



# Islam, Fiction and Human Rights: Amnesty International's literature programme

Loes van der Voort (3240525)

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Thesis Researchmaster Comparative Literary Studies, Universiteit Utrecht

Supervisor: prof. dr. Ann Rigney

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## Introduction: Amnesty's human rights literature programme

And what has art and literature to do with human rights? They are all bound up with this wonderful talent we humans have: to empathise with others. If, by reading... we are enabled to step, for one moment, into another person's shoes, to get right under their skin, then that is already a great achievement. Through empathy we overcome prejudice, develop tolerance and ultimately understand love. Stories can bring understanding, healing, reconciliation and unity. – Archbishop Desmond Tutu<sup>1</sup>

These words appear on Amnesty International's website and introduce the page entitled "Human rights fiction and poetry". The page can be found under the general heading "take action," and it lists a number of novels and poetry collections that are (co-)published, recommended or endorsed by Amnesty. The page offers a range of books through the Amnesty web shop and provides links to Amazon.com for the purchase of the remaining works. Related Amnesty webpages recommend more human rights fiction and non-fiction,<sup>2</sup> as well as a pamphlet that encourages teachers to use the works as a resource to incorporate a "personalised" version of otherwise abstract human rights into the classroom. The pamphlet supports the Desmond Tutu quote in asserting that literature helps people to empathize, which means that it "makes it easier to be kind, tolerant and willing to consider other points of view. It makes it harder to adopt prejudiced stances, helps to guard against aggression and conflict and may even encourage people to take positive action on behalf of others."<sup>3</sup>

The connection between literature and human rights is no spontaneous invention to be ascribed to Amnesty International. Literature has been tied historically to the emergence and perpetuation of human rights discourse.<sup>4</sup> The world of letters has historically allowed people to imagine other lives and connect their individuality to those of others. This, among other factors, resulted in the emergence of the public sphere, which consequently became a space where the people could publicly influence politics and law.<sup>5</sup> This coincided with the Enlightenment separation of natural and legal rights and social contract theory, on which I will elaborate later. Although these developments are more connected to the emerging nation-state than to a universal community, as many scholars have argued, they do acknowledge the role of literature in creating communities. Novels, and the empathy they engaged, also had a more universal role to play in the development of the first human rights documents that finally lead to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).<sup>6</sup> Joseph Slaughter, in his *Human Rights Inc.*, examines at the intersection of legal scholarship and comparative literature the relation between literature and human rights. He connects the discourse of the UDHR to that of the *Bildungsroman*, arguing that both discourses revolve around the socialization of the individual. As becomes clear in both Slaughter's theory and other theories that deal with human rights, the idea of universal human rights ties in with a notion of a global community that binds

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Rights Fiction and Poetry*. April 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=11728>. April 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Top Ten Summer Books List for Human Rights Advocates*. April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012.

<http://blog.amnestyusa.org/africa/top-10-summer-reading-list-for-human-rights-advocates/>. April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Amnesty International, *Using Fiction to Teach Human Rights*. August 21<sup>st</sup> 2012.

[http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_22658.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_22658.pdf). April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008; Joseph R. Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Thomas Burger trans. Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Hunt.

humans together. Imagined collectivity<sup>7</sup> or a common humanity that can be recognized in singular people and their stories, many have argued, destabilizes and broadens frameworks of understanding otherness.<sup>8</sup> In this view, a story invites the reader to imagine the other and opens one up to particularities and alternative views of the self and the other, while allowing for the recognition of common grounds. As such, the relation between stories and the recognition of people's human rights has been acknowledged widely.<sup>9</sup> Amnesty's vision uses this connection to insist on the power of literature in achieving human rights' universal aspirations.

However, if there is a common ground to humanity, there must be a norm that allows these singular beings to be defined as human. If there is no norm, no definition to determine what it means to be human, what holds humanity together? As Slaughter has argued, 'the People' are constituted in contrast to those who do not count as 'the People',<sup>10</sup> and subsequently have no rights; normativity also excludes. At the same time, Slaughter recognizes the importance of norms if human rights law wants to be effective. As such, any discussion about human rights is also about who falls outside the boundaries of humanity.<sup>11</sup>

The literary works endorsed by Amnesty cover a wide range of topics concerning human rights abuse, a large number of which are related to Islamic societies. Amnesty, although aspiring (and acquiring) international reach, is a European-born non-governmental organisation; its agenda originates in the equally European-born UDHR. In an increasingly globalized world, the contact with societies that are based on different sets of values poses problems. Since 9/11, increasing Islamophobia, anti-Americanism and the idea that Islam cannot be reconciled with the Western values on which international human rights law is based has even more complicated mutual understanding.<sup>12</sup> But, Amnesty's website suggests, the universality of empathy could overcome our perceived differences. It insists that literature not only creates empathy, but tolerance, understanding and even positive action. As such, literature can support the quest for the ultimate universality of human rights that the UDHR is assuming as well as aiming for.

I want to investigate the balance between universality and singularity that Amnesty International's choice of Islam-related literature portrays. Because of the perceived fundamental differences between Islam and Western values, my choice for these works serves to illustrate how Amnesty negotiates differences in favour of the idea of common humanity. Can a commonality be found that allows humans, those addressed by the UDHR, to regard others, those yet to be included, as equally

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<sup>7</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Death of a Discipline*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. 33; Slaughter, 2007; Spivak.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Gready, "Novel Truths: Literature and Truth Commissions". *Comparative Literature Studies* 46.1 (2009); Marcos Piason Natali, "Beyond the Right to Literature". *Comparative Literature Studies* 46.1 (2009).

<sup>10</sup> Slaughter 2007; 157.

<sup>11</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004; *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. London: Penguin Books, 2006, 138-150; Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 19; Butler 2004, 2; John J. Donohue & John L. Esposito, *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. 1; John L. Esposito & Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks For Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. New York: Gallup Inc, 2007. 1-1. David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 6; Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* London: Verso, 2002.

human? And if so, what particularities, if any, are at stake? Although, as shown above, literature has been connected to human rights, its current use in human rights advocacy has not yet been researched (unlike, for example, photography,<sup>13</sup> which has at least received some attention). The literature that Amnesty endorses has either been unstudied or considered only in relation to aesthetics or thematic context, and not in relation to its social resonance and mobilising potential. Slaughter, who treats a body of novels as human rights claims, limits his discussion to canonical *Bildungsromane* that helped build and exemplify the historical development of the normative discourse of human rights. However, he does not consider the role of literature in a broader sense, that is, other genres, literature that is not canonical, or literature's mobilisation in generating human rights awareness. Departing from the traditional approaches mentioned above, I will examine the texts as mediators between differently located groups, with a view to their supposed encouragement of a tolerance of otherness as the grounds of extending human rights. To advance Slaughter's analysis I will use recently developed tools in comparative literature relating to world literature and its global circulation, involving issues of translatability, universality of themes or discourse and accessibility.<sup>14</sup> Applying these discussions to 'human rights literature' will provide sharper analytical tools for understanding the potential of these works in opening up broader intercultural understanding or, as Slaughter's work might lead one to expect, in reinforcing a 'universal' norm. Amnesty's choice of literature might reveal some of the discursive practices, possibilities and limitations behind the definition of the human in a globalized world where human rights discourse and its cultural representation have become the grounds on which we negotiate cultural and religious differences and base our common humanity.

In what follows, I will further elaborate on the category of the 'human' in human rights discourse. Subsequently I will discuss the human in (world) literature, after which I will provide a short inquiry into the relation between Islam and modernity. Finally, I will look at Amnesty's literature project and examine more closely the depiction of the human in the six most explicitly Islam-related literary works. These are Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*, about her youth in Somalia and the dangers of Islam; Nawal El Saadawi's novel *Woman at Point Zero* about a woman's life in 1970's Egypt; Gabriella Ambrosio's *Before We Say Goodbye* and Suad Amiry's *Nothing to Lose But Your Life*, both dealing with the Palestine/Israel conflict; a collection of poetry by Guantánamo prisoners assembled by attorney Marc Falkoff; and a Sufi poetry collection edited by Bruce Wannell.

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<sup>13</sup> Marta Zarzycka, "Madonnas of Warfare, Angels of Poverty". *Photographies*, 5 (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*. M.B. DeBevoise trans. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004; David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003; Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature". *New Left Review*, 1 (2000).

## 1. The human in human rights discourse

The vision that Amnesty International presents is “for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights...”<sup>15</sup> This document originated in 1948 and was adopted by the United Nations in response to the horrifying experience of the Second World War, and after having vowed that such a large-scaled violation of human lives could never be allowed to happen again. The text was drafted in less than two years and was the first global expression of universal human rights. The UN recognizes that “at a time when the world was divided into Eastern and Western blocks, finding a common ground on what should make the essence of the document proved to be a colossal task.”<sup>16</sup> Others have recognized that finding such a common ground would prove to be a colossal task in any kind of world.<sup>17</sup> Although Amnesty defines itself as being independent of ideology of any kind (political, economic or religious), it bases itself on the UDHR. Humanitarianism, many have acknowledged, is not neutral, and has increasingly become attached to Western involvement in the developing nations, where economic sanctions and military intervention

are being used for humanitarian purposes.<sup>18</sup> Discursive practices are at work in the UDHR itself, too. It speaks of the “inherent dignity” of everyone in the “human family” as “the foundation of freedom,

### Excerpt from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

PREAMBLE: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world [...]”

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs [...]

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6: Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law

Article 15: [1] Everyone has the right to a nationality

Article 18: Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion [...] either alone or in community with others [and] to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19: Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 22: Everyone, as a member of society, has [...] the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality

Article 26: [1] Everyone has the right to education [...]

[2] Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

Article 27: [1] Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Article 29. [1] Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible”

[2] In the exercise of these rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society”.

<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, *Who Are We*. April 27<sup>th</sup> 2012. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are>. April 3<sup>d</sup> 2013.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations, *History of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2013. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/history.shtml>. April 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Appiah; Butler 2004, 2007; Hunt; Slaughter 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007, 59.

justice and peace in the world". Rights are the expression of this "universal dignity bestowed to a person on account of their humanity."<sup>19</sup> Everyone is equally entitled to the rights that are declared, this fact just needs to be recognized.<sup>20</sup> This means that the UDHR presumes the human and his rights to exist and be known before articulation. However, if these rights would already have been held by every human being, they would have become redundant, which, as any newspaper will confirm daily, they have not.<sup>21</sup> Their violation seems as structural as their affirmation. So, who is this human the UDHR speaks of? To answer this question, a short glimpse into the history of human rights discourse might prove helpful.

The emergence of human rights discourse can be traced back to the 1776 United States Declaration of Independence and the 1789 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. Lynn Hunt, in her historical survey of the development of human rights discourse, wonders: "How did these men, living in societies built on slavery, subordination, and seemingly natural subservience, ever come to imagine men not at all like them and, in some cases, women too, as equals? How did equality of rights become a "self-evident" truth in such unlikely places?"<sup>22</sup> They must have recognized something common, something inherently human to all of them. After all, as Hunt has pointed out, human rights are rights vis-à-vis other humans, not just as opposed to higher or lower entities.<sup>23</sup> Many scholars have argued that the imagining of others-as-same, that is, accepting another as equally human as oneself from within a specific discourse, is a major component of this sense of community. This active imaginative recognition of the other's humanity can be fitted with what Hunt calls 'empathy'. She has argued that human rights are founded on an emotional conviction based in their self-evidence, that is, "we are most certain that a human right is at issue when we feel horrified by its violation."<sup>24</sup> This circularity is affirmed by the preamble to the UDHR written by Jacques Maritain, in which he reports the attitude of the drafters (of which he was one): "we agree about the rights *but on condition that no one asks us why.*"<sup>25</sup> The commonsensical nature of human rights can be said to appeal to an emotional affirmation of their truth rather than a rational one. Philosopher Richard Rorty, in a similar vein, suggests in his contribution to the Oxford Amnesty Lectures on human rights in 1993 that sympathy and sentimental education rather than rationality are what advance the human rights struggle. What makes us human, and able to recognize others as such, is not our rationality but our ability to not only feel, but feel for the other.<sup>26</sup> In order to understand what this means *for* that other, it is helpful to trace back Rorty's idea of sympathy to eighteenth-century philosopher Adam Smith. In his canonical *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he identified an imaginative sympathy as the source of people's ability to feel for (the misery of) others – that is, a sort of imaginative 'changing places' with the other and feeling for him as though you *were* him.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Douzinas, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, 223.

<sup>21</sup> Slaughter 2007, 6, 81.

<sup>22</sup> Hunt, 1-18, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, 21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Maritain, "Preamble." *Human Rights: Comments and Interpretations*, a symposium edited by UNESCO, Paris: July 25<sup>th</sup> 1948. *UNESdoc*, April 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001550/155042eb.pdf> . April 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Rorty, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality." *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1993*, Stephen Shute and Susan Hurley eds. New York: Basic Books, 1993. 111-134

<sup>27</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie eds. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976 [1759]. 9-10; 43; 137.

This kind of sympathy is comparable to, if not identical with, what Slaughter, Hunt and Amnesty's literature project call empathy.<sup>28</sup> In terms of the practical implications of perceiving the other-as-self, empathy has had an important role to play. Hunt has argued that, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, people increasingly started to perceive themselves as separate and autonomous individuals, capable of moral judgment; in order for individuals to identify each other as morally autonomous too, empathy was needed. "Everyone would have rights only if everyone could be seen as in some fundamental way alike."<sup>29</sup>

"To cohabit the earth is prior to any possible community or nation or neighbourhood,"<sup>30</sup> as philosopher Judith Butler has argued in an edited volume about the public sphere. The assumption that a universal community of fellow humans exists, lies at the basis of the UDHR. This is confirmed in article 1: 'all human beings' should act towards one another in a 'spirit of brotherhood'. Looking at the language of the articles in the UDHR, what may strike the reader is the transition from human being to 'personality', and from 'everyone' and 'humanity' to 'society' (as in article 22: "Everyone, as a member of society, has ... the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality"). In this regard, it is important to note that the first two Declarations stated the rights of respectively US and French citizens. And, in the UDHR, too, the human who is entitled to human rights is not the human in a natural state; it is the human in society.<sup>31</sup> Slaughter has pointed out that 'personality' refers to the legal dimension of the otherwise abstract human, implying the human as the dignified, rights-holding person before the law.<sup>32</sup> As article 22 states, everyone has the right to the development of this 'personality'. This position is, paradoxically, both the premise and the outcome of the UDHR:<sup>33</sup> the human is assumed to naturally be the rights-holding person. Furthermore, as Slaughter suggests, this 'person' in international law is the product of a Eurocentric agenda, "an over-determined and inconsistent figure, a metonym for multiple and often irreconcilable political discourses and theories of law, history and the subject."<sup>34</sup> As such, this human rights person is not a uniform, natural being. However, for the sake of the 'universal' in the UDHR, a common ground is still assumed. In a way, the UDHR combines the idea of natural rights and positive rights. The former are supposed to be determined by nature rather than by any man-made authority, the latter are the rights of citizens under a social contract.<sup>35</sup> Considering the developments discussed above, the UDHR can be seen as a legal instrument that turns the idea of natural rights into positive law, meaning man-made law which obliges action. Article 29 confirms this in stating that only the law can limit a person's rights and freedoms in order to secure respect for others and for "morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society". This positions the human as a participant in a democracy and in a moral order that presumably is already known (for it remains unexplained in the document). The person it creates is therefore "not the name of

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<sup>28</sup> The term empathy only emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but Hunt argues that it is now used as sympathy was used in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century: "the active will to identify with others" (Hunt, 65).

<sup>29</sup> Hunt, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Eduardo Mendieta & Jonathan VanAntwerpen eds. *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. 83.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, 132, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Douzinas, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Slaughter 2007, 20; 26; 60-61; 77; Douzinas, 8.

<sup>34</sup> Slaughter 2007, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Patrick Riley, "Social Contract Theory and Its Critics". *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, Mark Goldie & Robert Wokler eds. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 351; Slaughter 2007, 63.

individual, irreducible difference but of sameness, the collection of common modalities of the human being's extension into the civil and social order."<sup>36</sup> The citizen is the particular human rights representation of the universal human, a person before the law with a recognized voice and place in the world, which means he can exercise his humanity and the rights that come with that. I will continue below to elaborate on what it means to be a citizen in relation to human rights.

A human rights person is thus the person before the law: the citizen. Modern law, as Jürgen Habermas has argued in his famous *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, is created by people to govern their community,<sup>37</sup> on which I will elaborate below. This means that the human rights person has to be recognized as what he supposedly already is by his fellow human rights persons. He needs to be recognized as having the rights the UDHR states. But who is the one to recognize those who are not recognized as human rights holders yet? As Slaughter has pointed out, the UDHR originates in a secular Europe, disenchanted by its Enlightenment-based idea of continuous progress,<sup>38</sup> and represents the last link in a centuries-long chain of human rights discussions. Several of the articles in the UDHR mentioned above confirm these secular and democratic roots. As an economic and political superpower in the world, we, "The West", already own these rights. Some even argue that human rights discourse "derive[s] from and help[s] secure the global hegemony of twenty-first-century American capitalism."<sup>39</sup> It has become the "official ideology of the new world order..."<sup>40</sup> This fear might be exaggerated, but it serves as a reminder of the need to remain critical of the human rights discourse. Without denouncing human rights as a tool of capitalist hegemony, I would still argue that human rights are indeed caught up in world politics, in such a way that it is not always clear whether they are the motivation or justification for intervention. Human rights are not a natural discourse that is above politics. It has been repeatedly pointed out that our current situation is a tautological one: human rights are for those who already hold them.<sup>41</sup> They thus appear empty, which means that, like old clothes, they are ours to give to those deprived of them.<sup>42</sup> This separates the human into two categories. On the one hand there are the saviours, those who hold (and have held since the emergence of the UDHR) the rights and are in a position to extend them. Their ownership of rights allows them to be aware of their violation, unlike the second category, the victims. Their position is circular: they do not own the rights, which means that they are neither human nor capable of recognizing what that means, and at the same time their humanity has been violated because they have not received their rights. To restore their humanity, the victims need to be made aware of the rights they have a right to, by those who are in a position to recognize and grant them.<sup>43</sup>

But not every victim seems eligible to receive these rights. Butler, in her inquiry into the post-9/11 discourse on humanity, separates the lives that are entitled to belong to 'humanity' from those that

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<sup>36</sup> Slaughter 2007, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Habermas, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Slaughter 2007, 15.

<sup>39</sup> David Holloway, "The War on Terror Espionage Thriller, and the Imperialism of Human Rights." *Comparative Literary Studies* 46.1 (2009). 41.

<sup>40</sup> Douzinas, 11-12.

<sup>41</sup> I point here to Jacques Rancière's discussion of, among others, Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Carl Schmitt, etc. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Steven Corcoran trans. London: Continuum, 2010. 72.

<sup>42</sup> Slaughter 2007, 314.

<sup>43</sup> Douzinas, 69.

are not on the basis of being 'grievable', that is, worth being mourned because they count as 'normatively human'.<sup>44</sup> It seems that the point of reference here is universal human rights discourse. Those from whom rights are withheld, who do not fit the "dominant frame for the human," are not considered to ever have been addressed by those rights in the first place. These are British historian Mark Curtis' "unpeople", "those whose lives are deemed worthless..."<sup>45</sup> They fit Giorgio Agamben's famous description of 'bare life' in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* as that of the person who may be killed but not sacrificed, meaning that, as a non-person, it exists outside the law and its murder cannot be called homicide.<sup>46</sup> This is a discursive difference, not a natural one. It is not the distinction between two groups of people but "how *the same* people can be treated."<sup>47</sup> as humans or non-humans. As Butler has argued, what makes us commonly human is our vulnerability, our dependence on one another. But in the case of non-humans, there is "no vulnerability that serves as the basis for an apprehension of our commonality..."<sup>48</sup> The 'unpeople' serve as the exception against which the rule is established;<sup>49</sup> the democratic, civilized human person is produced over and against those who do not enjoy these qualities.<sup>50</sup> They are the 'one use humans' who are the surplus to global capitalism's needs and "left to their 'natural' or 'man-made' fate from earthquakes and tsunamis, Aids and famines or, ethnic cleansing and small-scale genocides." "Individuals may be killed intentionally if their expected death is compensated by more than an equivalent expected increase in enjoyment of human rights."<sup>51</sup> The victims of human rights discourse are humans. The inclusion of diversity within a shared citizenship extends just so far the different 'other' does not challenge the social hierarchies. Looking at the UDHR with this limit in the back of the head, it seems that there is a division between acceptable and unacceptable difference that can be directly extracted from the document itself, although it is unclear where the dividing line lies. Whereas article 2 sums up a list of 'allowed' differences in terms of religion, nationality, opinion, social status and more, article 29 limits this to what falls inside "the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare." What these terms practically mean is unclear. The accepted range of diversity is thus normative: it "has helped classify traits and characteristics as right and wrong, normal and abnormal, and distribute people accordingly on a spectrum of power, domination and oppression."<sup>52</sup> Although the UDHR confirms the fact that there is a limit to having rights, it is not the UDHR itself that classifies these traits and characteristics. That is up to the way it is put into practice world-wide.

To understand the connection between the human and the citizen, it is important to understand the role of the public sphere. First, one needs to go back to the creation of the nation-state citizen as we know him. Social contract theory, as elaborated by eighteenth-century philosophers Kant, Locke, Hobbes, Hume and Rousseau, states that the citizen comes into being in the social contract, that is, the contract between the state and the human based on rights and duties for both. The divine right of the king was replaced by the natural rights of the people, who, in exchange for some of their 'natural' freedoms, were guaranteed their rights in the positive sense. Rousseau, here, detected a

<sup>44</sup> Butler 2004, xiv-xv, xx-xxi, 38; Slaughter 2007, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Mark Curtis, *Unpeople: Britain's Secret Human Rights Abuses*. London: Vintage, 2004. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Daniel Heller-Roazen trans. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. 12; 47.

<sup>47</sup> Žižek, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Butler 2004, 30, 36.

<sup>49</sup> Agamben, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Butler 2004, 91; Rorty; Žižek, 150.

<sup>51</sup> Douzinas, 100, 187.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, 43-44.

contradiction between man and citizen, the latter having been miserably tricked into surrendering his liberties to the rich and powerful.<sup>53</sup> He thus perceived of the social contract as an unfortunate removal from the human's natural, and free, state of being. However, writing two centuries later, Habermas has built more positively on the idea of the social contract with his public sphere theory. The public sphere, that used to be state-governed under the divine kings, was appropriated by the "public of private people" in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. People increasingly saw themselves as being naturally endowed with reason, and had started to perceive each other in a communal sense, recognizing each other's subjectivity and sensing an involvement with the collective well-being. They used the public sphere as a space of discussion (through direct and indirect communication) and as the source for the creation of laws and norms.<sup>54</sup> Behind this theory lies "Habermas' defence of "universalism" in ethical and political theory [that] stems from the possibility of rationally justifying individual belief as well as public consensus."<sup>55</sup> However, since Habermas, the concept of the public sphere has been taken out of its historical context and into current realities. Many have pointed out that the public sphere is only ideally a free and equal space, while in reality it produces a regulatory and hegemonic concept of the meaning of the individual and how he/she should live in society.<sup>56</sup> This is already paradoxically implied in Habermas' theory: if the public sphere is constituted by all people, those who do not belong to it are not people. That is what consensus means. As Jacques Rancière has argued in his philosophical inquiry into aesthetics and politics, consensus is defined by "preconditions that determine political choice as objective and univocal."<sup>57</sup> The political space is reduced to one specific lifestyle, with various peoples being reduced to a single people.<sup>58</sup> Politics are turned into policy. That means that some will fall outside of that space. Habermas' public sphere is one of such consensus. It is not open to all human beings; only as a full citizen with "minimal social, cultural, economic, discursive, and other resources of personality"<sup>59</sup> does one have access to the community of speech that is the public sphere. After all, as Habermas argued, individuals in the public sphere are bound together by both actual and imagined communication and one has to play by the discursive rules in order to belong. The limits that circumscribe the consensual community determine who falls outside of it.

The social contract, the power of the people and the role of fellow-feeling are all major anchor points of the historical human rights discussion. Above I discussed the discursive nature of the human in human rights discourse; the concept of the public sphere comes in useful because it sheds light on the complications of a utopian universal humanity that is open to everyone. The emergence of social contract theory and the increasing power of the people went hand in hand with the emergence of human rights discourse. In the first declarations of human rights, the connection between the citizen and the human is very visible, as both address the citizens of their own countries. The rise of the nation-state and nationalism enclosed the natural rights discussion within national frameworks. The concern for both creating and maintaining national homogeneity (that did not naturally exist) created a protective and closed atmosphere of nationalism. But as ethnicity and nationalism became more and more intertwined and culminated in the explosions called respectively the First and Second

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<sup>53</sup> Riley, 351, 353, 363, 365; Habermas, 97.

<sup>54</sup> Habermas, 27, 54.

<sup>55</sup> Borradori, 61.

<sup>56</sup> Slaughter 2007, 146-147; Borradori, 63.

<sup>57</sup> Rancière, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem, 72; Habermas, 189.

<sup>59</sup> Slaughter 2007, 154.

World War, the confidence in the modern nation was shattered. It was only then that the UDHR came into being,<sup>60</sup> and not without struggle. The failure of the League of Nations and initial opposition by both the United States and the former Soviet Union slowed the process down considerably.<sup>61</sup> The United Nations was finally formed as a transnational answer to the failures of the individual nation-states. In 1948, the UDHR was completed: human rights law had transcended its national boundaries in addressing a community called ‘humanity’.

Human rights discourse thus started with the rights of humans as a specific nation’s citizens, and expanded into the rights of citizens everywhere. The universal human rights order is international and extends beyond the nation-state: it makes the individual a world citizen.<sup>62</sup> But this kind of citizen, the human rights person (addressed by and entitled to human rights), is still the civil articulation of the natural human, only on a much larger scale than that of the nation. Benedict Anderson argued in his influential 1983 volume *Imagined Communities* that the nation-state was established by an imaginative connection between individuals that had never met. But he also mentioned that “... all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.”<sup>63</sup> Human rights discourse addresses humanity itself as such an imagined community. As noted in the connection between the public sphere and citizenship, the former is an important component in transforming the natural human into a rights-holding person. Slaughter has extended Habermas’ concept of the public sphere, arguing that it can be as narrow as one of humanity’s “legitimate” variations (i.e. the nation-state), but also as broad as humanity itself.<sup>64</sup> He is not the only one to recognize the broader potential of the public sphere. Rosanne Kennedy, who focuses on trauma and memory in a transnational context, has connected it to the human rights regime seen as a transnational network that presumes an international community that polices and responds to human rights.<sup>65</sup> “The drafters of the UDHR believed a functional public sphere to be such a powerful antidote to fascism, totalitarianism, and racism.”<sup>66</sup> But as critical theorist Nancy Fraser has pointed out in her compelling analysis of Habermas’ public sphere in the current day and age, the idea of a transnational public sphere poses problems. If the Habermasian public sphere functions as a space where fellow citizens establish the laws and norms of their social life by exercising their power to criticize the government, this cannot be realized on a global scale. There is no transnational government that can govern all these lives. If a public sphere is constituted by people who are all affected by its regulations, on a transnational scale, “the all-affected principle holds that what turns a collection of people into fellow members of a public is not shared citizenship, but their co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives.”<sup>67</sup> In the same

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<sup>60</sup> Hunt, 176, 184.

<sup>61</sup> The United States first opposed China’s suggestion that the charter include a statement on racial equality, but due to the pressure of minority organizations within the US and the urge of human rights attention in Latin-America and Asia, they finally gave in. The Soviet Union needed and received a guarantee that the charter would not intervene in its domestic affairs. Hunt, 200.

<sup>62</sup> Slaughter 2007, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London/New York: Verso, 2006 [1983], 6.

<sup>64</sup> Slaughter 2007, 159.

<sup>65</sup> Rosanne Kennedy, “Moving Testimony: Human Rights, Palestinian Memory, and the Transnational Public Sphere”, to appear in *Transnational Memory*, Chiara de Cesari & Ann Rigney eds. (forthcoming), 1.

<sup>66</sup> Slaughter 2007, 152.

<sup>67</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On The Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 24.2 (2007). 21.

vein, the influential French philosopher Jacques Derrida has argued that human rights law calls the “sovereign authority of the state” into question; its commitment to justice needs to address a human identity beyond citizenship.<sup>68</sup> Considering the limitations of the transnational public sphere in terms of citizenship and law, how is the human rights person then called into being?

Connecting Fraser’s all-affected principle to the UDHR that declares all people to be affected by it, I perceive of the UDHR as a structure that inhabits the transnational public sphere Fraser depicts. The UDHR poses itself as democratic, which means open to everyone. Democracy would be by definition the political space marked by what Rancière has called dissensus: “an activity that cuts across forms of cultural and identity belonging and hierarchies between discourses and genres, working to introduce new subjects and heterogeneous objects into the field of perception.”<sup>69</sup> The dissensual public space is thus the space where the people cannot be reduced to the population, or a certain form of identification and belonging.<sup>70</sup> However, as pointed out above, human rights, in their assumed consensus, form a tautology: the legal and the natural are moulded to become the same. The rights address those who already hold them. If our globalized world constitutes a transnational public sphere, it still needs limits that circumscribe it and make it a ‘consensual’ community, limits that determine who can act and who can speak.<sup>71</sup> So, in international law, too, “public spheres are transfigurative spaces of social reproduction inclined to perpetuate their own collective norms, personalities, and identitarian particularities.”<sup>72</sup> It follows that if a specific conception of the human is produced in the national public sphere, the same goes for a transnational one. Its regulation, as Fraser has pointed out, works differently than the public sphere on a national level. International human rights law is called ‘soft law’, meaning that its legal binding force (and, often, its executive organ) is absent or weaker than that of traditional law. Although the category of the human rights person is the socialized version of the individual, based on a similarity between people, the UDHR does not produce these persons “as legislators and adherents of its own laws,”<sup>73</sup> as is the case with Habermas’ public. There is no executive force other than a commonsensical, brotherly appeal, and the international law of the UN tribunal, as Habermas has argued recently, is too “dependent on the willingness of the great powers to cooperate.”<sup>74</sup> However, the commonsensical nature of the UDHR – that is, its assuming “the primary existence of what it seeks to articulate”<sup>75</sup> - receives its meaning from culture. Human rights, although their aspiration is universal, are still the rights of citizens in a nation-state that promises to protect them<sup>76</sup> and through which they can be reabsorbed into universal humanity.<sup>77</sup> “Morality and the natural entitlements of humanity” do not constitute rights, only “moral claims that may or may not be granted by the sovereign, who is still the only power recognizing and enforcing rights.”<sup>78</sup> The transnational public sphere to which the UDHR belongs defines what rights constitute the human, but cannot grant these rights. And even though one can appeal to European law, its power structure limits the effectiveness that exists in national law.

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<sup>68</sup> Borradori, 130, 163.

<sup>69</sup> Rancière, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Ibidem, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Butler 2004, xiv-xvii.

<sup>72</sup> Slaughter 2007, 162.

<sup>73</sup> Slaughter 2007, 71, 48, 58, 71; Douzinas, 24.

<sup>74</sup> Borradori, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Slaughter 2007, 79.

<sup>76</sup> Agamben, 75; Slaughter 2007, 89; Douzinas, 24.

<sup>77</sup> Slaughter 2007, 92.

<sup>78</sup> Douzinas, 173.

After 9/11 the issue of who does and who does not count as human became even more poignant in the face of global terrorism. Both Rancière and Butler, among others, have detected a heightened nationalist discourse in post-9/11 United States that reinforces this process.<sup>79</sup> The “either you’re with us or you’re with the terrorists” discourse divided West from East and the civilized humans from the barbaric non-humans.<sup>80</sup> It made abundantly clear that our globalized world is still governed by local perspectives. Globalization has been described as a process of world-compression or “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”<sup>81</sup> This definition suggests no hierarchy between these ‘distant localities’. However, the war on terror has shown otherwise. The collapse of the Twin Towers became the start of a new narrative with the West and its freedom as the protagonist, victimized by an evil inhuman force.<sup>82</sup> It left the West to claim the right to script international law, to decide over war and peace, justice and injustice, humanity and inhumanity, life and death. Costas Douzinas, who pioneers the discussion of the relation between human rights and empire, has described human rights discourse as a new world order in which “the West assumes that its wealth, power and assurance bestow a normative authority that discounts alternative views.” “To paraphrase Nietzsche, if God, the source of natural law, is dead, he has been replaced by international law.” Human rights discourse has become a weapon in waging the war on terror and legitimizing governmental actions.<sup>83</sup> This kind of West-centred ‘rights’ narrative is oblivious to the conditions that created global terrorism, namely US imperialism and foreign policy.<sup>84</sup> As Butler has pointed out, a narrative that situates agency and responsibility is more engaging than one that scatters it. Classically, war is understood to be between two identifiable parties, with a known enemy and a clear cause. The idea of a global network of terrorism not only makes the enemy unidentifiable, it also suggests a broader explanation of events, which is troubling. However, a misreading of the way in which each life is implicated in that of others risks missing the right solutions.<sup>85</sup> As Hunt has pointed out, even terrorists are people, and there has to be a way to deal with them: “we can neither tolerate nor dehumanize them.”<sup>86</sup> Thinking in metaphysical terms of good and evil, or human and inhuman, forecloses any global responsibility for the events, thus also a global solution, while that is precisely what is needed.

Taking into consideration that the definition of the human is discursive and depends on unequal global power from a local perspective, broadening the definition of humanity to include everyone becomes complicated. “How can respect for the inviolability of human dignity ... be kept alive in the face of growing and disarming systematic strains on the social integration of our political communities?”<sup>87</sup> In order to achieve this, one must be critical and recognize that any view that claims to be global is in fact always from somewhere, which means positioned and partial. For the war on terror, as Butler has suggested, this means an openness to a narration that might decentre Western supremacy, such as a story in which 9/11 is not the beginning. Instead of a return to nationalism,

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<sup>79</sup> Butler 2004, xi; Simpson, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Butler 2004; 2.

<sup>81</sup> Suman Gupta, *Globalization and Literature*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009. 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> Rancière, 103.

<sup>83</sup> Douzinas, 225, 24, 66, 182.

<sup>84</sup> Butler 2004, 3-11; Žižek 42.

<sup>85</sup> Butler 2004, 3-18; xi.

<sup>86</sup> Hunt, 213.

<sup>87</sup> Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 23.

Butler has argued that a redefinition of US globalism is called for in a globalized world where everyone inevitably depends on anonymous others and has to work with this. Recognizing another's vulnerability in an ethical encounter brings that great 'Other', as someone who seemed radically different, into being as human. This would widen the conception of a global community. For a more critical perspective one would have to escape Rancière's consensual 'democracy', based on exclusion. Instead, the world needs to "come to terms with the heterogeneity of human values."<sup>88</sup> I perceive this kind of attitude as an ethical complement to globalization and as resembling what philosopher Kwame Appiah, with his interest in politics and morality, has called cosmopolitanism:<sup>89</sup> "the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship."<sup>90</sup> This includes a consideration of universality as well as a respect for difference and particularity. There should be some commonality in the vocabulary of values in this shared world which prevents the relativist idea of separate islands that cannot communicate, but that does not mean that all will come to an agreement.<sup>91</sup> The cosmopolitan attitude in individuals is needed in order to imagine the universal community necessary to achieve the reality of universal human rights. Appiah has pointed out that "humanity isn't, in the relevant sense, an identity at all," but one can still care about the others one hears about and begin to see them as similar. And even though "toleration requires a concept of the *intolerable*"<sup>92</sup>, limits can still keep expanding. The other is never fully there to grasp, but "I am always with the other, my being is a being together, exposed to the singularity of the other and to otherness." In cosmopolitanism, each singular individual is a cosmos, "a universe of unique meanings and values."<sup>93</sup> As long as the human as an existing category does not have a universal reach, human rights needs to reconceive its definition.<sup>94</sup>

In order for this to be achieved, a more planetary response than international law, still "anchored in the nineteenth-century model of the nation-state,"<sup>95</sup> is needed. I use 'planetary' here instead of 'global' because, as Gayatri Spivak has famously argued in *Death of a Discipline*, the latter implies capitalist domination of the 'centre' over the 'periphery'. Planetary, in contrast, could enable us to think of a pre-capitalist world, and to rethink capitalist borders. "The collectivity that is presumed to be the condition and effect of humanism is the human family itself."<sup>96</sup> Habermas and Derrida, in their post-9/11 discussion on terrorism edited by Giovanna Borradori, have called for a more cosmopolitan order as well, where transnational public powers and alliances become the chief actors.<sup>97</sup> This argument can be aligned with Fraser's idea of the efficacy of the public sphere in a transnational world. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai already starts to inquire into the possibility of a less Western-centred transnational attitude in the 1990's. He speaks of '-scapes' (such as ideoscapes and mediascapes), landscapes that transgress traditional borders. These transnational social forms may generate post-national spaces and organizations, where diversity can be tolerated where it cannot in

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<sup>88</sup> Butler 2004, xii, 27, 42-44, 90.

<sup>89</sup> Douzinas, 134-135.

<sup>90</sup> Appiah, xiii.

<sup>91</sup> Ibidem, 30-31, 57.

<sup>92</sup> Ibidem, 98, 144.

<sup>93</sup> Douzinas, 294.

<sup>94</sup> Butler 2004, 91.

<sup>95</sup> Borradori, xiv.

<sup>96</sup> Spivak, 27.

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem, xiv; Fraser, 23.

the nation-state (because of its demand for homogeneity, narrative consensus and simultaneity).<sup>98</sup> As Fraser puts it; “if public sphere theory is to function today as a *critical* theory, it must revise its accounts of the normative legitimacy and political efficacy of public opinion.”<sup>99</sup> In order for universal human rights laws to work, and as long as there is no “constitutional frame for an emerging multicultural world society,”<sup>100</sup> it needs a critical public sphere. What follows from combining the above mentioned perspectives is that the cosmopolitan attitude could help individuals reorganize themselves in a transnational public sphere that is critical of local claims to a universal perspective, without losing sight of the fact that globalization has erased the borders that were believed to be set.

“To be human is to be intended toward the other” and “we are looking for our definition in the eyes of the other,”<sup>101</sup> Spivak has written. We, as humans, exist in collectivity only, but this collectivity is unstable. If imagining and constituting a world community, as broad as humanity itself, is necessary for the UDHR to fulfill its promise, the UDHR needs help. After all, the document itself represents moral obligations for the human community rather than an enforcement mechanism – as Hunt has pointed out, it would perhaps never have passed if it did. The rise in the 1980’s of NGOs, who based their programs on the UDHR,<sup>102</sup> represents the concern with the executive side of human rights law and its transnationality in an age of globalization. Amnesty International is an example of a multinational organization with a new form, “more diverse, more fluid, more ad hoc, more provisional, less coherent, less organized, and simply less implicated in the advantages of the nation-state.”<sup>103</sup> It can thus be seen to answer to the above mentioned calls for a more transnational approach to the world and humanity. Amnesty recognizes the importance of a world community to be imagined. But how will it start imagining this if the conditions for this community are so determined by localized power and national discourse?

This is where the empathic conditions of human right discourse might provide help. Appiah has argued, in line with Rorty, that understanding other values (or the way the content of values is filled in) has less to do with reasoned arguments than with imaginative engagement leading to empathy.<sup>104</sup> And even if this does not mean that consensus will be reached (after all, as Rancière has pointed out, this is not possible without excluding), “it helps people get used to one another.”<sup>105</sup> Although the UDHR is more easily endorsed than enforced, Amnesty believes in the power of empathy to create understanding that is needed for action in favour of human rights’ universality. Hunt has pointed out that if an imagined community is the basis of nationalism,<sup>106</sup> imagined empathy is the foundation of human rights. It was empathy that finally allowed proponents of human rights to include categories of what used to be bare life, excluded because of their alleged lack of moral autonomy and other human qualities.<sup>107</sup> Of course, these categories had to make themselves visible first; Rancière has argued that the staging of dissensus demonstrated that bare life could be political too. For example,

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<sup>98</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. 36, 177.

<sup>99</sup> Fraser, 24.

<sup>100</sup> Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 28

<sup>101</sup> Spivak, 73, 25.

<sup>102</sup> Hunt, 204, 207.

<sup>103</sup> Appadurai, 168.

<sup>104</sup> Appiah, 67; 81; 85.

<sup>105</sup> Ibidem, 85.

<sup>106</sup> Anderson, 6.

<sup>107</sup> Hunt, 32, 28-29.

women during the French revolution could be sentenced to death for opposing the Revolution, meaning that, on the scaffold, they were equal to men. Through their protest, they demonstrated their political capacity, thus including themselves into the realm of the rights-owning citizen<sup>108</sup> and consequently the human. Perhaps other marginal categories, especially those with values that supposedly conflict with that of the UDHR, could obtain the same goal. Amnesty relies on the power of stories to achieve the inclusion of hitherto marginalized humans. Stories might generate the empathy, tolerance and understanding that are necessary to broaden our framework around who are believed to deserve human rights. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the human that literature and reading could produce.

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<sup>108</sup> Rancière, 68-69.

## 2.The literary human: the singular universal

In invoking Desmond Tutu, a member of the South-African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Amnesty International presents itself as a transnational TRC, as it were, meant to give a voice to the unheard. The TRC relied largely on the function of the public sphere as a space where people could appropriate their voice through narration and could thus become the socialized version of themselves, able to participate in political life and exercise influence on the practice of law. It has been argued that stories can help judge the necessity for action, or to think about analogous situations. They may resist the domination of a certain ideology, bear witness to “unfinished business agenda’s,” give names to the nameless deaths in the media and complement or subvert the official version of a story where certain perspectives have been left out.<sup>109</sup> David Simpson, distinguished professor of English, has pointed out in his recent book *9/11: the Culture of Commemoration* that the fictional representation of human lives “is proposed as the key resource in a revitalized humanities education and able, at least potentially, to keep us from falling into the worst failures of imagination, those suppressing the dignity and vulnerability of others.”<sup>110</sup> In the discussion about ethics is where I will proceed to connect literature and human rights discourse. Literature can be seen to be able to cultivate “compassionate identification” with others, this compassion being the “ingredient of an adequate ethical personality.”<sup>111</sup> Butler has discussed this identification as an ethical mode of addressing and being addressed, “a mode of response that follows upon having been addressed, a comportment toward the Other only after the Other has made a demand upon me, accused me of a failing, or asked me to assume a responsibility.”<sup>112</sup> Habermas has recently described this kind of communication as a hermeneutic effort to induce “mutual perspective taking.”<sup>113</sup> The academic attitude toward literature, as many critics have pointed out, has also become increasingly ethical. The ‘ethical turn’ of the 1990’s saw a demise of grand theory and its critical deconstructivism, that were accused of being nihilistic and politically impotent. The emphasis turned to the human and “a concern with doing (and being) good.”<sup>114</sup> Literary scholar David Damrosch, who pioneers the recent world literature discussion, has argued that literature is about conversation, whether social or aesthetic.<sup>115</sup> Judging from these developments, the importance of communication, of discussion, in an ethical attitude towards others in a world community of human rights seems to be one of the major factors of that same attitude in the world of letters.

The connection between narrative and the influence of people through the public sphere has existed, many argue, since that influence began to increase. The generality of the abstract legal norms produced by the public, Habermas has argued, “had to have a peculiar obviousness for privatized individuals who, by communicating with each other in the public sphere of the world of letters, confirmed each other’s subjectivity as it emerged from their spheres of intimacy.”<sup>116</sup> Habermas thus

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<sup>109</sup> Butler 2004, 34; Gready, 162; Kennedy; Rancière, 133; Kay Schaffer & Sidonie Smith, “Life Narrative in the Field of Human Rights”, *Biography* 27.1 (2004). 4-5; Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007. 1-23

<sup>110</sup> Simpson, 126.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*, 125-126.

<sup>112</sup> Butler 2004, 129-131.

<sup>113</sup> Borradori, 37.

<sup>114</sup> Michael S. Roth & Charles G. Salas eds., *Disturbing Remains: Memory, History, and Crisis in the Twentieth Century*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001. 2

<sup>115</sup> Damrosch 142.

<sup>116</sup> Habermas, 54.

presents the literary world (together with print press) as generating a sense of common humanity within the newly emerged public sphere: it identified the citizen with the human being, and thus institutionalized the ‘fictitious identity’ of the public person.<sup>117</sup> The connection between the print press and the emergence of the modern nation-state has also been famously made by Anderson, who argued that the nation is a community imagined as “inherently limited and sovereign.” This imagining is in part constituted by the emergence of novels and newspapers, that created the fiction of simultaneity in time and space among people who had never seen each other.<sup>118</sup> As Habermas argued, public debate between these persons was supposed to create consensus as to what was in the interest of all – ‘all’ meaning all citizens, not humans, although all humans were supposed to be able to become citizens.<sup>119</sup> The individual can assume his socialized form through storytelling, voicing his critique, thus appropriating his place in the public sphere and providing a corrective to the government.<sup>120</sup>

This link between the public sphere and narration can also be connected to the emergence of human rights discourse. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Lynn Hunt has identified imagined empathy as the foundation of human rights. Empathy is developed through social interaction; the emergence of the novel in the 18<sup>th</sup> century expanded this interaction. As the number of novels and the range of literacy increased throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, people started to read across social boundaries. ‘Equality’ received a new meaning. Empathy’s boundaries started to expand, from the family and the church community to imagined others. The novel’s effect worked through involving the literate masses directly in a narrative about common people, rather than moralizing explicitly. As Hunt has argued, “the valorization of ordinary secular life” became “the foundation for morality,”<sup>121</sup> rather than some divine judgment, ready to be imposed. Slaughter, too, has discussed the emergence of the novel as part of human rights discourse’s emergence, especially in relation to the UDHR. During the UN drafting of the document, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, by some considered to be the first novel, was used as an illustration of the fact that “man could not live and develop his personality *without* the aid of society”<sup>122</sup> (referring to the tools Crusoe retrieved from the shipwreck). To Slaughter, the *Bildungsroman* and the UDHR have the same premise, that is, the social part of the individual. Stories thus represent the social connections between privatized individuals. Having considered all of the developments around human rights and the public sphere discussed above, I have identified two major aspects of the communicative power of literature: the fact that it provides stories *from* the realm of the other, and the fact that it is addressed *to* others. I will now further elaborate on the complicated balance between ‘addressing’ and ‘being addressed’.

In order to define this balance, literary scholar Derek Attridge’s convincingly written *The Singularity of Literature* proves helpful, as its attitude towards the communicative nature of literature matches that of human rights discourse, although not explicitly. In this book, Attridge explores the conditions of literature’s efficacy as a mode of communication between otherwise inaccessible others.<sup>123</sup> He has

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<sup>117</sup> Ibidem, 177, 56.

<sup>118</sup> Anderson, 6;25. 36.

<sup>119</sup> Habermas, 83, 85, 87.

<sup>120</sup> Joseph R. Slaughter, “A Question of Narration: The Voice in International Human Rights Law”. *Human Rights Quarterly* 19.2 (1997). 411.

<sup>121</sup> Hunt, 32, 39, 40, 38, 57.

<sup>122</sup> Slaughter 2007, 48; 156.

<sup>123</sup> Attridge, 7-8.

recognized that, if 'literature' is not clearly defined, that which it brings into existence is not uncomplicated either. Literature is not a means to communicate between two positions defined in advance. In this globalized world, literature is no longer the product of separate, static nations or cultures.<sup>124</sup> And perhaps it has never really been that. Critics have recognized widely that culture cannot be adequately described as a pre-existing and static set of values and practices belonging to a homogeneous population. Instead, it is always in the process of being made as it is lived.<sup>125</sup> Attridge departs from this assumption and employs the existing notion of 'the Other' to describe the literary work as that which comes into existence relationally as 'other to' the self, rather than being already there. The 'Other' and the 'Same' are thus constituted in the process of communication itself. Attridge identifies two seemingly contesting properties to this communication: universality and singularity.<sup>126</sup> Literature's singularity lies in its creation, the making of otherness, something "outside the horizon provided by the culture for thinking, understanding, imagining, feeling, perceiving."<sup>127</sup> At the same time, singularity is relational and lies in the work's reception.<sup>128</sup> Like each person, each literary work has a singular idioculture, that is, the "embodiment in a single individual of widespread cultural norms and modes of behavior."<sup>129</sup> Attridge argues that literature calls for a "readiness to respond to the work's distinctive utterance."<sup>130</sup> This means that the idioculture of both the work and the reader, the other and the self, are constituted in the process of reading.<sup>131</sup> Literary reading is creative in the sense that it calls for an adjustment of the framework of reception, a refashioning of "the existing norms whereby we understand persons as a category."<sup>132</sup> The other then comes into being as something that, or someone who, was historically occluded.<sup>133</sup> In the moment of identification of the self with that other, however, the other still resists complete absorption. Literary reading thus relies both on recognition and strangeness. The work's singularity contributes creatively to the reader's thinking and feeling, and in this process it produces intimacy, for that which was other can be now apprehended.<sup>134</sup> Attridge defines this intimate relation as an ethical one, meaning that the other arouses a sense of responsibility to and for him, without any explicit moralizing that would transform recognition into domination.<sup>135</sup> In short: the literary work as the demand of the other is "a call, a challenge, an obligation: understand how little you understand me, translate my untranslatability, learn me by heart and thus learn the otherness that inhabits the heart."<sup>136</sup> "The other' comes into the humanly constituted and constituting cultural sphere and changes it."<sup>137</sup>

The efficacy of the literary work thus lies in its 'singular universalism': its singularity allows it to shift existing frames, making it a carrier of universality.<sup>138</sup> It corrects both the fetishization of difference<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Attridge, 6.

<sup>125</sup> Appadurai, 12; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. 1-2.

<sup>126</sup> Attridge, 13. All following pages are from this publication, unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>127</sup> 19.

<sup>128</sup> 67.

<sup>129</sup> 22.

<sup>130</sup> 9.

<sup>131</sup> 24, 29, 53.

<sup>132</sup> 34.

<sup>133</sup> 36. Following Attridge, I will continue to use a lower case o rather than the capital O when speaking of the other, because of the specific connotations Attridge's work provides it with.

<sup>134</sup> 70, 76, 78.

<sup>135</sup> 133, 126.

<sup>136</sup> 131

<sup>137</sup> 135.

<sup>138</sup> Apter, 86.

and the fiction of sameness. Following up on the first chapter, Attridge's description of 'otherness' and 'singularity' seems to fit into a broader framework than that of mere aesthetics, although he suggests otherwise. In fact, although he particularly objects to appointing a certain broader purpose to literature, he provides a fruitful opening to begin seeing the role of literature in a broader discussion about humanity. Attridge's attitude towards literature resembles the famous post-colonial studies scholar Homi Bhabha's much quoted idea of 'newness' that enters the world through cultural translation in an encounter between cultures.<sup>140</sup> This idea of literature and ethical reading fits the influential scholar Edward Said's global humanism:

...humanism is about reading, it is about perspective, and ... it is about transitions from ... one area of human experience to another. It is also about the practice of identities other than those given by the flag or the national war of the moment. The deployment of an alternative identity is what we do when we read and we connect parts of the text to other parts and when we go on to expand the area of attention to include widening circles of pertinence.<sup>141</sup>

This kind of humanism is connected to what Hunt calls empathy and avoids clear-set "misleading cartographic divisions between European and non-European culture" and "totalizing interpretations that lend themselves to hegemonic application."<sup>142</sup> Considering my earlier discussion of global ethics, it also fits the cosmopolitan idea of a transnational world in which borders and differences are not purely national or otherwise clearly set.<sup>143</sup> Appiah has pointed out that respect for universality and particularity may clash – but whether one agrees or disagrees with the other, "if it is what you both want, you can make sense of each other in the end."<sup>144</sup> That is what Said imagined for the reader-text relation as well: a "sympathetic dialogue of two spirits across ages and cultures who are able to communicate with each other as friendly respectful intelligences trying to understand each other from the other's perspective."<sup>145</sup> The points of entry in this cross-cultural conversation are the similarities between the ones involved, rather than universal traits.<sup>146</sup> But how can one work with such a 'borderless' literary world, where the grounds of comparison are so unclear in the uncertain balance between universality and singularity? Who are being connected, if not fellow citizens, and how, if not based on national or cultural commonality? What is the balance between the cosmopolitan identities that globalization makes possible, and alternative reactions to and visions of globalization from "non-elite localized and marginal identities"?<sup>147</sup> To try and answer these questions, the idea of world literature, that has recently been resurrected from its 19<sup>th</sup>-century origin, proves helpful.

Damrosch has discussed world literature as having a multifold definition. First, it encompasses "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language."<sup>148</sup> Since the 1990's and the collapse of the Soviet Union, more and more non-Western literature has been entering the world and has thus shaken the Western masterpiece-organization of

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<sup>139</sup> Ibidem, 90.

<sup>140</sup> Bhabha, 7.

<sup>141</sup> Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. 80.

<sup>142</sup> Apter, 80.

<sup>143</sup> Appadurai, 16.

<sup>144</sup> Appiah, xiii, 99.

<sup>145</sup> Said, 91-92.

<sup>146</sup> Appiah, 97.

<sup>147</sup> Gupta, 95.

<sup>148</sup> Damrosch, 4. All following pages are from this publication, unless mentioned otherwise.

world literature.<sup>149</sup> Its current form, however, is not clear. At the same time, therefore, Damrosch proposes world literature as a mode of circulation and a way of reading *as* literature that crosses borders. “A literary work *manifests* differently abroad than it does at home” and thus retains its vitality.<sup>150</sup> A work of world literature gives the reader a feeling of similarity (that is either found or projected on it) but at the same time that which is like-but-unlike – “the sort of relation most likely to make a productive change in our own perceptions and practices.”<sup>151</sup> This latter dimension can be seen to resemble that which Attridge calls the ‘singular universal’. The work is both “locally inflected and translocally mobile” and thus “cease[s] t be the exclusive product of [its] own culture...”<sup>152</sup> It begins a new life once it is framed within a new language (translation) and context (transculturation).<sup>153</sup> Where Franco Moretti, in his much lauded and much criticized definition of world literature, suggests a comparatism based on global waves of transformation,<sup>154</sup> Damrosch is attentive to the text’s singularity – “individual cultures only partly lend themselves to analysis of common global patterns.” Now, he wonders, “how to mediate between broad, but often reductive, overviews and intensive, but often atomistic, close readings?”<sup>155</sup> Both Attridge and Damrosch seem to be caught up with the balance between the universal and the particular. What framework can encompass *all* literature without erasing difference?<sup>156</sup>

Damrosch remarks that an understanding of the social and cultural context, as well as of the aesthetic effect of a work, may be mutually enlightening. World literature constructions have always been about a “mixture of public concern and private pleasure.”<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, a reading of world literature should take into account “the values of the originary culture as well as the values of the receiving culture.”<sup>158</sup> Damrosch argues that “world literature has oscillated between ... assimilation and discontinuity: either the earlier and distant works reflect a consciousness *just like ours*, or they are unutterably alien, curiosities whose foreignness ... can only reinforce our sense of separate identity.” But instead of having readers choose between a self-centred idea of the world and a decentred one, Damrosch proposes that one should accept one’s own inevitable view, while also accepting the view of the work. Reading should be in the “field of force generated between these two foci.”<sup>159</sup> “The issue is to stay alive to the works’ real difference from us without trapping them within their original context or subordinating them entirely to our own immediate moment and needs.”<sup>160</sup> Gayatri Spivak, similarly, has introduced the idea of *teleopoiesis*: grafting other cultural mind-sets onto the dominant global capitalist Western ideology, in order to subvert it. What is susceptible to *teleopoiesis* is generalizable, but there are different ways to imagine the other and to let yourself be imagined.<sup>161</sup> As Damrosch has argued, literature’s universalism is then not some

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<sup>149</sup> 128-131.

<sup>150</sup> 5-7.

<sup>151</sup> 11-12.

<sup>152</sup> 21-22.

<sup>153</sup> 24.

<sup>154</sup> Moretti, 30.

<sup>155</sup> 26.

<sup>156</sup> 111.

<sup>157</sup> 85, 139, 118.

<sup>158</sup> 126.

<sup>159</sup> 133.

<sup>160</sup> 135.

<sup>161</sup> Spivak, 31.

essential property, but its efficacy in the world.<sup>162</sup> It must be recognized, as the feminist scholar Donna Haraway has argued, that each person is bound by one's own situation. She insists on being attentive to the agency of the objects one studies, as well as one's own. This calls for neither relativism (vision from nowhere) nor totalization (vision from everywhere). Instead, everyone has a limited location, accountability and partial vision. "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original: it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another."<sup>163</sup> Departing from the theories mentioned above, world literature seems to reveal something about both the self and the other which goes beyond the singular encounter of the reader and the work (as in Attridge's theory). As Bhabha has argued: "the study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness'."<sup>164</sup>

The balance between the universal and the particular can be exemplified by Attridge's idea of 'translating the untranslatable'. Translation is the welcoming of the other as 'same', while respecting its otherness and its singularity.<sup>165</sup> As the controversial philosopher Slavoj Žižek has argued, interestingly enough in a collection of essays that reacts to a post-9/11 worldview: "instead of imposing our notion of universality (universal human rights, etc.), universality – the shared space of understanding between different cultures – should be conceived of as an infinite task of translation, a constant reworking of one's own particular position."<sup>166</sup> Note that Žižek connects the field of culture and language to human rights discourse, as I will proceed to do throughout this chapter. Emily Apter, in her influential *The Translation Zone*, has called the condition identified by Žižek one of perpetual 'in-translation' and relates it to the Saidian transnational humanism discussed above.

Cast as an act of love, and as an act of disruption, translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual, and pre-given domestic arrangements.<sup>167</sup>

The act of translation thus says something about the translated as well as about the destination of the translation. In a similar vein, Damrosch has argued that translation is always a negotiation between the sending and the receiving culture; the receiving culture must recognize a similarity between itself and the other, while something specific or singularly other remains in the work.<sup>168</sup> Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti calls this the 'remainder': when a translation introduces "a domestic difference... into values and institutions at home."<sup>169</sup> This difference can provide insights into those values and institutions at home as well as those of the source culture. Translations thus communicate insights into differences and similarity. It is no wonder, then, that to Damrosch, world literature is literature that gains in translation. "In an excellent translation, the result is not the loss of an unmediated original vision but instead a heightening of the naturally creative interaction of

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<sup>162</sup> Damrosch, 137.

<sup>163</sup> Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges". *Feminist Studies* 13 (1988). 586.

<sup>164</sup> Bhabha, 12.

<sup>165</sup> Attridge, 74.

<sup>166</sup> Žižek, 66.

<sup>167</sup> Apter, 6-7.

<sup>168</sup> Damrosch, 167, 159, 187.

<sup>169</sup> Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia". *The Translation Studies Reader*, Lawrence Venuti ed. London: Routledge, 2002. 469.

UNESCO Charter of the Book, 1972

1. Everyone has the right to read.
2. Books are essential to education.
3. Society has a special obligation to establish the conditions in which authors can exercise their creative role
4. A sound publishing industry is essential to national development.
5. Book manufacturing facilities are necessary to the development of publishing.
6. Booksellers provide a fundamental service as a link between publishers and the reading public.
7. Libraries are national resources for the transfer of information and knowledge, for the enjoyment of wisdom and beauty.
8. Documentation serves books by preserving and making available essential background material.
9. The free flow of books between countries is an essential supplement to national supplies and promotes international understanding.
10. Books serve international understanding and peaceful cooperation.

reader and text.”<sup>170</sup> After all, “to use translation means to accept the reality that texts come to us mediated by existing frameworks of reception and interpretation.”<sup>171</sup> Instead of denouncing this mediation, one should accept it while simultaneously letting it expand one’s familiar frameworks of reception.

What strikes most about these discussions of literature’s universality and singularity, is that crossing borders between humans invariably tends to be seen as an inherent quality of literature. In this sense, literature is construed as intrinsically connected to universal human rights discourse. UNESCO also seems to have recognized this connection. As a UN agency it tries to contribute to universal peace and justice by promoting transnational collaboration in

various fields, including culture. In this capacity it drafted the Charter of the Book in 1972.<sup>172</sup> This presents literature in the discourse of human rights: everyone has the right to read and be read, and this right will serve to promote understanding across borders and international peace. Books are presented as the primary way of transnational communication that can ultimately fulfil the goals of the UDHR.

This may explain why Amnesty International uses literature to reach a transnational public. It is not uncommon for NGOs to use stories, framing them within the field of human rights, in order to broaden perspectives on who may be included within our conception of the human and his rights. Since the 1990’s, personal narratives have been increasingly used in human rights campaigns to generate awareness and empowerment.<sup>173</sup> Although literature has been connected to the emergence of national identity (see Anderson), national histories have always intertwined. It is now recognized that no national identity emerged in isolation, but always in contact with and by way of the exclusion of others. Contesting stories from the same space and time bear witness to this entanglement. The world of letters, I venture to argue, may thus be the primary space for the emergence of a transnational idea of the human. The power of stories in connecting individuals across borders and on premises other than nationality or culture has been broadly theorized. Literary theory has emphasized “literature’s lack of fixed borders, its malleability, its adaptability, its lack of place, and its unbounded capacity for assimilation.”<sup>174</sup> Appiah has identified story-telling as a universal trait of human communities. He attributes to it the power of humans to “align our responses to the world,” which in turn is “one of the ways we maintain the social fabric, the texture

<sup>170</sup> Damrosch, 292.

<sup>171</sup> Ibidem, 295.

<sup>172</sup> Slaughter 2007, 270.

<sup>173</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 5, 15.

<sup>174</sup> Natali, 178.

of our relationships.”<sup>175</sup> That which the French literary critic Pascale Casanova has called “the world republic of letters” comes in helpful to discuss the way this world functions. Her ‘republic’ is a space where texts exist in relation to each other, a world existing in its own right, with its own history and economy, and its own laws.<sup>176</sup> Its borders are different from and more permeable than national borders, and it is governed by “textual autonomy in which texts discover order and relationality because they are “allowed to live freely.”<sup>177</sup> Although I believe this republic of letters to be more connected to the rest of the world than Casanova at times seems willing to acknowledge, I do agree with her that literature’s relationality across boundaries provides a different perspective on borders, and the crossing of them, from a purely political or economic one. Literary scholar Suman Gupta has connected globalization and literature on a more integrative level, that takes into account different perspectives but also acknowledges the interaction between them. He discusses Appadurai’s ‘–scapes’ (mentioned in the previous chapter) as texts, deforming and constituting social processes in the globalized world.<sup>178</sup> For Appadurai, “the work of the imagination” is the “space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern.”<sup>179</sup> Amnesty can be seen to use the world of letters as a transnational public sphere to ensure the visibility of every human and his perspective, a public sphere that, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the UDHR needs in order to be effective.

However, if Amnesty’s literature project poses itself as part of a transnational public sphere, one cannot forget Nancy Fraser’s scepticism regarding the transnational public sphere’s efficacy. Furthermore, its regulatory function may endanger the openness to otherness that is necessary for a ‘responsible’ reading (as identified by Attridge and Damrosch). After all, as discussed in the previous chapter, the so-called universal access to the public sphere is still regulated by norms and rules. What if the other’s particularity cannot fit this kind of universality? Habermas showed himself to be sceptical about the function of the public sphere in relation to the age of mass media. He detected “the disintegration of the public sphere in the world of letters.”<sup>180</sup> Participation has become so commercialized that there is no longer any real critical pressure coming from it.<sup>181</sup> The public sphere has therefore lost its political function and lacks the power of communication necessary to exercise criticism and shift its boundaries; it is regulatory, not critical.

Going back to Attridge, it seems that communication is also a problem in his theory. Like Habermas, Attridge refers to a fusion of horizons, as a singular response to singularity. To Attridge, the relation between the literary work and the reader is un-generalizable and unique:<sup>182</sup> “More specifically, a reading is a performance of the singularity and otherness of the writing that constitutes the work as it comes into being for a particular reader in a particular context.”<sup>183</sup> If the results of this encounter are entirely personal and unpredictable, literature’s larger function as an instrument in the public sphere of human rights is made impossible. It is therefore, perhaps, that Attridge has denounced the instrumentalization of literature, its mobilization in order to obtain a certain goal.

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<sup>175</sup> Appiah, 29.

<sup>176</sup> Casanova, 5, 11.

<sup>177</sup> Apter, 64 (quoting Damrosch).

<sup>178</sup> Gupta, 88.

<sup>179</sup> Appadurai, 4.

<sup>180</sup> Habermas, 175.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibidem*, 169, 179.

<sup>182</sup> Attridge, 81-82.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibidem*, 87.

Instrumentalization “generalize[s] [literature’s] uniqueness and transform[s] its performativity into a static and therefore usable paradigm.”<sup>184</sup> The receiving frameworks are not shifted to do justice to a work’s singularity, but are regulatory and uncritical, precisely the opposite of what communication in the public sphere should ideally be.<sup>185</sup> The fine line between recognition and domination then risks being blurred. After all, as Attridge has argued, “the other is also vulnerable, in need of my protection.... Its power lies in its weakness. Literature ... can achieve nothing without its readers – responsible readers.”<sup>186</sup> This quote suggests a responsibility, but it is also quite patronizing; it is easy to overrule the vulnerable other (to whom Attridge refers with ‘it’, as if the other were inherently a powerless object) with the wrong, non-responsible intentions. This delicate balance between responsibility and mastery ties in with the balance between particularity and universality, that, to Attridge, cannot be possible within the instrumental use of literature that thwarts openness to literature’s otherness.

The danger of the instrumental use of literature has often been pointed out in relation to a distorted balance between universalism and specificity in the direction of the former. Damrosch has pointed to the fact that “globally directed works may be all too easy to understand,”<sup>187</sup> and do not challenge any existing presuppositions. Translation (or mistranslation, as Damrosch would call it) may accompany these problems by reinforcing a receiving country’s stereotypes of foreign cultures rather than broadening its framework of understanding.<sup>188</sup> A fundamental question lies at the basis of these fears: “Can expanding communication and interconnection open up a world of rich diversity, or will the result be a spreading *loss* of minority cultures and their languages, a ‘harrowing down’ that would leave only a commercialized global monoculture?”<sup>189</sup> The universal is then purely ideological,<sup>190</sup> “a cover for an unconscious process of assimilation to one’s own prior values,”<sup>191</sup> especially if knowledge of another culture is already limited. World literature theory was initially a response to the anxiety of incomparability. Incomparability can be a result of either too much emphasis on similarity, thus imposing a colonizing universalism, or too much emphasis on difference, rendering the basis of comparability and relationships between cultures problematic.<sup>192</sup> However, and despite all above mentioned authors’ careful attention to these issues, it still cannot seem to escape this tension. Damrosch argues that world literature depends only minimally on the awareness of a work’s original culture, and how much context is needed depends on the work and purpose of reading. As a work travels further, its national traces diffuse increasingly, and there is always a risk of “downplay[ing] the importance of what one doesn’t know” in a reading. Damrosch has argued that specialist knowledge can safeguard against the general “will to power.”<sup>193</sup> But the fact that he keeps switching between world literature as a body of work and as a normative concept gets him into trouble here; is world literature *recognized* or *defined* by a ‘good’ reading? Academic research may safeguard against the will to power, but this cannot be ensured in every random reading. Not every reader is what Attridge would call ‘responsible’. And who can judge how much context a book needs

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<sup>184</sup> Ibidem, 119.

<sup>185</sup> Ibidem, 83.

<sup>186</sup> Ibidem, 131.

<sup>187</sup> Damrosch, 18.

<sup>188</sup> Ibidem, 113.

<sup>189</sup> Damrosch, 121.

<sup>190</sup> Attridge, 12.

<sup>191</sup> Damrosch, 138.

<sup>192</sup> Gupta, 137-138.

<sup>193</sup> Damrosch, 139-140, 283, 285, 287.

in order to do it justice? Judging from the theories of Attridge and Damrosch, the balance between universality and particularity is difficult to maintain, and even though both try to emphasize the role of literature, it seems to ultimately depend on the expertise and attitude of the reader.

Another concern around the balance between literature's universality and singularity lies in the inequality of the world of letters. Like the UDHR, the Charter of the Book speaks of a world in which rights are universally and equally attainable. But like the UDHR, it finds itself in an unequal reality (which is why it needed to be drafted in the first place). Casanova discusses the world she has called 'republic' as having a centre and a periphery, rather than being equally open to everyone. Neither is it a realm "that exists outside of time and space and so escapes the mundane conflicts of human history."<sup>194</sup> National literatures rose with national rivalries, and although literature detached itself from its national authorities, it remains dependent upon world politics. Dominant cultural and economic forces are in control of what is considered to be literature. Peripheral writers gain immense profit from being received into the centre (through translation), which can be seen as evidence of a worldwide belief in the literary norms that the centre has established. These norms are invisible to the centre itself, which takes them for granted as natural.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, the centre controls what will and will not be translated and circulated.<sup>196</sup> As Venuti has argued, "... a very uneven pattern of the production of translations currently does much more to spread American culture abroad than to bring the world home to America."<sup>197</sup> The polyglots, cosmopolitans and translators who are responsible for exporting texts establish the values of these texts by virtue of their choices. "By rescuing texts from imprisonment within literary and linguistic boundaries, they lay down autonomous – that is, non-national, international – criteria of literary legitimacy."<sup>198</sup>

What, then, does the periphery need in order to enter the centre? A peripheral country can only be authorized and legitimized in the literary competition if it has a professional 'milieu' around literature: a good publishing industry, literary events and prizes, and media attention to literature (which are all dependent on a country's economy and politics). Paradoxically, this means it needs to have the literary capital it seeks to acquire.<sup>199</sup> Casanova has identified two strategies underlying "all struggles within national literary spaces:" assimilation "within a dominant literary space through a dilution or erasing of original differences" and differentiation "on the basis of a claim to national identity."<sup>200</sup> The latter will make it hard for the writer to gain access to world literary space. The former will make the work fall victim to what Casanova has called 'Parisianization' (Paris being her ultimate literary centre): "universalization through denial of difference." The centre's perspective, that is always *from somewhere*<sup>201</sup>, is here being mistaken for universality as that which is "acceptable and accessible to all". This entails a neglect of the work's specific context, making it impossible for the work to be fully appreciated<sup>202</sup> (both Damrosch's and Attridge's biggest fear) but the only alternative to not being read at all. Through transculturation, its sharp edges might be removed<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Casanova, 43.

<sup>195</sup> Ibidem, 37-39, 43.

<sup>196</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 11.

<sup>197</sup> Damrosch, 113.

<sup>198</sup> Casanova, 21-22.

<sup>199</sup> Ibidem, xii, 12, 15-17.

<sup>200</sup> Ibidem, 179, 180.

<sup>201</sup> Damrosch, 26-27.

<sup>202</sup> Casanova, 154.

<sup>203</sup> Damrosch, 24.

and it will become part of a world fiction with a tested aesthetic formula, or what Casanova has called ‘Nobel prize criteria’: universality, accessibility and non-exclusivity. Its “denationalized content can be absorbed without any risk of misunderstanding.”<sup>204</sup> She mentions some genres that blend within these works, such as the detective, the adventure story, the love story and the travel narrative.<sup>205</sup> The foreign “is reduced to an exotic version of our own,” which “enrich[es] Western culture but depress[es] the variety and originality of the local literary cultures elsewhere.”<sup>206</sup> Furthermore, Casanova finds literature from impoverished literary spaces to be governed by politics and realism – the autonomy of literary countries is thus marked by depoliticized and non-instrumental, ‘pure’ literature.<sup>207</sup>

Following up on the theories of Damrosch, Attridge and Casanova, I take into consideration both the risk of an imbalance between universalism and particularity and the inequality of the world of letters in relation to Amnesty International. After all, Amnesty uses literature for a goal, namely to engage readers in a particular way. Its use of literature may be described as an “activist framing” that “may enfold the narrative within the individualist, humanist, and secular frameworks of Western rights.”<sup>208</sup> As a European-based NGO it also occupies its space in the world’s power structure. Its choice of literature reflects what it values as a story that might expand human rights’ reach; its selection and framing of the stories shapes their meaning.<sup>209</sup> I argued before that Amnesty seems to position itself as a transnational TRC. But, as Paul Gready, academic, ex-Amnesty employee and Director of the Centre for Applied Human Rights at the University of York, has argued, truth commissions “provide a moderated, relativistic truth with which everyone can agree”. There are rules about “inclusion and managing difference.”<sup>210</sup> Individual expression - what the TRC called “personal narrative truth” - is converted into socialized speech. The latter is normative, and transforms “socially disruptive speech into socially acceptable forms by burnishing the sharp, individualist edges off the human personality.”<sup>211</sup> Amnesty, in need of a transnational public sphere, uses literature rather than oral testimonies as a basis for its goal of creating understanding. Gready deems novels to be able to escape the homogenizations of truth commissions. But in the case of Amnesty’s project, I would say that literature functions *as* its testimony. “Truth commissions and human rights reports are not novels and cannot adopt the generic qualities of novels (asking questions rather than providing answers, embracing ambiguity),”<sup>212</sup> Gready has argued. But in the case of Amnesty’s project, the novels *are* the human rights reports. Can they then still afford to only ask questions, to embrace ambiguity? As Rancière has pointed out, “aesthetic art promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity.”<sup>213</sup> But Amnesty does believe in literature’s power. To refer back to the quote from Desmond Tutu, Amnesty envisions literature as creating empathy, through which “we overcome prejudice, develop tolerance and ultimately understand love. Stories can bring understanding, healing, reconciliation and unity.” These terms may be roughly categorized into either universality (love, healing, unity) or singularity (prejudice, tolerance, understanding,

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<sup>204</sup> Casanova, 172.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibidem*, 171.

<sup>206</sup> Damrosch, 113.

<sup>207</sup> Casanova, 197-199.

<sup>208</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 5.

<sup>209</sup> Kennedy, 3-4.

<sup>210</sup> Gready, 160-161.

<sup>211</sup> Slaughter, 153.

<sup>212</sup> Gready, 174.

<sup>213</sup> Rancière, 133.

reconciliation). I will further elaborate on Amnesty's vision of literature as I discuss Amnesty's reliance on both the concepts of universality and singularity.

As a part of the public sphere, literature, too, can be a means to regulate the norms of imaginative belonging.<sup>214</sup> After all, as discussed above, to engage an audience as wide as the world, the complicated notion of universal qualities, of similarity, comes into play. Amnesty claims that it wants to create empathy, which relies on this notion of universality. In the preceding chapter, I discussed the positive role of empathy in human rights discourse. However, empathy also has its pitfalls. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, in a 2004 issue of *Biography*, have investigated the role of life narratives in the field of human rights. They have pointed out that the market provides commodified stories for people to "reinvent imagined securities." This can take the shape of empathetic identification with a radically different other that affirms the self as an empowered agent,<sup>215</sup> just as Attridge fears. Universality thus risks "overwriting the customs and beliefs" of the source culture.<sup>216</sup> It has been pointed out that literature's universality itself might be in question, because it has become synonymous with modernity.<sup>217</sup> Instead of its providing competing truths in place of the collapsed ideological master narrative,<sup>218</sup> it might reinforce the latter. Literature and justice, then, do not always coincide. Slaughter, in an article written with Sophia McClennen in an issue of *Comparative Literature* that focuses on human rights, has recognized that "literature does not always help us to "imagine others" and often serves to underscore national and ethnic divisions."<sup>219</sup> They have taken this argument from the famous literary critic Elaine Scarry, who argued that the difficulty of imagining others is that one cannot imagine the other as being *real*.<sup>220</sup> Imaginative empathy thus has its limits. To Scarry, "the latent nationalism or tribalism of great literature may make it a seductive vehicle for an exercise in self-reflection or self-identification, rather than reflection upon and identification with people different from oneself."<sup>221</sup> The 'unity' Amnesty aims for might therefore be very one-sided. Adam Smith would have refuted the idea that empathy is selfish, on the basis that "changing places" with the (suffering) other happens not by imagining that you are the one suffering, but that you are *the other* who is suffering.<sup>222</sup> However, he was pessimistic about empathy's capacity. He argued that this "soft power of humanity" is not what fosters active principles, unless it is accompanied by reason.<sup>223</sup> Even Appiah, in his reliance on the cosmopolitan attitude, has agreed that "explosions of feeling" are not enough to underwrite activism.<sup>224</sup> As Scarry argued, "the work accomplished by a structure of laws cannot be accomplished by a structure of sentiment. Constitutions are needed to uphold cosmopolitan values."<sup>225</sup> In short, empathy seems to be mainly

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<sup>214</sup> Slaughter, 155.

<sup>215</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 12.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibidem*, 4.

<sup>217</sup> Natali, 187.

<sup>218</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 27.

<sup>219</sup> Joseph R. Slaughter & Sophia McClennen, "Introducing Human Rights and Literary Forms; or, the Vehicles and Vocabularies of Human Rights". *Comparative Literature Studies* 46.1 (2009). 7-8.

<sup>220</sup> Elaine Scarry, "The Difficulty of Imagining Other People". *For Love of Country*, Joshua Cohen ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996. 2.

<sup>221</sup> Scarry, 104.

<sup>222</sup> Smith, 317.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibidem*, 137.

<sup>224</sup> Appiah, 170.

<sup>225</sup> Scarry, 110.

triggered by identification, which risks universalizing the other rather than accepting him *as other*. On top of that, its practical role may often be exaggerated.

Like empathy, tolerance is a slippery term. Derrida has discussed it as having its roots in a Christian form of charity. It is a conditional form of responsibility towards alterity and difference and “amounts to granting someone permission to continue living on.”<sup>226</sup> It therefore has a patronizing ring to it, and Derrida has found it unfit for usage in secular politics. Habermas, on the other hand, has recognized the religious heritage of the term, but he has argued that it is now practiced in a context of democracy and equality. Tolerance is therefore no longer owned by one side to be donated to the other. Like empathy, tolerance might therefore reinforce the illusion of universality that is really just a Western vision of the globalized world.<sup>227</sup> On the other hand, like empathy, it is also seen to have established and continue to establish a more inclusive notion of humanity.

Amnesty’s championing of ‘understanding’ and ‘reconciliation’ presents an attempt to overturn the scale in favour of literature’s singularity. Amnesty aims to broaden conceptions around who may be included. Therefore, it also *needs* literary works to present their particularity, their singularity. To Attridge, as discussed above, instrumentalization and openness to singularity cannot be combined. But as Kennedy has argued, testimonies are often helpful to legitimate the human rights struggle.<sup>228</sup> They allow readers to imagine a common past and a progressive future.<sup>229</sup> After all, ‘reconciliation’ reminds us of the South-African TRC’s goal to overthrow a grand narrative in favour of several singular ones. Art could make commonsensical new norms concerning that which is sayable, which is doable.<sup>230</sup> Slaughter and McClennen have also emphasized the importance of life stories in the human rights struggle,<sup>231</sup> and Damrosch has emphasized the power of testimony over the statistics of NGOs.<sup>232</sup> Gillian Whitlock, scholar of post-colonialism and life narrative, has called these kinds of stories in their instrumentalization ‘soft weapons’. In her book of the same name she discusses a range of these narratives.

Life narrative is instrumental in debates about social justice, and narrative can inspire readers’ imaginations to rethink communicative ethics in ways that engage with difference without resorting to either identification (which produces the empathic response) or othering (which looks to the antithesis of the self across cultures).<sup>233</sup>

She has argued that we need to “downplay the usefulness of symmetry – putting oneself in the place of others – in favour of working toward moral respect through asymmetrical relations, which recognize differences of history, social position, and experience that cannot be transcended.” This argument fits what I have discussed in the first chapter; the West must decentre itself so that the real reasons for the other’s suffering might be detected.<sup>234</sup> Combining these discussions on the ethics of human rights and literature, then, ‘understanding’ might provide a useful balance between empathy and reason. It is not a complete identification with the other, nor is it a disregard of the

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<sup>226</sup> Borradori, 16, 128.

<sup>227</sup> Ibidem, 18, 41.

<sup>228</sup> Kennedy, 3-4.

<sup>229</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 13.

<sup>230</sup> Rancière, 149.

<sup>231</sup> Slaughter & McClennen, 7-8.

<sup>232</sup> Damrosch, 233.

<sup>233</sup> Whitlock, 13.

<sup>234</sup> Appiah, 170.

other's differences. This does mean that both the attitude of reading and the choice of literature must adapt to this. Both need to downplay the idea of universality, without disregarding it entirely, in favour of an understanding of difference and particularity.

Thus, Amnesty's idea of literature might be the grounds for a balance between universalism and singularity. Amnesty needs the universality of literature to be able to reach an international audience. Even if the balance might sometimes overturn, as Damrosch has pointed out, "foreign works have difficulty entering a new arena if they don't conform to the receiving country's image of what the foreign culture should be."<sup>235</sup> Even Attridge has admitted that the instrumentalization of literature has been productive for human causes and political struggles in its accessing of inaccessible cultures.<sup>236</sup> World literature is about understanding other cultures, but as world literature theorist Mads Rosendahl Thomsen has suggested, distance, misrepresentation and perceived authenticity might be integral to the reading experience.<sup>237</sup> Amnesty, I argue, relies on this conception of world literature. In creating understanding for the other, there must be enough similarity for the reader to actually have the opportunity and the will to engage with that other, and perhaps at the cost of certain particularities. At the same time, there needs to be enough 'otherness' in order to actually broaden the range of humans that are worth engaging with.

What has become clear throughout my discussion of the human rights person and the literary human is that they are deeply intertwined. As Slaughter and McClennen have pointed out, human rights vocabularies and literature have informed each other. Not only is their emergence connected, but their properties as well. Both are imagined to cross national and cultural borders. Both are seen to circumscribe a category in which everyone may ideally be included. Both are seen to call for a cosmopolitan attitude that is open to otherness, to alternative views and values. At the same time, both are the product of discourse and ideology. Slaughter and McClennen have connected literature to human rights discourse, in the sense that both shape public views of social relations. They wonder, "if human rights language is always at risk of contamination by dominant power, then how have cultural vehicles for rights negotiated such a treacherous environment?" "Are there experiences in the world today that would be betrayed or misrepresented by the forms of literature as we know it?"<sup>238</sup> Both the human rights person and the literary person are particular representations of a universal abstract humanity, rather than a one-on-one match. In fact, as plain "humanity is not a property shared,"<sup>239</sup> it has no intrinsic normativity. Human rights and literature, therefore, construct the human rather than reflect a pre-existent one.<sup>240</sup> In this sense, both have become the norm concerning who is considered to be human. To Amnesty, human rights discourse presents the ultimate ideological human, and literature the ultimate form of narration in which this human can be found. The foregrounding of language as a means to create understanding, solidarity and even society is also part of a Western-oriented discourse. How universal is literature? In many African countries, the book is an imported cultural medium and fairly new. In the age of colonialism,

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<sup>235</sup> Damrosch, 117.

<sup>236</sup> Attridge, 7-8.

<sup>237</sup> Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, *World Literature and the Lure of Authenticity*. Presented as part of the series Comparative Literature Seminar 2012-2013, March 18th 2013, Utrecht University.

<sup>238</sup> Slaughter & McClennen, 11.

<sup>239</sup> Douzinas, 57.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibidem*, 45.

literature was often used in civilization missions to, for example, diffuse Christianity.<sup>241</sup> It is oral tradition that can be seen there as the creator of the imagined community; reading is often perceived as a solitary and even isolating activity.<sup>242</sup> Literacy is a communicative precondition of modernity and rationality and a fundamental medium of participation in modern society.<sup>243</sup> In stressing the universality of literature, the difference between modern and universal is again blurred.

The discursiveness of the form of humanity that Amnesty has chosen to endorse leads me to an important question: what individuals are sacrificed by human rights ideology for the future of humanity?<sup>244</sup> Or, as Butler has formulated it: “at what cost do I establish the familiar as the criterion by which a human life is grievable?”<sup>245</sup> Comparative literature, as it has been developed in recent years, may prove helpful in reinstating the balance between universality and difference. Both absolute difference and absolute sameness are the enemies of comparatism,<sup>246</sup> while Western imperialism and terrorism thrive on the idea of unbreachable difference on the one side and a unity of sameness on the other. Comparative literature, in that sense, places the reader in the position of Appiah’s cosmopolitan, against a divided world. This cosmopolitan reader strongly resembles Said’s humanist. Said has suggested that reading could play a large role in increasing mutual understanding and dissolving the myth of irreconcilable cultures, by stepping into someone else’s shoes, echoing Tutu. And as Appiah has argued, “a genuinely cosmopolitan response ... is about intelligence and curiosity as well as engagement. It requires knowing that policies [of] my state or region are part of the answer. It involves seeing not just a suffering body but a wasted human life.”<sup>247</sup> In Butler’s words: “I cannot muster the “we” except by finding the way in which I am tied to “you”, by trying to translate but finding that my own language must break up and yield if I am to know you.”<sup>248</sup> Differences require translation in order to approach a sense of sameness. But what is the cost of subscription to the surrogate citizenship of the transnational public sphere of human rights? What needs to be translated in order to be agreed upon? I will continue to discuss the problems associated with the differences experienced in what has been called the clash between civilizations, the West and Islam, in order to introduce the corpus of literature, as well as to provide some insights into the difficulty of propagating a universal worldview of any kind.

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<sup>241</sup> Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan – A Transnational History of The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003.

<sup>242</sup> Natali, 181.

<sup>243</sup> Slaughter 2007, 272.

<sup>244</sup> Ibidem, 82.

<sup>245</sup> Butler 2004, 38.

<sup>246</sup> Djelal Kadir, “Comparative Literature in An Age of Terrorism”. *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, Haun Saussy ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

<sup>247</sup> Appiah, 168.

<sup>248</sup> Butler 2004, 49

### 3. Islam and modernity: deconstructing the myth of the clash of civilizations

A disproportionate amount of the literature that Amnesty endorses for promoting human rights deals with the subject of Islam. This suggests that Muslims are a prime candidate for receiving our tolerance, empathy and understanding, and our human rights, all of which they, apparently, do not yet own enough. Indeed, an extensive survey executed by the Gallup World Poll<sup>249</sup> showed that, in 2006, half of the Americans had a negative view of Islam.<sup>250</sup> The current emphasis on Islam in the human rights struggle may stem from two observations that are part of the same process. First, the Islamic revival that has been identified across the world since roughly the 1970's, and second, awareness of a rising Islamic fundamentalism and Islamism that has gained media-attention ever since 9/11.<sup>251</sup> Increasingly, the world has become aware of the existence of a different kind of world than ours, one that is not based in the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Westphalian model of sovereignty (from which, as I have shown in the first chapter, our human rights discourse has emerged). This awareness has given rise to the idea of the 'clash of civilizations'. This term, coined by political scientist Samuel Huntington, gained currency in the 1990's and entered mainstream cultural vernacular after 9/11.<sup>252</sup> It assumes that current conflicts are primarily caused by cultural and religious identities that clash. This suggests that concepts like human rights, which I argued above are rooted in a specific culture, time and space, could never be shared by the inherently other. However, as human rights are meant to be universal, this means that the radically other should either become the same, or not participate at all. In what follows, I will provide a short inquiry into the Islamic revival in general and Islamic fundamentalism, in order to deconstruct the myth of the clash of civilizations. My aim is to provide some insights into the possibilities and difficulties of sharing a world of human rights.

The Islamic revival that has been happening since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is rooted in an increasingly globalized world, and in particular in the increasingly confronting encounter of the Arab world with the modern West. Although the Western and Arab world have been in contact for centuries, Western imperialism shifted the power relations so drastically that it left the Arab world no choice but to reinvent itself. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, it has been recognized that human rights discourse is no universal movement with equal participation, and that universality has become a euphemism for modernity and modern values. Natali has argued that "modernization must be seen not only as the inevitable destiny of the world, but also as its ideological truth."<sup>253</sup> It has also become the grand narrative of human rights discourse. But to say that modernization writes on people as though they were blank slates is not only condescending, but wrong; people take in the effects of worldly changes differently everywhere.<sup>254</sup> As Canadian scholar of Islam Andrew Rippin has pointed out, many believe that the Arab world has been, and still is, unable to respond to modernity very well.<sup>255</sup> The encounter left the Arab world (as well as the West) wondering whether Arab society had not lived up to Islamic standards, and had thus declined, or whether it was Islam itself that

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<sup>249</sup> Gallup surveys in 160 countries, claiming a 98% representativeness of the world's residents. It is self-funded and does not poll for political parties and advocacy groups. Esposito & Mogahed, 175.

<sup>250</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 46.

<sup>251</sup> Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. New York: Routledge, 2012. 197; Donohue & Esposito, 3.

<sup>252</sup> Holloway, 32.

<sup>253</sup> Natali, 187, 189.

<sup>254</sup> Appiah, 111.

<sup>255</sup> Rippin, 187.

needed modification. On the part of many Muslims and Arab Islamic countries, Rippin has argued, this has led to a quest for authenticity in the face of the West's self-proclaimed universality.<sup>256</sup> Because Islam lacks a religious authority like Catholicism's Pope, the encounter with the modern Western world triggered a range of reactions that re-investigated both religiosity and religion itself. Rather than rejecting modernity, the Arab world thus came up with multiple versions of it.<sup>257</sup> The encounter of the Arab world with the modern West meant the encounter with concepts like nationalism, individuation, secularization, and capitalism.<sup>258</sup> I will proceed to discuss these concepts in relation to Islamic revivalism.

The relationship between Islam and nationalism is complicated. Until the Ottoman Empire was dissolved in 1924, the Arab and Persian world were ruled by Islamic caliphates rather than by independent nations. Politics, social life and private life were all governed by Islam, that once emerged as both a political system and a religion.<sup>259</sup> The Sykes-Picot agreement, concluded in 1916 between Britain and France, secretly divided the empire between them in case of its defeat, which followed eight years later. This to the great dismay of the Arabs who did not receive their promised Arab homeland as a reward for cooperating with the West against the Ottomans. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by Arab independence movements, but as John Esposito, an expert in Islamic studies, and his colleague John Donohue have pointed out in their edited collection of Muslim reactions to modernity (*Islam in Transition*): "Muslim nations that have emerged from centuries of colonial rule have had but several decades as independent states to make a transition that in the West took several centuries."<sup>260</sup> The age of nationalism in the West, Anderson argued, coincided with the dusk of religious thought. "What then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning." It was nationalism that turned chance into destiny.<sup>261</sup> But this was a different kind of destiny than the religious one. As Anderson has pointed out, a crucial difference lies in the older religious community's "confidence in the unique sacredness of their languages, and thus their ideas about admission to membership." This idea of the "non-arbitrariness of the sign," that is, language as an "emanation of reality, not [a] randomly fabricated representation of it," is foreign to us now. But what it meant was that the acquisition of this language made you part of the community. This kind of simple 'conversion' does not exist in nationalism, which is defined by birth and the narrative of a shared common past.<sup>262</sup> The Islamic tradition still partly relies on the non-arbitrariness of the sign, more so than the Christian tradition that replaced Latin with vernacular in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Qur'an is believed to have been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic, and until recently this meant that it was untranslatable. Nowadays, translations exist, but only the Arabic version is hailed as sacred. Conversion to Islam is still a speech act, the *shahada*: 'there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger.'<sup>263</sup> Donohue and Esposito have shown that combining an Islamic world-view with nationalism forms a general concern in the many Muslim reactions to modernity. Some Muslim scholars have identified nationalism as un-Islamic because it

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<sup>256</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*. London: Hurst & Company, 2004. 23.

<sup>257</sup> José Casanova, "Nativism and the Politics of Gender in Catholicism and Islam". *Gendering Religion and Politics: Untangling Modernities*, Hanna Herzog & Ann Braude eds. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 34.

<sup>258</sup> Rippin, 184-185.

<sup>259</sup> Rippin; Donohue & Esposito.

<sup>260</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 5.

<sup>261</sup> Anderson, 11-12.

<sup>262</sup> Ibidem, 13-15.

<sup>263</sup> Rippin, 104.

stifles the Islamic doctrine of religious, cultural and ethnic plurality and has given rise to inequality and oppression in the name of the superiority of the nation.<sup>264</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalism in the Arab world, then, did not coincide with the dusk of religious thought, but with a renewed inquiry into the religion in which their history and identity was rooted.

As the collection by Donohue and Esposito shows, the reactions to the crisis of Western imperialism were manifold, but they can all be seen as reactions to westernization and globalization rather than an emphasis on Islam unrelated to outside forces.<sup>265</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most Islamic states either adopted or got forced upon them European laws that replaced the *shari'a*, the Islamic law. Note that the *shari'a* is not a document, but a set of interpretations of Qur'anic verses and the *Hadith* (accounts of the doings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) that vary across time, Islamic sects and legal schools, and that the *shari'a* was historically devised to limit the power of the autocratic sultans.<sup>266</sup> Rippin has pointed out that in order for religion to continue to play a role in their societies, Muslims had to demonstrate that either their religion supported the reforms or that the reforms should be replaced with Islamic law.<sup>267</sup> Rippin and other scholars have attempted to classify the different types of reactions that the encounter with the Western modern world triggered: traditionalist, modernist, nationalist, Islamist, fundamentalist, socialist.<sup>268</sup> For the purpose of this discussion, these strict classifications are unfruitful; they are both reductive and confusing, as many of them overlap. In what follows, I will show why.

Rippin has argued that, as the Arab world slowly gained independence from Europe during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and became more accustomed to the nation-state model, nationalist movements increasingly based themselves on cultural and ethnic terms rather than religious terms.<sup>269</sup> Pan-Arabism largely faded into state oriented nationalism. Alternative models, such as socialism/Marxism, arose in the 1960's and 1970's, but were also perceived to fail. As a reaction, the influential Islamic studies and political science scholar Olivier Roy has pointed out, revolutionary Islamism increased throughout the late 1970's and 1980's, resulting in the Iranian Revolution and the murder of the Egyptian president Sadat. Islamists wanted to establish an Islamic state and opposed national and ethnic divides, other than the traditional *ulama* (Islamic scholars) that were divided into

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<sup>264</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 482, 75. The roots of the doctrine of pluralism in Islam can be found in the Qur'an. Some examples: Surah 5 Al-Ma'idah, verse 48: "If Allah so willed, he would have made you a single People, but his plan is to test each of you separately, in what He has given to each of you". Surah 29 Al-Ankabut verse 46: "And dispute not with the People of the Book, except with means better than mere disputation, unless I be with those of them who inflict wrong or injury, but say to them: "WE believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you: Our God and your God is one: and it is to Him that we bow." Surah 2 Al-Baqarah verse 256: "Let there be no compulsion in religion" Surah 10 Yunus, verse 41: "If they charge you with falsehood, say: "For me are my deeds and for you are your deeds! You are free from responsibility for what I do, and I for what you do." Surah 18 AL-Kahf verse 29: "Say, 'The Truth is from your Lord, Let him who will, believe, and let him who will, reject". Surah 109 Al-Kafirun verse 6: "To you (non-believers) be your Way (Religion), and to me mine". For elaborations on this doctrine, see Donohue & Esposito 139, 279-282, 488-500.

<sup>265</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 462; Roy, 14; Simpson, 136. For an extensive overview of philosophical, theological and political reactions, see Donohue & Esposito.

<sup>266</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 35-36, 53-55.

<sup>267</sup> Rippin, 193.

<sup>268</sup> For two different possibilities of such classifications, see Rippin and Roy. Note that Roy differentiates between Islamism and neo-fundamentalism, whereas Rippin categorizes both under fundamentalism.

<sup>269</sup> Rippin, 186, 189.

legal schools and sects. Islamism referred back to the Qur'an that supported ethnic and cultural pluralism in favour of the larger umbrella of religion. But the lines between Arab nationalism (as it had become) and Islamism have become increasingly blurred; although Islamist groups identify themselves as transnational, they are rooted in particular histories and cultures. Because of this, Islamist groups are losing appeal beyond borders of their particular states, and Islamism is slowly fading into conservatism.<sup>270</sup> Roy has argued that neo-fundamentalism, an orthodox 'return to the sources', emerged as an alternative to Islamism. It rejects tradition and theology and it distrusts nationalism and the state. Whereas Islamists try to prove, using the ancient sources, that Islam is the best version of democracy and the best solution for human rights issues, neo-fundamentalists, basing themselves on the same sources, reject democracy and human rights as Western inventions that do not apply to the Islamic world. Neo-fundamentalism is less involved with politics and restricts religion to an imaginary space rather than a geographical one. This allows fundamentalist Muslims to live in a secular world and still be radically religious. However, even Roy himself recognizes that Islamism and neo-fundamentalism have become intermingled.<sup>271</sup> Some fundamentalists have gone political, trying to aim for a transnational Muslim community, while some Islamists have given up activism. On top of that, Rippin has pointed out, the term 'fundamentalism' arose in the US in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to describe conservative Protestants. It is now applied mainly by the West to refer to those who call for a strict implementation of the *shari'a*, an Islamic state, and who oppose the West and the perceived corruption of Muslim society.<sup>272</sup> In short, it is a Western definition that describes a very broad range of reactions that have historically not always agreed with each other. But there is one tendency to be extracted from them: many reactions were not so much about a return to tradition as the creation of new identities in the light of change. They were focused on keeping their religion relevant and therefore often returned to the ancient sources to re-inspect and reinterpret them. This has been their strength, as it indeed kept Islam on the map, as well as their weakness, as it reinforced tensions with the Western world.

The Islamic revival has not remained within the borders of the ancient Arab world.<sup>273</sup> Globalization and large-scale migration have produced a deterritorialization of Muslims. This, as Roy has argued, also entailed a process of individuation: the separation of the individual from a collective entity. Many Muslims (predominantly second-generation) have become alienated from their original cultures or ethnicity, which Roy calls 'deculturation'. They can hardly be called diaspora, because there is little reference to the countries of origin in their daily lives and practices. Instead, Muslims all over the world are in the process of reconstructing their identities in interaction with the wider society around them.<sup>274</sup> The influence of globalization on Muslim identities has not been sufficiently recognized. After 9/11, the translated Qur'an became a bestseller in the US; people wanted to understand what had happened and needed proof that Islam was not inherently evil or inherently opposed to the values of democracy and human rights. But, like any sacred book, the Qur'an has been and still is interpreted in various ways. Reading the Qur'an will not explain the conditions of global terrorism, nor what most Muslims think. Islam is not about what is in the Qur'an, but what Muslims say is in it.<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, if one limits Islam to the Qur'an or the opinion of the official

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<sup>270</sup> Roy, 58-77

<sup>271</sup> Ibidem, 170-173, 245-247, 276, 251-252.

<sup>272</sup> Rippin, 198.

<sup>273</sup> Roy, 143. All following pages are from this publication, unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>274</sup> 107, 120, 105, 203.

<sup>275</sup> 10.

*ulama*, one overlooks the agency that Muslims themselves have in orchestrating their lives in the modern world. After all, there is no central religious authority that defines Islam, but the passage to the West has demanded of Muslims that they explain themselves.<sup>276</sup> So, when investigating the relation between Islam and modern values, as Roy has convincingly argued, it is more important to examine the “reappropriation and self-rooting” of these values in Islamic societies and Muslim communities. “The issue is not the theological content of the Islamic religion, but the way believers refer to this corpus to adapt and explain their behaviours in a context where religion has lost its social authority.”<sup>277</sup> Because if one wonders whether Islam is compatible with democracy and human rights by expressing “problems linked with the passage to the West of Islam in terms of values, culture and religion,” one ignores the changes that Islam undergoes in this passage.<sup>278</sup>

Again, for this discussion it is unnecessary to classify the different ways Muslims have negotiated their identities in the face of modernity’s individuation and deterritorialization. What does prove useful is Roy’s discussion of what he has called ‘post-Islamism’: the “privatization of re-Islamisation”. This has nothing to do with trying to acquire Islamic state power, but rather with the private life of the individual.<sup>279</sup> But, just like the dawn of nationalism in the Arab world showed, the individuation of faith does not necessarily entail that it becomes modern and democratic. It can also become fundamentalist. Westernization in Islam has led to “a critical approach to dogma, a quest for *ijtihad* [personal interpretation of the religious sources], a renewal of theological thinking – in other words, an Islamic Reformation,”<sup>280</sup> with mixed results. Roy has identified, for example, a change in the use of the word *jihad*. *Jihad*, the struggle against the oppressors of Islam, has become the individual duty of every Muslim rather than the traditional collective one of those under siege. This “has more to do with a Western tradition of individual and pessimistic revolt for an elusive ideal world than with the Koranic conception of martyrdom.”<sup>281</sup> The individuation of *jihad* is, paradoxically, an innovation in the name of orthodoxy.<sup>282</sup> At the same time, globalization and individuation have provided the opportunity for new kinds of collectivity: a new global *ummah* (Muslim community) that, with the help of the Internet, transcends cultural and national boundaries, cut off from the traditionally conservative Arab societies that have become more and more corrupted and un-Islamic in practice.<sup>283</sup> Fundamentalist currents, among others, build on this possibility.<sup>284</sup> But meanwhile, increasingly, Muslims in non-Muslim countries are defining themselves in what Roy has called a ‘neo-ethnic’ sense. This means that there is less reference to faith and religious practice than to cultural patterns that are seen to be inherited.<sup>285</sup> ‘Muslim identity’ thus becomes detached from specific national backgrounds but is defined as a culture itself. The idea of an inherited culture fits the Muslim fundamentalist view that once you are born Muslim, you will always be Muslim. But Roy has argued that, in fact, this view has been adopted from a Western perspective, where ‘Muslim’ refers not to religion but a neo-ethnic group that is defined in opposition to the West.<sup>286</sup> This Muslim

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<sup>276</sup> 109-110, 151.

<sup>277</sup> 81, ix.

<sup>278</sup> 143.

<sup>279</sup> 97-99.

<sup>280</sup> 181.

<sup>281</sup> 43.

<sup>282</sup> 178-179.

<sup>283</sup> 24, 30, 171, 157.

<sup>284</sup> Appiah, 138-139.

<sup>285</sup> 124-128.

<sup>286</sup> 332.

identity fits “Western cultural and legal categories of [minority] identities” and “allows Muslims to surf the wave of [Western] multiculturalism.”<sup>287</sup> It is a paradox. On the one hand, Islam replaces ethnic identities among Muslims and gives a new name to the ‘difference’ experienced with respect to their surrounding non-Muslims. On the other hand, “the same marker, Islam, which is used to bypass ethnic differences in favor of a universal, purely religious and transnational identity, can ... be turned around to designate a minority group defined on a neo-ethnic basis by the ethnic origins of its members, whatever their personal commitment to faith.”<sup>288</sup> This neo-ethnic definition of Muslims thwarts their assimilation in the surrounding non-Muslim society. In short, although globalization and individuation have created the opportunity for new Muslim collectivities to emerge, these are not necessarily assimilated in a liberal, democratic or progressive collectivity, as modernization would have it, and they are formed in contact within the Muslim world as well as through the contact with the surrounding non-Muslim society.

Another aspect of modernity that is intrinsically bound up with the discussion on Islam and power is secularization. As Roy has argued, European secularism redefined religion as a private belief rather than a set of communal ethics. From this perspective, Islam can hardly count as a proper religion – it prescribes public behaviour. Secularism, therefore, “is not merely the division between public and private realms that allows religious diversity to flourish in the latter. It can itself be a carrier of harsh exclusions.”<sup>289</sup> Like nationalism and individuation, it triggered Muslims to redefine their relation to religion, rather than to adopt the European-defined one. Secularization does not necessarily entail a liberal form of Islam, as many have suggested. As Roy has argued, “to be a ‘fundamentalist’ Muslim in a non-Muslim society means experiencing secularization.”<sup>290</sup> Fundamentalism also goes hand in hand with the delegitimizing of religious professionals “in favor of religious-minded laypersons.” Secularism is thus an important trigger for Islamic revival, a new way of defining the autonomy of religion within a secular society.<sup>291</sup> Religious anthropologist Saba Mahmood has argued that “contemporary calls for reforming Islam are built upon a narrow vision of a secularized conception of religiosity that mobilizes many of the liberal assumptions about what it means to be human in this world.”<sup>292</sup> Unlike the neo-ethnic ‘Muslim’, Christians can escape their religious dimension because their religiosity confines religion to a private relationship between the believer and God, which is, to many Muslims, not enough. Islam is still influential in the political realm in the Arab and Persian world, and the Gallup World Poll has shown that the majority of Muslim men and women in predominantly Muslim countries want the *shari’a* to be a source of legislation, although they condemn abuses in its name.<sup>293</sup> Even for many European Muslims this idea is still of significance. It makes no sense to hope for a ‘Muslim Enlightenment’, because the relation between politics and religion is now different than it was when European Enlightenment kicked in. The Muslim world is already dealing with the modern world and westernization, in its own way. It *had* its ‘Protestant revolution’ with the fundamentalist idea of *ijtihad*, which does not in the least resemble Luther’s

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<sup>287</sup> 132-133.

<sup>288</sup> Talal Asad, “Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism”. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech*. Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler & Saba Mahmood, eds. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009. 55.

<sup>289</sup> Roy, 55.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibidem*, 148.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibidem*, 181, 4.

<sup>292</sup> Saba Mahmood, “Feminism, Democracy, and Empire: Islam and the War on Terror”. *Gendering Religion and Politics: Untangling Modernities*, Hanna Herzog & Ann Braude eds. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 209.

<sup>293</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 5, 48.

strict reading of the Bible.<sup>294</sup> Religious sociologist José Casanova has argued that the discourse on Islam being fundamentalist, anti-modern and sexist resembles the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century to mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century discourse on Catholicism in Europe, that was accused of being unable to assimilate because of transnational attachments and degradation of women. But, as argued above, many inhibitions for assimilation, such as transnational attachments, are the result of the engagement with global modernity itself.<sup>295</sup>

Nevertheless, there is no absolute dichotomy between the Western world and Islam in terms of how religion is treated. Roy has identified an increasing tendency of Muslim leaders to speak in terms of values rather than interdicts and obligations, which can be seen as “a way to recast a Muslim identity in terms compatible with a Western conception of religion.” Moreover, by asking for their communities to be able to enjoy the same rights as other religions, “they put Islam into the folds of the general Western perception of what a religion is.”<sup>296</sup> To argue that a ‘moderate Islam’ needs to be created to comply with the West alienates the Muslim majorities that the West needs to challenge religious extremism and terrorism.<sup>297</sup> At the same time, as Esposito has pointed out, “if the ... politically radicalized continue to feel politically dominated, occupied, and disrespected, the West will have little, if any, chance of changing their minds.”<sup>298</sup> In short, secularization has stirred different reactions from the Muslim world, but has neither produced a universal ‘docile’ version of Islam, nor one that is radically evil.

The last phenomenon that has contributed to the crisis of the Muslim world is global liberal capitalism as the economic and political hegemony of the West. Costas Douzinas has discussed ‘the imperialism of globalization’ as American foreign policy protecting its own political and economic hegemony. Since the Cold War, Douzinas proceeds, the US has forced its policy priorities onto the world and it is widely known that it has covertly removed democratically elected governments around the world if these were not pro-American. “Without directly occupying foreign countries, the Americans asserted the power to decide who was fit to rule countries within its informal empire’s sphere of influence.”<sup>299</sup> Globalization does not bring about world equality, Douzinas has argued; in fact, it divides the world and has left the West in power. Many feel that the impact of oil relations and revenues has driven Muslim countries away from Islam. Saudi Arabia is often seen as corrupt and un-Islamic, as was the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The US and its international alliances have supported, and still support, autocratic governments in oil-producing countries because they benefit from the political stability and fear the consequences of the move to democracy.<sup>300</sup> In the 1950’s, the US sabotaged the emergence of a democracy in Iran and reinstated the autocratic Shah to secure their own oil supply. In the 1980’s, it supported the international network of the Taliban in Afghanistan to resist against the Russian invaders. In 2003, it used democracy as an excuse to invade Iraq, after their initial justification, finding weapons of mass destruction, fell through. But, as Butler wondered, “can ‘democracy’ be the name of a form of political power that is undemocratically imposed?”<sup>301</sup> The US

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<sup>294</sup> Žižek, 52. Also: Habermas in Borradori, 18.

<sup>295</sup> Casanova 2009, 21-22.

<sup>296</sup> Roy, 132, 205.

<sup>297</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 161.

<sup>298</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 97.

<sup>299</sup> Douzinas, 144-145.

<sup>300</sup> Rippin, 190.

<sup>301</sup> Butler 2010, 37

has also refused to recognize Hamas in Palestine although it was democratically chosen. The Gallup World Poll shows that all these developments, and the atrocities at Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib on top of that, have created distrust among Muslims.<sup>302</sup> As Kenneth Roth, the head of Human Rights Watch, has argued, the corruption and double standard made ‘democracy’ look ugly to people. The suppressing of (Islamic) opposition compromises civil liberties, and it reinforces the idea that the war of the West is against Islam.<sup>303</sup> Gallup has shown that most of the Arab world has lost its faith in the sincerity of the US mission to spread democracy in their part of the world. In fact, the US is perceived as inhibiting the growth of democracies.<sup>304</sup> This critique, Roy has argued, extends to questioning US honesty concerning other values they stand for, such as pluralism, peace and secularism. “The portrayal of the United States as a country ruled by evangelical Christians ... accentuates the extent to which attempts to control political regimes within the Muslim world are seen as an overwhelming conspiracy against the interest of Islam in general.”<sup>305</sup>

I started this short inquiry into the relation between Islam and modernity in order to make clear that what has been perceived as a ‘clash of civilizations’, or even fundamentalisms, is, in fact, a lot more complex than two opposites that meet. Perhaps the debate was never between Islam and the West, or Muslim and Western values. One can hardly talk about a clash of civilizations when the US is knowingly working together with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia without the former criticizing the latter’s non-democratic values, or the latter criticizing the former’s consumerism and secularism.<sup>306</sup> As Habermas has suggested, the clash of civilizations “is often the veil masking the vital material interests of the West,”<sup>307</sup> an excuse for the war on terror, or a way to ascertain hegemony. The West’s hegemony made it impossible for it to see that its ‘truth’ is merely a version of reality. Rancière has pointed out that, when what is and what ought to be have become indistinctive, self-reflexivity becomes impossible.<sup>308</sup> This has given way to the post-9/11 idea of absolute, infinite justice versus absolute, infinite evil; many have argued that Islam has become the great antagonist to the West’s hegemony. Global terrorism is a phenomenon yet unseen in this scale, and because there are no identifiable players in the war on terror, it exceeded all juridical and political measures that would have applied to a ‘simple’ war between states.<sup>309</sup> The tendency to perceive of conflicts in this traditional sense gave way to false identifications, which resulted in the West’s invasion of countries that could never have resulted in transnational terrorism’s defeat.<sup>310</sup> And as Butler has argued, the popular phrase “there is no excuse for September 11” has resulted in the stifling of any discussion about the role of the West’s foreign policy in creating the conditions for terrorism.<sup>311</sup> The Arab world has had a similar tendency to simplify the complexities of its situation. The West became a scapegoat for its experience of loss and decline. Twentieth-century imperialism increasingly polarized the Arab worldview: it posited their spirituality against the Western secular forces and consumerism.<sup>312</sup> The

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<sup>302</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 58-59.

<sup>303</sup> Ibidem, 162.

<sup>304</sup> Ibidem, 32; Rippin, 190.

<sup>305</sup> Rippin, 191.

<sup>306</sup> Whitlock, 101; Žižek, 42.

<sup>307</sup> Borradori, 36.

<sup>308</sup> Appiah, 41; Rancière, 184.

<sup>309</sup> Rancière, 103.

<sup>310</sup> Borradori, 2; Žižek.

<sup>311</sup> Butler 2004, 3.

<sup>312</sup> Borradori, 19; Tariq Ramadan in Donohue & Esposito, 474. In her book *Nomad*, which I will discuss in the next chapter, Ayaan Hirsi Ali accuses Ramadan of being a “closet Islamist” undeserving of his title.

Swiss Islamic studies professor, and Muslim, Tariq Ramadan has criticized this polarizing Arab attitude. He has argued that the feeling of being dominated led Arab Muslims to construct themselves as 'other', in opposition to the West. Little knowledge of the actual West turned it into a caricature, and living with any values that seemed Western, regardless of their attraction, left many Arab Muslims feeling as though they were betraying their own religion. Instead of mobilizing their claim to universality, they remained in the position of the victim of Western universalist claims.

Maybe the clash, then, has less to do with values and ideals than with policy. In Esposito's words, "what does distinguish the politically radicalized from others is their perception of the West's politics, not its culture."<sup>313</sup> Žižek has pointed out that the 9/11 attacks have often been seen as an attack on democratic freedom and multiculturalist tolerance, but these are not inherently un-Islamic, as I will show below. 9/11 more likely represented an attack against the fiction of modern global capitalism as a universal tendency, and the US fantasy of invincibility.<sup>314</sup> Rejecting Islam, or, as Mahmood adds, even a liberal religious sensibility among Muslims will thus not eliminate terrorism.<sup>315</sup> The fact that a political conflict is turned into a cross-cultural one creates problems. The idea that Western and Muslim values are incompatible has distorted the communication that Habermas has identified as necessary in order to recognize one another as members of the same community.<sup>316</sup> In Ramadan's words, "far from creating a bridge between two worlds, they implicitly deny the legitimacy of one of the partners to speak about its universal principles."<sup>317</sup> Roy has argued that the clash of civilizations says more about the internal crisis of the West and its meaning in the modern global age, with Islam as an externalized threat to its hegemony.<sup>318</sup> I would add that the same goes vice versa. Both worldviews are in crisis, but not necessarily with each other; their crisis is, as Derrida has called it, an autoimmune one.<sup>319</sup> As the notorious French post-structuralist philosopher Jean Baudrillard argued, there is no clash of civilizations, there is only globalization battling itself.<sup>320</sup> Unfortunately, both worlds are trying to resolve it through appointing a common enemy, defining themselves as either superior to or victimized by it, so that they will not have to interrogate their own agency in addressing the crisis. But religio-cultural explanations rather than political and historical ones will not help understand global terrorism and fundamentalism, but will recreate the imaginative West versus East dichotomy.<sup>321</sup> As Esposito has pointed out, "unless decision makers listen directly to the people and gain an accurate understanding of this conflict, extremists on all sides will continue to gain ground."<sup>322</sup> And extremisms, that claim ownership of the truth, rule out alternatives and let the minority overwrite the majority opinion, are precisely the biggest obstruction to sharing a world.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 98.

<sup>314</sup> Žižek 50, Susannah Radstone, "The War of the Fathers: Trauma, Fantasy, and September 11." *Signs*, 28.1 (2002).

<sup>315</sup> Mahmood, 210.

<sup>316</sup> Borradori, 35.

<sup>317</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 477.

<sup>318</sup> Roy, 334-337.

<sup>319</sup> Borradori, 21.

<sup>320</sup> Jean Baudrillard, "The Spirit of Terrorism." Translated by Michel Valentin. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101:2 (2002). 403-426.

<sup>321</sup> Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104.3 (2002), 784.

<sup>322</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, xi.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibidem*, 96.

So, what does this perceived conflict mean for human rights? Is there a possibility that they could ever really address a universal public? The UDHR states that every country has a right to self-determination and development. But the inherent paradox of the UDHR causes a conflict between these two processes. As Slaughter has argued, in order to be eligible to the rights of self-determination and development, a country is supposed to be already self-determining and developing. People are both the participants and the beneficiaries of these rights. A people must be self-determining to be recognized, but they only get this legal capacity at the moment they “coalesce as a recognizable people.” It is often the lack of self-determination that makes this development impossible. And it is finally the “small circle of ‘civilized nations’ which constituted the international legal order” that decides which country is and which country is not up to the task. In a world where nations depend on one another to exist, one country’s development can harm that of another. What is more, a country’s development and self-determination can mean the violation of that of its people. “The social obligation to develop one’s personality [...] implies a correlative obligation to recognize oneself and others as (central) subjects of human rights with symmetrical potential for self-determination and development.” This means that, at the moment the international order judges a country to be insufficiently equipped for self-determination and development, it is not recognized as a subject of human rights.<sup>324</sup> In Butler’s words, as long as “Islam is seen as barbaric or pre-modern, as not yet having conformed to those norms that make the human recognizable,”<sup>325</sup> the war on terror deaths that fall in Muslim countries will not be as grievable as ours. The increasing emphasis on universal human rights thus lays bare their exclusivity and reinforces the inequality of power.

As Appiah has wondered, “How, in principle, to distinguish benign and malign forms of universalism?”<sup>326</sup> To ask whether democracy and human rights are Western values or universal ones is irrelevant; this question cannot be answered. Instead, the question is whether people can agree on ways to live together without agreeing on the motivations. As the Israeli-Palestinian anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod has wondered, if justice is needed in order to achieve this, can people accept that there are different kinds of justice?<sup>327</sup> Might different ways of living, such as religious ways, be “more meaningful for different groups of people?”<sup>328</sup> Are human rights something we can all agree on, and can they thus affect all, although they are grounded in a certain time and space? Or does that mean bypassing other ‘universalities’ in favour of it? Who speaks for the *ummah*, when, as Roy has argued, the Western Muslims are more easily heard because they are more prone to react to Western comments and because they are not censored?<sup>329</sup> Ramadan has pointed out that many of the Western (ex-)Muslim scholars we hear in the news have lost legitimacy among Muslims around the world.<sup>330</sup> And as Roy has argued, “Human rights lobbyists, minority rights groups and some political parties ... lobby Western states to protect the cultural rights of minorities, which sooner or later obliges them to provide objective criteria for what a 'cultural' or ethnic or national community is." But it is impossible to define a global *ummah*. Many academics have identified that there is no *ummah* in the geopolitical sense. There is just Islam as a religion and Muslims who negotiate their religious identities in numerous ways. In fact, “... there are as many *ummahs* as groups pretending to

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<sup>324</sup> Slaughter 2007, 213-223.

<sup>325</sup> Butler 2010, 42.

<sup>326</sup> Appiah, 143.

<sup>327</sup> Abu-Lughod, 787.

<sup>328</sup> Ibidem, 788.

<sup>329</sup> Roy, 105.

<sup>330</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 477.

embody it.”<sup>331</sup> Islamisation is just the rejection of traditional hierarchies and de-culturalisation. This should not be seen as a threat, but as enabling new ways for Muslims to connect to the rest of the world. After all, in Simpson’s words, culture is habit “that gives us the self-identity to keep going and to invent new culture while always threatening to limit us to the pure replication of a previous or imaginary wholeness...”<sup>332</sup> But Roy has pointed out that if Islamisation can limit that threat, and emphasize the inventiveness, everyone can speak the truth about what Islam is.<sup>333</sup> Connections of Islam with modern global realities are diverse, multiple and often contradict.<sup>334</sup> Islamisation, then, opens up the public sphere, allows people to define their religion in their own, multiple ways and disables the state to control or restrict it.<sup>335</sup>

Building on Simpson and Roy, the same acceptance of pluralism might go for other culture-grounded aspirations to universality, such as human rights discourse. Perhaps these different universalities need not exclude each other. Habermas has pointed out that claims for universality emerge from religious discourse and can never be fully extracted from it,<sup>336</sup> which also goes for ideas of equality and cohabitation, meaning “recognition of the importance or at least inevitability of continued life in the same place, even when, values, identities, and practices cannot readily be reconciled.”<sup>337</sup> After all, like the UDHR, Islamic doctrine supports the idea of cultural, ethnic and religious pluralism in favour of (spiritual) universalism.<sup>338</sup> “The faithful have been commanded to accept the plurality of human society as a reality as well as a challenge.” If this doctrine was actually followed, we would find, according to the Malaysian Muslim scholar Osman Bakar, that “commonalities are the universals that need to be strengthened and the differences are the particulars that need to be respected.”<sup>339</sup> As discussed in the first chapter, Butler has argued that there is no common denominator among the different members of ‘humanity’, which means that “the right to have rights emerges invariably in different forms and through different vernaculars.” This includes religious vernaculars. It is “the obstruction that thwarts analogy [that] makes ... specificity plain and becomes the condition of the process of pluralization.”<sup>340</sup> The universal right for everyone to cohabit the earth “has to break up into its non-universal conditions; otherwise, it fails to be grounded in plurality.” To recapitulate; the UDHR does not need a consensual public sphere to function, but a dissensual one, that nevertheless agrees on the fact that everyone belongs in it, including those who adhere to a religion that may challenge some assumptions that underlie the UDHR, but is grounded in the same plurality. As Butler has argued, “we not only live with those we never chose, and to whom we may feel no social sense of belonging, but we are also obligated to preserve those lives and the plurality of which they form a part.” Holding on to the idea of mutually exclusive truth claims is simply untenable.<sup>341</sup> To paraphrase Appiah, there is no truth when it comes to morality.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Roy, 124, 340, 297.

<sup>332</sup> Simpson, 31.

<sup>333</sup> Roy, 167.

<sup>334</sup> Casanova 2009, 32-34.

<sup>335</sup> Roy, 220.

<sup>336</sup> Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 113

<sup>337</sup> Ibidem, 130-131

<sup>338</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 482.

<sup>339</sup> Ibidem, 500, 482.

<sup>340</sup> Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 86-87

<sup>341</sup> Borradori, 19.

<sup>342</sup> Appiah, 11.

The majority of the people interrogated by the Gallup World Poll are concerned about a better understanding between Islam and the West which, according to them, needs to happen through respect for difference, autonomy and self-determination.<sup>343</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the West needs a greater sensitivity and self-criticism in dealing with other cultures.<sup>344</sup> And, as Ramadan has argued, if Muslims could relate more to the “universal dimension of their principles that would enable them to build bridges with the Other... and bring to the fore, out of respect for what is different, common fundamental values,”<sup>345</sup> they might be able to relate to their religion without reinforcing a sense of separation from others. Religious choices occupy a more sensitive space in the world because their motivation cannot always be accepted.<sup>346</sup> But, as Appiah points out, “Indeed, our political coexistence, as subjects or citizens, depends on being able to agree about practices while disagreeing about their justification.”<sup>347</sup> This entails a universal truth, that is, an obligation towards other humans, without universal agreement. Many Muslims are now interpreting their sources in order to reach that agreement about practices.<sup>348</sup> For example, some Muslim theologians and philosophers have argued that the foundations of human rights can already be found in Islamic sources, and it has even been suggested that the contact with the Muslim world influenced the idea.<sup>349</sup> After all, change is not a one-way street. On top of that, only a minority among mainstream Muslims and even extremists are of the opinion that democracy is a foreign concept and that the Islamic empire should be restored; the majority wants democracy and equality, albeit based on religious principles.<sup>350</sup> As Abdelwahab El-Effendi, coordinator of the Democracy and Islam program of the University of Westminster, has pointed out, Islam’s monotheism requires democracy, as “the sovereignty of one man contradicts the sovereignty of God, for all men are equal in front of God.”<sup>351</sup> Another example is *ijtihad*. Edward Said has argued that this Islamic practice of interpretation assumes that the Qur’an can never be fully understood, but that one always needs to keep committing oneself to the everlasting attempt to do so.<sup>352</sup> As such, *ijtihad* is stimulating Muslims to think for themselves. This has been done, for example, in relation to the *shari’a*; as many still believe in it, to oppose rights abuse in *shari’a* law, it is more effective to “challenge the compliance of these laws to Islamic principles” than to argue for its complete removal.<sup>353</sup> *Ijtihad* fits exactly the global humanism discussed in the previous chapter. Religious motivations may need translation to relate to secular justifications, and the other way around, but they can come to similar conclusions.<sup>354</sup>

Can we speak of the demise of the human rights era? After all, as seen above, its universalism (both in origin and reach) has been questioned and challenged. One can even wonder if there really ever

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<sup>343</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 60, 91-92.

<sup>344</sup> Borradori, 35.

<sup>345</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 477.

<sup>346</sup> Appiah, 10.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibidem*, 70.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibidem*, 145-147.

<sup>349</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 7, 11, 178-183.

<sup>350</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 63, 56: “Iran’s former president Mohammad Khatami, an advocate of Islamic democracy, said in a June 2001 television interview that “today, world democracies are suffering from a major vacuum which is the vacuum of spirituality” and that Islam can provide the framework combining democracy with spirituality and religious government.”

<sup>351</sup> *Ibidem*, 55-56.

<sup>352</sup> Said, 68-69.

<sup>353</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 116.

<sup>354</sup> Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 64.

was an 'ethical turn' or, as Rancière has argued, whether it was merely "an increasing tendency [of the West] to submit politics and art to moral judgments about the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices."<sup>355</sup> Nevertheless, the international market for local stories of human rights abuse and the ethical responses to them have not diminished. Personal narratives remain popular. Amnesty International plays with this popularity by trying to create a transnational public sphere of human rights, where stories can overcome claims for universality, irreconcilable difference, politics, power and economic opportunity. For any kind of transnational public sphere to exist, including Islam, neither religious nor non-religious positions should be favoured. Excluding religion from the public sphere, as Habermas has argued, will undermine the public sphere's function<sup>356</sup> and that of both the UDHR and Amnesty International with their universal aspirations. I will now proceed to shortly discuss Amnesty's literature project and its relation to literature as a means to overcome the problems and differences identified in this chapter.

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<sup>355</sup> Rancière, 184.

<sup>356</sup> Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 129.

#### 4. Amnesty International and literature

Amnesty International, as mentioned in the first chapter, is a non-profit organization that dedicates its efforts to ensure that “every person can enjoy all of their rights.” It was founded in London in 1961 and has both the longest history and the widest name recognition of all human rights NGOs, which makes it a leading example for the human rights movement. It propagates international solidarity, has offices in over eighty countries and encourages its approximately three million members to write letters, campaign on- and off-line, demonstrate and lobby those with influence. The campaigns are dedicated to defend justice for crimes against humanity, freedom of expression, women’s rights and to abolish the death penalty.<sup>357</sup>

Since 2010, Amnesty International has increasingly been turning to literature to support its vision of human equality. Its criteria for selection are rooted in what has been called ‘human rights literature’, a concept Amnesty stood at the cradle of. Wikipedia has dedicated a page to this concept, which it defines as “a literary genre that deals with human rights issues, and thus – directly or indirectly – promotes values of human rights. The goal of Human Rights Literature is to combine the literary driving force with the motivation for action...” It also emphasizes that human rights writing is not solely an aesthetic exercise, but demands social commitment of the writer. According to Wikipedia, the concept of human rights literature was first articulated in the foreword to the short stories anthology *Freedom*, published in 2010 in cooperation with Amnesty International.<sup>358</sup> This foreword was written by Vered Cohen Barzilay, former Amnesty Director of Communication & Publications and a board member of Art for Amnesty, which works with musicians and artists around the world to give human rights a voice. *Freedom*, including the foreword, has been translated into various languages including Polish, Spanish and Italian, and has been published around the world. The term human rights literature was further introduced to the public in 2010 at the Edinburgh Book festival, and in 2012 Cohen Barzilay formally introduced it at Oxford University during a discussion entitled “The Power of Literature and Human Rights,” as well as in early 2013 at the Literary Festival of the London School of Economics. Here, Cohen Barzilay has argued that the power of human rights literature may inspire the reader to fight for a better future for all humanity, without imposing upon him or her the duty to take action.<sup>359</sup> In 2012, Cohen Barzilay founded Novel Rights, an e-publishing house that creates and promotes human rights literature. Judging from its definition, it seems that human rights literature addresses readers who already hold the rights, and are in the position to grant them to others who do not – those who are the main subject of the literary works.

On its website, Amnesty recommends, endorses or co-publishes both fiction and non-fiction for advocating human rights. A range of these works are offered through their web shop,<sup>360</sup> and under the heading “Books for Amnesty,” one can find a list of second-hand bookshops owned by Amnesty. These bookshops “raise money to fund ... campaigns and human rights work” and are there to generate awareness of Amnesty’s goals.<sup>361</sup> The page provides a link to the up-to-date inventory, existing mainly of human rights reports and non-fiction on human rights abuse, but also of some of

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<sup>357</sup> *Amnesty International, Who We Are.*

<sup>358</sup> *Wikipedia, Human Rights Literature.* Wikimedia Foundation. June 2013. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_rights\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_literature). June 29<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>359</sup> *Novel Rights, About.* June 29<sup>th</sup> 2013. <http://novelrights.com/about/>. June 29<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>360</sup> *Amnesty International UK Shop.* June 29<sup>th</sup> 2013. <http://amnestyshop.org.uk/books.html>. June 29<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>361</sup> *Amnesty International, Books for Amnesty.* June 2012. <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=503>. June 29<sup>th</sup> 2013.

the fiction listed on the Human Rights and Fiction page. The 2010 “Top 10 Summer Book List for Human Rights Advocates” by the blog editors of the Amnesty International USA website provides a range of fiction and non-fiction that promotes human rights, as well as a space for comments and further suggestions. In total, about thirty-five of the books endorsed or recommended by Amnesty are works of fiction that are offered either through their web shop or through links to Amazon.com. Furthermore, Amnesty has supported several literary events, such as the Sufi Poetry event organized by the art charity Poet in the City, that supports poetry education.<sup>362</sup>

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## Human rights fiction and poetry



*And what has art and literature to do with human rights? They are all bound up with this wonderful talent we humans have: to empathise with others. It, by reading, we are enabled to step, for one moment, into another person's shoes, to get right under their skin, then that is already a great achievement. Through empathy we overcome prejudice, develop tolerance and ultimately understand love. Stories can bring understanding, healing, reconciliation and unity.*

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

The power of human rights within fiction and poetry cannot be underestimated. From timeless novels such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with its themes of race and social divisions, to the contemporary examination of humanity's replicated android self in Philip K. Dick's both classic *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, good fiction can engage our imaginations and affect our perception of the world around us.

These titles encourage the reader to let go of preconceptions and explore through the art of poetry and story-line exactly what is meant by the phrase 'human rights'.

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### BEFORE WE SAY GOODBYE



**Gabriella Ambrosio**  
 Inspired by an actual suicide bombing, this extraordinary novel tells the story of two teenage girls, one Palestinian, one Israeli. One is a suicide bomber, the other her victim.

Find out more

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### FIRE IN THE SOUL



**Edited by Dinyar Godrej**  
 Commentaries on events between Israel and Palestine, a collection of essays by...

# HUMAN RIGHTS NOW BLOG

## Top 10 Summer Book List for Human Rights Advocates

BY THE EDITORS  
 July 23, 2010 at 3:07 PM

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Here at Amnesty, our staffers have put together a list of books on our summer reading list for human rights. We invite you to read with us as we look to books, non-fiction and fiction alike, on issues in today's world. Here are our top 10 summer must reads!

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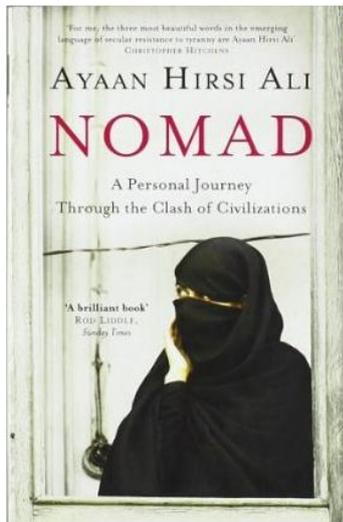
<sup>362</sup> See chapter ‘Sufism: Islam’s human-shaped spin-off,’ p. 94.

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The body of literature that Amnesty recommends, endorses or (co-)publishes exists of many topics related to human rights abuse and its causes, such as poverty, conflicts or corruption.<sup>363</sup> The works I will discuss are all related to Muslims as the subjects of human rights abuse, albeit in very different ways. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the perceived clash between the Western and Islamic civilization complicates the universal umbrella of human rights, that originates in a particularly Western context. Up to today, very few of Amnesty's offices are located in Muslim countries, and very few staff members are from these countries. However, as its final aim is to include everyone, especially those whose values are perceived to provide a challenge for inclusion make the most interesting cases. I will proceed to examine the way in which the works represent the Muslim as a candidate for inclusion into the world of human rights propagated by Amnesty, while remaining attentive to the issues around literature's representativeness and the negotiation of differences in backgrounds and motivations discussed in the previous chapters.

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<sup>363</sup> It is interesting to refer back to Pascale Casanova, who argued that only literary impoverished spaces employ politicized realism (see chapter 2). Perhaps Amnesty employs this genre (which is also used by Western writers in the corpus) for authenticity, to connect the literature, as demands for human rights, to these impoverished spaces for which it demands rights.



### Nomad : Enlightenment gone astray

Time and again I heard the question: How typical was your experience? Are you in any way representative? *Nomad* answers that question. It is not only about my life as a wanderer in the West; it is also about the lives of many immigrants to the West, the philosophical and very real difficulties of people, especially women, who live in a tightly closed traditional Muslim culture within a broadly open culture. It is about how Islamic ideals clash with Western ideals. It is about the clash of civilizations that I and millions of others have lived and continue to live.<sup>364</sup>

This quote introduces Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations* (2010) as a continuation of her earlier book *Infidel* (2006), a New York Times bestseller in which she mostly speaks of her life in rural Somalia, where she was born, and her departure: at the age of 23 she allegedly fled from Somalia to the Netherlands from an enforced marriage, where she abandoned Islam and became a right-wing politician. *Nomad* repeats some of *Infidel's* content, but also deals with its aftermath: in 2006, Hirsi Ali moved to the USA because some of the conditions under which she was allowed to stay in the Netherlands were exposed as lies. *Nomad* did not sell as many copies as *Infidel*, which sold out only two days after its publication in the Netherlands and was equally well received in English-speaking countries upon the translation's release, but it did receive high rankings on Amazon.com and Goodreads, as well as positive reviews from journalists such as Christopher Hitchens and John Lloyd and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins.<sup>365</sup> On Amnesty's website, *Nomad* is listed on the fifth place in the top 10 of books that advocate human rights.

Through anecdotes of Hirsi Ali's experiences as a Somali refugee in the Netherlands and a Dutch immigrant in the USA, *Nomad* is framed as a memoir. This "signals to the reader an intended fidelity to history and memory."<sup>366</sup> But as is the case in any life-story, this first-person narrative is constructed through selected memories that receive their meaning and cohesion in hindsight.<sup>367</sup> In Hirsi Ali's case, all her experiences are framed to underscore the book's core message of the clash of civilizations, presented as a series of strong statements, often factually unmotivated: Islam is a sick religion, inherently connected to poverty and oppression, and opposed to Enlightenment values.<sup>368</sup> The book is divided into four parts: the first serves to interpret the experiences of Hirsi Ali's youth, the second and third narrate her transition to modernity on the basis of which she interprets her youth, and the last one provides an advice to the world. Hirsi Ali tries to engage her readers with her authority as an ex-Muslim as well as an academic. She frames her story as a coming-of-age narrative in which she, as an Enlightened Western female, not only looks back upon her naïve Muslim youth, but in which this youth is equated with the condition of Islam as a backward religion in general. Hirsi

<sup>364</sup> Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Nomad: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2011. Xv.

<sup>365</sup> Goodreads, *Nomad*. June 7<sup>th</sup> 2013. <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6663818-nomad>. June 7<sup>th</sup> 2013; Amazon.com, *Nomad*. June 7<sup>th</sup> 2013. [http://www.amazon.com/Nomad-America-Personal-Journey-Civilizations/dp/B0048ELEAE/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1370611241&sr=8-1&keywords=Nomad%2C+Ayaan+hirsi+ali](http://www.amazon.com/Nomad-America-Personal-Journey-Civilizations/dp/B0048ELEAE/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1370611241&sr=8-1&keywords=Nomad%2C+Ayaan+hirsi+ali). June 7<sup>th</sup> 2013; Hirsi Ali, cover.

<sup>366</sup> Whitlock, 12.

<sup>367</sup> Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*. Sara B. Young trans. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 78.

<sup>368</sup> Hirsi Ali, xiv, 144-145.

Ali's generalizations of Islam bypass the way in which it is and has been adapting and reacting to the modern world. She limits revivalism to violent fundamentalism, which she argues is inherent to Islam as a system of social discipline, whereas in the West, she argues, religious fundamentalism and violence are incidental. She bases herself on two observations: Muslim terrorists who commit mass murders are often friendly and polite, and her religious education included violence as a political tool. But she ignores the fact that many serial killers, religious or not, are described as friendly and polite, as well as the fact that she was educated by not just any Muslim, but an extreme Islamist.<sup>369</sup> In the first case she is ignoring patterns, in the second she is over-generalizing. This seems to be her tendency throughout the entire memoir. I will proceed to discuss *Nomad* in the structure of the preceding chapter, by addressing Hirsi Ali's reflections on Islam in relation to nationalism, individuation, secularization and capitalism.

A noisy, tarpaulin-covered street market was across the road, crowded with stalls selling lengths of saris, international phone cards, and spicy lamb sandwiches... I was right back in the heart of it all: inside the world of veils and blinkers, the world where women must hide their hair and their bodies... and must follow a few steps behind their men on the street... We were all very far from where we had been born, but only I had left behind that culture. They had brought their web of values with them, halfway across the world. I felt as though I was the only true nomad.<sup>370</sup>

Hirsi Ali's observation of the largely Muslim population on Whitechapel Road, London (to which her father belongs) at the start of the book serves to establish immediately the image of the Muslim population in general as unwilling to assimilate and develop. Hirsi Ali looks upon her former community through the lens of her Enlightenment values and their function to groom citizens rather than to preserve separateness. She does not believe that a Muslim can become a real citizen of a European nation, because Islam is inherently un-modern. Multiculturalism, with its "illusion that one can hold on to tribal norms and at the same time become a successful citizen" is thus postponing the Muslim transition to modernity.<sup>371</sup> She argues that Muslims are opportunistic rather than loyal, that they become citizens of European countries just for the benefits and consider themselves Muslim first.<sup>372</sup> They hold on to their family ties, whereas Hirsi Ali states that "[she] will not serve the bloodline or Allah any longer,"<sup>373</sup> having sworn her loyalty to national ties now. She identifies in European Muslims a process of "self-ghettoization" which closes them off and renders them susceptible to the cultivation of a hatred that threatens Western values.<sup>374</sup> She sees the Muslim mind as susceptible to radicalization because Muslims are not allowed to think critically about their religion.<sup>375</sup> Much like fundamentalists do, she refers to Qur'anic quotes to define what it means to be a Muslim, and thus fills in what she thinks Muslims think – concluding that they should abandon the scripture altogether.<sup>376</sup> She identifies a threatening Muslim unity that transcends all ethnic and

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<sup>369</sup> Ibidem, 191.

<sup>370</sup> Ibidem, 11-12.

<sup>371</sup> Ibidem, xx.

<sup>372</sup> Ibidem, 24, 139.

<sup>373</sup> Hirsi Ali, 92.

<sup>374</sup> Ibidem, xxi, xxiii, xvii.

<sup>375</sup> Ibidem, 141-142.

<sup>376</sup> Examples: epigraph, xiv, 24, 79, 196.

sectarian disputes<sup>377</sup> (interestingly enough, fundamentalism's goal); she argues that Westerners "have a vision of Muslims as a mass of unbending, irrational, unthinking beings, incapable of calmly examining new ideas on their merit."<sup>378</sup> This sentence is exemplary for her use of language throughout the book; course, unnuanced words, borrowed from anti-Islamic media discourse.

Hirsi Ali's generalizations ignore that the re-emergence of Islamic identity or even the radicalization of Islam is a sign of the dissolution of tradition, not a persistence of it. She conflates tribal life and religion, which, as discussed in the preceding chapter, is ignoring the fact that many Islamic reactions to modernity reject tribal tradition. In fact, many Islamic groups, both modernist and fundamentalist, reject the authority of the Caliphs of the Muslim empire because they were chosen on the basis of their bloodline (much like in European kingdoms) rather than their competence. Furthermore, Hirsi Ali's Enlightenment values are preserving the separateness she condemns, in judging who is and who is not eligible for citizenship. Hirsi Ali divides the world into the Enlightened West and the evil fundamentalist *jihadis* that need to compete "for the hearts and minds" of the Muslim population in the West. But first of all, she is overestimating the nationalistic loyalty of European citizenship in the present age of globalism and economically motivated migration. She herself may be the best example of this. She was accepted as a political refugee in the Netherlands on account of her forced marriage in Somalia. However, at the time she had been living in Kenya for over twelve years, and she arrived in Holland through Germany. She concealed these facts because they would not have allowed her to stay in Holland; Kenya, at the time, was considered a safe country. In an interview in 2006 she even admitted to having been an economic refugee rather than a political one.<sup>379</sup> Secondly, she is presenting the Muslim population as an isolated whole, without agency, existing everywhere but belonging nowhere. She is quick to generalize on the basis of uncertain facts: "... at least two dozen Somali youths from Minnesota are said to have gone to Somalia to fight in the civil war there. Nothing illustrates more clearly my point that the threat posed by radical Islam is both internal and external."<sup>380</sup> Her argumentation cuts her off from the Muslim majority even more,<sup>381</sup> and also from the radicalized minority, whom she sees as evil and already lost, unable to change. Overall, Hirsi Ali is dismissing the effect of individuation that has also affected the Muslim world, as will become clear below.

The most striking example of the way Hirsi Ali fills in and generalizes Muslim thought, is her idea about Muslim women. *Nomad's* cover shows a picture of a woman, dressed in a heavy, black cloth, leaving only her eyes uncovered. She is looking away from the camera, thus seems distant and does not invite engagement with the viewer. Throughout the book, the veil reappears as the symbol of Islam's oppression of women, rearing them to become "submissive robots."<sup>382</sup> Hirsi Ali interprets the veil as a sign of submission to God and to men, and argues that women who wear it have failed to release themselves from this obedience. "These women believe that their own bodies are so

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<sup>377</sup> Ibidem, 200. Furthermore, Hirsi Ali stages the argument of a common enemy in front of which to unite as an exclusively Muslim practice, ignoring that the USA is in fact doing the same.

<sup>378</sup> Ibidem, 239.

<sup>379</sup> *Nova Zembla*. Twan Huys and Reijer Zwaan. May 11<sup>th</sup> 2006.  
<http://www.novatv.nl/page/detail/uitzendingen/4340>. June 28<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>380</sup> Ibidem, 139.

<sup>381</sup> Ibidem, 133, 21.

<sup>382</sup> Ibidem, xix.

powerfully toxic that even making eye contact with other people is a sin. The extent of self-loathing that this expresses is impossible to exaggerate...<sup>383</sup> The language she uses exemplifies the way in which she speaks of Islamic culture as a pre-Enlightenment discourse, rooted in religious superstition and the de-valorisation of the individual. She represents Muslim society as existing of oppressing men with several scared, veiled and circumcised wives. However, again, she is conflating tradition and tribal society with religion; polygamy, for example, is rejected by fundamentalists on account of there being no Qur'anic evidence for it. Female circumcision is practiced in tribal African societies, but rarely in the (often rural) Muslim Middle East. Hirsi Ali does not make this distinction.<sup>384</sup> Furthermore, her strictly Qur'anic view of what the veil means leaves women powerless to decide its meaning. When her cousin asks her for skirts and blouses, she is happy: "This gave me hope, for I thought that if she were attracted to shrouding herself in a *jilbab* she would not ask for such clothes."<sup>385</sup> But as Esposito points out, emancipation is not about wearing a two-piece swimsuit.<sup>386</sup> First of all, there is many variation in styles of covering. The Qur'an does not require women to cover their faces, and contrary to what many think, the veil, or *hijab*, can refer to any style of body covering: from full body covering (*burqa*) to facial covering (*niqab*) to partial covering (*jilbab*) to only covering the hair. *Nomad's* cover reduces the wide range of possibilities to one specific style. Furthermore, as several scholars have pointed out, the veil has often been a symbol of protest, a means for women to enter the public sphere and the sign of an elevated cultural status; there is a trend among higher educated women to start wearing it.<sup>387</sup> In the West, Roy has argued, many who wear a veil play on the "modern concept of personal freedom,"<sup>388</sup> and they use many alternatives to the face-covering *niqab* depicted on the front of the book. But Hirsi Ali's secular view cannot seem to be aligned with the association with submission of the veil in general.<sup>389</sup>

There are certainly many gender-related problems in developing Muslim societies, and as Abu-Lughod has argued, cultural relativism is not the answer: "it is too late not to interfere. The forms of lives we find around the world are already products of long histories of interactions."<sup>390</sup> But there needs to be an appreciation of the differences between women around the world "as products of different histories, expressions of different circumstances, and manifestations of differently structured desires."<sup>391</sup> Although it should not be ignored that in many Muslim countries the *niqab* or *burqa* is obligated, leaving women little choice, by equating the veil in general with oppression, Hirsi Ali is bypassing the roots of female suffering in the societies she criticizes. The Gallup World Poll has shown that the priorities of many women in developing Muslim countries are not related to their headwear, but to peace, politics and economic development.<sup>392</sup> Hirsi Ali argues that Muslim women have to become aware of the fact that they are oppressed, like slaves once had to, but in order for that to happen, they need help of those who are already free.<sup>393</sup> "Western feminists should take on

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<sup>383</sup> Ibidem, 18-19.

<sup>384</sup> Ibidem, 156.

<sup>385</sup> Ibidem, 70.

<sup>386</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 132.

<sup>387</sup> Kevin J. Ayotte & Mary E. Husain, "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil". *NWSA Journal*, 17.3 (2005); 117, Esposito & Mogahed, 108-110; Abu-Lughod, 785-786.

<sup>388</sup> Roy, 193.

<sup>389</sup> Mahmood, 209, Hirsi Ali, 226.

<sup>390</sup> Abu-Lughod, 786-787.

<sup>391</sup> Ibidem, 783.

<sup>392</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 127.

<sup>393</sup> Hirsi Ali, 162.

the plight of the Muslim woman and make it their own cause. Their aim should be to help the Muslim woman find her voice.”<sup>394</sup> But instead, as Esposito has remarked, Western feminism is often oblivious to the “greater context of human rights, including harm caused by poverty, political repression, and war – especially when Western policies are perceived to have caused these hardships.”<sup>395</sup> Reducing the problems of women in developing countries to gender and misinterpreting their priorities not only renders the women passive, it “also proves useless when it comes to the elaboration of oppositional political strategy.”<sup>396</sup> Furthermore, it is ignoring the achievements of Muslim countries. In 2005, the UNESCO Gender and Development report showed that the female to male ratio in post-secondary education was a 100% or more in Jordan, Algeria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh.<sup>397</sup> Although many Muslim women interrogated by Gallup want progress and equality, they want it on their own terms, including religious ones.<sup>398</sup> The Western position on female rights echoes old civilizational missionary practices. As the London Mayor Boris Johnson said in 2001 (when he was still a parliamentarian): “it is time for some concerted cultural imperialism. They are wrong about women. We are right.”<sup>399</sup>

Hirsi Ali, on the one hand, renders women completely powerless. She argues that it is Allah who is a misogynist, denying women the pleasures and advantages of learning and friendship. But, again, she bases herself on Qur’anic verses on which her enemies also base themselves, and she denies the power that women have in interpreting their religion. On the other hand, she often represents Muslim women as inherently evil, mean and stupid, regardless of their commitment to religion.<sup>400</sup> Her mother serves as the prime example for this. Hirsi Ali, at times, represents her as monstrously unfeminine as a result of her fulfilling of the gendered role that is demanded of her by Somali society. When she, for example, does not want to see her bastard grandson, Hirsi Ali condemns her because “it [is] natural for a woman to welcome her grandchild, a grandson, into the world.”<sup>401</sup> When her mother gives her son Mahad a bath, “he howled in pain and shame,”<sup>402</sup> shame because she is a woman and he is a man. In Western discourse, a woman bathing her son would never be associated with shame, but for this purpose, Hirsi Ali conveniently takes over the (what she perceives as) Islamic gendered roles. She does the same in the case of her Muslim cousin, who infected her Irish boyfriend with AIDS: although they both agreed on unsafe sex, Hirsi Ali argues that he was victimized by her because he must have thought (speculates Hirsi Ali, although she admits she has never spoken to him) that “*she’s a Muslim girl, she wears a headscarf, she condemns any kind of sexual activity before marriage, so she must be a virgin.*”<sup>403</sup> She generalizes this into saying that welcoming cosmopolitans will fall victim to the consequences of allowing Muslims in their society. In short, Hirsi Ali forecloses the option of Islamic female power, ‘female’ and ‘Islamic’ being mutually exclusive, and brands women that hold on to that as unfit to be saved.

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<sup>394</sup> Ibidem, xxi.

<sup>395</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 129.

<sup>396</sup> Ayotte & Husain, 117.

<sup>397</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 103-104. Note that this ratio in Turkey, a secular nation with a Muslim majority, is only 74%, which is lower than in Saudi Arabia, where it is 89%.

<sup>398</sup> Ibidem, 102, 113.

<sup>399</sup> Ibidem, 100-101, 106.

<sup>400</sup> Hirsi Ali, 34-35.

<sup>401</sup> Ibidem, 62.

<sup>402</sup> Ibidem, 50.

<sup>403</sup> Ibidem, 79.

Hirsi Ali's position towards secularization is quite ambiguous. Although she, as an atheist, is not in need of religion, she recognizes that democracies in the West vary in their relation to it. Speaking from a country in which political discourse is saturated with religious references, Hirsi Ali treats Western religious discourse as a way to wrap her secular arguments in an attractive package in order to win over the masses. Although the ideal situation to Hirsi Ali would be universal atheism, Muslims, un-Enlightened as they are, need spiritual guidance, and she knows best what kind: it is the humane figure of Jesus and the redemptive Christian God that Muslims really seek, as the lesser of all religious evils.<sup>404</sup> Muslims, Hirsi Ali argues, do not know how violent their God is, because they do not understand their own scriptures. She propagates Catholicism as a means to reconcile Muslims with the secular world, lauding Christian ideals such as "individual responsibility, frugality, tolerance and moderation."<sup>405</sup> She argues that Catholicism is secularized and reformed, that its God is synonymous with love and science and that the Bible is seen as merely a book of parables. Although she realizes that the critical thinking and equality she identifies are not inherent to Christianity but the result of historical processes,<sup>406</sup> she is convinced that Islam could never go through these. Therefore, "the Christianity of love and tolerance remains one of the West's most powerful antidotes to the Islam of hate and intolerance."<sup>407</sup> Hirsi Ali's ideas about Catholicism and her adoption of its discourse leave her to conclude, naively, that the societies based on it are a "cocktail of races, religions and classes."<sup>408</sup> To underscore her convictions, and perhaps to bring in some more 'evidence' (albeit fictional), she even stages a fake conversation between an Enlightened Christian American and a Muslim girl, in which the former asks the latter to answer for the fundamentalist terrorist attacks in Mumbai, 2008.<sup>409</sup> The Muslim girl cannot justify the attacks, which leads the smart Christian girl to conclude that there is something wrong with Islam in general. In short, Hirsi Ali not only ignores the human rights abuses that are still happening in Catholicism's name, calling this violence 'incidental' as opposed to violence as a rule in Islam,<sup>410</sup> she also keeps playing down the intelligence and agency of Muslims themselves.

Capitalism, to Hirsi Ali, is the only right way to a modern and Enlightened lifestyle. She critiques her cousin, who lives in the USA and sends money to his family in Somalia, for "denying himself the fruits of his own labor."<sup>411</sup> To her, the best way to divide people is according to wealth, which she finds to be more genuine and practical than according to family.<sup>412</sup> The structure of the book exemplifies this: the first part, which judges Hirsi Ali's youth and Muslim life in general, is divided into chapters named "My Father," "My Half Sister," "My Cousins," etc. Her later chapters are divided according to her new priorities: "School and sexuality;" "Money and Responsibility." Hirsi Ali never wonders whether feeling obligated to take care of your family is really 'unfreedom', or whether there is not something to say for a more communal way of life. She engages the reader with a starting anecdote everyone might be able to relate to – her trip to London to visit her father on his deathbed. Short anecdotes from her own Somali family life, existing of a dominant father, a submissive mother, some almost

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<sup>404</sup> Ibidem, 239.

<sup>405</sup> Ibidem, 253.

<sup>406</sup> Ibidem, 160.

<sup>407</sup> Ibidem, xxii.

<sup>408</sup> Ibidem, 124.

<sup>409</sup> Ibidem, 208-209.

<sup>410</sup> Ibidem, 240, 253. It is interesting to note that, on some issues, Islamic law is more ambiguous and nuanced than the Catholic Church – for example, abortion. Esposito & Mogahed, 130.

<sup>411</sup> Hirsi Ali, 75.

<sup>412</sup> Ibidem, 90.

invisible sisters, a spoiled brother and a horribly old-fashioned grandmother, teach the reader that such a deathbed means something completely different for Muslims. She speculates that, for her father's Somali friends, "[she] would not be welcome at [her] father's bedside because [she] was an unbeliever, an infidel, an avowed atheist, a filthy runaway, and, worst of all, a traitor to the clan and to the faith."<sup>413</sup> She fears that they might want her to die, so she does not trust them with her whereabouts, not even her family. Her father, she adds, might not want her to attend his funeral on account of her being a woman. She tries to ease her pain by hoping that her father had forgiven her right before he died, although she can never be sure. She uses this quite heart breaking story to conclude that communal life, governed by religion, precludes assimilation into the modern world. She is proud to announce that, during her political career in Holland, she supported work quotas for Eastern European immigrants over family reunion quotas for Moroccan and Turkish immigrants. The problems this has brought with it remain unmentioned. She recounts that Somali refugees are not capable of dealing with money and bank accounts and blames Islam for insisting on sharing money and condemning debt, while simultaneously bringing up women to always say 'yes', which brings them into sales-debts.<sup>414</sup> She bases this on her own experiences as a Somali refugee; her current self-defined position as an Enlightened woman allows her to judge others that have not gone through her process of *Bildung* (yet). Her argumentation ignores the poor economic situation of rural Somalia. Hirsi Ali also ignores the negative effects that global capitalism has had on the world. She justifies the USA's controversial connections to autocratic Muslim countries by arguing that they serve to infiltrate Muslim networks and to rebuild invaded countries.<sup>415</sup> She does not acknowledge that wealth is often not a matter of choice. She accuses Muslim families in Somalia of poisoning their children, raising them in dangerously gendered roles and failing to provide them with the proper tools to develop. She also argues that they are scientifically undereducated and un-innovative, which endangers the health and comfort of generations to come.<sup>416</sup> But she blames Islam, as an anti-modern religion, for this ignorance, rather than economic and political disadvantages, war, poverty and corruption.

Hirsi Ali's adoption and combination of pro-Enlightenment and anti-Islamic discourses as a weapon against that which she identifies as both anti-Enlightenment and Islamic, divides the world she represents in two. She judges this world with her adopted Western standards, that according to her, are the universal standards to which all must live up.<sup>417</sup> To Hirsi Ali, there is no such thing as more than one ultimate truth claim. "All human beings are equal, but all cultures and religions are not... the culture of the Western Enlightenment is *better*."<sup>418</sup> Hirsi Ali is a champion of Enlightenment's gains, among which critical thinking and the emancipation of the masses, but she herself is excluding a large part of the population she feels is either without agency because it does not choose, or entirely unfit for emancipation because it has chosen the wrong side. Many have pointed out Enlightenment's disappointing legacy of separation,<sup>419</sup> but to Hirsi Ali, the only way to deal with the problems between the West and Islam is complete westernization. She makes it her mission to convince Western students that their fellow Muslim students, "...these veiled and bearded

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<sup>413</sup> Ibidem, 8.

<sup>414</sup> Ibidem, 99, 180, 182.

<sup>415</sup> Ibidem, 144.

<sup>416</sup> Ibidem, 64, 77-78, 91, 118, 132.

<sup>417</sup> Hirsi Ali, 26.

<sup>418</sup> Hirsi Ali, 212.

<sup>419</sup> Borradori, 22; Slaughter 2007, 15.

youngsters, with whom for years they had shared cups of coffee, books, and classes, did not share their most basic values."<sup>420</sup> She equates appearance to fundamentalism, although the converse does not apply – she interprets the make-up her veiled cousins wear as “skin-deep” modernity and argues that “pop music, denim jeans and the legal right to have sex at age sixteen” are not enough to make Muslims modern.<sup>421</sup> On the other hand, she propagates the “Las Vegas moment” when people can shake off traditional morals and “gamble and fornicate.”<sup>422</sup> She argues that promoting respect for the minority Muslim culture and religion will deny those Muslims “their right to wrest their freedom their parents’ culture.”<sup>423</sup> She dismisses any particularities of Muslims or Muslim countries as undesirable: “Whether your country of origin is Pakistan, Morocco or Somalia, you are not living there for a reason,”<sup>424</sup> suggesting that these countries will never allow the emergence of modern citizens as long as they are Islamic. Overall, Hirsi Ali’s discursive division of the world and conveniently taking over whichever discourse helps her to interpret situations in a way that condemns Islam, is weakening her arguments.

Hirsi Ali, like Amnesty, believes in the power of words, “that can break through many other kinds of force.”<sup>425</sup> But her view of humanity and tolerance is admittedly and specifically Western, excluding all alternatives. By narrating her experiences within a framework of *Bildung*, Hirsi Ali presents the world as a hierarchy of possible realities, and she simplifies the problems of contesting worldviews by employing the recognizable coming-of-age story, which allows her to posit her view as a more developed and matured version of reality than the ‘before *Bildung*’ worldview of Islam. She argues that equal respect for cultures will result in oppression and ignorance, rather than a “rich mosaic of colorful and proud peoples interacting peacefully while maintaining a delightful diversity...”<sup>426</sup> Precisely for this, *Nomad* has been lauded.<sup>427</sup> British economist Deepak Lal calls Hirsi Ali’s book “a searing indictment of the cult of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘diversity’ which are disabling other Muslims in the West from making a similar transition, and making their youth turn to radical Islam and becoming ‘jihadis’” and an inquiry into “how and why Islam poses the gravest threat to Western liberal societies.” Philosopher Sam Harris “can think of no one who better exemplifies the hard-won gains of the Enlightenment or can speak more effectively in their defense.”

However, as Mahmood has pointed out, Hirsi Ali’s status as an ex-Muslim gives her orientalism a particular force and authenticity that is detached from her current occupation.<sup>428</sup> She works for the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative American think tank. Although Hirsi Ali does not perceive of herself as conservative (she is, for example, pro-choice), she finds that American liberals are too afraid to criticize Islam.<sup>429</sup> But the fact that her book is framed as a memoir stages it as authoritative. The reviews on Goodreads and Amazon.com affirm this authenticity. Most readers refer to the work as a memoir or a testimony, and many feel that Hirsi Ali is honest regarding the account of her personal suffering. Most express empathic responses to it, such as shock, sadness or

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<sup>420</sup> Hirsi Ali, 135.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibidem*, 81, 248.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibidem*, 259.

<sup>423</sup> *Ibidem*, 164.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibidem*, 134.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibidem*, 262.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibidem*, 261.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibidem*, praise-section.

<sup>428</sup> Mahmood, 199.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibidem*, 106.

gratefulness for their own lives. Hirsi Ali uses her air of authority concerning both Islamic culture and the Western world to draw conclusions that are merely speculative. Her statistics on the number of veiled schoolgirls are preceded by 'perhaps' or 'probably'.<sup>430</sup> She bases herself on Somali culture and her own life experience, and if she does not know a certain Somali word, it does not exist (for example 'immune system', emphasizing their backwardness<sup>431</sup>). But she has only lived in Somalia until her sixth year, and she finds that "debates on Islam, multiculturalism, and women have been exhausted in the late 1980s and 1990s," which is why she is not up to date and only follows news on attacks in the name of Islam.<sup>432</sup> And indeed, her readers' empathy does not always translate to trusting her judgment, even though that is what Hirsi Ali is finally aiming for; in *Infidel*, she has declared that she favours reason and facts above emotions and irrationality (such as religion).<sup>433</sup> The reviews show a wide range of reactions concerning Hirsi Ali's condemnation of Islam and the impossibility of reconciling it with Western values. A few react that they were educated by her and call it a 'must read' for those who wish to be informed about Islam and immigration. Many of those who appreciated her earlier books agree. But others find her denunciation of Islam too aggressive and disagree with her absolute exaltation of Enlightenment culture.

Hirsi Ali uses tricks of the literary trade to generate empathy and to reinforce her message, but because of her simplistic employment of a familiar structure, the "classic standard (male, liberal) autobiographical plot in which personal success is the measure of willpower and autonomy,"<sup>434</sup> in combination with a language devoid of aesthetics that echoes typical Islamophobic discourse, her work can hardly be called singular. Its aesthetics are subordinated to its content, which is either preaching to the converted,<sup>435</sup> reinforcing existing ideas, or causing people to disagree on account of its extreme character. Overall, the general authority that she claims is rooted in very specific conservatism, first from a rural Somali family, now from an American think tank. A number of her readers are aware of her partiality, but those who are already on 'her side' and those who are unaware of many of the issues she addresses, take her view as authoritative.

Although Hirsi Ali's arguments are rooted in the same values as the UDHR and Amnesty International, her very limited and quite conservative view of what constitutes humanity still excludes about 1.3 billion of the world's population.<sup>436</sup> The fact that Amnesty recommends Hirsi Ali's book illustrates the inegalitarian and discursive nature of their shared values, and the ease with which they can be used for opposite goals. Amnesty thus endangers to estrange its reading audience from those for whom they ask tolerance and understanding.

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<sup>430</sup> Hirsi Ali, 78, 137.

<sup>431</sup> Ibidem, 77.

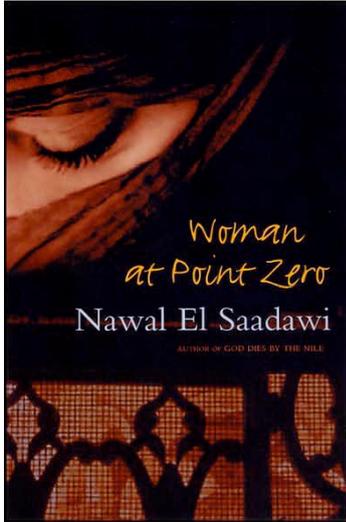
<sup>432</sup> Ibidem, 144, 114.

<sup>433</sup> Mineke Bosch, "Telling stories, creating (and saving) her life. An analysis of the autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali." *Women's Studies International Forum*, 31 (2008). 141.

<sup>434</sup> Bosch, 142.

<sup>435</sup> Anja Meulenbelt, who pioneers Dutch second wave feminism, has stressed that "the women [Hirsi Ali] claims to liberate turn from her. Her following according to all the reactions in newspapers and websites, consists predominantly of Dutch autochthones who already were convinced of the backwardness of Islam." Bosch, 145.

<sup>436</sup> Esposito & Mogahed, 97.



### The universal Arab woman at point zero

The novel *Woman at Point Zero* by the Egyptian author Nawal El Saadawi is recommended fourth in the top 10 of human rights advocating books on the Amnesty website. It can be purchased through a link to Amazon.com. After its release in 1975, the novel has been published in twenty-two languages and the English language translation, published in 1983, subsequently became a bestseller. Amnesty's recommended version is provided with a new foreword written in 2007 by Arab studies scholar Miriam Cooke.

El Saadawi is an Egyptian psychiatrist, writer and activist. In 1981, she was arrested and imprisoned for criticizing Anwar Sadat's one-party presidency. She was released after his assassination a few months later, but fled to the USA after her name appeared on a fundamentalist death list. In 2004, she "presented herself as a candidate for the presidential elections in Egypt, with a platform of human rights, democracy and greater freedom for women,"<sup>437</sup> but was forced to withdraw. Her novel *Woman at Point Zero* is based on the life-story of an Egyptian woman named Firdaus, imprisoned for murdering a man. Before her execution, she tells her story to a female psychiatrist. Both the novel's praise-section and foreword hail the novel as a universal story of Arab female suffering. "It does not matter of this story is true or made up, or a bit of both (which it is). What matters is that it unfolds a universal tragedy..." "Woman at Point Zero is the story of one Arab woman, but it reads as if it is every woman's life."<sup>438</sup> I will explore the way in which the novel constructs this image of the universal Arab woman in order to draw some conclusions about the novel's function in the context of Amnesty's recommendation of it as promoting human rights.

The novel is set up as a first-person narrative from the perspective of the narrator, the psychiatrist. She serves as the focalizer who immediately establishes Firdaus as unique within her prison environment: "if you look into her face, her eyes, you will never believe that so gentle a woman can commit murder," narrates the psychiatrist.<sup>439</sup> At the same time, the almost magical atmosphere the narrator creates is insisting on a universal authority that resides within Firdaus. As the psychiatrist enters the cell to meet her, the sky opens; she hears a voice as though in a dream, coming from "the depths of the earth, drop[ping] from the rooftops, or fall[ing] from the heavens. Or [it] might even flow from all directions, like air moving in space reaches the ears."<sup>440</sup> The narrator feels overcome by subjective feelings "not worthy of a researcher in science,"<sup>441</sup> not based on rationality: "she could not read or write and knew nothing about psychology, so how was it that I had so easily believed her feelings could be true?"<sup>442</sup> It is because this woman, Firdaus, represents everyone. At this point, Firdaus' story appears as a second first-person narrative, with Firdaus as the focalizer, within the larger frame of the psychiatrist's narrative. Firdaus positions herself as the representative of every layer of society: "Only my make- up, my hair and my expensive shoes were 'upper class'. With my

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<sup>437</sup> Nawal El Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*. Sherif Hetata trans. London: Zed Books Ltd, 2007 [1975]. Foreword by Miriam Cook.

<sup>438</sup> Foreword and praise. All following pages are from this publication, unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>439</sup> 2.

<sup>440</sup> 8.

<sup>441</sup> 4.

<sup>442</sup> 5.

secondary school certificate and suppressed desires I belonged to the 'middle class'. By birth I was lower class."<sup>443</sup> As such, she presents herself as every voice that desperately needs to be heard: "Let me speak. Do not interrupt me. I have no time to listen to you."<sup>444</sup>

Right from the start of her story, Firdaus takes over the narrator's universalizing discourse. She recounts being a young girl in a small village, seeing the men pray during the Friday sermon. They all resemble one another, their eyes have an "aggressiveness that seemed strangely servile."<sup>445</sup> The focus turns to her father, a Muslim and a cold and rigid man. When Firdaus describes him eating the food he deprives her of, his mouth "like that of a camel," his jaws "clamping down" "with a loud grinding noise," his tongue "rolling round and round and round in his mouth" and licking off "some particle of food that had stuck to his lips or dropped on his chin," he can hardly be called human.<sup>446</sup> He serves as the representative of all men: "sometimes I could not distinguish which one of them was my father. He resembled them so closely that it was difficult to tell." Her mother, an observant Muslim herself, turns out to be as bad as her father. "One day I asked my mother about him. How was it that she had given birth to me without a father? First she beat me. Then she brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs. I cried all night."<sup>447</sup> Not a page later, sexual abuse by her misogynist uncle is quickly described, and Firdaus remembers how her mother would not help her walk, or keep her warm at night, but would abandon her to warm up the father.<sup>448</sup> "No light seemed ever to touch the eyes of this woman..." A particularly horrifying scene sums it all up: "When one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his legs, and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep."<sup>449</sup> Firdaus moves to live with her uncle in the city, but is used as a cleaning lady and treated "with the peculiar kind of courtesy devoid of true respect which men preserve for women."<sup>450</sup> The sex between her uncle and his wife (who also mistreats Firdaus) is described as being mechanic and devoid of romance.<sup>451</sup> She has high aspirations concerning her future career and becomes obsessed with reading about Persian, Turkish and Arab rulers, but she finds that all they have in common is that they are men and that they had "an avaricious and distorted personality, a neverending appetite for money, sex and unlimited power."<sup>452</sup>

This picture of a distorted family life, based on abusive men and servile women, is drawn within the span of twelve pages and sets apart an estranged Firdaus, who, as has already been made clear to the reader, has a strong and gentle presence. In this regard, the novel seems to agree with Hirsi Ali's theory that the Islamic family structure is inhibiting the development and growth of children. Men, pictured as primitive animals, are set apart as the antithesis to human dignity as defined in the UDHR; they are not concerned with development, respect, equality or the recognition of the other's

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<sup>443</sup> 10.

<sup>444</sup> 9.

<sup>445</sup> 11-12.

<sup>446</sup> 18.

<sup>447</sup> 12.

<sup>448</sup> 16.

<sup>449</sup> 17.

<sup>450</sup> 22-23.

<sup>451</sup> 40.

<sup>452</sup> 27.

rights. This forecloses their claim to human rights and basically leaves them to be “human refuse.”<sup>453</sup> Women, unaware of their position as slaves, are both the powerless victims of these men and their evil accomplices. Luckily, Firdaus detaches herself by asserting that her parents do not feel like her parents.<sup>454</sup> She realizes that something is missing; on several occasions she mentions something, “a part of [her] being which had been born with [her] when [she] was born, but had not grown with [her] when [she] had grown.”<sup>455</sup> Something that could have been, but is not. The descriptions of it refer to the circumcision as well as something deeper. It seems to refer to the place where she was born, which deprived her of the opportunities and options she could have had. Her reluctance to become ‘one of them’ has her running away.<sup>456</sup> But without any options, she has to return and never regains the choices she lost.

In what follows, the story walks the path it paved from the start. Firdaus is forced to marry a man who fits her earlier descriptions of men as largely repulsive:

On his chin, below the lip, was a large swelling, with a hole in the middle. Some days the hole would be dry, but on others it would turn into a rusty old tap exuding drops red in colour like blood, or whitish yellow, like pus....  
The swelling on his face interfered with the movement of his jaws, and his shrivelled old man’s stomach was upset by too much food.<sup>457</sup>

She describes the touch of his hands like “the claws of a starving man who has been deprived of real food for many years wipe the bowl of food clean, and leave not a single crumb behind.” He beats her, but “the precepts of religion permitted such punishment.”<sup>458</sup> Her bruised face is not remarkable to others, male or female, as “all husbands beat their wives.” Again, Firdaus runs away, thinking there must be something better, but every bit of hope relating to men is shattered quickly. She meets Bayoumi, who takes her into his house and cares for her, but her observation that “his nose resembled that of [her] father,”<sup>459</sup> foreshadows the inevitable disaster. At first, she enjoys his touch, but her remark that his hands feel like her uncle’s is another foreshadowing. When she asks him to find her a job, he becomes abusive, locks her up, rapes her and allows others to do the same.<sup>460</sup> Again, the distinction between the different men is absent, this time confirmed by the men themselves: “[Firdaus] insisted, ‘You are not Bayoumi. Who are you?’ ‘What difference does it make? Bayoumi and I are one.’”<sup>461</sup> Firdaus runs away again and ends up in a brothel, where the female owner recognizes her story: “they’re all the same, all sons of dogs, running around under various names. Mahmoud, Hassanein, Fawzy, Sabri, Ibrahim, Awadain, Bayoumi.... I know them all. Which one of them started it? Your father, your brother... one of your uncles?”<sup>462</sup> So far, it seems as if being abused is one of the most essential features of the universal Arab woman. And in Hirsi Ali’s words,

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<sup>453</sup> Holloway, 34.

<sup>454</sup> 19.

<sup>455</sup> 30. Also 22, 60.

<sup>456</sup> 42-43.

<sup>457</sup> 45.

<sup>458</sup> 46.

<sup>459</sup> 49.

<sup>460</sup> 51-53.

<sup>461</sup> 53.

<sup>462</sup> 55.

“some girls comply. Others lead a double life. Some run away and fall victim to prostitution or drugs. A few make their way on their own, as [she] did...”<sup>463</sup>

Firdaus becomes a prostitute as a way of valuing herself and determining her own worth.<sup>464</sup> If she is going to be raped, she might as well control it, a sad image of female empowerment. When she realizes it is the brothel owner who takes most of the money, she runs off again, only to get raped twice, once by a policeman. She starts working at an office, but finds that there, too, the men want to have sex with her. Again, she finds that prostitution might be her only option: “I realized that as a prostitute I had been looked upon with more respect, and been valued more highly than all the female employees, myself included.”<sup>465</sup> Hope shimmers shortly as she and her colleague Ibrahim, who is chair of the revolutionary committee, fall in love. But his name, mentioned by the brothel owner as one of the ‘universal abusive men’, warns the reader. In the end, Ibrahim marries another woman for wealth and prestige, and Firdaus “realized that he had not really been in love with [her], but came to [her] every night only because he did not have to pay.”<sup>466</sup> She returns to being a prostitute. As a prostitute she cannot be disappointed, as she no longer has the hope or expectations that she had when she was in love. As the brothel owner told her: “you will get nothing out of feeling except pain.”<sup>467</sup> When Ibrahim, now a married man, visits her, for money this time, she realizes that finally, “all women are victims of deception”, but “the least deluded of all was the prostitute.... Marriage was the system built on the most cruel suffering for women.”<sup>468</sup>

Slowly, Firdaus starts to realize more clearly what that ‘something’ inside her that she lost was: “a human being who was not looked upon with scorn, or despised, but respected, and cherished and made to feel whole.”<sup>469</sup> Her country makes it impossible for her to gain power, and the only way to feel slightly independent, through prostitution, takes away her ability to feel human. This is exemplified by a passage in which a politician, whom she had refused as a client, sends over a policeman to try and convince her. “He [said] that if I really loved my country, if I was a patriot, I would go to him at once. So I told the man ... that I know nothing about patriotism, that my country had not only given me nothing, but had also taken away anything I might have had, including my honour and my dignity.”<sup>470</sup> Dignity, the principal human quality according to the UDHR, is supposed to be safeguarded by the country of which one is a citizen; in this case, the country, ruled by men, abuses dignity and takes away humanity of the female part of society. As the author’s foreword asserts, Firdaus is “the person who has been deprived of the ability to trust lives on the margins of society; she is only barely human.”<sup>471</sup> She loses all hope of ever regaining her humanity when one of her clients, and a pimp, tells her that she will never leave this occupation. She kills him. It seems obvious to interpret the murder as a sign of empowerment. However, Firdaus tells the police that “no woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man,”<sup>472</sup> reinforcing the idea that the patriarchal society is abusing what it should be maintaining. When the story is over, the psychiatrist

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<sup>463</sup> Hirsi Ali, xix.

<sup>464</sup> 58.

<sup>465</sup> 82.

<sup>466</sup> 96.

<sup>467</sup> 60.

<sup>468</sup> 94.

<sup>469</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>470</sup> 98.

<sup>471</sup> Viii.

<sup>472</sup> 109.

'awakens' as in a dream. She is the first person again, and the focalization returns to her. The same magic atmosphere as at the start is described, reinforcing, again, the air of universality surrounding Firdaus' story:

Firdaus' voice suddenly fell silent, like a voice in a dream... What lay under me was ... cold like the ground... It was the cold of the sea in a dream. I swam through its waters.... Her voice was now silent, but its echo remained in my ears, like a faint distant sound. Like the voices one hears in a dream. They seem to arise from close by, or seem to be nearby although they come from afar. We do not know in fact from where they arise. From above or below. To our left or our right.... But this was not air flowing into my ears... The voice... was a real voice.<sup>473</sup>

"Death and truth are similar," Firdaus tells the psychiatrist. Both require courage to face, both are savage and simple.<sup>474</sup> This closing allegory gives the story its direction, as the praise-section affirms. The "directness and passion" are said to "transform... the systematic brutalization of peasants and of women into powerful allegory." Its allegorical simplicity makes it "a story that reaches everyone regardless of their gender, nationality or station in life," argues Cooke in her foreword. To her, this makes it easier to empathize: "you do not have to be a lost little girl to appreciate how great was Firdaus's need for her uncle and how terrible the shock when he abused her." The reviews of the book, mostly written by females, affirm this.<sup>475</sup> El Saadawi's powerful descriptions of abuse leave her readers indeed very shocked. She employs literary language, such as metaphors, to insist on the universality of the images that are presented. The animalistic, brutal descriptions of the men contrast with the image of the woman "as a pebble which someone had tossed into its waters, rolling along with the crowds that rode in buses and cars, or walked the streets, with unseeing eyes, incapable of noticing anything or anyone."<sup>476</sup> El Saadawi's convincing metaphors reinforce both the stark contrast between men and women, as well as the authenticity of the images. One reader even argues that this is not a fictional story, because, like "in non-fiction, there is no sugar" to coat the story. If literature's singular universalism, as discussed in the second chapter, means that literature's singularity allows it to carry universality, El Saadawi's use of literary devices to convey the content can be said to achieve this. It introduces difference, shocking readers with the hardships of those "out there whose lives are really tough," but as one reader argues, "the descriptive words [were] disturbing but at the same time if it was less descriptive then the story wouldn't be as interesting." Several readers point out that the repetitiveness of the abuse is powerful, and one reader admits that it "first threw [her] off, but then [she] felt that it reinforced the overall message of the trail after betrayal, of an entire lifetime of having the same thing happen over and over again with men." Most find the scenes of abuse disturbingly difficult, but they also find them inevitable to feel and know what Firdaus has been through. As such, the book establishes a community that posits the writer and the readers against the evil Egyptian men. The readers express their hope that this story will teach society and change it for the better.

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<sup>473</sup> 113-114.

<sup>474</sup> 114.

<sup>475</sup> *Goodreads, Woman At Point Zero*. June 14<sup>th</sup> 2013.

[http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/159604.Woman\\_at\\_Point\\_Zero](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/159604.Woman_at_Point_Zero). June 14<sup>th</sup> 2013; *Amazon.com, Woman At Point Zero*. June 14<sup>th</sup> 2013. <http://www.amazon.com/Woman-Point-Zero-Nawal-Saadawi/dp/1842778730>. June 14<sup>th</sup> 2013

<sup>476</sup> 43.

Life narratives of Muslim women have gained popularity after 9/11. They often posit women as “the most abject victims of the ideology of Islamic fundamentalism” and affirm the connection between gender-inequality and fundamentalism, so as to support the cause of imposing democracy as a means to emancipate women.<sup>477</sup> As Gillian Whitlock has argued, life narratives like these are taken up empathically; readers identify with them “through trauma and in terms of human rights campaigns for social justice that play to Western traditions of benevolence. This is the transit lane that allows life narratives to move from East to West rapidly and to become highly valued commodities for a “primed” readership.” And indeed, El Saadawi has a large audience in the West. Over the years, her political engagement has received much media-attention internationally, most of her works have been almost immediately translated upon release and are well-known assets of the curricula at many university’s women’s studies departments.<sup>478</sup>

However, as the foreword affirms, *Woman At Point Zero* is, at least partly, fictional. As Whitlock argues, literary hoaxes bring to light “the investments elicited by life narrative, and they also remind us of the risks of emotional engagement for readers, publishers, and critics.”<sup>479</sup> This novel has never been revealed as a hoax, and it admits its added fictionality. However, this does not eliminate the risks that exist in emotional engagement. The universality the novel carries does not balance difference and sameness, like it ideally would, but polarizes the world. *Woman at Point Zero* depicts a society devoid of humanity and concerned with taking that of others. The Islamist rapist, a site of deviant sexuality, as “an emerging cultural archetype of the war on terror”<sup>480</sup> and the Muslim female as a powerless creature that has accepted her slave-status recreates an “imaginative geography of West versus East,”<sup>481</sup> humanity versus inhumanity, female victims versus male perpetrators, propagating tolerance and understanding for the latter, but not for the former. And as I have shown in the third chapter, the construction of such polarizations may risk oblivion to the real problems and solutions for the situation that is, in reality, much more complex. Furthermore, the novel’s universal claim, supported by the fact that the narrator grants the focalization to the victim herself, gives it an air of authenticity, which risks the overestimating of El Saadawi’s authority. El Saadawi uses the transnational public sphere of letters to defend women against the suppressive public sphere represented in the novel, but the book was written in 1975. Still, the foreword, written in 2007, depicts it as professing a universal truth. Furthermore, El Saadawi, although, like Firdaus, born in rural Egypt, was supported by her parents to go to school. Unlike Firdaus’ father, hers had managed to climb the social and economic ladder through education, and the family moved to Cairo to support El Saadawi’s career goals.<sup>482</sup> In the West, El Saadawi’s attempt to voice her own experiences as an Arab woman, against the many orientalist representations, is lauded; however, this novel has largely been ignored. It seems as though El Saadawi’s own insistence on her authenticity<sup>483</sup> is hard to reconcile with this novel, that is voicing another woman’s experiences. Whether she is playing “into

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<sup>477</sup> Mahmood, 194.

<sup>478</sup> Pauline Homsy Vinson, “Shahrazadian Gestures in Arab Women’s Autobiographies: Political History, Personal Memory and Oral, Matrilineal Narratives in the works of Nawal El Saadawi and Leila Ahmed.” *NWSA Journal* 20.1 (2008). 79; See also El Saadawi’s website, directed at both Arabic and English-speaking audiences, for an overview her international achievements. *Nawal El Saadawi*. July 3<sup>d</sup> 2013. <http://www.nawalsaadawi.net/>. July 3<sup>d</sup> 2013.

<sup>479</sup> Whitlock, 12-13.

<sup>480</sup> Holloway, 35.

<sup>481</sup> Abu-Lughod, 784.

<sup>482</sup> Homsy Vinson, 80.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibidem*, 86.

the negative perceptions and stereotypes of mainstream Western culture,” as she is sometimes accused of,<sup>484</sup> or presenting a universal truth, is not a question that can be answered. But that is precisely why it remains important to be attentive to questions of authenticity. Amnesty subordinates the novel to its immediate goals, but as David Damrosch has pointed out, this may blind the reader to the works’ real difference from current time and space.<sup>485</sup> El Saadawi’s assimilation in Pascale Casanova’s ‘centre’ of literature, in a sense, causes a detachment of the native setting and time,<sup>486</sup> especially in the case of this novel. The singular becomes universal in such a way that it overwrites current-day context, and excludes alternative realities and alternative relations between men and women. Amnesty’s advocating of the novel thus leads me to conclude that if tolerance, understanding and empathy for the ‘universal’ Arab woman are engaged at the cost of tolerance, understanding and empathy for ‘universal’ Arab men, and of the relationships between particular Arab men and women who do not fulfil the roles El Saadawi has identified, this novel does not successfully advocate a world of universal human rights.

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<sup>484</sup> Ibidem, 85. See also Bosch, 145: she has argued that many of El Saadawi’s Western readers only remember the parts of her work that reinforce stereotypes, while El Saadawi has increasingly been employing these.

<sup>485</sup> Damrosch, 135.

<sup>486</sup> Casanova 2004, 209.



### Incorporating the impossible: female suicide terrorism in *Before We Say Goodbye*

*Before We Say Goodbye* gives us a rare look and a wonderful opportunity to get to know reality from the bird's-eye view, with all its complexity and many faces. It does not embellish it. It does not blame or judge, nor does it get tangled in political accusations of who is better off or who is hurting more. It mourns, it despairs and it hurts, but it is brutally honest. And that is where its importance lies. That is where its magic lies. - Vered Cohen-Barzilay, Director of Communications and Publications, Amnesty International Israel.<sup>487</sup>

This is the text that endorses Italian author and former journalist Gabriella Ambrosio's first novel *Before We Say Goodbye*, published in 2004 (translated to English in 2010). Furthermore, this quote from Ali Rashid, former head of the Palestinian delegation in Italy, adds:

"*Before We Say Goodbye* can do infinitely more for the peace between the two people than hundreds of political goodwill talks I have heard." The quotes affirm Amnesty's idea of literature and suggest that this novel might increase understanding, tolerance and even peace. *Before We Say Goodbye* has been promoted as a prime example of human rights literature by Vered Cohen-Barzilay, who was mentioned in the fourth chapter, as well as by Amnesty International itself on its human rights fiction page. Amnesty's logo is printed on the back cover, accompanied by the text "Endorsed by Amnesty International UK as contributing to a better understanding of human rights and the values that underpin them." It can be purchased through Amnesty's web shop. The novel has been awarded at the French Festival du Premier Romance and has been published in many countries such as the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Spain, Greece, Korea, China. Israel and the Palestinian Territories, where it has been adopted by human rights organizations to educate about human rights.

As discussed in the first chapter, Slaughter has argued that, in order to become a free and self-determining human rights person, the legal person and the human being are reconciled as "the social expression of an abstract humanity."<sup>488</sup> This is a process of individuation – becoming a person - that is, similarly, a process of socialization. Slaughter calls this 'incorporation'. According to him, the *Bildungsroman* is also thematized by incorporation. It depicts the emergence of the individual in society, who, in this way, claims the right to be a free and self-determined human rights person. Human rights law and the *Bildungsroman* as part of its discourse share the paradox: they exclude the marginal, those lacking the qualities of the incorporated personality, in order to be normative, and the protagonist is subjected to this discourse in order to become a free, self-regulating human rights person.

But what if this process of incorporation, the *Bildung*, is sabotaged on both the part of the individual and society? *Before We Say Goodbye*, based on a newspaper article, narrates a day in the life of several inhabitants of Jerusalem, both Israeli and Palestinian. It ends with a Palestinian girl blowing up herself and an Israeli girl in a supermarket. The values that underpin these attacks are often seen as radically different from human rights values (I will elaborate on this later), and if the individual does not conform to the norms of humanity formulated by the UDHR, incorporation from the

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<sup>487</sup> Gabriella Ambrosio, *Before We Say Goodbye*. Alastair McEwen trans. London: Walker Books Ltd, 2010. Praise.

<sup>488</sup> Slaughter 2007, 20.

perspective of the individual is impossible. Society, the other major part of Slaughter's idea of incorporation, or more specifically, the nation-state, must grant the individual the possibility to develop his personality and gain his rights. But although the Palestinians may constitute a nation, they have no state; the land they feel is theirs is already taken by the Israelis, there is no state to grant them their rights. This part of the incorporation process thus also seems impossible. How does this novel ask for recognition of human rights for a Palestinian suicide bomber, if the conditions for incorporation into human rights discourse are not there? To investigate this, I will start by discussing both parts of the failing incorporation-process: society and the individual.

Part of Slaughter's idea of incorporation is the emerging of the individual in modern chronological time:<sup>489</sup> but this novel depicts only one day. The omniscient narrator quickly establishes that there is no progression or *Bildung* possible. "There was no difference between yesterday, today and tomorrow, ... the past was a hole, the present didn't exist and the future was the same."<sup>490</sup> The inhabitants of the Palestinian refugee camps cannot make plans; their curfew is called randomly, life is constantly suspended. "A world apart. A world in waiting." "You start living outside time. You forget what day of the week it is."<sup>491</sup> There seems to be no resolution in sight: "It'll take time... but what time, what is time, not something that belongs to us... Who is it that decides how time passes here?"<sup>492</sup> The Israeli soldiers, with their curfew, are in charge of Palestinian time and space. The word 'nothingness' appears repeatedly throughout the book. The reader is shown a glimpse of the lives of several people, just living restricted in a refugee camp or in the midst of a people who does not like them: "There was nothing else to do but grow, in those circumstances."<sup>493</sup> Naturally, there is physical growth; but no development.

The problem is the lack of a nation-state to be incorporated in. UDHR states that everyone has the right to a nationality,<sup>494</sup> but paradoxically, one has to be a citizen to profit from the UDHR. In the case of this novel, there is no nation-state, at least not for the Palestinians. Slaughter has argued that the nation-state as a community gives the individual the cultural and traditional tools to allow storytelling.<sup>495</sup> Without these tools, there is no story. A community of speech is only open to the citizen, whose "right to address others is recognized by those others."<sup>496</sup> As discussed in the first chapter, citizens are bound together in the public sphere by communication, both actual and imagined. One has to play by the rules of this speech in order to be incorporated; think, for example, about censorship, but also about legal restrictions on hate speech or Holocaust denial in certain countries.<sup>497</sup> Slaughter has argued that "expulsion from the community of speech represents the fiercest assault on the human personality because it excludes the individual from 'a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective.'<sup>498</sup> Statelessness means social death,

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<sup>489</sup> Ibidem, 108-109.

<sup>490</sup> Ambrosio, 19. All following pages are from this publication, unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>491</sup> 43, 85.

<sup>492</sup> 84.

<sup>493</sup> 18.

<sup>494</sup> Slaughter 2007, 226.

<sup>495</sup> Slaughter 2009, 154.

<sup>496</sup> Slaughter 2007, 154.

<sup>497</sup> Michael J. Bazylar, "Holocaust Denial Laws and Other Legislation Criminalizing Promotion of Nazism."

*Genocide Prevention Now, Genocide Review*. 2009. <http://genocidepreventionnow.org/Portals/0/docs/Bazylar-GPN-Original.pdf>. July 4<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>498</sup> Ibidem, 158-159.

bare individuality and “human rightslessness.” *Before We Say Goodbye* recognizes the problems of communication in binding the citizens together when there is no common nation, by presenting the problems between the Palestinians and Israeli as mainly communicative. “...the Jews celebrated what they call the War of Independence and the Palestinians call the Nakba – the catastrophe – when they were driven from their homes.”<sup>499</sup> When one of the Israelis dies in an explosion, one of his friends wonders: “what could they know about Ariel? What could they know about the girl he’d become engaged to two days before we left?”<sup>500</sup> The lack of narrative knowledge is presented as the reason for the violence perpetrated. Apart from communicative problems, the Israelis and Palestinians are presented as much alike. “We are depressed; they are desperate.”<sup>501</sup> It reminds the reader of a time, before Israel was there, when the Israelis and Palestinians lived relatively peacefully on the land they shared and they both loved.<sup>502</sup> After all, nationalism only started to play a role as soon as the state Israel was called into being; some have argued that it was only then that the idea of a Palestinian identity emerged.<sup>503</sup> One of the characters, an Israeli who was breast-fed by an Arab woman, even remembers warmth between the two peoples. His father, however, says he’s wrong: “But you don’t remember the looks of the other Arabs ... For an Arab and a Jew can have the same features, the same complexion, the same way of dressing and moving. But not the look; the look is different.”<sup>504</sup> Again, the problems are posed as those of communication, both verbal and non-verbal.

The lack of a way to manifest one’s voice has its effect on all the characters, Palestinian and Israeli. Dima, an 18-year old Palestinian girl who lives in a refugee camp, always took a deep interest in the news. She is obsessed with a newsreader on the Arabic television named Leila. “Leila spoke loud and clear. It was all so obvious when Leila spoke. In this way she made injustice and brutality public. The future would be dead if someone didn’t shake it like this, ... make sure it didn’t stop.”<sup>505</sup> But on the day that is described, Dima realizes something.

What is a news item before it becomes news, Leila, when it is still a blend of anger, vengeance, action, suffering, hypocrisy, cowardice, fear, hope, signs? When you come and cook it into news and carry it around the world, it has already lost its strength; you have already stripped it of the howl and the urgency that involves understanding.<sup>506</sup>

Dima realizes that it takes more than news to create awareness. The situation of the Palestinians is urgent; it takes immediacy, a now, a momentum. Dima has decided to blow herself up – “a date with the future, in her own way, somewhere.”<sup>507</sup> She promises her television that she will be the news. That people will have to change because she is about to change them. She commits the suicide attack in a supermarket, taking with her only the guard who tries to stop her and the Israeli girl Myriam.

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<sup>499</sup> 43.

<sup>500</sup> 75.

<sup>501</sup> 41.

<sup>502</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History of Palestine*. Presented as part of the Edward Said Memorial Conference, April 15-17, 2013, Centre for the Humanities & the Treaty of Utrecht Events, Utrecht University.

<sup>503</sup> Robert JC Young, *Edward Said’s Palestine: Writing, Photography, and Representation*. Presented as part of the Edward Said Memorial Conference, April 15-17, 2013, Centre for the Humanities & the Treaty of Utrecht Events, Utrecht University.

<sup>504</sup> 61-63.

<sup>505</sup> 28.

<sup>506</sup> 66.

<sup>507</sup> 28.

Myriam, who is around the same age as Dima, is described as always having pretended to live in a normal country. She uses this fantasy to establish order, and upsets her mother with her lack of interest in the news and the situation of her country. For most of the story, she is shown withdrawn on a hilltop, dreaming about a dead friend and about America, where she lived for a while. She wants to go back and prefers speaking English above Hebrew. She dresses herself after American fashion, exercises with Jane Fonda work-out video's and uses make-up. Her problem is that she feels she has to choose: in multicultural California she could be everything, but here, everything was "white and monotonous." "Why do we have to stop being American to go back to being fundamentally a Jew? Why at a certain point in life do we have to?"<sup>508</sup> She realizes that the conflict, implicated in the rest of the world that is dividing and divided because of it, makes it impossible for her to be both. Nathan, Myriam's 19-year old brother, could be the ultimate *Bildungsheld*; he is young and is serving his country in military service. "But, at nineteen, at a time when all the strengths of a boy should begin to bear fruit and new seeds, where had Nathan ended up?"<sup>509</sup> He is described as having a shadow over his face, avoiding eye-contact and, like Myriam, he ceases to want to understand what is going on, as if he has detached himself from life. Myriam, towards the end of the novel (and the day), does realize how much she loves her country and her religion and decides not to go back to America. She chooses, but she seems to choose the country itself over the people in it: "nothing was worth as much as this earth, she suddenly thought."<sup>510</sup> Choosing Israel means choosing the ground, not all the people on it, for that is impossible: if Israel was a nation that satisfactorily incorporated all the people that lived on its ground, Palestinians would not want independence. Nevertheless, both Israelis and Palestinians are there. Myriam's choice is impossible, it cannot be reality, which is confirmed when a little later, she is killed in Dima's suicide attack.

To recall Slaughter's terms, the suicide attack represents a severe problem of incorporation on the part of the individual, which is intrinsically bound up with the lack of a social environment to be incorporated in. Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) holds that "education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and of the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms..."<sup>511</sup> The act of destroying the self and others can hardly be called a recognition of the dignity of the human personality. As Hunt has pointed out, before the famous French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789, the first real human rights document, the body was still subjected to French law; suicide was punishable. But to have human rights means to have bodily self-possession, the affirmation that your body is yours, including the 'right' to commit suicide ('right' here being the fact that it goes unpunished). However, few would argue that suicide is a positive affirmation of bodily self-possession; you cease to be human, so you gain nothing. The Western reader may not want a story about a girl blowing herself up for society or religion. This is not the human rights narrative of self-possession that has been going on for ages: when the body was 'given back' to the individual in the French Declaration, one could no longer be punished by being sacrificed for the good of the community or for a religious purpose.<sup>512</sup> Why would people do it to themselves?

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<sup>508</sup> 54.

<sup>509</sup> 30.

<sup>510</sup> 59.

<sup>511</sup> Slaughter 2007, 248.

<sup>512</sup> Hunt, 74, 97.

Suicide terrorism can be seen as a reaction to modernity that uses modern tools to battle it. Especially since 9/11 it has been observed how the increased possibilities of transnational contact through modern media, such as the Internet, are used against the West by the extensive, transnational networks of terrorism.<sup>513</sup> In addition, these terrorists produce their own deaths, they use the self-possession of their body as a means to destroy, to obtain political goals or gain media attention.<sup>514</sup> There is no right response to this; producing your own death is cheating according to the Western zero death aim. Terrorism is a term reserved for ‘them’, as ‘others’, not for ‘us’ as the West; the word marks that which falls outside of our discourse of justified violence.<sup>515</sup> As Butler has argued, our moral responses are regulated by interpretative frameworks, and ‘normal’ deaths in war, committed by legitimate states, are less repulsive to us than suicide terrorism that is not state-sponsored, even directed against the state, and thus unjustified and illegitimate.<sup>516</sup> Baudrillard has pointed out that, whereas Muslim suicide terrorists exchange their lives for Paradise, ‘Western’ deaths are without hope.<sup>517</sup> We cannot recognize terrorist attacks like this as the product of a rational, coherent political position; the attackers’ motives are inexplicable to us, beyond reason, morality and social norms. Therefore, Western media discourse around suicide terrorism is devoid of historical perspective.<sup>518</sup> Terrorism shatters “our liberal-democratic consensus.”<sup>519</sup> But Esposito, in his short survey of the history of suicide bombing, has argued that, even though religion is used to legitimize the act, the attacks are more often motivated by foreign occupation than by religion.<sup>520</sup> There have been secular, mainly nationalist groups that have used religion to justify their suicide bombings; some terrorists, like the 9/11 hijackers, were not particularly observant of faith, and in many countries suicide terrorism was unknown until foreign invasions.<sup>521</sup> State terrorism, terrorists who become allies (i.e. Nelson Mandela) and allies who become terrorists (i.e. Bin Laden) further complicate the matter.

In the case of female suicide bombers, the situation is even more complex. The idea of suicide bombing stands in contrast with the constructed label of woman as a victim. Female suicide bombers challenge the man/woman dichotomy. The media cannot explain the phenomenon; as Israeli film theorist Dorit Naaman has pointed out, while the motives of male suicide bombers are assumed to be clearly political and religious, the image of a young and beautiful woman cannot be reconciled with the fundamentalist dark side.<sup>522</sup> The Western media “cannot tolerate Palestinian female suicide bombers in the context either of Islamic terrorism or of their deviation from desired feminine behavior.”<sup>523</sup> “A woman as a suicide bomber seems so oxymoronic that an individualized psychological explanation for the deviation must be found.”<sup>524</sup> This leaves the Western audience oblivious to a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon, enabling it to avoid uncomfortable

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<sup>513</sup> Baudrillard, 403-426.

<sup>514</sup> Dorit Naaman, “Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers”. *Signs*, 32.4 (2007). 938.

<sup>515</sup> Butler 2004, 4, 13-14.

<sup>516</sup> Butler 2010, 41, 49.

<sup>517</sup> Baudrillard, 417.

<sup>518</sup> Naaman, 938-939.

<sup>519</sup> Žižek, 154.

<sup>520</sup> Roy, 44.

<sup>521</sup> Mogahed & Esposito, 76-79.

<sup>522</sup> Naaman, 939, 934-935, 942.

<sup>523</sup> *Ibidem*, 943.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibidem*, 936.

issues of agency and subjectivity. But, Naaman has argued, women, like men, act out of nationalist zeal as well as personal motivations.<sup>525</sup> “A comprehensive approach to the Palestinian female suicide bomber cannot reduce or even prioritize gender oppression over other ... circumstances but rather needs to be accounted for in the complex web of power and social relations in Palestinian society...”<sup>526</sup>

In *Before We Say Goodbye*, these fundamental problems are not addressed. The suicide attacks are shown to be hailed in the refugee camp, but the image of scared young boys leaves the role of religion as merely horrifying and unexplained: the young boys yell “honour to the martyrs of Allah!”, but “in the meantime they’ve started to wet their beds again.”<sup>527</sup> Dima’s attack is used to discard the role of religion completely. It is presented as an act of depression, hopelessness, and victimhood. Every time she thinks about something that makes her realize “her heart [is] warming,”<sup>528</sup> she hastens to stop. This implies that her act requires a cold heart and detachment from emotions, rather than a passion for something, like her country. Religion or nationalism are not mentioned once. If they would have been mentioned, there would have been a point to her death, it would not have been senseless. Instead of presenting the modern idea of self-possession as a weapon used by a terrorist, the suicide-act is presented as the opposite of self-possession: “She had already been dead for a good while; she no longer had arms, she no longer had hands, she no longer had legs to obey her will.” “Dima felt as if all her strings had been cut. Disconnected. She couldn’t even sense the air around anymore.”<sup>529</sup> Dima is the victim of her own act, not the perpetrator; she was already detached from both her surroundings and her own body – she is identified by Ghassan, the bomb-deliverer, as no longer having any blood.<sup>530</sup> She does mention revenge,<sup>531</sup> directed at the Israelis who confine the Palestinians’ existence to the camp, but any agency she might have had in this sense is undone in the end, when “with horror she realized she was no longer in control of her movement,”<sup>532</sup> her attack kills only two innocent civilians and is condemned by Dima’s father to have been pointless. This kind of terrorism is not the faceless, inhuman terrorism in the name of religion shown on the news, nor is it in any other way ideological. It is, in fact, presented as the ‘regular’ suicide of a teenager who sees her future as hopeless. The fact that she is a woman does not complicate or challenge the suicide attack, but reinforces its passive motivations.

*Before We Say Goodbye* complicates the idea that ordinary Israelis and Palestinians are inherently opposed to each other, by giving insights into the fabricated nature of the conflict. It also condemns suicide attacks as pointless and senseless and shows that nothing will ever change if the fight is fought like this, but that the fight will keep being fought like this as long as the attackers have no other way to fight, no army to join.<sup>533</sup> Dima wants her death to be her decision, not that of someone else. But is the reason that she dies really hers? Has the act given her any agency or empowerment at all? The newspaper article the novel is based on mentions little details about the girls, Ayat Akhras (‘Dima’) and Rachel Levy (‘Myriam’). They looked alike and their pictures were juxtaposed in the

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<sup>525</sup> Ibidem, 946, 944.

<sup>526</sup> Ibidem, 945.

<sup>527</sup> 86.

<sup>528</sup> 38.

<sup>529</sup> 95, 111.

<sup>530</sup> 99.

<sup>531</sup> 98.

<sup>532</sup> 109.

<sup>533</sup> 113.

newspaper, the victim and the perpetrator. But, as Naaman has pointed out, the article does not mention that Levy was about to join the military “which would have directly or indirectly put her in a position that would have endangered the lives of Palestinian civilians.”<sup>534</sup> The novel has Myriam thinking about enlisting voluntarily, but she finally changes her mind about going.<sup>535</sup> Perhaps women fighters, largely repressed in the media, “challenge the patriarchal army order in more profound ways than suicide bombers, ways that are harder to dismiss or subvert.” Furthermore, in Akhras’ suicide video, it becomes clear that she was protecting the honour of the family since her father was accused of collaborating with Israel.<sup>536</sup> In the book, her father indeed works with Israelis, but this is not at all presented as an accusation or a reason for Dima to be upset. It is rather presented as admirable, as support for the book’s attempt to dissolve the difference and hatred between the two sides. Besides, who could feel empathy for an honour killing? Akhras also says in her video that she wants the Arab world to start helping Palestine, rather than watching the girls fight. This makes her suicide an act of strong spirit and resistance, which contradicts the idea of depression.<sup>537</sup> Furthermore, it gives Palestinian terrorism a more specific face underneath the overarching term ‘terrorism’. After all, whereas Akhras’ act of terror trades in a life for another life, the terrorism of 9/11 is larger and extremier, because a realistic goal is lacking and vulnerable complex systems are exploited.<sup>538</sup> In the novel, this part of Akhras’ video is quoted,<sup>539</sup> which could have been an opportunity to elaborate on the issues addressed above. Instead, Dima’s agency is undone again by her sudden change of heart and her powerlessness towards the end. At the same time, Akhras criticizes the fact that women in Palestine can be ‘used’ for suicide bombing but not for active fighting, which reinforces the fiction that a female life is not worth living, but in death they can be equal to men.<sup>540</sup> These are all issues that the novel could have picked up on. They criticize the attitude of the Muslim world while simultaneously complicating Western black-and-white notions of suicide terrorism and female victimization.

But that was, apparently, not the goal. In defining Dima’s death in terms everyone can relate to, the novel enables the fiction that Western modernization as a universal tendency stands against an evil opponent. The suicide is presented and as an act of wanting to become *real* news in order to show people around the world how horrible, pointless and senseless the situation really is, without revealing much about the conflict itself. Dima’s death, that could have given her agency, is reduced to a means of educating the West, teaching us that a Palestinian girl is the same as any other (Western) girl. “Education is the only weapon we have in this life,”<sup>541</sup> says Dima’s father to the press after she dies, completely in the line of human rights discourse. He even muses that, because she was a girl, she must have been desperate, and that her attack represents her feeling of not having any “dignity of the person.” After all, this story, as a part of the human rights speech community, needs to obey the rules of speech to be recognized as belonging to this community. The rules that apply here are those of hegemonic grammar, the language that is reserved for the hegemonic power. For example, the adjective ‘terrorist’ is used by the Israeli state to describe Palestinian acts of

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<sup>534</sup> Naaman, 942.

<sup>535</sup> 113.

<sup>536</sup> Naaman, 950.

<sup>537</sup> Ibidem, 946.

<sup>538</sup> Borradori, 33-34.

<sup>539</sup> 142.

<sup>540</sup> Naaman, 949.

<sup>541</sup> 95.

resistance, but not for its own state violence.<sup>542</sup> The term also refers to the narrative that becomes the standard story. The danger of hegemonic grammar is that those within it fail to recognize the marginal other as human. More specifically, after 9/11, as Butler has pointed out, hegemonic grammar might have caused a failure “to conceive of Muslim and Arab lives *as lives*.”<sup>543</sup> Using terms as ‘slaughtering’ to describe the way Palestinians murder (not the other way around), and reducing their deaths to numbers, the Israeli officials try to dehumanize them. As Žižek has argued, Palestinians have become Agamben’s homo sacer, “the object of disciplinary measures and/or even humanitarian help, but not full citizens.”<sup>544</sup>

*Before We Say Goodbye* tries to challenge some aspects of this hegemonic grammar while working from within it. It has to; in order to portray the female suicide bomber as human, it defines Dima’s act of terror in Western terms, which separates it from terrorism’s inhuman connotations. Furthermore, it recognizes that a nation as sick as Israel cannot harbour this incorporation: “perhaps it is in our DNA by now – fear, rejection. Destruction. Who do you think came to populate the land of Israel? Idealists... the traumatized... dreamers... fanatics.”<sup>545</sup> In this regard, it is interesting to note that, as several philosophers and Holocaust-survivors have pointed out, the lowest form of Jewish human life in the Nazi camps, those who had passed into the inhuman, were called *Muselmänner*: Muslims.<sup>546</sup> And now, the Palestinian condition now begins to resemble that of the diasporic Jew. Israel and Palestine are implicated in each other, but they cannot exist together. The place where individuals can normally enjoy human rights has now become the place where these rights are violated; difference and exclusion, enforced from the outside, are interiorized. This counts both for the Israelis, although they are officially entitled to most of the ground, and for the Palestinians, who have no right to it but still live there. Article 13 of the ICESCR states that all persons will participate effectively in a free society and that understanding towards all races, ethnicities and religions shall be promoted. This is not safeguarded in Israel. The fact that the Palestinians and Israelis cannot seem to both be incorporated means that neither can.

*Before We Say Goodbye* tries to skip the step of the nation-state by creating a different kind of community. It shows that, all over the world, lives are implicated in each other: “... and so they would carry on talking about current events ... Of Dima’s everyday life, and how it had been influenced by the beating of a butterfly’s wings in Texas.”<sup>547</sup> The importance of the nation-state is undermined; “we practically invented a language with which to talk to one another. But we already understood one another, because a destiny like ours is a bond stronger than any nation.”<sup>548</sup> If communication binds citizens together, hegemonic international human rights language could also bind citizens together in another way than a nation. This is what the novel tries to do. Through the character of Dima, it sets forth the ability of news to create empathy as inferior to that of literature. As Whitlock has suggested, “empathic engagement suggests that casual and passive spectatorship of violence and suffering becomes an ethical practice of witnessing, and the presentation of news should be

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<sup>542</sup> Butler 2004, 4.

<sup>543</sup> Ibidem, 12.

<sup>544</sup> Žižek, 116.

<sup>545</sup> 101.

<sup>546</sup> Simpson, 162-165.

<sup>547</sup> 36.

<sup>548</sup> 102.

constructed to direct audience feelings to produce this moral effect...<sup>549</sup> This novel stages the news in such an empathy-generating manner. Dima's critical attitude towards the news can be read as a small clue to the possible purpose of the story in terms of a human rights claim. Her wanting to become news could be conceived metafictionally, as if she knows she will become a different kind of news, novel news. As Hunt has argued, reading literature allows people recognize others as equals, which creates new individual experiences and even makes possible new social and political concepts, such as human rights. This kind of empathy is created through involvement in the narrative, not through explicit moralizing.<sup>550</sup> The reader gets a sense of immediacy through this recognition, but at the same time, the novel exists beyond immediacy because it lasts, as opposed to news that is very temporary.<sup>551</sup>

Dima's suicide, as a deliberate sabotaging of her own incorporation, can then be seen as precisely a fierce desire for a general Palestinian incorporation. It is as if the characters recognize that their stories cannot be heard through themselves. Abraham, the guard who dies in Dima's attack, has become a little deaf over the years and he does not care. "words flew and got soiled, and when they reached their destination they were no longer the same; you couldn't do anything about it. Abraham was a man of few words, and above all he never argued. If he had an opinion, he attached little importance to voicing it."<sup>552</sup> This quote reinforces a point Hunt makes: "Habit can familiarize men with the violation of their natural rights to the point that among those who have lost them no one dreams of reclaiming them or believes that he has suffered an injustice."<sup>553</sup> The novel connects this habit to the characters' violated right to narration. They have given up on the idea that their voice will be heard, and it is as if Dima realizes that there is no other way than to be what the world wants her to be. "Everyone values you, but only up to a certain point; they value you as long as you behave like all the others who share this life with you. That's the way of the world; that's the way of the family. If you want approval, all you have to do is what they think you should do."<sup>554</sup> The novel shows itself quite self-reflexive here, revealing its impossibility to go beyond similarities if it wants to adhere to human rights discourse. International human rights language replaces the voice of the individual, and the international literary society replaces the nation. By showing failed incorporation, the process Slaughter imagines is still in the novel, only reversed; incorporation in the international sphere must create understanding and empathy, so that the international can 'cure' the national with human rights. The absence of a healthy society for the individual to be incorporated in, is thus compensated by the imaginative society of international human rights literacy. The society of which our author is already a part.

Ambrosio, a Western, enfranchised citizen who is neither Palestinian nor Israeli, takes up the act of reclaiming humanity for others, including the nameless suicide bombers of the newspapers. Due to the bodily destruction of the characters, the author is forced to take over their bodies and voices through an omniscient narrator from within the discourse that defines humanity. In her afterword, Ambrosio explains that she had wanted to delve deeper into the familiar news, in order to raise questions rather than answers – which is, according to her, the requirement of a good book. "What

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<sup>549</sup> Whitlock, 155-156.

<sup>550</sup> Hunt, 33-56.

<sup>551</sup> Slaughter & McClennen, 1-19.

<sup>552</sup> 91.

<sup>553</sup> Hunt, 170.

<sup>554</sup> 98.

emerged from my exploration of that news item was not just a story about Israel or Palestine, but a universal story... One that applies to any love-hate relationship; to any tormentor-victim relationship. One that explores that which is more intimate and yet more universal, and which causes us to mirror our enemy.” Ambrosio tries to convey the message that everyone is fundamentally the same through a style that is direct and urgent, like a newspaper-article, but that also attempts to provide the characters with names, faces and motivations. Unlike El Saadawi, Ambrosio uses little literary language, and what she achieves is that, unlike El Saadawi’s novel, *Before We Say Goodbye* does not explicitly polarize; reader reviews on both Goodreads and the Amnesty website itself praise the novel for not taking sides in this true story and showing a comprehensive picture of the conflict, which makes it possible to feel empathy for both Dima and Myriam.<sup>555</sup>

But still, the same problem arises as I have identified with El Saadawi’s novel: precisely because the work is presented and received as a piece of journalism that uses the freedom of fiction to make a universal claim about a particular situation, it runs the risk of passing off other, non-mentioned aspects as either untrue, unimportant or even inhuman. How about the specificities of the area, of religion, of entitlement? Ambrosio’s rewriting of the story from a position of incorporation necessarily excludes the real marginal. These are the ones that cannot be understood, the ones who do put the ground they love before people, the ones that do want to die for their religion, the ones who do not stand a chance because they do not fit “the generic forms in which ‘human variation’ is felt to be socially acceptable.”<sup>556</sup>

As Slaughter has argued, “[in] its ideal configuration, a society of readers assumes a benign humanitarian interventionist posture toward the unincorporated, pressing them to assert their right to claim a right to incorporation – a right to have rights.”<sup>557</sup> The goal of this kind of incorporation is fulfilled when the incorporated person acquires human rights literacy, which is the capacity to read both himself and others as human rights persons. Only then is the human personality fully developed according to human rights discourse. Slaughter discusses reading as an act of imagination that can, ideally, extend humanity to the not yet incorporated literary personifications, while at the same time self-reflectively extending the humanity of the readers themselves.<sup>558</sup> As suggested in the introduction, this novel about suicide bombers could have achieved this extension of humanity. It might have trespassed the margins of human rights discourse, it might have pushed the limits, it might have come a little closer to that ‘ideal’ in ‘ideally’. It might have entered that one place where Slaughter did not go, that could broaden his reducing view of human rights discourse as the values that underpin suicide terrorism are so fundamentally different from those of human rights law. But *Before We Say Goodbye* does not touch upon the real margins of who can count as human, because it realizes that it needs the exclusions. We, the Western readers, can recognize the people as being like us, because they are represented as such. This novel is part of the movement to provide human rights literacy to the not yet enfranchised, to ensure development of the human personality and a sense of its dignity. But it does not extend the scope of this development, like it would ideally do.

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<sup>555</sup> Goodreads, *Before We Say Goodbye*. May 29th 2013. [http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8610949-before-we-say-goodbye?auto\\_login\\_attempted=true](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8610949-before-we-say-goodbye?auto_login_attempted=true). May 29th 2013. Amnesty International, *Book Search and Order Online – Before We Say Goodbye*. May 29th 2013.

[http://www.amnesty.org.uk/books\\_details.asp?BookID=112](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/books_details.asp?BookID=112) May 29th 2013.

<sup>556</sup> Slaughter 2007, 328.

<sup>557</sup> Ibidem, 307.

<sup>558</sup> Ibidem, 23, 274.

As Naaman has argued,

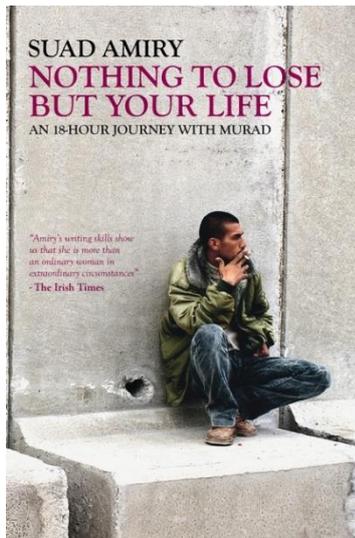
the media treatment of [suicide terrorism] both in the Arab world and in the West relies on convenient stereotypes and conventional narrative frames. Those representations deny women agency and instead represent them ... in a hegemonic framework that enables readers and viewers to maintain both the comfortable gender status quo and their preconceived notions about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.<sup>559</sup>

Perhaps, as the praise-section argues, this book does not blame or judge, and does shatter some preconceived notions. But the “bird’s-eye view” mentioned by Cohen-Barzilay is limited, and any complexities are shunned in favour of fictional clarity. There is no singularity, no “proximity of the unfamiliar,... of difference that makes [us] work to forge new ties of identification and to reimagine what it is to belong to a human community in which common epistemological and cultural grounds cannot always be assumed. [This] story takes [us] home and tempts [us] to stay there.”<sup>560</sup> Despite the novel’s non-judgmental view of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, it cannot be mistaken to be about ‘the’ female suicide bomber. It is about her representation in Western human rights imagination.

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<sup>559</sup> Naaman, 951.

<sup>560</sup> Butler 2004, 38.



The difficulty of becoming other people: *Nothing to Lose But My Life*

“As I see it, it is wrong to write about people without living through at least a little of what they are living through.” Ryszard Kapuscinski – *Another Day of Life*.

Hence I accompanied Murad and his friends on a journey that lasted eighteen hours. – Suad Amiry<sup>561</sup>

These two sentences are the start of *Nothing To Lose But My Life – An 18-hour Journey with Murad* (2010), a memoir based on the author Suad Amiry’s trip with a group of West Bank Palestinians who spend their lives crossing the border with Israel in order to work and provide for their families. Amiry is a celebrated Palestinian writer and

architect who has lived in Jordan and Lebanon before finally settling again in the West Bank. She is mostly occupied with Palestinian peace and the preservation of Palestinian landscapes. Her earlier memoir *Sharon and my Mother-in-Law*, published in 2004, was translated into seventeen languages, became an international bestseller and won the 2004 Viareggio Prize, a prestigious Italian literary award. *Nothing to Lose But My Life* was translated into several languages upon release (including English and Italian) and has had a largely positive reception. It has a four-star rating on Amazon.com and Goodreads, and the Bloomsbury Publishing House lists several good review from the Irish Times, the Jordan Times and This Week in Palestine.<sup>562</sup> However, overall it has received less attention than Amiry’s first work and is less available to the public: for example, the Dutch e-store bol.com supplies only the Arab version. The book appears on the tenth place in Amnesty’s top 10 and can be purchased through a link to Amazon.com.

Like Ambrosio, Amiry writes about the relation between Israel and Palestine, but instead of fictionally delving into her topic, she does so physically; first of all, she already lives in Palestine, and secondly, she actually lives through what she writes about. The use of Kapuscinski’s quote gives the reader an idea about Amiry’s goal: living through a part of the other’s life in order to imagine it. It therefore suggests even more authenticity and reliability than Ambrosio’s newspaper-based story. At the same time, however, it suggests that anything other than actually living through a situation does not allow one to speak about it in any informed manner. What, then, does Amiry imagine to be the function of this novel? Can it teach the readers enough to allow them to talk about it? Or should everyone live through it? To try and answer these questions, I will discuss the novel through a double lens. That of Amiry, who witnesses the struggles of her fellow countrymen, and that of the reader, who witnesses Amiry’s reflections on her role as a witness and author.

Amiry, throughout her journey, becomes increasingly aware of the way Israel and Palestine are implicated in one another. She and the men leave their homes in the middle of the night, in peace and quiet: “I must say, it would have been less nerve-racking handling the presence of the Israeli soldiers than their absence. We’d become so used to their forty-odd-year ‘presence’ that a one-night

<sup>561</sup> Suad Amiry, *Nothing To Lose But Your Life – An 18-Hour Journey With Murad*. Doha: Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation Publishing, 2010. Kindle Edition. Location 19. Epigraph. All following locations are from this publication, unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>562</sup> Bloomsbury Publishing, *Nothing To Lose But Your Life*. July 5<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/nothing-to-lose-but-your-life-9789992142356/>. July 5<sup>th</sup> 2013.

absence seemed absolutely unbearable.”<sup>563</sup> Amiry wonders whether it was the Palestinian provincial lifestyle or the Israeli occupation, or a causal connection between those, that had contributed more to the desertedness of the roads at night. “Whether we’re the chicken or the egg, we’re certainly contributing to making their/our occupation a part-time responsibility.”<sup>564</sup> One of the men tells Amiry about the time he wanted to get home before sunset during Ramadan to be in time for the family dinner, but got into trouble with Israeli soldiers. They release him before dawn, mocking: “now you can go and have suhur (the meal eaten before sunrise in Ramadan) with your families.”<sup>565</sup> This anecdote shows how the Israelis dominate the existence of the Palestinians, but it also shows how deeply rooted the Muslim customs are in Israel. On observing how much the men love their mothers’ cooking, Amiry muses: “Isn’t food the sauce of every man’s Oedipus complex?”<sup>566</sup> The reference to Freud is interesting, as conservative anti-Islam thinkers, such as Hirsi Ali, have argued that Muslims often reject scientists of various disciplines, among whom Freud, on account of their being Jewish.<sup>567</sup> In this regard it is interesting to note that racial connotations of Judaism are a Western invention, not Islamic. Anti-Semitism in the Muslim world is a sentiment adopted from Western discourse.<sup>568</sup>

The relation between the Israelis and the Palestinians is one of push-and-pull and of mutual dependence. The power that the Israelis exercise over the Palestinians bears witness to this. Amiry divides the Israeli soldiers up in the “shoot at us,” “arrest us,” “beat us up,” “non-arresting” and the “pretend not to see us” guards. Not all guards just recklessly discard the Palestinians, but that does not diminish their power over them. To the contrary; when the group approaches the border, some of the guards let them through. Amiry wonders: “What the hell is going on? Didn’t they see us? Didn’t they realise we’re workers on the run?” But one of the workers replies: “Of course they did; they decide what they want, whenever they want. That’s the real power.”<sup>569</sup> Another example is employment. The men tell Amiry that Israeli employers pay better than Arab ones, and when a little boy tells her that his father refuses to work for Israelis because they do not pay, one of the men says: “Hey, kid, don’t exaggerate, she is not a reporter for Al Jazeera TV. Don’t listen to him. Israeli employers are a hundred times better than Arabs.”<sup>570</sup> Interestingly enough, Amiry decides to join the men after she hears a story about Murad, one of them, being abused by an Israeli employer.<sup>571</sup> But she increasingly becomes aware that, rather than the two parties existing in isolation to each other, they exist with and through each other. The Israelis need the Palestinians as well as the other way around. When the men cannot find any work over the border, and one of them suggests going home, another answers: “What home? I’d rather die here than go back empty-handed.”<sup>572</sup> Amiry remarks that it is safer for some ‘wanted’ people to be in Israel than in their own villages in the West Bank.<sup>573</sup> The readers learn that Israeli soldiers love the Lebanese singers Nancy ‘Ajram and George Wassouf; a picture is described in which Murad wears a T-shirt with Hebrew writing, contrasting with the Arabic words for ‘victory is near’ on his arm; most Palestinians are described as preferring the Israeli

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<sup>563</sup> 213.

<sup>564</sup> 213-220.

<sup>565</sup> 225-232.

<sup>566</sup> 288.

<sup>567</sup> Hirsi Ali, 200-201.

<sup>568</sup> Roy, 327.

<sup>569</sup> 1960.

<sup>570</sup> 500-1420.

<sup>571</sup> 560.

<sup>572</sup> 1510.

<sup>573</sup> 1458-1469.

phone company over the Palestinian one.<sup>574</sup> But Amiry does not linger in utopian love-stories between the two sides. She keeps alternating between narrating the Israeli-Palestinian connections and her critical views of both sides. One of the workers mentions that his fellow Palestinians never sympathize with him when he gets arrested.<sup>575</sup> Amiry also mentions “how Palestinians liked to exaggerate their sufferings,” but immediately after she narrates a quite horrifying scene in which an Israeli soldier humiliates a Palestinian.<sup>576</sup> Her critical attitude, and that of her fellow countrymen, complicates the idea that there is one Palestinian people versus one Israeli people.

We don't want anything but to work and feed our children. What have we gained from the second intifada in 2000? We destroyed ourselves with our stupid slogan 'al-Aqsa wal-Aqsa' (referring to the Aqsa Mosque). Is Jerusalem only ours? Let them have it, let them take it all. Look at the 1948 Arabs, they sold it and they built it. Look at them today, they have a good life, a life even better than the Jews. ... They can go wherever they wish. What more does anyone want from life?<sup>577</sup>

Palestinians now may not agree with the Palestinians then, and not all of them wish to fight for their space, not all of them are fanatics. Amiry tries to insist on the multifaceted aspects of all the characters. They are not only Palestinians, but musicians, or communists, or Muslims, or lovers, or fighters, or workers, or all at the same time. “Some spoke Palestinian Arabic with a few Hebrew words; others spoke Moroccan Arabic or Berber with French words; some spoke Turkish with German expressions; and some spoke Mexican Spanish with much American slang.”<sup>578</sup> Amiry also keeps appealing to ‘universal’ (that is, at least Western) stereotypes in order to complicate notions of an isolated Palestinian unity. The reference to men loving their mothers’ cooking is one of such appeal, and so is the image of a group of young men cheering for a broadcasted football match.<sup>579</sup> The fact that they are in a coffee house in a “non-descript new ‘village center’,” rather than in a pub drinking beer, is a particularity that is not disturbing to the ‘universal’ image of men watching sports on TV. Palestine’s inability to successfully voice its demands in the Israeli public sphere, as discussed in the previous chapter, is here illustrated by its inability to, in spite of good football records, qualify as World Cup contenders because of an Israeli attack.<sup>580</sup> But at the same time, Amiry emphasizes the difference between Palestine and the world that is creating the gap between them: “I couldn't begin to imagine what the Milanese, Neapolitans, Parisians and Londoners would do if put under curfew for thirty or forty consecutive days.”<sup>581</sup>

Amiry also complicates the idea that ‘Palestinian’ is identical to ‘Arab’. From the start of the large-scale Jewish migration in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea existed that Palestinians were merely Arabs who could easily integrate elsewhere. And since 9/11, Israel and Palestine have become more polarized than they were, with Israelis becoming associated with the West and the Palestinians with the Muslim Arab world. But in reality, it is much more complicated than that. “Israel – officially representing Western liberal modernity – legitimizes itself in terms of its ethnic-religious identity; while the Palestinians – described as premodern ‘fundamentalists’ – legitimize their demands in

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<sup>574</sup> 601, 1764.

<sup>575</sup> 1721-1732.

<sup>576</sup> 1703-1722.

<sup>577</sup> 1747-1756.

<sup>578</sup> 1205.

<sup>579</sup> 297.

<sup>580</sup> 891.

<sup>581</sup> 220-225.

terms of secular citizenship.<sup>582</sup> Amiry recognizes the Arab world's unity as well as its internal differences. One minute she compares Murad's house to her grandmother's house in Damascus,<sup>583</sup> the next she recounts a conversation about Murad's girlfriend between him and his father. "She's not Russian, she's Moroccan.' 'Worse', said the father... 'She's not Moroccan, she's Yemeni'. 'Even worse.'"<sup>584</sup> One minute an old man is dwelling on the Ottoman Empire and the betrayal of the English; the next, Amiry mocks the empire in saying that "[Palestine] seem[s] to have remained faithful to two of the Ottoman Empire's traditions: loud phone conversations and endless wars."<sup>585</sup> Then again, when Murad's father is watching the TV series *The Lost Heaven*, Amiry draws attention to the connections in the Arab world while it criticizes the Arab attitude towards the past and present:

"Like the rest of the Palestinians, and 250 million other Arabs, [he] was mourning the loss of Andalusia in 1492, which was the subject of the Syrian television series. Having a Syrian mother myself, I recognized the phenomenon of dwelling on the glory of the past rather than dealing with the harsh realities of today (meaning my father)."<sup>586</sup>

Amiry's awareness of Israel's condition as being one that exists between several people is illustrated by her newfound respect for those who drive the Palestinian workers to the borders: "And if there is anyone who deserves a world medal for resilience, patience and resistance against Israeli occupation, it is Ford bus drivers."<sup>587</sup> 'In-between' is the continuous condition of the country. Children even want to go on a ride on the buses for a lack of amusement parks. Everything, including the food (both the Israelis and Palestinians claim falafel to be their national sandwich) is "cross-cultural, cross-national, cross-religious, cross-colour and, most importantly, cross-country..."<sup>588</sup> The wall that is being built by the Israelis,<sup>589</sup> disabling the Palestinians from working in Israel, deprives the men of being more than just Palestinians.<sup>590</sup> But, at the same time, it does not really clearly divide anything; once on the Israeli side, the men are relatively safe. "If the Wall separates Palestine from Israel then why are they harassing us on our side?"<sup>591</sup> The wall is artificially trying to divide two peoples that are as much different as they are connected. That may be why Amiry refers to the one side as "Israel proper" and to the other as "Israel not so proper."<sup>592</sup> What changes, when over the wall, is not the people but the relation between people. "So far we had managed to speedily run away from them [...] and now we were to be on the same bus with them. I was trying hard to understand the new rules of this part of the game."<sup>593</sup>

Finally, Amiry starts to notice that "for [her], and many others, Israel was virtual. For Murad, Israel was 'home'. Israel was a reality, a harsh reality."<sup>594</sup> Murad has been coming here seven years out of

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<sup>582</sup> Žižek, 126.

<sup>583</sup> 316.

<sup>584</sup> 522.

<sup>585</sup> 1622, 150.

<sup>586</sup> 363.

<sup>587</sup> 738.

<sup>588</sup> 2457.

<sup>589</sup> 1682.

<sup>590</sup> 1800-1907.

<sup>591</sup> 1982.

<sup>592</sup> 2206.

<sup>593</sup> 2237.

<sup>594</sup> 2429.

his twenty-one. The Israeli bus drivers and soldiers recognize the men. It is their country: “after all, as the Arabic saying goes; the land belongs to the one who ploughs it, Al-ard li ili bizraha.”<sup>595</sup> A striking scene takes place when the group boards a bus. While Amiry is thinking about a movie in which a Palestinian boy blows himself up in the bus, Murad is pointing out all the sights and his experiences with them.<sup>596</sup> The situation is much more complex than Amiry had imagined, and she realizes that the connection of the workers to Israel/Palestine is completely different from hers. “There was no other place on this planet that I felt so out of place, so out of space, so out of time, so out of history, so out of meaning, so out of logic, so out of my skin, and so outraged as when I was in my historic ‘homeland Palestine’.”<sup>597</sup> Her hometown Jaffa looked alien to her.<sup>598</sup> At the same time, she realizes that the same goes for the Israelis: “the majority of Israelis hated the settlers to the point where they insisted that the settlers must remain with us, on the West Bank.”<sup>599</sup> It embarrasses her to realize these inconsistencies. “I was ashamed of myself. I was ashamed of my people. I was ashamed of this world.”<sup>600</sup>

Amiry thus seems to realize that her role in the journey is almost obsolete. She starts out right away by separating herself from the men she is joining on their trip: “I pressed my tits in an attempt to hide them, if not totally then at least to flatten them as much as possible so they would pass for a man’s well-built chest muscles.”<sup>601</sup> With this sentence she immediately establishes the fact that she can never *be* them; she can just approach them. However, in reminiscing about her youth, when she used to dress like a boy in order to play with boys, she affirms her potential to at least partly become one of them. “Tonight, I was to play with Palestine’s ‘Big Boys’.”<sup>602</sup> She starts to feel connected to them: “I caught myself saying ‘we’. I guess the bond had already been formed.”<sup>603</sup> And despite her ‘intrusion’, the men talk about bribes, jobs, hashish, all inside information. Amiry is careful not to generalize, and when she does, she justifies it: “I was trying hard to resist the fact that they all looked alike, only to learn later that the three ‘eers’ [Muneer, Musheer, Shaheer] looked alike simply because they were brothers. Oh well.”<sup>604</sup> She even feels she is in a position to warn the men, who have been taking the dangerous trip all their lives, about the possibility of being shot.<sup>605</sup> But throughout the journey, she starts to perceive the difference between her and the men. “It was amusing the way they talked about me in the third person... So much for my attempt to look like one of the Big Boys.”<sup>606</sup> She finds that they actually do all look alike to her: “Faceless illegal workers let it be.”<sup>607</sup> As she realizes the complicated relation between the men and the land, she feels embarrassed about waking up everyone in the middle of the night to take this trip that will accommodate her writing.

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<sup>595</sup> 2403.

<sup>596</sup> 2390.

<sup>597</sup> 2472.

<sup>598</sup> 2742.

<sup>599</sup> 2755.

<sup>600</sup> 2575.

<sup>601</sup> 60.

<sup>602</sup> 125.

<sup>603</sup> 747.

<sup>604</sup> 804.

<sup>605</sup> 1915.

<sup>606</sup> 1411.

<sup>607</sup> 833.

Only a pretentious bourgeois, a romantic and a leftist like me would think she could represent the underdog: workers, women and children. ... And here I was trying to collect material for my new book by being adventurous *only once*, then playing around with the material (people's lives) and writing a brilliant book about the remaining 150,000 Palestinian workers who were feeding a million.<sup>608</sup>

They treat her like a journalist, not like one of them, and sometimes even accuse her of making money out of their misery. But Amiry does not give up.

"All it takes is to shot at *only once*. *Only once* and you'll be dead and never have a chance to write this *bloody* book..." Amiry slowly starts to realize that her role is not to *become* one of the men, but to observe them and write about them, for they will never have the chance to be heard. As she points out, "... there were no international referees to witness what was happening."<sup>609</sup> When she decides not to take certain risks during the trip, she feels embarrassed, but realizes that without the storyteller, there is no story.<sup>610</sup> Even if *they don't* survive, *she* has to. The fact that the men sometimes pretend that she is not there, only reinforces the idea of authenticity of her account. The authenticity comes not from her being one of the men, but being the observer. Amiry, as an informed bystander, can even take a critical distance from them. When the men speak of recent developments and negotiations, she doubts there have been any; some of them had not even been born yet during the time in which their stories take place.<sup>611</sup> She also recognizes that the men daily shift positions when it comes to political matters.<sup>612</sup> Her distance allows her to make some rather bold statements; she treats dangerous situations as opportunities to "get some real action into this book."<sup>613</sup> But she also realizes that "[she] couldn't have stayed with them for more than eighteen hours,"<sup>614</sup> affirming her inability to actually experience what the men experience on a daily basis.

In the end, Amiry affirms the quote she starts with: you cannot write about lives unless you live a little through them. Her courage to actually come along reinforces the 'living through'; when Amiry returns home and looks in the mirror, she concludes: "I could see Murad's sunburnt face, / I could see Abu Yousef's, / Saed's and Muneer's, / And of course that of silly Ramzi."<sup>615</sup> But the fact that she was merely an observant emphasizes the living through 'only a little', which she affirms when she directs herself towards the Palestinian workers: "Thank you for a trip that has completely changed my life and my attitude, and surfaced my anger about an 'unfair' world that you are fated to face, I am afraid, all alone. And for that, I apologise."<sup>616</sup> Amiry tries to take the reader along on the trip, with sentences like: "for the first kilometer I was driving at one... metre... per... hour," to make the reader feel the slowness. But she diminishes what it means, to those workers, to go along. Now, if Amiry had to physically 'live through a little' to what Palestinian workers go through in order to write about it, and still cannot understand or change things, what is the function of the novel and its readers? As

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<sup>608</sup> 447-460.

<sup>609</sup> 1339.

<sup>610</sup> 1665.

<sup>611</sup> 1876.

<sup>612</sup> 1740-1747.

<sup>613</sup> 1229.

<sup>614</sup> 1875.

<sup>615</sup> 2875.

<sup>616</sup> 2917.

Amiry wonders: “If it wasn’t clear to me, then how would my readers understand?”<sup>617</sup> What does Amiry imagine her novel to be?

The book ends with a newspaper article about a Palestinian, shot at the border because he had no work permit and whose parents cannot get hold of his body.<sup>618</sup> Butler has argued that the public sphere is created through the omission of certain deaths, which means that losses that do not count as losses establish the limits of who is considered to be a human participator in the public sphere: “...The norm governing who will be a grievable human is circumscribed and produced in ... acts of permissible and celebrated public grieving.”<sup>619</sup> It seems that, like Amiry, the novel is there to bear witness, creating a space in which the non-existing can exist, the un-witnessed witnessed, and the un-grieved grieved. This need for space is closely related to the spatial problems that create the conflict between Israel and Palestine in the first place – there is too little space to hold every history, every life, every nationality.

Throughout the novel there are references to what objects and spaces hold and hide. An especially striking chapter, entitled “Animals’ Nightmare, Children’s Fable, Timeless, Space-less,”<sup>620</sup> tells the story of animals having to point out all that is lost because of the wall, because, in the camel’s words (since this is not the first wall in human history), “the problem with you, mankind, is that you have a short memory, and hence never learn from history.”<sup>621</sup> But the landscape does remember. The mole collects the remnants of ancient civilizations, damaged by the Wall: “These we can put together: some shards are Greek, some are Roman, and some are Byzantine. The ones we can’t do much about are the many layers of early and late Arab periods. These have been damaged beyond repair, in spite of fourteen centuries of existence.”<sup>622</sup> Although it cannot be resurrected like other empires, the land bears witness to the fact that an Arab empire once existed. The Israeli settlements, built by Arab hands, bear witness to the insecurity of both Israel’s and Palestine’s future; the men sometimes create bad constructions, to spite their oppressors, but then realize that maybe, someday, the crooked buildings will be theirs again, and use the best cement.<sup>623</sup> The pieces of art Amiry observes when sitting in a park bear witness to Israel’s violent overtake. The pseudo-Calder sculptures “violated the very concept and spirit of Calder’s [laws of] movement and balance,” but “why should this sculpture be more honest about its origins than the park in which it stood? If Israel had violated every other law on this planet, why should Calder’s laws of balance and movement be respected?”<sup>624</sup> The park itself hides the remains of a destroyed Arab village, like many Israeli nature sanctuaries do.<sup>625</sup> What is left are only road signs; “wasn’t it amazing how we needed simple things such as a road sign to assure us that we truly existed on this land?”<sup>626</sup> Throughout Amiry’s journey, she is constantly reminded of Palestine’s existing through its absence. She cannot find one single Arab house; even the trees are no longer native Arab. She imagines the wiped out Arab town of Mlabbis; she can see the villagers reading the Qur’an, going to school, and trading food with Israelis despite

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<sup>617</sup> 1930.

<sup>618</sup> 2931.

<sup>619</sup> Butler 2004, 37-38.

<sup>620</sup> 1993

<sup>621</sup> 2102.

<sup>622</sup> 2062-2069.

<sup>623</sup> 987.

<sup>624</sup> 2607-2613

<sup>625</sup> 2600.

<sup>626</sup> 2826-2833.

their differences. She imagines the town's destruction. "... a whole nation's memory had frozen right there and then, and a whole world was trying hard to wipe out [this] memory. But memories are spirit-like: they have the ability to reincarnate."<sup>627</sup> Amiry imagines the memories to manifest in spaces, both existent and no longer there. It is all part of her "impossible mission to trace and reconstruct a lost world, a lost society, and perhaps a lost hope..."<sup>628</sup>

It seems as though, in the context of Palestine, all these spaces function as *lieux de mémoire*, spaces that hold memory when there no longer is an active environment of memory.<sup>629</sup> But the *lieux de mémoire*, here, are not only the places that are there, but first and foremost the spaces that are lost. British Writer Iain Sinclair has once described psychogeography as a "grid of energies" throughout a city, "anchored by sites and icons," energies of a past that the present wishes to forget or omit, but that exercises influence over the imagination through its energy.<sup>630</sup> Although Sinclair speaks of the map of London, it seems as though this novel presents Palestine as such a grid of energies, existing from a collection of *lieux de mémoire*, both there and no longer there, that resurrect its memory. And the novel, while witnessing the failure of inclusive citizenship, connects the past and the present in establishing new identities of longing and belonging.<sup>631</sup> Palestine, as it is now, is created through Israel's expulsion of its inhabitants.

It makes sense that Amiry, as the founder of the Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation, would place such an importance on physical spaces. As an authority on the subject, she may talk about it. Amiry establishes the authenticity of her account on the basis of this authority and her authority as a critical observer, not through her ability to *be* one of the men; although Amiry, as Tutu advised, steps (quite literally) into the shoes of another, she realizes that this will not make her that other, nor will this novel make the reader that other. As Whitlock suggested a good, engaging novel should do: it downplays symmetry in favour of non-transcendable differences of history and experience.

When looking at the reviews of the novel on Goodreads and Amazon.com,<sup>632</sup> it seems as though people do see Amiry as an authority; they trust her because she is Palestinian and because she actually went along on the trip. It seems as though the book demands a struggle-for-rights-centred view: one reader praises Amiry's critique of the Israeli state that "makes her resistance stronger than more direct action would do." But what is striking is that some readers are disturbed by the lack of details and would have preferred more stories about Amiry's travel companions. Despite the impression Amiry's story leaves on them, they seem to be looking for something in the characters to compare themselves to. One reader even mentions that she feels embarrassed because the Palestinian workers get up at two-thirty, while she complains about getting up at six – a minor detail in the novel, but one she could relate to. Throughout the novel, there are references to European writers and musicians, and amicable English is used. These aspects might be there to contribute to a

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<sup>627</sup> 2623-2683.

<sup>628</sup> 2853.

<sup>629</sup> Erll, 23.

<sup>630</sup> Elizabeth Ho, "Postimperial Landscapes: "Psychogeography" and Englishness in Alan Moore's Graphic Novel From Hell: A Melodrama in Sixteen Parts." *Cultural Critique* 63 (2006). 109.

<sup>631</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 6.

<sup>632</sup> *Goodreads, Nothing To Lose But My Life*. June 1<sup>st</sup> 2013. <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/8016273-nothing-to-lose-but-your-life>. June 1<sup>st</sup> 2013; *Amazon.com, Nothing To Lose But My Life*. June 1<sup>st</sup> 2013. <http://www.amazon.com/Nothing-Lose-But-Your-Life/dp/9992142057>. June 1<sup>st</sup> 2013

transnational appeal, which makes it an interesting choice for Amnesty.<sup>633</sup> But apparently, these few familiar references are not enough for the readers to really engage with the characters. Unlike El Saadawi and Ambrosio, Amiry's memoir leans towards singularity rather than universality. It insists on a difference between the characters and the rest of the world, including herself. She does not go as far as to suggest, like Hirsi Ali did, that this difference is destructive and should be annihilated, but she does present it as a difference that cannot be bridged completely, even when following the exact same paths as others. Perhaps, then, *Nothing To Lose But Your Life* insists on difference a little too much, to the point where the message becomes more matter-of-fact than empathy-engaging, while that is what Amnesty is aiming for.

Through its novelistic journalism (or vice versa), *Nothing To Lose But Your Life* explores the presence of Palestine in an Israeli-dominated life, without falling into generalizing judgments of either. It does so through its nuanced account of the limits and possibilities of experiencing the other's life and remembering another life. However, it seems as though the nuance and the limitations are not particularly what is drawing the readers. In some way, it seems that Amiry is preaching to the converted. In her acknowledgements there are many Italian names; together with Ambrosio's novel, it seems as though Italy is a fruitful ground for a pro-Palestinian (or at least not anti-Palestinian) novel. Indeed, Italy has and has had a good connection to the Palestinian Authority.<sup>634</sup> However, that does not mean it is pro-Islam: like Ambrosio, Amiry downplays the significance of religion. It appears as a manner of speaking ("may Allah...") rather than anything else. At times, she is critical of religion. When she imagines the destroyed Arab village where people were being taught to read the Qur'an, she "looked everywhere for a girls' school but failed to find one."<sup>635</sup> In chapter that presents the fable of the wall, the animals receive a letter from God that says: "I apologize for not being able to address this very sensitive issue. I can't do much about your sufferings in my Holy Land... ." The fox concludes that "His sorrowful words made many of us despair and commit suicide."<sup>636</sup> The reliance on God is criticized and any religious motivations for Palestinians as well. She concludes: "God, all they want is work."<sup>637</sup> Despite Amiry's insistence on her small part in the trip and the particularities she could never grasp, her conclusion, attentive of universalizing something that is not universal, still generalizes the Palestinian workers. The work presents them as a whole, different from 'us', different from religious groups, even different from her; but thus denies them the chance to be part of a larger movement against the injustices suffered by the Palestinians, and to be more than those 150,000 Palestinian workers who feed a million.

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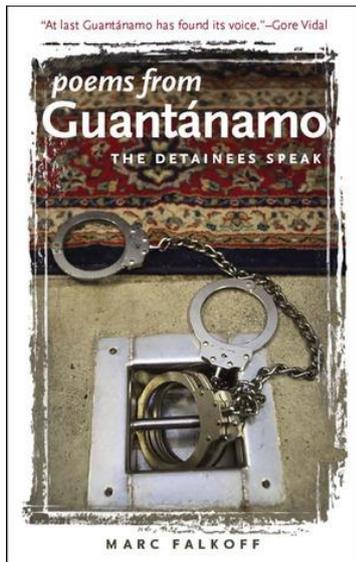
<sup>633</sup> I do not know whether these names were already in the original Arabic version or whether they are the translator's choice, but because the translation is used by Amnesty, it is not of a particular importance in this context.

<sup>634</sup> *Wafa, Palestinian News & Info Agency*. "Italian President Announces Upgrading of Representative Office in Rome to Delegation." June 3d 2013. <http://english.wafa.ps/index.php?action=detail&id=16144>. June 3d 2013.

<sup>635</sup> 2652-2660.

<sup>636</sup> 2102-2125.

<sup>637</sup> 2880. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, for example, for an extreme opposite suggestion: to her, the conflict is completely religious: "... from the Arab Islamic perspective it is a holy war in the name of Allah, and victory will come only if the Jews are destroyed or enslaved, if all the infidels are killed, converted, or "dhimmified" into the status of submissive, second-class citizens." 200 (note that she ignores that the opposite is happening now).



## The silent voices of Guantánamo

“At last Guantánamo has found its voice.” – Gore Vidal<sup>638</sup>

Schaffer and Smith have argued that, since 9/11, “a new regime, that of the global “war on terror” seems to be displacing the regime of human rights, sidelining certain principles of justice and reorienting the politics of alliance and responsibility along the way.”<sup>639</sup> In the discussion on Hirsi Ali’s book, I have shown how alliance and responsibility are complicated by the histories of the Arab world and the West that are implicated in one another. The detention centre at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba is one of the most poignant examples of how justice can become subordinated to the politics of war. The Guantánamo detention centre was established by the US government in 2002 for the purpose of holding prisoners of the post-9/11 War on Terror. Since it has been operative, 779 prisoners were detained at Guantánamo, 166 of whom remain imprisoned to this day. Only 8% of the prisoners are accused of being part of Al Qaeda, 5% were captured in Afghanistan and fewer than half of the prisoners are accused of having committed any hostile act against either the US or any of its allies; as a result, many do not know on what grounds they are being held. Their imprisonment is indefinite, there is no judicial oversight nor any prospect of a trial. Their condition violates the Geneva Conventions that establish the international legal standards for the humanitarian treatment of (prisoners of) war. The prisoners in Guantánamo are therefore not prisoners of war, but unlawful combatants, the term used for prisoners who have violated the laws of war and to whom the Geneva Conventions do not apply.<sup>640</sup>

Marc Falkoff, the attorney for a number of detainees and the holder of a doctorate in American literature, has compiled a collection of twenty-two poems written by seventeen Guantánamo (ex-) detainees entitled *Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*, published in 2007. Amnesty recommends the volume on its human rights fiction page and it can be purchased through its web shop, as well as on Amazon.com. Since the poetry collection was announced, it has received much international attention. Predominantly praising articles have appeared in the Guardian, the Huffington Post, on the websites of human rights organizations, and it has received scholarly attention from, among others, Judith Butler. A year after its publication, *Poems from Guantánamo* was already in its third edition. Furthermore, it occupies the sixty-eighth place in Amazon.com’s Bestselling Middle Eastern Poetry Top 100.<sup>641</sup>

Falkoff argues that the poems are a result of the prisoners trying to “maintain their sanity, to memorialize their suffering and to preserve their humanity through acts of creation.” He expresses the hope that these poems may allow the detainees to become part of the dialogue about “whether to extend the Geneva Conventions protections to the detainees.” “Perhaps their poems will prick the

<sup>638</sup> Marc Falkoff ed., *Poems From Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*. Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2007. Praise section. All following pages are from this publication, unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>639</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 20.

<sup>640</sup> Butler 2004, 51; Falkoff, 105.

<sup>641</sup> Amazon.com, *Bestsellers in Middle Eastern Poetry*. July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013. <http://www.amazon.ca/Best-Sellers-Books-Middle-Eastern-Poetry/zgbs/books/13804241#4>. July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013.

conscience of a nation.” After all, although the poems were not written with the assumption that they would receive an audience (initially, the prisoners had no writing equipment so they scribbled on paper cups), by their circulation they can be perceived within a new frame. As Butler has argued, we understand humanity through frames of meaning, social institutions rather than static entities, that seek “to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot.”<sup>642</sup> The framework of humanity, discussed in the first chapter, depends on these frames in order to exist. But “the frame that seeks to contain, convey and determine what is seen... depends upon the conditions of reproducibility in order to succeed.”<sup>643</sup> Frames of apprehension must circulate to maintain their hegemony. Butler argues that this means that a frame breaks with itself, which allows for new modes of apprehension, new frameworks. This happened, for example, when the pictures of US officers abusing prisoners at Abu Ghraib circulated across the Internet and caused global outrage. The pictures made possible the recognition of the humanity of the abused by the public, and thus shattered the framework of inhumanity imposed on the abused in exactly those pictures. Thus, when frames circulate, which they must in order to exist, “a taken-for-granted reality is called into question, exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame.”<sup>644</sup> This means that “it becomes possible to apprehend something about what or who is living but has not been generally “recognized” as a life.” By their circulation, the poems, Falkoff argues, “attest to the humanity of these men, who have been vilified by our government as “the worst of the worst” evildoers on the planet.”<sup>645</sup> The poems depict the inhuman treatment the authors suffer, precisely to break up this existing frame of their inhumanity. I will proceed to discuss the frame of inhumanity that the war on terror has established for these prisoners, after which I will investigate in what sense the poems break up or shift this frame, while at the same time acknowledging the conditions on which this frame can exist.

Falkoff, in his foreword, compares the condition of the Guantánamo detainees to that of the victims of the Gulag, the Nazi camps and Japanese American internment camps. But Butler has argued that the position of the Guantánamo detainees is not that of ‘bare life’, like that of the Nazi camp prisoners that form Agamben’s famous case study. According to Butler, it is not the absence of law that produces the Guantánamo detainees, but the illegitimate “exercise of state power freed from the constraints of all law.”<sup>646</sup> The state is absolutely sovereign, and does not need evidence, or even a charge, to hold the prisoners indefinitely.<sup>647</sup> Discursive practices mark and maintain state sovereignty; by referring to “detainees” rather than “prisoners”, internationally recognized rights discourse is avoided.<sup>648</sup> Because the discourse of terrorism poses it as a threat that is limitless and endless (existing outside of time, morality and humanity, as discussed in the previous chapters), the state of emergency and thus the lawless state power can also justify its indefinite character.<sup>649</sup> The suicides of three detainees in 2006 were referred to as acts of “asymmetric warfare,” as were several additional suicides.<sup>650</sup> Government officials have compared Guantánamo to mental institutions,

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<sup>642</sup> Butler 2010, 3.

<sup>643</sup> *Ibidem*, 10.

<sup>644</sup> *Ibidem*, 12.

<sup>645</sup> 3-4.

<sup>646</sup> Butler 2010, 29.

<sup>647</sup> Butler 2004, 70-71, 55.

<sup>648</sup> *Ibidem*, 64.

<sup>649</sup> *Ibidem*, 65.

<sup>650</sup> 2.

where people are also held involuntarily if they pose a threat to others. This analogy suggests that the detainees, defined as Muslim extremists, stand outside of reason, and are in need of restraint.<sup>651</sup> This makes them less than human, killing machines in a state of permanent war that would kill again once released. They fight outside of the legal frameworks of violence that is considered a justified human activity; this means that they are outside the law and can be treated as such.<sup>652</sup> Because the detainees are placed outside of the human community, their detention can be justified in the language of human rights.<sup>653</sup>

Falkoff suggests that *Poems from Guantánamo* might shift the framework of humanity so as to include the detainees. Right away, his dedication establishes the humanity of the prisoners: “For my friends inside the wire;” “Inshallah, we will next meet over coffee in your homes in Yemen.”<sup>654</sup> The poems in the collection share several properties. Many use the *qasida* genre, that exists of formal meters, twelve to eighty verses, and both spiritual and quotidian themes. This genre was often used during 20<sup>th</sup>-century decolonization to express cultural heritage in the Arab world. It accommodated regional customs and dialects, but was guarded from being appropriated by national elites - its character was that of popular dissent.<sup>655</sup> In the context of reaching a transnational audience (it has been used in this way by, for example, Osama Bin Laden), the *qasida* often avoids vernacular and regional or national themes. The same goes for the poetry in *Poems from Guantánamo*. I will proceed to discuss two of the most important common themes that can be found in the poems: physical incarnation and oppression and romantic longing.

As remarked in an essay by Flagg Miller, linguistic and cultural anthropologist, that precedes the poems, most of them are concerned with “physical incarnation and oppression.”<sup>656</sup> The detainees are critical of their captors’ hypocrisy concerning violence and war. Miller identifies a post-colonial socialist influence in many of the poems: themes and repetitions that are easy to memorize or to sing collectively, rather than aesthetically complex. The poetic meter is simple and underscores engagement with the rural and tribal song tradition.<sup>657</sup> Shaker Aamer is probably the most famous author in this book. Aamer, a Saudi Arabian citizen and a British resident, has been held in Guantánamo since 2002 and has never been charged with a crime. Without actually being able to communicate, through his charisma, his actions (he has initiated several hunger strikes) and his attorney he has become a ‘spokes-person’ for the detainees, and many petitions have gone out to effectuate his freedom. Aamer has been cleared for release twice, however, without any result; he remains in solitary confinement.<sup>658</sup> Aamer’s poem draws attention to the “schism in the public rationality” of his captors.<sup>659</sup> The poem is short and repetitive, and wonders what kind of peace his captors are after:

Peace of mind?  
Peace on earth?

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<sup>651</sup> Butler 2004, 72.

<sup>652</sup> Ibidem, 76-78.

<sup>653</sup> Ibidem, 89-90; Douzinas, 59.

<sup>654</sup> ix.

<sup>655</sup> 8.

<sup>656</sup> 12.

<sup>657</sup> 13.

<sup>658</sup> 19.

<sup>659</sup> Butler 2010, 57.

They talk, they argue, they kill –  
They fight for peace.<sup>660</sup>

It exposes US hypocrisy in torturing and killing in the name of peace. The poem of the Sudanese Sami Al Haj, who, like Aamer, is still being held in Guantánamo without evidence supporting his charge, also draws attention to US hypocrisy:

They have monuments to liberty  
And freedom of opinion, which is well and good.

But I explained to them that  
Architecture is not justice.<sup>661</sup>

If one draws his analogy further, it means that, if buildings do not represent justice, an attack on them does not represent an attack on justice. The poem questions the connection between the US and justice by witnessing the traumatic experience of torture. “I was humiliated in the shackles./ How can I now compose verses? How can I now write?” Through wondering about this, Al Haj is writing the poetry he cannot and is not allowed to write.<sup>662</sup> As such, it breaks a frame that is not supposed to be broken: the idea of legitimate violence against illegitimate violence is shattered in the reference to torture. It is known that the prisoners at Guantanamo have been “subjected to stress positions, sleep deprivation, blaring music, and extremes of heat and cold during endless interrogations.” They have been sexually humiliated, threatened, and have been denied basic medical care.<sup>663</sup> Torture and other injustices were kept secret because it was in the interest of the military and national security. Mohammed el Gharani, one of the first ‘enemy combatants’ in Guantánamo, attests to torture as a means for the oppressor to keep its sovereignty: “The soldier struck with his boot; / He said we were all equally subjects.”<sup>664</sup> His use of the word ‘subjects’ rather than ‘citizens’ allows for a comparison with the time of absolute sovereignty of the ruler, a time before human rights. His poem attests to Guantánamo’s restraints on the freedom of religion that the UDHR professes. “Not even the book of God was protected;” Falkoff points out that the detainees were often prevented from praying, and were “forced to witness American soldiers intentionally mishandling the holy Qur’an.”<sup>665</sup> El Gharani associates the war with early European crusades, but remains faithful to his own religion:

If you want dignity and protection  
Then raise the cross for protection  
All of us threw the card away  
Intent that our spirits be redeemed in sacrifice.

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<sup>660</sup> 20.

<sup>661</sup> 42.

<sup>662</sup> Butler 2010, 56.

<sup>663</sup> 1.

<sup>664</sup> 38.

<sup>665</sup> 1.

His verse “Their war is against Islam and justice” subverts the associations in the binary justice/US vs. injustice/Islam. The Yemeni Emad Abdullah Hassan also refers to the USA’s hypocrisy concerning religious values:

They have turned their land of peace  
Into a home for hypocrites.

They have exchanged piety  
For cheap commodity.<sup>666</sup>

His transnational appeal to overthrow the system has a socialist ring to it, and poses the oppressors on one side against the oppressed on the other.

My song will expose the damned oppression,  
And bring the system to collapse

....

My brother’s yearning covers all the world,  
His thoughts crowd the universe.

A poem by Yemeni Adnan Farhan Abdul Latif exposes a similar hypocrisy, but keeps closer to religion than to socialism. It juxtaposes ‘them’, the US military, as the criminals who betray their values to the righteous Muslims who respect them, thus reversing the frame in which Guantánamo functions. Through the repetition of ‘they do not’ and the adherence to a single theme, the poem can be read and remembered easily.

They do not respect the law,  
They do not respect men,  
They do not spare the elderly  
They do not spare the baby-toothed child.  
They leave us in prison for years, uncharged,  
Because we are Muslims

....

But we are content, on the side of justice and right,  
Worshipping the Almighty.

Abdullah Al Anazi, who lost both legs due to a US bombing in Afghanistan, and has not received proper medical care at Guantánamo, also shatters the common logic of Guantánamo. His poem opposes the “prison of injustice” to his having “no fellows but the Truth.”<sup>667</sup> A poem by Moazzam Begg, a British citizen who has been held without charge for three years, denounces the frame that is imposed on the prisoners’ humanity, accepted as factual truth: “Home is cage, and cage is steel / Thus manifest reality’s unreal.” It also names the function of poetry to undo this false frame:

Now “patience is of virtue” taught,  
And virtue is of iron wrought;  
So poetry is in motion set

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<sup>666</sup> 56.

<sup>667</sup> 25.

(Perhaps, with appreciation met).<sup>668</sup>

The wrought iron in combination with virtuous patience evokes the image of the poet behind bars, waiting for his poetry to be heard. Although he does not use the word 'framing', Begg's poem, in referring to bars, cages and the ironic injustice of his detention, conjures up its multiple meanings. To frame is to give meaning and structure to situations, as Butler has described it, but it also means "to set up, to place the blame and punishment on an innocent person."<sup>669</sup> In the case of the Guantánamo poetry, both meanings play a role in dealing with terrorism: within Guantánamo, innocent people are framed in order to frame global terrorism. A poem by Shaikh Abdurraheem Muslim Dost tries to undo the frame that explains terrorism as standing outside of time and space. To him, it is not an expression of lack of virtue or a denunciation of it, but a reaction to historical and current events.

Consider what might compel a man  
To kill himself, or another.

Does oppression not demand  
Some reaction against the oppressor?<sup>670</sup>

One of the most striking poems is "Death Poem" by Jumah al Dossari, a Bahraini ex-detainee of Guantánamo (released in 2007), and a father, who has tried to commit suicide twelve times.

Take my blood.  
Take my death shroud and  
The remnants of my body.  
Take photographs of my corpse at the grave, lonely.

Send them to the world,  
To the judges and  
To the people of conscience,  
Send them to the principled men and the fair-minded.

And let them bear the guilty burden, before the world,  
Of this innocent soul.  
Let them bear the burden, before their children and before history,  
Of this wasted, sinless soul,  
Of this soul which has suffered at the hands of the "protectors of peace."<sup>671</sup>

Al Dossari's poem is reproduced on the back cover and symbolizes the overall appeal to the readers. In referring to incarnation and oppression, the poems expose that which was meant to be hidden: the hypocrisy of the self-proclaimed righteous having resorted to the unjustifiable violence they accuse their victims of. "Where is the world to save us...?" wonders Abdul Latif. Martin Mubanga, a UK citizen who was released in 2005 after thirty-three months of imprisonment and is now on a mission to inform the world about Guantánamo's injustice with his rap poetry, draws the reader in by positioning the detainees, the Muslims and the readers who want justice on the same side, over

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<sup>668</sup> 30.

<sup>669</sup> Simpson, 87.

<sup>670</sup> 34.

<sup>671</sup> 32.

against the system of military and political corruption.<sup>672</sup> As such, the poems call the world to break up its frame, that links the US to justice and righteousness and the Muslims to infinite crime, in favour of a more critical one that acknowledges the role of the original frame as an excuse for inhuman actions.

The second theme that comes back in many of the poems is that of romantic longing. Miller points out that Arabic poetry was influenced by Romantic European writers, and include un-Arabic references.<sup>673</sup> The Jordan Osama Abu Kabir uses the image of nature in Spring, that he will never see again, as an analogy to his longing for his wife and children.<sup>674</sup> He refers to a salmon swimming up a stream, while there is no salmon in Arabic waters. Ibrahim al Rubaish's poem, "Ode to the Sea," touches upon the more sublime aspects of Romantic poetry. He longs to dive into the ocean, but describes the sea as hostile and unpredictable:

Gentle, deaf, mute, ignoring, angrily storming,  
You carry graves.

If the wind enrages you, your injustice is obvious.  
If the wind silences you, there is just the ebb and flow.

But he soon connects it to his oppressors:

Oh Sea, you taunt us in our captivity.  
You have colluded with our enemies and you cruelly guard us.

Don't the rocks tell you of the crimes committed in their midst?  
Doesn't Cuba, the vanquished, translate its stories for you?

The reference to nature collaborating with the US military draws attention to the global sovereignty of the US discourse on terrorism, when even nature, that, in the Romantic tradition, is often represented as untameable, is drawn into this representation of reality.

Butler, in her short analysis of some of the poems, has argued that they affirm the vulnerability of the men and are appeals to "a social connection to the world."<sup>675</sup> After all, speech acts are necessary to create community and gain political influence.<sup>676</sup> And poetry, Miller has argued, as an intimate medium, "can communicate that which is too humiliating to acknowledge publicly."<sup>677</sup> Using the familiar vocabulary of the Arab liberation front of the past, the detainees' verse is a cross-cultural response to global inequality.<sup>678</sup> The collection leaves the reader with a heavy responsibility: "if we care enough, if we are troubled enough, it will not be just the verses that are set free to roam the world but the hands and lips and lungs that composed them."<sup>679</sup> Butler recognizes that the poems

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<sup>672</sup> 57.

<sup>673</sup> 13. Other example than mentioned below: Shaikh Abdurraheem Muslim Dost, Cup Poem 1, 35.

<sup>674</sup> 50.

<sup>675</sup> Butler 2010, 59-60.

<sup>676</sup> Douzinas, 283.

<sup>677</sup> 15.

<sup>678</sup> 15-16.

<sup>679</sup> 72.

might not change the course of war,<sup>680</sup> but she concludes that they are “critical acts of resistance” forming networks that “pose an incendiary risk ... to the form of global sovereignty championed by the US.”<sup>681</sup>

But if, as Al Rubaish’s poem argues, “The poet’s words are the font of our power,” then they need a universal appeal, as I have pointed out in the second chapter. The singularity, the newness the poets introduce by shifting the frame that justifies their detention, is punctuated with familiarities, such as Romantic imagery, that allow the reader to perceive of the authors as equally human. In this regard, it is also interesting to point out that which is *not* there; Miller has concluded that “barely half of the poems invoke Islamic terms to develop themes of militancy” and some are even secular.<sup>682</sup> There are no overt associations with Islamic symbols. Religion is mostly treated in a very Christian manner: the religious references are to familiar stories and images and the religious values of unity and charity speak to the Christian imagination.<sup>683</sup> Why are the poems constructed like this? Three reasons come to mind. Perhaps the detainees realize they would not reach a worldwide audience if they were to represent any diehard jihadi views; it could also be that the real radicals are keeping quiet; or maybe, we expect stereotypical goals and motivations from them whereas human experience is more complex than that.<sup>684</sup> It is important to recognize the complexity of the detainees’ experience, because it attests to their humanity. However, as I have pointed out in relation to the literary works discussed above, the discourse around the work’s production and publication must not be ignored. *Poems from Guantánamo* might appear to be the least problematic of all the works in terms of authenticity. Unlike Ambrosio and, to a lesser extent, Hirsi Ali and El Saadawi, the authors speak entirely from their own experience, and the fictionalization lies in the poetic creation rather than the creation of content. However, it is clear that the identities of the prisoners are mediated by US administration in the broadest sense of the word.<sup>685</sup>

First, there is the discursive administration that they have to adhere to. Miller has argued that the men want to engage the sympathy of an audience as broad as possible, and “realize that a vocabulary of Islamic militancy is poor currency for such ends... Instead, the poets strive for a language that is more likely to win advantage: the discourse of universal human rights.”<sup>686</sup> After all, as Simpson has pointed out, “human rights discourses are entering the repertoires of a growing number of transnational Islamist organizations.” The reference to familiar images, such as a longing

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<sup>680</sup> As Simpson has argued in relation to the photographs of Abu Ghraib that shocked the world and exposed US injustice in the war on terror: “this opening of imagination and attention to the suffering and human integrity of the Iraqi (and Arab) other did not, however, prove lasting.” (113)

<sup>681</sup> Butler 2010, 62.

<sup>682</sup> 12.

<sup>683</sup> Examples: Shaikh Abdurraheem Muslim Dost, “Two Fragments”, 36; Sami Al Haj, “Humiliated in the Shackles” refers to the ‘evil snake’, 42. Abdulaziz, “O Prison Darkness” refers to heaven’s door, 22; Abdulla Majid al Noaimi, “My Heart was Wounded by the Strangeness”, and many more, use the invocations of God and Allah as stylistic devices more than anything else. “I conclude my poem by invoking prayers and blessings, / on the messenger of Allah, Ahmed, his chosen one.” 63.

<sup>684</sup> 12.

<sup>685</sup> 14.

<sup>686</sup> 15.

for home, gives their narratives a universal appeal.<sup>687</sup> The short introductions to all the poets are also sure to mention that they are fathers and sons, rather than getting into their (alleged) offenses.

Secondly, there is the problem of circulation. Additional verses have been written, by these and other detainees, but were destroyed.<sup>688</sup> Most poems were confiscated by the Pentagon because they were said to risk national security in form and content, by smuggling messages, for example. Defence Department spokesman Commander J.D. Gordon has interpreted the detainees' poetry as a tool in their battle against Western democracy, rather than an aesthetic expression (he had not read the poetry collection at the time).<sup>689</sup> Many think that it is precisely the threat of exposing more information that is keeping the detainees from being released.<sup>690</sup> As a result of the Pentagon's policy, only the English translations of the poems are available, produced by "linguists with secret-level security clearances" without real expertise in translating Arabic or access to dictionaries and other tools. "The translations that we have included here," admits Falkoff, "cannot do justice to the subtlety and cadence of the originals."<sup>691</sup> Translation has often been an issue in the war on terror; Apter has argued that a failure of translation is part of what causes war, and increases as the enemy diffuses its base across national borders and in transnational spaces such as the Internet or, in this case, the publishing industry. In the Iraq war, the lack of translators in the American camps created many misunderstandings between soldiers and prisoners, and in 2003, several translators at Guantánamo Bay were fired for suspected mistranslation and infiltration.<sup>692</sup> Finally, although the poetry has bridged a gap between the detainees and the rest of the world, the poems have appeared in the US and were "rescued by American lawyers, printed by an American press, copyedited by American eyes, published in the very heartland, the very center, of the nation that has so maltreated these men."<sup>693</sup>

So, the question is, which poems are not there? How about the overly Islamic ones? Butler has argued that it may not just be extremist acts that are considered irrational, but "rather any and all beliefs and practices pertaining to Islam that become, effectively, tokens of mental illness to the extent that they depart from the hegemonic norms of Western rationality."<sup>694</sup> Furthermore, the published poems are all by men who have been released or are not charged with a significant or proven crime. How about those who *have* committed serious crimes? Can they be still be treated inhumanly according to our human rights discourse? After all, Amnesty International's focus was initially on 'prisoners of conscience', those imprisoned on account of their beliefs rather than a committed crime. The poems in this volume underscore this definition: "The book of God assuages

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<sup>687</sup> Simpson, 38. Examples: Shaikh Abdurraheem Muslim Dost, Cup Poem 2, 35; Abdullah Thani Faris al Anazi, "To My Father", 25. Abdulla Maid al Noaimi, "I Write My Hidden Longing", 59-60.

<sup>688</sup> Butler 2010, 55.

<sup>689</sup> Marc Falkoff, "Poems From Guantánamo." *Amnesty International Magazine*, 2007. Center for the Study of Human Rights in the Americas. 2007. <http://humanrights.ucdavis.edu/projects/the-guantanamo-testimonials-project/testimonies/prisoner-testimonies/poems-from-guantanamo>. July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013.

<sup>690</sup> It is also the reason contact between the detainees and their family is limited. "... Begg received a heavily-censored letter from his seven-year-old daughter; the only legible line was, "I love you, Dad." Upon his release, his daughter told him the censored lines were a poem she had copied for him: "One, two, three, four, five, / Once I caught a fish alive. / Six, seven, eight, nine, ten, / The I let it go again." 29

<sup>691</sup> xi, 4-5.

<sup>692</sup> Apter, 13-15.

<sup>693</sup> 1.

<sup>694</sup> Butler 2004, 72.

my misery, / Even though they declared war against it.”<sup>695</sup> The poems thus replace the existing harmful framework that allows the US military to operate outside of the law, with the binary frame of belief systems that clash. Victimhood is framed neo-ethnically, on the basis of (religious) identity rather than actions. The reviews mentioned on the Amnesty website support this frame: “The verses provide a harrowing insight into the torments and fading hopes of the prisoners. Only two Guantánamo inmates have been charged with a crime.”<sup>696</sup> On Amazon.com and Goodreads, the reviews are similar. Although not everyone is equally charmed by the quality of the poems, mostly for their lack of complexity, everyone agrees that they have an urgent message to tell: “they strike a popular and universal chord as cries from the heart.... They might simply be called poetical statements.”<sup>697</sup> As is the tendency with all the works I have discussed so far, the reception shows that the aesthetics in the poetry collection are subordinated to the content. In their universal appeal, the poems engage and their power lies in breaking up a framework of justified violence that is exposed as unjust. However, the involvement of the powerful parties concerned with the practices at Guantánamo Bay limits the efficacy of the collection, even if the editors reflect upon this limitation. As such, it still excludes the margins of justified violence by omitting the voices that may be too singular (both in content and aesthetics) and too marginal to break up the system in which their suffering is framed.

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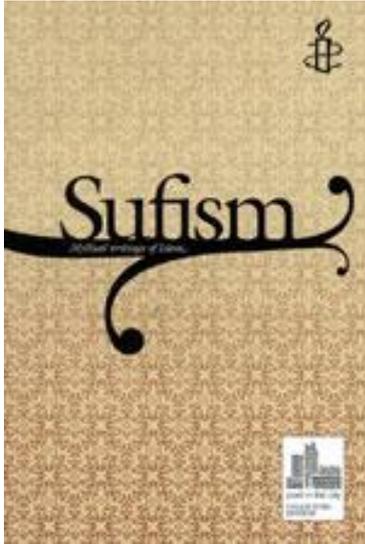
<sup>695</sup> 59.

<sup>696</sup> Amnesty International, *Human Rights Fiction and Poetry*.

<sup>697</sup> Amazon.com, *Poems From Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*. June 12<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<http://www.amazon.com/Poems-Guantanamo-The-Detainees-Speak/dp/1587296063>. June 12<sup>th</sup> 2013. See also Goodreads, *Poems From Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak*. June 12<sup>th</sup> 2013.

[http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/783143.Poems\\_from\\_Guantanamo](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/783143.Poems_from_Guantanamo). June 12<sup>th</sup> 2013. It is interesting to note that, after my having ordered the poetry collection from Amazon.com, Amazon.com suggested Moazzam Begg’s memoir *Enemy Combatant: My Imprisonment at Guantánamo, Bagram, and Kandahar*. He has been found innocent and was released, reinforcing the particular type of detainee the reader is supposed to identify with.



### Islam's human-shaped spin-off: Sufism

This literature is a by-product or 'spin-off' of the practice of Islam, both as a personal discipline of devotion and piety and as a public moral action, of the individual questioning despotism, hypocrisy and corruption. The two are closely connected but are not the same – they are conceptually and practically distinct. At its best, the literature inspired by Sufism can give an imaginative entry into the world of lived Islamic mysticism.<sup>698</sup>

The poetry collection *Sufism: Mystical Writings of Islam* was published in the wake of a Sufism event at the UK Headquarters of Amnesty International in 2006. It was organized in order to raise awareness for the persecution of Sufis in Iran, prisoners of conscience who peacefully protested the closure of their house of worship.<sup>699</sup> The publication is part of a larger project, 'Poet in the

City', a British charity that makes international poetry, as a way to get acquainted with other cultures, accessible to a broad audience through events and activities. In her foreword to the poetry collection, Kate Allen, the director of Amnesty International UK, adds that poetry is a civilized and authentic way of expressing human dignity, especially during times of hardship and repression of human rights.<sup>700</sup> Another foreword by the organizers of the Sufism event calls for mutual respect and tolerance, within an audience that exists of both Muslims and non-Muslims, through Sufi poetry as "a rich cultural heritage that emphasizes the common humanity which unites us all." *Sufism: Mystical Writings of Islam* is a concise collection of sixty-eight pages (fifty of which are actually devoted to the poetry itself, including the original Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Punjabi versions), mainly reproducing poetry by the most famous Sufis. The poems are categorized by their linguistic origins, and each section is preceded by a short introduction of the language and its speakers today, as well as short biographies of the poets and descriptions of the themes of their poetry. Amnesty, whose logo appears on the front cover, recommends the collection on its human rights fiction page and offers it through its web shop. The collection has received little international attention and no reviews on Amazon.com.<sup>701</sup> However, the top of Amazon.com's Bestselling Middle Eastern Poetry Top 100 is occupied mainly by poets who are also included in *Sufism: Mystical Writings of Islam*.

Amnesty's choice for Sufism to unite people is not surprising. Sufism is a mystical Islamic sect that emerged around the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century and gained an organized form around the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Its emergence was influenced by both mystical Christian currents and political motivations; in the face of political leaders manipulating religion for their own purposes, early mystics posed themselves as true Muslims who held on to the Islamic spirit – they were apolitical and indifferent to worldly and material affairs, their trust was on God completely. During the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Sufism helped spread Islam all over the world. Its mystical poetry was appealing, and its attitude towards local religious practices was tolerant as long as the basic spiritual impulse was that of Sufi Islam. Sufism brought Islam closer to the people, and empowered local cultures and groups that were excluded by normative Islam through a different "association with the worldly powerful religion of Islam."<sup>702</sup> It

<sup>698</sup> Bruce Wannell, ed. *Sufism: Mystical Writings of Islam*. London: Axon Publishing, 2007. Editor's foreword.

<sup>699</sup> Ibidem, 10.

<sup>700</sup> Ibidem, 14.

<sup>701</sup> Amazon.com even lists three used copies that can be bought for a penny.

<sup>702</sup> Rippin, 146.

induced a religious Muslim revival at a time when institutions had started to choke themselves. From the time it emerged up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sufism was not a general social movement. Numerous different Sufi orders were established around a *shaykh* and his pupils, and had only regional influence. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, the Ottoman Empire made use of Sufism's popularity by controlling it. It gained more political influence and its organization became less loose – allegiance to a single order rather than several became a requirement, and the succession of *shaykhs* became dynastic rather than selected spiritually. As Sufism gained popular support, the 18th-century *Wahhabiya* were less enthusiastic. They declared that Islam needed to be purified from un-Islamic aspects like saint worshipping, the idea of an intermediary between God and the worshipper and overly vocal and ecstatic music and dance. They wanted to establish the norm, as a central authority, that would define rightful membership of the Muslim community. This movement went hand in hand with the shedding of the legal schools' traditions and *ijtihad*. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and up to today, Sufism, and its ecstatic practices, have remained popular, despite repeated (fundamentalist) attempts to reform or dispose of it.<sup>703</sup>

Sufism as a popular Islamic strand challenges the idea of the Islamic community as a historical cumulative one. It allows Amnesty to separate the violent jihadi forms of fundamentalism from a more peaceful and apolitical form of Islam. In the collection's foreword, the organizers of the Sufi poetry event champion the launch of the Sufi Muslim Council after the London bombings, that condemns extremism and supports "the more tolerant and inclusive traditions within Islam." To the organizers, Sufism is relevant in the "current battle being waged for the traditions of Islam," just like it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The 2006 event was meant to show another side of Islam than the one represented in the media: "aesthetic, sophisticated, nuanced, self-questioning and profound." However, as the opening quote of this chapter suggests, although the two are related, there is a difference between Sufism and other Islamic strands. The difference is not easily defined; the majority of Muslims are Sunni, but within Sunni Islam the attitudes towards Sufism differ. Some argue that Sunni Islam and Sufism do not necessarily exclude each other. Others, like the *Wahhabi*, condemn it for the same reason they used to in the past. Sufism is hard to classify, as it differentiates itself through its transnational origins. Pascale Casanova has argued that local literary traditions usually do not lend themselves for transnational ideas of literature.<sup>704</sup> However, as Sufi poetry inspired and was inspired by a range of different cultures and languages, and Sufi poets were usually travellers, it might offer a perfect balance between the universal and the singular, as a transnational form and medium through which the local can take shape. I will proceed to discuss some of the poems and the balance between universality and singularity they portray, in order to draw some conclusions regarding Sufism's alleged function in uniting different Muslims and non-Muslims in a nevertheless Islamic way.

One of the poems in the Amnesty-endorsed collection by the famous Persian poet Hafez (d. 1389) evokes imagery that can be recognized by Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike. He uses the *ghazal* – an originally Arab poetic form that can be found in all Asian languages now due to its spread through Sufi poetry. It consists of rhyming couplets and a refrain, usually an expression of being separated from love, and the pain and beauty that come from that. Hafez compares the return to God to Joseph's return to Canaan, referring to Noah but also the *Ka'ba*, the Muslims' sacred building in

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<sup>703</sup> Ibidem, 136-151, 169-177

<sup>704</sup> Casanova 2004, 107.

Mecca. The themes of hardship, ‘coming home’ and ‘having faith’, are quite general in this poem: “Though this part of our journey is so dangerous, and the goal remote, / No roads are without endings;” “So long as your thought is prayer, your lesson the Holy Book, never grieve.”<sup>705</sup> The non-specific references to religion make the poem easy to relate to, regardless of which religion the reader might adhere to. The following excerpt of a poem by the Iraqi mystic Al-Niffari (d. 965) refers even less to religious specificities, but it is precisely that which allows it to be interpreted in different ways.

He stopped me in Death.

...

Deeds came to me and I saw in them hidden illusion, that turned to dust.

There was no help except the mercy of my Lord.

He said to me ‘Where is your science?’ I saw the fire.

‘Where are your deeds?’ I saw the fire.

‘Where is your intuition?’ I saw the fire.

And He unveiled to me his unique sources of knowing. So the fire died down.

He said to me ‘I am your protector and friend!’ So I stood firm.

‘I am your intuition!’ So I spoke out.

‘I want you!’ So I went forth.<sup>706</sup>

The poem is preceded by an introduction that explains it as a vision of a near-death experience “where all humanity is stripped away, and only God’s mercy re-establishes the quality of being human.” Furthermore, it adds that “this is an experience no doubt shared by prisoners of conscience and victims of torture anywhere.” However, this explanation is particularly secular and oblivious to the common Sufi analogy of ‘dying in oneself’, which means the shedding of earthly features in order to submerge in God.<sup>707</sup> This is the final goal of the Sufi and is seen as a positive experience, rather than that of a tortured prisoner. The poem, that mentions the uselessness of material and earthly forms of knowledge (science, intuition and deeds) before the eternal fire, supports this goal. A similar interpretative issue arises around the poem by the Andalusian Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), one of the most famous Sufi masters.

‘Incredible! A garden among fires,

My heart turns to all forms,

It has become                    a meadow where gazelles graze  
    a monastery where monks pray;  
    a temple for idol statues  
    a cube for circumambulating pilgrims;  
    both Torah scroll and bound volume of Qur’an.

I follow the religion of love:

where love’s camels lead, there is my religion and there my faith.’<sup>708</sup>

The introduction interprets it as expressing human love that lets the heart rise “above narrow definitions that constrict being into mutually hostile identities – surely a lesson that Sufism can give

<sup>705</sup> Wannell, 48.

<sup>706</sup> Ibidem, 22.

<sup>707</sup> Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi and Andrew Rippin, eds. *Classical Islam: A Sourcebook of Religious Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Kindle Edition. Loc. 6319-7354.

<sup>708</sup> Wannell, 26.

to the world, even today.” Its reference to the Torah and the ‘religion of love’ appeals to religions in general rather than Islam in particular, which allows for broad recognition. However, again, Sufism strives for divine love. Human love is merely a stage along the way that needs to be surpassed. Ibn Arabi spent his life writing and lecturing on Sufism, refraining from any political action whatsoever. Love for humanity was not the purpose of Sufi poetry. The poem by Al-Farid supports this: “It is a useless love that allows souls to subsist,” just like Ibn Ataullah’s: “the temporal should subsist in the presence of God.”<sup>709</sup> The poetry included by perhaps the most famous Sufi poet in history, Rumi (d. 1273), also deals with the longing for divine love. “Yet when you have left selfishness behind, / The ecstasy of love comes to you then.”<sup>710</sup> His verses lend themselves perfectly for an interpretation that champions leaving selfishness for a love of others, which Amnesty’s idea of literature and positive action requires. Rumi’s use of analogies to divine love, like the longing for a woman and excessive drunkenness,<sup>711</sup> together with his insistence on religion as an experience that is above all personal, have made him very popular in the Western world, where he has been translated extensively. However, what is often ignored in the translations or the selection of the poems is his insistence on the importance of religious observance and the Qur’an’s divinity. References to drinking wine and the female touch are Sufi symbols that refer to divine love; neither wine nor touching women are stages in the Sufi path to the divine.<sup>712</sup> When a poem seems to be about a woman, it always turns out to be about God:

Remember the scent, of my loved one absent  
 I am sick to the heart  
 Without my King, my being’s spring  
 I have no part.<sup>713</sup>

The remaining poems in the collection, such as those by Yunus Emre (d. 1320) and Shaikh Farid (d. 1266) make use of similar symbolism. “Crazed lovers, like Majnun, seek Leila;”<sup>714</sup> what is not mentioned here is that the famous story of the separated lovers Leila and Majnun ends with Majnun having become oblivious to Leila in the face of the divine love he really craves, ending with his dying.<sup>715</sup> The poem by Shah Husain (d. 1599) refers to the Punjabi version of Leila and Majnun, Ranjha and Heer.<sup>716</sup> Still, the poets are hailed in the introductions for retaining universal and wide-spread appeal that transcends “class, colour and creed,” and messages of earthly love and humanity.

Sufism’s universal imagery and references to cross-cultural and cross-religious practices and stories make it a great carrier for multiple interpretations, including that of the human equality which Amnesty champions. And indeed, Sufism does not differentiate between humans, as all of them are equal in the face of the final goal: divine love. However, earthly matters and human love are disregarded in the face of this divine love; activism is certainly not part of the Sufi agenda. One may argue that this does not matter. After all, poetry is multi-interpretable and its purpose in the world today, especially in the case of age-old poems like these, is hardly about the original meaning. In

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<sup>709</sup> Ibidem, 28, 32.

<sup>710</sup> Ibidem, 38.

<sup>711</sup> Ibidem, 42.

<sup>712</sup> Calder, 6319-7354.

<sup>713</sup> Wannell, 44.

<sup>714</sup> Ibidem, 56.

<sup>715</sup> Nizami, *The Story of Layla and Majnun*. Dr. Rudolf Gelpke trans. New York: Omega Publications, 1997.

<sup>716</sup> Wannell, 66.

which way the readers interpret them is hard to say, as reviews are lacking. However, as the foreword suggests, this Sufi collection was meant to show a more tolerant and inclusive side of Islam. Two problems arise.

First of all, Sufism is more organized and strict than the poems would suggest. Rather than encouraging people to individually undertake the mystical quest, Sufi orders, *tariqa's*, are structured by a strictly hierarchical master/pupil relation. Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century it has become more aligned with orthodoxy – *tariqa's* formally accept Islamic law and ritual as binding. Although their view of Islam's true nature is different from that of orthodox Islam, external behaviour is much alike.<sup>717</sup> So, although the poems speak of a general mysticism that is open to every walk of life, externally, it is still very much a Muslim practice. Secondly, Sufism still occupies a problematic place in the Islamic world. It has been suggested that Sufism, due to its popularity, can “provide a religiosity that combines the authenticity of a non-fundamentalist tradition and a modern spirituality.”<sup>718</sup> In the West, the Sufi brotherhoods that have emerged as new ways of self-realization in the new community are often apolitical and “present themselves as “moderate” and pro-Western alternatives to Islamic fundamentalism.”<sup>719</sup> Sufism thus manifests itself as a modern way of Islamic self-realization in the new community; even ‘sisterhoods’ are emerging. Some, like the scholar of Arabic and Muslim convert T.J. Winter, have argued that Sufism could restore the “unity and decency in the Islamic movement” that has been closed off to alternative Islamic expressions by the popular *Wahhabi* intolerance.<sup>720</sup> The problem is that popular orthodox and fundamentalist Islam rejects Sufism as an un-Islamic sect, partly on account of the fact that it has been appropriated in un-Islamic ways. As such, it has become disconnected from the forms of Islam that it would have to challenge, and the chance it will draw people to its side becomes slimmer than the composers of this collection may hope. As the introduction has indicated, indeed, this literature gives at best an imaginative entry into Islamic mysticism, but only partly. If Sufism is supposed to take place in a battle, as the collection suggests, it first needs to be recognized as a player. And although the selection of poetry and translations allow it to be recognized as such by the West, Sufism's largely ignored heritage and ambiguous role in the Islamic world risks voiding the battle of its Islamic character and making its opponent a no-show.

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<sup>717</sup> Rippin, 136-151.

<sup>718</sup> Roy, 220-221.

<sup>719</sup> Roy, 228.

<sup>720</sup> Donohue & Esposito, 390.

### Conclusion: soft law, soft weapons and the soft power of humanity

“In their capacity to contribute to the creation of human identities, human rights have become a means for regulating human life, and so have become tools of public power and the expression of individual desires.”<sup>721</sup>

What has emerged from Amnesty’s selected readings discussed above is a literary representation of the human rights-earning person. The necessity of this representation lies in the paradoxical nature of human rights, that address the universal human but “do not inhere in the fact or experience of being human.”<sup>722</sup> What it means to be human is to be recognized as such by other humans; to Amnesty, literature provides the tools to achieve this recognition. In generating empathy it could allow people to develop tolerance, understanding and finally reconciliation and unity. The UDHR’s soft law is thus enabled by soft weapons, generating empathy as the soft power of humanity.

But softness evokes both weakness and mouldability. Weakness, to Adam Smith, lies in empathy’s inability to triumph over reason when it comes to taking action. However, as Rorty has pointed out, recognizing others as human depends more on our ability to feel for the other than any rational definition. Judging from both the content and the reviews of the literature discussed, it was indeed the readers’ empathy that was engaged, resulting in the recognition of the literary other as human. Whether this has spurred activism is outside the scope of this argument, but it certainly gave shape to the concept of humanity in the face of human rights. And this is where the mouldability comes in. Even though Amnesty champions tolerance and understanding, the engaging aspects of the literary works seem largely to remain within the familiar and do not really introduce anything new, which the ideal communicative function of literature would be. This has either to do with the specific selections, the origin of the author, mediation by outside parties or the explanatory frameworks that are offered around the content. Interpretation, whether it is translation or reception in another culture, is making anew in a particular context. This can be seen in all of the works, albeit in different ways; Hirsi Ali interprets her experiences as a Muslim in rural Africa in the light of her current views and occupation, El Saadawi fictionalizes another person’s experiences while Amnesty takes it out of its original context, Ambrosio fictionalizes a newspaper story from another country, Amiry narrows the story of Palestine down to a journalistic account of a singular phenomenon out of fear of generalization, the collection of Guantánamo poems hides that which is not there, and the Sufi poetry collection pours the centuries-old Sufi poets into a general and recognizable mould. Either the subject of the works or the works themselves have travelled outside of their original frameworks and are framed within a context of human rights, through a familiar blend of genres (such as poetry, adventure and testimony in Amiry, *Bildung* in Hirsi Ali and Ambrosio)<sup>723</sup> or connections to them (such as transnational influences in the poetry collections). The other is thus moulded to fit the frame of humanity that already was at the audience’s disposal. The freedom to work, to love family, friends and partner, the freedom of opinion and female rights are hailed as universal qualities binding humans together. But this happens at the cost of particularities that, as a result, fall outside of what it means to be human. This is not to say that the freedoms and rights that are supported are unimportant or even non-universal. But because other values are not addressed, the familiar values

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<sup>721</sup> Douzinas, i.

<sup>722</sup> Holloway, 33.

<sup>723</sup> Casanova 2004, 171.

remain the role model and their superiority is reassured. This entails a separation of those whose lives challenge our assumptions of what it means to be human.

In the case of these particular Islam-related works, this means that religion plays either only a very marginal role, or a division is made between a right and a wrong way, a human and an inhuman way to exercise religion. The UDHR propagates freedom of religion, which means that religion must remain within the private sphere in order not to clash with others in the public sphere. This 'Enlightened' version of religion does not necessarily sort with the Islamic tradition of *tawhid*, oneness, which demands that religion governs life's totality. Not all Islamic strands nor all Muslims within them may agree with this, but by ignoring the possibility completely, the works' discourse reinforces human rights' localized origins, while presenting them as universal, inevitable and natural.<sup>724</sup> But the fact that the Organization of Islamic Conference, existing of fifty-six Islamic states, has issued the *shari'a*-based Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam in 1990 as a counterpart to the UDHR, shows that this is not so. The CDHRI was condemned by the UN Commission on Human Rights on account of religious intolerance, and has since been revised.<sup>725</sup> However, it shows a Muslim attempt to reconcile human rights with Islamic law, something that is apparently inhibited by the UDHR. Does Amnesty, through their choice of literature that is framed in the context of human rights, then speak for Muslims, or are they actually abusing their right by taking over their voice? After all, as Slaughter has argued, the right to self-determination is the right to narrate one's own life, and "the right to narration is not merely the right to tell one's own story, it is the right to control representation."<sup>726</sup> Can literature then misrepresent claims for human rights and if so, what does this mean?

Two conclusions may be drawn from Amnesty's literature selection. One could argue that Amnesty falls into all the pitfalls that the critics and academics mentioned in the first chapters have tried to avoid. It avoids the grey area between isolation and assimilation, and offers a "universal and seemingly uncontested ethics of cross-cultural relations."<sup>727</sup> The works' politicized contents mark their characters' position at the bottom of the literary and rights hierarchy (as Pascale Casanova suggested), and position the West as the saviour of those deprived of rights.<sup>728</sup> This orientalism inhibits the practice of Appiah's open-minded cosmopolitanism, Said's global humanism, and even Attridge's idioculture. And what does it mean to talk about 'we' as humans, when the frame that defines humanity is either too narrow or too broad to satisfactorily harbour specific experience?

But as long as the UDHR has no universal constitutional form of endorsement, it depends on international human rights discourse in the (mass) media to become common sense. It follows that Amnesty uses recognizable characters and situations that are not too (morally) complex; otherwise, recognizing them as equally human would require too much work from the reader, or would even remain impossible. As Dima reflected in *Before We Say Goodbye*: "Everyone ... value[s] you as long as you behave like all the others who share this life with you... If you want approval, all you have to do is

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<sup>724</sup> Whitlock, 13.

<sup>725</sup> Turan Kayaoglu, "It's Time to Revise the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam." *Brookings Doha Center*. April 23<sup>th</sup>, 2012. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2012/04/23-cairo-kayaoglu>. June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

<sup>726</sup> Slaughter 1997, 430.

<sup>727</sup> Whitlock, 13.

<sup>728</sup> Douzinas, i.

what they think you should do.”<sup>729</sup> Inclusion can only be authorized if the grounds of comparison are there. The limits to this inclusion already becomes clear when looking at the reception of the literary works; the Sufi poetry, far away from the average reader in time, space and genre seems to have had the least attention, whereas Hirsi Ali and El Saadawi have reached a big audience with their quite clear-cut narratives. Although Amnesty criticizes the fact that the UDHR’s universality is not universal, and indeed draws attention to conflict situations in which people exist who do not belong to this universality, it still works within the framework. “Moral and legal universalism is, thus, self-reflexively closed in the sense that its imperfect practices can only be criticized on the basis of its own standards.”<sup>730</sup>

Finally, the literature Amnesty endorses does not sufficiently challenge pre-existing assumptions about humanity. Could it achieve this within the limits of its partiality, that is, its adherence to the UDHR? Influential cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz separates four strands of popular Islam-related literature. Hirsi Ali and El Saadawi can be said to belong to the first: the kind that opposes and compares the West to Islam as two civilizational wholes. The other four works belong both to the second and third categories, the kind that separates varieties of Islam as either “bad/real/authentic/tolerant/terrorist,” and the kind that minimizes the difference between Islam and other major religions.<sup>731</sup> The fourth category Geertz has identified, however, is lacking among Amnesty’s choice of literature. This category sees Islam not as “a cohesive entity persisting through time” but as a different tradition “coming into more and more immediate and difficult contact with one another and with the non-Muslim world as the vast and entangling forces of globalization and modernity advance.” The emphasis could be on religious identity as self-constructed rather than defined by objective norms,<sup>732</sup> and to a closer attentiveness to a more comprehensive picture of suffering as a result of economic and political hegemony rather than merely ideology.<sup>733</sup> This approach seems the only one rooted in reason, not just empathy, while in the case of the other approaches, empathy is engaged at the cost of reason. In the words of Appiah: “... what’s wanted, as Adam Smith would have anticipated, is the exercise of reason, not just explosions of feeling.”<sup>734</sup> Perhaps, activist human rights framing cannot “interrupt the spiral of stereotyping,”<sup>735</sup> thus achieve what local framing can, namely, negotiating traditional and modern discourses and practices, using frameworks “different from, but arguably consonant with, modernist aspirations for human dignity and social justice.”<sup>736</sup> These frames may also do more justice to the difference in the position of Islam, integration, immigration and ‘political correctness’ between Europe and the US.<sup>737</sup> The importance of narrative is then not undone, but remains foundational in establishing shared pasts

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<sup>729</sup> Ambrosio, 98.

<sup>730</sup> Borradori, 42.

<sup>731</sup> Whitlock, 62-63.

<sup>732</sup> Roy, 196.

<sup>733</sup> Žižek, 102.

<sup>734</sup> Appiah, 170.

<sup>735</sup> Borradori, 36.

<sup>736</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 5.

<sup>737</sup> Ayaan Hirsi Ali touches upon this subject lightly, arguing that American are less aware of the problems of Islam, while more willing to solve them. The Americans’ ability to depend less on the government and move on more quickly after a scandal that does not match with their values make them a different target for the threat of Islamic radicalism. Finding out whether these assumptions are correct would be a step in the direction of more nuanced research into the specificities of Islam and integration around the world. 125-127.

and collective futures, and hopeful in finally achieving freedom, justice and human dignity.<sup>738</sup> Communication might then open both 'us' and 'them' up to self-reflexivity and more effective solutions to conflicts and the improvement of conditions of living.<sup>739</sup> If the limit on what can be said and heard, that is, the limit that constitutes the public sphere, may thus be expanded, mutual understanding may travel "...in the direction of what may yet be called justice."<sup>740</sup>

Even though it is outside the scope of this paper to discuss alternatives to Amnesty's literary corpus, and while this brief argument cannot do justice to the work, I would argue that the Iranian Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's *The Colonel*, published in the US and Germany in 2012, is an example of a novel in Geertz's fourth category. Dowlatabadi provides a nuanced and complex account of the aftermath of the Iranian revolution from the perspective of a former colonel under the Shah's regime. The novel engages with religion, power and censorship of the public sphere and insists on the different agents that have played a part in the revolution and the disillusionment after it. Through a careful deconstruction of the plot structure and the characters, the novel shows that the destruction of the public sphere stands in close connection to the destruction of the human as such. Dowlatabadi wrote the novel thirty years ago, but hid it, knowing it would endanger his position in society. Three years ago, he sent it in to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for an obligatory check. As for now, it still has not been published in Iran; after reading it, the ministry's vice chairman of books responded: "Yes, it's a good book. But it's a different account of the revolution... This is not our understanding of how the revolution occurred." Dowlatabadi responded: "But this is my understanding of what occurred."<sup>741</sup> Finally, they neither approved of nor declined publication. But meanwhile, Dowlatabadi still lives in Tehran. As the colonel says towards the novel's end: "Iran is my country. Can't you see that?"<sup>742</sup> Dowlatabadi does not underestimate the role of the nation-state in asserting human rights. He could, theoretically, circumvent Iranian legal channels by publishing his novel in Persian through a European or American publishing house, thus making it available for his Iranian readers. But he prefers to adhere to the law: he believes that it would be good for the regime, both then and now, to have writers working within the system, to normalize rational disagreement and different opinions. "It shouldn't be that I want to kill you, I want to confront you or I want to leave."<sup>743</sup> Dowlatabadi is aiming for change from within. But right now his novel is already keeping open the 'unfinished business' agenda of the Iranian revolution by adding another story to the world, asserting its place in an international public sphere of letters that does not reject it. The novel thus insists on the importance of individual experiences that should, in the end, constitute common humanity and its power in the public sphere – finally, also in Iran.

Unfortunately, Amnesty's body of literature I have discussed here has not yet touched the realm of genuine mutual understanding. It seems as though the inquiry into the human rights person as Amnesty imagines it has only brought the discussion back to the beginning. The much theorized and recommended delicate balance between universality and particularity is not maintained, and the

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<sup>738</sup> Schaffer & Smith, 21.

<sup>739</sup> Borradori, 36.

<sup>740</sup> Mendieta & VanAntwerpen, 90.

<sup>741</sup> Lahry Rother, "An Iranian Storyteller's Personal Revolution". *New York Times, Books*. July 1<sup>st</sup> 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/02/books/the-colonel-by-the-iranian-writer-mahmoud-dowlatabadi.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/02/books/the-colonel-by-the-iranian-writer-mahmoud-dowlatabadi.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0). July 23<sup>d</sup> 2013.

<sup>742</sup> Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, *The Colonel*. Tom Patterdale trans. Brooklyn NY: Melville House, 2012. 204.

<sup>743</sup> Rother.

fusion of different perspectives can hardly exist if the literature is selected and fitted to already be on a prefabricated side, to which the readers supposedly belong. The emergence of identities in the process of reading is thereby foreclosed. It may be difficult to determine which literary works might fit Geertz's fourth definition and invite the reader to engage with the singular and to include it in the framework of universal humanity, while also reaching a broad audience. But as Douzinas has argued, "humanity has no foundations and no ends... But if humanity has no ends, it can never become a sovereign value and war fought in his name will always be fake." And if the discussion on what constitutes humanity would stop right there, and would remain to exclude, "the principle of just war will have finally won, in the proclamation of a perpetual peace drowned in endless violence."<sup>744</sup>

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<sup>744</sup> Douzinas, 290.

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