

**The Farhat J. Ziadeh  
Distinguished Lecture  
in Arab and Islamic Studies  
2006**



**Department of Near Eastern Languages & Civilization  
University of Washington, Seattle**

Dear friends and colleagues;

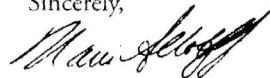
We are very pleased to provide you with a copy of the Fourth Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture in Arab and Islamic Studies: "The Novel, the Novelist, and the Lebanese Civil War," delivered by Elias Khoury on April 20, 2006.

The Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lectureship is dedicated to the promotion and celebration of excellence in the field of Arab and Islamic studies and was formally endowed in 2001. Farhat Ziadeh was born in Ramallah, Palestine, in 1917. He received his B.A. from the American University in Beirut in 1937 and his LL.B from the University of London in 1940. He was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, London, and became a Barrister-at-Law in 1946. In the last years of the British Mandate, he served as a Magistrate for the Government of Palestine before eventually moving with his family to the United States. He was appointed Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Princeton where he taught until 1966, at which time he moved to the University of Washington. The Ziadeh Lectureship is a fitting tribute to his countless contributions to the building of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Washington, and extraordinary contributions to and influence on the field of Arabic language and literature and the study of Islamic law in the U.S. and internationally, through his long list of publications, but also through the countless students whom he has mentored and colleagues with whom he has collaborated.

The Ziadeh Endowment fund has been a labor of love, involving generous contributions over several years from a very, very long list of people. These include many students and colleagues, friends, and above all Farhat and his wife Suad themselves, and their family members. If you have been one of these contributors, we want to extend once again our warmest thanks for your continuing participation in helping make this lectureship series possible.

You may also find an electronic copy of Elias Khoury's lecture on our departmental web site: <http://depts.washington.edu/nelc/>, as well as other information about the Department and its program and events, online newsletters, and contact information.

Sincerely,



Naomi Sokoloff  
Chair, Near Eastern  
Languages & Civilization

Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization  
University of Washington, Seattle

**The Fourth Farhat J. Ziadeh Distinguished Lecture  
in Arab and Islamic Studies**

*April 20, 2006*

**THE NOVEL, THE NOVELIST,  
AND THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR**

**Elias Khoury**  
*Editor-In-Chief, Annahar*

## Elias Khoury

Elias Khoury is a native of Lebanon. He studied History and Sociology at Lebanese University in Beirut, later finishing his dissertation at the University of Paris. Before the completion of his studies in Paris, Khoury visited a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan. The visit inspired his lifelong commitment to supporting the struggle for Palestinian rights and he later went to work for the Palestinian Liberation Organization's research center in Beirut.

Khoury began his literary career by publishing his book, *Searching for a Horizon-The Arabic Novel After the Defeat of 1967* (1974). He then published his first novel "On the Relations of the Circle" (1975). In 1998, he was awarded the Palestine Prize for his latest novel *Gate of the Sun*, and in 2000, the novel was named *Le Monde Diplomatique's* Book of the Year. He served on the editorial board of *Mawakif Quarterly*, and as the managing editor of *Shu'un Falastinia* (Palestine Affairs) and of *Al Karmel Quarterly*. In total, Khoury has published 11 novels, 4 books of literary criticism and many articles and reviews. He is also a playwright and has participated in writing two films.

Khoury's academic career includes his work as a Professor at Columbia University, the Lebanese University, the American University of Beirut, and the Lebanese American University. He is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the cultural supplement of Beirut's daily newspaper, *An-Nahar*, and is a Global Distinguished professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University.

# THE NOVEL, THE NOVELIST, AND THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR

Elias Khoury

Despite the cessation of armed conflict and the signing of the Taef Accords in 1989, the question of whether the Lebanese civil war has really ended remains open. The question of how it will be written in history is also open. When a conflict whose roots reach as far back as the nineteenth century has dwelled in the realms of the civil, political and regional, it is indeed worth interrogating the significance of identifying an “end” or a “conclusion.” Interrogating what has been identified as the beginning is an equally worthy question. Can the incident of the ‘Ayn el-Remmaneh bus on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1975, be deemed the real date or the protests by fishermen in the coastal city of Sidon in February of that year, or even the bloody countrywide demonstrations that erupted on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in 1969 and instigated the Cairo Agreement that regulated the relationship between the Lebanese state and the Palestine Liberation Organization?

Gramsci argued that history is invariably written by the victors, but as the Lebanese civil war found all its protagonists defeated at the time of its formal conclusion, who then might be entrusted with drafting the history of that war? Just as the history of the 1840-1860 civil war has remained captive to memory, suspended in the realm of orality, will this most recent civil war become captive as well, or has it found other unconventional and unfamiliar ways to write itself, regardless of the controversy of determining vanquisher and vanquished?

In the 1990s, after the implementation of the Taef Accords, cultural life in postwar Lebanon witnessed the unraveling of one of its most meaningful battles. Spearheaded by architects, with intellectuals and artists along their side, a campaign was waged to counter the implementation of the project for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the city’s war-torn historic center. The government had underwritten the entire task to a private shareholding company, the Société Libanaise de Développement et Reconstruction, otherwise known as SOLIDERE. The master plan seemed to bring the last blow to the architectural fabric of downtown Beirut that had survived the war. Historic buildings were reduced to smithereens with dynamite, their rubble stacked on the “Normandy dump.”

In a few weeks, the initiative for reconstruction succeeded in achieving what the war had failed to in fifteen years. No traces of Ottoman Beirut remained, while the quarters from French colonial mandate Beirut were rehabilitated. The interests of real-estate speculators and unbridled capital holders were more powerful than the voices of architects and intellectuals trying to save the city and defend its memory.

Perhaps one of the main reasons for the defeat of the architects’ and intellectuals’ campaign was precisely that they framed it as a defense of memory. The texts authored by Jade Tabet and ‘Assem Salam were focused on the consequences of creating a city center with severed connections to the larger fabric of the city, but the language of memory prevailed

and from within it the ambiguity of nostalgia surfaced. The directors of SOLIDERE successfully portrayed the campaign and its protagonists as hostage to a nostalgic attachment for a past that will never return. In contrast, they cast their project as forward-looking, visionary, inspired from and true to the city's long and rich history, but able to embody new aspirations.

Obviously, the campaign was not defeated in the terrain of culture. The foul stench of corruption and corruptibility supports evidence that it was political money, the only language and practice that capital holders know, that earned them victory. It is nonetheless important to examine the counter-cultural campaign critically and identify its shortcomings. Chief amongst them was the understanding of memory. The question deserves to be asked: Was rehabilitating old Beirut, instead of throwing its architectural fabric as rubble to feed a landfill, a nostalgic, passéist project?

In the aftermath of the civil war, there was an understanding of the notion of memory in the ideology of the ruling 'new-old' class establishment that prevailed. It was embodied in the Amnesty Law, the lingering question of the missing, the closure of the files of war crimes, the salient suggestion that the war did not take place or that it ought to be a chapter for forgetting, the collapse of the Lebanese body politic, the complete subservience to Syrian tutelage, etc. Thus memory was an essential issue in the realm of culture; it implied a demand for accountability, for identifying caveats, an antidote to revenge. In the case of the seventeen thousand missing, the chapter was tragically concluded with the government proposing that the only solution for their parents and kin was to declare them dead and turn the page, and not a single investigation was conducted.

The new postwar political class—warlords and war criminals in alliance with oil-enriched capital and military and security apparatuses—was able to impose an amnesia, a complete forgetting, in order to whitewash their innocence. Their victims were silenced. The struggle for recovering memory was not in its essence a nostalgic draw for the past. Rather, it was a drive to claim the present, because the present can only be grounded in a break from its past. In other words, collective memory has to remain living for the present to be free from the hold of the past. This, perhaps, was the shortcoming, the failure to recognize in the counter-offensive with SOLIDERE that the company's public discourse, purportedly forward-looking and centered on meeting aspirations of the future, was in its essence a discourse caged in the past. It was borne from a Saudi-Syrian-American alliance that perpetuated the hegemony of those militias that had earned the Syrians' approval. Their destruction of the past, which was predicated on the negation of memory, in effect reproduced it. And when the past cannot find realms to exist as such, it grabs hold of the present. The spectacle of the burial ceremony of late Rémond Eddé in May 2000 is a useful illustration of my argument. The ceremony took place in the Mar Jerjes Maronite Church, located not far from Burj Square in downtown Beirut. At the airport greeting the coffin flown from the man's long exile in Paris, a banner spoke the same message of the banner that greeted his father, Emile Eddé, when his coffin too was flown from Paris, where he had been in exile in the fifties. The banners read, "Your Coffin is Your Throne, and Their Thrones Are Their Coffins," and a branch from a cedar tree was placed on both coffins. Emile Eddé had left the country because he was against the struggle of Lebanese independence from the French mandate in 1943, while his son, Rémond Eddé, had left

the country to live in exile in Paris, because he defended the independence of the country against both Israeli occupation and Syrian domination. Despite the profound changes in circumstance, it seemed for a moment that time had not lapsed, that there was no past, that the present was a mere reproduction of a past that refuses to fold. The Eddé family belongs to the political establishment of the country, they emblemize that system where traditional élites anchor their legitimacy in tribalism and tradition to perpetuate their seat in power. The blurring, beyond recognition, of distinction between past and present is also how that system endures and simulates a spectacle of perennial stability. The particularisms of either political and social moments as well as the specificities of the circumstances of each are dimmed and transcended, because the system is invariably able to adapt itself to new situations. Thus, the question of the relationship of memory to the present was one of the foremost issues for culture in postwar Lebanon.

The campaign to preserve the “memory” of the city’s historic center was not compelled by nostalgia. It was an attempt to build a new present, to truly turn the page of the experience of the war and allow it a place in collective memory. The aim was to rebuild the war-torn city center into a plural space where social classes and sectarian communities could coexist and interact, the opposite of what SOLIDERE planned—a fortress that expels residents, segmented into gate communities, policed by private security. Thus have they rendered, for example, the exclusive residential neighborhood they call the “Saifi Village.”

The republic born from the Taef Accords, wholly subordinate to Syria’s control, the cesarean-delivered child of an agreement between militias and oil rich capital and, as such, by virtue of its constitutional make-up, could not sever the past from the present, and writing the history of the war was impossible.

The complex ambiguities surrounding the question of collective memory and the construction of a new present were the legacy of the civil war; it was itself complex and so were the political, social and cultural structures that it created. In addition to being the terrain for a conflict amongst the Lebanese, it was also the site where regional conflicts were played out, an undeclared intra-Arab war embedded within the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Two previous civil wars had afflicted Lebanon, the war of 1840-1860 ended with maneuvering from Fouad Basha (the ottoman representative), international diplomacy instituted the “*mutasarifiyyah*” system (that gave mount Lebanon its autonomy under the Ottoman rule, and created the foundations of a political regime based upon confessional affiliations) and French troops deployed in Lebanon. The 1958 civil war ended with a deal between Egypt and the United States known as the Murphy-Nasser agreement, the re-institution of the covenant of 1943 (that distribute power according to confessional lines) and the deployment of American marines on the coast of Lebanon. The third civil war of 1975-1990 witnessed a more complicated trek. Arab and international troops were deployed; a long Israeli invasion reached the capital and ended only in the year 2000; a long Syrian military presence policed an uneven truce; a national reconciliation was deferred and an incomplete independence claimed.

The third civil war was a compass for the regional transformations and a paramount site in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is a mistake to examine it in isolation from its regional embeddedness just as much as it would be a mistake to disregard its internal causes.

The civil war did not only destroy the social, political and economic structures of the country; it also obliterated the ideological-cultural consensus. The main feature of that consensus was its precariousness. It was predicated on a logic of compromise that became its weakness as soon as the warring factions withdrew their endorsement. The set of imagined fictions constructed by that ideology followed suit.

The war was full of surprises and amongst them was the imprint of the Rahbani brothers' legacy on the collective imagination. It played a decisively shaping role and a contradictory one at once. Their songbook was appropriated by all the warring factions and disseminated throughout their media, but at the same time, the body of representations, metaphors, allegories and myths their songbook and musicals depicted were the object of sharp critique. The Rahbani brothers' musical theater, centered on the figure of Fairouz, is one of the most glaring illustrations of the paradoxical nature of mainstream, popular cultural production and its relationship with prevailing ideology. The surrealism of the poet Georges Shehadé on the one hand and the megalomania and exaggerated patriotism of the poet Saïd 'Aql on the other hand, infused the construct that emerged at the hands of the Rahbani brothers, molded from the contradictions around them with singular individualism and childlike candor. Their musical theater captures the foundations of the Lebanese experience. It is able to transcribe it more profoundly than any work by historians and ideologues that tried to present visions for the country and looked to anchor its roots in a historical continuum. The body of the Rahbani brothers' work contained the seeds for a social critique that had the potential to be more genuine and profound than any of the conflicting ideologies that theorized the importance of melting Lebanon within the larger Arab realm.

In a way, the war began as if it were waged on the legacy of the Rahbani brothers' experience. It is no coincidence that in the body of work of Ziad Rahbani (the son of the eldest of that band of brothers, 'Assi Rahbani), particularly in his astounding vernacular dialogue, there is a critique of his father and uncles' work. He pushed for transcending the political discourse of "*Rajeh al-Ukthubah*" that incarnates compromise and deals with reality as a literary lie and "*Al-Leyl wa al-Qandeel*," in which the bad guy changes his nature because he was seduced by a beautiful innocent girl. The war did not destroy the legacy of the Rahbani brothers' work; they remain an integral part of popular culture in Lebanon as well as the Arab East. It was, however, able to shatter the set of cultural taboos and inhibitions that had prevented literature from capturing lived experience in its own language.

Modern poets rebelled and rejected prevailing ideological paradigms. There was the voice of individualistic rebellion (as with Onsi el-Hajj), or the voice of collective existentialist rebellion (as with Khalil Hawi). The rebellious spirit of modern poetry met with a rebellion in theater and the emergence of a countercurrent vanguard movement on the eve of and during the civil war with two principal figures, Roger 'Assaf and Rémond Jebara.

The representation of the lived present, the transcription of the real, the focus on subjectivity and its dialectical relationship with a collectivity in the process of fragmentation will only appear in the novel.



The chief conceit of this paper is that the Lebanese novel was **only born** during the war. In the historical bracket that preceded the eruption of the war, there was no Lebanese novel *per se*, though there were great writers and great works of fiction. Beginning with Ahmad Fares Shidiyaq, the renowned exile who founded modern Arab prose, Jebran Khalil Jebran and Maroun 'Abboud, up to the works of Tawfiq Youssef 'Awwad, Souheil Idriss, Youssef Habshi el-Ashqar, Leila Ba'albaki and others. Despite each of the works' virtues of innovation and originality, the totality of the literary works do not form a coherent, independent body.

It was a different case with poetry. The totality of works cohered to form a body, as with Elias Abou Shabkeh, al-Akhtal al-Sagheer, Saïd 'Aql and Khalil Hawi, in addition to the publication *Shi'ir*, heralded by Youssef el-Khal, Adonis, Onsi el-Hajj and Shawqi Abou Shaqra. The novel was estranged from the wider literary realms; its marginal status was noteworthy. It stunted its development and thwarted its ability to articulate a narrative reflection of lived experience. Poetry was the eminent form of literary expression; its dominion had far-reaching influence, permeating, for instance, to the folk song. It constructed a reality of its own. On the one hand, that otherness stemmed from its image (or self-conscious perception) of rebellion in modern poetry and from the allegorical and metaphoric pastoral poetics, like those found in the Rahbani brothers' theater, on the other hand. It wasn't until the 1960s that theater began to defy norms, taboos and inhibitions, and for modern Lebanese theater to emerge.

There are many theories one can borrow to explain the absence of the novel in Lebanon until the eruption of the war, beginning with Georg Lukács, who claimed that the novel was a form directly related to the revolution of modern capitalism and the emergence of the subject in history. One could also borrow the theory of the Jordanian novelist and essayist, Ghaleb Halasa, who ascribed the birth of the novel to the birth of the state and the middle class. In a comparative study the Egyptian novel with the Shami novel—the novel of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine—Halasa, declaring his allegiance to the former, concluded that the emergence and development of the Egyptian novel was chiefly connected to the existence of state structures in Egypt. The Palestinian critic Faisal Darraj, on the other hand, draws direct causal connections between the existence of the novel and democracy. If we borrow these sets of theories and accept that they are correct, they may help explain the absence of the novel, but they do not explain its birth. The Lebanese novel was born during the dismantlement of the Lebanese state and the collapse of the middle class. Democracy and its practices collapsed under the rule of armed militias that succeeded to the rule of the security regime under the Syrian domination. As for the establishment of modern capitalist structures and Lukács' theory, it comes from a specific historical and economic experience that cannot be universalized unless one presumes that the history of the world is a mere mirror of the history of Europe.

Surely the discussion in theory deserves serious attention, and ought to also engage Frederic Jameson's postulate that the Third World novel is an allegory of the nation, or Homi Bhabha's work on nation and narration. However, it might be more useful first to determine and investigate the set of relationships surrounding the birth of the Lebanese novel during the civil war and attempt to read the experience from within, so as to identify

the discursive underpinnings of theory and extend the discussion into the present moment and the future.

What I define as the Lebanese novel is a body of works that emerged without a theoretical awareness of itself or theoretical reflection to form a body. In that respect, it contrasts sharply with the experience of the modern poetry movement. Men and women, with different literary experience, found themselves embedded in the reality of the civil war and crafted a narrative to transcribe it. There are no elements that one can identify, either in genre or syntax, to bind these works together in a common theoretical denominator or framework. The only salient feature at the heart of all these works is freedom. A freedom from concern for conventions of form, a freedom in approaching themes, a profoundly subjective voice and the attempt to present a subjective historical purview. The language is sophisticated, classical and yet woven with vernacular. Perhaps the more important feature is that the novels' fictional characters seem real and have entered the collective social imagination as such. This impulse for freedom was born in the collapse of a set of taboos that girdled prose writing.

The first taboo to collapse was the war itself. In 1860 and in 1958, the war did not find a script to narrate its story and became a story without an end. With the third civil war of 1975, we find for the first time geographical regions, communitarian sects, characters with names that sound real and a narrative unencumbered from literature's compulsion to moralize. The war was the context for the quotidian and it was inconceivable to write about everyday life in abstraction from it.

The second taboo to be obliterated was the ideological hold that had rendered writing the lived and the real impossible. The country had become officially independent in 1943 as a result of a compromise, and at the essence of all compromise is a masking of the expression of divergent sensibilities and their integration into a fictional construct. As the national covenant collapsed with the eruption of the war, society was unfastened from its conventional reigns and prevailing ideologies lost their hold over consciousness.

The third taboo to lapse related to the present itself, or the lived moment. The cultural universe in which the present moment and its literary translation were inscribed rendered it closer to an illusion. Even in the masterworks of Tawfiq Youssef 'Awwad and Souheil Idriss, like in *al-Ragheef*, 'Awwad's novel of the First World War and its famine, or in *al-Kbandaq al-Ghameeq*, Idriss's novel of sons' rebellion against their fathers, the present can be perceived but only in fragments. Whereas the novels of the war, in spite of being impeded with various difficulties, tried to record the quotidian and present moment, moving from the subjectivity of the individual to collective experience, without regard to the impact of their literary transcriptions on society.

The elimination of these three taboos allowed fiction writing to become boundless, unfettered, and in the span of two decades the collection of works produced were able to form a body of literature that claimed its own literary universe. The Lebanese novel, lodged in the margins of cultural production connected to the human sciences, has become the principal vehicle for the representation of a reality rich in contradiction and tragedy, in which it found the ability to construct its different mirrors.

It is useful here to make note of two rectifications. First, the new experience with fiction writing was not severed from the legacy of the literary works that preceded them. In *al-Thil wa al-Sada (The Shadow and the Echo)*, one of the most profound and compelling novels in Arab fiction, Youssef Habshi al-Ashqar was able to write the war in the idiom of the tragic. Moreover, the narrative, semantic and syntactic work of Ahmad Fares Shidiyaq and Maroun 'Abboud not only evidenced the flexibility of the Arabic language, but also that its modernization was foremost a return to its origins in orality.

Secondly, this new experience with fiction was also deeply connected to the experience of poetry. A number of novels can be read as extensions of the poetic experience, beginning with the impulse for rebellion.

With the exception of 'Abbas Beydoun, the second and third generation of modern poets did not venture in writing novels.

These two considerations are revealing of the extent that the Lebanese novel is the progeny of the post-Mahfouz Arab novel. Since the experience of Gallery 68 in Cairo and the publication of *Men in the Sun* by Ghassan Kanafani in 1963, the Arab novel has been engaged in experimentation freed from the imperium of conventional realism and has ventured into uncharted territory for new forms and genres whose point of anchor is the representation of the present and the manufacture of the language for its transcription. Ghaled Halasa, sadly, passed away before he could witness how his theory collapsed, but also the extent to which his novels have left an imprint on the new Lebanese novel.

Was the Lebanese novel born amidst a theoretical vacuum? A clear answer may not be possible here, but it is significant that a close look at the body of works of Hanan Al Sheikh, Huda Barakat, Rashid Al Daiif, Hassan Daoud, Mohamad Abu Samra, Jabbour Douaihi, Rabih Jaber, Alawia Sobh, Iman Yunnes, Najwa Barakat and others exposes the astounding plurality of styles whose influences range from the French *nouveau roman*, the American novel, *A Thousand and One Nights*, Latin America's magic realism and the post-Mahfouz Egyptian novel. These literary references, diverse and sometimes contradictory, have all coupled in the crucible of the transcription of the lived, concrete and present. In that, it has been allowed to unshackle itself from the burden of referencing and outline a unique referential universe particular to itself.

It is also useful to return to consider the Soviet critical theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, who understood the word as a living entity. As such the novel is released from the constraining idealist framing of Lukács and becomes a literary genre that cannot be effectively contained, according to Bakhtin. The poetics of prose, dialogical literature and the living word render the art of fiction an open ended literary genre able to embody all genres, grounded in the present and the future.

In light of these observations, we are able to read the art of modern Arab fiction and extract three key elements:

1. An engagement with the tradition of classical Arabic prose, with the attempt to transgress the compulsion to revive the past and in order to draw inspiration from it. (Note the difference between al-Yaziji's *Maqamat* and their dead resur-

rections in contrast with the livelihood of al-Shidiyaq's texts and the aesthetics in al-Mullihee's *Hadith Issa Bin Hisham*.)

2. The language of the present and its requirements, beginning with the revolution of modern journalism, and its need for a language of reporting and conveying information.

3. The influence of contemporary western literature through the translation of the body of European literary works or their rewriting. The modern art of the novel emerged during the colonial era, or under the colonial relations of production (according to Lebanese Marxist philosopher Mehdi 'Amel), part and parcel with the resistance against the colonial project. In that regard, a search for an identity exists in the historical works of Jirji Zeydan, the drive to modernize the romantic trend in the works of Jebran Khalil Jebran and the group of exiles, and the complicated track of Mahfouz's other novels that not only subsumed the history of the European novel, but also proceeded to pursue the formal and thematic search for the new, as, for example, in *al-Harafeesh*. The causal connections between the art of the novel and the rise of capitalism and the middle class elucidated by Lukács are not enough to analyze the emergence of the Arab novel and its evolution unless we inscribe these two elements in the framework of colonial and post-colonial literature, resistance and the search for a new meaning for the present.

Certainly, this approach deserves further elaboration, but for the purpose of the present argument, it allows us to understand how the Lebanese novel came to life in a social world that was dismantling, when individuals and groups were gripped in a frenzied search to find meaning in the midst of a wide historical chaos that overwhelmed Lebanon for more than fifteen years. Thus we are able to explain why themes like the loss of the father, the question of identity, death and sex, became salient to the contemporary Lebanese novel. Also, we are able to explain its forms, which can be grossly categorized into two frameworks.

The first framework embodies the drive in post-Mahfouz novels in quest for new, unfamiliar narrative form that hinges between historical writing, fragmented narrative, poetry, and casting of the everyday in literary metaphor. Perhaps Emile Habibi's *Pessoptimist*, in its virtue as its own literary structure that melts the art of the *maqama* with sarcasm, exilic fiction, parody and metaphor, is an appropriate illustration of the genre.

The second framework emerges from the collapse of the prevailing ideological vocabulary as well as social and cultural structures. Space was cleared for the idiom of the lived present to come to life and impose itself on the literary structures.

At the intersection of these two frameworks, the Lebanese novel of the civil war was born as if it carried the mandate of transcribing the present in the present. For that purpose, it had to produce a deconstruction and reconstitution at once.

According to the lexical compendium of classical Arabic, *Lissan al-'Arab*, «*kataba*», the root verb for «write» means to join, bring together. Hence, integral to writing is the act of collecting. Writing is a reproduction of lived experience from consciousness, memory, imagination and language. In the context of the Lebanese novel, it implied an act of de-

struction as well. This is one of reasons the choices for form are invariably open and the style is richly diverse. The attempt to model and categorize works is at best tedious, at the least premature. The war has been text for tragedy, stage for parody and a daily encounter with death. Writing was rediscovered as a means for creating life and grabbing onto it from the death machine.

A number of observations are worthy of note:

The first observation was also spoken of by al-Jaheth. When the Abbasid writer attempted to define poetry—while also defining literary expression in its various forms—he wrote, “meanings are proposed on the way.” The question is no longer to uncover the meanings articulated during the war, or “on its way,” rather to uncover the way itself and the significations of lived experience where the act of writing is woven as an extension of the fabric of life.

The second observation was taught by Abi Hayyan al-Tawhidi, who defined writing in a work that carries one of the most beautiful titles in Arabic, namely, *al-Imta' wa al-Mu'anassab*, or *Pleasuring and Companionship*. The work is a collection of [Moukabasaat], statements and anecdotes that call upon intellectual reflection as well as spiritual longing and crafts a literary text from the lived as well literary memory in the same instance.

The third observation is given by *A Thousand and One Nights*. Undoubtedly, the smartest pair of eyes that laid its gaze on that text belonged to the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges. He may have been blind, but his eyes saw the book as circles of stories that never end. *A Thousand and One Nights* teaches us that stories are neither a reproduction of life, nor an expression of our attachment to it; they are also life itself.

The fourth observation is from Joseph Conrad, a writer who has made a homeland for himself in language. Edward Saïd reiterates his idea, claiming that writing becomes the point of intersection for exiles between the outside and the inside. And when the German theorist Theodor Adorno described the homeland, he abbreviated it to writing.

These four observations or lessons locate the experience of the novel in both its literary and social frameworks and acknowledge the processes of deconstruction and reconstitution embedded within the world of signs, significations and form that the war obliterated. It is an experience born in the hell of the Arab East that has become a hell the size of the world and the terrain of struggle where the American empire and Israel are enforcing a neo-colonialism wrought in racism, arrogance, and tyranny.

Two questions beckon to be asked:

The first pertains to the literature of the Third World today. In the 1950s, and in the midst of the struggles for liberation, Franz Fanon proposed a theory of liberation that has become the canon for anti-colonial literature. After the publication of Edward Saïd's *Orientalism*, the concept of post-colonial literature was coined to identify cultural and literary trends predicated on the end of colonialism that asked questions about identity and multiculturalism. The question at this moment is about the necessity for a new coin,

a new interpretive framework, because what has come after post-colonialism is a new form of colonialism under different circumstances, where wars of identity are waged: an apartheid regime is established in Palestine, a military occupation is ravaging Iraq, and forms of barbaric—as well as pornographic—abuse are institutionalized in the Guantanamo prison, Abou Ghreib prison and others.

The second question pertains to the new meanings we encounter in this era of post-colonialism, specifically the notion of multiculturalism or cultural diversity. Will the new empire destroy pluralism and diversity, and enforce a return to racial supremacy in the vein of the nineteenth century's "civilizing mission"? In today's terms, the civilizing mission would be closer to a bestializing mission that seeks to build gates to separate Rome from the barbarians.

These two questions are directly connected to the attempt to understand the new Lebanese novel and its relationship to the war. Has the war really ended in Lebanon?

As we have known it, the war spanned from the years 1975 to 1990 and has surely ended. In lieu of the 1943 covenant, a new covenant has been negotiated but never implemented. As such, the country has remained suspended in waiting, at the mercy of a political class that knows only the political practice and ethos of governance of thievery, selling out, despotism and subservience.

After the Intifada of Independence of March 14, 2005, where more than one million Lebanese demonstrated and occupied the Bourj Square and imposed retreat on the Syrian troops that dominated the country for thirty years, Lebanon is still suspended. The heavy geopolitical reality and the inability of the political class to create a new national consensus are creating a political vacuum that can threaten the unachieved new independence.

These are not features exclusive to Lebanon but to the larger Arab East since the bloody attacks on September 11, 2001 in New York. The Cold War had brought to life a monster with two heads: the first head is fundamentalist and suicidal, the product of a crisis constitutional to profound contradictions in the Arab peninsula; the second head is the American master, who has fed fundamentalism with steroids to use it in the Cold War. Emboldened by the rise of the fundamentalist right to the helm of power in the United States, it is now waging a war of civilizations with its only weapon, barbarity. Two savage powers in the Arab East have transformed it in a living, burning hell. The invasion of Iraq with its dictionary of lies and ruses is today a laboratory for savagery. It meets with Zionism in its singular objective, the eradication of life in the Arab East.

The civil war has ended but now we are all at war. War is at our doors, in the neighbor's yard. It is inside each of us, because the goal for each of the two monstrous forces is the demonization and estrangement of Arab societies. Under the banner of democratization, or religiosity, they are driving the Arab world to a precipice.

Side by side with the sexually graphic recordings of the savagery in Iraq, Palestine has become a large prison that holds captive suffering, pain, misery and despair. Our countries have become home to a crushing war that seems limitless and no one knows the disasters it

carries for the future. The war is out there, here and inside us, we can no longer close our eyes and pretend we don't see it. Blinding are the fires flaring in the dark of night, blinding are the flashes from digital cameras recording post-modern American forms of torture. We are at war. Writing is still an attempt to capture meanings—deconstructing and reconstituting them anew. What was witnessed in Lebanon was a chapter in a tragedy that started in 1948, and because of despairing consciousness, it seeped to the entire Arab East.

War was not waged over memory, nor was it over identity, nor was it over fundamentals. It was a war waged on the present. Writing that takes place in the present finds itself capturing meanings, discovering stories that never end, and dwells in homelands so estranging they seem like exile. The Third World novel that found in Achebe the voice of tragic colonial dismantlement, in Yashar Kemal its pastoral rhythm, in Nagib Mahfouz a history that did not belong to it, in the Latin American novel the ability to transform imagined fiction into a reality imbricated into the story, finds itself today, as it sets on the course of transposing the real into fiction, having to deconstruct and recollect in order to contribute to the production of meaning.