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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE WARWICK DATABASE OF ARABIC LITERATURE

In this progress report, I inform you of the various activities that I have undertaken since October and I highlight some of the challenges that I have faced.

FORMATTING AND ONLINE PUBLISHING

One of the important considerations for this project is its accessibility.

I spent a good deal of time thinking about what the database will look like and how it can be made accessible to different audiences such as undergraduate students and academics but also, in future, the general public. I designed a few different webpages before deciding on the present structure (which I explicate below). Dr Susan Brock in the IATL advised me to set up a student focus group to obtain feedback on my concerns and this was very valuable advice which I acted on. I selected 4 students who are currently taking my module on Arabic Literature and who are somewhat familiar with this area. Their feedback helped me make the following decisions:

- Include a table of contents with keywords (screen shot 2)
- Include a page of useful maps (screen shot 4)
- Widen the scope of the database to include references to 5 countries: Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Lybia
- Include many more images of particular spaces that are represent these 5 countries

Students also insisted that one of the great advantages of having such a database would be that it fills the gap in the current provision of academic work written in English. For, although it is possible to find some books and essays in scholarly journals, yet these are at times outdated, at others controversially written from a Western perspective. I agreed with the students' view and I undertook the translation of a number of interviews, some from Arabic, others from French and these will be original contributions available only on the database. Screen shot 5 shows an interview with the Lebanese author Elias Khoury which I translated with the interviewer's permission.

I am somewhat confident that I have devised a database that will be easy to navigate. I have set up a meeting with the focus group after the exam period in order to ask for more feedback.

RESEARCH AND DATA COLLECTION

Another important consideration has to do with the content of the database. I hope to offer a set of online resources which facilitate the study of Arabic literature and enable me to teach a wide range of texts (poetry, fiction, drama) with reference to relevant contexts. To this end, I will populate the database with contextual information but, most importantly, I will include original research.

In my funding application I explained that I was planning to undertake a research trip to the National Library of Cairo and I also wanted to conduct field research in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula to collect information on the Tuareg tribes in Lybia. I also planned to travel to the American University of Beirut, the library of which carries an extensive range of sources. The purpose of these trips was to collect original material for scanning, annotating and posting online. Unfortunately, 2 factors thwarted these plans: the unstable political climate in Egypt, Lybia and Lebanon and the heavy teaching load I was given in the English department which did not allow me any time to be off-campus.

I intend to remedy the situation by undertaking the research trip to Cairo and Lebanon in September. I have made some connections with librarians and academics at the University of Cairo and the American University of Beirut and they have offered to give me access to the stacks and archives. In the meantime, I have written 18 critical essays which I will edit and publish online.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

I have been very careful with regards to using material that is available online. Whatever I have used to date has been cleared by the copyright holders or else it's available online without a clear indication of ownership. The issue I face though has to do with making the database public, in future. At the moment, copyright holders agree to allow me to use their material because it's in a non-profit, education setting. What happens when we make the database public is a question that I need to explore in more depth.

STUDENT CONTRIBUTION

I have benefitted a great deal from having students on a focus group to offer ideas and suggestions for the database. I intend to acknowledge their contribution, of course but I also wish to work with students more closely in the coming year in a more "formalised" structure. For example, next year I will have a new PhD student from Egypt who will be working on translations of Medieval Arabic poems. I will be teaching a new module on Arabic literature for the MA in world literature degree and I will carry on teaching the undergraduate module on Arabic literature. I would like to involve more students with the database because I think that, once the infrastructure is in place, the content can be provided by various levels of researchers.

To this end, I have agreed to work with Peter Larkin on the student as research initiative that the library launched recently. I hope to link this project to the Warwick DAR and recruit a strong body of student researchers as contributors.

PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Time: I regret to say that my teaching workload has been huge this year and that, although I was “technically” released from my duties on the Academic writing programme (which counted for 50% of my workload) I was given a great deal of teaching on the English degree. As a result, I have been working late nights, weekends and bank holiday to ensure that my IATL-funded project does not suffer.

Expertise and technical know-how: I am aware that there is technical support available at the IATL but, in my experience, this was not helpful. I have remedied this problem by asking personal friends with experience of web-publishing. In retrospect, I wish I had put in the budget breakdown a specific amount of money for buying-in technical help. I should also add that the computer I use in the English department, and which is new, is not suitable for the type of work I wanted to do on this database. It would appear that departments buy computers with the lowest specifications possible. For example, my computer does have an in-built camera, it has no speakers, it lacks “Windows Movie Maker” and has little memory. Although the IATL team lent me a camera, I was still not able to record podcasts because there was no microphone. Consequently, I spent my own money on a new home computer which has the necessary requirements.

The new moodle: The university has recently announced that we will have a VLE up and running in September. I have tried to have conversations with colleagues in IT services about the extent to which the work I am doing on the database will / will not be affected by the introduction of moodle. I am sorry to say that no one seems to have an answer. This issue is at the back of my mind although I wonder if the IATL technical team may be able to offer advice.

CONCLUSION

Constructing this database is very important for my teaching and for my students’ learning. I have found some challenges while setting up the framework of the database and I have been under pressure to find time to work on it. However, I am content with what I have completed thus far, especially since I have a great deal of material that is simply waiting to be put online. In a way, I feel that the difficult period has passed. In a few weeks’ time the summer term will end and I will be so pleased to devote June, July, August and September to populating this database. At present, I feel confident that by October, I will have a working database that can be used in the next academic year for teaching undergraduate and graduate modules.

I have already begun to explore funding sources to support the continuing expansion of this database and I think that the collaboration with the library will be invaluable in engaging even more students with this project.

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Welcome

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أهلاً وسهلاً أهلاً وسهلاً أهلاً وسهلاً

Welcome to the University of Warwick's Database of Arabic Resources, the Warwick DAR. The Arabic Greeting Ahlan wa Sahlan is an apt metaphor for this database which is aimed at the academic community and has been constructed with a view of facilitating access to resources on Arabic Literature and Culture for students and researchers.

Ahlan wa Sahlan is a typical greeting for a visitor to one's home. The saying in Arabic is "مِنْت أَهْلًا وَرِغَاءَت سَهْلًا" and means "you have arrived among family and have stepped on plain ground". The saying welcomes visitors to your home as part of your family and promises them a comfortable stay by referring to the ground as plain, obstacle free, easy.

The DAR is a common noun meaning "lounge", "Salon" is a suitable acronym for this e-salon of literary and cultural references.

Screen Shot 1: Welcome page

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CONTENTS

Name	Description	Keywords
Online Sources	e-journals; newspapers; e-sources	
Welcome	Ahlan wa sahlam	Ahlan wa Sahlan; Al Dar
Transliteration		JIS; transliteration system
Maps	Maps	Maps; history; culture; politics
Interviews		
Articles	Articles	Articles
Fiction	sources; criticism; references	Novels; contexts; themes
Poetry	Poetry	Muallaqat
Lectures	EN274 Lectures	
Bibliography	Annotated Bibliography	Annotated Bibliography; Arabic sources

The content of the database is not yet available for public viewing. If you wish to contribute articles or other information please contact [Dr. Cathia Jenainati](#)

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Screen Shot 2: Table of contents

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Transliteration

The database uses the transliteration system of the *Journal of Islamic Studies* (JIS), published by Oxford University Press.

Arabic	Transliteration	Sound
ا	a	
ب	b	
ت	t	
ث	th	
ج	j	
ح	h	
خ	kh	
د	d	
ذ	dh	
ر	r	
ز	z	
س	s	
ش	sh	
ص	s	
ض	d	
ط	t	
ظ	z	
ع	e	
غ	gh	
ف	f	
ق	q	
ك	k	

Screen Shot 3: Transliteration

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Maps

Area Maps

- "Expansion of the Ottoman Empire" and "Decline of the Ottoman Empire"
- "Middle East Regional Map" produced by the United States Central Intelligence Agency
- "The Arabian Peninsula", produced by the United States Central Intelligence Agency
- "Fresh Ground Water Sources" in the Middle East from the Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection

Lebanon

- Political Map produced by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency
- Map of Beirut (1912) from Karl Baedeker, "Handbook for Travellers in Syria and Palestine"
- Distribution of Religious Groups in Lebanon (in 1983) from the Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection

Lybia

- Map of Ethnic Groups (1973) from Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection

Syria

- Political map produced by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency
- Map of Damascus (1912) from Karl Baedeker, "Handbook for Travellers in Syria and Palestine"

UK Border Agency on Lebanon

UK Border Agency on Lybia

Screen Shot4: Maps ([LINK](#))

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Elias Khoury

Interview of Elias Khoury by Geneviève Simon; Conducted in Beirut, for *La Libre Belgique* 22.11.2011; Translated by Cathia Jenainati; published on Warwick DAR (23.11.2011)

Pour l'écrivain libanais Elias Khoury, le merveilleux est l'essence du travail littéraire. Rencontre avec un témoin privilégié du printemps arabe, inquiet de voir Beyrouth en passe de perdre son âme.

For the Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, the fantastic is the essence of literary work. A meeting with this privileged witness of the Arab Spring, anxious to see Beirut on the brink of losing its soul.

Entretien à Beyrouth
Beyrouth, 31 octobre 2011.

Dans le taxi qui se faufile dans la circulation débridée, ponctuée d'incessants coups de klaxon, la conversation tourne rapidement à la principale préoccupation des Libanais, source d'une angoisse palpable : la situation en Syrie et ses inévitables conséquences sur le Liban. Elias Khoury nous a donné rendez-vous à Achrafieh, quartier de Beyrouth-Est où il vit. Depuis trois ans, l'astucieux de "La Porte du soleil" a quitté la rédaction en chef du supplément culturel du quotidien "An-Nahar" et dirige désormais "Le Journal d'études palestiniennes" tout en vivant quatre mois par an à New York où il enseigne la littérature comparée à l'université. Rencontre avec un écrivain qui est une star en son pays.

"Si vous avez vraiment vu ce que vous racontez, cela signifie que vous avez vu des choses extraordinaires et, si vous n'avez pas vu ce que vous racontez, cela signifie que vous êtes un bon écrivain". Cette citation du raïfle Harun, mise en oeuvre du "Coffre des secrets"(Actes Sud, 2009), guide-t-elle votre travail ?

Non, c'est la différence entre l'imaginaire et le réel. Je pense que l'écriture est une grande fenêtre, que cet imaginaire nous conduit vers l'inconnu, tandis que nous fabriquons des choses réelles, concrètes. Cette relation entre le concret et l'inconnu nous mène au monde que

Interview in Beirut
Beirut, 31 October 2011.

In the taxi that winds its way through the unrestrained traffic, punctuated by incessant tooting, the conversation quickly turns to the Lebanese's principle preoccupation, a source of palpable anxiety: the situation in Syria and its inevitable consequences on Lebanon. Elias Khoury agreed to meet us at Achrafieh, a quarter of East Beirut where he lives. Since three years ago, the writer of "Gates of the Sun" quit his post as editor-in-chief of the cultural supplement of the daily newspaper "An-Nahar" and is now directing the "Journal of Palestinian Studies" all the while residing four month per year in New York where he teaches comparative literature at NYU. This is a meeting with a writer who is a star in his own country.

"If you have really seen what you recount, this means that you have seen extraordinary things and, if you have not seen what you recount, this means that you are a good writer." Does this quote, by Calif Harun, used as the motto of "Coffre des secrets" (Actes Sud, 2009) guide your work?

No, it's the difference between the imaginary and the real. I think that writing is a big window, that the imaginary leads us to the unknown, whereas we fabricate the real, the concrete. This relationship between the

Screen Shot 5: Interview with Elias Khoury (translated for DAR)

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Fiction

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Name	Description	Keywords
Aslan	The Heron	Aslan; Egypt
Barakat	The Stone of Laughter	Barakat; Lebanon
Ez Eldine	Maryam's Maze	Ez Eldine; Egypt
Gazzar	Black Magic	Gazzar; Egypt
Ghandour	The Honey	Ghandour; Lebanon; Palestine
Idlibi	Sabriyya	Idlibi; Syria
Khoury	City Gates	Khoury; Lebanon
Koni	The Seven Veils of Seth	Koni; Libya;
Mahfouz	Children of the Alley	Mahfouz; Gebelawi; Egypt
Mina	Fragments of Memory	Mina; Syria;
Munif	Endings	Munif; Saudi Arabia
Saadawi	The Fall of the Imam	Saadawi; Egypt
Sheikh	The Story of Zahra	Sheikh; Lebanon
Tahawy	Gazelle Tracks	Tahawy; Egypt

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Screen Shot6: Fiction contents page

Tahawy
www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/about/people/permanentacademicstaffstaff3/jenainati/dr.cathia/warwick/dar/database/contents/fiction/tahawy/

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Miral Al Tahawy: Gazelle Tracks

Author Profile

On the 18th of October 2006, the Egyptian novelist Miral Al Tahawy made headline news for her bold decision to stop wearing a head scarf and to abandon the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan AlMuslimeen) with whom she had been associated. Tahawy's decision was met with disapproval in some parts of the Egyptian press and curiosity in others. In an interview with the online news site *Al Arabiya.net* Tahawy explained that she no longer agreed with Islam's conception of women's bodies as sites of shame and taboos. She asserted that she did not consider herself a body and did not want to be objectified in relation to her body.

Al Tahawy's life began in a conservative, traditional bedouin setting within the tribe of Al-Hanadi. She received an education because her father allowed to study in spite of the strict rules that governed girls' behaviour in her tribe. She obtained a BA in Arabic Literature and then found a job as a school teacher in order to avoid being married at an early age. She pursued further studies at Cairo university and moved to the city at the age of 26. She has declared in interviews that the move to Cairo caused a great deal of conflict with her parents who were not accepting of their daughter's independence. She negotiated with her father to allow her to finish her Masters' degree and her PhD from Cairo university and she graduated having completed her thesis in Hebrew, Persian and English. She embarked on a successful writing career that will see her receive the prestigious Naguib Mahfouz Prize for Literature in 2010 and be nominated for the Arabic Booker in 2011.

[Read more](#) and here in the [Washington Post](#)


Contexts

History: Agricultural Land Reforms

"The Basha used to follow the news broadcasts on the radio with great interest. They had been talking about revolutionary correctionism and agricultural reform" (Tahawy 20).


The novel is set against the backdrop of the programme of Land Reforms initiated by the officers of the 1952 Revolution. The Basha is a land owner who risks losing his wealth if the programme of reforms is implemented. [Read more...](#)

Miral Al-Tahawy
ميرال الطحاوي



Gazelle Tracks (2008)

نقرات الظباء
[Naqarat al ziba']



The Tribes of the Arabian Peninsula

12:33
23/05/2012

Screen Shot7: typical fiction page ([LINK](#))