

# Recontextualizing Resistance



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Edited by

Loubna Youssef and Emily Golson

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## INTRODUCTION

Resistance, a theme that emerged from discussions of nineteenth-century literature, has become the focal point of several areas of study during the last seven decades. Its popularity was supported by reader-response theory and semiotic analysis: the former recognized that readers will bring their individual ideology, background, context, expectations, and interpretative strategies to the act of making meaning from texts and the latter acknowledged that language allows for meaning and perception of the world to be embodied in complex apprehensions of time and place in which juxtaposed details allow for the emergence of multiple nuances and insights. These and other theories formed the background for first generation postcolonial resistance studies of race, ethnicity, gender, and power and second generation studies of orientalism, feminism, and disability. Often these studies employ specialized vocabulary that describes negative or positive processes that affect the identity or subjectivity of a group. Examples of this vocabulary are as follows: essentialism, the process of selecting specific attributes of an identity to characterize an individual or a people; alterity, a process that approaches specific attributes of individuals and peoples as “other” or “different”; ambivalence, a feeling that arises from identifying individuals or groups as inferior and exotic, innocent and devious, blessed and cursed, etc.; hegemony, the tracing of the social, cultural, ideological, or economic forces that control and transform the subsequent identity of individuals and groups; diaspora, the migration of cultures and peoples that often results from or are part of resistance; and metanarrative, the process of presenting a decontextualized resistance experience or belief as truth. Although varied and interesting, resistance studies have their limitations: penetrating explorations sometimes end in clichéd solutions, binary oppositions sometimes obscure complex problems, and specialized vocabulary, when taken out of context, can constrain rather than open new possibilities for meaning. More importantly, however, these studies provide strong support for works that celebrate the profound meanings, provocative insights, unconstrained energy, and powerful human emotions in what has slowly come to be recognized as resistance “art.”

The contents of this book draw upon theoretical and creative resistance texts written from the mid-twentieth to the early twenty-first centuries.

Beginning with Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* (1987), a work that focused critical discussion on what she defined as a category of writing that emerged from the "organized national liberation struggles of the nineteenth century, alongside guns, pamphlets, and diplomatic delegations" (xvii), we summarize and extend her argument to include subsequent creative works. In the first chapter of Harlow's text, she credits the title of her book to the publications of Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972), a well-known Palestinian journalist, activist, fiction writer, and critic of the 1960s, whose *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948–1966* was based on the premise that cultural resistance was "no less valuable than armed resistance" (2). As Harlow notes, Kanafani influenced the thinking of Lebanese writer Elias Khouri, who referred to the increasing appearance of ideology in literary writing as a needed "literary resistance to the hegemony and oppression in the Arab region." In his "Democracy and Modern Despotism" (1982), Khouri argued that "linguistic initiatives working together with rigid conditions in occupied lands are both a means of political mobilization and a repository of a collective memory, and as such, must be respected and preserved because they sustain, within the popular memory, national community" (34).

Expanding upon the claims of Kanafani and Khouri, Harlow furthered her study of resistance literature by reminding her audience of the request made by Edward Said in "Permission to Narrate" (1984), in which he openly admitted that even though resistance literature was both "political and politicized," it offered a needed portrait of the struggles of contemporary life" (16–29). Adapting terms and quoting views expressed in Said's *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), *Orientalism* (1979), "Orientalism Reconsidered" (1985), and his introduction to Halim Bakarat's *Days of Dust* (1983), Harlow listed the reasons for his approval of resistance literature as follows: it exposed an "existential mutation for which Arab history was unprepared" (Harlow 1987, 18); it addressed misconceptions in previous constructions of the Arab and Middle East "other" (Said 1979, 65–7); and it encouraged the revisions of national, regional, and cultural identities, which Said claimed were "more consistent with the current Arab movement" from "hereditary ties of 'filiation' to collective ties of 'affiliation'" (1983, 16–25).

To further strengthen her case, Harlow cited Michel Foucault's call "to abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where power relations are suspended" (1987, 27) to concentrate on "the exploitation of knowledge by interests of power to create a distorted historical record" (*ibid.*, 116). Thus, in support of what she and others recognized as a need for an "immediate intervention into the

historical record,” Harlow built her case for the production and study of a literature that “interrupted the present agenda of those writing history” to encourage the creation of works that featured “historically specific analyses of ideological and material conditions,” thereby confronting writerly and scholarly issues in a meaningful way.

Shortly after the publication of Harlow’s *Resistance*, cultural critic Rey Chow broadened and enhanced arguments for and against the study of resistance in works of art by suggesting that those who spoke against that which oppresses and for the oppressed “other” were taking a position of powerlessness in order to claim a particular form of “moral power,” an insight which she linked to Derrida’s concept of “essential fundamentalism” (1993, 11). Recognizing that, as Bowan states, the “occasional convergence of cultural activities and issues involves dimensions and decisions that are ethical and political” (2010, x), Chow identifies situations in which one “other” does violence to another “other,” and vice versa, as a rhetorical rather than ethical or moral paradox (1993, 10–11). Thus, by validating what Stuart Hall called a vital portrayal of “ever irresolvable but permanent tension” in and among cultural productions, area studies, and cultural studies (1992, 285), and by suggesting that there are differences in the resistances explored in these approaches, Chow not only creates a space for the various arguments that comprise the cultural studies terrain but also elevates “resistance” to a special category of inquiry (1998, 67).

Our book touches upon the development of resistance art during the last seven decades through genres of autobiography, fiction, flash fiction, drama, film, music, poetry, and speeches, each of which adds a different perspective to our recontextualization of resistance. Most of the studies’ contents refer to productions in the Arab region, but a few examine resistance in works that have emerged elsewhere. The first chapter of our text begins with a philosophical history of the concepts of power and resistance written by the award-winning playwright and translator Mohamed Enani, who found himself in the middle of a resistance movement when he returned to Egypt in the 1970s after 10 years of study in England. The second chapter by Loubna A. Youssef provides support for those who view resistance as art by drawing upon the well-known children’s writer Abdel-Tawab Youssef’s (1928–2015) view of the life of his father, Sheikh Youssef, as an epic journey of resistance in *My Father: An Egyptian a Teacher* (Arabic 1976/English 2014). The remaining essays, written by scholars who live and work in countries in which resistance art has a long and honourable history, examine instances of cultural resistance in poetry, drama, fiction, folklore, music, speeches, and digital works that offer additional insights and recontextualizations.

Emily Golson's essay on the many uses of silence in three works of two Egyptian fiction writers, Yusuf Idris and 'Abd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, argues that the commonly accepted Western interpretation of silence as being negative is not fully evidenced in the Arab fiction of the Egyptian post-*nahda* period; rather, the silence that appears in the *nahda* and other periods of Egyptian writing is used to introduce shifts or important moments when the writer is recontextualizing former Western assumptions or interpretations. The next three essays offer insightful responses to other common assumptions. Pervine El-Refaei argues for a revised understanding of the relationship between memory and identity in Susan Albuḥawa's *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) by tracing the emotional effects of exile and migration of three generations of a Palestinian-American family to their startling conclusion. Jacqueline Jondot identifies fragments of inter and intratextuality in the novels of Nubian writer Jamal Mahjoub as contributing to a revised, nomadic identity of the Nubian self. And finally, Chris Weedon challenges the British conception of a singular shared British history and ancestry by following the story of a street boy of African and Asian descent from Yemen to Somalia to the Sudan, Egypt, Palestine, Italy, and miscellaneous British merchant ports-of-call in the British-Somali writer Nadifa Mohamed's *Black Mamba Boy* (2010), a work which Weedon claims not only rests in the collective memory of different groups but may also contribute to a revised British identity.

In the area of flash fiction (a type of short short story), Galila Ragheb examines the various techniques used in Atwood's *The Little Red Hen* to explore and skilfully subvert the original meaning of the narrative to reveal a hen who "resists stereotyping and becomes both the victim and victor of her own tale." By questioning the illogicality and unfairness of patriarchal discourse, the hen arrives at a deeper intellectual understanding of her identity, as is the case in all of the prose fiction studied in this volume.

In contrast to the fiction, the drama studies emphasize the physical and emotional aspects of resistance by creating spaces for physical and oral juxtapositions. Recognizing that the arena of struggle has moved beyond orality to ferocious acts of terrorism, Amal Mazhar examines two plays—Mohammed Salmawy's *The Chain* (1994) and Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists* (2005)—in order to distinguish between the terms "terrorists" and "freedom fighters." Omayya Khalifa focuses on allegory in the adaptation and appropriation of two plays by the Kuwaiti playwright, director and founder of Zaoum Theatre in London in 1996, Sulayman Al-Bassam, one of which is Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that he localized and recontextualized to produce a political allegory. Stating that orality, in the

form of stories, forms the backbone of a culture, Heba-T-Allah Aziz Selim argues that Naguib Sorour's *Menein Ageeb Nas* (Where do I Find People [who Understand]?) (1974) is an epic play that not only retells a memorable love story but also narrates the story of a country finding in orality a means for allowing dramatic utterances and movements to express various aspects of love's resistance to tyranny and oppression. Taking advantage of emerging research in affect theory, Nagla al-Hadidy examines the dubious representation of a boy as both subject and object in The Spiderwoman Theater's *Sun, Moon, Feather* (1975) as an illustration of Deleuze and Guattari's argument that "a body is not perceived as having an intrinsic inner meaning by itself but as a part of something that acquires meaning with the assemblages it develops with other bodies." Amina ElHalawani picks up this argument as she focuses on storytelling as a way of forming *communitas* in Egyptian independent theatre through the Black Ducks' *Rainbow* (2014) and the Bussy Project's *A Well-Behaved Girl* (2014). And finally, Heba El-Abbadi recontextualizes the resistance to the "dis" in the word dis-abled in William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker* (1956) and Mark Medoff's *Children of a Lesser God* (1980) by exploring the playwrights' representation of power inequities in the lives of their characters. In almost all of these cases, resistance is portrayed as a deep emotional, if not spiritual, longing for authenticity.

If fiction provides an intellectual backdrop for resistance, and drama expresses the emotional and physical connection to it, then film provides a broad sensual framework through which the former provisions can be united. In her essay on the film *Rana's Wedding* (2002) and *Paradise Now* (2005), by the Palestinian director Hani Abu Assad, and the film *The Bombing* (1998) by the French-Israeli director Simon Bitton, Yasmine Mahfouz argues that the background for the occupation of Palestine from 1948 onward provides a synopsis of the effects of different forms of resistance on the Palestinian estrangement from country and culture. She concludes that the consequences for those who live in an occupied Palestine do not radically differ from those who leave: all will suffer from feelings of mental, psychological, and/or physical entrapment. Aparajita Nanda examines Trinh T. Minh-ha's *A Tale of Love*, a film loosely based on a nineteenth-century Vietnamese national poem of love, "The Tale of Kieu." The filmmaker's revision situates the action in the immigrant reality of the United States, where the modern-day Kieu writes about her poetic predecessor while working as a freelance writer and a part-time model. Noting how the poetics of love becomes visible through various sites of resistance and contextual discourses, such as the use of colour, movement, the veil, and so on, Nanda argues that Minh-ha advocates a

much broader interpretation of Kieu's story than that proposed in traditional interpretations of love stories.

The chapter offerings for poetry and music provide examples of art that resists change and art that spreads throughout the diaspora respectively. In opposition to the use of resistance, Hoda Shucry Ayad explores the work of Mourid Al-Barghouthi, a contemporary Arab poet who, though Palestinian, strongly opposes politicizing art and reaches for a poetic expression that rests solely on an aesthetic beauty that could never be expressed in resistance art. Albrecht Fuess, on the other hand, studies how migrants with a Muslim background respond and resist through music by shedding light on the growing "Islamization" of French music in the French *banlieu*.

Finally, as an example of rhetorical resistance art in nonfiction, Amany Badawy and Randa Anwar offer a cluster analysis comparison of the inaugural speeches of Mohamed Morsi on June 29, 2012 and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi on July 3, 2013, concluding that Morsi's clusters portray the image of a president who seeks to earn acclaim through the use of kinship terms, endearing qualities, and direct address, while el-Sisi's clusters offer a view of a military man caught up in thinking and planning for the future. Both resist the upheaval leading up to Mubarak's removal from office by creating carefully constructed portraits of themselves that stand in opposition to what Mubarak was perceived as representing.

In sum, the essays in this text present recontextualized or expanded versions of a number of theoretical arguments and traditional assumptions that address four prominent resistance concerns. First, resistance is not constrained to any one country, discipline genre, or period. Second, resistance can be evidenced in art without taking away from the aesthetic value of a work. Third, some forms of resistance encourage thoughtful, positive interpretations of a moment. And fourth, resistance is a necessary and valuable tool for advancing the human condition. We hope that our collective contributions further the understanding of these resistance concerns.

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Loubna Youssef and Emily Golson  
Cairo, January 2017

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# EYEWITNESSES



## CHAPTER ONE

# RESISTANCE—EXISTENTIAL AND LINGUISTIC: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

MOHAMED ENANI  
CAIRO UNIVERSITY

Brought up on the alternate use and abuse of power in Egypt for more than half a century, I believed in Lord Acton's famous adage: "Power corrupts: absolute power corrupts absolutely." However, being at an almost total remove from the disturbances of rule and the political turmoil in the Middle East for a whole decade during my study in Britain, I was happy to accept what I later knew was Heidegger's theory about the "destinies of Being." What Heidegger means, of course, is that "Being" has inherent laws which determine the destiny of *beings*. If one had to define my philosophical stand, if so it was, one would say it was a combination of Rorty's pragmatism and an almost metaphysical faith in knowledge. I voraciously read and translated all sorts of texts, and, on my return to Egypt, found in reading and writing a source of new pleasure and an intimation of social power. Especially when I wrote for the stage or translated plays, I felt the power of the creator who watches their creatures say what they want them to, do what they have envisaged, and—more importantly—*be* what they decide them to be. It wasn't until I discovered Foucault much later—in the late 1980s in fact—that I began to link, or to see a link, however inchoate, between power and knowledge.

In his *History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault says "Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere" (Vol. I. 93). More fascinated, naturally, by the power/knowledge dyad than by Foucault's new definition of power, I still assumed that power pertained primarily to the political sphere, as facts in the Egyptian situation led me to believe. Not surprisingly, knowledge seemed to be allied to the work of the intelligence services, about which I had learnt a great deal. To my yet-untrained mind, living in the genial atmosphere of

the English Department headed by a kindred spirit, the high-minded Hoda Guindi, I had not been introduced to the modern arts of hedging, prevarication, and chicanery in present-day ideological contestation. I still assumed that the concept of power as all-pervasive was simply a reworking of the Nietzschean philosophy of “the will to power,” to which we had been introduced early in life but only as a curiosity to be wondered at, and to be kept at bay at all costs.

Still, as I seriously continued my career as a dramatist, I began to encounter unusual forms of power, and odd means of resistance. I went back to Foucault, and in the same book I came across a statement that spoke of power differently and in a way that explained a great deal about my “life in theatre,” to put it grandly, at the time. Here, Foucault generalizes his definition of power so that it includes any kind of social action; and as social action cannot be separated from the prevailing conventions and mores in a given society, power will appear at all levels of interaction, even between ordinary individuals involved in apparently innocuous acts of persuasion, or in conversations hitherto regarded as bland or socially ritualistic. My efforts to get my plays put on the stage, especially my strange encounters with the censors, elsewhere narrated, confirmed the aforementioned Foucault statement, namely his argument that “where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently,” he concludes, “this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation ... [Resistances] are inscribed in the latter [i.e. power] as an irreducible opposite” (1978, 98).

As such, abstractions are the stock-in-trade of all philosophical enquiry, however defined. I liked to think of the power/resistance nexus in concrete terms: I thought of the Newtonian principle of action and reaction and the law of inertia in mechanics which makes one action conditional on another. The solution was, however, far from satisfactory, as the Foucauldian generalization seemed to be a little imprecise. One aspect particularly troubled me, namely Foucault’s tendency to believe that there is “essentially no such thing as the legitimate exercise of power,” according to Wollen’s interpretation (1992, 183): “If those who contest power ... must necessarily partake of the very mechanisms of power in their struggle to combat it—then their struggles are condemned a priori to reproduce the thing they are combating.” In other words, if the exercise of power is by definition “bad,” should it be resisted in all its manifestations? Can we think of power only in terms of its imposition of conventions and mores on a given society, or an ideology dictated by a prevailing regime, or, worse still, as an anti-intersubjectivity force, forging human relations with a totalizing outlook, destroying the autonomy of individuals? Beware

of the temptation to cite instances from history if you like to claim there is such a thing as benign power, for then you'll be accused of logo-centrism and bring the wrath of Derrida upon your head; and if the benevolent ruler happens to be a man, say Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, the charge will be identified as phallogocentrism!

It was a conundrum I painstakingly avoided. Especially as Foucault became popular in Egypt in the 1980s, I found that the more I read of this man's writings, the more confused I got regarding his (by now) well-known triad of knowledge-power-resistance. As our first Cairo symposium on comparative literature drew to a close, with Foucault's ideas very much in the air, a Lebanese friend of mine (a former student in fact) bought me a book, *Unruly Practices: Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (1989), that had been recently published and which revived my interest in other works by Foucault. In a chapter entitled "The French Derrideans: Politicizing Deconstruction or Deconstructing politics," the author of that book, Nancy Fraser, had the gumption to tackle the issue head on:

The problem is that Foucault calls too many sorts of things power and simply leaves it at that. Granted, all cultural practices involve constraints. But these constraints are of a variety of different kinds and thus demand a variety of different normative responses ... Foucault writes as if oblivious to the existence of a whole body of Weberian social theory with its careful distinctions between such notions as authority, force, violence, domination, and legitimation. Phenomena which are capable of being distinguished via such concepts are simply lumped together ... As a consequence, the broad range of normative nuances is surrendered, and the result is a certain normative one-dimensionality. (69)

The passage was a clear invitation for me to read Max Weber, the only problem being that many of his works in German had not been translated (into English, that is), and, even if translated, were not available. When I came across something about him in English, I translated it into Arabic and it was duly published in *Fusul*, the Arabic periodical concerned with literary criticism. But criticism in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s in Egypt took a decisively cultural turn, to the point of conflating "critical theory," a euphemism for a certain brand of Marxism, with "literary theory" as succinctly introduced by Jonathan Culler (*Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* [1997]) and, in Egypt and the Arab world, with "literary criticism" as we know it in our Arabic traditions, especially since the advent of New Criticism in the 1940s–50s. When I got hold of Weber's *Sociology of World Religions* translated and included in a huge

volume entitled *From Max Weber* under a different title, “Religious Reflections of the World and their Directions” (323–59), I found more than I had bargained for—I found a philosophical concept of art that exceeded my most sanguine expectations; but that I shall come to later. My immediate concern, however, is the Foucauldian triad.

Armed with the Weberian five categories of power—authority, force, violence, domination, and legitimation—I could see power at work everywhere I went. My Arabic play الغريبان [*The Crows*] was staged in 1988 and scheduled to be televised in 1989. However, it was banned by the censor at the last minute when he heard that the play dealt with an apparent famine, manufactured by a number of wheat-growing peasants. In that play, I employed the power-resistance conflict in the verbal games of a sycophantic government minister, a hypocritical poet, and the myrmidons of the Sultan. Particularly caustic for the censor was my vindication of the innate freedom of women in the Egyptian countryside, apart, of course, from the mordant sarcasm of the ruler. Just as had happened back in 1964 when my البر الغربي [*The West Bank*] was put on the stage, brilliant writers and critics, such as Saa’d Wahba and Ragaa’ Elnakkash (no less), advised me to keep clear of such heady ideas, and Mahmud Alsheaity, then head of the State Publishing House, commenting on my earlier play ميت حلاوة [*Meet Halawa*] (1979) whispered to me: “if you like comedy so much, why ridicule the regime? Can’t you write romantic comedies?”

The ban on televising my play was a watershed. In collaboration with the late Samir Sarhan, I wrote a documentary entitled *Journey of Enlightenment*, staged in 1990, in which I said what I wanted, channelling my thought through the work of three exponents of Egyptian “freedom”: ’Al-Aqqad, Al-Rafi’, and Taha Hussein. The authorities were definitely uncomfortable about the performance and, though not a popular success, the reaction of the audiences was enough to alert the censors to the dangers of dealing with potentially flammable ideas on the stage. Its run was cut short, but I was now completely absorbed in tracing the intricacies of the verbal games of power and resistance.

In my following play جاسوس في قصر السلطان [*A Spy in the Sultan’s Palace*] (1990), I questioned the claim made by every ruler to be enacting God’s will. This was the central ploy, in an incident taken from the history of Egypt in the early fourteenth century when the Tartars had swept over the Arab East, ransacking Iraq and then the Levant, and were poised to invade Egypt. The irony is that when the Tartars were eventually converted to Islam, the situation hardly changed: each side believed they were heaven-inspired, and it took brute force to ensure the dominance of

one over the other. If, just for the sake of argument, we exclude the transcendental claims, we shall easily see the Nietzschean view of power—that is, power for itself, not instrumental power—revived by Heidegger and his French followers, or his advocates, in the twentieth century. Verbal games pale into insignificance; we see neither Dr. Berne’s “games” nor Wittgenstein’s “language games”: we see nature red in tooth and claw. On the way back to Egypt, having vanquished the Tartars, the Egyptian army stopped over in Bilbis, somewhere east of the Nile Delta, where Qutuz, the Egyptian ruler and commander of the triumphant army, was killed by his second in command, El-Zahir Beibars (الظاهر بيبرس) who declared himself a new ruler. This is a fascinating episode in Egyptian history creatively handled by the gifted playwright Hammuda in his masterpiece *Ibn Al-Balad*.

From the point of view of cultural criticism, one may easily see in it an eloquent illustration of Carl Schmitt’s concept of “decisionism.” Here is a ruler capable of taking a decision *ex nihilo*. Here is a hero who defied all the constrictions of rationalist thought and decided *on the spot* that he should rule Egypt. No resistance can now be brooked, as the sword spoke louder than words as the Arab poet Abou Tamam authoritatively said:

The sword’s reports are truer than letters:  
Its sharp edge separates reality from illusions.

In other words, power now takes the form of “force,” physical and irrevocable. And as Baibars was made “into” a popular hero, around whose exploits a whole folkloric tradition took form, complete with song and dance, in Germany the arch-decisionist assumed absolute power with the Enabling Act of March 1933, showing how his “populist” ideas served to entrench his sole power. Though the comparison is necessarily relative, a similar situation has existed in Egypt since the 1952 *coup d’état* that eventually developed into a revolution.

Let us temporarily suspend value judgement as Foucault and Derrida do, but concentrate on the structure of the mechanism of power and resistance in the two situations. In each we find the Nietzschean ideal of a man worthy of respect: a man who wills power and gets it. Thereafter follows domination, and the twin Weberian categories of authority and legitimation. For this, each leader requires apologists and philosophers, especially such writers as can interpret his decisionism as inspiration, a call from above. Having banished transcendentalism altogether, God included, Heidegger had to find a substitute in “Being”; it is the destiny of being that spoke through the Fuhrer, he says; though in our case, it was the

will of God, embodied in the high values of revealed religion, that gave his authority Weberian legitimacy. The leader may be of military provenance, but he is *not* required in the Egyptian situation to exhibit military ingenuity or achieve victory in any battle: he is held higher than these temporal, if not profane, ends.

Most of us, me included, are nostalgic for the days of power found in the sense of national pride restored by the leader. A whole rhetorical tradition was built on the images of leaders who verbally recovered the value of individual men and women, painted a rosy picture of the future of our country, and appeared to be capable of military exploits worthy of our Ancient Egyptian heritage. Some people actually believed that Muhammad Ali's dominance over the Arab East could be repeated. Those were heady days, requiring no philosophy but, most importantly, we were all young. It is the same feeling which Wordsworth had in the days of the French Revolution, with "France standing on the top of Golden hours. And human nature seeming born again." "Bliss was it in that dawn of being to be alive," he says. "To be young was very heaven."

It may be difficult to disentangle myself from the nostalgia and the sense of the good old days, but for a scientific discussion of power and resistance, I found structural parallels in the interwar situation in Germany and the Egyptian Revolution. Both leaders believed in military discipline, both were populist, speaking of democracy, and both had immense popular backing. Both had brands of socialism variously qualified, as national socialism and Arab socialism, which were publicized by semi-philosophers and true philosophers, people who wholeheartedly supported the posited political creed and accused their detractors of high treason. Both "philosophies" were formally against metaphysics, though the Egyptian brand of this trend was more Cartesian than Heideggerian—that is, allowing for the duality of body and soul, rather than totalizing everything in Being. Both thought of their nations in racial (not racist) terms, one believing in the Aryan race, the other in the Arab race (having suspended any recourse to value temporarily); one believed he needed *lebensraum* and so sent his troops into other countries, the other believed he needed to export the "revolution" and gain allies in other countries, sending his troops into them. Each had an amazingly essentialist outlook; and each seemed to believe in military might, but while one was backed by a real fighting army, the other was backed by linguistic might—real linguistic might.

Structural parallelism apart, substantive questions condition the quality of resistance that each exercise of power engendered. In Europe, resistance was truly philosophical and the thinkers who resisted national socialism



left for the USA where Horkheimer and Adorno, for instance, worked and produced weighty and influential books. In Egypt, however, resistance mainly took the form of a return to metaphysics, in this case a reborn faith in God. Mustapha Mahmoud was a famous anti-metaphysical writer, and at one time was hailed as the first ever Arab philosopher, especially during his atheist phase, when he wrote pseudo-scientific articles. Liberal thinkers in Europe had contested “foundationalism,” followed by the critical theorists who tried, successfully in many cases, to present Marxism in a new key. They were opposed to German Idealism, together with the efforts of the Vienna Circle and the Frankfurt School in the reformulation of theories of truth, ethics, and epistemology. All Mahmoud did, however, was to present rudimentary scientific facts drawn from his study of medicine. I remember one article of which he was most proud, about the secret of the long life of a tortoise, which he attributed to near inactivity, while in contrast more active animals had shorter spans of life. Still a schoolboy, I was fascinated by the human analogy the argument implied. It wasn’t until much later that I realized it was no more than a poetic vision, and had nothing to do with science proper. Soon enough, with the demise of the Arab dream after the 1967 defeat, many of the more vociferous of the leader’s supporters beat a regular retreat, showing that they still believed in God and that metaphysics was not so bad after all. In his *Return of Consciousness*, Tewfik Al-Hakim summed up the reaction of many intellectuals to the flawed system that was based on language, and that had led to such humiliation.

The effect of the debacle was astounding. Pondering the disaster, many hitherto staunch supporters of the regime were literally dumbfounded. Some had a nervous breakdown, and a famous poet was sent to Russia for psychiatric treatment; others soon declared that they were cured of the atheism which had made them believe in the “power of man,” and now they had regained their faith in God. Major hierophants of “Arab socialism” sought to justify their stance claiming that the “theory” was valid (“Look at the Soviet Union,” they pointed out), but that the application was faulty; the leader was blameless, but our capitalist enemies could not stomach such a visionary leader whose policies did not serve their interests and so plotted to bring him down. They had a point, in fact, but the validity of their argument went against the grain. Their voices were drowned out by the general realization, gradually taking shape, that the rhetorical structure had fallen—“with hideous ruin and combustion,” as Milton would put it—with the devastating military defeat. The Return to God, and to metaphysics, was inevitable. I remember in 1969 when my wife and I were enjoying a concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London,

given by 'Abdul-Halim Hafiz, and a member of the audience was overcome by emotion when the singer spoke of Jesus Christ, invoking the power of the Lord to help the Arabs at their darkest hour, so to speak, and began to whimper audibly. Suddenly, a Palestinian sitting next to him shouted in anger, "now you know there's a God, don't you, you Pharaonic atheists!"

Now resistance to the power of that regime, for long silenced by the regime's secret police and specially trained henchmen, took the twin forms indicated in the title of this address—that is, *existentially* and *verbally*. The realization of the nature of the disaster was, as I have said, gradual: it took a couple of years for the people to internalize what had in fact happened. And as the prospects of change were almost ruled out, with the same ruling clique firmly in place, the first existential form of resistance took place. Under immense pressure to grant a modicum of freedom to the people, the regime allowed citizens to actually leave the country. This was first greeted with suspicion: can one actually go out of the country if one so wished? After all, it had taken me nearly seven months in 1964–5 to get an exit visa, and my old passport gave me the right to visit Libya only, then under the monarchy, and regarded as unattractive (before the discovery of oil, that is). Things were different now: in 1968–9, according to official figures, about one quarter of a million persons left the country, some for good, some temporarily. As resistance, this departure meant substituting *Sein* for *Dasein*, in Heideggerian terms; that is, people exchanged presence for existence. As a friend of mine owned up to me at the time, "I can only exist where I can speak my mind; and I do mean now to exist." He was on his way to Canada to immigrate permanently; others left for other destinations, and as more oil-rich Arab countries appeared on the map, many Egyptians were quick to exchange their homeland for other places, forming new Egyptian colonies as though to stress their existence.

As opposed to this form of what some have described as "negative resistance," a huge battalion of writers and artists showed how art could be a truly positive form of resistance. Novels, plays, and poems continued to be produced, embodying disenchantment with the carceral society that remained unchanged, in spite of the military defeat. A common joke at the time was that after the death of the leader (physically this time), some still wanted him to rule rather than a member of the old military junta. Incidentally, some of those who had gained prominence under the power of the dead leader felt that the new regime, not much different in essence, frowned upon them or was at least unsympathetic to their socialist sentiments, and so ran away for short or long stays abroad. The real artists, however, whatever their ideological leanings, produced masterpieces that

showed that Foucault's appeal to the "other of Reason," "unreason," or madness could be used as a tool in the exercise of resistance. But I think it is perhaps the Weberian view of art, referred to in the above-quoted book, that should help us to understand how art came to constitute the language of positive resistance. His view is naturally general, pertaining primarily to the role of art in Western capitalist societies, within what he calls the "Aesthetic Sphere"; but, for our purposes, it explains how Arabic dramatists in Egypt were fascinated with the theatre of the absurd, and why they preferred to translate the term as اللامعقول (absurd). This was Foucault's "the other of Reason," as elaborated in great detail in his *Madness and Civilization* (1965), especially as he attributed truly ethical and epistemological significance to the study of "unreason." Meanwhile, Weber (1922) encapsulates the power of art in its liberating effect; in this book he says, "[under] the ... intellectualism and rationalization of life ... art becomes a cosmos of more and more consciously grasped independent values, which exist in their own right" (342).

According to Wollen's interpretation, "Foucault must invoke as a source of resistance an entity (or entities) that exists at a *total remove* from the dominant manifestation of 'power-knowledge.' In principle, such resistance must assume the form of a primordial, presocialized otherness, such as madness" (1992, 183). Wollen may not be too far off the mark, if we understand "madness" as what Foucault sees as the vast human resources condemned to obscurity, to silence, and to repression by the exercise of "Reason." In madness he found "natural qualities" that are liberated but which, being opposed to social norms, must be disciplined or punished. The rule of Reason cannot accept the presence of such "other of Reason" which threatens its power: it fights it, banishes it, or brands it as madness. In fact, as I read Foucault's explanation (and vindication) of madness, I remembered the words of Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: "The lunatic, the lover and the poet/Are of imagination all compact." Seen in the light of the Shakespearean line, Foucault's claim seems to make sense: in it we see the Weberian independent values which true art embodies.

In Arabic drama, such independence was achieved by going to history, as though to create situations with values unrelated to the present but which in fact help the audience to make better sense of their immediately lived experience. For the "other of Reason," many dramatists enjoyed writing in the manner of the Theatre of the Absurd. Tewfik Al-Hakim did both. He wrote some avowedly "absurd" plays, namely *O Tree-Climber*, *The Fate of a Cockroach*, *Food for Every Mouth*, and one long play by his own admission designed to represent the conflict between power and the

law, *The Sultan's Dilemma*. Both kinds represented art as a language of resistance; and in each case we have an absurd situation created by the “other of Reason.” Even the “law” in the latter play must be seen as a product of “unreason,” specifying that if a powerful man, in Nietzschean terms, ascends to the throne when, in fact, he had once been a slave (most of the Mamelukes who ruled Egypt in the era prior to the Turkish occupation in 1521 were European slaves), his legitimacy requires that he must be “freed” first (more on this later). The solution was that someone should buy him and “free” him before allowing him to exercise his power. When the buyer happens to be a prostitute, the “other of Reason” takes centre stage. Similar handlings of bizarre situations in the drama of the period occur prominently in the works of Mikhail Roman, Saa’d Wahba, and Rashad Rushdy. Salah ’Abdul-Saboor’s five plays in verse, written in 1969, in a sudden flowering of genius comparable only to Keats’s, show to what extent the “other of Reason” was used as a language of resistance. Lewis ’Awad, the most authoritative critic of the time (and of all time I would say), wrote two reviews of *O Tree-Climber* in *Al-Ahram* in two successive weeks, presenting two contradictory interpretations: one showing that it is indeed in the “absurd” tradition, exploring its “other of Reasonness” features, the other suggesting that it is a philosophical meditation on the nature of absolutism. When I asked him which approach he preferred, he answered with a question: “Which do *you* prefer?” It was a question for which I had no answer, and still do not.

With the benefit of hindsight, I can now see that it was the rhetorical nature of the regime’s power that generated the language of resistance as “art.” While people still debated some of the Weberian categories of power—authority and legitimation—the air was vibrant with lively contestation, or “academic bombardment,” with argument pitted against argument, and all things seemed to show that the language of power had met its equal in a superior language of resistance—art.

In my anthology of *Modern Arabic Poetry* in Egypt (1986) I offered examples of ’Abdul-Saboor’s lyrical poetry of resistance. Shortly after the 1967 war, in a little volume of verse, he struck hard at the highfalutin claims of that era about the Arabs being a united nation credited with glorious deeds. *Meditations on a Wounded Time* shows in poem after poem how ridiculous such claims were. Here, the poet draws pictures of the Arab past where the single ruler—as Caliph, as provincial governor, as small official—practices dictatorial rule. The typical Arab potentate in the poetry of Salah ’Abdul-Saboor was a sensual man given to a life of pleasure, perhaps as a result of the sudden affluence brought about by the riches gained from the newly-conquered lands in the past, or from the

newly-acquired oil-wealth at present. The poet here resorts to parody to portray these rulers as surrounded by sycophants and self-seekers and uses classical Arabic to recreate the vaunted past in painfully grotesque forms. Influenced by the great thinkers of the time, he could no doubt reveal the consequences of the monopoly of power by one individual—the crushing military defeat, the loss of Sinai, the oil wells in the Gulf of Suez, and the Suez Canal revenues.

Equally problematic and prominent in the aforementioned volume was the concept of freedom. It was Zaki Naguib Mahmoud who showed that this concept had been handed down from our ancestors almost intact: a free man was the opposite of a bondman. To be born in slavery meant that a man was not in possession of his full rights as a human being: he would not be in command of himself, drawing his power *and* will from those of his master. This was equally true of both sexes, of course, but slave girls had a lurid history in major works of Arabic literature, such as *al-Aghani* and the great *One Thousand and One Nights*. The word “free” and its cognates, therefore, carried nothing of the modern political or intellectual significations. It was the “free men,” not the slaves, who were required to fight for their country; they could own property (including human chattel) and engage in properly organized matrimonial arrangements. This historical feature, bequeathed by the Roman Empire to the people of the Arab east, was truly a stumbling block confronting the exponents of enlightenment, notably Taha Hussein. In his *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, Hussein could advocate the adoption of Western culture *in toto*, claiming that ours was a Mediterranean culture, but his totalizing effort floundered on the tradition of bondage. It may appear odd to hear the famous advocate of women’s rights in Egypt, Huda Sha’rawi, as late as 1924 proudly stating that slaves in her household were kindly treated. Now regarded as a harbinger of the feminist movement in the interwar period, her memoirs show that the tradition of contrasting freedom with slavery did not die outright, even with the royal decree prohibiting the use of slaves in household work. In Saudi Arabia, King Faysal, a truly enlightened man, God rest his soul, ordered an official ban on slavery in 1961.

Our language, therefore, as used in opposing domination—that is, as a resistance tool—militated against the adoption of the modern concept of freedom for quite a while. A distinction had to be made in this connection between the word “servant,” as applied to all people as God’s worshippers (عباد الله) and as applied to a caste of slaves originally captured in war and “sold to slavery” (as Othello recounts to Desdemona’s father), or as later captured by the European slave-traders in Africa. As in English, and

possibly in other modern languages, the word “slave” has lost its old literal meaning in Arabic and became a trope. One encounters various figurative uses of the term in Arabic poetry and Shakespeare, and, of course in Hegel’s theory of the master-slave relation (1953).

The “slave trope” worked very well in poetry in the interwar period, and Lucentio’s cry “O let me be a slave to achieve that maid/ Whose sudden sight has enthralled my eye” (*The Taming of the Shrew*, I, i. 17–18) is matched by Shawqi’s:

My master who had my soul in his hand,  
Has lost it, may his hand be blessed!

The advent of the Apollo School in Arabic poetry in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s changed everything. Under the influence of the English romantic tradition, poets could deal with freedom in its modern sense, no doubt supported by the political thinkers of the time who introduced the modern concepts of democracy, the constitution, parliamentary life, and so forth. Resistance now looked to the poet for a new interpretation of “freedom,” endowing it with almost metaphysical and, indeed, cosmic power. With Shelley’s dictum in mind—the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of mankind—’Ali Mahmoud Taha could describe the poet in the following image:

[The Poet] comes down to earth, like a beam of radiant light,  
With a sorcerer’s wand, and the heart of a prophet.

Gone is the old opposition between servant and master, bondman and freeman, etc. The new concept had already been built up in Europe in the nineteenth century by Hegel himself in his celebrated characterization of history as “progress in the consciousness of freedom” (24).

However, liberation for the Egyptians meant, perhaps primarily, getting rid of British occupation. This occupation was seen as the major obstacle to the freedom of the people, as the British colluded with the corrupt monarchy to play havoc with the country’s fortunes. There were various aspects of the concept of freedom in those days, but “freedom” became the main weapon in the arsenal of resistance. The articles, studies, and books produced at the time seemed to be obsessed with the idea of freedom. As Wordsworth had believed that social freedom should be based on individual freedom, the poets especially were at the vanguard of the freedom-quest. Poets of the Apollo school now regarded themselves as poets of resistance, not by actually attacking the regime or even foreign occupation (though nobody doubted it was the archenemy to freedom), but