

## طرح بعض الايديولوجيات النسوية ثانية للبحث (ملخص)

### ايليز سالم منغانارو

تدحض الكاتبة قراءات بعض النسويات اللواتي يحلن كتابة الأديبات اللبانيات المعاصرات تحليلاً بدائياً، إذ كثيراً ما يعرضن علينا كليشيات تذهب ببساطة الى ان كتابة النساء مناقضة للكتابة الذكورية التي تعكس العنف والحرب. فأراء هؤلاء الناقدات النسويات لا تأخذ بعين الاعتبار مواقف أخرى كثيراً ما تكون نتيجة الطبقة الاجتماعية التي تنتمي اليها الكاتبات. أوليس هناك في الواقع، كاتبات مناضلات يرين ان الحرب تغير المجتمع؟ ثم أليس هناك كتاب رجال يناهضون العنف والحرب؟ إن ايليز سالم منغانارو تأمل أن تثير نقاشاً أكثر اتزاناً إذ يضع الكتابة النسائية في سياق مقارنة اوسع.

### الأديبات العربيات والشهرة العالمية

#### ميريام كوك

تعرف العالم الانكلوسكسوني الى الكاتبات العربيات في المعرض الدولي للكتاب الذي أقيم في لندن سنة ١٩٨٦. منذ تلك السنة تكاثرت الترجمات والمحاضرات والمؤتمرات التي دُعيت اليها

\* راجع المقالة بلغتها الاصلية ص : 165

## NEGOTIATING FEMINIST IDEOLOGIES WITHIN LEBANESE WOMEN'S WRITINGS

Elise SALEM MANGANARO

I would like to provide a brief narrative on my education, teaching, and scholarship to help contextualize my current relationship to Lebanese women's writings. I would then like to raise some questions that might help us continue the dialogue on women in Lebanon.

My training for the Ph.D. in literature was quite traditional and historical. The literary canon, divided according to distinct chronological periods, was foregrounded. The accepted classics (from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf) were studied in a new criticism mode, while some attempt was made to understand the relevant historical period. The few women read in this canon appeared almost as anomalies, curiosities: Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf. Little attempt was made to link literature as cultural production to actual socio-political realities. Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial theories of literature were not available prisms to me through which to read and interpret texts.

With a Ph.D. in Renaissance and Eighteenth Century British literature, I embarked on a teaching career that would quickly open up my eyes, so to speak. Making the selections for courses, designing syllabi, and deciding how to interpret literary works in the classroom, forced me to engage the materials in a new way. I found myself unable to justify grouping certain poets according to traditional labels,

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and I was unconvinced that close textual readings, in themselves would yield important knowledge. Increasingly, I asked my students to reflect upon cultural questions : what was the system of patronage ? what class of society was writing (and reading) ? what bodies of knowledge were already available to our authors ? how did exploration and science alter literary production ? and, most relevant to this paper, where in the world were the women ? I was unable to teach the literature without contextualizing it in some significant way, and I discovered that close textual readings were, indeed, enhanced by this method.

Not surprisingly, my first years as an assistant professor coincided with my own readings in critical theory from the structuralists and post-structuralists, to the feminists and marxists, to the psychoanalysts and deconstructionists, to the post-colonialists and post-modernists. While some of this “theory” proved cumbersome and jargonistic and not, in the end, especially useful to me, there was some that resonated and forever altered the way I would read a text. Most significantly, I could no longer ignore modes of production, so my literature classes became sites for cultural studies as well.

My own scholarship, during this period, also shifted away from my rather traditional Renaissance dissertation. As a graduate student, I had resisted the notion of doing anything connected with the Middle East. I recall professors almost begging me to write on some of the influences of the Arab Orient, but I was not interested. I had left Lebanon as a pre-med student during the war, and now I was in the U.S. as an English major - leave me alone ! But ten years later I found myself gravitating back to the Middle East. Both my research and my teaching began to reflect interests in Arab authors and themes, and it was not long before I began to focus my studies on female writers not only from the Arab world but from the broader “third world.”

As an entire industry was growing in the U.S. around third world female authors and ethnic American writers, my interests were well

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received. Female authors whether African, American, Nigerian, Indian, or Arab were now being grouped together in journals, anthologies, and scholarly books, and taught collectively in popular courses on marginalized voices. There was little doubt that women, who had been economically and politically silenced across all cultures, deserved a special space to be heard ; and third world women or “women of color” were seen as doubly victimized and all the more deserving of recognition. As a Lebanese, I felt a special obligation to become informed about the literature of Lebanese women mapped out so helpfully by Miriam Cooke and others. Whenever possible, I included authors like Hanan al-Shaykh, Etel Adnan, Ghada al-Samman, Andrée Chédid, and Emily Nasrallah into the discussion (whether in the classroom or in the scholarship).

I was also pleased that a growing number of scholars were choosing to talk and write about Lebanese women authors. The possibilities of cooperation and discussion across disciplines (and continents) was enhanced, although much of the focus remained rather narrowly conceived in discussing these authors in the context of the recent Lebanese wars.

My own scholarship shifted again when I was asked to edit a special volume of *The Literary Review* on Lebanese literature. Now I had to acquaint myself with a whole host of male writers, some already lionized and some virtually unknown. It was during the two years that I worked on this broad project that I began, once again, to ask different questions of my own pedagogy and scholarship. My primary concerns were with identifying a Lebanese nation and culture that could house a literary production. What were the problematics of attempting an anthology of Lebanese literature ? what political forces were at work to either sabotage or encourage the very concept of a Lebanese canon ? what criteria for literary representation could be just ?

As Lebanon struggles to become a viable nation, I am now particularly interested in how the literature informs the current cultural



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climate and how it might instigate change. My earlier focus on women writers, therefore, must be reassessed within this paradigm of, for lack of a better word, nation-building. During my sabbatical next year, I will be working on a book tentatively entitled, *Constructing and Interpreting a National Literature : The Example of Lebanon*. This project attempts to link literary output and nation, forcing us to confront very difficult issues like civic and social responsibility, educational reform, and state-mandated "culture." The very elusive concept of nation as it is linked to Lebanon needs to be unpacked in order to more fully contextualize the literature that might be associated with it.

One of the contributions of my book will be, I hope, to complicate all notions of the Lebanese Other. Too often the nationalized Other is made to fit in to already existing ideological agendas within the American academy. While I have found it refreshing to come across an increasing number of Arab and Islamic writers (and occasionally Lebanese authors) in large anthologies and on course syllabi, I am somewhat disconcerted at how this material is almost totally decontextualized. The samples are usually grouped in easy categories : war literature, female victimization, family as community... with little attention to the nuances of actual lived cultures. At the very least, my book will place the literature in context, providing a framework for how other traditionally exoticized literatures might be read.

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What follows is a paper loosely based on a presentation I delivered at the Modern Language Association convention in Dec. 1994. It is my first attempt to question some of the current scholarship on Lebanese women and to raise, in the spirit of dialogue and not confrontation, some useful strategies on how to proceed with this debate on Lebanese women.

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In 1975, much of Lebanon became a battlefield for warring factions that pitted Lebanese against Lebanese ; Lebanese Christian militias against Palestinian fedayeen ; Syrian army against Lebanese pro-Islamicist and pan-Arabist groups ; Syrians against the Christian Phalange ; Israeli forces against Palestinians ; Shiite against Palestinians ; Israeli against Shiite ; Iranian against Israeli ; Shiite against Sunni ; Lebanese army against pro-Islamist groups ; Christian militias against Lebanese army, and on and on.

Though much of this supposed "civil" war (or wars) have now ended (officially with the signing of the Taef national reconciliation pact in 1989 but effectively with the ousting of General Aoun by Syrian forces in Oct. 1990), battlefronts remain active in South Lebanon (Shiite vs. Israeli) and occasionally within the increasingly demoralized Palestinian camps (Palestinian vs. Israeli ; inter-Palestinian division : pro and anti-Arafat). The Syrians remain as power brokers in the country ; Israel continues to occupy and control much of South Lebanon ; Iran still mans and funds fundamentalist groups ; Kurdish militias, Sri Lankan oppositional guerillas, Palestinian splinter groups continue to train in Lebanon's Bekaa valley, which has been a lucrative center for hashish and poppy crops, supporting entire economies in the region.

And this is only the tip of the iceberg... The complexities of the Lebanese wars (never just Civil, Regional, or International) often produced a kind of despair from those who tried to comprehend it, or led to an easily reductionist explanation like : Muslim vs. Christian ; Arab vs. Israeli ; Lebanese vs. Syrian ; rich vs. poor ; U.S. vs. U.S.S.R., etc. While any one of these simplistic dichotomous oppositions existed and played their part in Lebanon's battlefield, interpreting the entire collapse of Lebanon in terms of a single metanarrative could very soon backfire. This is not the appropriate forum for me to enter into a lengthy analysis of Lebanese politics, but this brief introduction helps me to contextualize any discussion of Lebanese war fiction and, more

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specifically, to offer a critique of what I see as a Western feminist reductionist analysis of female war literature.

Much has been written lately on how war, revolution, political upheaval can break down traditional boundaries, allowing for a new space and opportunity to be fulfilled by previously under-represented groups, like women. In all spheres and disciplines routinely dictated by patriarchal orders, a transformation during war reshuffles existing patterns, offering a reconfiguration of societal norms. Obviously any study of literary history attests to the fact that changing social and political realities gives rise to new literary voices. It is no surprise, then that the cataclysmic Lebanese wars yielded a vital body of Lebanese literature by women.

This literature, mostly prose fiction, has often been labeled, categorized and discussed in terms of a feminist-womanist discourse that resists and counters the hegemonic male ideology. The Lebanese wars, seen primarily as male driven, became the locus for female authors who sought in their fiction to depict an anti-war perspective. Ghada al-Samman, Hanan al-Shaykh, Etel Adnan, Andrée Chérid, Hoda Barakat, and Emily Nasrallah, for example, concretized the horrors of war in memorable fictions that often centered on women's worlds and consciousness.

In *Kawabis Beirut* (1976), al-Samman describes a series of nightmarish episodes too grotesque, but unfortunately only too real in Lebanon's 1975-76 war. Here, the perpetrators of violence are men, the victims often women and children; images abound of beaten women, torn-to-bits women, and amongst the decapitated corpses and bloody streets the figure of a child, for example, blown up by a birthday hand grenade...

In *Hikayat Zahra* (1980), al-Shaykh presents a female central character, Zahra, whose life (and death) is manipulated by a male-generated war. The seemingly imbalanced Zahra, who finds ultimate fulfillment in her sexual relation with a sniper, offers, in the end, the only sane alternative in a crazed world.

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In Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose* (1977), Marie Rose, the humanitarian teacher and a supporter of Palestinian rights in Lebanon is brutally murdered by Phalange militiamen in front of the very children she is teaching and nurturing.

In Chédid's *La Maison sans racines* (1985), Lebanese women march in a defiant peace gesture to end the war, and Sybil (a young American girl visiting her Lebanese grandmother) is gunned down.

In Barakat's *Hajar al-Dhihik* (1992), the homosexual protagonist, Khalil, retrieves a masculine identity by participating in the war, forever alienating him from the female narrator who will continue to write as he drives away and out of the novel in the last page.

In *A House Not Her Own* (1992) by Nasrallah, many of the short stories, like "Explosion," focus on the erratic and incomprehensible violence bombs, an especially potent force in the Lebanese wars, that target the most innocent (here a young girl clutching her new cabbage patch doll in a supermarket with her mother).

Attempts have been made to link the feminist with the pacifist, to read women's narratives in opposition to male discourse, and to identify supporting passages from fiction that obviously present an alternative to a seemingly male-driven war. All of the above authors can be interpreted that way, reinforcing a rather preconceived formula that maternalism, compassion and sanity reside in the traditionally marginalized woman who refuses to participate in a violent man's world.

I would like to argue that while some Lebanese female writers did indeed oppose the war, their narratives should not be used as windows, prisms, through which one can explain Lebanon's complex gender relations and eventual political configuration. These authors, if interpreted solely as female pacifists, provide a rather narrow opportunity for entering into Lebanon's "space."

For those of us who, for the past five to ten years have been studying and teaching third world female literature know, there has been a flurry of translation, publication, anthologizing, criticism of specifically

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female authors. This is a wonderful thing, but it has also, I believe, resulted in a rather skewed view of how we understand those literatures and the cultures that produce them. In the U.S., for example, university press editors have explicitly told me that if I were to write on or put together a collection of Arab female writings, then send in the manuscript immediately to them ; anything with “women” in the title, I’ve been told. Hanan al-Shaykh, speaking recently at the Middle East Studies Association conference in Arizona, jokingly referred to her newly acquired status, and that she, along with other Arab women authors were suddenly in such “great demand.” Perhaps more to the point, when we first began to correspond in 1992, she was surprised that I was Lebanese since only “Western women” seemed interested in her work.

I would like to offer two observations that might complicate the reductionist link between female authors and a feminist antiwar narrative :

1. As al-Shaykh implies, these female authors often have a larger audience abroad than in the country of origin. Not coincidentally, most of the authors briefly mentioned above are women of privilege, usually versed in English or French, who left Lebanon during the war years (most still remain in Europe or the U.S.) and had the time and space to reflect upon and utilize the war in their narratives that were then published by presses, often outside Lebanon, and made available usually to an elite readership, often in the West as well. The fact that most of these authors are relatively well-to-do does not in the least detract from the pertinence and importance of their literary output, but it does force us to recognize *class* as a factor alongside *gender* in our interpretations.

A female author opposed to war obviously does not speak for the Lebanese militiawoman, the Palestinian female warrior, the Hizballah female suicide bomber ; Lebanese women participated in the various armies, militias, and warring factions, not just as supporting cast (while that was their main role), but on the frontline. Sufficient scho-

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larship on the subject of women and armed struggle (Palestine and Algeria being the most blatant examples in the Arab world) lends testimony to the fact that women's liberation is often indelibly linked to national struggle. And while the "national" struggles might not be so easy to discern in Lebanon's wars, to some they did exist, and, to some, the same clarity of vision inspired armed struggle as it did when Algeria fought off the French or the Palestinians resisted Israeli occupation. So war, thus perceived, offers liberation not just discursive level...

Indeed, one could make a further case that women not only participated in the actual fighting, but helped preserve and sustain an ideology of war and violence in Lebanon. It is, after all, the women who also raise their sons to fight, to uphold a morality of honor, revenge, and "patriotism." One needs only to recall the examples of songs, chants, slogans taught by mothers to young kids instilling anti-Muslim, anti-Christian, anti-Palestinian values. Or note the tradition of boasting about sons' prowess in fighting, or the public display of mourning, recognizing martyrdom as the ultimate honor.

A too quick association of non-violence with female consciousness undermines any possible legitimate act of war that in other contexts might be described as liberation, revolution, democratization. In fact, the general knee-jerk reaction most of us comfortably situated in the West might have regarding war and armed conflict must be understood, to some extent, in terms of our privilege. In other words, war is altogether evil when one's life is good and happy; obviously it is less evil when one's life is already miserable, fraught with injustice, lack of representation, and already imbued with violence. Opposition to war, to all war, to armed struggle, is not always a clearly ethical position (to be so readily espoused by all women across all time and space) ; in fact, to those under-privileged groups (that always include women) social turmoil might offer at least the possibility of positive change. So to categorically link all women and all female authors to a universal anti-war thematic is a simplification that hides the many ten-

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sions and potential arenas for struggle within the contingent political and literary moment.

2. Many Lebanese male authors, most of whose works are not available in English translation, also countered the war in graphic, gripping, memorable fiction and poetry. Elias Khoury (the only Lebanese author besides Hanan al-Shaykh whose works are rather regularly translated into English from Arabic) constructs worlds of disjointed time and space, reflective of an often meaningless war ; Rachid al-Daif highlights psychological damage and escapism during wars ; Yusuf Habshi al-Ashqar creates a protagonist trapped within the war, unable to think or take action. The poetry of Joseph Abi Daher decries the insanity of war and laments the current status of exile ; Adonis and Nizar Kabbani both write moving elegies on the death of Beirut and the fickle nature of war... And the list continues.

It is necessary, I believe, to study female fiction in conjunction with, not in opposition to, the literature produced by men. While there may be differences that need to be articulated between the two groups, they can often be understood in gender-free terms. Including the men in the discussion also allows for the possibility of agreement and genuine debate. In trying to comprehend the Lebanese wars and to project a possibly reasonable future, we must be open to the diversity of voices that constitute Lebanon, and not get imprisoned within agendas that often thrive on blame and a mentality of victimization.

So in my opinion, gender, as an exclusive term articulated by Western theorists, has not been a very useful criterion in approaching Lebanon's complex situation. To say that men propagate a discourse of violence while women do not is disingenuous. To classify Lebanese authors by gender and then hope to fully understand the socio-political realities of Lebanon would be short-sighted. While there is little doubt that prioritizing gender is a necessary step in our dialogue, focussing only on gender can give us skewed results.

To study Lebanese female war fiction, therefore, in isolation is to ar-

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rive at certain pre-ordained conclusions that do more to further western feminist agendas than to help us appreciate the nuances of the literature (which I have not discussed in this paper) or to understand the causes of our wars and the challenges that still face us in the years ahead.

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***REMISE EN QUESTION DE CERTAINES IDEOLOGIES  
FEMINISTES***

*L'auteur réfute les lectures de certains idéologues féministes qui analysent les écrits des femmes libanaises contemporaines de façon trop simpliste. Car ils tombent souvent dans les clichés qui présentent*



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*les écrits des femmes comme s'opposant simplement au discours masculin fait de violence et de guerre, sans prendre en considération d'autres attitudes qui dépendent souvent de classes sociales différentes. N'y a-t-il pas, en effet, des femmes écrivains militantes pour qui la guerre changerait la société ? Et des écrivains masculins qui s'érigent contre violence et guerre ? Elise Salem Manganaro espère ainsi déclencher un débat plus équilibré, en mieux situant les écrits de femmes dans un contexte comparatif plus large.*

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