



**Arrays
of
Egyptian and Tunisian
Everyday Worlds**
 An update on the project
*In 2016—How it felt to live in the Arab
World five years after the “Arab Spring”*

edited by
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‘Āmmiyya

(..) bridging the big gap that has emerged between our language of today and the essential works (*ummahāt al-kutub*) of literature, the heritage and the language and style they were written in (...) for the language not to be a monopoly for those who studied it and understand it (...) so that it is possible for a twelve or thirteen, or even younger boy or girl, to read one of the essential works and understand what is being said (...) that it is natural and happens in any language (...) personally I think that no awakening/revival/renaissance (*nahḍa*) will take place in the Arab countries unless we know how to understand our forefathers first. (al-Ma‘arrī 2016: 7-8)¹

These points are listed as motivations for why the Egyptian scholar, translator and novelist Nārīmān al-Shāmīlī (b. 1983) chooses to translate Abū ‘l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī’s *Risālat al-ghufrān* (“The Epistle of Forgiveness”) into Egyptian ‘āmmiyya (vernacular Arabic). It is most likely the only translation published this year from *fushḥā* (standard Arabic) to ‘āmmiyya. However, use of ‘āmmiyya in writing is not rare: billboards decorating buildings and roadsides are often in ‘āmmiyya, which is also frequently used on social media [↗ **Social Media**]; Egyptians receive text messages from their telephone companies in ‘āmmiyya [↗ **Mobile Phones**], and books are being published that are written fully or partly in ‘āmmiyya, or in a mix between ‘āmmiyya and *fushḥā*. Many of them belong to the *adab sākhīr* genre [↗ **Satire**], such as *Ghayr qābil li’l-nashr* (“Unpublishable”) by Sharīf As‘ad, or even self-help books [↗ **Self-help**] such as *Il-Khurūg ‘an il-naṣṣ* (“Out of the Box”) by Egyptian psychiatrist Muḥammad Ṭāhā [↗ **Psychiatrists**]. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm’s book *Maṭlūb ḥabīb* (“Sweetheart Wanted”) is labelled *i’tirāfāt* (“confessions”). As many writers before him, he raises the dilemma of which variety to write in:

I have grown up but I have not really grown up...I have grown up but I still write ‘āmmiyya next to *fushḥā*...I know that it is better if the book is all in *fushḥā*, but I prefer to express myself in ‘āmmiyya, I was born and raised in a country which speaks in a variety (*lahga*) which is different from the official variety (*lahga*) that is written in books and in education. I learned in one way and lived in another. I cannot define my identity closer to any of the varieties...both of them represent me...a variety closer to my intellect (*‘aql*) and a variety closer to my heart and way of life...for this reason I decided to complete the book using both varieties” (Ibrāhīm 2016: 10).

Moreover, the Egyptian president [↗ **Father figures**] gives formal speeches in ‘āmmiyya and uses several linguistic features that are not associated with the prestige register of ‘āmmiyya. On October 6, the Facebook page *Asa7be Sarcasm Society* posts a meme involving an image from a news broadcast showing al-Sīsī commemorating the 43rd anniversary of the October War together with the Sudanese President ‘Umar al-

Bashīr [↗ **Commemorations**]. The caption reads *iddihā wāhda taḥyā Masr/Misr*, which literally means “Give it a ‘Long live Egypt.’” The word for Egypt is spelled with the letter *sīn* instead of the correct *šād*, mocking the president’s ‘weak’ pronunciation. Imitation or mocking of specific pronunciations is often found when ‘*āmmiyya*’ is written. On November 1, a meme posted on the same Facebook page targets certain women who speak in a flirty/childish/spoiled manner. This time it is an image from the movie ‘*Asal iswid*’ (“Black Honey”) from 2010. The original scene involves the protagonist, called Maṣrī (i.e., “Egyptian”), who has returned to Egypt after twenty years in the United States, his friend Sa‘īd, and Mervat, the woman Sa‘īd is in love with. Mervat is a primary school teacher of English, and Maṣrī is provoked by her faulty English: she pronounces /f/ for /v/, /b/ for /p/ etc. The author of the meme turns the focus over to Egyptian ‘*āmmiyya*’, adding the following caption:

dī hiyya illī biḥibbahā!! Dī bit’ūl māthī wa-thaḥlāna yā Sa‘īd (“Is this her that you love!! She says *māthī* and *thaḥlāna*, Sa‘īd!”).

Māthī is a variant of *māshī* (lit., “it goes”, i.e., “o.k.”), and *thaḥlāna* of *za‘lāna* (the feminine form for “sad”). The post generates comments of which some contain new memes treating the same topic. One of these is an image from a different movie, in which a woman is portrayed as saying *shha’ūllak kita baqā zaḥlāna minak*. This would, according to the conventions, be written *mish ha’ūllak kida baqā za‘lāna minak* (“I’m not going to tell you, I am angry with you”). Yet, this particular transcription points to specific linguistic features—those of flirty/childish/spoiled/lower class women—which are immediately recognized as communicating a social meaning. Such meanings are often linked to certain speech groups or strata of society [↗ **Affluence vs Destitution**], or a specific person or character [↗ **Celebrities**].

Related Entries

Arrays: Celebrities; Commemorations; Father figures; Mobile Phones; Psychiatrist; Satire; Self-help; Social Media ♦ **Codes:** Affluence vs Destitution

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- Muḥammad Ṭāhā. 2016. *Il-Khurūg ‘an il-naṣṣ*. al-Qāhira: Dār Tūyā.
- Sharīf As‘ad. 2016. *Ghayr qābil li’l-nashr*. al-Qāhira: Dār Tūyā.

Memes

- Muḥammad Durgham, posting on *Asa7be Sarcasm Society*, October 6, 2016, <<https://www.facebook.com/asa7bess/photos/a.263636427064801.58209.263629920398785/1285512081543892>> (retrieved October 27, 2017).

Muhammad ‘Āṭif, posting on *Asa7be Sarcasm Society*, November 1, 2016, <<https://www.facebook.com/asa7bess/photos/a.263636427064801.58209.263629920398785/1310753782353055>> (retrieved October 27, 2017).

N.N., posting on *Asa7be Sarcasm Society*, November 1, 2016, <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1171521389596682&set=p.1171521389596682>> (retrieved October 27, 2017).

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Notes

Introduction: From “Issues” to “Arrays” (S. Guth & A. Hofheinz)

- 1 For a discussion of our approach in the context of others in an “Academia in Transformation” (to quote the title of a research initiative of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities, AGYA), see Barbara WINCKLER and Christian JUNGE, “Opening Up the Text: Arabic Literary Studies on the Move,” Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) – Transformation Group, Working Paper No. 2/2017, available from <http://agya.info/fileadmin/user_upload/Working_Groups-images/Transformation/WPS_Academia_in_Transformation/Paper_7_Opening_up_the_Text_Winckler_Junge.pdf>.
- 2 Free pdf available from <https://monoskop.org/images/9/95/Gumbrecht_Hans_Ulrich_In_1926_Living_on_the_Edge_of_Time.pdf>.
- 3 “atmosphere, mood, spirit, vibe, ...”—a key word in Gumbrechtian thinking that is difficult to translate, which is why the author himself usually prefers to leave it untranslated. See especially his *Stimmungen lesen: Über eine verdeckte Wirklichkeit der Literatur*, München: Hanser Verlag, 2011 (translated into English by Erik BUTLER as *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature*, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012). Cf. also the public lecture “The dimension of ‘Stimmung’ in contemporary popular culture,” given on December 13, 2016, in Minsk, available on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/t_dajId2BaA>.
- 4 Much of the material was collected in a shared researcher’s notebook, using *Evernote* (<https://evernote.com>).
- 5 The “special dossier” *Living 2016: Cultural Codes and Arrays in Arab Everyday Worlds Five Years After the “Arab Spring*,” edited by Stephan Guth and Elena Chiti, appeared as pages 221-388 of *JAIS*, 16 (2016), and is accessible both at *JAIS*’s previous website (http://www.hf.uio.no/jais/volume/vol16/v16_09_living2016.pdf) and at the new pool of open-access journals hosted by the University of Oslo, see <<https://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/JAIS/article/view/4761>>.
- 6 The list, processed from the data collected in our researcher’s notebook as well as from the studies contained in the *Living 2016* dossier (see previous note), is given on pp. 229-33 of Stephan Guth, “Introduction: *Living 2016* and the *In 2016* project,” *JAIS* 16 (2016): 224-33.
- 7 GUMBRECHT 1997: 434.
- 8 Ibid. (our emphasis, S.G./A.H.).
- 9 Ibid. (dto.).
- 10 Ibid. (dto.).
- 11 Ibid. (dto.).

‘Āmmyya (E. M. Håland)

- 1 My translation – E.M.H.

Clash (E. Chiti)

- 1 Andeel, “Al-’adāla li’l-jamī’”, *Mada Masr*, 11 February 2016: <<https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/02/11/cartoon/u/justice-for-all/>>.
- 2 Fieldwork notes, January-February 2016.
- 3 “Al-yawm... intilāq ma’raḍ al-Qāhira li’l-kitāb,” *Al-Shurūq News*, January 27, 2016: <<http://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=27012016&id=fe442bc5-e180-45fa-afaa-745f748240bf>>.
- 4 “Tajribatu-hu ma’a ’l-Ikhwān fī ḍayf al-sharaf,” *Akhbār al-Adab*, February 14, 2016: 6.

- 5 Fieldwork notes, Round Table Al-thaqāfa fī'l-muwājaha, Cairo Book-Fair, Main Hall, January 29, 2016.
- 6 Shahira Amin, "Three years on, wounds of Egypt's deadly sit-in dispersals linger," *Al-Monitor*, August 21, 2016: <<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/08/egypt-three-year-anniversary-rabaa-sit-in-brotherhood.html>>.
- 7 "I was terribly wrong"—writers look back at the Arab spring five years on," *The Guardian*, January 23, 2016: <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/arab-spring-five-years-on-writers-look-back>>.
- 8 "Ishtibāk: fīlm miṣrī fī iftitāḥ mahrajān Kān," *al-Ahrām*, May 13, 2016: <<http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/978271.aspx>>.
- 9 Thomas Sotinel, "Clash : après le bus 678, le fourgon de police," *Le Monde*, May 12, 2016: <http://www.lemonde.fr/festival-de-cannes/article/2016/05/12/clash-apres-le-bus-678-le-fourgon-de-police_4917875_766360.html>.
- 10 <<https://twitter.com/moezmasoud/status/730910281442971649>>.
- 11 TV show *Anā Maṣrī*, ḥalqat "Fīlm Muḥammad Diyāb *Ishtibāk*, bi-nakha siyāsiyya wa-thawriyya", May 15, 2016: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiwWQxmP5WQ>>; see also: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmujpDCBA>>.
- 12 "Tom Hanks and Daniel Craig Express Their Love for Egyptian Movie 'Eshtebak'", *Scoop Empire*, July 26, 2016: <<http://scoopempire.com/eshtebak-tom-hanks-daniel-craig/>>.
- 13 Aḥmad Miḍḥat, "Mā lā ya'rifu-hu Tom Hanks," *Masralarabia*, July 30, 2016: <<http://www.masralarabia.com/المقالات/907-أحمد-مدحت-1180705-ما-لا-يعرفه-توم-هانكس-عن-فيلم-اشتباك>>.
- 14 Sāmih Faraj, "Intībā'āt sarī'a 'an fīlm *Ishtibāk*", *Za2ed18*, July 31, 2016: <<http://www.za2ed18.com/انطباعات-إذا-نشتبك-من-مع-يكتب-فرج-سامح/>>.

Conversions (M. Lindbekk)

- 1 "Āwiz tighayyir diyāntak fī Maṣr, ibqā qābilnī," *al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12, 2016, <<http://www.elsaba7.com/NewsPrint.aspx?Id=142416>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 2 al-Buḥayrī, Aḥmad, "Shaykh al-Azhar: Ḥurriyyat al-i'tiqād shay' wa-ḥurriyyat al-irtidād shay' ākhar," *al-Miṣrī al-Yawm*, June 16, 2016, <<http://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/965579>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 3 "Āwiz tighayyir diyāntak fī Maṣr, ibqā qābilnī," *al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12, 2016, <<http://www.elsaba7.com/NewsPrint.aspx?Id=142416>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Egypt Independent*: "Egypt's Jewish community diminished to 6 women after death of Lucy Saul," July 30, 2016, <<http://www.egyptindependent.com/egypt-s-jewish-community-diminished-6-women-after-death-lucy-saul/>> (accessed December 15, 2017).
- 6 *Nmisr*: "Quwwāt al-amn ta'zil anṣār al-ikhwān al-muslimīn ba'd tasabbubihim bi-islām thalāth masīhiyyīn bi-Ṭurah," *Nujūm Miṣriyya*, January 29, 2016, <<https://www.nmisr.com/arab-news/egypt-news/الامن-تعزل-انصار-الاخوان-المسلمي>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 7 'Abd al-Ḥafīz, Ṣabrī. "al-Aqbāt yatazāharūn li-sti'ādātihā wa'l-muslimūn li-tasallumihā," *Īlāf*, May 7, 2016, <<http://elaph.com/Web/News/2016/5/1087240.html>> (accessed November 1, 2017).
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 "Āwiz tighayyir diyāntak fī Maṣr, ibqā qābilnī," *al-Ṣabāḥ*, April 12, 2016, <<http://www.elsaba7.com/NewsPrint.aspx?Id=142416>> (accessed November 1, 2017).

Dual Identities / Masking (S. Guth)

- 1 English *mask* is from Middle French *masque* 'covering to hide or guard the face' (16c.), from Italian *maschera*, from Medieval Latin *masca* 'mask, specter, nightmare,' which is perhaps from Arabic *maskharah* 'buffoon, mockery,' from *sakhira* 'be mocked, ridiculed' – <etymonline.com> (as of 09Dec2017).
- 2 Quoted in: <http://www.venice-days.com/FILM.asp?id=9&id_dettaglio=552&lang=eng>.
- 3 Khādījah is a traditional Islamic name in reverence for the Prophet's first wife.

Satire (on YouTube Channels) (M. Mohamed)

- 1 *yiʔallish*, on the other hand, is the common term among Egyptian youth for all kinds of verbal practices that stimulate laughter, like puns, parody, and irony.