

Nationalism in the Season of Revolution: The Work of Syrian, Libyan, and Egyptian Poets

Muhammad Luthfi Zuhdi¹

Abstract

The Arab Spring was an important chapter in the modern history of the Arab world, with the revolution that started in Tunisia bringing the wind of change to many other Arab countries. Syria, Libya, and Egypt were inevitably hit by this revolutionary wave. However, the revolution did not emerge out of nowhere, and there were some trigger factors. Poets are among those actors who play an important role in spreading ideas about change. This article describes in detail the role that Syrian, Libyan, and Egyptian poets played in voicing their nationalism amid the intense political struggle between those in power and those who desired change. This research is a qualitative study applying the sociology of literature approach. In conclusion, this study found that Arab nationalism manifested in various forms of poetry, and this had a significant influence on mobilizing the masses.

Keywords: poetry, Arab Spring, sociology of literature, Arab nationalism

Introduction

Literature in the Arab world has a long history, one as long as the Arab civilization itself. Historical records indicate that the Arabs began writing inscriptions about 150 years before the Hijra, with Muhalhil being the earliest known figure to write Arabic poetry. He was followed by other Arab poets, such as Umruul Qais, Zuhair bin Abi Sulma and Ka'ab bin Zuhair, among others. Indeed, various poets emerged over time in various periods, starting from the Islamic era and moving through the Umayyah dynasty and the Abbasid dynasty before finally reaching the modern era, which began for Arabic literature with Napoleon Bonaparte's conquest of Egypt in 1798. His arrival brought not only soldiers but also various tools of civilization, such as printing presses. This is why his arrival is considered as the catalyst for the first phase of the modern Arab era (Al-Fakhuri, 1986).

Since the early 19th century, various Arab literary figures—such as Mahmud al-Barudi, Ahmad Syauqi, Ibrahim al-Mazzini—and literary critics like Thaha Husein and al-Aqqad have emerged (Al-Fakhuri, 1986). In the 20th century, Najib Mahfudz became famous as a novelist and won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. Ahmad Bakatsir—who was born in Indonesia, raised in Yemen, and became famous in Egypt—arose as a figurehead before dying in 1969. The sociopolitical

¹Dr. Indonesian University, Jakarta; Email: m.luthfiz009@gmail.com

conditions in Arab countries also encouraged the emergence of poets with certain tendencies in their poetry. For example, Mahmud Darwis was a well-known 20th-century Palestinian poet and author who voiced struggle in his work. Next, Syrian-born Nizar Qabbani was a diplomat before resigning in 1966, and his poetry tends to speak about the freedom of women and society, with him being an existentialist (Al-Fakhuri, 1986).

In 2011, the Arab Spring (Arabic: *Al-Tsawrat al-‘Arabiyyah*) flared up in Tunisia and spread to other Arab countries, most notably Egypt, Syria, and Libya. This inspired the poets of these countries to voice their grand ideas about sociopolitical and cultural issues. Their responses to the condition of their countries showed how powerful the nationalism of the Arab poets was. Nationalism, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is “*loyalty and obedience to a nation.*” Carlton J. H. Hayes, an American historian, gives a similar definition of nationalism: “*loyalty and attachment to the interior of the group (namely the nation and homeland) are the basis of nationalism.*” This definition emphasizes similarity in cultural backgrounds, and cultural groups are considered the main factor in forming a nation (Hayes, 1926:279). This article seeks to analyze some of the poetic works of authors who lived in countries that had become restive due to the Arab Spring. Among these are Abeer Sulaiman and Ali Molla Musa from Syria, Miftah al-Ammari and Khulud Al-Fallah from Libya, and Hisham al-Jokh from Egypt. The Arab Spring was an important chapter in the modern history of the Arab world, because this popular movement, led by the youth, drastically changed the political landscape of the Middle East and North Africa. It first started in Tunisia but quickly spread to other nearby countries, such as Libya, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen.

Research Questions

- 1) What kind of themes in the Arabic spring poets are identified to promote the nationalism in the season of revolution?
- 2) How nationalism expressions in the ports of the season of revolution are perceived according to the country of Syrian, Libyan, and Egyptian perspectives?

Methods

This research is content analysis design that follows a qualitative approach and applies the sociology of literature theory. The sociology of literature, as explained by Damono (Damono in

Wiyatmi, 2013) is the objective scientific study of humans and institutions in society and related social processes. Indeed, both sociology and literature are tools for human comprehension, and between them, a common point of view for human facts can be found (Solikhah, 2016; Tarman & Kılınc, 2018). Sociology dissects and studies the structure of social institutions, religions, politics, and economic processes. Everything is a social structure when visualizing the ways that people organize themselves in society. Literature, meanwhile, is a written expression of a society's dynamics in terms of social, religious, political, and economic aspects.

According to Faruk (1994), the sociology of literature is a science that explains literature through the lens of the scientific and objective study of humans in society and the related social institutions and processes. Literature is a social product, and it even forms part of some social institutions (Wolff, 1989). The social structure, family relationships, class clashes, and social factors are therefore reflected in the literature of the time (Budiharso, 2016; Damono & Effendi, 1979; Tolba, 2018; Wiyatmi, 2013;).

Data of this study are themes of poets that expresses revolution season in three countries, namely Syria, Libya and Egypt. The themes define nationalism during the revolution season on the countries. Four poets from various Arab countries are the sources of data. Data are analyzed by implementing content analysis techniques that cover (1) converting data in the poets into narrative contents, (2) determining the data into unit of analysis as represented in the research questions, (3) defining the rules of data coding, (4) applying the coding into the whole of the data, (5) checking the consistency and accurateness of the coding, and (6) drawing the conclusion to select final data.

Results and Discussion

Themes of Nationalism in the Poets of the Revolution Season

Themes of the poets in the revolution season indicate that they influence the conflicts in Syria, Egypt, and Libya, and that they had on the literary expression of poets in these countries, the background to these countries' conflicts. Libya is well known for its abundant natural wealth, and it plays an important role in international energy politics because of its large oil and gas reserves. In addition, its former leader, Muammar Gaddafi, had often acted as a symbol of resistance against the West, raising Libya's role in the Arab world. However, he was also an authoritarian ruler who refused to allow any space for political opposition, and he tended to act harshly against anyone who might try to oppose him. Sociologically, Libya as a country is supported by tribal and ethnic

elements. Each tribal leader has authority over his tribe, and such people are usually appointed based on their charisma. Every order from a chieftain is considered an obligation that must be carried out, and this explains some of the armed conflicts that involved various tribes and government soldiers (Anderson, 2011).

During his period, Gaddafi was able to suppress any resistance from tribes who did not fall into line with his policies. He had support for his government from loyal tribes, and this enabled him to withstand any attempts at overthrowing him as leader. Under Gaddafi's rule, Libya enjoyed reasonable economic growth, but for those who opposed, Gaddafi's oppressive policies were reason enough to fight. In the end, the Arab Spring sounded the beginning of the end for Gaddafi's regime in Libya.

The revolution in Tunisia that succeeded in bringing down Ben Ali's regime inspired young Libyans to achieve a similar outcome, namely to topple an existing authoritarian regime and replace it with a democratic system. However, while the Tunisian people were able to overthrow Ben Ali's regime without an armed conflict, Libya's story followed a very different route. Before Gaddafi's ultimate fall, many pitched battles took place between government troops and the forces of the opposing factions. The situation in Libya spiraled out of control due to support from Western countries, which directly involved themselves in efforts to overthrow Gaddafi by conducting airstrikes. These airstrikes were led by the United States and its NATO allies Britain and France, thus nullifying the advantage of the Libyan Government's superior military power (Anderson, 2011).

The armed conflict in Libya lasted almost a month. NATO's superior air forces soon defeated the Libyan air force, making the job of the opposition groups easier because they could focus on fighting soldiers loyal to Gaddafi without worrying about airstrikes. In 2016, Gaddafi's fall was embraced enthusiastically by supporters of the revolution. Gaddafi, who was a strong symbol of power in Libya for thirty years, eventually died at the hands of his people. Following Gaddafi's fall, transitional steps were supported by Western countries, and opposition groups were helped in identifying post-Gaddafi leaders (Simpson, 2018).

However, Gaddafi's fall did not solve the country's problems. The winner of the subsequent general election became caught in a civil war. The new government army had not been able to fully control the country because many military factions still bore allegiance to Gaddafi, making a civil war unavoidable. Libya transformed into a very unstable country due to clashes between the

government military and opposition military forces, each of which claimed the territory they controlled. This situation grew more complicated because other countries in the world were also divided, with some supporting the new government after the Arab Spring, while other countries lent their support to General Haftar, who was originally a Gaddafi loyalist.

In Syria's case, meanwhile, the Syrian people made similar demands to those made in Tunisia. They demanded that the Assad regime step down and hold a democratic general election. They hoped that with the introduction of a democratic system, the country's government would not be dominated by the current regime. It was also hoped that democratic elections following the will of the people would lead Syria towards economic improvement. The masses who took to the streets demanding that Bashar Assad resign included students, labor groups, youths, artists, and opposition parties who had always wanted regime change.

Assad rejected the protestors' demand and responded by deploying troops to disperse the crowds and ensure that their efforts would be thwarted. This reaction in turn sparked bloody clashes between the army and demonstrators. The government's tough stance in deploying troops escalated the actions of the demonstrators, with them now taking to the streets armed with weapons. What had started as a demand for political transition in Syria turned into an armed conflict between government troops and opposition militia? This conflict between the two camps in turn destabilized Syria. Civilians who sought to avoid conflict decided to flee the country as refugees. The subsequent large-scale exodus then became a big problem for the international community (Simpson, 2018).

In Egypt, the demonstrators were inspired by the revolutionary movements in Tunisia and other nearby countries, so they sought to overthrow the longstanding regime of Hosni Mubarak. This long-lasting regime with authoritative tendencies had had little impact on improving people's lives through a growing economy. For this reason, critical economic problems triggered some youth and social activists to take to the streets in Egypt. The demonstrators wanted Hosni Mubarak to step down and allow the country to hold democratic elections (Simpson, 2018).

A massive demonstration took place in Tahrir Square in Cairo, and this was followed by similar protests in other major Egyptian cities. They voiced a shared aspiration for a drastic change of leadership, hoping that the regime in power could be purged and that Egypt could get a new uncorrupt government capable of improving the country's economy. The movement finally succeeded in overthrowing President Hosni Mubarak, and following a transitional period after his

fall, elections were held to elect members of parliament and a new president. The elections that took place for the first time after the fall of Hosni Mubarak were indeed capable of appointing emerging new leaders, but the new president, Muhammad Mursi, did not last long. His term was ended by a coup d'état carried out by the military (Mady, 2013).

In the cases of Egypt, Syria, and Libya, similarities existed in terms of the triggers that started the revolutionary movements. The people of these countries wanted a change in national leadership because they felt their leaders did not uphold democratic values and focused too much on the powerful people. Economic problems were also a contributing factor in the people's demand for regime change. During a revolution, a social process takes place in society. This study discusses the role of poets' reflection when their countries face a political transition. The poets of Syria, Egypt, and Libya all possess a distinctive expression in their works related to the Arab Spring, as explained below.

Perceptions of the Conflicts in Syria, Egypt and Libya

The revolutionary events in Arab countries inspired the birth of George A. Simon's work *Poetry and the Arab Spring*. Simon provides illustrations for five Arab poets who responded to the political situation during the Arab Spring. Simon highlights a correlation between social and political situations with a strong narrative in the poetry of the time (Simon, 2015). In addition, Mark Levine wrote an article entitled "*When Art Is the Weapon: Culture and Resistance Confronting Violence in the Post-Uprisings Arab World*," which contains an analysis of the artworks that were used in the resistance movement. Levine analyzes artworks in the form of poetry, graffiti, music, theater, and other forms of art as tools for social and political transformation (LeVine, 2015).

Some previous research about the influence of literature on political constellations in Arab countries can be found in works by such as Kadalal (2014), who states in his article that the Arab Spring influenced the emergence of literary works in Egypt and Syria. In these two countries, the influence of the developing sociocultural conditions on literary work was very visible, and this was further strengthened by the fact that political events often solicit a response through literary channels (Kadalal, 2014; Khosravi et al., 2016). Likewise, Michel's (2013) study states that Arabic plays a role in the transmission of people's resistance to the ruling regimes of the Arab world. Nazir explains how the word "Irhal," which translates as "to go," became a slogan in

countries affected by the Arab Spring. This shows that Arabic, as a common language among Arab countries, has similarities in terms of meaning, thereby speeding up the spread of ideas for overthrowing dictatorial regimes in various countries. In his research, Nazir did not progress to the stage of analyzing each literary work by Arabic writers seeking to spread propaganda through their poetry.

In her analysis, Torlakova (1970) also identified a connection between politics and metaphorical narratives in the works of Arabic writers affected by the Arab Spring. She added that metaphors acted as effective instruments for spreading the message of resistance during the Arab Spring revolution.

This article discusses the poetry of four contemporary Syrian, Libyan, and Egyptian poets, representing the poetic voice of nationalism in the Arabic countries. The other poets are Abeer Suleiman, Miftah al-Ammari, Khulud al-Falah, and al-Jokh. The word “nationalism” in this article refers to the deep love of Arab nationalism and a particular homeland that is revealed through the “patriotic” experiences.

The first Syrian poet (Hope, 2002; Suleman, 2020), described in a poem how the armed conflict raging in Syria had taken away all the beauty and love that had existed in people’s lives, such as the beautiful gardens, the attractive beaches, the mountains, and all the plants and animals that had once been full of beauty before the unending civil war. The presence of a frightening stranger is portrayed as a wolf that comes into one’s life, making its victims powerless and restless through its presence. The safest thing that can be done in this situation is to hide in the “cave of poetry.”

The poet feels insecure about expressing his ideas in real life, because the law of the jungle prevails there. There are no legal considerations or applicable regulations, and truth or fallacy is determined by the holder of the gun. In this case, however, the poet feels comfortable conveying his ideas in the form of poetry, which he refers to as the cave of poetry. A cave is regarded as a safe place to shelter from various threats, such as the strong midday sun, heavy rain, predatory animals, and even human enemies. The poet hopes that by hiding in the cave of poetry, he will be safe from all such threats.

The thoughts of the speaker are conveyed in a few verses below under the title “Gua Poetry.”

يوماً ما سأهديك بيتي؛
بالموج المسدل

على نوافذه
بنوارس الغنج تطير بين غرفه
بزوارق العشق ترسو في حديقته
.....
و الذئاب المخيفة في بيتك الطيب

One day I will give you my house.
With waves hanging on its windows,
Seagulls flying between the rooms,
And love boats moored in its garden.
.....
And the scary wolves in your good house

Transactions and interests that are commonplace in political and international relations appear to be embedded in the verses. The speaker wants to give a house to the reader as a gift, but on the other hand, he will also receive a house gift from him.

يوماً ما سأهديك بيتي
One day I will give you my house.

Then, on another line, the speaker says that he will be given a house instead.

و ستهديني بيتك
You will give me your house,

In the war, all houses—regardless of their beauty—are useless because they cannot protect its occupants from the coming danger, so the speaker chooses to take shelter in the *cave of poetry*, an imaginary sanctuary for expressing imagination and powerful feelings. The privileges of that place cannot be found in any house, whatever its condition, in absence of the law, with people assaulting and killing each other. The two houses of the writer and the reader are not suitable for habitation anymore, because they cannot ensure safety, so the speaker left them to live in the cave of poetry. In this poem, the speaker hides behind words with no apparent ideology or affiliation to associate them when. The speaker does mention the warring factions in Syria, but it does not express any opinions toward certain countries involved in the war, such as Russia, Iran, or Turkey. There is

not even the slightest opinion of the Syrian regime. What is expressed is that in the name of war, whomever is involved in it becomes a destroyer of beauty, peace, and love.

و بطيب خاطرٍ
سوف نهجر البيتين
و سنرجع
:لنعيش معاً في كهفِ الشِّعرِ
.ذاك الذي اختبأً فيه

And willingly
We will abandon these two houses
And return
To live together in the “cave of poetry,”
The one we hid in
During the war

In another poem entitled “My Homeland on Facebook,” Suleman (2020) imagines that he makes friends with “his country” on Facebook. All this time, he has been with a good, fun friend, one filled with laughter and beautiful songs. He likes to visit his interesting posts.

,الوطنُ صديقي على الفيس بوك،
أبدأ صباحي دوماً بقراءة منشوراته
رائقَ الطباع كان قبل أعوامٍ ؛
.. ينشرُ على حباله الأغاني والزرزير

My home is my friend on Facebook.
I always start my morning by reading his posts,
It was his charming character a few years ago.
He spreads songs and chants on his strings.

At one point, the friend of the speaker becomes “temperamental” and “reckless,” and he likes to curse, but he also cries easily. He likes to make rash decisions that result in him making many mistakes, even fatal ones that cause destruction and the death of many people. Not only that, but hope was also buried inside. He says:

نزقاً صارَ ؛
يشتم و يبكي كثيراً
يكتبُ فيرتكب الأخطاء؛
أمس - مثلاً - رفعَ جنثاً مجرورة
...و اليوم ، نصب مشانق للأمال

Then reckless,
He curses and cries a lot.
He takes decisions and makes many mistakes.
Yesterday, for instance, he raised dragged corpses.
And today, we put up the gallows of hope...

The battle that occurred makes the speaker feel fear, fear and worry about his children, so he looks for them.

و حين يشاركُ روابط المعارك
أخاف
فأتفقد أطفالي

And when he shares the bonds of battle,
I'm afraid,
So I look for my children...

The country, which the speaker loves very much as a true nationalist, was betrayed by his friend, who had transformed into a scary, creepy, and even deadly monster who is destroying the nation and his family. However, the speaker is unable to remove that deadly friend from Facebook, but on the other hand, the speaker does not dare to decide to withdraw from life on "Facebook."

الوطن صديقي المزعج على الفيس بوك
لا أستطيع حظره والإبلاغ عنه
و لا أدري متى يشفق عليّ
... فيحذفني

My home is an annoying friend on Facebook.
I cannot block or report him.
I don't know when he will have pity on me...
...and then delete me.

The speaker loves his homeland and enjoys his life inside, so he puts trust in him. However, he is helplessly confronted by the reality, alongside the “friend” who destroyed his life and his future. This poetry is also an expression of strife and physical battles, as well as the social and political upheaval that was taking place in Syria, but it does not mention the various factions, either implicitly or explicitly. Instead, it shows more a sense of closeness to the homeland he loves, even though his homeland later betrays him.

In the third poem, “We Adjust”, Suleman (2020) uses the first-person pronoun with a plural word, implicitly making it an expression of a mass of people.

In a major conflict, members of society are, both individually and communally, forced to participate in it to avoid being swept away by war. Therefore, the speaker, from the beginning, states that in this very precarious situation, the best way to save yourself is to adjust to the situation. All the features of war—such as the stench, the whir of bullets, and the constant bad news—become daily events that people become used to. They no longer feel uncomfortable around rotting corpses or the whistling bullets from the various factions fighting for their respective versions of the truth. There is no absolute truth of ideology or importance. Every time, truth can change depending on developments in a limited, regional, or international environment.

سوف نظلُّ على ما يرام طالما نتأقلم؛
 ننام على نباح كلب الجيران المرتاب من كل الروائح
 نفيق على الرصاص و نحسبه مطراً لخران النباح
 نفيق على الرصاص

We will be fine as long as we adjust.
 We sleep while the neighbor’s dog barks, annoyed by the rotten smell.
 We wake up to the whistling of bullets, such that we think the rain is hitting the window.
 We drink coffee with a sharp pain on seeing the news broadcast.

In a raging war, many situations make a 180-degree turn. Laughing, an expression of joy and happiness that anyone can do normally becomes a very difficult thing to do. Shame that should be costly is instead pushed at a cheap price. During situations like this, courage is not accompanied with sufficient tools to maintain safety. For example, it is like a person who blocks an arrow with a plastic chest plate that can be easily penetrated rather than one made from steel. Abeer compares the difficult situation with someone who imagines building a beautiful garden in the middle of the

destroyed city, someone talking about freedom while in prison, and someone talking about generosity without having hands.

.. نشترى الضحك بسعر أعلى, نبيع الحياء بسعر أقل
نتلقى السهام السامة بصدور بلاستيكية
نكتب عن حدائق الغاردينيا بين ركام المدن المدمرة
و عن الحرية في السجون
و عن العطاء بأيدي مبتورة

We buy laughter at a high price, and sell shame at a low one.
We accept the poison dart with a plastic-made chest plate.
We think about building a garden among the ruins of the destroyed city,
And about freedom while in prison,
And giving with amputated hands.

The speaker takes advantage of any bad and scary situation and sees it with positive value instead, by replacing the crow as a bad symbol with the inspiring love from the sparrow. A useful remedy can also be extracted from a poisonous snake. The only thing left in this endless raging war is love. Thus, this love provides the optimism to face life and adjust to it.

نستلهم من الغربان عشق العصافير
و نستخلص من أفاعي الوحشة الدواء
... نحبُّ ... نحبُّ ... نحبُّ
!و لا نتهتمّ

We take inspiration from the crow, the love birds.
We extract medicine from the viper.
We love ... love ... love ...
We adjust!

With his remaining strength gathered to form a figure full of grace and toughness, he keeps moving forward with a sense of optimism toward *nothingness*, which is an expression of *tawakal* or submission to Allah in its totality to eliminate all forms of egoism.

،ننفض عن ملابسنا الكوابيس في الصباح
لنخرج إلى الحياة

.. بكامل أنافتنا

: و مثل آلاتٍ متينة الصنع

نمشي

و نمشي

قُدماً

.. نحو العدم

We shake off our nightmares in the morning,
To face life
Full of grace,
Like a tough machines,
Run
And we run,
Onwards
Towards nothingness...

In his poem entitled “Fireworks Festival,” Suleiman (2020) uses plural words to involve many people, and the terrible war in Syria, which involves many foreign factions and countries, is portrayed as a clown game with different masks. This clown game uses lively and festive fireworks and gives children a sense of joy, fun, and entertainment. On the opposite side, though, is the reality of a terrible, deadly, and devastating war, one not just involving domestic factions but also large foreign countries with very sophisticated weapons.

The speaker faces a very hard and deadly reality, trying to survive and thrive, not just for himself but also for his children. With an abundance of affection, he protects and embraces the children amid the various factions that are destroying each other, accompanied by lulling his children to sleep by saying that the war is just a charade and not real.

حفل الألعاب النارية

... حسناً

، سوف تقع الحرب

لكنني لن أخاف؛

.. لن أجعل أطفالي يخافون منها كذلك

، سأضمّمهم إليّ برفق

و أخبرهم أنها كذبة

.. أو خدعة سينمائية

Firework Festival
All right...
The war will fall,
But I will not be afraid;
I will not make my children fear it either...
I will hold them gently,
And tell them it is a lie
Or a massive hoax...

A sense of optimism and hope of a pleasant life is grown to encourage the future of his children and country, all amidst the uncertainty of their safety from war.

و سنقوم بعد القذائف
- بدل الخراف -
.. حتى ننام
ثم سنحلم سوياً بفجرٍ جديد
نفيق فيه
،على شرائط ملونة
.. و بوالين كثيرة

We will count the shells
Like counting sheep
Until we fall asleep...
Then together we will dream of a new dawn
Where we wake up
On colorful sheets
Of many colors...

After the fireworks festival performed by the clowns ends, the speaker tells that he will be busy collecting funny masks scattered throughout his country, the masks of the strangers they had forgotten about after the massive fireworks feast. The lively firework festival ends with the foreigners leaving without saying farewell.

وسوف نجمع كثيراً من الأقنعة المضحكة
المرمية في شوارع مدينتنا أقنعة نسيها الغرباء
لما أقاموا حفل الألعاب النارية الكبير .. و مضوا
دون إلقاء التحية

We will collect many funny masks,
Discarded in the streets of our city, forgotten by strangers
When they held their big fireworks party...and then left
Without saying goodbye.

The expression of love for the homeland in this poem is very deep, even though it is not conveyed explicitly. The speaker suggests that his homeland is actually in good condition, and it is only the foreign intruders destroying it. However, that does not make his love for his country any less, even if the massive fireworks party, namely the war, is destroying his country.

The next poem is “An old dog barks to offer advice” by Miftah al-Ammari (2020), a Libyan poet. The background to this poem differs from that of the four previous poems. In this poem, the discussion about the war that took place in Libya seems more realistic, such as by mentioning soldiers, tribal strife, oil refineries, rockets, and so on. This diction is interesting because the expressions conveyed tend to be more concrete. Indeed, poets usually employ figurative language, but this poem uses realistic terms.

هكذا...

.....

النافذة المكسورة في قلبي

إلى شرفات طرابلس وهي تختنق بسحب الدخان

المتصاعدة من خزانات النفط التي قمر تصاعده من خزانات النفط التي قمر تاف النفط الثهانا

So be it.

.....

The shattered window in my heart,

To the outskirts of Tripoli choked by a cloud of smoke

Rising from the oil tanks that were destroyed by the missile.

This poem still also uses indirect terms, however. The speaker, like other poets, does not want to be shackled by rules, even poetic rules (*‘Ilmu al-‘arudh*). He wants to freely express things. In his belief, any idea or action, regardless of how big or small, must have a cost. He describes the large number of “gallows” that would require the felling of many trees. To build many “prisons,” many “parks” need to be sacrificed. The speaker wants to deliver the message that building a country

does not necessarily mean eliminating areas of peace and joy, let alone doing things that will torment people.

لهذا
أنا عاشق سيء وشاعر مخل بتعاليم جنرات العروص
ومتفائل جدا, ليس بإزاحة التخلف عن كاهل المخيلة
:فقط لأن الشاعر, لا الجندي
من سيغافل الموت المتربص باللغات
ليعود أخيرا من ميدان الشهداء بباقة ورد

For this,
I am a bad lover and a poet who does not care about the rules of poetry
And very optimistic, not by eliminating the imagination,
Just because I am a poet and not a soldier:
Who ignores the uncertain death of language,
To finally return from the battlefield with a bouquet of flowers.

هكذا
كلما أضفنا مشنقة، نخسر شجرة
كلما أقمنا سجنا، تختفي حديقة
وهكذا
كأي يوم مهمل
" كلب عجوز ينبح لتقديم نصيحة "

I see
Whenever we build a new gallows, we lose a tree.
Whenever we build a prison, a garden disappears,
And so on.
Like any meaningless day,
"An old dog barks to offer advice."

In this poem, the speaker does not speak directly about his homeland. He mentions the existence of a war being fought over the wealth of Libya, such as the oil refineries. The bombs and rockets are a daily sight, but he is a person who is optimistic about his future, although it reminds him that amid such devastating and deadly warfare, one must always be vigilant. Anyone who ignores the warning will go home in vain, because whatever decision is taken, there will be a price to pay.

Building a gallows means cutting down a tree for the wood, while adding a prison means losing the garden it is built upon. He points out that everything will continue, even while the old dog continues to give warnings.

The second poem about Libya is by Khulud Al-Falah (2020), and it is entitled “The Boring Tale.” Amid the raging war, you do not know who are friends and foes, because there are so many factions fighting, creating groundless expression. All that is remembered are the scattered fragments of a life story, such as little girls playing with dolls in their spare time, middle-aged mothers gossiping with their peers, and young women making themselves up in front of a mirror and painting their nails. There are also dreams about day-to-day activities, such as talks about skin-tightening mixtures, weight loss, Botox injections, and so on. Meanwhile, the men head for the battlefield.

حكاية مملة
الفتيات الصغيرات
يملأن الفراغ
.....
عن آباء ذهبوا إلى الحرب
وأمهات يصنعن الفرح
الفتاة الصغيرة
مع الدمية الوحيدة

The Boring Tale

Little girls
Fill their spare time,

.....
While fathers go to war,
And mothers create joy.
Little girl
with the only doll.

ستهتمين أكثر بنعومة يديك
طلاء الأظافر
خلطات شد البشرة
وصفات الوزن المثالي

You will care more about the softness of your hands

nail polish,
skin-tightening mixtures,
And recipes for weight loss.

تأمل وجوه الفنانات على شاشة التلفزيون

ا لمحقونة بالبوتكس والفيلر

Looking at the faces of female artists on TV,
Injected with Botox and fillers.

Amid the hustle and bustle of the daily routine, the speaker seems to feel lonely. This reflects a life full of the noise of war but devoid of friendship. The speaker tries to entertain himself by eating chocolate to lift his spirits. To him, this can foster a sense of happiness and reassurance.

ستتبع نصيحة إحدى الصديقات بأكل الشوكولاتة

"لأنها تبعث على السعادة وتحسن المزاج"

وقبل أن تذهب للنوم

"تردد أغنيته المفضلة لصباح" أحس قد أليه وحيدة

You will follow a friend's suggestion to eat chocolate:
"because it will bring a sense of happiness and create a better mood."
And before going to bed,
You repeat your favorite song for Shabah: "I feel alone."

The final poet we will discuss is an Egyptian. In the Arab world, Egypt is considered the center of Arab civilization, possibly even the global civilization. Thus, there is a well-known proverb in Arab countries: "*Egypt ummud dunya*" ("Egypt is the center of global civilization"). This saying manifests itself in Egyptian people, including Hisham al-Jokh, an Egyptian poet who is discussed below.

Al-Jokh voices true Arab nationalism. In his poetry, he takes the view that love for the homeland is not limited to Egypt but covers all Arab countries, from the western tip of Morocco to the eastern end of the Sultanate of Oman. Hisham al-Jokh's poem "Visa" strongly expresses Arab nationalism. The speaker reveals that since childhood, Arabs are exposed to the nationalist song "*Arabia is my homeland; Arabs are my siblings.*"

التأشيرة

Visa

وقد علمت في صغرى بان عربوتى شرفى

I was taught in childhood that my Arabism is my honor,

وناصيتى وعنوانى

My badge and my banner.

وكنا فى مدارسنا نردد بعض الحان

And in school, we would repeat some songs.

نغنى بيننا مثلا

We sing between us, for example,

بلاد العرب أوطانى - وكل العرب اخوانى

"The Arab world is my homeland / And all Arabs are my siblings."

Arabs are portrayed as a brave and strong people, even when under pressure from many parties.

The speaker then continues:

وكنا نرسم العربى مشوقا بهامته

We would draw the Arab tall and strong,

له صدر يصد الريح اذ تعوى

With a chest that would block the wind if it howled,

مهابا فى عبائته

Powerful in his mantle.

The speaker expresses a strong dream: When he grows up, he wants to explore the Arab world from Morocco to Libya, Bahrain to Oman. He wants to pick dates in Baghdad, walk as far as Syria, press olives in Palestine, and land in Mogadishu. At this time, the only war mentioned is the one to free the al-Aqsa Mosque from Zionism.

سأبحر عندما اكبر

I will set sail when I grow up.

امر بشاطيء البحرين فى ليبيا

I'll pass by Bahrain's beach in Libya

واجنى التمر من بغداد فى سوريا

And pick the dates of Baghdad in Syria.

.....

وان حروبنا كانت لاجل المسجد الاقصى

And that our wars were for the al-Aqsa Mosque

وان عدونا صهيون

And our enemy is Zion.

However, in adulthood, this dream has faded. There is no more mention of traveling around the Arab world, or even crossing the border, because he did not get a visa. Even worse, the Arabs who were called siblings are now killing each other. Their lives have returned to the Jahiliah era, the time before the arrival of Islam. The speaker describes the conditions of the civil war between fellow Arabs, which resembles the war and hostility between the *Aus* and *Khazraj* tribes before the onset of Islam in Medina.

وحين كبرت

And when I grew up,

لم احصل على تأشيرة للبحر

I did not get a visa to go to sea.

لم ابحر

I did not set sail.

وأوقفنى جواز غير مختوم على الشباك

I was stopped with an unstamped passport at the window,

لم اعبر

So I did not cross the border.

The speaker sees that the leaders are responsible for the divisions and wars in Arab countries. He sarcastically quips that “*have not the Arab nations been taught to be united, and not separate, as they learned in the schools built by those Arab leaders.*” This is because the sense of nationalism among the Arab leaders has faded. They share power and natural wealth with other nations, so the Arabs have become scattered.

الستم من نشأنا في مدارسكم

Were we not brought up in your schools,

تعلمنا مناهجكم

learning your principles?

.....

الستم من تعلمنا على يدكم بان العود محمى بحزمته ضعيف حين ينفرد

Didn't you teach us that sticks are strong in a bundle and weak when separated?

.....

الستم من تعلمنا على يدكم ان اعتصموا بحبل الله واتحدوا

Aren't you the ones who told us, "hold fast to faith in God and unite?"

.....

تقاسمتم عربيتنا ودخلكم بينكم صرنا كما الانعام

You've divided our Arabism between yourselves and among yourselves, and we have become like animals,

The Arab country in this context is Egypt, which is in the midst of the overall destruction of the Arab world due to civil war and the intervention of foreign nations, but the speaker's sense of nationalism is growing stronger. He says proudly that he is an Arab, and his opinion of Arab nationalism has not changed at all. The Arab world, which is scattered in his eyes, still comprises the countries he mentions: Egypt, Tunisia, Iraq, Oman, and so on.

He is still proud to be part of an Arab world that stretches from green Tunis to Oman, cultivates dates in Baghdad, and has water that flows from the springs of Sudan.

He is also proud of the Arabs' religious and ethnic diversity, so he does not differentiate between religions and races because they are all considered important components of Arab nationalism. He mentions the Christians, Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, Druze, and Alawi as inseparable elements of Arab nationalism.

انا العربى لا اخجل

I am an Arab, unashamed.

ولدت بتونس الخضراء من اصل عمانى

Born in green Tunisia of Omani origins.

وعمرى زاد عن الف وامى ماتزل تحبل

I am more than a thousand years old, and my mother still gets pregnant.

انا العربى فى بغداد لى نخل

I am an Arab, I have palm trees in Baghdad

وفى السودان شريانى

And arteries in Sudan.

انا مصرى موريتانيا وجيبوتى وعمانى

I'm an Egyptian of Mauritania, Djibouti, and Oman.

مسيحى وسنى وشيعى وكردى ودرزى وعلوى

Christian, Sunni, Shia, Kurd, Druze, and Alawi.

Amid the speaker's pride of Arab nationalism, there is great anxiety over the disunity of the Arab nation. While other countries are united, the Arabs choose to distance themselves from each other. He sees the roots of the hostility among the Arabs being far removed from the noble teachings of Islam.

The speaker equates the fragmentation of the Arab nation to the period before the arrival of Islam in Medina. At that time, there was constant hostility and wars between the *Aus* and *Khadzraj* tribes. After Islam, the two united, and Islam forged a strong state in Medina.

انا لا احفظ الاسماء والحكام اذ ترحل

I do not learn the names of the rulers as they leave.

تشتتنا على يدكم

We have been scattered at your hands.

وكل الناس تتكتل

As other people are gathering,

سئنا من تشتتنا وكل الناس تتكتل

We are sick of being scattered as other people gather.

ملنتم فكرنا كذبا ووتزويرا وتأليفا

You have filled our thoughts with lies, forgery, and falsehoods.

.....

هجرنا ديننا عمدا

We have deliberately abandoned our religion.

فعدنا الاوس والخزرج

We have returned to being the Aws and the Khazraj.

The speaker attributes the disunity and enmity of the Arabs to the Arab leaders, while the people are in fine condition. The Arabs will unite, and there will be no division of the Sudanese state and no occupation of the Golan Heights, and Lebanon will not have to heal its wounds alone. They will be able to press olives in valiant Palestine, grow wheat in Morocco, harvest pearls in the Arabian Gulf, and cultivate crops in Sudan.

ويعلن شعبنا العربي متحدا

Declaring our Arab nation unified.

فلا السودان منقسم

Sudan is not divided.

ولا الجولان محتل

Nor is the Golan occupied.

ولا لبنان منكسر يدواى الجرح منفردا

Nor is Lebanon broken, tending to its wounds alone.

سيجمع لؤلؤات خلجينا العربي فى السودان يزرعها

Our Arabian Gulf's pearls will be gathered and planted in Sudan.

فينبت حبها فى المغرب العربي قمحا

And their seeds will grow as wheat in Maghreb.

يعصرون الناس زيتا فى فلسطين الابيه

The people will press oil in proud Palestine.

The speaker gives a warning to the leaders who should be held responsible for the split, saying that the Arab nation and nationalism will continue to exist, even though it has been hit by constant sedition. The voice of the Arabs will continue to echo, "*Arabs are my homeland; Arabs are my siblings.*"

احذركم

I warn you.

سنبقى رغم فتنكم

We will remain despite your sedition.

.....

فرشاتي والوانى

My brush and my paints.

ويبقى يرسم العربى

Will keep painting the Arab

ممشوقا بهامته

tall and strong

ويبقى صوت الحانى

And the sound of my rhymes will remain:

بلاد العرب اوطانى

The Arab world is my homeland.

وكل العرب اخوانى

And all Arabs are my siblings.

Generally, the themes of poetry expressed during revolution season in Egyptian, Lybian and Syria and poet reflect the strong sense of Arab nationalism that emerged in a person growing up in a country that is considered the center of the Arab civilization. Egypt calls itself *umm al- 'Arab* (the mother of the Arab nations). The Egyptians feel that the unity of the Arab world is their responsibility, so it is not surprising that this proverb reflects Egypt's maternal feelings for the rest of the Arab world.

Conclusion

After analyzing the poetry of five poets from various Arab countries, in summary it is clear that each country certainly has a unique civilization and characteristics. Among Arab countries, Egypt has a broader view of nationalism than most. This is crystal clear in the Egyptian poet's expression in his poetry when describes nationalism and his defense of a nation that covers the entire Arab

region from westernmost Morocco to eastern Oman. These Arab countries share a unity that cannot be broken, as expressed through the slogan “The Arab world is my homeland; Arabs are my siblings.”

The Lybian and Syrian poets, meanwhile, express their nationalism by referring to their love of their respective countries. Almost none of the poems express any particular ideology, either political or religious. This poem is very explicitly ideological because it clearly expresses support for the establishment of an Islamic nationalism.

The expressions conveyed in the poetry also share some similarities in the idea that the destroyers of their beloved countries are foreigners who come to the country to fight each other, take their natural resources, or occupy it as a strategic position. What all the poems also have in common is a message is that their leaders are the destroyers, yet these leaders ironically also teach the people of their country about unity, oneness, friendship, and love for the country.

Almost all the poems express ideas in connotative language. Only one expresses itself denotatively, with the rest not mentioning a particular state, person, or ideology. The poem of al-Jokh does explicitly mention ethnicity and religion—such as Christians, Sunnis, Shias, Kurds, Druze, and Alawites—but not to criticize them, because it instead positions them as important elements making up the whole of Arab nationalism. This expression emerged from a poet who was born and raised in Egypt, which is considered the center of the Arab civilization, hence the proverb “*Egypt Ummud dunya*” (Egypt is the center of global civilization).

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