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To cite this article: miriam cooke (2011) The Cell Story: Syrian Prison Stories after Hafiz Asad, Middle East Critique, 20:2, 169-187, DOI: [10.1080/19436149.2011.572413](https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2011.572413)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2011.572413>



Published online: 20 Jul 2011.



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The Cell Story: Syrian Prison Stories after Hafiz Asad

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Prison can be a key to creativity, but it can also be a trap. How could I write without exaggeration, without needing to convince the reader of the evil I had experienced? How could I prevent politics from interfering with art? Writing, especially this kind of writing is like extracting oil out of the soil and then purifying it. It is the search for the line, what I call the *barzakh*, that both separates but also brings together the explicit and the hidden.¹ My challenge to myself was to convey the absolute simultaneity of life and death that is part of the prison experience.

(Syrian short story writer Ibrahim Samuil, 1996)

Prison is a place without time, a place full of contradictions. It is the moaning of embers and the sighing of ashes; an empty, stony, polluted, immoral time. It is a time you document first on the walls and then in your memory. But when the years turn into a long train whose whistle exhausts and you despair of its ever stopping, why then you try something else, something that resembles forgetting ... Prison? My God!! Is it enough to call it Death's ally?²

(Syrian poet Faraj Bairaqqdar 2005)

These epigraphs by two Syrian writers who spent years in prison epitomize the importance of prison literature in conveying daily life under Hafiz Asad, both inside and outside the cell.³ When I was in Syria during the mid-1990s, poet Mamduh Adwan and filmmaker

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¹ The word *barzakh* that is most commonly associated with the Q 23: 100 verse referring to the barrier between life and death that is both life and death and neither.

² Faraj Bairaqqdar (2001) Interview with Muhammad Ali al-Atassi, *The Experience of Captivity and Freedom*, *Al-Nahar* (Amsterdam), January 22, 2001.

³ It is important to note that Syrian prisons are probably no worse than prisons elsewhere, especially in the United States. But the difference in the Syrian context is the taboo on telling the cell story. Many journalists, social scientists and prisoners have written without censorship about the horrific conditions in which American convicts are held, none more vividly than Christian Parenti. His disturbing analysis of the emergence of the prison-industrial complex presents story after story of convict abuse that range from arbitrary executions to institutionalized rape of both men and women; fear of prisoner solidarity has led to the encouragement of paramilitary prison gangs that link and extend rivalries outside the walls. In contrast with America, where the

Muhammad Malas urged me to turn my attention to prison literature. They argued that it was important not only as a witness to abuses that intellectuals suffered because of their ideas, but also as a powerful evocation of life outside. In his introduction to Ibrahim Samuil's *Light Coughs* (1990), Adwan wrote:

Prison narratives reflect our daily life. Ibrahim Samuil draws us into the prison or into the atmosphere created by fear of the prison. He compels us to recognize the similarity between official confinement and the suffocating constraints of daily life. This kind of literature reminds us of our lost humanity, a humanity found in little relationships, pains and concerns, in little dreams.⁴

These cell stories articulated the way in which a particular kind of subjectivity was produced, particularly in solitary confinement. Patrick Anderson describes how this process worked in Turkish prisons:

The State reproduces itself by enabling the production of political subjects and reinvents itself by describing and defining those subjects according to a dogma of 'rights' that in turn reflects an impression of (and solicits faith in) values such as 'freedom,' 'security' and 'property' ... Social death is registered on the level of personal interaction and experience, and institutionally, as a systemic function.⁵

These political subjects are de-socialized, marginalized and, after experiencing 'social death,' they are unable to function. Social death, what poet Faraj Bairaqqdar calls 'human traces,' persists beyond the cell.

When I met with him in the mid-1990s, Malas explained that Ghassan al-Jabai was 'writing about an experience we share. It is so familiar. We do not have to go to prison to appreciate their cell stories.' In *Dissident Syria*, I analyzed prison narratives that were dark and so carefully articulated that they were sometimes impenetrable. Because Malas had recommended it, I read *Under the Sun on the Sand*. It was, he said, a brilliant example of how to deal with censorship. But also, I thought, with the uninitiated reader. What did this paragraph mean?

An army of black skeletons crawls over the earth of the naked, cement yard, an intertwined, interwoven army like the string of pigeons *hanged* from the hunter's waist ... a school of sardines goes out daily to dry on the sand, under the burning, desert sun (and the walls are adorned with) thick drops of oil.⁶

Footnote 3 continued

privatization of prisons has provided employment for over half a million civilians, and facilitated the exploitation of prison labor and incarceration may be considered 'a small scale form of Keynesian, public-works-style stimulus,' the economic dimension in Syria is not paramount; see C. Parenti (1999) *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (London: Verso), pp. 193, 213, 217.

⁴ Ibrahim Samuil (1990) *Al-nahnahat* [Light Coughs] (Damascus: Dar al-Jundi).

⁵ Patrick Anderson (2004) 'To Lie Down to Death for Days': The Turkish Hunger Strike 2000–2003, *Cultural Studies*, 18(6), pp. 818, 843.

⁶ Ghassan al-Jaba'i (1994) *Asabi' al-mawz* [Banana Fingers] (Damascus: Manshurat Wizarat al-Thaqafa), pp. 87, 200.

The skeletons, al-Jabai explained, were the shriveled prisoners who once a day for a few moments circumambulated the prison yard and, squinting in the unwonted light, they saw thick drops of oil. What were those drops? Was it really oil? No. That was how the hanging cadavers of former cellmates appeared on the yard walls. The spectacle was a warning, a daily lesson. Such descriptions of life-death become terrifying in their allusiveness.

Malas dreamed of making a film of this story. It was an impossible dream at the time. But some dreams, if the conditions are right, can be realized. In 1998, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with al-Jabai he started to adapt *Under the Sun on the Sand*.⁷ Seven years later and five years after the death of Hafiz Asad, they had filmed and produced it in Syria. How was this possible?

In this essay, I ask what changed between the rule of Hafiz Asad and that of his son Bashar who came to power in 2000. How is it that the ‘truth’ of prison experience, the always already irreducibly not yet expressed, might begin to find its way into language?

Three Cell Stories

A bridge narrative between the rules of Asad father and son is Hasiba ‘Abd al-Rahman’s *Al-Sharnaqa* (The Cocoon) that was published in 1999 without indication of publisher or place of publication. In a 2006 interview with *Al-Zaman* in Amsterdam, ‘Abd al-Rahman said that she decided to publish in Beirut because:

I was fully aware that the Syrian censors would not permit such a novel to be published and so I was compelled to publish it in Beirut even though the publishing house would not allow its name to be revealed.⁸

The Cocoon, the only woman’s prison narrative I have found,⁹ evokes the underground women’s world where ‘Abd al-Rahman spent over seven years some time around the 1991 Gulf War.¹⁰ A half-page preface disavows any connection between the novel’s characters and real people but salutes the ‘heroines who bore banners and were imprisoned during a time when heroism had become a kind of madness and self-sacrifice trivial and principles were trampled underfoot’ (‘Abd al-Rahman 1999: 5). This is one of the very few references the author makes to the political conditions that led to these women’s imprisonment.

⁷ *Under the Sun, On the Sand* (2007), dir., Muhammed Malas [film] (Syrian National Film Organization). Available at: <http://www.arteeast.org/cinemaeast/syrian-06/syrian06-films/thenight.html>, accessed July 9, 2010.

⁸ It is curious also that no names of *Al-Zaman* staff were mentioned; a note at the end cites the magazine’s collective. Available at: <http://www.free-syria.com>, accessed August 10, 2010.

⁹ Upon her release, in September 2000, Hasiba ‘Abd al-Rahman was the first Syrian woman to be appointed a member in the secretary councils of committees defending democratic freedoms and human rights in Syria. Yet most women withdraw completely from political engagement after leaving prison. Massoud Akko writes ‘the merciless treatment of political women activists at prisons makes ladies today reserve [sic] concerning participation in political and legal or even civil work due to security.’ (M. Akko (2008), *Syrian Women between Politics and Human Rights*. Available at: <http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=15093>, accessed March 7, 2010.

¹⁰ Hasiba ‘Abd al-Rahman (1999) *Al-sharnaqa* (no publication details available), p. 201.

Kauthar, the granddaughter of a *shaykh*, like other fellow prisoners, had been drawn almost involuntarily into political work. Caught distributing pamphlets for a nameless party, she is thrown in with a motley crowd of rich and poor, Islamists and prostitutes, political prisoners and murderers who fall in and out of friendship over the course of 300 pages.¹¹ Remembering the alarming transformation of an uncle after being Inside—‘his long beard, the pallor of his face, his distracted look, his forlorn features’ (p. 20)—she wonders how she, too, is changing.

Harsh interrogations produce hallucinations, terrible memories of an abused childhood and temporal disorientation: ‘Time passed slowly . . . quickly . . . I’ve no idea!!’ (30). During this time of no-time she begins to write on the prison walls, and, in solitary confinement, she fills ‘the emptiness of the day with stories and tales so as to sleep’ (pp. 31, 41). But her sleep is haunted by the hanged cadavers of women who were killed ‘in the name of God’ (p. 52). Becoming aware of the significance of what they have done to find themselves in prison, some compare themselves with famous fighters from Zaynab, the granddaughter of the Prophet Muhammad, to Angela Davies and Rosa Luxembourg (p. 280).

Unlike men’s prison stories of the Hafiz era, *The Cocoon* does not dwell on the individual but instead accentuates the collective. The women are in communal cells where they sometimes seem to replicate life outside; they cook, drink tea, tell stories, smoke, and watch television. The rich acquired servants from among their poor cellmates, the political prisoners interrogated the faith of the Islamists, and all might come together in a hunger strike that brought them rights they would not otherwise enjoy. Some reflected at length—they had the time after all—about their empty marriages, and the moments of delicious adultery. Some even fantasized sexual liaisons with handsome guards. For some, their experience outside was so bad, their alienation so intense that being Inside made them feel that at least here they belonged; it gave them something special: ‘Prison experience was hers alone!! It made her different from all the others’ (p. 164). Tension and distrust waxed and waned, as when the quarreling women would unite against the prison authority to protect a sister (pp. 227–256, 260). False rumors of release drove each woman into her cocoon, ‘in each butterfly is the worm that spins her silk’ (p. 199). While the first half of the novel is almost entirely dialogue, the penultimate section consists of ten ‘Papers’ or meditations about relationships with former lovers, daughters and with each other. The novel ends in a nightmare of women being carried aloft in coffins and weeping for the evil in their lives.

In a September 2006 interview with an anonymous interviewer from *Al-Zaman*, ‘Abd al-Rahman explained that she felt compelled ‘to record women’s specific experiences with their positive and negative details. Let people respond however they like. I will never again write about prison.’ For three months after publication, the Syrian authorities summoned her repeatedly. They demanded that she explain:

the symbols and references and what this or that thought meant and why I had written it this way and not another. What really surprised me was the harsh and negative reaction of the opposition. They accused me of washing dirty laundry in public. I was amazed that their violent reaction was no different from that of the

¹¹ When the women were among themselves and irritated, they might lash out and ‘Ibn Khaldun’s *‘asabiya* dissolved’ (p. 181). *‘Asabiya* is the term that fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldun coined to describe the group feeling distinguishing the powerful tribes from the decadent sedentary cultures.

authorities except that the latter could summon me and they could not. They wanted a story about heroes when it was a story of intellectual and military defeats.

She clarified that it was not the entire opposition but only some who were afraid of being discovered; they wanted everything, including their prison experiences, to remain hidden.

Despite the state's concern about the book, 'Abd al-Rahman and her husband were given passports and allowed to leave the country. Yes, she concurred with the interviewer, the state was claiming: 'Look at how we are giving travel documents even to members of the opposition. They can say whatever they like in international literary conferences without being oppressed or risking torture or extradition.' Clearly, she understood and was not afraid to talk openly about how commissioned criticism worked. In *Dissident Syria*, I coined the phrase commissioned criticism to describe:

an official and paradoxical project to curtail popular unrest ... It is not merely the toleration of transgressive practices that bridge the cognitive gap between the lies of government pronouncements and the reality of everyday life. Rather, it is the regime's Machiavellian manipulation of dissidence. Commissioned criticism is a state-sponsored practice that performs official accountability for the rosy rhetoric of slogans while converting real dissident practice into state ideology ... Intellectuals are made to understand that they have the responsibility to critique and that the refusal to do so may be no less risky than its excessive deployment ... Such criticism helped the state fashion the facade of freedom, democracy, and civil society while morphing political dissidents into obedient citizens.¹²

'Abd ar-Rahman was one of the last prisoners to register her experiences of incarceration during the rule of Hafiz Asad and to find that her work might be commissioned.

*

In 2006, the television screenwriter Khalid Khalifa (b. 1964) published *Madih al-karahiya* (In Praise of Hatred), a novel about the 'Events,' the euphemism used for the struggle between the Alawite-dominated government and the Muslim Brothers that peaked in 1982 and left thousands dead.¹³ Even though he is critical of the Islamists whom the Syrian government tried to crush for over 30 years, the novel was banned almost immediately after it came out in 2006. When it was republished in Beirut the following year, it became a finalist for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, a new award modeled on Britain's Man Booker Prize. In an April 2008 interview with Bryan Denton of the *New York Times*, he said:

Banning books is normal for us here, it's funny, even a little absurd ... It's not like Europe—'Ooh, I've been censored!' Here, we know people in the censorship

¹² miriam cooke (2007) *Dissident Syria. Making Oppositional Arts Official* (Durham: Duke University Press); see Chapter Four.

¹³ Khalid Khalifa (2006) *Madih al-karahiya* [In Praise of Hatred] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab).

office ... So you might call them: 'Why the hell did you censor my book?' And he'll respond, 'Why the hell did you have to write about this?'¹⁴

Written in the first person, *In Praise of Hatred* is narrated by a medical student from Aleppo and tells the story of a young woman from a Muslim Brotherhood family.¹⁵ She finds herself in prison after her brother and fellow Islamists are slaughtered in Tadmor Prison following an assassination attempt on Hafiz Asad in 1982 and murders of people from the 'other confession,' a term that never is explicated but that seems to refer to Alawites (pp. 112, 240–248).¹⁶ She is held for 100 days in solitary and then she is moved to a communal cell with other Muslim Sisters. Like the Islamist women with whom the Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi was incarcerated in 1981,¹⁷ these Sisters obsess over details of religious practice as they try to distance themselves from the common prisoners who pass through the cell (p. 257). When interrogated and threatened with torture, the narrator summons her reserve of hatred to stand her ground. It is this hatred that 'is our great weapon that makes the majority defend its confession against the ruling minority' (pp. 124, 127, 150).

Full of sympathy for the women who suffer the loss of their men or endure years of prison and torture, or accompany their husbands to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet infidels, *In Praise of Hatred* is a ringing condemnation of the men who waver in their political commitments or who are prepared to risk the safety of those who trust them to pursue goals they do not really want. During a furtive meeting with her beloved activist brother Husam, she tells him proudly of her political activities, he gives her money for their mother and leaves. Later, however, her hero announces his regret to have been involved in the killings and his desire to make the pilgrimage to Mecca to gain absolution for having murdered 'innocent civilians from the other confession.' He insists that she withdraw from politics and pursue her education. Amazed, she wonders whether 'we had been overly optimistic about the killings,' and she worries that this weakened man may reveal all to his interrogators (pp. 135–137, 147). Leaders like the narrator's uncle Bakr run away when threatened and abandon not only their loved ones who remain at the mercy of the authorities, but also companions who had committed themselves without thought of the cost.

Upon her release, the narrator discovers that she has become a heroine. Her room has remained untouched during her seven and a half-year absence, 'my belongings had acquired symbolic significance' (p. 320). She is stymied by their attitude since she feels incapable of connecting to them and their ideologies that had driven her before her social death in prison. From Syria to Afghanistan, they hail her prison years that have raised high the banner of Islam (p. 334). 'Abdallah 'Azzam, the real Arab Afghan leader and Osama Bin Laden mentor who is married in the novel to her former cellmate Safa', now shrouded

¹⁴ Bryan Denton (2008) Interview with Khalid Khalifa, *New York Times*, 14 April.

¹⁵ In the interview with Denton, Khalifa explained that although 'the novel is centered on a single Aleppo family, it encompasses the broader global story of political Islam over the past three decades. Some real people make appearances, including Abdullah Azzam, a leader of the Afghan jihad against the Soviet Union and a mentor of Osama bin Laden.' Ibid.

¹⁶ According to the 2010 Transitional Justice in the Arab World Project report entitled *Years of Fear*, supported by Freedom House, 'as many as 17,000 Syrians may have been "disappeared" during Hafiz el-Assad's rule'; see further, Robert Fisk (2010) Ghosts from the Past; Syria's Thirty Years of Fear, *Independent*, June 27.

¹⁷ Nawal El Saadawi (1984) *Mudhakkirat fi sijn al-nisa'* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi).

in black, writes to her from a training camp in Qandahar telling her how proud she has made the fighters; they will avenge her suffering and the suffering of all Muslims (p. 293). Soon thereafter he is wounded in a battle in Qandahar and he is sent, still in a coma, to a London hospital where the narrator gains access to him in her capacity as doctor. Almost as though he were not quite human, she observes him from a distance. Her time inside has separated her from these ideologues, these former companions in arms.

*

In *Al-qawqa'a: yawmiyat mutalassis* (The Shell: The Diary of a Voyeur) Mustafa Khalifa¹⁸ records his time in the 'desert prison,' i.e., Tadmor. A Catholic film student, Musa, is arrested on April 20 upon his return from Paris under the mistaken suspicion of being a member of the Muslim Brothers. He leaves on July 3, 13 years later. The dates are probably 1982 until 1994, since those are the dates of Khalifa's imprisonment in Tadmor. The Kafkaesque theme of mistaken identity or incarceration for no known reason is found in many prison narratives like Fadil Azzawi's *Al-qal'a al-khamisa* (The Fifth Citadel) (1972) that narrates the life of a prisoner apprehended in a café while looking for a prostitute and then never released.

Writing openly about prison, Musa lists his privations, the 'carnival of torture,'¹⁹ the lice, the filth, the unbearable toothaches, the beatings by the Muslim Brothers who condemn him to death for being a Christian, an unbeliever (2008, p. 213). He counts obsessively: 10,000 prisoners, many university graduates; 35 dormitories with one toilet per 86 men crammed together in 25 square meters (pp. 21, 26). He fights madness by encasing himself in a shell. The shell is the cell that he voluntarily enters for the 13 years of silence spent with the Brothers who refuse to speak to him because he is Christian: 'The ashes of extinguished years gradually cover the freshness of memories of the outside. This outside withdraws as the individual dives deep into the daily details of prison' (pp. 241, 234).

Telling No-Time

Cell narratives evoke what Derrida calls 'life-death,' and Ibrahim Samuil experienced as the 'absolute simultaneity of life and death.' These narratives tie and untie the knots of time between a lost past, an empty present and an impossible future, between life-death inside and outside. For Jacques Derrida, such a life-death state constitutes the aporia that exceeds language: 'How can we *think* that? How can we *say* it while respecting logic and meaning? How can we approach that, live, or *exist* it?'²⁰ It is the no-time of those who are pushed into the no-place of the *barzakh*, that limbo separating life and death and bringing them together. For Hasiba 'Abd al-Rahman, prison literature arises out of 'a torn

¹⁸ Mustafa Khalifa (2008) *Al-Qawqa'a yawmiyat mutalassis* [The Shell: Diary of a Voyeur] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab). The 1993 National Academy of Sciences report, *Scientists and Human Rights in Syria*, identifies Khalifa as a '43-year-old topographer; arrested in January 1982 by Mukhabarat al-'Askariyya (Military Intelligence) for suspected involvement in prohibited Party for Communist Action; previously detained in 1979–1980; reportedly held in Saidnaya Prison; adopted as prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International; married with one child' (AI UA 10/25/91; CDF Engineers List 1991; AI Newsletter 8/92; NAS).

¹⁹ This expression, *haflat al-ta'dhib*, is prison jargon.

²⁰ Jacques Derrida (1993) *Aporias* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 65, 68.

imagination that evokes place that is no-place and time that is no-time. Everything is lost in prison.'²¹ Once there, the prisoner is put:

on the path of the *aporia*: the difficult or the impracticable, here the impossible, passage, the refused, denied, or prohibited passage, indeed the non passage, which can in fact be something else, the event of a coming or of a future advent which no longer has the form of the movement that consists in passing, traversing or transiting.²²

'No-time' is the time of those who are disoriented in two temporalities, the one glacial and the other instantaneous.²³ The narrator of *In Praise of Hatred* looked for ways to represent her 'feelings of heavy time when our lives rolled around like scattering pomegranate seeds.'²⁴ This was how the 'hell voyage' was traveled; seven and a half years 'during which I aged seven and a half centuries' (p. 316). Time elapsed without its passing being noted; theirs were 'seasons without seasons ... as though the time of golden letters had been transformed into black ink.'²⁵

If the passing of years was noted, it might be casual and as though disconnected from its reality. The narrator of *In Praise of Hatred* mentions each year in a subordinate clause: it was after she had been inside for a year that 'the floggers stopped flogging, having acquired all the information they needed' (p. 257). Seven pages and two years later, she is moved with nine other women to another prison; another four pages and the third year is noted in connection with the birth of a boy in the cell and her withdrawal from any form of religious practice. On her way to yet another prison and overwhelmed by the sounds of the traffic and other signs of everyday life outside, she mentions the fourth year in a subordinate clause: that night 'for the first time in four years I stretched out freely and was able to turn over more than once before dropping into a deep sleep' (p. 282). The fifth year comes five pages later in the middle of a sentence about her father's visit (p. 287). Six pages later, an old friend visits, and she finds it 'hard to summarize six years in two hours' and then the 'seventh winter passes, the seventh is our sacred number that our Qur'an mentions with reverence, and much had changed' (pp. 293, 302). And then another six months to make up the seven and a half years during which 'I aged seven and a half centuries.' When the officer releasing her handed her the papers, 'he held out his hand and I stretched out mine to transfer to him the poison of my hatred and to shake the hand of the enemy. But when I looked into his eyes I knew that he was dead' (p. 316). She had won the centuries-long battle.

²¹ *Al-Zaman* (2006) Interview with novelist and politician Hasiba 'Abd al-Rahman,' *Al-Zaman*, September 12.

²² Derrida, *Aporias*, pp. 46, 3, 8.

²³ For Moroccan Fatna El Bouih, who was Inside for years when Hasan II was king, suffering is weighed in measures of time: 'The time? No time, no difference between day and night. Everything was the same here, even torture had no time ... [T]ime is a sharp sword. You want it to be short, you want it to understand, you ask it to help but time has no mercy: it stretches out and pulls away ... Time is the first enemy on the battlefield ... Time wins every round.' (El Bouih (2008) *Talk of Darkness* (Austin: University of Texas Press), pp. 6, 24.) For Faraj Bairaqqdar, time in Tadmor was so excessive that he did not know what to do with it (see his 2005 interview with Fadil al-Fadil).

²⁴ Khalifa, *Madih al-karahiya* [In Praise of Hatred], p. 305.

²⁵ 'Abd al-Rahman, *Al-sharnaqa* [The Cocoon], pp. 183, 186.

In *The Shell*, Musa details his first five days and then skips six and a half months to November 16, and then New Year's Eve. The next jump is to August 31, September 10, and then December 25, and then the massacre of Muslim Brothers on February 22, then March 24 and 30. These are the days that are picked out of the blur of cell time, the temporality of those who live in no-time. This diary of individual days constitutes 'a voyage through space . . . a voyage through time'²⁶ In no-time, changes are registered only when they enter time. Just when linearity and action emerge out of the voyage of waiting, chronology may be reversed. Key turning points may be omitted and then referred to later within another chronology. An intensely anticipated event disappears only to appear in the recounting of unrelated events. Without compass, the reader is drawn into the swirl of no-time. This is not the circular or arabesque time of autobiography that bridges the birth of the author and her time of writing; it is an arbitrary series of moments taken out of time.

Time in prison is two times, each accompanied by contradictory feelings. Present time is heavy, slow. Past time in prison is light, quick. Suddenly you become aware and you ask yourself: What? I've spent five years, seven, or is it ten? Truthfully, I didn't feel the time. God, how did these years flash by like lightening?²⁷

Astride such incongruent times, prisoners no longer know where or even who they are. They are like Derrida's *arrivants*, stripped of:

all the distinctive signs of a prior identity, beginning with the very border that delineated a legitimate home and assured lineage, names and language, nations, families and genealogies . . . Since the *arrivant* does not have any identity yet, its place of arrival is also de-identified; one does not yet know or one no longer knows which is the country, the place, the nation, the family, the language, and the home in general that welcomes the absolute *arrivant*.²⁸

The *arrivant* in prison is reborn into a terrifying world of *no time* whose truth exceeds language; it is without past or hope of future.

Prison literature, like the experience it articulates, is contained within borders that cannot be traversed but only entered and interminably traversed. The cell is the place of the non-passage; this is the reason Khalid Khalifa's narrator does not feel free when she is freed. She can only connect with former cellmates. Prison dominates her days in medical school and when she travels to London to be close to her uncle Bakr, she realizes that she cannot connect even with those she had thought close to her. Even a year after his release *The Shell's* Musa wonders whether he will ever be able to

²⁶ Khalifa, *Al-Qawqa'a yawmiyat mutalassis* [The Shell], p. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 184; see also p. 305. This recalls what American prisoner Sam Melville wrote before he was killed in the 1971 Attica prison riots: 'It has been six months now and I can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly.' When Frederic Rzewski put this to music in his powerful 'Coming Together,' the refrain is repeated dozens of times, finally dwindling into a whisper wracked with pain. Iraqi Azzawi writes "the seasons follow one another without paying me any attention" (Fadil al-Azzawi, [2000, 1972], *Al-qal'a al-khamisa* [The Fifth Citadel] (Cologne: Al-Kamel Verlag) p. 153.

²⁸ Derrida, *Aporias*, p. 34.

say that I have left prison. I don't think so . . . Every day I do automatically what is necessary to continue staying alive; I eat, I drink, I sleep . . . Will I carry my prison with me to my grave? . . . To the shell that fear had built around him has been added another thicker, stronger, blacker shell because in the first shell there was hope for something better. In the second there is nothing other than nothing.²⁹

In this second shell he has no desire for the tiniest aperture out on to the outside. The memoir ends with Musa turning in on himself entirely (p. 383). The cell cannot be left, only passed through to its limits; it is the entrance and passage to a future toward which there will be no movement, but it is also and at the very same time the non-passage of traversing and transiting without possibility of arrival.³⁰

'Prison never leaves me,' Ibrahim Samuil laments.

Prison is tattooed on my soul; it flows in the blood of all that I write. The beatings may cease but the pain in the soul is forever. Under martial law, when you have no right to a lawyer, a judge, a trial or a sentence, you live in limbo. Life outside is no different from inside; there is no end in sight.³¹

Prison writers articulate the melancholy of those who have lost something—in this case, connection to others—and, because they do not believe that they have totally lost sociality when they return to the outside they do not mourn its loss. Connection persists as a loss they never acknowledge and that thus haunts them in such a way that they retain 'a constant and complicated attachment to the lost object.'³²

In a 2008 interview, the founder of the Syrian communist party Riyad al-Turk stated that he would never be able to live beyond that life-death that marked his 17 years of incarceration between 1980 and 1998 and then again for 15 months between 2001 and 2002. In *The Shell*, Musa wonders whether there is 'a single prisoner in the whole wide world and at any time who has spent a year or more in prison and then, when he leaves, he is who he is . . . I've never seen anyone who entered this prison leave it' (pp. 230, 265). Release does not bring freedom: '[S]ince leaving prison I've felt a chasm that cannot be spanned . . . I am disturbed at the thought of mixing with people for work or for any other reason. I want to seclude myself as far as possible from them' (pp. 364–365). The chasm yawns ever wider for some who cannot survive outside, like his only friend Nasim who throws himself from the roof of a six-storey building: 'With the passing of days and the chain of deaths, the numbers of pieces dying inside us increase and the space for death grows . . . I'm carrying a huge graveyard inside me. At night these graves open their doors and their occupants look at me, they speak to me and scold me' (pp. 375–377). Life in limbo turns time into an obsession.

Writers are claiming this Sisyphean experience that they can never go beyond but only endlessly traverse. Prisoners under constant surveillance lose spatial and temporal

²⁹ Khalifa, *Madih al-karahiya* [In Praise of Hatred], p. 380.

³⁰ In the American context, this non-passage can be seen in the alarming rate of recidivism (see Parenti, *Lockdown America*).

³¹ Quoted in cooke, *Dissident Syria*, p. 128.

³² Moneera al-Ghadeer (2009) *Desert Voices: Bedouin Women's Poetry in Saudi Arabia* (London: I. B. Tauris), p. 50.

orientation, unable to know the limits of the place in which they are held or to track the passage of time. In the cell, 'no time' materializes in the space of 'no place.' Time is both empty, without beginning or end, and full of stops and starts.

Beyond the Aporia

Since Bashar Asad came to power in 2000 the situation of artists and intellectuals seems to have changed from what it was under his father. The famous Damascus Spring witnessed a number of progressive initiatives, including Riyad Saif's Movement for Social Peace that issued the 2001 Statement of 1001. Reform, democracy and freedom were in the air. Significantly, the terrifying prisons at Tadmor and Mezze were closed in 2001 and the number of detainees was radically reduced.³³ Like the Moroccan prisoners released when Muhammad VI came to power and who wrote about their time inside under his father Hasan II, Syrians have been representing openly their prison experiences during the rule of Hafiz Asad in literature, film and even cartoons. Whereas cultural production during Hafiz Asad's regime was highly allegorical and carefully historical, today it is generally direct and less formally experimental. Although some of these texts are censored, writers and filmmakers clearly feel they can engage with what before had been taboo.

Films, novels, poetry and interviews graphically depict confinement and torture, especially in Tadmor during the 1980s heyday of Muslim Brotherhood activism. It is possible to write about this place that Faraj Bairaqqdar once called the 'kingdom of madness and death,' perhaps because after being closed, the name Tadmor cannot refer beyond itself to the real. In his 2001 interview with Muhammad 'Ali al-Atassi, Bairaqqdar spoke openly about the years 1987–2000 that he had spent in Tadmor and Saydnaya. Poetry had allowed him to 'control my prison rather than be controlled by it ... Love is one of the ingredients of resistance. Poetry. Despair also, but not in a suicidal or capitulatory sense ... Two weeks after my imprisonment began, poetry came by itself, as a defense mechanism.'³⁴ But how did they write under impossible conditions when they were denied paper and pens? Mustafa Khalifa explains:

Written is not exactly the word, since in the desert prison there are no pens or paper for writing ... The Islamists developed a style of mental writing ... when I decided to write these memoirs I could train myself to turn my mind into a tape recorder in which I recorded everything I saw and heard.³⁵

Bairaqqdar confirmed this kind of writing when he told al-Atassi that in Tadmor he 'trained his memory' in order not to forget the poetry that poured into the vacuum of his cell. When he could, he would write the first line of a poem on a piece of cigarette paper or on an onion skin or on a bit of wood with the hope that this first line would later trigger the rest of the poem. In isolation, under conditions of absolute sensory deprivation, the mind begins to produce its own stimuli. Without temporal and spatial orientation the individual becomes

³³ Joe Pace & Joshua Landis (2009) *The Syrian Opposition: the Struggle for Unity and Relevance 2003–08*, in: Fred Lawson (ed.) *Demystifying Syria* (London: Saqi).

³⁴ Bairaqqdar, Interview, p. 9.

³⁵ Khalifa, *Al-Qawqa'a yawmiyat mutalassis* [The Shell], p. 9.

victim to his/her fantasies and nightmares and they have to be woven into art so as not to obsess and destroy. Again and again, prisoners assert that creative acts resist madness.

The absolutely forbidden during the 1990s became permitted in the new century. In 2001 and 2005, Faraj Bairaqqdar, and in 2008, Riyad al-Turk gave frank interviews about the torture they had endured during decades of incarceration. Mention of the destruction of the old city of Hama, formerly so beneath the radar as to be illegible for the uninitiated, is explicit. Today the Sunni city can be called a killing field; Khalid Khalifa imagines a city ‘dreaming of restoring leadership to our confession, of raising the Qur’an above the sword.’ But soon ‘thousands of corpses are evaporating in the air of Hama mixing with the smell of the river.’ Fearlessly, he recounts the killing of four members of the Abu Nur cell and three others, the discovery of a stash of arms and ‘thousands in the desert prison or in rotten underground detention centers heavy with the stench of blood and shit awaiting a virtually assured death’ while subjected to the most terrible of tortures. A prisoner from Hama spoke about her destroyed city, ‘with cadavers thrown into the streets to decompose.’³⁶ The story of Tuhama burying her three brothers by the Orontes River that runs through the heart of Hama evokes the 1982 massacre in tragic detail:

Tuhama was struck with aphasia after carrying her three brothers’ corpses out into the streets in search of two square meters in which to bury them. Gunfire exploded from all sides but she could not be stopped as she continued on her way with one of her brothers in her arms. She buried all three of them in the bank of the Asi (Orontes) River. She prayed for them and when she raised her voice to recite the Fatiha she realized that she could not speak. But after two nights spent with the corpses and the sound of the bullets, she did not care.³⁷

This latter-day Antigone finds herself incarcerated with political activists who scarcely notice her when she passes through them like a spirit.

In 2007, Muhammad Malas’ impossible dream came true: His adaptation of al-Jabai’s 1994 short story, ‘On the Sand under the Sun,’ came out. It was finally possible for this heartbreaking prison story to be performed and filmed. Whereas 10 years earlier, al-Jabai described executions so indirectly as to be almost incomprehensible, after 2000 the incomprehensible could be translated into the legible. Malas worked with al-Jabai to stage and then film this surreal story that he had ‘written’ while in Tadmor, written in his head in defiance of the prohibition on writing. But in the film, the writing is ink on paper next to an overflowing ashtray. Signifying beyond their lexical meanings, the written words in the cell story had evoked the choking, coughing airlessness of the cell. In stark contrast with this textual allusiveness, the film is a carnival of whips and words etched black on the white of a clean sheet of paper. After the opening shot³⁸ the actors, young, strong and attractive in their black slacks and T-shirts, enter carrying cage walls. They build the cell around themselves, the barbed-wire roof settles over the bars, a crown of thorns, and al-Jabai—who plays himself—commands them to whip the ground, and then, dismantling the structure, they leave. The oil

³⁶ Khalifa, *Madih al-karahiya* [In Praise of Hatred], pp. 152, 160, 144, 272.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

³⁸ Malas used the device of heads in silhouette looming up out of the horizon that he deployed in *Yaumiyyat ‘unf’ adi*, the 1996 film about Michel Seurat that he made with Usama Muhammad.



Figure 1. Writing a cell story in 'Under the Sun on the Sand.' Screen grab

drops of the story disappear and the shadows that replace them are clearly cadavers hanging above the yard. The camera's focus reveals the secrets of the allusions and they become dully familiar. Execution scenes figure just as explicitly throughout *In Praise of Hatred* and *The Shell* with their gallows, farewells and dead men walking.

Another striking development is that the prohibition on mentioning the Muslim Brothers seems to have been lifted. Between 2000 and 2003, Bashar Asad pardoned hundreds of Muslim Brothers, even if he did not repeal Law 49 of July 7, 1980 that mandated capital punishment for those who did not renounce their Brotherhood membership in writing. After the secularist Committee for the Revival of Civil Society called in 2005 for dialogue with the Muslim Brothers, the Damascus Declaration was released and the spring thaw froze back into winter. Note the striking contrast between how al-Jabai in 1994 refers to the Muslim Brothers and the strategies of the more recent texts.

'Can we forget the sound (*sawt*) or whip (*sawt*)?' I had not understood what he meant and when we met I had asked for clarification: 'The *sound* of the *whip*, Ghassan said, was often accompanied by another *sound*, the sound of the Muslim Brothers' voices screaming: "Allahu akbar! God is great!" No matter how much they were tortured the Muslim Brothers, or at least those whom Ghassan heard, continued to praise God.'³⁹ The recent novels openly name and describe the Brothers and they are even protagonists, as in Khalifa's *In Praise of Hatred*. Some of them are good and others evil. In Tadmor, their cries of 'God is Great' are unambiguous responses to torture and anticipated execution.⁴⁰ Twice a week at night, Mustafa Khalifa writes, the prisoners heard the sound of helicopters, 'planes of death piloted by Azra'il, the Angel of Death.'⁴¹ Officers from the capital flew to Tadmor with the names of those to be executed after a minute-long trials. He describes the calm of the Brothers as they took leave of their companions and

³⁹ cooke, *Dissident Syria*, p. 135.

⁴⁰ Khalifa, *Madih al-karahiya* [In Praise of Hatred], p. 266.

⁴¹ Khalifa, *Al-Qawqa'a yawmiyat mutalassis* [The Shell], p. 113.

distributed their clothes for to those who might need them: 'The execution takes place in front of the sleeping area. We saw the gallows several times on our way into and out of the breathing yard . . . from time to time we hear shouts of God is great . . . the last time my hair stood on end.'⁴² That was May 3rd, when 45 became martyrs; this was one of the many massacres of Brothers in Tadmor⁴³ that Khalifa describes in cinematic detail:

The blood of prisoners' brains splattered the cell ceilings. Corpses were stacked in the corridors like rotten oranges thrown helter-skelter into a rat-filled box forgotten in a corner of the steerage of an ocean liner . . . more than eight hundred prisoners were slaughtered in under an hour and bulldozers carried their cadavers to a secret place where they were thrown into a ditch. No one knew its shape, depth or smell.⁴⁴

The blood and slaughter and the forced witnessing is detailed. When Musa no longer heard the Brothers' cries he looked through a hole in the wall and saw the men being dragged out with their mouths taped shut.⁴⁵ At one point, Musa let a fellow prisoner watch an execution through the hole in the wall. First, he vomited; next, he smiled (pp. 205–206).

Not only are the executions graphically portrayed, but the attitude of the military toward their operation also may be described. They were said to relish the opportunity

to shoot the prisoners like fish in a barrel; they delight in their falling like flies . . . bristling with arms they head toward the desert as though to hunt wild ducks. (After their planes land) they have plenty of time to prepare their rifles. Their enemies are human sacks shackled with iron and chained to the walls. (pp. 238–239)

News traveled fast and the inhabitants of Hama and Aleppo mourned publicly in a scene reminiscent of the Karbala lamentations. The narrator of *In Praise of Hatred* and her mother set out at dawn in a caravan of cars transporting:

mothers from all the cities who wanted to smell their sons, unwilling to believe the stories they thought were invented. The checkpoints and the soldiers' rifles stopped thousands of people who spent the night outdoors at a distance from the prison that had fallen utterly silent after the removal of the corpses and the fire-hosing (of the blood) as though the soldiers were merely doing routine work . . . Women in black knelt in rows holding their brothers', fathers' and sons' photographs as though they were praying to a god in whom they had long believed. Then they heard the stories of the few who survived 'carrying their bowels as they clung to life.'

Six of the officers lost their minds and they were released from service with their medals of honor, as though the state knew that its orders exceeded the ability of

⁴² Ibid., p. 117.

⁴³ The infamous massacre of Muslim Brothers in Tadmor took place on June 27, 1980. Tlas affirmed that every week during the 1980s there might be as many as 150 hangings in Damascus alone. See S. Koelbl (2005) *Das Einmal der Diktatur, Der Spiegel*, 21 February, p. 113.

⁴⁴ Khalifa, *Madih al-karahiya* [In Praise of Hatred], pp. 240–248, 290.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 143.

normal people to execute without going mad. The narrator and her mother left the women who were determined to stay until their men's bodies were returned to them. Despite visions of him in heaven or being eaten by dogs, the narrator hoped that her brother was not among the murdered, but her mother knew and when they reached home her heart gave out. (pp. 240–248)

It is not only prison narratives and stories of the state's targeting of the Muslim Brothers that are allowed to circulate, but other taboos are also being lifted. Writers and artists, even some active during the time of Hafiz Asad, are unveiling the apparatus of the Asad cult. In *The Shell*, Musa's contempt for the Leader is palpable, especially when his uncle, who has become a government minister, insists that he must sign a telegram of gratitude to the president: 'No more humiliation. Let it be prison or death . . . I shall not thank the one who imprisoned me for these long years. I shall not thank the one who stole from me my life and my youth.' His uncle asks his son to sign for Musa.⁴⁶ Khalifa writes about the many who left the country because they could no longer tolerate the as-if game they had to play if they were to survive:

doctors and engineers and judges and citizens who could not tolerate living under billboards glorifying the Party and where people belted out enthusiastic encomia that had become an unbearable hysteria reminiscent of the howling of a pack of mad dogs.⁴⁷

Nihad Siris devotes his *Uproar and Silence* (2004) to lampooning the Asad cult.⁴⁸ The *tanaffus* of 1990s literature and film threads through this narrative,⁴⁹ but here it is not a daring allusion to the unbreathability of the current regime. It is a throwback to the time of silencing but without its dread. On the occasion of the 1990 celebrations for the twentieth anniversary of the *Haraka Tashihya*, the term used for the Hafiz Asad regime, children shout: 'Long live, long live!' The name of the one whose life should be lengthened is left out. Boys are beaten for not participating (later called 'escaping') in parades, and the streets are draped in 'huge cloth banners covering the buildings . . . No one is allowed to see the faults of the leader' (p. 40). All display images of the *za'im*, or Leader (a word that dominates the text), to prove their love for him. When a poor employee produces hundreds of posters with one of the Leader's eyes smudged because of a faulty copier, he is arrested and tortured for six months for having made the Leader 'look like a pirate' (pp. 124–128). Touring a 'propaganda workshop,' the narrator visits the psychological department where the easy repeatability of slogans is examined, then he walks through warehouses stacked floor to ceiling with Leader posters; next, he is invited into the department devoted to the embellishment of the Leader's images (pp. 142–151).⁵⁰ It is a:

⁴⁶ Khalifa, *Al-Qawqa'a yawmiyat mutalassis* [The Shell], pp. 338–339, 345.

⁴⁷ Khalifa, *Madih al-karahiya* [In Praise of Hatred], pp. 350–351.

⁴⁸ Nihad Siris (2004) *Al-samt wa al-sakhab* [Silence and Uproar] (Beirut: Dar al-Adab).

⁴⁹ See also Khalifa, *Al-Qawqa'a* [The Shell], pp. 87–92.

⁵⁰ Khalifa also describes these national celebrations lionizing the incomparable Leader and broadcast in the prison. The prisoners are taken out into the yard to show their devotion: 'for the first time since I arrived here they have allowed us to stand in the yard with our eyes open.' (Ibid., p. 55).

[c]enter dedicated to the design and production of slogans appropriate to specific occasions. The people here are brought up on rhyming slogans . . . the roar of shouts and loudspeakers in our parades are necessary to erase thinking. Thinking is revenge. It is a crime, a betrayal of the leader. Love of the Leader does not require thinking because it is self-evident . . . Contempt of the Leader may lead to 20 years' sleep in *prison* . . . He loves to see the masses killing themselves on his behalf. (pp. 16–20, 41, 77, 80–91, 124)

Since the narrator had refused to host on his radio program a literary competition 'in praise of . . .' (the name is again omitted), he is under surveillance. The state will put an end to him with 'silk gloves' by connecting him through marriage to the Leader's henchman, his future stepfather: '[T]hey are concerned about you because you're different; they don't want anyone to be different. They want you to join them and to praise them' (pp. 48–75, 150, 102). In other words, they would like to *commission his criticism* by having him work for them in the propaganda department (p. 158). In disgust, he exclaims to his girlfriend: 'Don't you see what's happening? Human beings have absolutely no value. They brought 45 cadavers of people who were trampled to death or smothered in the crowd or shot by a celebratory bullet' (p. 131). So, Fathi became 'a lover of silence' (p. 156). This kind of criticism of the Asad cult was unthinkable under the father.

Conclusion

Prison narratives provide a prism onto life under authoritarian rule. They are written for those who have been inside to check the veracity of their memories in an attempt to understand what kind of political subjects they have become and also for those outside who may have no real idea of the cell experience but who need a place from which to think and understand their situation and structure an alternative.

The past decade has witnessed a remarkable increase in the production of fiction and films revealing the oppressive strategies of the Syrian state. Whereas pre-2000 narratives focused on isolation and the unbearable loneliness and darkness of the cell, that zone of sensory deprivation in which temporal and spatial moorings disappear, Bashar-era writings explicitly depict prison communities, the torture and the executions.

Some of this work is allowed to circulate and some of it is banned. The cartoonist Ali Farzat was allowed to publish an astonishing image of Tadmor (Figure 2). This is the carnival of torture the writers evoked: Interrogation tools are attached to the walls of the cell; one prisoner with a hand and foot amputated hangs from straps while his blood drips on to the floor; meanwhile, his torturer weeps at the tenderness of a television romance.

On the other hand, less radical representations are censored or, at least, not circulated. In 2008, 'Abd al-Hamid 'Abd al-Hakim directed *Kharij al-taghtiya* (Out of Coverage) and the following year Hatem 'Ali directed writer-producer Haitham Hakki's *Al-layl al-tawil* (The Long Night), films that revolve around the release of long-term political prisoners. Neither film has been shown in Syria even after jumping through the various hoops necessary to get a film into production. Both films focus on prisoners' families and friends who for decades have been negotiating and compromising with the authorities to secure the release of loved ones. These are films that ought to be welcomed. The closing of high-security prisons in Tadmor and Mezze would seem to symbolize the dawn of a new age,

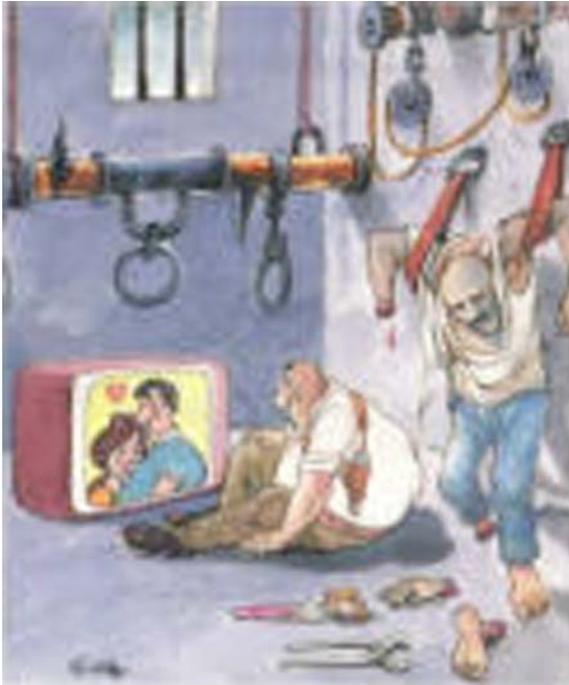


Figure 2. Ali Farzat's 'Life in a Tadmor Cell'

and films such as these might mark the beginning of a season of justice. However, these films are not celebrations; they are dirges. The release of Zuhair, after a decade, in *Out of Coverage*, and of Karim, after two decades, in *The Long Night* throws their families into crisis. How are these aging activists to be accommodated in homes that have long grown used to their absence?

In a February 2010 interview with Ana Maria Luca, Hakki said that he had been motivated to write the screenplay because:

I knew a number of people who were either political prisoners or political detainees. What always amazes me is the relationship [of the prisoners] with the men in power, the friendship or family ties. I thought a lot about how to discuss the matter in the film: being high-ranking officials and then [spending] 20 long years in prison. This is one aspect of the story. I wrote this script from my conviction that this topic is the most important in our country. And through the depth of the humanitarian work of art, this movie is an invitation not to repeat the circumstances that led to all these individual tragedies. Closing the file of political prisoners is one of [the] signs of political reform and that we're moving toward democratic goals. We got the approval for the scenario very easily. The governmental Commission for Film, Television Industry and Photography found it all in order. No problem whatsoever. The prison scenes were even filmed in a real prison with the approval of the Ministry of Interior. No, there was no problem with

shooting this movie . . . But the finished film is subject to another committee of the Ministry of Culture.⁵¹

Like Hafiz-era films, *The Long Night* was praised and awarded prizes abroad, but it has not yet been shown in Damascus, not even at the 2009 Damascus Film Festival, the only occasion when politically daring domestic films are shown. However, the formerly taboo mention of prisons in films seems to have been lifted.

So far has liberalization gone in Syria that in 2006 Hasiba ‘Abd al-Rahman was able to call upon its citizens to make the state accountable for its discourse about democracy and freedom of expression and a noble, free life; ‘but we have to remember that states do not give freedoms for free. There must be great sacrifices to seize these legal rights.’⁵² She has thrown out a challenge to intellectuals to speak truth to power.

On October 9, 2009, Hasan ‘Abbas took up her challenge, and *Al-Adab* published his article entitled, ‘*Hikayat didd al-nisyan*’ (Stories against Forgetting: A Reading of some Contemporary Syrian Novels⁵³). His thesis was that *during the past 10 years* (i.e., since Bashar Asad came to power) novels no longer were written to make readers forget their circumstances but rather to forbid forgetting. They elaborate the ways in which the state ‘prevents a contestatory consciousness through a series of steps that begin with censorship in its multiple forms and end in prison or sometimes execution.’ Even after passing through the censors or publishing abroad, writers like Mustafa Khalifa, Khalid Khalifa, Ibrahim Samuil, Ghassan al-Jabai and Faraj Bairaqqdar risk freedom and life. Their writing was, ‘Abbas asserts repeatedly, and ‘still is (*la yazal*) to a certain extent,’ about the painful truth of political prison, a truth silenced in official publications; it is an indictment of the state.

‘Abbas was commenting on a known literary phenomenon. To his dismay, on October 17 the Syrian government banned the October 9 edition of *Al-Adab*, shocking ‘Abbas into countering that this ‘ban did not accord well with the current situation in Syria or with the image which Syria is trying to project about itself and its culture . . . These works are widely available and read. So what’s wrong with writing about them?’ But what he did not acknowledge was the *la yazal* that he sprinkled throughout the text. Whereas the writers were clear about the fact that they were dealing with ‘events’ that had happened long ago, ‘Abbas pointed to the persistence of these practices. The ‘isolationist prison regime,’ to use Patrick Anderson’s term, continues, but in other forms.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank several people who have read and commented on this essay: Nikolaos von Dam for his generosity and encouragement; at Duke University, members of the 2009–2010 Innovating Forms Seminar

⁵¹ Ana Maria Luca (2010). Available at: <http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID = 148305#ixzz0tIyzED8Q>, accessed July 10, 2010.

⁵² Hasiba ‘Abd al-Rahman (2006) The Novelist and Politician Hasiba ‘Abd al-Rahman, *Al-Zaman* (Amsterdam), September 12. Available at: <http://www.free-syria.com>, accessed March 15, 2010.

⁵³ ‘Protest against forgetting’ is a phrase Eric Hobsbawm used in a March 2002 interview with David Frost. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/breakfast_with_frost/2009287.stm, accessed September 1, 2010.

that the author co-directed with Fred Moten; in Rome, participants in the June 2010 European Modern Arabic Literature Seminar.

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