term prospects for Christians in the Middle East?

Nizar Fares: Oh, it's getting worse. And it's going to get worse. I'm praying that God will protect these people and that there is a divine plan. God loves His people, His refugees. So I pray that it's all part of the Master's plan. And at the end, I think life for the Christian faith has been all the time like this since Christ, so it's nothing new. We were always persecuted through ages. When people die for their faith, they will be with the Lord. That's our faith. There is always going to be suffering and persecution for our faith, and we have accepted this as part of our dwelling in this earthly life.

I just pray that in the coming days, God has mercy on our families. That is my prayer. I know a lot of families who have suffered from atrocities in Aleppo, and there's unspeakable stories about what they've been through. There are a lot of things that are happening that nobody is talking about. For example, on the Turkish border, you have one of the biggest organ trafficking corridors in the world. I have friends who were just injured, like a simple injury, and they went to the hospital and ended up dead. Afterwards, they bring them to their families, and they're empty, no organs. They endured

the worst, these people, especially in Syria. I don't know if I answered your question, but I don't see a green future for Christians in the Middle East.

What was your vision when you started "Nizar Fares Global Ministries?"

Nizar Fares: My vision is to help all the people who are suffering from fighting in the Middle East. The first, most important thing is that I'm not alone. People are helping financially from the U.S. I'm going back to the Middle East four times a year to help the refugees, and I couldn't do it by myself. In the places where I go, there are no other non-profits working. I go to a lot of Christian camps, a lot of Muslim camps, and we help with a lot of food supplies and health supplies. Sometimes we also just encourage them and pray with them.

I do concerts too. Because I have this big ministry with kids, all the kids in these camps know my songs. They are social songs. They teach them how to take care of themselves, hygiene, how to brush their teeth. The refugees are coming from faraway villages where there is no civilization. It is very minimal. So, you need to teach the kids how to take care of themselves, especially since some of the kids are without their parents. Their parents died.

Fares' album "Masafatou Qalben" deals with challenging themes. Nizar Fares.



I have a special place in my heart for the single moms there because I was raised by a single mom. During the war, Lebanon lost tens of thousands of men, so these are tens of thousands of families with widows. I have a heart for these kids. If I had the chance to live with my mom and someone could have provided her with help, I would have had a better childhood. I want to give the kids what I was deprived of.

Describe your most recent trip to Iraq. What was it like day to day? Where did you travel and what was your schedule?

Nizar Fares: My last trip to Iraq was at the end of November and beginning of December 2016. I was there for ten days. I visited Erbil

“People were so happy that Mosul was freed from ISIS, but when they went back to check their homes, they saw there’s no way they could come back for the next year or even two years. Because there’s no infrastructure, electricity, water—nothing.”

and Dohuk, which are the northern parts, under the authority of the Kurds. I was originally invited to do a big concert for “Christ Day.” But when they freed Mosul from ISIS, it started to have a more national theme. So it was called *Maharajan al Awda*, which means Festival of the Return. I went there and I sang and I ended the festival with many choirs and songs and dances. And I was blessed by different things. I visited many, many, camps, many refugee camps. I saw a lot of families. I went to three schools. I did beautiful kids’ outreach with grades one up until six. And we distributed a lot of sports shoes and sportswear to high schoolers.

That was during the day. During the night, I was doing concerts and home gatherings. Because not all people have churches. People who are far away from the city and villages, they just gather in homes or in camps. So we visited also a lot of camps. Some people, because they want to go back to their village, they are not in a camp. They are outside a camp somewhere in the wilderness, they have tents. What they are doing is, they do not want to be subscribed for the U.N., because everybody who is subscribed by the U.N. will have to leave Iraq at some point. These people want to go back to their homeland, so they intend to live outside the camp. We visit these people because nobody takes care of them. Because they are not on the official lists, you know? They are not affiliated with anybody.

We go especially to these camps, and we pray with them, we encourage them, we give gifts, clothes, whatever the need is. We intend to do it on a personal basis. So we arrive on site with our money and we buy on the spot. We don’t just send money, so we can watch everything: how it is spent, with the right people and so on. This is the work.

If you could share anything with our readers about the situation in Iraq, what would you tell them?

Nizar Fares: The worst thing happening in Iraq right now is something you might not hear in the media. People were so happy that Mosul was freed from ISIS, but when they went back to check their homes, they saw there’s no way they could come back for the next year or even two years. Because there’s no infrastructure, no electricity, no running water. no septic system—nothing. And all the houses are burned or looted. So they will be living in their tents and pre-fabricated houses in refugee camps for a long time.

The Iraqis are shocked and devastated. Because they’re realizing how hard it’s going to be to go home. So for me, this was psychologically my most challenging trip, because I saw how people are suffering.

How does your work give you hope?

Nizar Fares: On my most recent trip to Iraq, I spent my last three days in Dohuk, a two hour drive from Erbil. I had met one of the priests there before ISIS arrived. He is Syriac Catholic. He built a church for the refugees in a big shipping container, and it can hold something like 700 people. I arrived in the middle of the night, and we spent hours catching up. At 3 o’clock in the morning he asked, “why don’t you play a concert in our church too?” So I agreed, and the next day when I gave the concert, the church was packed. It was just beautiful. That concert for me was much better than the concert that had been planned far in advance, which was on Iraqi national TV and had 6,000 people in attendance. But the impromptu concert in the container in Dohuk was more prayerful for me. It was like God designed it. ♦

Poetic Justice

MAHMOUD DARWISH'S VISION OF
PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI COEXISTENCE
IN THE HOLY LAND

Muriel Leung

Muriel Leung is an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania set to graduate in 2019. A physics major, she is also deeply interested in poetry and writing. She has worked at the Kelly Writer's House and the New York City's Poets House, and writes for Penn's student-run IMPACT Magazine dedicated to social justice.

T

o many Palestinians and members of the Arab diaspora around the world, the poet Mahmoud Darwish (March 13, 1942-August 9, 2000) was a larger-than-life icon, a literary rock star who read his work to football stadiums filled with tens of thousands of people.^{1,2} Darwish's works, which focused on themes of exile and protest, reflected and shaped the development of Palestinian identity after the 1948 Palestine War. One of Darwish's most popular poems, "Identity Card," is a cry of defiance written soon after that war's end. The poem eventually spread throughout Palestine and even the larger Arab diaspora as a protest anthem.³ Yet Darwish was a diplomat as well as a protester—his work sought not only to empower Palestinians, but also to "reach out to the other side" and to empathize with Israelis in the hope that they might empathize in return. Darwish arranged meetings between Palestinian and Israeli intellectuals, and published

essays on their discussions.⁴ He was optimistic that, through mutual understanding, the two sides could eventually reconcile. “I do not despair,” he explained to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. “I am patient and am waiting for a profound revolution in the consciousness of the Israelis. The Arabs are ready to accept a strong Israel...all it has to do is open the gates of its fortress and make peace.”⁵

In his poetry, Darwish often alluded to Andalus, a region in the southern parts of Spain and Portugal where Muslims, Jews, and Christians coexisted for centuries during medieval times. Classical Arab poets wrote of Andalus as a symbol of lost Paradise, and Darwish’s contemporary poets often used Andalus as a metaphor for Palestine—another lost paradise of the past. “That’s not my view,” Darwish said when asked about the meaning of Andalus in his own poetry. “I have always said: Andalus may return.” Palestine was and could be again “a meeting place of all strangers in the project of constructing human culture.”⁶

This essay will explore the evolving ways in which Darwish’s poetry sought to metaphorically return to Andalus, or to create a vision for Palestinian-Israeli coexistence in Palestine. The first section provides context by exploring Darwish’s formative years. It will discuss the Palestinian literary tradition and the environment he was born into, as well as the personal influences on his writing. The section will focus on how his early immersion in Hebrew literature and his close relationships with Jewish Israelis allowed him to empathize with their own story of exile. The second section will analyze the portrayals—both empathic and critical—of Israeli characters in his poems. The third section shows how his later poetry evolved from a criticism of the conflict to a narrative that enabled both peoples to ‘call Palestine home. This essay argues that Darwish’s poetry was, in part, a quest to create a story of a Palestinian Andalus where both Jews and Arabs could peacefully, if not perfectly, coexist. It draws directly upon Darwish’s poetry, previous scholarly

discourses on his writings and life, news articles, and interviews with the poet. It must be noted that any analysis of his poems is based entirely on translation from the Arabic. Although multiple translations of his poetry have been consulted to ensure a well-rounded sense of his works, some of the meaning and power has inevitably been lost in translation.

Darwish in Context

Mahmoud Darwish was born on March 13, 1942 in the Palestinian village of Al-Birwa in Galilee. During the 1948 Palestine War, his family fled to Lebanon only to secretly return the next year. They were, too late, however, to be included in the Israeli census of Arabs, and were thus denied Israeli citizenship. The Darwish family also found that their village had been razed and repopulated with Israeli immigrants.⁷

⁸ Living as a refugee in his own homeland had a profound effect on Darwish, as it did on hundreds of thousands of other displaced Palestinians, leaving a “wound” he would never forget.⁹

Darwish’s pain drove him early on into both poetic and political action. At nineteen, he published his first collection of poems, *Wingless Birds*, which voiced the anguish and anger of exile. He also became



Mahmoud Darwish reciting his poetry. Mahmoud Darwish Foundation.

involved in the Israeli Communist party Rakah, one of the few political parties that allowed Arab membership, and became the editor of its newspaper.¹⁰

Darwish was born into a literary tradition in which poetry and politics were not exclusive. Arab cultures have a long tradition of the “poet-warrior,” dating to classical times when some of the most famous poets were or sought to be tribe rulers.¹¹ Arab-Palestinian poets of the generation before Darwish, including one of Darwish’s inspirations Abdulrahmin Mahmoud, had vigorously protested British colonial oppression through their work and political activism.¹² Yet intellectuals of Darwish’s generation, most notably the novelist Emile Habibe, also sought to work alongside Israeli activists.¹³ Thus, Darwish was brought up in an environment that empowered poets to strive for both justice and peace.

Darwish’s upbringing also made him sensitive to Jewish culture, language, and to the plight of Jews as exiles through history. He came of age amidst a “new wave” of Palestinian poets for whom Hebrew was a second language, and who had been schooled in Hebrew literature, history, and theology. Furthermore, after 1948, a mutual trade embargo existed between Israel and Arab nations, and the Israeli government imposed a two-decade ban on Arab-owned presses and independent Arab publications. As a result, for Palestinians growing up in Israel during this period, Hebrew became, by necessity, their means of engaging with the outside world of poetry and literature.¹⁴ Darwish was first exposed to many of his favorite poets through their Hebrew translations.

Darwish was drawn to the Hebrew biblical narrative and its symbols and frequently incorporated them into his work. In the Jewish narrative of exile, he saw a parallel with the Palestinian struggle; he recognized that Jews and Arabs were both history’s victims of sorts, and were each merely trying to claim a physical and historical space for themselves. As he reflected in an interview with Israeli poet and critic Helit Yushurun, “Our tragedy is that we are all witnesses to a historical turning point, a new order in history and geography. That’s why everyone is making claims.”¹⁵ Through recognizing a mutual

struggle, he “learned forgiveness. Because in the end we are all exiles. The occupier and myself — both of us suffer from exile. He is an exile in me and I am the victim of his exile. All of us on this beautiful planet Earth, we are all neighbors, we are all exiles, we are all walking in the same human fate, and what unites us is the need to tell the story of this exile.”¹⁶ He also felt that Jewish culture was an integral part of his identity. As he saw it, “I am a son of all the cultures that have passed through the land—the Greek, the Roman, the Persian, the Jewish, the Ottoman. A presence that exists at the very core of my language.”¹⁷

This does not mean that Darwish refrained from competing with Israeli writers to express greater suffering or love for Palestine.¹⁸ But this competition was not rooted in disrespect or disregard for Jewish history; rather, he felt that “because of... political tension—which says that if Israel is here the Palestinians must be absent, and that if the Palestinians are here then Israel must be absent—we haven’t accepted the fact that we are the products of similar conditions and have competed with each other over who is the greater victim.”¹⁹ He empathized with Jewish immigrants coming to Israel even as he felt that some of them wanted to erase his identity.

Darwish’s empathy for Israeli Jews also stemmed from his personal relations with them. “I will continue to humanize even the enemy,” he stated in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. “The first teacher who taught me Hebrew was a Jew. The first love affair in my life was with a Jewish girl. The first judge who sent me to prison was a Jewish woman. So from the beginning, I didn’t see Jews as devils or angels but as human beings.”²⁰

Human Scale: Writing Israeli Characters

Reflecting his empathy for the Jewish exile, Darwish’s poems portrayed sympathetic—if flawed—Israeli characters. In one of his more famous poems, “A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies,” Mahmoud, a stand-in for the poet, converses with an Israeli soldier. On one hand, the soldier is a sympathetic character who “dreams of white lilies / an olive branch, / her breasts in evening blossom.” Like any romantic man might, he

dreams about his mother, lovers, and—as symbolized by the olive branch—of peace. Yet the portrayal is also charged with criticism. The white lilies are nonnative to Palestine, just like the soldier. As the poem develops, it becomes clear that this character loves Palestine in a conceptual way, and that his heart is as removed from it as the white lilies on his mind:

Homeland for him, he tells me, is to drink my
mother's coffee,
to return at nightfall.
I asked him: and the land?
I don't know it, he said.
I don't feel it in my flesh and blood,
as they say in the poems.
Suddenly I saw it
as one sees a grocery store, a street, newspapers.
I asked him, do you love it?
My love is a picnic, he said,
a glass of wine, a love affair.
—Would you die for it?
—No!
All my attachment to the land is no more than a story
or a fiery speech!
They taught me to love it, but I never felt it in my
heart.
I never knew its roots and branches, or the scent of its
grass.
- And what about its love? Did it burn like suns and
desire?
He looked straight at me and said: I love it with my
gun.²¹

The poem implies that everything the soldier does *not* feel for the land is what burns in the heart of the poem's character Mahmoud (both the character and the poet himself). Thus, the reader is meant to both relate to the soldier's simple, almost childish conception of Palestine—picnics and his mother's coffee—and to feel exasperation that his feelings

do not compare to the profound love experienced by the fictional and real Mahmoud. Darwish also portrays the soldier's complex feelings towards killing:

How many did you kill?
—It's impossible to tell. I only got one medal.
Pained, I asked him to tell me about one of the dead.
He shifted in his seat, fiddled with the folded
newspaper,
then said, as if breaking into song:
He collapsed like a tent on stones, embracing
shattered planets.
His high forehead was crowned with blood. His chest
was empty of medals.
He was not a well-trained fighter, but seemed instead
to be a peasant, a
worker or a peddler.
Like a tent he collapsed and died, his arms stretched
out like dry creek-beds.
When I searched his pockets for a name, I found two
photographs, one of his
wife, the other of his daughter.
Did you feel sad? I asked.
Cutting me off, he said, Mahmoud, my friend,
sadness is a white bird that does not come near a
battlefield.
Soldiers commit a sin when they feel sad.
I was there like a machine spitting hellfire and death,
turning space into a black bird.²²

The soldier then goes on to describe his first love and faraway cities. By the end, the audience finds the soldier both sympathetic and repulsive. He seems to have no choice but to block sadness from his mind while killing. He also shows discomfort when Mahmoud asks him to describe the murder, and remembers tender details about his victim, including the photographs of his wife and daughter in his pockets. Yet the soldier's capacity for empathy only goes only so far; when asked to quantify the

“Living as a refugee in his own homeland had a profound effect on Darwish, as it did on hundreds of thousands of other displaced Palestinians, leaving a ‘wound’ he would never forget.”

death he has caused, he thinks in terms of medals. If the soldier is a metaphor for Israel, Darwish is challenging Israel’s unequivocal claim to the Holy Land by questioning the nature of their love for it, and by calling out the brutalities committed in their effort to secure it. Yet he brings the conflict down to the scale of a friendly conversation, showing that the greater Palestinian-Israeli conflict is comprised of individuals who simply want better lives for themselves and those they love. In this view, empathy between the two groups is difficult, but possible.

In addition to friendship across lines, Darwish also looks at the conflict from the perspective of romantic love. Rita, a pseudonym for a past Israeli lover of his, recurs frequently in his poetry. Poems such as “Rita and the Rifle” and “Rita’s Winter,” echo his sentiment that Jews and Arabs in Palestine are both victims of history and of a vicious cycle of exile, and that the two groups might coexist without these negative forces. In “Rita and the Rifle,” for example, Mahmoud mourns a touching and passionate romance brought to an end by “the rifle,” which symbolizes the conflict between the lovers’ peoples.²³ “Rita’s Winter,” meanwhile, is a heartbreaking dialogue that takes places between Rita and Mahmoud shortly before she leaves him. Early in

the poem, Rita expresses that the love between them is something deeper and more powerful than the forces of conflict that divide their respective sides. Rita says:

And yours are the stags, if you want, the stags and the plains

and yours are the songs, if you want, the songs and the astonishment

I was born to love you

a mare who makes a forest dance, and carves your unknown in corals,

I was born a woman to her man,

...

I was born to love you,

I left my mother in the ancient psalms cursing your people and the world

I found the city guards feeding your love to the fire

And I was born to love you.²⁴

Rita essentially declares that she was born to love him before even her people. She is willing to abandon her mother and her mother’s hatred for Palestinians,

The tomb of Mahmoud Darwish in Ramallah, Palestine. Wikimedia Commons 2011.



“Darwish did not want to define being Palestinian in an ethnic or other inherently exclusive manner—rather, he discussed it in terms of a mixture of different peoples and cultures.”

and to call the land (“the stags and the plains”) his if only they can be together. But she later despairs:

There is no land for two bodies in one, no exile for exile

in these small rooms, and exit is entry:

We sing between two chasms in vain...we should depart and clarify the path

yet I can't and you can't

...

Take me to a faraway land

Take me to the faraway land, Rita sobbed, this winter is long...

And she broke the ceramic of the day against the iron window-pain

...

then she went barefoot to the unknown, and departure reached me.

In this poem, the two lovers' hearts have the capacity for coexistence. But they are fighting against historical and political forces that drive their people apart. Here, Darwish once again puts the tragedy of Israeli-Palestinian tensions on a human scale and depicts it through the interactions of two complex and highly relatable characters.

A Return to Andalus: Envisioning Coexistence

Given his empathetic portrayals of both Israelis and Palestinians, what future did Darwish envision for them? How could he, as a poet, create a narrative they could both share? The members of the Jewish diaspora

migrating to Israel based their claim to the land on the concept of Zionism, which declared the land a homeland for ethnic Jews and thus “was instrumental in positioning Palestinians as indisputable Others.”²⁵

As a mature poet, Darwish decided to challenge the Zionist story using language as divine as the Bible's. In a poetics essay published in 1999, Darwish voices his realization that “the Other [Israel] has a Creation narrative that has become one of the sources of knowledge for humankind: the Bible. Given this, how could we have written a less mythic narrative?” In this same essay, Darwish declared a mission to write a narrative for Palestinians through his later poetry. But Darwish did not want to define being Palestinian in an ethnic or other inherently exclusive manner—rather, he discussed it in terms of a mixture of different peoples and cultures:

“I am on a quest for my identity according to the laws of crossbreeding, of the shock and cohabitation of all identities. I want this hymn to take root in the open space of history. I don't know where this quest will lead me, but I know that its origin is the multiplicity of cultural origins. In such a project, poetry comes up against cultural racism and rejects any culture based on purity of blood. Aren't we the children of a region that from time immemorial has been the theatre of interactions, both positive and negative?”²⁶

Poems from his later collections, especially *Ara Ma Urid* (I See What I Wish To See, 1990) and *Ahada-'ashara Kawkaban* (Eleven Planets, 1992), contain many epic-style poems that incorporate Christian, Jewish, and Muslim parables with references to Canaan and Andalus.²⁷

Taking pride in every Palestinian being a “son of all the

cultures that have passed through the land,” Darwish believed that Palestinians could again welcome Jews, this time as the state of Israel, into their homeland.²⁸ Several of these poems address “strangers” who are cautiously welcomed into the land of the speaker. In *A Canaanite Stone at the Dead Sea*, the speaker states:

Stranger, hang your weapons in our palm tree
and let me plant my wheat in Canaan’s sacred soul.
Take wine from my jars.
Take a page from the book of my gods.
Take a portion of my meal,
take the gazelle from the traps of our shepherd’s songs.
Take the Canaanite woman’s prayers
at the feast of her grapes.
Take our methods of irrigation, take our architecture.
Lay a single brick down and build up a tower of doves
Go ahead, be one of us, if that’s what you want.
Be a neighbor to our wheat fields.
Stranger, take the stars of our alphabet from us
And together we’ll write heaven’s message
to man’s fear of nature and man’s fear of
mankind itself.
Leave Jericho under her palm tree
but don’t steal my dream, don’t steal
the milk of my woman’s breast
or the ant food dropped in the
crack’s in the marble!²⁹

This unnamed narrator is willing to accept the “stranger” into his land so long as this stranger does not destroy or steal what its natives have. Note however, the native is welcoming the stranger into his land and his people’s ways. Darwish still sees Palestinians as having the primary right to the land, since they already had an established presence in Palestine and are the ones engaged in welcoming. Nevertheless, despite Darwish’s inevitable and recurring sense of Palestinians having a “truer

attachment to the land,” in this poem the narrator presents the possibility of a peaceful Andalus.

Conclusion

Throughout his life, Mahmoud Darwish believed that Israelis and Palestinians could peacefully coexist. His education and his personal relations with Jewish Israelis taught him to empathize with the Jewish history of exile, and to relate to their stories despite tensions between them and “his” Arab-Palestinian people. He was positive that there could be mutual empathy between the two sides. He publically expressed confidence in a peaceful future and a return to the metaphorical Andalus of his poetry.

In his writing, Darwish actively worked to pave the road to this Andalus. His earlier poetry, such as “A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies” and poems about his ex-lover Rita depict Israelis with empathy and even tenderness. Through descriptions of everyday encounters between the people on both sides, he showed on a human scale how both Israelis and Palestinians were affected by the conflict.

A manuscript page of the Qur’an written in Al-Andalus in the twelfth century. Wikimedia Commons



Later in life, he sought to “create a genesis” for Palestinians that also included a place for Israelis. Fellow poet Zakaria Mohammed described his later works as “a conversation between him and the Israelis to find a spot where they can reconcile.”³⁰ Darwish’s epic poems incorporating Christian, Muslim, and Jewish stories and references to Andalus challenge the monopoly of any one culture on the land. They also told stories of people cautiously welcoming “strangers” onto their land in exchange for respect.

Despite Darwish’s inclusive vision, Israel’s reception to Darwish has been reluctant at best. He was jailed five times during his lifetime for the contents of his poetry. When he joined the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1973, he was banned from Israel, and was only allowed to return in 1996. He was banned again during the al-Aqsa uprising, and was not even allowed to visit his mother when she was hospitalized with stomach cancer.^{31, 32}

However, Israel is slowly becoming more open to his poetry. In 2000, Education Minister Yossi Sarid proposed that five of his poems would be an optional part of the multicultural curriculum. There was an uproar, but the announcement signaled that the political and cultural climate had reached a stage where the idea could be considered. Today, several volumes of his poetry have been translated into Hebrew, and newspapers are increasingly asking for translations of his works.

Furthermore, Darwish did live to witness some peace-making between Israel and Palestine. In fact, he wrote the Algiers Declaration, the 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Statehood in which the PLO accepted coexistence with Israel through a two-state solution.³⁴ Of course, it has been hard for Israelis to listen to Darwish’s Palestinian voice when it carries the possibility of challenging their right to the land they have fought so hard to inhabit. In spite of this, however, it seems the younger generation in Israel is finally reaching out and responding to those poems of Darwish that speak to them, to the Palestinian perspective, and to the possibility of a modern Andalus. ♦

ENDNOTES

- 1 Khaled Mattawa, Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet’s Art and His Nation (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 15, 16.
- 2 Mahmoud Darwish, interview by Raja Shehadeh, *Bomb Magazine* 81 (2002), accessed December 12, 2016, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2520/mahmoud-darwish>.
- 3 Mattawa, Mahmoud Darwish, 7-13.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 5 Reuters and Zvi Bar’el, “Palestinian Poet Mahmoud Darwish Dies at 67,” *Israel News Haaretz*, last Modified August 10th, 2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/palestinian-poet-mahmoud-darwish-dies-at-67-1.251462>
- 6 Mahmoud Darwish, interview by Helit Yushurun, “Exile is So Strong Within Me, I May Bring It to the Land,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42 (2012): 46, accessed December 12, 2016.
- 7 Maya Jaggi, “Poet of the Arab World,” *The Guardian*, last modified June 7th, 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/jun/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview19>
- 8 Khaled Mattawa, Mahmoud Darwish: The Poet’s Art and His Nation (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014).
- 9 Jaggi, “Poet of the Arab World.”
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Mattawa, Mahmoud Darwish, 24.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 23
- 13 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 27.

- 15 Mahmoud Darwish, interview by Helit Yushurun, "Exile is So Strong Within Me, I May Bring It to the Land," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42 (2012): 46, accessed December 12, 2016, <http://www.palestine-studies.org/jps/fulltext/162552>
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Jaggi, Poet of the Arab World.
- 19 Mahmoud Darwish, interview by Helit Yushurun, "Exile is So Strong Within Me."
- 20 Jaggi, Poet of the Arab World.
- 21 Darwish, Mahmoud, "A Soldier Dreams of White Lilies," trans. Denys Johnson-Davies. *White Rose eTheses Online*. Accessed December 12, 2016 <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/7703/2/Appendix1%20The%20poems%20and%20their%20translations.pdf>
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Khaled Mattawa, Mahmoud Darwish, 55.
- 24 Mahmoud Darwish, *If I Were Another*, trans. Fady Joudah (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux Books, 2009), 91-92.
- 25 Mattawa, Mahmoud Darwish, 61.
- 26 Mahmoud Darwish et al., "I Discovered That the Earth Was Fragile and the Sea Light," *boundary 2* 26, no. 1 (1999): 83, accessed December 12, 2016, http://www.jstor.org/stable/303855?seq=1#fndtn-page_scan_tab_contents
- 27 Collected in Mahmoud Darwish, *The Adam of Two Edens: Selected Poems* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 77-76.
- 28 Darwish, interview by Helit Yushurun,
- 29 Darwish, *The Adam of Two Edens*, 77-76.
- 30 Jaggi, "Poet of the Arab World."
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Mattawa, Mahmoud Darwish, 50.
- 33 Jaggi, "Poet of the Arab World."
- 34 Ibid.

Pehlwani

A PHOTO ESSAY

Harshini Karunaratne

Harshini Karunaratne is a Sri Lankan-Peruvian studying Film & New Media and Theater at New York University Abu Dhabi. Her background in photography began with sports photography in 2010. Her current interests lie in projection mapping, live video performance, and audiovisual work. She now works with Dhakira, the newly founded UAE center for local and global heritage studies, where she hopes to learn more about Abu Dhabi's Saadiyat and Dalma islands. This photo essay is the product of a trip to Dubai with a theater class, where Karunaratne looked at Pehlwani as performance, ritual, sport, and play.









As the sun sets on another Friday, a group of Pakistani men gather in an empty lot. The space is open and flat, nothing more than a dusty patch near the central fish market in Dubai. The men assemble in a circle and take their seats, perching on small slabs of rock so their *kurtas* don't get dirty. Stragglers shuffle in and form a standing ring around the crowd. As the sun sinks lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the dirt, the group grows quiet. They are spectators awaiting their spectacle.

One man steps forward with a jug of water. He removes his shoes and walks to the center of the crowd, where he empties the water to create a ring of mud. Another jug is passed over; he repeats the process. One by one, the jugs are poured out, creating an arena of fresh mud for the match. A second man steps forward, slowly. He is elderly and commands respect. He has come to serve as the referee.

Next, two wrestlers, the *pehlwan*, emerge. They begin to warm up, jogging in small circles and stretching out their muscles. South Asian men have practiced *pehlwani*, a word which in Urdu means "wrestling," since at least 5000 B.C., and *pehlwan* are known for their athleticism and discipline. Out of nowhere, a carpet materializes and is unfurled beside the muddy circle. The final entrant walks forward: a slickly dressed man, his chin held high, his shoulders rolled back. He shakes the referee's hand before settling down onto the carpet. This man is the financier of the evening's bout of *pehlwani*.





At last, the referee speaks to the assembled crowd, eliciting cheers. A murmur rolls through the men as spectators begin to place their bets. The *pehlwan* are ready. They undress, dismissing their fine *kurtas* and stripping down to their undergarments, and then they wind an additional layer of cloth through and around their legs. Stray ends of the fabric get tucked into the undergarments to keep their clothing secure.

Before entering the mud, the *pehlwan* pay their respects to the arena. They touch the ground and place their hands together. As the referee introduces the wrestlers to the audience, each man acknowledges his competition by patting the other *pehlwan* down with dirt and sand. The two slap hands, and with another exclamation from the referee, the fight is on.

Over the course of the next hour, several matches will be won and lost. *Pehlwan* will be thrown onto their backs; audiences will jeer; savvy gamblers will collect their rewards. And before the call to prayer sounds when the light leaves the sky, all of the men assembled will disperse and return to the routines of their day.

Until next Friday, when a new champion is crowned. ♦



The Empire Strikes Back

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN
CONTEMPORARY TURKISH POLITICAL
DISCOURSE

Frances Fitzgerald

Frances Fitzgerald is a third-year at UC Berkeley, majoring in Political Economy and minoring in Arabic. She visited Istanbul two years ago and she is traveling to Jordan this summer to study Arabic.

In the century since the fall of the Ottoman Empire, ambivalence and contradiction have defined Turkey's political rhetoric regarding its imperial legacy. As the leader of the nascent Republic of Turkey in 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk embarked on a mission to quickly build a modern nation-state, rejecting Turkey's Ottoman and Islamic past and establishing a Western orientation that pervaded Turkish politics throughout the 20th century. "Neo-Ottomanism" emerged as an alternative perspective in the late 1980s, promoting a renewed appreciation for the Ottomans and for Turkey's Islamic character. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's political leader since 2003, has been a critical advocate of this approach, and as his agenda becomes increasingly confrontational and conservative, the Ottomans have taken on yet a new role in official Turkish rhetoric. The changing treatment of the Ottoman Empire by Turkish



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, president of Turkey. Wikimedia Commons, 2017.

politicians—and particularly in their use of the term “neo-Ottoman”—reflects their ideologies about Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and the roles of religion and ethnicity in defining what it means to be a Turkish citizen.

The Republic of Turkey emerged from a deeply problematic empire, and Mustafa Kemal aimed to sever his new nation from its Ottoman past.¹ He developed “Kemalism,” a nationalist ideology which sought to “modernize” Turkey by embracing systems such as democracy and secularism, and which treated the Ottoman Empire as “another country,” as opposed to Turkey’s predecessor state.^{2, 3} The Kemalist reforms abolished the Caliphate, secularized the legal and education systems, outlawed Sufi orders, replaced the Arabic alphabet with the Latin alphabet, and adopted the European clock and calendar.⁴ Kemalism was completely oriented toward the West, devoted to “the

elimination of the influences of Islamic/Arab culture by adopting Europe as a model.”⁵

The Kemalists’ separation of religion from government best exemplifies their rejection of the Ottomans. While Islam shaped Ottoman politics, law and social systems, the Kemalists based their political philosophy on French laicism: they were “assertive secularists,” meaning religious expression was tightly controlled in public spheres.⁶ Additionally, though they did not define Turkish citizenship in terms of race or religion in the Constitution, they conceived of the nation as “ethnic Turks,” which could only include ethnic and religious minorities if they could be “Turkified.” When the Kurds rejected Turkification, Kemalists saw them as a threat to modernization and national security.⁷ Although Kemalism faced challenges from both conservatives and liberals throughout the 20th century, its central tenets remained dominant in Turkish politics.⁸ Only relatively recently has Turkey begun to rethink its pro-Western, anti-Ottoman perspective, which has had major implications for the place of Islam and minorities in Turkey.

Neo-Ottomanism is a reaction against this aggressive secularism and nationalism. Developed by secular, liberal intellectuals and by the socially conservative (but politically liberal and nationalist) President Turgut Ozal, neo-Ottomanism “challenged the unitary plank of national identity and strict secularism of the early nation builders,” touting Turkey’s “multi ethnic composition [and] tolerance of Ottoman Islam.”⁹ Neo-Ottomanism aimed for a synthesis of the Turkish and Islamic identities, embracing the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire for its pluralism, as well as its Islamism as a source of soft power in the Middle East.

Ozal’s neo-Ottomanism also challenged Turkey’s Western trade and foreign policy focus. Though Ozal maintained a close relationship with George H.W. Bush and “showed no hesitation” in allying with the United States against Iraq in the Persian Gulf War, he actively pursued better relationships with Arab

“With a faltering economy and increasing unpopularity, Erdogan has fallen back on his conservative coalition, introducing a new Ottoman discourse which focuses on Islam and legitimizes an interventionist foreign policy.”

nations, as well as with states in Central Asia and the Caucasus.¹⁰ Ozal also established relationships with Kurdish leaders and was a proponent of moderate Kurdish rights throughout his political career, in contrast to the Kemalists who saw Kurdish nationalism as “an existential threat to Turkey’s territorial integrity.”¹¹ Continuing in this direction, Erdogan’s early administration was centrist and moderate in its approach toward Islam, minorities, and the West.

As a social conservative, Erdogan lauds Ottoman Islamism. However, he was not dogmatic in his early Prime Ministership; his views mirrored American “passive” secularism, which allows religious expression in public spaces and by individual civil servants.¹² His Justice and Development Party (AKP) asserts that Kemalist secularism has created hostility toward religion, and that “the state could be secular, while individuals are not necessarily so.”¹³ For example, Erdogan campaigned in 2007 on lifting the hijab ban in civil service jobs, arguing that it discriminated against conservative women.¹⁴ The Turkish Constitutional Court annulled the Parliament’s decision to lift the ban, but ultimately the ban was lifted in 2013.^{15, 16}

Erdogan and the AKP were also more moderate in their treatment of minorities, referencing the Ottoman millet system “in which each minority community was left in peace.”¹⁷ The stringent nationalism of Kemalism meant that ethnic and religious minorities were excluded from positions of power, and neo-Ottomanism opened the door for a more pluralist conception of Turkish citizenship.¹⁸ Citing Turkey’s “imperial and multinational legacy,” the AKP passed laws enabling broadcasting in languages

other than Turkish in 2004, and drafted a new civil constitution in 2007 which replaced the reference to “ethnic Turks” with “citizens of Turkey.”^{19, 20, 21} Kemalists’ ethnic idea of what it meant to be a Turk had room for inclusion only through assimilation, whereas neo-Ottomanists, because of their celebration of the Ottoman legacy, had a “less ‘ethnic’ and more multicultural conceptualization of citizenship.”²²

The final shift inspired by neo-Ottomanism was Erdogan’s foreign policy. Erdogan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoglu developed a policy of “zero problems” with Turkey’s neighbors, which emphasized strengthening relationships and staying uninvolved in regional conflicts. Turkey pursued better relationships with Iran, Iraq and Syria, Turkish conglomerates’ investments in the region greatly increased, and trade with its eight nearest neighbors doubled between 2005 and 2008.²³ Additionally, though Erdogan more actively pursued partnerships and alliances with nations that were previously under the Ottoman yoke, he retained his good standing with the West. His government was repeatedly hailed as a “progressive and prosperous democratic model” for other nations during the Arab Spring, and some saw him as even more Western-aligned than the Kemalists, due to the Kemalist resentment toward the West’s support of the Kurds and “moderate Islam.”^{24, 25}

These trends have not endured. Since the election in 2007 solidified his grip on power, and especially since being named President in 2014, Erdogan’s treatment of the Kurds and his foreign policies have shifted remarkably. Formerly a more moderate political ideology, the term “neo-Ottomanism”

“He is moving away from a foreign policy of ‘zero problems’ and working to establish Turkey as a regional superpower.”

is now used almost exclusively by Erdogan’s critics to accuse him of imperialist ambitions. Erdogan’s recent rhetoric regarding the Ottomans reflects his changing conception of Turkish citizenship. Integral to this Muslim identity is the Ottoman Empire, and Erdogan often refers to the glory of the Ottoman caliphate.²⁶ By stressing an Islamic identity, he insists that the different ethnicities are unified, dismissing Kurdish demands for democratic rights.²⁷ In a reversal of his 2007 campaign messages, Erdogan began using “increasingly militaristic and nationalist language toward the Kurds” once elected.²⁸ More recently, his government has targeted Kurds since the failed coup in July 2016, closing 15 pro-Kurdish news outlets and detaining Kurdish members of Parliament with unsubstantiated links to the separatist PKK.^{29, 30}

As Erdogan cracks down on political dissent within his borders, he is also moving away from a foreign policy of “zero problems” and conspicuously working to establish Turkey as a regional power. His initial innovation in looking past the Kemalist Western orientation has been overshadowed by recent statements regarding the “former Ottoman territories,” signaling desires to increase Turkey’s influence and dominate its neighbors.³¹ Erdogan has attempted to play a role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and has “barged” into the fight against ISIS in Mosul, undermining the fragile alliances that exist between the Iraqi army, Kurdish forces and Sunni tribal forces.³² He justified this move by saying that Turks “did not voluntarily accept the borders of our country” at the end of World War I—openly implying a wish to redraw them.³³ Erdogan’s current brand of neo-Ottomanism harbors a sense of grandeur about Turkey’s foreign policy, believing that Turkey’s “strategic vision and culture reflect the geographic reach of the Ottoman and Byzantine empires...thus it should play a highly active diplomatic, political and economic role across the region.”³⁴

With a faltering economy and increasing unpopularity, Erdogan has fallen back on his conservative coalition, introducing a new Ottoman discourse which focuses on the role of Islam and legitimizes an interventionist foreign policy. Accordingly, the meaning of “neo-Ottoman” has evolved from an alternative political ideology to a term used by critics of Erdogan’s policies and governing style. As Erdogan consolidates power by replacing the parliamentary system with an executive presidential system, supporters and critics alike call him “Sultan Erdogan,” the former praising his strength and the latter deriding him as authoritarian.³⁵ Because of this lack of consensus, because perceptions of the Ottomans differ greatly depending on one’s conception of the Turkish nation, rhetoric regarding the Ottoman Empire continues to be a useful tool in analyzing Turkish political ideologies. ♦

ENDNOTES

- 1 Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), Page 11.
- 2 William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 2013).
- 3 Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey*, Page 11.
- 4 William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 2013).
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Hasan Kosebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Islam, Nationalism, and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Page 9.
- 7 Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey*, Page 11.

- 8 Suna Kili, "Kemalism in Contemporary Turkey," *International Political Science Review / Revue Internationale De Science Politique* 1, no. 3 (1980), Page 400.
- 9 Anita Sengupta, *Myth and Rhetoric of the Turkish Model: Exploring Developmental Alternatives*. (Berlin: Springer, 2014), Page 88.
- 10 Alan Cowell, "Turgut Ozal, 66, Dies in Ankara; Pugnacious President of Turkey," *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, 17 Apr. 1993.
- 11 Sengupta, *Myth and Rhetoric of the Turkish Model*, Page 88.
- 12 Kosebalaban, *Turkish Foreign Policy*, Page 9.
- 13 Ali Carkog̃lelu and Barry Rubin, *Religion and Politics in Turkey* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) Page 161.
- 14 Roff Smith, "Why Turkey Lifted Its Ban on the Islamic Headscarf," *National Geographic*. *National Geographic Society*, 12 Oct. 2013. Web.
- 15 "Court Annuls Turkish Scarf Reform," *BBC News*. *BBC*, 05 June 2008. Web.
- 16 Smith, "Why Turkey Lifted Its Ban on the Islamic Headscarf."
- 17 Uğ̃mit Cizre, *The Turkish AK Party and Its Leader: Criticism, Opposition and Dissent* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016). (No page numbers).
- 18 Fatma Muğ̃ge Gocek, *The Transformation of Turkey: Redefining State and Society from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Era* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011) Page 5.
- 19 Bart Ziino, *Remembering the First World War*, (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), Page 156.
- 20 Derya Bayir, *Minorities and Nationalism in Turkish Law* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), Page 169.
- 21 Ekrem Eddy Güzeldere, "CRIA » Turkey: Regional Elections and the Kurdish Question," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Summer 2009. Web.
- 22 Kenneth M Pollack, *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2011), Page 269.
- 23 Gocek, *The Transformation of Turkey*, Page 2.
- 24 Elmira Bayrasli, "The Ottoman Revival Is Over," (*The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, 30 Mar. 2014).
- 25 Omer Taspinar, "Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism," (*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. N.p., 7 Oct. 2008).
- 26 Cizre, *The Turkish AK Party and Its Leader*.
- 27 M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2009), 191.
- 28 Ayhan Kaya, *Europeanization and Tolerance in Turkey: The Myth of Toleration* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- 29 "Can Turkey's Democracy Survive President Erdogan?" *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, 01 Nov. 2016. Web.
- 30 "Can Turkey's Democracy Survive President Erdogan?" *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, 01 Nov. 2016. Web.
- 31 "Can Turkey's Democracy Survive President Erdogan?" *The New York Times*.
- 32 Gocek, *The Transformation of Turkey*, Page 17.
- 33 "Turkey Barges Into the Mosul Fight." *The New York Times*. *The New York Times*, 24 Oct. 2016. Web.
- 35 Pollack, *The Arab Awakening*, Page 270.
- 36 "Turks Deliver Setback to 'Sultan' Erdogan," *BBC News*. N.p., 08 June 2015. Web.

Hanging By A Thread: Dissident Puppeteers in Assad's Syria

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAFAT ALZAKOUT

A.J. Naddaff

A.J. Naddaff is an Arab Studies and political science major and a research assistant for the Arab Studies Department at Davidson College. This summer he will be conducting a project under the mentorship of Rebecca Joubin, the Chair of Arab Studies at Davidson, documenting the intersection of Syrian diaspora art, the lives of the artists, and their intellectual response to crisis of varying kinds throughout Western Europe.

W

hen a group of Syrian artists first launched their satirical YouTube-based puppet show called Top Goon months after the 2011 revolution began, they knew it would cause controversy. In a country known for its draconian crackdown on artistic dissidence, Syrian ruler Bashar al-Assad, referred to in the show as Beeshu, was lampooned to an unprecedented degree. A beakish nose protrudes from the puppet's narrow face and an exaggerated lisp rolls off his bloodthirsty tongue. In the second episode, he stars on a game show entitled "Who Wants to Kill a Million?" Top Goon's rise and fall from prominence has mirrored waning international attention toward the seemingly interminable Syrian war. Season One caught the attention of major news outlets—including *Al Jazeera*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and the *Los Angeles Times*—at a moment when the revolution was ripe and

such dissidence was hailed as “ground-breaking.” But by the summer of 2015, when the show’s third and final season aired, the number of viewers had plummeted. As the war rages on today, the world has diverted its gaze from Syria.

Top Goon founder Rafat Alzakout, an experienced theatre actor and director, laments this loss of interest. After years of bloodshed and multiple failed attempts to resolve the conflict, he says, “no one cares about Syria.” He faults the international community for allowing the war to continue. “By showing silence around the world, nations both ignore and support the regime. They destroyed Aleppo and nothing has happened.”

Exiled in Germany, Alzakout finally feels far enough from the regime’s grip to abandon his old pseudonym, Jameel (Arabic for beautiful). We met over Skype at the beginning of summer 2016, to discuss the creation and evolution of the show and his beliefs about Syria’s future. This interview has been lightly edited and condensed.

When did you decide to form Top Goon and how did you gather the group of actors?

Eight months into the Syrian revolution, like many artists, I began participating in demonstrations in the street. This was extremely dangerous. At this point, the regime had tried to ban international journalists from coming into the country in attempt to shield Syrian stories from appearing in international headlines. It was at this moment that I realized I must do something with art. I immediately began brainstorming the type of art that would allow me to express myself without risk. From this thought process, the idea of puppets evolved.

I graduated from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus in theater acting and began teaching shortly thereafter. Some of the artists on the show I met through this teaching and some of them were my friends from a long time ago. I have a very famous artist friend who made these puppets in Damascus, while I was drafting the script for the first episode.



A still from Episode 3, “Tickle.” YouTube 2017.

Because of the amount of equipment needed and the likelihood that a pro-regime force might find us filming, I decided to move to neighboring Beirut where we would be a lot safer. Each year my artists changed. It all depended on the security situation, though. As some of my staff moved, I had to find new artists to replace them.

Why did you use English subtitles and who did you envision as your target audience?

You are correct in singling out the importance of my English subtitles. English is the lingua franca. Because the regime tried to close down the country and shield the international community from its atrocities, our aim was to articulate what was happening in the most accessible manner to people outside the country. Without English, we would be in the same era as the Middle Ages, so of course I had to use subtitles. You know, since the first day, the regime has been trying to claim that they are fighting a battle against Al Qaeda and religious fanatics. But it has not been like this until very recently. And yet the regime continues to bomb the civilian movement--not even the rebels. Of course, there is a civil war now but the

indescribable tragedy of the Assad regime is its brutality towards the civilian movement. Through the medium of English subtitles, it was possible for us to reach a broad audience, which drove the regime mad.

Do you think the regime ever had any suspicion about the identity of the show's creators?

They sent a lot of scary messages to our Facebook page and to our email. When they sent these messages we realized that they were in a state of panic and that they had absolutely no idea who we were.

For three years we were very secretive and the cast was very careful because, you know, this is no joke at all. At any moment, we could have been caught and tortured to death. You saw what happened to Ibrahim Qashoush, Ali Ferzat, and countless other artists we do not talk about, especially young ones. In 2012, they tortured and killed my friend, a Syrian-Palestinian, Hassan Hassan, so we were very cautious. Now I am not really sure if we are still mysterious to them.

What is the role of art in the revolution?

I just finished a long documentary film on this question called "Home." The film depicts how a young group of hopeful friends' dreams for artistic creativity are crushed and give way to disillusionment over a period of three years in their hometown Manbij.

On that note, I think art attempts to wake the conscience of people. Art can tell people every day--even tell the regime--that what they are doing is wrong and it must be stopped. Art can capture what is happening and be stored as an archive for future generations to understand. But to be frank, many other Syrian artists and I feel frustrated. There is a huge art culture in Syria; thousands and thousands of articles, films, and videos have been released. As evidenced by the continual suffering of the people, nothing has happened. I can screen and capture the regime's wrongdoings, but, to be honest, I do not know the exact power of art.

During the early days of the uprising, many Syrian artists and intellectuals were criticized for not playing a

larger role and taking a firmer stance in the uprising. Some even supported the regime. How do you respond to this?

Actually, I think there are a lot of artists who have had a very strong voice against the regime from the beginning. For five years, Syrian artists and activists have been trying to tell the world what is happening. If you type 'Syria' in Arabic on YouTube, you will see millions of videos of what is happening there.

I have met with many ambassadors and official figures from all over the world, who knew from the first moment that without a supporting civilian movement, any aspiration for a democratic Syria would disappear. However, many artists who had strong oppositional voices from the start are beginning to grow tired from the lack of care.

Do you disagree with renowned Syrian artist Khaled Khalifa's claims that art can give people strength and courage, while still acknowledging the true heroes are the civilians on the ground helping one another survive through the regime crackdown?

I would like to think art can give people hope. I think we can at least make people laugh a bit. This is very important because I believe in laughter, comedy, and humor. In this world of absurdity, comedy provides a way of coping with oppression. As I said, the regime is not comfortable with our art so they must believe it gives some type of hope and strength to people.

Before 2011, a so-called "wall of fear" thwarted most dissident art within Syria. While censorship has not remained uniform, for the most part, the regime has been able to control and dominate dissenting artwork. What gave you the courage to produce Top Goon in this climate?

Before 2011, in Syria, you couldn't say anything political or anything regarding the president. We had a layer of silence building up throughout years and years. But when the revolution started in Tunisia and the dictator was toppled, hope began for the Syrian people too. I didn't dream I could do something like this before

the revolution. A lot of artists including writers—even Khaled Khalifa—didn't dream they could talk about this regime like they can now. Today, we openly talk, we make fun of and criticize the situation. The revolution literally broke this wall of fear and gave me the courage to produce *Top Goon*. As an artist, I knew I had to do something. The regime tries to tell people that the wall will be rebuilt, but I don't think so.

You very easily could have chosen to dehumanize Assad in your depiction of him. Yet you emphasize your intention to show his human qualities. Why was it important for you to do so?

To make comedy you have to choose someone a little bit like Assad, with a selfish and weak character. His portrayal is based on a true narrative. His father was a very strong character, and everyone knows he is nothing like his father. In fact, even the Syrians who support the regime talk about his weak character compared to his father. We try to deal with this to make fun of him, to destroy this wall around him. Before the revolution, you couldn't make fun of him or criticize him. Because of this, our aim was to destroy his haughty personality and charisma in any way possible.

*What is your favorite scene in *Top Goon*?*

There are a lot, but I really enjoy the last scene in "Hamlet," Episode Three, Season Five. It describes theoretical situations. If you are a victim armed with a knife and have the opportunity to kill Assad, will you do it? It is a dark episode but it is also very philosophical one. I enjoy wrestling with this kind of question because it is now in the mind of every Syrian including myself. Can we could solve the crisis by killing Assad? Or how can we solve the problem? The war has brought a black box filled by a lot of dark questions. You can't express these thoughts out loud or to anybody but you can still have them and ask them to yourself. I tried to address these kinds of questions. To me, there is no answer to these questions. Even if you were to tell me now, "Rafat, you have this opportunity to kill Assad," I don't know if it would solve the problem. It is a very difficult question, because it is one that Syrians constantly

face. Today, a lot of young Syrians are defined by weapons. Yet, before the uprising, these same people weren't soldiers or affiliated with violence. The international silence over Syria sustained a war that has forced more and more people into this dark corner. We are faced with the option between being a perpetrator of violence or a victim of one. This becomes a very difficult question, actually, and a sad truth.

What does the future of Syria look like, considering that the situation only seems to get bleaker?

You're right. It is a very dark situation now. It is getting worse and worse every day. When we started a revolution against the dictatorship, we knew the dictatorship knew nothing about democracy or talking with its people. They are a weapons machine, a hate machine, which tries to kill and destroy us if we try to say anything. But of course I still have hope. In the end, the revolution is will change everything. For me, it is a big step for the Syrian people that we started this. I know the price we have paid is high. But what has started cannot be stopped. We will continue. Of course, I have always had this hope and I continue to have it. The regime must go. Even 10 years, 20 years, 80 years from now, it will go. Look at world history. You will see no dictatorship lasts indefinitely. Stalin is gone. Pinochet is gone. Eventually Assad will be gone too.

Characters on *Top Goon* include Bashar Al-Assad (center). YouTube 2017.



*“They are a weapons machine, a hate machine,
which tries to kill and destroy us if we try to say anything.
But of course I still have hope.”*

In an ideal world, how could other countries like America help Syria?

When the Assad regime used chemical weapons in the summer of 2013, Obama ordered them to relinquish them. Two weeks later, the Assad regime surrendered its weapons. If America wants to stop the barrel bombs, they can stop it. But they haven't done anything. Above all, we need to support civilian people who don't kill. This means real support, not intervention. This means an increase in humanitarian aid and zones to protect civilians. The only support we have is from Russia and Iran providing more weapons and killing. It is a big lie when people exclaim that they cannot support Syria because they do not want the country to end up like Iraq. There is a lot of support that can be given. And all of us witnessed what happened after the chemical weapon massacre. You can't say you are a democracy inside America if you are not one outside America. When you believe something, you have to believe it everywhere and support it everywhere. You can't be good with your family and allow the murder of other families.

Of course, to solve the problem, we must go to the roots. The roots are the presence of dictatorship in the Middle East. And I am not referring to Daesh [ISIS]—they are the results of dictatorship. You can't fight Daesh and support the regime simultaneously.

The system of global politics around the world is dirty. Two years ago, I did not dream of leaving the region, but I had to. I didn't have any choice. Actually now, I am frustrated. A lot of Syrian artists and activists are disillusioned with the world. But the Syrian spirit remains. We cannot be destroyed. Syrians will win their rights by living in a normal country that has democracy and justice. I am in Germany as we speak. This is the basic right of every human being.

What can I do? What is your hope for people like me? How can I make others see beyond the numbers and understand the human connection?

You have to tell our story. You have to support the civilian movement, and, if you have a choice, you have to tell people what is happening. The revolution started because of democracy, because of a new future. The intention was not to make war or impose religion on our country. This is very important. It is important for you to share our work outside Syria so people can see what is really happening. We don't have the luxury to express frustration because we need to continue seeking help. We need to search for those who believe in human beings.

All of us have to work to fight not only against Assad and dictatorship in Syria but against all political and economic systems that exploit countries around the world. What is happening in Syria is a result of this system. People like you, like me, like your friends—from all around the world, we must stand united together to show that we will not accept this system.

Please tell me more about what you are doing now.

Like I said, I finished my last documentary film. It was screened in many countries, like France, Germany, and Turkey. I finished it four months ago, and now I'm thinking about a new play about corruption before the revolution. It will require a lot of funding since it's a huge project. I have around 25 characters in this play. I don't know yet if anyone is interested in sponsoring it. The play, if I do it, will be very important to shed light on the situation in Syria before the revolution. In the meantime, I am trying to work with young Syrian refugees. Actually, I am very confused. I don't know a lot of people here; it is only my first year [as a refugee in Berlin]. I do not have a very clear answer for you. ♦

Instruments of Exchange

THE IMPACT OF THE MIDDLE EAST ON WESTERN MUSIC

Cameron Joseph Verbeke

Cameron Joseph Verbeke is currently a senior at Marquette University studying history, economics, and law. His areas of study include Britain, Ireland, the Soviet Union, and especially the Middle East and North Africa. Following graduation, he plans to attend law school.

T

hroughout history, the Middle East has had a substantial—if sometimes unappreciated—impact on the Western world. In certain areas, especially chemistry, astronomy, philosophy and medicine, this contribution has been well documented. However, one particular area remains largely ignored: the many contributions of the Middle East to the music of the West. Through the preservation, innovation, and reintroduction of music theory, the Middle East has continually helped to shape Western music, from antiquity to the present. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the achievements of Western music theory were in great danger of being lost. However, scholars living under the Byzantine Empire and Abbasid Caliphate showed a great appreciation for the West's work and sought to preserve it by translating vast amounts of Greek and Latin text into Arabic. It is because of their efforts that we still have access today to the musically

relevant works of great Greek thinkers such as Pythagoras, Euclid, and Ptolemy.¹ Yet the thinkers of the Middle East did not simply seek to preserve these groundbreaking studies; they also sought to expand upon them. Many famous Muslim philosophers—most notably al-Kindi, al-Farabi, and even the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun—made considerable innovations to the field of music theory, using the Greek treatises as their basis. Al-Kindi, for example, added a detailed fret board to the oud (an Arab precursor to the guitar).² He also proposed the idea of a one-eighth time signature; that is to say, one that uses eighth notes rather than the standard quarter notes.

Al-Farabi continued the development of music theory, incorporating Ptolemaic ideas to create a new way of tuning the oud using microtonal intervals to create a diatonic scale.³ And in the thirteenth century, the renowned Turkish musician Safiuddin al-Armawi added subdivisions amongst the intervals of the Pythagorean scale in order to create new melodic modes.⁴ He also created an early form of musical tablature in which he represented various positions on the fretboard with the first ten letters of the Arabic alphabet. These are only three of the many philosophers of the Middle East who contributed greatly to the development of the music of the West by expanding on some of the earliest studies of music theory.

While the musicians of the Middle East greatly expanded on the theory behind the music, they also began to produce new musical instruments that served as predecessors to many contemporary

Western instruments. While it is nearly impossible to pinpoint an exact date and location for the creation of many of these instruments, early records show that they began spreading around the world from the Middle East at various points in antiquity. For example, the oud—a form of the lute that originated in Persia—served as the foundation for the modern-day guitar and mandolin. Indeed, the word “guitar” itself may come from the Arabic word “qitara,” the precursor of the Spanish word “guitar.”⁵ The violin also has ties to the Middle East, as its early construction was based off the rebab, an instrument that originated somewhere in the Middle East and North Africa in the 8th century and spread along trading routes.⁶ Other Middle Eastern instruments with Western counterparts include the qanun and the harp/auto-harp, the santour and the hammered dulcimer/piano, the nay and the flute, and the zurna and the trumpet/horn.⁷ As these instruments began reaching Europe, largely through Sicily or Spain, they quickly gained popularity, even winning over the Frankish kings Pepin and Charlemagne. Both of these great kings began to incorporate various Arab instruments into Christian church music, and by the 11th century, many of these instruments were in use by the church, which helped spread them across Europe.⁸

The impact of the Middle East on Western music is not limited to the medieval period. The numerous Ottoman incursions into Europe from the 16th to the 18th centuries left distinct cultural impressions within the areas they conquered. While the Ottomans themselves were never able to breach the gates of Vienna, some elements of their culture did. The most explicit form of Ottoman

“In addition to the rebab and violin, other Middle Eastern instruments with Western counterparts include the qanun and harp, the santour and piano, the nay and flute, and the zurna and trumpet.”

influence was the spread of a style of music known as “Turkish March.” As the name would imply, the style was derived from the music played by musicians within the Ottoman Janissary corps.⁹ Turkish motifs first appeared in two separate pieces of music in 1775—Mozart’s *Violin Concerto No. 5* and Haydn’s *L’incontro Improvviso*.¹⁰ The style remained popular for decades and was notably favored by Beethoven, who used it in his 1812 *Marcia alla Turca* and in the final movement of his famous *9th Symphony*—in which the chorus is accompanied by the faint sound of Turkish instruments.¹¹

Even to this day, the Middle East continues to inspire many artists in the West to experiment utilizing elements from the East. One prominent example of this trend is the story of Dick Dale, known to fans as “The King of Surf Rock.” Dale, born Richard Monsour, was the son of an immigrant from Lebanon. Dale, who was raised in Boston, grew up speaking Arabic in his family and learning about the music of Lebanon from his uncle. His uncle taught him how to play the Lebanese goblet drum, but Dale’s real passion came from watching his uncle play the oud.¹²

One song in particular piqued Dale’s interest: “Miserlou,” a tune popular among Greek refugees from Turkey. The name of the song translates as “The Egyptian” from Turkish.¹³ According to Dale, a young fan once approached him and asked if he could play an entire song using only one guitar string. Dale promised the fan that at the concert the next day he would get his wish. Dale thought back to his uncle playing “Miserlou” on the oud, and quickly taught himself how to play it using only the high-E string of his guitar. At the concert the following evening, the song was so popular with the crowd that Dale quickly decided to record a studio version for his next album.¹⁴ “Miserlou” became a hit in the United States following its release in 1962, and enjoyed a resurgence after its use in the 1994 Quentin Tarantino film *Pulp Fiction*. The song would also go on to influence future acts like the Beach Boys and Jimi Hendrix, who both sought to either cover their own versions or write new songs similar to “Miserlou.”¹⁵

While Dale laid the groundwork for the adoption



A classic oud, relative of the guitar. Wikimedia Commons, Kovalchek, 2014.

of Arabic musical elements into popular music, it was not until the end of the decade when many popular acts began to incorporate Eastern scales with Arabic quartertones into their songs. Two of the most popular tracks to use these scales were “Paint it Black” by the Rolling Stones, and “White Rabbit” by Jefferson Airplane.¹⁶ However, Arabic influence in the 1960s was by no means limited to these two groups. Another band that drew influence from Arabic music were the Doors. In an interview with author Jonathan Curiel, Doors’ keyboard player Ray Manzarek spoke about how the Doors often used a mix of Latin-American and Arabic themes in their songs. Regarding Doors’ songs such as “When the Music’s Over” and “The Mosquito,” Manzarek said, “We were all into Arabic-style playing because it’s so much fun to play with Arabic rhythms and Arabic harmonies. From a keyboard perspective, and certainly from a guitar perspective, we were using Arabic modal lines.”¹⁷

The Middle East's influence on modern American music does not end there. The Grateful Dead album *Blues for Allah*—dedicated to Faisal al-Saud, king of Saudi Arabia and a noted fan of the band—features many songs that utilize quartertones and Arabic scales.¹⁸ Both Bob Dylan and Robert Plant (of Led Zeppelin) were fans of legendary Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, and incorporated her influence in their own songwriting. Peter Gabriel and Eddie Vedder (of Pearl Jam) both collaborated with Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan on their songs.¹⁹ In the 1990s and 2000s, the heavy-metal band System of a Down sold tens of millions of albums while making heavy use of Armenian melodies and traditional instruments such as the duduk (a double-reeded variant of the oboe). In 1999, rapper and hip-hop artist Jay-Z prominently featured a motif from the 1957 Egyptian song *Khosara Khosara*, by Baligh Hamdi and Abdel Halim Hafez. And following the September 11th terrorist attacks, Bruce Springsteen released his song “Worlds Apart,” which criticized Islamophobia and attempted to musically reconcile East and West through the heavy use of Qawwali background singing, a 700-year old style originating in Sufi Islam.²⁰

While many today continue to polarize the West and the Middle East, those who do so fail to appreciate the rich exchange that has existed between these two entities throughout their shared history. The many ethnic groups that have lived in the Middle East and North Africa have made significant contributions to many fields of academia including chemistry, astronomy, philosophy, medicine, and beyond. But to this day, some of the most important contributions of the Middle East to the West lie in their rich, shared musical traditions. From antiquity to the present. The scales and theory, instruments, and even contemporary rock songs of the modern West all owe a considerable debt to the influence and contributions of the Middle East. ♦

ENDNOTES

1 Rabag Saoud, *The Arab Contribution to Music of the Western World* (Manchester: Foundation for Science Technology and Civilization, 2004), 3.

2 Saoud, 3.

3 Ibid., 4.

4 Ibid., 5.

5 Farmer, 137.

6 Ibid., 140.

7 Saoud, 14.

8 Ibid., 7.

9 Henry Farmer. *Military Music* (London: Parrish Publications, 1950), 28.

10 Ibid., 29.

11 Ibid., 32.

12 Jonathan Curiel, *Al' America Travels Through America's Arab and Islamic Roots* (London: The New Press, 2008), 120.

13 Ibid., 120.

14 Ibid., 120.

15 Ibid., 122.

16 Gary Laderman and Luis Leon, *Religion and American Cultures: Tradition, Diversity, and Popular Expression*, 2nd edition (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 970.

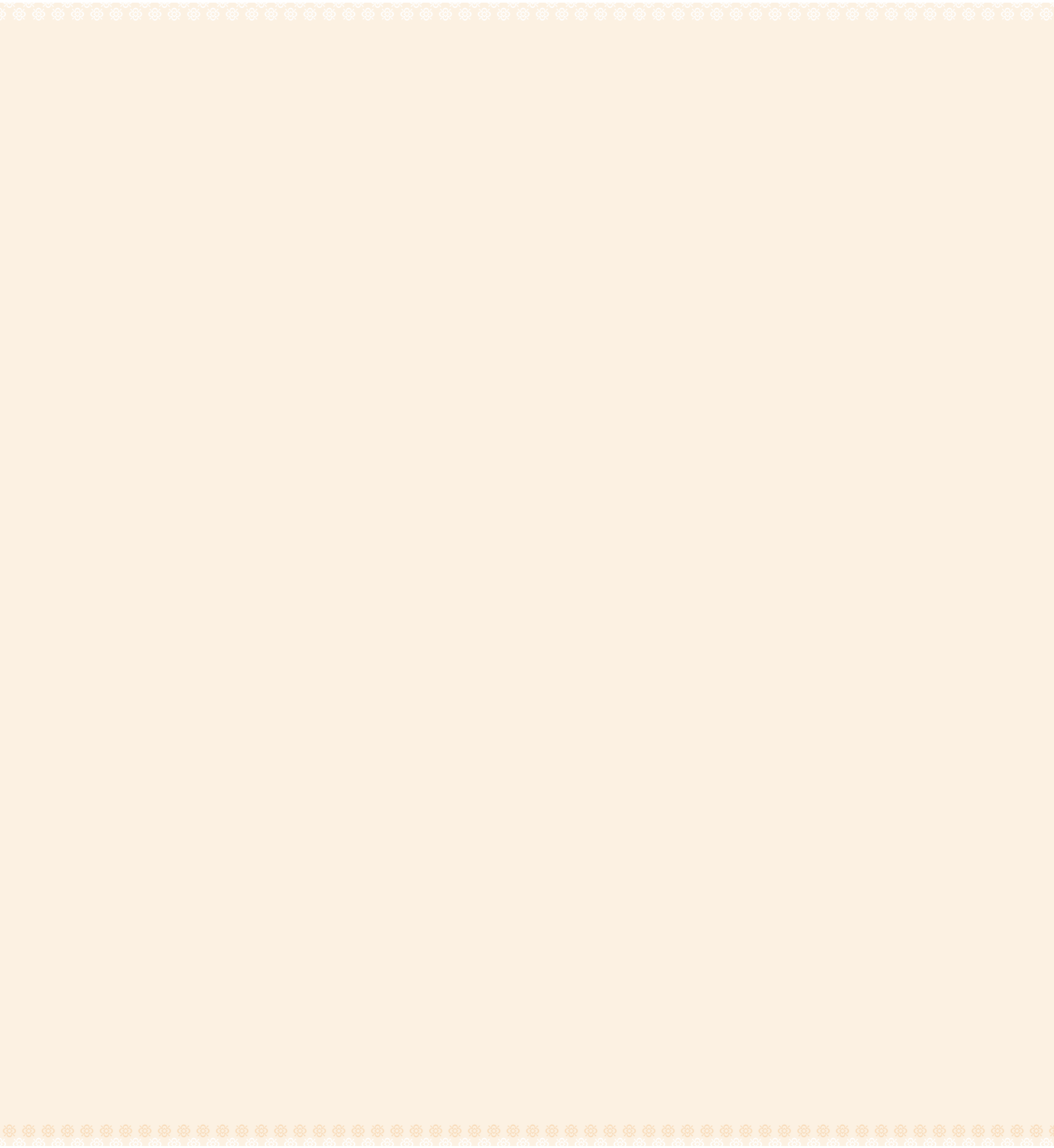
17 Curiel, 124.

18 Ibid., 125.

19 Laderman et al., 972.

20 Reed, “System of a Down’s ‘Toxicity: Ten Things You Didn’t Know,” *Rolling Stone*, September 4, 2016.

21 Holston, “What Does Islamic Music have to do With Blues, Jazz, and Surf Rock?” *DMagazine*, 4/7/12.





≈ CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS ≈

1. We welcome submissions from undergraduate and graduate students from all universities and disciplines.
2. We accept submissions year-round, authors will be notified in the summer and winter of the status of their submission.
3. Send submissions to: submissions@alnoorjournal.org.
4. Each paper should be submitted in Microsoft Word format.
5. Academic papers should be approximately 8,000 words, features and essays should be approximately 1,500 words.
6. Authors are encouraged to submit any photography, art, or graphics pertaining to his/her piece.
7. Please submit a title page containing the title of your piece, your full name, school, department, year of graduation, and contact information.
8. Papers should be formatted using Chicago Citation Style with endnotes and a complete bibliography. Pages should also be numbered.
9. Possible topics are any subject relating to the history, religion, culture, art, and politics of the greater Middle East.
10. Examples of the types of papers that may be submitted are past or current research projects, relevant classroom papers, and senior theses.

Thank you. We look forward to reading your submissions.

*For more information on submission deadlines and information about the journal,
please email us at eic@alnoorjournal.org.*

