Int. J. Middle East Stud. **33** (2001), 477–502. *Printed in the United States of America*

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RESISTING SILENCE IN ARAB WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Silence . . . continual silence. . . . However, it is a conscious silence, aware and vigilant, not a silence of absence and emptiness.

The chain of silence has been broken; I have written five poems. I feel somewhat at ease. I shall write, I shall write a lot.

Fadwa Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*

Words that are too explicit become such boastings as the braggard uses; and elected silence implies resistance still intact.

Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*

As far as I recall, writing down the experience is not a sign of defeat in itself. Perhaps my defeat is hidden between the lines; my writing this experience down on paper must contain the beginning of the defeat.

Latifa al-Zayyat, *The Search: Personal Papers*

Fadwa Tuqan, Assia Djebar, and Latifa al-Zayyat are three Arab women who are well known for their literary and artistic creativity, as well as for their political activism. Each has written at least one autobiographical work charting her struggles in the personal, political, and literary arenas, and each has chosen to express these struggles in terms of finding a voice that resists silence but also acknowledges that silence is a form of resistance.[1] In writing their autobiographical works, these women are interested in creating not simply a female autobiographical tradition but, rather, a tradition that specifically does credit to their need to authorize their voices without posing as authorities from above, to write narratives that are simultaneously antiauthoritarian and authoritative, and to do so by speaking for and on behalf of others without appropriating them or subsuming them into their own agendas. Their autobiographical works are thus marked, and ultimately enriched, by tension, hesitation, and anxiety, particularly regarding their own power and authority as authors. This hesitation enables them to express collective sorrows and dreams in this seemingly most individualistic of genres.[2]

One striking similarity among the three works on which I will concentrate—Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey*,[3] Djebar's *Fantasia*,[4] and al-Zayyat's *The Search*[5]—is

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743801004019 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that what initially appear to be three disparate experiential territories (the sexual, political, and literary) at some point merge into one another and are seen to be multiple facets of the same structures of oppression and strategies of resistance. As the connections among these domains are explicitly made, the author–narrator is empowered to break a silence that had lasted for a long time and to write in a new way that challenges and reconfigures the masculinist aesthetic expectations that had consciously or unconsciously stifled her. When Tuqan, one of the foremost Palestinian poets of the 20th century, understands her insistence to write romantic rather than political anti-Zionist poetry as a reaction to her restricted life as a woman, she is liberated into writing a poetry and an autobiography that can merge the political with the personal. When Djebar, a noted Algerian writer and filmmaker, connects her inability to cry out in ecstasy during love-making with her inability to write in French or Arabic, and connects both with her dual oppressions—by the French as an Algerian and by Arab patriarchy as a woman—she is able to write the beginnings of both her history and that of her country. And when al-Zayyat, an established writer and critic, finally is able to expose her naked body to prison guards, who are both male and instruments of governmental coercion, without feeling shame, she is empowered to publish an autobiography that reveals her innermost vulnerability but does not humble her.

Tuqan could not overcome her reluctance to write political poetry until 1967; Djebar spent twelve years unable to write and used film as a medium of expression instead; and al-Zayyat published her second creative work twenty-six years after her hugely successful first novel, *al-Bab al-maftuh*.[6] The writing of these autobiographical works became possible only when these women understood their silences not as the inadequacy or weakness that they had previously considered them to be, but as a further expression of their ambivalence about power and its structures, including the literary. These autobiographical works are informed by the awareness that this ambivalence is a warranted—indeed, a necessary—step toward beginning a new kind of writing that does not easily conform to andocentric conventions and simply perpetuate existing traditions. It is a writing that challenges these conventions and traditions and renegotiates the space of the literary vis-à-vis other patriarchal spaces of power. And, of course, the autobiography, perhaps the ultimate site of confession and self-exposure, is fertile space for exploring the ambivalent relationship between writing and power. On the surface, an autobiography appears to be a celebration of the achievements and accomplishments of its writer, an act of narcissism announcing that one's character and life are worthy of sharing with the world. Yet an honest autobiography inevitably exposes aspects of one's life and character that are not entirely praiseworthy and often becomes an exploration of vulnerability and loss.[7] In other words, each of these women sees writing, and writing specifically and unabashedly about the self, as a source of power, an extremely significant process that allows them to examine, interrogate, and attempt to bring about change. It is both a private activity crucial for analyzing, understanding, and maybe even reinventing the self, and a public activity that enables them to interact with and re-create the world around them. Yet they also understand writing—and, more specifically, writing an autobiography—as a relinquishing of power. The arbiter, the silent partner of the contract—that is, the reader and the critic—assumes certain privileges of power because, as Michel Foucault suggests, "the site of confession or self-exposure dramatically reverses power's conven-

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tional dynamics: the one who remains silent and who listens exerts power over the one who speaks."[8] Similarly, a staged self-silencing may be an extremely powerful form of public opposition, denoting rejection and even rebellion.[9] In writing these autobiographical works, the authors are speaking out against their silence and against the forces and mechanisms that produced it, but they are also acknowledging its power by incorporating certain silences in their writing and reproducing their narrative voices as sites of contradiction and ambivalence.

Although the general silencing of women appears to be an almost universal phenomenon, cutting across different periods and places, it is nevertheless a phenomenon that needs to be dealt with contextually. It is important to remember that historically voices have been available to women, just as voices have been denied them, and ingenious women have often been able to subvert the restrictions placed on them in ways that are only recently coming to light through the efforts of committed feminist scholars. In the Arab context, women have almost always had some access to composing "high" literature and to sharing their compositions with a public audience. We know, for example, that in pre-Islamic Arabia, where the favored literary genre was poetry, dozens of women (sixty or seventy, according to different sources) were considered established poets. The main genre in which they wrote was elegy (*rithāʾ*), and one of the most famous, if not *the* most famous, poets of the elegy in the Arabic tradition is a woman: al-Khansaʾ. In spite of that, the criteria by which female poets were evaluated and judged were almost always put forth and applied by men. It has been noted that "the word for literary excellence (*fuḥūla*) was derived from *faḥl*, which originally meant a sexually superior male." When the early Abbasid poet Bashshar wanted to praise al-Khansaʾ, he said: "that [woman] defeated the [male] master poets (*fuḥūl*); she had four testicles."[10] It has also been noted that of the pre-Islamic elegies that have been preserved, hardly any take as their ostensible subject a woman. But because an elegy is often just as much about the mourner as it is about the dead person, this poetry is an important source for studying women's creativity.

Arab women continued to compose *rithāʾ* after the advent of Islam and until the end of the Andalusian period; they resumed doing so in the modern period with the *nahḍa*, or renaissance of Arabic literature, when they began to compose in virtually all of the fields of Arabic literature.[11] We also know, however, that certain subjects seem to have been closed to "respectable" women until the 20th century. One of these was erotic poetry, which was primarily composed and recited by slave girls, with a few exceptions, such as Layla al-Akhyaliyyah and Wallada bint al-Mustakfi. Thus, a female Arab poet in the Umayyad period could, and might even have been expected to, recite poetry expressing her anguish over the death of a brother or a husband, but expressing romantic passion or erotic desire for a man would have been difficult.[12] A poem written by a man, however, could often express that desire via a fictional, and occasionally real, woman. In other words, a male poet such as ʿUmar ibn Abi Rabiʿa could write a poem in which Hind was seen and heard admiring her naked body and wondering how desirable it was to a man, but a real Hind—a historically identifiable Hind, that is—would have found writing that herself very difficult. So although the range of topics that was allowed a female author was limited, that was not the case for female speakers, fictional or fictionalized, within texts written anonymously or by men. One well-known example is Scheherazade, the fictional narrator of *Thousand*

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and One Nights, who told stories that sometimes bordered on the obscene in an effort to ward off death. It is of course true that a whole set of different issues is associated with historically identifiable individual authors as opposed to anonymously written texts with fictional female narrators.[13] Yet even the writing of fictional stories in which a woman is the narrating voice—the speaking subject who explains, comments, judges, and desires—is significant in that it creates possibilities, both empowering and anxiety-provoking, for the modern female Arab writer, and this we shall see particularly in the case of Tuqan.

BEYOND THE ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE: FADWA TUQAN'S DIFFICULT JOURNEY

Fadwa Tuqan, a major Palestinian and Arab poet, was born in 1917 in Nablus, Palestine, to a wealthy and influential family. Her autobiography *Rihla jabaliyya, rihla saʿba* was first serialized in 1978–79; published in book form in 1985, with several subsequent reprints; and translated into English in 1990 under the title *A Mountainous Journey*.[14] Of the three works I discuss in this article, *A Mountainous Journey* is the only one identified by its author as an autobiography, or *sīra dhātiyya*. Although it is not an entirely typical example of the genre, as I will show, it is more so than the other two works both in its style of composition and in the way it conforms to the "success-story" paradigm, beginning with its very title indicating ascent in the face of great obstacles. Although Tuqan implicitly compares herself to Sisyphus early on, writing, "I carried the rock and endured the fatigue of the endless ascents and descents," she admits that she considers herself to have "succeeded . . . in surmounting what would have been insurmountable without the will and the determination to pursue the noblest and the best of goals."[15]

Most of these obstacles, as she tells it, are directly related to her gender. This work includes sharp criticism of the seclusion of women in the 1920s and '30s, calling female society in Nablus a prison, a chicken coop, a women's *qumqum*, and the *qumqum* of triviality (*qumqum* being the bottle in which genies are usually imprisoned in *Thousand and One Nights* and in folk tales). Within this prison of triviality, Tuqan's basic and ultimate fear was of being a nothing and drowning in nothingness (*lāshayʿiyya*). As a child, she was disturbed by the fact that her father rarely addressed her directly, usually referring to her in the third person even when she was within hearing distance.[16] She was pained by her paternal aunt's threats and rebukes whenever she dared to raise her voice "'silence, shut up! The next thing you know you'll be a *jinkiya* [professional singer] in Hind and Sareena's band.' My voice would suddenly break off, leaving the song hanging incomplete in the air."[17] This aunt's prohibitions extended to poetry, for when she saw one of her older brothers helping Tuqan with her poetry, she bitterly reprimanded him, explaining that "a girl must be subdued every time she raises her head."[18] (Literally, "Whenever a girl develops a horn, break it."[19]) Tuqan the adult narrator is aware that, although she resents this treatment and comprehends its basic unfairness, she has also internalized some of it and has become unsure of herself—of her physical attractiveness, her voice, and her significance:

> In my silent contemplation, I would repeat: Who am I? Who am I? I would repeat my name over and over again in my thoughts, but my name would seem foreign and meaningless to me.

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At that point any connection I had to my name, myself, or my surroundings would be cut, leaving me submerged in a very curious state of non-presence and nothingness.[20]

Tuqan's relationship with her mother was equally difficult.[21] The narrator understands that her mother was also a victim and takes pride in the fact that her mother was the first woman to take off the veil in Nablus and tried to become involved in women's groups and organizations. She also seems somewhat aware that her mother's singing and storytelling were significant activities that gave her a taste of the power and beauty of the female voice:

When mother crooned in her tender moving voice I would run to sit beside her, listening very attentively. . . . 'Where are you going, my consoler?' . . . 'Assemble the tribe and gather the dear ones' . . . and other songs I still love. . . . Making music and singing were an outlet for expressing my repressed emotional needs during my girlhood and youth.[22]

In addition, her description of the public bath shows her awareness that the joyful, liberating atmosphere is a result of the women's unveiling of their bodies as well as their voices: "the lively women's voices mingled with children's cries and shouts, water dripping on to naked bodies from long flowing hair."[23] And yet, ultimately, she sees her mother as someone who, though victimized into silence herself, also participated in silencing her, as in the following recurrent nightmare: "[s]he would be silent while I, filled with feelings of suppressed defeat and a bitter sense of anger at the injustice, would try to scream out her unfairness at her, but my voice would stick in my throat." She also mentions that her mother would rub her lips with red-pepper seeds to punish her.[24]

Tuqan's path toward charting a different identity for herself comes literally through finding a voice—specifically, a poetic voice. Through the friendship and guidance of her older brother Ibrahim, who was the foremost Palestinian poet of his time, she gradually begins to develop an alternative image of herself as bright and accomplished.[25] Yet her relationship with poetry is not without tension and reflects her conflicted feelings about her sense of self, which is in turn inextricably bound up with her gender—more specifically, in this case, with her gendered poetic voice. Tuqan finds that she is unable to write poetry addressing public and political issues and is inclined toward personal poetry dealing with her private emotions, her sorrows and desires, most often romantic and erotic ones. This went against her family's wishes and was highly unusual for Palestinian poets, who tended to write nationalistic poetry and to see their primary role and responsibility as spokespersons for their people. Initially, Tuqan attributes this to her secluded condition as a woman and wonders how her father could demand that she address public issues when she was denied access to the meetings and gatherings where discussions of relevant national concerns took place. But it becomes clear that this is not the only—perhaps not even the main reason—for her disinclination for public poetry. Her father's death and her ability to participate fully in the political and intellectual life of her community is a form of release, yet she admits that it is only a temporary release, for she soon reverts to her more personal brand of poetry. It appears that writing public poetry and adopting the persona of spokesperson for the collective represented a threat to Tuqan—a threat of a return to her earlier days of insignificance and nothingness. The incarceration and neglect she suffered as a child and adolescent, coupled with her negative view of

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female society in Nablus, lead Tuqan to see autonomy and freedom as the most sought-after conditions in her life. Submerged for too long in a collective entity called "the women" and denied independence, even recognition as a person in her own right, she could not bear willingly to forsake or subsume this individual being, achieved after a great deal of struggle, to collective thoughts and concerns. This still budding sense of self needed to be fully asserted, recognized, and celebrated before it could fuse with other selves in a collective voice without feeling lost.

There is yet another way to regard Tuqan's personal poetry as a form of gendered rebellion—in this case, against literary conventions. Her fellow male poets show extreme courage and defiance when their poetry engages the struggle against imperialism and Zionism. Her insistence on exploring and exposing intimate feelings and experiences in poems that she shares with a public audience, however, is equally brave and defiant. It must be seen as a conscious rejection of the existing literary code of the time, which decried such subjects as inappropriate for respectable women. According to Salma Jayyusi, a respected poet and poetry critic, Tuqan's greatest contribution to modern Arabic poetry lay in her "early liberation of the erotic," in which she preceded male poets, for "Fadwa's mounting candor about her emotional life as portrayed in her verse remains an amazing feat of pioneering courage."[26] Indeed, in Tuqan's poetry the female body is no longer simply the object of male desire, the arena in which men can play out their fantasies and needs, for a woman now writes about her own desires and insists on her centrality to her poetic universe.

How does this fit in with the literary traditions that Tuqan was taught and to which she was exposed? The answer to this question is actually quite complicated. According to Tuqan, the first poem that Ibrahim showed her and asked her to memorize, so she "could see how Arab women write beautiful poems," was one in which a female poet lamented the death of her brother.[27] The lines of this poem, as she quotes them in the autobiography, are entirely about the dead brother and say not one word about the woman herself—not even about her feelings of loss or bereavement at the death. Tuqan does not directly criticize Ibrahim's choice—quite the contrary, in fact. The choice of the poem is in line with the high women's poetic tradition whose most famous representative is al-Khansaʾ. Tuqan's most favorite poets at the time, however, were not al-Khansaʾ and company; the poets she mentions are all male. She lists her first love as Ibn al-Rumi and her last as Abu-Firas al-Hamadani. It is important to note that Tuqan's attraction to and identification with these male voices did not center on what we would now see as stereotypically masculine qualities, or what the medieval critics would refer to as their *fuḥūla*. The poem by Ibn al-Rumi that she admires and emulates is an elegy to his dead son. Whereas the lament that she quotes by the female poet is devoid of explicit emotion, the elegy by Ibn al-Rumi is undoubtedly one of the most emotional poems in the Arabic language. Ironically, then, it is the openness of the male poets about their innermost sorrows, their admissions of weakness, their "longings," "suffering," and "tender feelings and extreme emotionalism"[28] that attract Tuqan to them, not any heroic endurance or machismo.

But Tuqan's relationship with the literary heritage is complicated even further by her brother Ibrahim, who, after reading one of the laments that she has written in Ibn al-Rumi's style, responds: "[s]ister, people aren't interested in our personal feelings. Don't forget this fact." Again Tuqan does not react angrily or by criticizing Ibrahim,

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and she puts the blame on her own introverted nature, which "was stronger than Ibrahim's excellent advice."[29] But one can well imagine that her feelings toward him were more confused than the surface of her words would lead us to believe. However, she followed his advice for some time, writing poetry that, according to one critic, was far superior to that of "many men composing soft feminine poetry" and reminding him of the poetry of Abu Tammam and Mutanabbi, two of the more "masculine" poets.[30] But she also must have had some desire to separate her poetic voice from Ibrahim's, for the anxiety of influence could not but have been extreme in her case. Ibrahim was not only the older brother, teacher, mentor, and supporter who literally enabled her to write and to publish. It also appears that when she started publishing, many readers and critics assumed that it was really Ibrahim who was writing the poems, not Fadwa. Her depiction of her relationship with Ibrahim curiously lacks the ambivalence or dual awareness that characterizes her relationships with almost every other family member, almost as if it is the last taboo that she cannot bring herself to breach. But it would have been natural that, together with the admiration and gratitude that she felt, she also would have desired distance from him and from the male poetic tradition of courage and resistance to the enemy that many credit him with starting (Tuqan herself credits Ibrahim with being "the voice of the Palestinian people"[31]) in order to develop and assert her unique voice.[32]

But it is also important to note that, alongside the male poets that Tuqan loved and imitated and with the high women's poetic tradition about which she felt ambivalent, she was exposed to alternative women's voices. We have already seen the powerful, almost magical, effect that her mother's songs and stories had on her, and she mentions other singers whose voices were available through recordings, such as Umm Kulthum and Fathiyya Ahmad.[33] Tuqan notes that although her father forbade singing and playing the lute by his own family members, he derived a great deal of pleasure and comfort from listening to music and to female singers. It is not surprising that this young girl, yearning for her father's unattainable affection and respect, would aspire to become one of these "unrespectable" singers who nevertheless succeeded in what she herself was failing so miserably—capturing her father's attention and admiration. Another non-mainstream poetic tradition that she identifies with is that of the slave girls owned by the ruling classes who, in the Middle Ages, composed and sang love poetry. She discovers one such poet, Dananeer, in classical anthologies and uses the name as a pseudonym when she starts publishing love poetry. She quotes "in all simplicity and innocence," as she puts it, an editor who claimed that "Dananeer was honorable and chaste" in order to "shield me from the shame of love and to convince the reader that love poetry did not remove the qualities of 'chastity' and 'honor' from the female writer of poetry."[34] The chastity and innocence, however, do not come from disclaiming these experiences and feelings as real and ascribing them to an imaginary speaker or persona. In fact, Tuqan readily admits that she experienced love and its thrills and excitement many times in real life,[35] going so far as to assert that "it is unnatural that one's heart should be bound up in one person all one's life. It is normal for more than one relationship to form and for love to recur in the heart"[36] and that "I have never believed that one's emotional life ends with the end of a particular love affair. Indeed I feel I am fulfilling the message of Eve. This guarantees a refreshing change of spirit."[37] What she is asserting in the strongest terms, then, is that there is

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no shame in experiencing love or in writing about the experience. Thus, Tuqan's earlier love poetry, which may at first glance seem to be typically feminine, is when seen contextually a subversive woman's reaction to attempts, deliberate and otherwise, to prescribe for her a priori what she may and may not say. One has to look at a variety of contextual literary and extra-literary factors to understand truly the originality and depth of this rebellion.

Yet Tuqan is not entirely comfortable with these tendencies, and the word *qumqum* now becomes associated with individualism (*qumqum al-dhātiyya*), which she feels restricts and limits her. She chooses to end her autobiography with an extremely significant intersection between the public and the private: the Arab defeat in 1967. This event marked an important turning point in her life, for it began an almost wholehearted merging with the collective and an ability to write political poetry. Ironically, then, the 1967 defeat represents a moment of triumph in Tuqan's own development as a poet, despite, or perhaps because of, her undoubtedly deep anguish over the catastrophe. The defeat frees her from the *qumqum* of individualism, perhaps because she feels that everyone, not only herself as a woman, is caged in the *qumqum* of occupation. Because Tuqan can finally identify with the entire nation's powerlessness and vulnerability, which reflect her own, she can now sing their collective sorrow. Whereas she had previously felt her marginalization much more acutely as a woman than as a Palestinian, it is at this moment, when citizenship truly is no longer a privilege, that she can see it as more than a male prerogative and can fully embrace both her national and her gendered identities. These identities are no longer conflicting strands of her self; rather, they echo one another. One should not discount other factors that may have contributed to this new-found ability to write simultaneously as a woman and as a Palestinian without feeling a contradiction in doing so. By this time, Tuqan had become well established as a poet and had reached a stage of self-confidence and security in her independence, both in her personal life and in her career, so that merging with the collective did not have to threaten her sense of self or her unique poetic voice. Moreover, she was no longer the sole female poet giving voice to a woman's experiences and dreams. Others had joined her, making women's desire a fairly common poetic topic. Thus, her stance was less rebellious, though still acknowledgeably pioneering. Tuqan's later poetry indeed shows an amazing blend of the personal and the collective, an "I" and an "eye" that are intensely private and, at the same time, staunchly communal. These poems are undoubtedly written by a woman who is undoubtedly a Palestinian.[36]

The composition of the autobiography itself reflects many of these tensions and anxieties. As mentioned, *A Mountainous Journey* is the most mainstream autobiography of the three works I discuss both in its ordering and its adherence to the paradigm of an important person who succeeded despite all the obstacles in her path. But lying within this overall frame are constant disruptions—that is, the text often subverts its stated intentions. Tuqan asserts that "for the ambitious person, the journey of life is an uninterrupted progress from one stage to another. . . . Life is motion, forever going forward."[39] But the text also shows that she is well aware that the progress is rarely, if ever, "uninterrupted," and that often "going forward" involves making circuitous trips, meandering, stopping, and even temporarily moving backward. Thus, the surface organization, an apparently linear and chronological ordering of events, is almost con-

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stantly interrupted and dislocated. The relation of incidents from a specific period are often intruded on by other, seemingly unrelated incidents and characters from different periods that eventually shed light on the incidents and, more important, on her reaction to them. It is evident that Tuqan is concerned not only with an external narration of the incidents and events that her life comprised but also very much with an attempt to understand, and to make understood, the needs and desires that lay behind these events. Thus, her linear journey abounds with halts and side trips. The symbol of the mountainous journey, then, is not limited to her life story of triumph against all odds. It applies equally to the writing of the autobiography, which is an inner journey of self-exploration and self-understanding.[40] For this journey, two processes are crucial—the process of remembrance and the retrieval of connections between the inner world and the external world, which at some point cease to be separate entities.

In more than one place in the autobiography, Tuqan talks about somehow losing her past:

> I often find that the past has gone not only in its physical sense, but in its psychological sense too. What is past has a value that differs entirely from my present view, so it loses its psychological significance. I feel that I am another person with no connection to my former self, no longer acquainted with it except in memory. The world of my childhood is the only one that has not lost its psychological meaning for me. . . . With that exception, everything, it seems to me, submits to the laws of change.[41]

If Tuqan is truly convinced that the "psychological significance" of the past is no longer retrievable and that she has no connection to her former self, then how is it possible for her to write her autobiography? Is it almost the same as writing the biography of another? I believe that a significant conclusion one can draw from these statements is that Tuqan is aware that what she is presenting in this autobiography is not an unadulterated past but very much a past seen through the prism of the present and ordered according to its psychological and aesthetic criteria. It is, as Sidonie Smith puts it, "an interpretation of earlier experience that can never be divorced from the filtering of subsequent experience or articulated outside the structures of language and storytelling."[42] How does Tuqan propose to use memory to retrieve that past and to explore the connections among these multiple selves that she believes existed at different moments of her life? It is precisely by accepting that, in a very basic way, she is telling the story of another, and that for the story to be as "true" as possible, the other must tell the story with her.

A Mountainous Journey is woven with quotes from earlier travelers to the city of Nablus, including historians, ancient and contemporary poets, famous singers, newspaper articles, and letters from Tuqan's cousin and from acquaintances. In her introduction to the translation, Fedwa Malti-Douglas comments on this intertextuality, finding it somehow disturbing that these external male voices are needed to authorize or provide credence to the female narrator.[43] There is no doubt that the vast majority of "other" voices included in the text are men's, but women's voices are also present. Moreover, if we respect Tuqan's assertion of her sense of estrangement from her past selves and of how she depends on what she wrote in the past to gain some understanding of these former selves,[44] then we can include under the rubric of intertextuality the last section of the book, which comprises twenty-seven entries from Tuqan's per-

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sonal diary written in 1966–67. Tuqan herself gives us a clue to understanding the crucial role that intertextuality plays for her. Early in the autobiography, she comments that her mother had no anecdotes to tell about her infancy and early years: "But she never quenched my thirst with one simple anecdote. Cringing with a feeling of nonentity I would tell myself: I am nothing. I have no place in her memory."[45] Implicit in this reaction is an awareness that the telling and retelling of stories is not only an important link to memory, which connects us with a past that is no longer accessible, but that the very act of storytelling validates our existence and imbues our past with significance.

If we replace the notion of a self that is stable and already constituted with the notion of a self or selves that are transient through continual change, that are in a perpetual state of becoming, then our presence in language and stories is crucial, for it anchors us by offering a self that is fixed in specific moments, and our change becomes a form of continuity rather than extreme rupture.[46] These stories provide us a space of consolation in which we can temporarily revisit the past as it once was—a meeting place of what we once were and what we now are, and an assessment of the relationship between the two. Moreover, it is not surprising, nor is it necessarily disturbing, that Tuqan has anxiety about her power as an author, which manifests itself in her inclusion of external voices to authorize and validate her own. We have seen that Tuqan, like many female writers all over the world, experienced her "individual creativity as alienation from the culture that fosters it." It therefore is not unexpected that she overcomes this anxiety by inserting "multiple narrative voices to balance the needs of connection and separation."[47] To take this a step further, one should keep in mind that by the time Tuqan is telling her story, she no longer perceives it as hers alone. Similar to her poetry, it is the story of an individual woman who is also a Palestinian and whose personal history is interweaved with the story of her country and its trials and disappointments in the 20th century. Through the insertion of other voices, then, she writes an autobiography that is simultaneously intensely personal and unabashedly collective, one in which multiple selves come together to tell their stories and validate their singularity as well as their affiliation.

This imperative to be true to the personal project while meeting communal goals is one of the main organizing principles in the text. At every juncture there is a seamless connection between private moments and public events, intimate feelings and collective sentiments, personal goals and national ambitions. And often, though not always, intertextuality is the transitional device that connects the different registers of discourse and textual spaces. One typical example can be found in the few pages preceding Tuqan's account of the death of Ibrahim. These pages use Ibrahim's dismissal from the Palestine Broadcasting Station in 1940 and quotations from the Jewish newspapers that attacked him, as well as his own rebuttal to these attacks, to thread together comments about the growing Zionist influence, the tension between the Hebrew and the Arabic press, British censorship, some information about pre-Islamic poetry, and her own private anguish over his death not long afterward.[48] But whereas Ibrahim's life usually provides a harmonious link with external events, the ups and downs of his career corresponding to the fortunes and misfortunes of the Palestinian cause, the relationship between Tuqan and her outside world is more ambivalent. The autobiography begins by almost immediately connecting the birth of the infant Fadwa with death

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and disaster in the form of the martyrdom of her mother's cousin and the British occupation of Palestine. This dissonance between women's well-being and Palestinian liberation operates as a subtle leitmotif most of the time and is explicitly stated on a few occasions, as when Tuqan writes, "When the roof fell in on Palestine in 1948, the veil fell off the face of the Nablus woman. She had struggled for a long time to free herself from the traditional wrap and thick black veil."[49] And just as the work's beginning establishes a painful disharmony between a woman's private realm and her public causes, it ends by reiterating how, as I mentioned earlier, Palestine's disaster of 1967 becomes an occasion for her to break the chain of silence, and "all of a sudden I, myself, am a poem, burning with anguish, dejected, hopeful, looking beyond the horizon!"[50] Although this phenomenon of the creative writer's work thriving on personal and political catastrophes is by no means limited to women, it does have a gendered dimension in the case of Tuqan that cannot be ignored, particularly when one sees it in conjunction with the poetry she wrote after 1967. In fact, it is because Tuqan is able to break the silence about her humiliations as a woman and within the family (compare her earlier feelings of shame and humiliation, which prevented her from revealing "the reality of the wretched situation at home"[51]) that make this journey so moving. In moments of crisis—and the Palestinian situation certainly qualifies as such—there is often a tendency to cover up internal disagreements and not expose the negative qualities of the group, this being seen as a form of betrayal because it gives ammunition to one's enemy. To Tuqan's credit, she does not succumb to this pressure and manages to portray the complexities of the situation with courage and honesty, so that her female body and the Palestinian body politic are neither rendered totally inviolate nor left open to violation. Tuqan's text transcends this simplistic binary opposition and confronts us instead with a reality wherein neither total subordination nor complete triumph is left unchallenged.

OUT OF THE PRISON HOUSE OF LANGUAGE: ASSIA DJEBAR'S LIBERATING MOVES

Djebar's "preparation for an autobiography," as she calls *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, was first published in French in 1985 and translated to English in 1989. It shares more than a few of the concerns that animate Tuqan's work, including the struggle to find a voice that can do justice to different strands of the self through connecting different forms of oppression, and to write an autobiography that can give expression to individual as well as communal concerns. Djebar was born in 1936, and so shares with Tuqan the experience of occupation, for Algeria did not become independent from France until 1962. Yet there is one major difference. Tuqan, although she is sometimes ambivalent as to the degree to which her poetry should be involved in political struggle, has fairly straightforward feelings about the Israeli occupation. Although she may wonder which Arabic linguistic styles or registers are most appropriate for expressing her vision, she does not doubt that Arabic—and certainly not Hebrew—is the vehicle for her literary creativity and political struggles. In the case of Djebar, the journey toward finding her own voice is further complicated by the ambivalent relationship she has with the French language. On the one hand, French is the language of the occupier, the oppressor, the enemy. (Djebar actually

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participated in the war of independence against the French.) Yet the French language is also the one in which she was educated and one that she associates with liberation.[52]

Djebar, a historian and creative writer who often attempts to blend the two genres by blurring the distinctions between them, started her career by publishing four novels in French, which were followed by a period of twelve years of silence starting in 1962 (the year of Algeria's independence from France). In those years, she apparently was attempting to move to writing in Arabic and failing to do so. She was not entirely silent during that period, of course, for she continued to teach history at the University of Algiers and made a film, *La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenoua*, in which music alternates with testimonies in Arabic and Berber by Algerian peasant women who fought in the war of independence.[53] In 1980 she broke her silence as a fiction writer by publishing a collection of short stories, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*,[54] followed by *Fantasia* in 1985, in which she exposes her love–hate relationship with both languages, as well as the limitations of both historical and creative writing and the implications regarding the multiple facets of her identity as a French-educated, France-resisting, anti-patriarchal, female Algerian historian, filmmaker, and creative writer.

Fantasia interweaves two histories. The first is a personal history of a nameless narrator who shares much of Djebar's history. The second is the history of Algeria starting from the point at which the French landed on Algerian shores in 1830 and ending with the recollections of Algerian women who fought in the war of independence and their insights into post-independence Algeria. Djebar presents us not only with many different moments in time, but also with many different perspectives and ways to tell about these moments. She succeeds in structuring her text in such a way that these different angles of consciousness can stand separately but also merge with and shed light on one another—the different parts of the text are in a self-corrective dialogue with one another. Although I will continue to refer to the different sections as "personal" and "historical" for the sake of convenience, this distinction is an over-simplification that glosses over the interpenetration of the two in this text.

The personal sections, which alternate with the historical sections in the first two parts of the book and are interspersed irregularly with the "voices from the past" of the third part, are in no way a comprehensive, chronologically ordered account of the narrator's life. Rather, they zoom in on specific incidents and characters that share the quality of being cornerstones in this Arab woman's search for a liberating medium of expression, starting with the "little Arab girl's first day at school" and ending with the adult writer's attempts to bring to the pen (she uses the Arabic *qalam*) the victims of history who never had a chance to tell their own stories. In these personal sections, a relationship is established almost immediately between Arab traditions and the Arabic language, on the one hand, and women's cloistering, their limited access to the outside world, and the curtailment of their freedom, on the other. In particular, the Arabic language mutes the relationship between a woman and her body, including her voice. In the traditional Arabic school, the girls sit huddled up and covered. As soon as they become identifiably female, they are veiled: "her swelling breasts, her slender legs, in a word, the emergence of her woman's personality transformed her into an incarcerated body!"[55] At the French school, to which the narrator's father has chosen to send her, the girls run around freely in their comfortable, unrestrictive clothing. In

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the Arabic language, a certain silence reigns—a woman's conversation is laden with "the omnipresent 'he,'" "the 'I' of the first person is never used," and women primarily tell their stories "by means of understatement, proverbs, even riddles or traditional fables, handed down from generation to generation, the women dramatize their fate, or exorcise it, but never expose it directly."[56] In the traditional Arab quarters,

> the only really guilty woman, the only one you could despise with impunity, the one you treated with manifest contempt, was "the woman who raises her voice." . . . To refuse to veil one's voice and to start "shouting," that was really indecent, real dissidence. For the silence of all the others suddenly lost its charm and revealed itself for what it was: a prison without reprieve.[57]

When Arabic is a language of "stifled aspirations," French becomes a language of liberating "secret missives."[58] The first love letter that she writes as an adolescent is in French, and her father becomes angry when he uncovers this secret correspondence: "thus the language that my father had been at pains for me to learn, serves as a go-between, and from now a double, contradictory sign reigns over my initiation."[59] She is also fascinated by the letters written by "three cloistered girls" living in a tiny village whom she visits in the summer during her childhood. These girls, whose father can neither read nor write French, write and receive letters from young men from all over the Arab world whose addresses they find in the personals sections of magazines. The French language enables them to escape the physical walls surrounding them and partake of experiences they would not otherwise be able to have. Letters also allow them to redefine and subvert some of the most basic rules pertaining to women in their village, including who a "stranger" is and who has a right to a woman's body. As the younger girl puts it:

> I'll never never let them marry me off to a stranger who, in one night, will have the right to touch me! That's why I write all those letters! One day, someone will come to this dead-and-alive hole to take me away: my father and brother won't know him, but he won't be a stranger to me![60]

But matters of course are not as simple as French equals liberation and Arabic equals repression. French may have been, since childhood, "a casement opening on the spectacle of the world and all its riches,"[61] but it is also true that

> the words I use convey no flesh-and-blood reality. I learn the names of birds I've never seen, trees I shall take ten years or more to identify, lists of flowers and plants that I shall never smell until I travel north of the Mediterranean. In this respect, all vocabulary expresses what is missing in my life, exoticism without mystery, causing a kind of visual humiliation that it is not seemly to admit to.[62]

The lack of immediacy that characterizes her relationship with French from early on—the fact that it is a language with an ambiguous referential role, that it is associated with lack or void rather than plenitude in her life—stands in contrast to the warmth and familiarity of Arabic, the "mother tongue," with everything that this term implies in terms of intimacy, security, and trust. Thus, the term of endearment *hannouni*, when used by her brother or an old friend, instantly creates an emotional bond, a feeling of safety and oneness that is not possible to achieve with the use of any equivalent French term, so that it is not simply the term but also the emotions conjured up by the term that are untranslatable. This dichotomy between freedom and intimacy

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743801004019 Published online by Cambridge University Press

extends into the arena of the body and sexuality, where the unrestrained cry of pleasure during sex becomes symbolic of a triumph over the restraints of the body and the voice. But even though the French language, and a French partner, allows her the freedom to cry out with pleasure, this does not extend to heart-felt love. Thus, it never becomes true passion, for these sexual partners do not become "lover-friends." Ultimately, the intimacy of the Arabic wins the battle: using it with Arab men deflects erotic games or adventures, and, ironically, even the shared taboos are of value in enabling them to

> take the mutual risk of our acquaintanceship developing into love. With friend or lover from my own birthplace, emerging from an identical childhood, swaddled in the same indigenous sounds, anointed with the same ancestral warmth . . . still steeped in the same garden of taboos, in the same thickets of lethargy, yes, with my brothers or my lover-friends, I finally recover my power of speech, use the same understatements, interlace the allusiveness of tone and accent, letting inflexions, whispers, sounds and pronunciation be a promise of embraces. . . . At last, voice answers to voice and body can embrace body.[63]

But another, extremely important dimension stands in the way of French being the language of true love, and that is the structure of power between the conqueror and the conquered, or the imbalance that persists even after independence. Djebar is well aware of the games of power that are involved in the two conquests—the occupation of a country and the possession of a woman's body. The historical sections that lay out the conquest of Algeria make this clear by using vocabulary associated with erotic adventure and triumph. Thus, she writes, "as the majestic fleet rends the horizon the Impregnable City sheds her veils," and she is "like a figure sprawling on a carpet" and "makes her appearance in the role of 'Oriental Woman.'"[64] This "Oriental Woman" receives the "first kiss of death" from the French aggressors, who penetrate her "with the sounds of an obscene copulation."[65] And because Djebar, a student and personal friend of the late Franz Fanon, understands that victims often internalize their own victimization, and may even transform their pain and humiliation into a form of pleasure to make it more tolerable, she realizes that there may be an element of masochism involved in the pleasure that an Algerian woman derives from exposing herself to the "master," "in stripping herself naked, making herself vulnerable, conquered. . . . Exactly, 'conquered.'"[66] This nudity, then, when exposed to the "master" is not a victory over internalized repression through transcending it. Rather, it goes one step farther in internalizing one's own objectification and sense of inferiority; it is surrender. Conversely, although she thought that Westernizing her body would enable her to be free and to be seen as a person in her own right, she discovered that even though she "had a body like that of a Western girl," to the French she would remain "veiled, not so much disguised as anonymous."[67] To her French seducers she remains, in spite of everything, the quintessential Arab woman and thus doubly distanced and objectified.

Djebar establishes a parallel between the unveiled yet symbolically absent woman—the naked, conquered female—and the exposed author writing in the language of the former conqueror. Because writing is like "an act of love," not to write in Arabic is "to be separated from a great love." Composing her text in French carries many of the same conflicts that writing that first love letter held. Alongside its liberating potential is the danger that it will distance her from her earliest childhood memo-

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ries and disconnect her from her historical roots; that it will transform her autobiography into a flat, dispassionate recollection; that it will not be the reflection of her true voice. Because Djebar values the oral tradition, and particularly her connection with the women who can express themselves only in that tradition, writing in French makes her feel that she is "alternately the besieged foreigner and the native swaggering off to die, so there is seemingly endless strife between the spoken and written word."[68] Moreover, the political dimension of using French cannot be underestimated. "The French language blinded the peeping-toms of my clan and, at this price, I could move freely, run headlong down every street." And yet, how can using the former colonizer's language not be an expression of defeat and abdication? How can the French not take using the language as the ultimate sign of their triumph and superiority over an inferior race? How can they not see it as a justification for their exploits when that people, now supposedly free to use any language they choose, can by their own admission not be free except in French? Writing in French

> is a public unveiling in front of sniggering onlookers. . . . A queen walks down the street, white, anonymous, draped, but when the shroud of rough wool is torn away and drops suddenly at her feet, which a moment ago were hidden, she becomes a beggar again, squatting in the dust, to be spat at, the target of cruel comments.[69]

The composition of *Fantasia* is dictated in large part by Djebar's need to resolve these dilemmas and cohabit with her "stepmother" tongue without severing the bonds of childhood. Djebar must find ways to unveil before the sniggering onlookers without allowing their cruel comments to devastate her; to reveal *their* shame in her nudity; and to make them feel their own disgrace in her humiliation. Stripping naked in their language, then, must somehow take "us back oddly enough to the plundering of the preceding century."[70] Djebar achieves this partly by giving her struggles with the French language such a central role in the personal sections. These parts explain the absolute necessity of including the other two major components of the text—the historical sections and the "voices from the past" sections. Without them, Djebar would have failed to write an autobiography that "does not silence the voice, but awakens it, above all to resurrect so many vanished sisters."[71] Integral to coming to terms with her use of French is her making out of it a medium of expression for the victims of France's brutality to the Algerians. Her French writing gives voice to "those bodies bereft of voices" of the past, the entire tribes whom the French burned alive in caves and annihilated, among others. Moreover, she often uses writings by French witnesses or participants in these events. These writings may originally have allowed them to "savor the seducer's triumph, the rapist's intoxication,"[72] but within her own text they serve to strip bare their own barbarity.

Djebar brings up an additional dilemma in these sections: how to speak on behalf of others without rendering them even more voiceless. She is extremely sensitive to the fact that the writing of history itself is often responsible for covering up the plight of the mute victims of the past, and she is anxious about falling into the same trap herself. In addition to relying heavily on contemporaneous documents, she constantly and consistently problematizes her own role as historian and draws our attention to her positionality vis-à-vis the events she is narrating. In the following quotation, for example, her intervention is made patently clear to the reader, whom she gently invites

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to direct his or her attention to other onlookers who will be severely affected by the events being played out, but whom no historian has bothered to write, or maybe even wonder, about:

> As this day dawns when the two sides will come face to face, what are the women of the town saying to each other? What dreams of romance are lit in their hearts or are extinguished forever, as they gaze on the proud fleet tracing the figures of the mysterious ballet? . . . I muse on this brief respite; I slip into the antechamber of this recent past, like an importunate visitor, removing my sandals according to the accustomed ritual, holding my breath in an attempt to overhear everything.[73]

But Djebar is well aware that it is not only the now long dead and forgotten victims of France who are "bereft of voices," but also those many living women who are victims of poverty, ignorance, and patriarchy, and whom she curiously labels "voices from *the past*" (italics mine). As one of these women puts it, "Alas! We can't read or write. We don't leave any accounts of what we lived through and all we suffered!"[74] Djebar is equally committed to bringing the *qalam* to these *mujāhidāt*, or resistance fighters. She sees her role as scribe, attempting to transcribe their words into a French that maintains the tempo, texture, and expressions of their spoken Arabic and Berber with minimal interference on her part. Indeed, the style of these sections is markedly different from that of the sections that she writes. These sections serve many functions. By maintaining the oral rhythms of these women's words, Djebar resolves some of her anxiety about her text being cut off from her heritage as an Arab woman, which is predominantly oral. Moreover, including these voices balances the otherwise somewhat exaggerated binary opposition between liberating French and incarcerating Arabic. These *mujāhidāt* are undoubtedly non-Westernized Arabic- and Berber-speaking women who, illiterate as they may be, are nevertheless strong, independent fighters who are well aware of their oppression at the hands of the French and, in some cases, at the hands of Arab men, as well.

Djebar also problematizes the power that she has over these women's voices and brings to the foreground her fear of reflecting her own barrenness and aphasia onto their voices. Thus, the equivalent of her insistence on inserting herself and pointing out her own positionality in the historical sections is, perhaps paradoxically, her attempt to move back and allow the women to speak on their own behalf in the "voices from the past" sections. Her deliberate intervention into the documents written by the French participants challenges and redresses the limitations and biases of historical writings and the sequential narration of the "voices" section, in which individual members of the group tell their stories in turn, and in which the voice of the author who selects and orders these voices retreats in anxiety over its power, is her more modest but honest solution to the problem of carving out a communal voice that is not the fictitious creation of a single author.

THE EMPOWERING POETICS OF HESITATION IN LATIFA AL-ZAYYAT'S SEARCH

If Tuqan's text is a post facto *re*presentation of the search for a voice as an ascending journey, though one with halts and side trips, and Djebar's text presents us alternately

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with the crisis and its resolution, then al-Zayyat's narrative can itself be said to be the search for and the resolution to the crisis. Finding her voice does not occur to al-Zayyat outside of or prior to the text. Rather, it materializes through the very act of composing it. Latifa al-Zayyat (1923–96), is certainly among the most important Egyptian and Arab writers, critics, and activists. Her life, from early on, is rich with actions and positions of extreme courage and integrity. Yet there is one mysterious period of silence in her career. In 1960, al-Zayyat published her first creative work, a novel entitled *al-Bab al-maftuh*, which was an instant hit with both critics and readers. It was even made into a successful film. But al-Zayyat did not publish her second creative work, a collection of short stories entitled *al-Shaykhukha*,[75] for another twenty-six years. In the decade following the publication of *al-Shaykhukha*, during which al-Zayyat was in her sixties and early seventies, she published four more creative works, including the autobiography. Again al-Zayyat, like Djebar, was not entirely silent during those years, for she continued to teach as professor of English literary criticism at ʿAin Shams University and to write and publish critical works. Yet she herself admitted that, as a critic, she suspended her own views and beliefs, submitting herself totally to the text she was studying. Only in the mid- to late 1980s did she allow her own voice and vision to stand side by side with that of the authors she was analyzing.[76] This long period of silence during what is supposedly the most fertile period of one's career is intriguing, and al-Zayyat sets out to search for an explanation, or for explanations, for it—explanations that will enable her to understand much about her self, her life, and the world around her.

Al-Zayyat's "personal papers" are divided into two parts. The first part is dated 1973, and the second part dates from her second period of imprisonment in 1981. But the papers appeared only in 1992, and thus must have been considered one work sometime between 1981 and then.[77] The first part also comprises writings from other periods of her life that are not arranged in any immediately discernible chronological order. It includes "plans for a novel" from 1963, the last chapter of a novel written in 1950, and a few paragraphs "from an unfinished novel entitled *The Journey*" from 1962. Moreover, the work includes and mixes together different modes: the failed novelistic attempts, near-straightforward nostalgic recollections of the past, and sections of almost dogged introspection and self-analysis. The form of *The Search* is in fact so original and unusual that in a recent conference on her works (one of several that were held during the last few years of her life) there was a heated debate as to whether the work had any form at all, with the final consensus being that it definitely had form but one that did not easily fit into any a priori notion of genre.[78]

Within this almost jumbled blend of narrative modes from different periods one can trace the main lines of al-Zayyat's life. She talks about her fairly happy though somewhat gypsy-like early childhood, and her college days, when she joined the Communist Party and became involved in the struggle against the British presence in Egypt. She also writes about her capture by the political police and about her first marriage in 1949; her interrogation and imprisonment for about six months in solitary confinement; and her second marriage, which lasted for more than a dozen years, and her ability finally to divorce that man. She concludes with her second imprisonment in 1981 at age fifty-eight, after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat ordered the arrest

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743801004019 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and imprisonment, without trial, of more than 1,500 opposition figures of various affiliations.

The external events draw a profile of a successful woman who no doubt suffered disappointments and setbacks but nevertheless continued to struggle and achieve a great deal. Yet an underlying tone of defeat and failure seeps through the relation of events, and as we read on, we see that the inability to publish creative work for so long became a symptom and a symbol for al-Zayyat's dissatisfaction with herself. It is not that al-Zayyat was not writing during those years, for she was. Nor is it that the censor did not permit her work to be published. Rather, she never submitted her work to a publishing house. This becomes even more surprising when one realizes that al-Zayyat had apparently resolved for herself at an early age many of the major conflicts that silenced Tuqan and Djebar for so long and that material conditions in large part did not impede her from carrying out her resolutions. As early as age six to eight, she became determined to go to the university, and she did. Through her introduction to the young poet al-Hamshari, she grew fascinated with the power of the imagination and the word, and, as it turned out, she had a gift for writing and speaking. And although she does not address the issue of English versus Arabic in this text, it seems that she resolved this problem by using English for lectures and in quite a few of her critical writings, while her creative writing is exclusively in the Arabic language.[79] At age eleven, while watching from her balcony as the police shot down twenty-four unarmed demonstrators, she determined that her life must be one of commitment to national causes, and this was in harmony with her inclination and belief that one "does not really find himself [*sic*], does not become whole, unless he first loses himself in a whole, a totality greater than his narrow, individual self. The open door to true peace with the self is the door that opens on to belonging to the sum, the whole, in thought and word and deed."[80] Thus, the issue of publication is a crucial one, for it transforms her writing from a private into a public activity, allowing her to touch others, to connect with them and create a community of readers and thinkers with mutual ideals and shared dreams who can, by their collective action, re-create their world.

Al-Zayyat takes one step after another to explain this silence, each progressive step requiring more courage in coming face to face with her own limitations. The first step takes her to the arena of gender. One definite external force that pressured her to mute her voice was her second husband. She remembers that, on showing him one of her manuscripts for comment, he characterized it as "sentimental, too sentimental."[81] With this one phrase, he dismissed her writing as too feminine, for it did not conform to normative (i.e., masculinist) prescriptions and was consequently deemed somehow inferior. The next question must be why she married this man whose politics, values, and lifestyle were so different from her own and why she gave him so much power over her.[82] Her immediate and unashamed answer is sex, for this man was able to awaken her desires and satisfy "the woman" in her. Before her relationship with him, al-Zayyat had a difficult relationship with her own body. She recounts the embarrassment, even guilt, that she felt about the voluptuousness of this female body. The following quotation, where she speaks of her former self as "the girl," demonstrates the power of the male gaze, even when it is only imaginary, and how it physically obstructs a woman's path to knowledge:

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As the girl weaved her way with difficulty across the reference room in the library of Fouad I University, from the reading area to the bookshelves and back again, with some reference book or other, it seemed to her that everyone in the room had fixed their eyes on her. When she realized she had not found what she was looking for, which meant she had to make the journey again under those predatory eyes, she felt like fleeing the room.[83]

Two years after she started at the university, she joined the National Movement and says that she felt no embarrassment standing in front of large groups, talking and gesturing passionately, marching in demonstrations, and sitting on the shoulders of her comrades, confronting the opposition put up by students from the Muslim Brotherhood group. The reason "she no longer felt confused about her body," however, was that "she no longer felt that she *had* a body."[84] As she understood it much later, her desire to be respected as a serious, committed person, and to maintain this image in everyone's eyes, caused her to stifle her desires, to be puritanical in the private as well as the public sphere to the extent that the only passion she shared with her first husband was the passion for shared political ideals. This perceived dichotomy between being respected and being physically desired and desiring, between being a whore or being a saint, has of course been demonstrated repeatedly by feminist scholars in various disciplines.[85] Al-Zayyat's second husband succeeded in awakening her latent erotic desires, creating for her a new self-image of an attractive, desirable woman: "in the beginning, she dismissed this new image as worthless, laughing at it, disbelieving, but as it imprisoned her, she soon came to worship it."[86]

But this explanation related to gender, although an important part of the story, is not the whole truth. Only much later, and apparently through the very writing of these papers, was al-Zayyat able to connect her silence to another important aspect of her being: her political self. While in prison in the fall of 1981 she came to understand and became willing to accept that her silence was in some way an outcome of her first experience of imprisonment in 1949, and she admits that the woman who left that prison was not the same one who entered it. The gate out of the prison was the gateway to that second marriage. Until this happened, she believed that the earlier imprisonment had left her unscathed, and that she had been able to withstand the interrogation, humiliation, and torture without being defeated. She had been totally unable to acknowledge that her captors had succeeded in breaking her spirit or humbling her and had clung to the myth of herself as a woman who refused to bow her head to avoid the slaps. Only thirty-some years later could she understand that the experience had actually broken her. It had succeeded in transforming her into a self-censorer. She can acknowledge and forgive herself for this when she finally realizes, facing a similar situation at the mature age of fifty-eight, that in spite of all our strength, integrity, and courage, incarceration and torture are not experiences for which we can ever be totally prepared or that we can easily dismiss. Rather, we need constantly to reprepare ourselves to deal with these experiences and their effects.

This discovery and this connection she is able to make between her first imprisonment and her second marriage is possible when she can see clearly that repression on the basis of gender and on the basis of political activism are closely related not only in her own psyche, but also in the very structures of power that attempt to silence opposition. In the Qanatir women's prison in 1981, two very different types of political prisoners (or so it seems at first) are put together in the same cell: secular, leftist-

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leaning prisoners such as al-Zayyat and women who belong to so-called extremist Islamic political parties. The authorities apparently hoped that the two groups would not get along and would take out their anger and frustration on each other. As it turned out, the women's hatred of the corrupt government and the oppressive prison officials created a bond between them.[87] In the course of a search raid, whose description concludes the work, the prison officials attempt to subdue and humiliate the Islamist women by forcing them to stand before them and answer questions without their veils. Al-Zayyat, diehard secularist that she is and a woman who is far from sympathetic to religious fundamentalism or the wearing of the veil, finds herself outraged at the prison officials' attempt to dishonor the Islamist girls by unveiling them, for she realizes that taking away their right to veil themselves is stealing their human dignity and that the prison officials are baring their bodies to infiltrate their souls. When the search raid starts, al-Zayyat is in the bathroom, and her anger and embarrassment at coming out of there and not finding her dress allows her to understand the mechanism of humiliation that the officials are using. After an initial, almost hysterical, search for her dress, she quickly forgets about it, defiantly refusing to allow her nakedness to shame her. Instead, she runs around the room collecting every single item of Islamic clothing, including veils, robes, and gloves, and handing it to the Islamist girls to cover themselves. This experience allows her to pull together different threads of her experience and to realize that the many faces of oppression—religion, patriarchy, the state, and criminals—are all ultimately one and the same. Her own silence must be seen within the context of all these authorities—authorities that sometimes are antagonistic to one another but often contiguous in their repression of women.

But one more space remains that al-Zayyat must storm, and one more legend remains that she must destroy before she can finally liberate herself from her terror and guilt. The search raid was for al-Zayyat such an important and unprecedented event because

> it had never happened before that the dividing line between reality and imagination, life and art, had slipped down from my consciousness, or that the terrified child and the bold girl who found salvation in belonging to the whole, and the young woman debilitated by the inability to act, and the woman in the middle of her life pressed between the covers of a book to avoid a clash, all burst into life from nothing, at the same conscious moment.[88]

The real purpose behind the search is not to uncover the women's bodies, for that is a tactic of intimidation. Rather, as al-Zayyat puts it, the purpose is to discover the body of evidence that the women are thinking human beings: their books, newspapers, notes, memoirs, letters, etc.[89] When the women hear about the upcoming raid, they attempt to hide and destroy that evidence, and as al-Zayyat is pouring water over the papers in the toilet, she realizes "that my papers were all jumbled up in their secret hiding place and that although I always tried to keep them in order, they were not."[90]

I believe that the important discovery al-Zayyat makes here is that it is precisely her attempt always to keep her papers in order that causes them to remain in their hiding places. This is what makes her "the woman in the middle of her life fleeing life between the covers of a book."[91] In other words, al-Zayyat comes to the astonishing conclusion that her sense of guilt and failure are not really the result of her inability to publish. Instead, they stem from the kind of writing that she was practicing

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during those years, where "my defeat is hidden between the lines; my writing this experience down on paper must contain the beginning of the defeat."[92] Because al-Zayyat desperately needed to draw a certain picture of herself, to herself, as the woman who did not allow her imprisonment to defeat her, her writing itself was a defeating exercise, for it enabled her to cover up the pain and the wounds that the experience engendered. It allowed her to create a myth that she lived with for many years—a myth that was a form not of empowerment but of escapism. Controlling the experience corresponded to a tight control over the narratives describing the experience, and ordering these emotions translated into a strict ordering of her texts. Paradoxically, then, the more control al-Zayyat attempted to exert over her writings and the experiences analyzed in these writings—the more she "dotted the i's and crossed the t's of her experience in prison so that it could be published,"[93] the less control she actually had over both. The neat, ordered resolution of the crisis was ultimately a false one. Writing thus became a compromising activity rather than an act of resistance.

This is the awareness that she brings to *The Search*, in which she becomes an author who deliberately refuses to pose as an authority from above. Instead, she presents herself as a writer, even a reader, of her own writing who is grappling with issues of writing and power within the text itself. Thus, the work's final sentence, in which she declares that she can now finally put her "papers, that were all mixed up where they lay in their secret hiding place, in order,"[94] must be seen as a paradox. *The Search* is a presentation of these papers in a rather mixed-up state—artistically and deliberately so, of course.[95]

Al-Zayyat made intriguing decisions in putting these papers together. For example, why did she include selections from earlier writings that, she declares many pages later, were lacking in some way? Why did she not at least include her critique with, or before, the selections? In other words, if the central awareness of her life and her relationship with writing came in 1981, and if she put this work together in 1991, why did she not start with this awareness and allow it to frame and anchor her readers' experiences of the early material? Unlike Djebar, who alternates chapters dealing with her weaknesses and anxieties and her own solution to them, al-Zayyat, it seems to me, takes the risk of putting her weakness as a writer on display. The corrective or balancing narratives do not come until much later. This determined insistence on exposing her weaknesses, her fumblings and failures, especially in the area of writing, is further indication that the control she wants to exert over her text is reactive and circumstantial rather than fixed and absolute. Her authorial authority becomes a dialectic of struggle and evolution within the text, a process of becoming that readers are allowed to experience and share.

The other stylistic features of *The Search* also point in this direction. First is the focus on a limited set of events and feelings that one returns to over and over in a variety of modes; the many gaps in sequence and yet the underlying coherence of the whole so that the work feels both successive and ruptured; the switches from the first to the third person; the very title, with its connotations of aggression—or, at least, coercion; and particularly the almost constant movement between external descriptions of events and the internal monologues commenting on and analyzing not only the events but also al-Zayyat's thoughts and feelings about them, sometimes contradicting and correcting herself almost in the same breath. This results in a fusion

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between the event and the telling of the event, the experience and the writing of the experience, as in the following example:

> She came out of the City prison after six whole months of solitary confinement with half of her human faculties engaged and the other half latent, almost dead. She had to move from one extreme to the other, as the woman in her sought revenge for having been denied for so long and fought for the opposites to be reconciled, for the complete being to emerge, an extremely individual person as much as an intensely social committed one. (I hope I am not justifying and deceiving myself again. All I can say for certain is that this split, along with other shortcomings, was one of the reasons why I achieved so little for a relatively long period of my life.)[96]

Thus, after apparently finding the explanation for a certain tendency or behavior and explaining it to herself and to us, al-Zayyat adds: "I hope that this is not a new self-justification and self-deception."[97] And so we share not simply her memories, but also her struggle as she analyzes her life from various perspectives and at different moments of being. We are witnessing not simply the events that constituted her life, but also the way, or ways, in which she perceived them and attempted to make sense of them within the context of her life. Moreover, al-Zayyat allows us to see how each perception and each explanation was, in its own way, not exactly wrong but definitely flawed. In composing this text, al-Zayyat finally is not ashamed that "nothing she does will ever be complete."[98] In her journey it no longer matters that the mountaintop is never completely reached, and the resolution is never entirely final, for the search itself becomes that which is valuable and empowering.

CONCLUSION

Fadwa Tuqan, Assia Djebar, and Latifa al-Zayyat succeed in writing autobiographical works that are both individual and communal, and that link and weave together in a masterly way their experiences as women, political activists, and writers. Their texts succeed in large part because each realizes that the relationship between writing and power, and between speaker and audience, is complicated and that breaking the silence is not always a sign of liberation. As they speak, they make us acutely aware that silence is often a form of rebellion, and that writing and speaking are sometimes dishonest compromises that veil the truth rather than expose it. Their writings become true sites of resistance because they do not position themselves as all-knowing authorities who hold all the right answers. By one of these ironic inversions of writing—in exposing their tentativeness, vulnerabilities, hesitations, and stumblings—these women's voices are much more powerful and compelling than the louder voices of those who are self-assured, adamantly certain of the correctness of their ways, confident in their supreme abilities to show others the right path. These voices, which truly question and gently whisper their fumblings and search, deserve to be heard. They deserve not to be silenced.

NOTES

[1]The injunction to silence is hardly a uniquely Arab phenomenon, as is shown by the recent proliferation of feminist studies in the West with "silence" and its antidote, "voice," in their titles. This phenomenon is equally true of the Arab world. To note just two of many examples, a recent collection of short stories by

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Arab women takes its title from a wonderful short story by the Egyptian writer Salwa Bakr, "All That Beautiful Voice That Comes from Within Her" (in *Kullu hadha al-sawt al-jamil*, ed. Latifa al-Zayyat [Cairo: Nur Dar al-Mar'a al-ʿArabiyya, 1994?]). Similarly, in the recent Tunisian film *Silences of the Palace*, directed by Moufida Tlatli, the virtual loss and retrieval of the voice becomes a symbol for the female protagonist's awareness and acceptance of the female self.

[2]There is a vast body of theoretical work focusing on autobiography. Two extremely useful collections of essays on the subject are *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), and idem, *Studies in Autobiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For autobiographies in the Arab world, see *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi Books, 1998). Although many of the essays in the volume stay with a conception of autobiography as defined by Philippe Lejeune in his seminal essay "Le Pacte Autobiographique" (*Poetique* 4 [1973]: 137–62), they offer a wealth of information and analysis on 19th- and 20th-century Arabic autobiographies. For an introduction to Arab women's autobiographies, see Fadia Faqir, "Introduction," in *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, ed. Fadia Faqir (Reading, U.K.: Garnet, 1998), 1–23. The volume also contains interesting essays by women focusing on their relationship with writing.

[3]Fadwa Tuqan, *Rihla jabaliyya, rihla saʿba* (Amman: Dar al-Shuruq, 1988). The English translation is *A Mountainous Journey*, trans. Olive Kenney (London: Women's Press, 1990).

[4]Assia Djebar, *L'amour, la fantasia* (Paris: J. C. Lattes, 1985). The English translation is *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (London: Quartet Books, 1989).

[5]Latifa al-Zayyat, *Hamlat taftish: awraq shakhsiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1992). The English translation is *The Search: Personal Papers*, trans. Sophie Bennett (London: Quartet Books, 1996).

[6]Latifa al-Zayyat, *al-Bab al-maftuh* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anglo, 1960).

[7]On autobiography and loss, see John Paul Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); and idem, *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[8]Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 49.

[9]The Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif, shortly after the publication of her novel *In the Eye of the Sun* (New York: Vintage International, 1994), was invited for a gathering at the *atelier*, a meeting place for intellectuals in Cairo. For weeks afterward, everyone talked about the event, not because of anything Soueif said, but because she refused to speak, which was taken as a form of revolt against the questions she was asked. One of course needs to remember that a woman's silence is marked as an absence worth analyzing only in spaces where her words are anticipated and welcomed.

[10]Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 42–43.

[11]For a historical overview of their involvement, see Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, esp. chap. 2, "The Pioneering Generation."

[12]It must be remembered that most of the generalizations that have been made about the differences between poetry written by men and women in Arabic are based on cursory observation, and serious studies of various aspects of women's literary creativity remain to be done. For one thing, there have been suggestions that the extant corpus tells us more about the preferences of the male scholars who collected and transcribed the poetry than about what women actually composed. To test this premise, Marle Hammond, a doctoral candidate at Columbia University, is comparing the selections by female poets included in the most authoritative anthologies with those chosen for less authoritative ones. Indeed, the latter give us a much wider range of subjects and styles, many of which were clearly deemed inappropriate for the mainstream anthologies.

[13]According to Michel Foucault, an anonymous text has a writer, not an author, for texts really began to have "authors" "to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is to the extent that discourses could be transgressive. . . . Discourse was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods; it was essentially an act—an act placed in the bipolar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous": Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josue V. Harari (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 148. See also Roland Barthes, "Authors and Writers," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 143–50.

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[14]She followed it with a second part, *al-Rihla al-asʿab* (Amman: Dar al-Shuruq, 1993).

[15]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 12. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from the three autobiographies are from their English translations.

[16]Ibid., 49.

[17]Ibid., 32.

[18]Ibid., 33.

[19]Tuqan, *Rihla jabaliyya*, 38.

[20]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 51.

[21]Fedwa Malti-Douglas considers the autobiography a matriphobic text. She focuses on Tuqan's assertion that her mother tried to abort her and did not recall the date of her birth: Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Problematic Birth: Fadwa Tuqan and the Politics of Autobiography," in *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 164–68. Joseph Zeidan also uses the term "matrophobia" to describe relationships with the mother in several other semi-autobiographical works: see Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists*, 141.

[22]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 33.

[23]Ibid., 23.

[24]Ibid., 20–21. Hanan al-Shaykh, *Hikayat Zahra* (Beirut: Hanan al-Shaykh, 1980). The English translation is *The Story of Zahra*, trans. Peter Ford (London: Quartet Books, 1993). It opens with Zahra's memory of her mother silencing her by covering her mouth. Here again we have the double awareness of the mother as a silenced victim and as a silencer.

[25]As Malti-Douglas astutely notes, the first time the reader encounters the name Fadwa within the text is on the cover of the notebook in which Ibrahim will teach her poetry: Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Introduction: A Palestinian Female Voice against Tradition," in Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 6.

[26]Salma Khadra Jayyusi, "Foreword: Mistress of the Two Gifts: Love and Pain," in Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, x–xi.

[27]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 58.

[28]Ibid., 64–68.

[29]Ibid., 70.

[30]Ibid., 73.

[31]Ibid., 71.

[32]It is perhaps ironic that Tuqan does participate in the high female poetic tradition, again through Ibrahim, though inadvertently on his part this time by elegizing him after his tragically early death and elegizing her second brother, Nimr, some years later, although she hardly devotes her entire career to this the way al-Khansaʾ did. For an essay that focuses on Tuqan's elegies as they relate to Arab female poetic traditions, specifically al-Khansaʾ, see Terri De Young, "Love, Death, and the Ghost of al-Khansaʾ: The Modern Female Poetic Voice in Fadwa Tuqan's Elegies for her Brother Ibrahim," in *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature*, ed. Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 44–75. Zaynab Fawwaz sees al-Khansa"s insistence on continuing to elegize her brothers after the establishment of Islam as a form of resistance to the new religion, because she was mourning two non-Muslims: Zaynab Fawwaz, *al-Durr al-manthur fi tabaqat rabbat al-khudur* (Kuwait: Maktabat Ibn Qutayba, n.d.), 109–14. I am indebted to Mervat Hatem for this observation.

[33]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 67.

[34]Ibid., 73.

[35]Ibid., 47.

[36]Ibid., 116.

[37]Ibid., 184.

[38]Two good examples are included at the end of *A Mountainous Journey*: "The Sybil's Prophecy" and "In the Aging City," 232–39.

[39]Ibid., 137.

[40]Ann Norton, who was a discussant for this paper at the University of Pennsylvania's Middle East Studies Seminar, also pointed out that breaking away from the linear narrative allows for a separation between the nation in space and the nation in time. As it opens the possibility of rewriting the past, it also opens the possibility of return to a pre-Israel state. I am grateful to Ann Norton for her thoughtful comments on the paper, which guided me in making a few important changes.

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[41]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey* , 117. For an analysis of another narrative exploring the relationships between past and present selves, see Magda M. Al-Nowaihi, "Memory and Imagination in Edwar al-Kharrat's *Turabuha Zaʿfaran*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25 (1994): 34–57.

[42]Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, 45.

[43]Malti-Douglas, "Introduction," 8.

[44]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 167.

[45]Ibid., 19.

[46]Muhammad Barrada explores the role of memory in the self's continuity and rupture in great detail in *Luʿbat al-Nisyan* (Rabat: Dar al-Aman, 1987). The English translation is *The Game of Forgetting*, trans. Issa Boullata (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996). See also Magda M. Al-Nowaihi, "Committed Postmodernity: Mohamed Berrada's *The Game of Forgetting*," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 15 (1999): 1–24; reprinted in *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature*, 367–88.

[47]Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, ed., *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing, and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), xxiii. In the second part of Tuqan's autobiography, *al-Rihla al-asʿab*, the organization is even less neat, and the intertextuality is even more pronounced.

[48]Tuqan, *A Mountainous Journey*, 100–104.

[49]Ibid., 113.

[50]Ibid., 191.

[51]Ibid., 171.

[52]This ambivalence regarding the language of the occupier is not unique to Djebar and is shared by many Maghribi writers. To mention just one example, Abdelkebir Khatibi devotes his novel *Love in Two Languages*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), to one aspect of this problematic. And this situation is not limited to Maghribi writers in their relationship to the French language. Ahdaf Soueif, an Egyptian, writes in English, and there are a number of Palestinian writers who write in Hebrew, the best-known of whom is Anton Shammas.

[53]Dorothy Blair, "Introduction," in Djebar, *Fantasia*.

[54]Assia Djebar, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartements* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1980). The English translation is *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

[55]Djebar, *Fantasia*, 183.

[56]Ibid., 154–55.

[57]Ibid., 203–204.

[58]Ibid., 180.

[59]Ibid., 4.

[60]Ibid., 13.

[61]Ibid., 126.

[62]Ibid., 185.

[63]Ibid., 129.

[64]Ibid., 6.

[65]Ibid., 15–19.

[66]Ibid., 128.

[67]Ibid., 126.

[68]Ibid., 215.

[69]Ibid., 181.

[70]Ibid., 157.

[71]Ibid., 204.

[72]Ibid., 45.

[73]Ibid., 8.

[74]Ibid., 148.

[75]Latifa al-Zayyat, *al-Shaykhukha wa-qisas ukhra* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabi, 1986).

[76]Idem, "al-Katib wa al-hurriyya," *Fusul* 11 (1992): 237–39.

[77]In "al-Katib wa al-hurriyya," al-Zayyat refers to it as a work that she had recently completed.

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[78]For a brief review of the discussions that occurred during the conference, see Sayyid Bahrawi, ed., *Latifa al-Zayyat: al-adab wa al-watan* (Cairo: Nur Dar al-Marʾa al-ʿArabiyya and Markaz al-Buhuth al-ʿArabiyya, 1996), 221–33. The volume includes the papers from that conference. The June 1994 issue of *Adab wa-naqd* also includes a valuable "file" on al-Zayyat on the occasion of her seventieth birthday: "Latifa al-Zayyat: min al-darura ila al-hurriyya," *Adab wa-naqd* 106 (June 1994): 31–95. I must note that a great deal of first-rate criticism has been published on al-Zayyat in Arabic, making her perhaps one of the most analyzed Arab female writers, while to my knowledge almost nothing has been published about her in English, with the exception of one translated interview, "On Political Commitment and Feminist Writing," in *The View from Within: Writers and Critics on Contemporary Arabic Literature*, ed. Ferial J. Ghazoul and Barbara Harlow (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1994), 246–60, and one essay by Sophie Bennett, "A Life of One's Own?" in Ostle et al., *Writing the Self*, 283–91. For a discussion of the politics of translation and reception of Arab women's texts here in the West, see Amal Amireh, "Framing Nawal el-Saadawi: Arab Feminism in a Transnational World," *Signs: Journal of Women, Culture, and Society* 26 (2000): 215–49.

[79]As far as I am aware, she does not address and is not asked about this issue of English versus Arabic elsewhere; thus, this would seem to have been an unmeditated rather than a deliberate strategy.

[80]Al-Zayyat, *The Search*, 100.

[81]Ibid., 111.

[82]She does not mention this second husband's name, but it is well known that he is the late playwright and drama professor Rashad Rushdi.

[83]Al-Zayyat, *The Search*, 103. Fatima Musa-Mahmud (Moussa-Mahmoud), of the same generation as al-Zayyat, who also went on to finish her doctorate and become a noted professor and critic, recollects how as a young girl coming home from school she would not dare to stop and leaf through the books displayed on the streets (it is still a common place to display books for sale in Cairo) out of embarrassment at being watched by the men in the neighborhood: Fatima Musa-Mahmud, "Awraq shakhsiyya," *al-Katiba* 1 (1993): 32–33.

[84]Al-Zayyat, *The Search*, 104. The italics are added per emphasis.

[85]Men also are affected negatively by this dichotomy: see Magda M. Al-Nowaihi, "Constructions of Masculinity in Two Egyptian Novels," in *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity*, ed. Suad Joseph (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 235–63.

[86]Al-Zayyat, *The Search*, 107.

[87]For other accounts of that imprisonment, see Safinaz Kadhim, *ʿAn al-sijn wa-al-hurriyya* (Cairo: al-Zahraʾ li-l-Iʿlam al-ʿArabi, 1986), esp. the chapter titled, "Fa-kharaja ʿala qawmihi fi zinatihi"; Farida al-Naqqash, *al-Sijn: damʿatan wa-warda* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabi, 1985); and Nawal al-Saʿdawi, *Mudhakkarati fi sijn al-nisaʾ* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabi, 1984). The English translation of al-Saʿdawi's work is *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, trans. Marilyn Booth (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). For an earlier account of political detention during the period of Nasser, see Zaynab al-Ghazali, *Ayyam min hayati* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1977). Barbara Harlow describes the same technique of factionalizing and dividing prisoners to control them easily on South Africa's infamous Robben Island: see Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 137.

[88]Al-Zayyat, *The Search*, 115.

[89]Denying prisoners reading and writing material is a common tactic in many countries: see Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 124–28.

[90]Al-Zayyat, *The Search*, 118.

[91]Ibid., 117.

[92]Ibid., 113.

[93]Ibid., 111.

[94]Ibid., 125.

[95]For al-Zayyat's comments on how she came to compile this work, which she sometimes refers to as a novel (*riwāya*) and sometimes as a story (*qiṣṣa*), and also refers to the first-person voice as the narrator, see "Tajribati fi al-kitaba," in *Sahib al-bayt* (Cairo: Dar al-Hilal, 1994), 122–23, 125–29.

[96]Al-Zayyat, *The Search*, 106.

[97]Ibid., 105.

[98]Ibid., 111.

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