New Geographies:
Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature

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Maquetación y diseño de cubierta:
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Introduction

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This publication, *New Geographies: Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature*, contains some of the papers presented at the 11th EURAMAL (European Association for Modern Arabic Literature) conference (*New Geographies and Genres in Modern Arabic Literature*), that took place in Madrid between 7-10 May of 2014 at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. This publication is also the 11th publication of the EURAMAL conferences http://www.euramal.eu/conferences/home.html

The original idea for the conference was to explore emerging regions and genres that do not usually receive much attention from critics and academia. The research papers that are presented here relate primarily, although not exclusively, to the suggested topics for the conference, such as "New genres, (for ex. Science Fiction, Graphic novel…)", "Emerging Arab writers from the Gulf to the Ocean", "Arabic literature and World Literature", "The religious as an essential element in contemporary creative writing", "What happened to *iltizām*?", and "Transforming the canons". Closely related to these processes of change is the role of translation and its impact on new conceptions of literature (*adab*), its understanding, spread, and function. As a result, particular panels were organized, including "Reception: readers and/or translations" and "New roles and concepts of literature/*adab*". The papers presented at the conference explore a variety of mutations and transportations (physical, conceptual, linguistic…) in the Arabic literary scene, some of them formal, others thematic. Since many of these transformations have been taking place over the course of the last few years, the conference focused mainly on the last two decades, although many issues inevitably required historic or diachronic perspectives.

Under the general title, *New Geographies: Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature*, this publication is divided in two parts. The first, *Contexts*, is devoted to general issues related to canon, new thematics and media, including comparative and diachronic approaches, as well as literary movements and trends such as Surrealism or Science Fiction. The second,

Texts, includes analysis of concrete texts (mainly narrative, though also poetic), generally framed within the new Arab literary geographies and genres that until very recently were under-represented.

At the Madrid conference, **Roger Allen**, Professor Emeritus at the University of Pennsylvania, gave the Edward de Moor Memorial Lecture. The lecture, and first text of this volume, "Transforming the Arabic Literary Canon", focuses on this key issue not only for modern Arabic literature, but for the whole field of literary studies. Traditional canons have been challenged on many fronts during the last century, and from various theoretical tenets: multiculturalism, feminism, postcolonialism and the like. The canon of Arabic literature elaborated during the Arab renaissance period (or *nahda*) is now under thorough reconsideration. Another more comprehensive understanding of canons that encompasses problematic realms--either historically, as Al-Andalus; terminologically, as *inhitāt* (decadence); or geographically, as the Maghrib; or genderly--is emerging in the twentieth-first century. However Allen highlights the urgent need for a reconsideration of the "*nahda-canon*" and of such notions as the "decadence paradigm" "that has been so carelessly applied to it for so long". Allen also points out how translation-flows and international literary awards are new agents that play decisive roles in shaping the new canons. From his perspective, always inclined to look for continuities more than ruptures, he goes on to address the need to provide better and dynamic responses to our pedagogic needs.

Other contributions to the *Contexts* section include "'New Media' and the Transformation of the Public Sphere in the *nahda* Period and Today: How the Advent of the Periodical Press and the Internet Have Affected the Arab/ic Literary Field – Analogies and Differences", where **Barbara Winckler** examines in detail a panoply of parallel elements that relate the advent of the press during the *nahda* and the emergence nowadays of new forms of communication, that allow for better interaction between authors and audience. She examines the transforming pressure exerted by modern mass media upon language, which has to adapt to new dynamics, as well as the revision of the notion of authority. In "Programs of Renewal. Towards an *adab al-bawh wa'l-ṣidq wa'l-karāmah*? An analytical and comparative glance at the forewords of some recent (literary?) publications", **Stephan Guth** tackles several prologues from the twenties of the twentieth century (mainly by ʿUbayd and Taymūr), in which, in the post First World War context, the authors express and anticipate the desire for change as part of a shift towards new values and norms in literature. These considerations would lead to a nationalist literature (*al-adab al-qawmī*) which would lead in turn to straightforward realism and mark the development of twentieth-century Arabic literature. Guth observes similarities between these programmatic prefaces and those of recent works of the so called *adab sākhir* (ironic literature). Certain parallelisms can be seen, such as the desire for aesthetic renewal, the iconoclastic drive and rupture of gender and language conventions, as well as the use of modern technologies for diffusion and connection with new and more massive audiences.

In **Sobhi Bustani's** contribution, "Médias, religion et écriture romanesque dans le nouveau champ littéraire arabe", he raises the question of increasing religiosity in today's Arab societies. In a world dominated by written and audiovisual mass media, religious messages have acquired greater diffusion and influence. These issues have had an impact on the literary realm, and recent Arabic novels tackle the question of religion and religiosity as a pivotal argument. However, Bustani concludes that, in confronting the increasing religiosity of society, the posture adopted in these novels is frequently critical, even ironic.

In his essay, "The Planet of Stupidity. Environmental Themes in Arabic Speculative Fiction", **Tetz Rooke** broaches the topic of science fiction literature. He examines half a dozen recent Arabic novels (from 2009 to 2014) that can be ascribed to the Speculative Fiction subgenre, still a minority tendency in the Arabic literary context, but also one of growing interest. Rooke tackles the current panorama of what he terms *climate fiction* within the broader Arabic Science Fiction genre, noting its derivatives of environmental justice as a renewed form of compromise (*iltizām*).

Returning to the link between mass media and literature, **Arturo Monaco,** jumping across boundaries of time and genres, uses his contribution "Syria and the Reception of Surrealism: *Siryāl* 1947 vs. Radio SūriyāLī (SouriaLi) 2012", to present a comparison of the poetry written by Urkhan Muyassar and ʿAlī Naṣr in the heyday of surrealism and nationalism in Syria during the aftermath of the Second World War, with the contents of broadcasts by the online radio station SouriaLi (in Arabic, both "surreal" or "Syria for me"), whose sarcastic and introspective tone allows him to suggest parallels between the surrealism of Muyassar and the contestatory irony of the radio station.

Finally, in this section we come to a contribution by **Mercedes Aragón Huerta**, "À propos du *zaǧal* marocain", which tackles the history of *zajal*, of poetry in Moroccan Arabic, and the rise of modern *zajal* as a new genre characteristic of modern Moroccan literature. While still a minority genre, its expansion has emerged as an important modality not only for artistic expression but also as a mechanism that favors the standardization of *dārija* or Moroccan colloquial Arabic.

In the second section of this publication, *Texts*, we begin with "Encounters of a Different Kind: Two Emerging Novelists from the Gulf", an essay in which **Rasheed El-Enany** confronts different visions of cultural encounter. He deals first with an example of the well-established tradition of Arab vs. West opposition, as displayed in Muḥammad Ḥasan ʿAlwān's *al-Qundus* (The Beaver, 2013), where the West is depicted as the realm of freedom and success. A new dominating-dominated relation is the axis of the novel by the Kuwaiti writer, Suʿūd al-Sanʿūsī's, *Sāq al-Bāmbū* (*The Bamboo Stalk*, 2012), a work in which the Gulf becomes situated in the centre, and the marginalized Other comes from Asia, those million immigrants coming to the wealthy Gulf countries, in this particular novel specifically from the Philipinnes.

In "Paysages et narration: du reportage à la fiction dans l'œuvre de Yūsuf Rakhā", **Monica Ruocco** analyzes the work of the prolific Egyptian writer and journalist, Yūsuf Rakhā, from the perspective of the blending of fictional and non-fictional genres and their mutual influences, all within the framework of a global vision of the author's work and the renewal of Arabic literature's fictional paradigm. In the same vein, **Dounia Abourachid Badini** explores the porous limits of genres, using her essay, "Poétique de *l'autofiction* dans *al-Ajnabiyya* (*l'Etrangère)* de Alia Mamdouh", to examine the poetic resources deployed by Iraqi writer ʿĀliya Mamdūḥ in her novel *al-Ajnabiyya* (2013), where Mamdūḥ fictionalizes her own personal experience as an emigrant in 21st century Europe and

discusses the conflicts derived from the search for identity and the feeling of alterity, loss and loneliness.

In "Between Fantasy and Science Fiction: Saudi Society through the Eyes of a Jinn", **Ada Barbaro** examines the novel *Hawjan* (2013), written by the Saudi Ibrāhīm ʿAbbās, a text whose borders range from science fiction to fantastic literature. The novel offers a critical view —characteristic of SF literature— about a Saudi society immersed in a process of change, one that oscillates between tradition and religion and where the new generations push towards an unstoppable process of modernization.

From a more sociological perspective, **Francesco De Angelis** uses his essay, "*Khalf al-shams* by Bushrā al-Maqṭarī, when Commitment is Female in a Macho Society", to discuss this novel (2012) by the Yemeni author. The question of literary commitment is explored within the framework of the peculiarities of a particular country, Yemen, one that is deeply involved in harsh circumstances that complicate creativity, a location in which the mere existence of literary activity and publication efforts constitute, in and of themselves, forms of commitment and self-affirmation. Furthermore, the novel is the work of a woman and has been published in a deeply patriarchal society and in the context of popular revolts.

In "Transtextual Postmodernity: Hassan Najmi´s Novel: *Gīrtrūd*, Gertrude Stein´s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas,* and Anaïs Nin´s *The Dairy of Anaïs Nin*", **Joshua Abdallah Sabih** approaches the surprising narrative game that Moroccan poet and novelist Najmī constructs in his novel *Gīrtrūd* (2011). In which the text of the discourse is configured as a palimpsest of texts and previous references, of metatextual games and confusion of characters' roles and voices. In a further essay devoted to Moroccan literature, **Tina Dransfeldt Christensen's** "Narrating the Unnarratable: The Role of Literary Memory in Moroccan Testimonial Writing. *Ḥadīth al-ʿatmah* by Fāṭnah al-Bīh" examines prison narratives, a whole subgenre in Moroccan fiction and autobiography. In a reflection on Moroccan prison testimonies that makes use of Fāṭnah al-Bīh's work as an example, the author of this essay reveals narrative strategies that tend to transcend the individual experience in the process of constructing a collective memory, as well as discursive mechanisms that allow to narrate the unspeakable.

In another essay that discusses trauma and suffering, "Traces of Postmemory in Salmān Nāṭūr's *Dhākira*" **Simone Sibilio** maintains that the concept of *postmemory*, theorized in principle for the Jewish Holocaust, may be applied in a significant and efficient way to the Palestinian case. Postmemory, that is, the collective memory fragmented and reconstructed by the generations that come after those who directly suffered the traumatic event, is applied to the Palestinian case and the Nakba via the novel *Dhākira* (1983), written by Salmān Nāṭūr.

This volume also offers contributions by several young scholars. In "The poetic voice. Muzaffar an-Nawwab: A singular case of literary circulation and reception" **Fatima Sai** examines the work of the Iraqi poet, Muẓaffar al-Nawwāb, which revolves around the idea of homeland and exile, as well as its particular form of dissemination, one that tends to rely more on oral transmission than writing. In "Re-defining identity in exile: an analysis of the Saudi novel *al-Urjūḥa* by Badriyya Bashir", **Mercedes S. Melchor Velayos** tackles the Saudi literary scene, characterized among other things by the rise of a new generation of

novelists. In particular, the article explores the socio-cultural and literary devices that allow women writers to formulate a "hidden" discourse that expresses their distance from the official ideology of the Saudi regime. Finally, **Peter Konerding** presents an article written in Arabic, "مسألة أدب البوب في الأدب العربي المعاصر", [The question of pop literature in Modern Arabic literature], where, after defining the concept of "pop literature", he examines relevant examples in recent Arabic narrative that may be ascribable to this literary trend.