Toward Arab Spring Narratives

The Politics of Translated Arabic Literature in the Wake of the 2011 Arab Uprisings

RMA thesis Comparative Literary Studies

Merlijn Geurts

Utrecht University

22 July 2014

Supervisor: Birgit Kaiser

Second reader: Kári Driscoll

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Introduction

At the end of 2010, beginning of 2011, the world witnessed how a series of massive protests across the Middle East and North Africa changed the Arab region. The uprisings throughout the Arab world that were retrospectively referred to as the "Arab Spring"[1] started in a small Tunisian village, Sidi Salah. There, on December 17, 2010, a man who tried to make a living as street vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, set himself on fire after market inspectors confiscated his wares and cart and publicly humiliated him. By the time that Mohammed Bouazizi died in the hospital, after having been in a coma for a while, large groups of Tunisian protesters demanded the removal of their oppressive and corrupt president, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had been in power since 1987. Three weeks later the Tunisian president fled to Saudi Arabia. Encouraged by the success of the Tunisian Revolution, Egyptian citizens also began to demonstrate en masse on January 25, 2011 (most visibly on Cairo's Tahrir Square) against president Hosni Mubarak's regime. Eighteen days later president Mubarak resigned as president after almost thirty years of presidency. Following the overthrows of governments in Tunisia and Egypt, the entire Arab region seethed with unrest. In the first months of 2011 uprisings started in Libya, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Morocco, and other Arab countries. While in some countries the uprisings caused, in a relatively short time, the downfall of long-standing regimes (Yemen – President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Libya – Muammar Gaddafi), or ended in governmental concessions or changes (Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain), in other countries the conflict between the protesters and the regime is currently still ongoing and has become more and more violent, Syria's civil war being the ultimate example.[2]

Almost from its very first start the Arab Spring has attracted worldwide attention. It has been one of the most mediatized events of the twenty-first century, discussed by journalists, commentators, critics, and academics all over the world. The Arab protesters themselves have played a considerable part in the media coverage of the 2011 uprisings and directly reported about the developments of the demonstrations on social media such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. However, in this thesis I will focus on the ways in which the Arab Spring uprisings are narrated in English to, primarily, a non-Arabic audience, to the

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1. Although I am aware of the problematic implications of the term "Arab Spring"–a term primarily used in the Western world to refer to the 2011 Arab uprisings–(I will discuss some of these problems in chapter 2) and agree with the many scholars and critics who havea pointed to the Orientalist nature of the term 'Arab Spring' (see, for example, Rami G. Khouri, "Drop the Orientalist Term 'Arab Spring,'"), I will nevertheless use this term in this thesis since I am specifically discussing the ways in which the Arab uprisings have been told by (*Western) outside* spectators and how translated Arab literature that is read by a *Western* audience intervene in these (Western) narratives.

2. For a detailed overview of the first year of the Arab Spring uprisings (17 December 2010 – 17 December 2011), see the interactive timeline of the Arab Spring launched by *The Guardian* that brings together all key events of the uprisings in the different countries (Blight, Garry, Sheila Pulham and Pauley Torpey. "Arab Spring: An Interactive Timeline of Middle East Protests" *The Guardian* 5 January 2012. Web. 11 June 2014). http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline

outsiders of the uprisings that followed the uprisings from a distance. Thereby, I will not only analyze the 'media' narratives that directly represent the uprisings, but also, and particularly, translated Arabic literature, read by an international readership, that, as I will illustrate, indirectly reacts to the Arab Spring (narrative) and, importantly, opens up a space where alternative Arab Spring narratives can be told.

Especially in the early stage of the Arab Spring in which widespread demonstrations all seemed to positively change the Arab countries, non-Arabic journalists were largely optimistic about the developments in the Arab region. For example, Roger Cohen, a columnist for *The New York Times* wrote a column in March 2011 confidently titled "Arabs will be Free," which he ends with the following words: "People are born throughout the Middle East. They are discovering their capacity to change things, their inner 'Basta.'" In the same month Brian Whitaker reported in *The Guardian* about the autocratic regimes of Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen that were starting to fight back against the demonstrators. Despite these oppositions, Brian Whitaker remains positive and does not believe that the outlook for democracy has disappeared, since "Arabs now have a shared, unstoppable drive for freedom" and "looking at the region as a whole, the prospects have never been brighter." Especially, if we consider the fact that the Arab region, as Helmut Anheier, Mary Kaldor, and Marlies Glasius rightly argue, has long been "considered by Western commentators as politically stagnant, and incapable of democratization" (3), the outside response to the Arab uprisings seemed to have distinguished itself by its positive tone.

The rapid developments during the Arab Spring that radically changed the political climates in the Arab world, combined with the positive attention that the uprising attracted worldwide, have been reason for some scholars to announce that the Arab region entered a new phase. A striking example of such a scholar is the Iranian-American scholar Hamid Dabashi, because in his book *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012) he argues that the Arab spring does not only put to an end the autocratic regimes that seemed so inviolable for such a long time, but also to the ways in which the West has subordinated the Arab world by imagining it inferior to the Western world. As the title of Dabashi's work already indicates, to Dabashi the Arab Spring marks the end of postcolonialism and postcolonial thought. He concludes the introduction of his work as follows:

> In the blossoming of the Arab Spring we are all liberated from […] the ideological formations of subservient knowledge that sustained the falsifying phantom of 'the West' in order to subjugate the liberating imagination of 'the Rest,' [and] we are finally witnessing the epistemic end of that violent autonormativity whereby 'the West' kept reinventing itself and all its inferior others" (15).

Although Dabashi is maybe right in emphasizing the radical governmental changes that the Arab Spring uprisings have brought about (in some Arab countries), I think he overstates the extent to which the Western, well-established imaginative construction of the Middle East has been transformed. In contrast to the Dabashi's optimistic statement about the end of postcolonialism, I will explain in this thesis how a

seemingly positive narrative has been constructed to narrate and represent the Arab uprisings to the (primarily Western) outside spectators of the Arab Spring: a narrative that I will call the 'grand narrative of the Arab Spring.'

Although the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard famously announced in his 1979 report "The Postmodern Condition" that postmodernism can simply be defined as the "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv) and that "in contemporary society and culture […] the grand narrative has lost its incredibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses" (37), in the last couple of years scholars have declared the return of the grand narrative in the twenty-first century (see for example Keeble 106; Braidotti). In this light, R. James Ferguson has argued that even in the twenty-first century, or rather *precisely* in the twenty-first century that has known complex political events with an international character, the historical grand narrative has been used as an explanatory mechanism to help making people understand developing conflicts. Ferguson points out that also in the context of the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world it appears that it is difficult to explain the Arab Spring "without recourse to long-term narratives that can explain the behavior of states, populations and civilizations." According to Ferguson, these grand narratives "permeate the news media and current affair blogs, but are also commonly found in academic journals and scholastic books" (36).

In other words, despite the cacophony of voices (both in the 'traditional' news media and in social media), the voices that were mostly heard in the non-Arab world altogether constructed the popular grand narrative of the Arab Spring that, as I will point out in this thesis, in turn narrated the Arab uprisings. This narrative was constructed in line with Orientalist frameworks that conceive of the Arab world as radically non-Western, backwards, susceptible to violence and chaos, and as undemocratic by nature. That is, although the Western representation of the Arab Spring at first sight seems to represent the Arab world in a different, more positive light, I will explain in the following chapters how the way in which the Arab Spring is framed temporally, spatially and in terms of characters (and agency) pertains to the perpetuation of Orientalist, postcolonial discourse that sustains the unequal power structure between the Western world and the Middle East. In selecting these three thematic aspects of the Arab Spring narrative (time, space and main characters) I have expanded on the argument of Dina Heshmet. During the conference "Narrating the Arab Spring" that was held at Cairo University in February 2012, Heshmet criticized the representations of the Egyptian uprisings in which the revolution was restricted "in terms of time (eighteen days), actors (Cairo's Middle class), and space (Cairo's Tahrir Square)" (Antoun). She points out that because of this limited focus, such narratives problematically simplified the complexity of the causes and developments of the Egyptian uprisings, as well as the diversity of the people involved in them.

Hesmet's criticism can be extended to the grand narrative of all uprisings across the Arab region, which because of the many differences between all the countries that were involved in the Arab Spring, is

even more problematic. Also in the most dominant narrative of the Arab Spring uprisings, the temporal framework, the spatial setting and the main characters are restricted. As I will illustrate in this thesis, throughout the representations of the Arab uprisings to outside spectators, the Arab Spring did not last longer than two years (until the moment internal conflicts between the protesters and violence clearly gained the upper hand), took place on the public squares in the big Arab cities (Tahrir Square being the most prominent space of resistance) and was successfully carried out by a very selective group of people (a group that is painted in sharp contrast with the images the Western world long had of Arab people). This narrative is not only restrictive since it reduces the complexity and the internal differences of the Arab Spring, but also because it reduces the revolutionary character the Arab Spring potentially has. After all, the limitations of time, space and character stimulate those people who witnessed the Arab Spring from a distance to interpret the development in the Arab world in line with familiar frameworks that subordinate the Arab region and its people. Thus, if we analyze the popular narrative of the Arab uprisings and look at its underlying assumptions about the nature of the Arab world and its population, the Arab Spring transforms into a far lesser revolutionary influence than initially conceived.. Therefore, in order to truly speak of a revolution in the Arab world that marks a new phase in the region's history, there also has to take place a revolution, or a radical change in the way the Arab world is imagined by the non-Arab world.

With this statement I agree with Félix Guattari who has argued that he does not "believe in revolutionary transformation whatever the regime may be, if there is not also a cultural revolution, a kind of mutation among people, without which we lapse into the reproduction of an earlier society […] and there is nothing utopian or idealistic in this" (Guattari and Rolnik 261). Yet, while Guattari seems to suggest that the transformation has to take place among the people of the society in question, in the case of Arab societies I want to argue that the cultural transformation must also take place, in a significant manner, within the Western world, as it is predominantly here that the socio-cultural image of Arab societies has been constructed.

A cultural regime where I believe a start is made for such a cultural revolution is the regime of literature. So far, the relation between literature and the Arab Spring has been a very marginal topic in the extensive scholarship on the 2011 Arab uprisings. The largest amount of academic works has been written from a political perspective (in the strict sense of the word, that is, "relating to the government or public affairs of a country" (Oxford Dictionaries)) or from an international relations perspective.[3] Aside from that the

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3. Although the amount of academic works are numerous for some examples, see: David Lesch, and Mark Haas, *The Arab Spring: Changes and Resistance in the Middle East,* (2012); Joel Peters, *The European Union and the Arab Spring: Promoting Democracy and Human Rights in the Middle East,* (2012); Jeremy Bowen, *The Arab Uprisings: The People want the Fall of the Regime,* (2012).

particular topic of the role of social media in the Arab Spring has been discussed very often.[4] The few scholars that have analyzed the interaction between literature and the Arab Spring have highlighted some interesting aspects of this relation. Rachael Allen, for example, has examined the direct role of literature (more specifically, poetry) during the demonstrations. She argues that poems that were primarily written before the uprisings were revived during the demonstrations and functioned as literary texts that united the protesters, inciting their belief in the uprisings (cf. Allen). Others have argued that before the Arab revolutions there had already been a revolution in Arab literature. "The seeds of rebellion," as Alexander Key phrases it, "were evident in creative works–from literature to rap music–long before the Arab Spring unfolded" (qtd. in Aquilanti). Closely related to Key's argument is Rita Sakr's work *'Anticipating' the 2011 Arab Uprisings: Revolutionary Literatures and Political Geographies* (2013) in which she analyzes recent Arab novels (some novels that I will also analyze) in which the Arab uprisings were already anticipated or prefigured. Lastly, an interesting topic of discussion has been how the Arab Spring has influenced the literary climate. Although it is maybe too early to answer this question, people such as journalist Ali Khaled have expressed hope that after repressive cultural periods in which literature has been strictly censured, the Arab Spring will bring a new cultural awakening (Khaled).

Yet, the relation between literature and the representation of the Arab Spring has remained undiscussed. At first sight this is not very remarkable as until now there has been nearly no literature that directly narrates the (still ongoing) Arab uprisings.[5] In *The Guardian* the Egyptian writer (both of fictional and non-fictional works) Ahdaf Soueif has expressed the more frequently reiterated opinion that "[i]n times of crisis, fiction has to take a back seat." According to her, "[a]ttempts at fiction right now would be too simple. The immediate truth is too glaring to allow a more subtle truth to take form. For reality has to take time to be processed, to transform into fiction" (Soueif). She concludes that for now the writer of fiction has to involve himself or herself in the uprisings not as a writer but as a citizen, as political activist. However, while Soueif is maybe right in her conviction that, because the political upheaval in several Arab countries is still developing, it is too early to reflect on the Arab Spring in fiction, I do not share her view that it is not possible for literature to play an important role in the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings. On the contrary, this thesis will aim to clarify how works of fiction have an important function in relation to the Arab Spring as they can potentially disrupt the problematic narrative that reduces the revolutionary character of the uprisings. I will not, however, analyze the potential for this disruption in

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4. Also here the examples are numerous, but for some examples, see: Philip N. Howard, Muzamill M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave?: Digital Media and the Arab Spring*, 2013; Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segev, and Tamir Sheafer, "Social Media and the Arab Spring" (2013); Habibul Haque Khondker, "Role of the New Media in the Arab Spring" (2011).
5. So far, I only know about two fictional works that deal with the Arab Spring. First of all, Ben Jelloun's widely discussed short story "By Fire" (2011) in which he has fictionalized Mohammed Bouazizi. His short story narrates what factors has made Bouazizi to decide to put himself on fire. Secondly, G. Willow Wilson's science fiction novel *Alif the Unseen* (2012) in which certain events in the novel are very similar to the events of the Arab Spring. For this reason the novel is reviewed in *The Guardian* under the title "*Alif the Unseen*: Speculative Fiction Meets Arab Spring" (Walter).

literature that is written after the Arab Spring started (as it does not yet exist) but rather turn to recent Arabic literature (published before the Arab uprisings or in the first months of the Arab Spring): literary works that since the Arab uprisings started have undergone a remarkable change.

The five Arabic novels that are the focus of this thesis differ significantly from one another, both in style, theme and setting. The debut novel of the Libyan author Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men* (2006), narrates the story of a young Libyan boy whose life is irreversibly changed in the summer of 1979, when the country's repressive political climate propels him into adulthood at a young age. In his more recent novel, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (2011) the protagonist struggles to deal with both the sexual feelings he is developing for his stepmother and the disappearance of his father who has been kidnapped because of his (former) political role in an unnamed country. *Sarmada* (2011), a novel written by the Syrian author Fadi Azzam follows the lives of three women during the 1960s in the small Syrian village Sarmada, that is both affected and relatively unaffected by the political developments Syria goes through. In the fourth novel, *In Praise of Hatred* (2006), written by the Syrian author Khaled Khalifa, the reader follows a Syrian girl in the 1980s, on the verge of adulthood, who step by step becomes a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Finally, in the novel of the Egyptian writer Ahmed Khaled Towfik, *Utopia* (2008), a futuristic, dystopian Egyptian society is sketched in which the differences between the ultra-wealthy and ultra-rich Egyptian population are put to the extreme.

Although it is clear that the novels describe a range of topics and are set in different countries and times, these five works of literature have nevertheless important elements in common. As the Arab Spring has attracted worldwide attention, these fictional works have received (renewed) similarly widespread attention: The novels of Khalifa, Towfik and Azzam that were originally written in Arabic, have been translated into English after the Arab Spring began[6]; The two novels of Hisham Matar received an enormous amount of media attention since 2011. Furthermore, all the five novels have been reviewed many times and all authors have been asked to comment upon their work. Very importantly however, these novels have come into prominence in relation to, or even because of, the Arab Spring. Although none of the novels directly narrate the 2011 Arab uprisings, the fictional stories they tell are nevertheless linked to the Arab Spring revolutions. On the one hand, we could see the (renewed) appreciation for these novels as a positive development. After all, because of the positive interest of the non-Arabic world in Arabic literature since the Arab uprisings started, the novels are now also read by a worldwide audience. This development has allowed these novels the potential to disrupt the narrative of the Arab

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6. Since it is important to know when exactly these novels are written (and translated) I will give an overview of the novels' publications in both Arabic and English.

      Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men*, (originally written in English), 2006.
      Hisham Matar, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (originally written in English), March 2011.
      Fadi Azzam, *Sarmada*, (originally written in Arabic), January 2011, English translation: October 2011.
      Khaled Khalifa, *In Praise of Hatred* (originally written in Arabic), 2006, English translation: 2012.
      Ahmed Khaled Towfik, *Utopia* (originally written in Arabic), 2008, English translation: December 2011.

Spring as it has been predominantly narrated in the Western world. On the other hand, the way in which these novels are presented to English-speaking readers, as novels that could inform or teach non-Arabic people about the political developments that take place in a region that is (in all probability) unknown to them, runs the risk of blocking the potential disruptive qualities of these literary works. Namely, if readers read these novels as works that inform them about a complex political situation, the literary character of the novels is easily overlooked, while that is exactly the place where I will locate the potential unsettling politics of literature. The aim of this thesis is therefore to expound and illustrate an (ideal) political reading of this specific corpus of literature in relation to the Arab Spring, an interaction between a non-Arabic reader and the literary texts in which the potential disruptive politics of the fictional works reaches its full potential.

Underlying this thesis are two main assumptions[7]: First of all, that the ways in which the Arab uprisings are imagined, presented and narrated in the non-Arab world are an essential part of the Arab Spring itself and have to be included to determine the success of the uprisings. In order to speak of a real revolution in the Arab world, not only the governmental regimes in the Arab countries have to change, but also the people´s (Arab as well as non-Arab) *régime du savoir*: "the regime of knowledge production," the language with which we understand and criticize things" (Dabashi 26, 75). Secondly, the idea that literature is not located in an extra-worldly, transcendental sphere that lies beyond the world of politics, but instead that literature is anchored in society. With this notion of literature I agree with Edward Said who has argued that texts are in the world, that is, literary texts are worldly, and always contain within them the political, historical, social and economic circumstances under which they are made (1983, 35). Moreover, because fictional texts are worldly they should not be excluded from the world of political conflicts, as Ahdaf Soueif, for example, indirectly does by arguing that only once the Arab Spring is over there will be place again for works of fiction. On the contrary, literature can interact, every time it is being read, with political situations (both of the past and the present) in different ways and always has the potential to reshape readers' views on these political events.

In the first theoretical chapter I will explain step by step what I mean with a political reading of these literary texts (in the context of the Arab Spring) and why this way of reading literature politically is particularly important for this specific corpus of literature: novels, originally written in Arabic, that are now read in translation by a non-Arab readership, often in relation to the 2011 Arab uprisings. In this chapter I will introduce Rancière's notion of the distribution of the sensible, the horizon of what is visible, sayable, audible, and thinkable (Rancière 2004a, 12). First of all, because with this notion it is possible to bring together the political regime and the aesthetic regime that are often considered as two separate spheres. Secondly, because with the notion of the distribution of the sensible (yet with certain limitations) I will argue how these works of literature can be understood as politically relevant in the context of the

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7. I will justify and explain these two main assumptions in more detail in the next chapter.

Arab Spring: that is, how this corpus of literature (all five works together) disrupts the grand narrative of the Arab Spring and prepares the ground for alternative Arab Spring narratives.

In the chapters that follow I will provide various political readings of these novels. Because I believe that especially as a specific corpus of literature these literary texts can contribute significantly to the understanding of the Arab Spring, I have chosen not to analyze these novels separately, but instead (all) together in relation to the basic elements of the popular Arab Spring narrative: time, space and characters.

In chapter two I will analyze all five novels in relation to the temporal framing that is used in the grand narrative of the Arab Spring. I will argue how most commentators and journalist place the Arab Spring in a very short temporal frame. Their narratives mostly start with Bouazizi's self-immolation that suddenly and unexpectedly sparked the uprisings throughout the Arab region and end their narratives when violence started to dominate the conflict and when it became clear that the process towards democracy would (in most cases) become a long-term process. In contrast, the five novels offer the possibility for a much longer time frame. I will show how the novels that all describe historical periods preceding the 2011 uprisings, make a link between these historical periods and the Arab Spring and in this way place the recent Arab uprisings in Arab history. Furthermore, I will argue, using Towfik's *Utopia* and Azzam's *Sarmada* as examples, that the novels put into question the temporal form (linear and chronological) that is mostly used to narrate history, including the Arab Spring.

In the third chapter I am going to focus on spaces of resistance. As will become clear, the central focus in the Arab Spring narrative are public spaces where clearly visible, massive groups of demonstrators gathered to protest against their countries' regimes (Cairo's Tahrir Square being the ultimate example). As a consequence of this spatially restricted focus, Marc Lynch correctly states that "the master narrative pitted an undifferentiated people against universally villainous regimes" (243). I will analyze how the novels by providing its readers with alternative spaces of protest (the Syrian country side, the space of the home) extend the political sphere of the Arab Spring. Furthermore, I will make clear in this chapter how the expansion of the Arab Spring's space of resistance also disrupts the undifferentiated and generalized images of the protesters and their enemies and simultaneously stimulates to pay attention to the internal differences and power relations of the protesters.

Subsequently, in chapter four, I will expand on the topic of the protester and illustrate through different analyses that the novels provide images of protesters that deviate from, and are given more agency, than the most visible protester of the Arab Spring: the 'Westernized,' peaceful, secular, tech-savvy demonstrator. Furthermore, in this chapter it will become clear how these alternative fictional protesters question two problematic relations that are made in many accounts of the Arab Spring: first, the link that is made between visibly protesting women and democracy, whereby women end up being used

as indicators for the degree of democracy. Second, the connection people make between violence and the failure of democratization.

Because in these three chapters of analyses a variety of topics and aspects of the Arab Spring narratives are discussed, I will bring all chapters together in the fifth chapter and link again the analyses of the novels with Rancière's notion of the distribution of the sensible. In this way I will conclude with how this corpus of novels can disrupt the grand narrative of the Arab Spring by unsettling the narrative's parameters, therein opening up a space where multiple narratives of the Arab Spring narratives can be told in the future.

1.

The Politics of Literature, or the Politics of Reading Literature Politically

In the introduction I have brought together a political event, the Arab Spring, and a special corpus of literature: novels written by Arab authors, recently translated into English and often brought into relation with the 2011 Arab uprisings. Yet, these novels do not simply represent the 2011 uprisings. More importantly, these novels unsettle, intervene in and react to the Arab Spring (narrative) and, therefore, can be seen as political, literary texts. But what do we mean with political literature (and what not)? How do we have to understand the relation between politics and literature, between the Arab Spring and these five novels written by Arab authors? And most importantly, how can we read a work politically while beholding a work's literary character? As will become clear in this chapter, since I am going to argue in this thesis how Arabic literature can intervene in and influence the Western reader's view on the Arab Spring (and the Arab world)–in other words, with the West reading the 'Middle East'–it is even more important to define in detail how I am going to read these works of literature politico-aesthetically in the light of the Arab Spring (narrative).

Politics, literature and the distribution of the sensible

Political art, or more specifically, political literature has been a recurrent, problematic concept through history. Because of the strong insistence in (Western) art theories on art's autonomy (an idea that has its roots in Romanticism, but became especially established since the Modernist period) the connection between art on the one hand and politics, activism and engagement on the other hand is hard to make. There exists a persistent tendency to situate art in a unique, extra-worldly realm and to circumscribe art as the "artwork in itself," cut off from the economic, social and political developments of daily life. However, despite art's supposed autonomy, people have often tried to explain–in order to defend or argue for the relevancy of art–how art is nonetheless linked to the socio-political world. As Gabriel Rockhill summarizes, in the history of theorizing the notion of political art there are two main trends: first of all, those scholars who address "content-based commitment" and focus primarily on the representation of political subjects in art.[8] Secondly, the trend Rockhill names "formal-commitment" whose focus lies more upon the language an author uses or the forms in which subject matter is presented (2009, 195).[9] However, the tension between art as a separated realm and art as related to politics remains complicated. Namely, by arguing for the political character of art, there exists a risk to instrumentalize art, to simply

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8. As Rockhill explains Sartre's 1948 essay "What is Literature?" is often seen as exemplary for this content-based commitment.

9. French structuralists and poststructuralists and especially Roland Barthes' academic response to Sartre in *The Degree Zero of Writing* (1953) can be identified with this second "formal-commitment" argument.

conceive of art as politics but in a different form; defending the uniqueness of art, on the contrary, can easily preclude all possibilities to link art with the political sphere.

In order to escape from this long-lasting problem of connecting art with politics, while simultaneously maintaining the idea of art and politics as two separate realms, the influential scholar Jacques Rancière introduced a new way to think about their relationship. Leaving behind the assumption that politics and art belong to different spheres, but are in need to be connected, Rancière used the concept of the "distribution of the sensible" to relate art to politics without reducing one to the other (Rockhill 196). In Rancière's works the frequently used expression "distribution of the sensible" refers to "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception," the horizon of what is visible, sayable, audible, and thinkable (Rancière 2004a, 12). This notion is used by Rancière to emphasize, on the one hand, the aesthetical character of politics and, on the other hand, the political side of art.

In regard to politics, the distribution of the sensible is the 'aesthetics' that is located at the core of politics. According to Rancière, politics is not, as it is commonly conceived of, only the practicing of power, the continuous struggle to possess power, or the enactment of collective wills and interests (Rancière 2001, n. pag.; Rancière 2004b, 10) Instead, politics in its most basic form is primarily a way of framing a specific sphere of experience. As Rancière phrases it in his article "The Politics of Literature" (2004): "It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible and the sayable, which allows (or does not allow) some specific data to appear; which allows or does not allow some specific subjects to designate them and speak about them. It is a specific intertwining of ways of being, ways of doing and ways of speaking" (10). In regard to the Arab Spring and its narration, Rancière's idea of the aesthetics of politics is extremely relevant, as in the chapters that follow we will see how in the narrative of the Arab Spring only specific elements are selected as relevant and only certain subjects are conceived of as subjects that are allowed to speak: all narratological choices that have political consequences, because it influences how people will perceive the Arab Spring and, more broadly, the Arab world.

If we think about politics in this way, we can understand how art, or literature, relates to this distribution of the sensible. Firstly, the regime of art (that which is conceived of as art) is itself already dependent upon a certain distribution of the sensible. After all, art is a system in which some practices are acknowledged as art and others are not, moreover, a system that determines how art relates to other practices such as politics (Tanke 75).[10] Therefore, by recognizing the contingency of the regime of art, Rancière rejects the assumption that art is *by definition* separated from politics since the definition and

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10. In a similar way, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in his famous work *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (1996) has analyzed in detail how the 'autonomous' literary field as we know it today has been constructed in the second half of the nineteenth century. In his work he argues convincingly against those who conceive of art as inherently autonomous and as a regime that is separated from society. As Bourdieu argues, "rather than a ready-made position which only has to be taken up […] 'art for art's sake' is a *position to be made* (76). The fact that this modern idea of art–a piece of work that is thought to have an autonomous value–had to be constructed and defended "in the field of power" (76) indicates that literature is interconnected with various structures of social relations, despite this ideal of autonomous art.

delimitation of art and its effects are always subject to change. Secondly, art itself is also involved in the distribution of sensitive data. In literature, for example, fictional worlds–specific spheres of experience– are created with words: worlds that are similar or opposed to the world of politics and can lead to both a confirmation or a reconfiguration of the dominant distribution of the sensible. Just by being literature, literature does a kind of, what Rancière calls, "side-politics or meta-politics" (Rancière 2004b, 163): Literature seeks to leave behind the sensible order of ordinary political experience and invents a sensorium–characters, settings and events–that is both proper and improper to it. Freed from its earthbound reality, literature can display what these ordinary subjects, settings and events are (Vallury 236). In this important moment, literature has the possibility to partake in the reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible, be it a minor or a dramatic reconfiguration. In other words, I agree with Yves Citton who states that the most important moment in Rancière's theory is the moment that the hegemonic distribution of the sensible (together with its exclusion of certain issues, its silencing of certain subjects, and its hierarchies) can potentially be changed (Citton 123). It is also this moment of reconfiguration that will be the central focus in the analyses of the novels of this thesis.

Nonetheless, although Rancière emphasizes mostly the moments of reconfiguration, Rockhill correctly argues that Rancière often reminds his readers that art is not inherently revolutionary in the sense that art always leads up to reconfigurations of the hegemonic, sensible order (200). On the contrary, art can also act as a so-called "police order" by confirming and reinforcing the hegemonic distribution of the sensible that precludes the opportunity for political dissensus. Hence, if Rancière states that art is inherently political he refers to the constant tension between configurations of the sensible order and potential reconfigurations thereof.[11] Consequently, as is important to note, art does not relate to politics in the sense that politics is the consensual distribution of the sensible order and art its redistribution. Rather, art is coincidental with politics since they both are simultaneously a distribution and potential redistribution of the sensible (although art and politics each partake in this distribution/redistribution by other means).

Keeping in mind this intertwining of distributions and redistributions, we can concentrate on the moment of dissensus, the process of disrupting and/or changing the sensible order that will be central in the analyses of the five novels. Following Joseph Tanke, who analyzes three different forms of dissensus based on Rancière's diverse use of this notion, I want to discuss these different forms of disruption, since

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11. The intertwining of configuration and reconfigurations becomes more clear in the later works of Rancière, as Rockhill has pointed out. While in his earlier works Rancière clearly distinguishes the established sensible order from the deviating moments of dissensus and destabilization, later he refers in his definitions of politics and art to both distributions and redistributions of the sensible, thereby making clear how they always work in junction (Rockhill, 200-202). As the following quote from his book *Aesthetics and its Discontents* (2004) illustrates, his most important expression "the distribution of the sensible" comprehends both "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception" and its potential disruption: "This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, and of noise and speech constitutes what I call the distribution of the sensible" (2009, 24-25).

these three forms of dissensus can be helpful for thinking about the different ways in which the novels unsettle and change the dominant distribution of the sensible. While Tanke writes about these different appearances of dissensus as if they are taking place after each other, I believe it is important to conceive of these three forms of dissensus as if happening 'horizontally': that is, all at the same time, whereby only the three forms of dissensus working together, can potentially cause the redistribution to take place.

The first form of dissensus Tanke discusses, is the way in which artistic practices can disturb the sense of self-evidence with which we perceive the settled sensible order. To phrase it differently, while normally we take the distribution of the sensible for granted, art can make us aware of this particular distribution and, as a result, can suddenly reveal the possibility for change. Dissensus in its second manifestation opens up a space where subjects, before thought of as non-existent, can identify themselves as (political) subjects. That is, works of art intervene into politics since they invent a world that allows for the emergence of identities that previously were not recognized within the hegemonic sensible order.
In the last form of dissensus art does not only dispute the existing sensible world, but actually provides its audience with an alternative sensorium, different from the hegemonic distribution of the sensible. The sketch of an alternative world of experience invites people to place this fictional counter-world in opposition to their own world, thereby again bringing into doubt the unquestionability of the everyday world they live in. Dissensus thus, in all its manifestations, broadens the sensible world: "that what can be seen, heard and told."

Rancière's then, given his arguments on the political impact of art, conceives of art as having a great influence since: "[D]issensus is not a question of mere perspective; it does not simply allow us to see the world differently, it actually modifies the sensible world" (Tanke 105, emphasis in original). Similarly, according to Rancière 'real' political art will not simply lead to an awareness of the (disputable) state of the world. Rather, as Rancière argues, art can only be characterized as politically disruptive once it provides a double 'shocking' effect: "the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification" (Rancière 2004a, 63). In other words, art questions the hegemonic sensible world by making it readable (and thus open to change) and, simultaneously, by introducing a sensible world that is not yet readable to the viewer/reader of art, but that in the process of making it readable can change the way in which the viewer/reader sees, hears, and understands the world. This double effect of politically disruptive art will come back in the three chapters that follow.

In sum, the strength of Rancière theory is that he maintains the unique character of art (although he does not treat is as a sphere inherently separated from everyday life) while convincingly arguing for the political dimensions of art. That means Rancière's argument allows us to focus on the political aspects of a literary work without ignoring the literary specificity of the text we are dealing with. Although concentrating on the politics of literature, the literary text under discussion can still be treated for its

poetic qualities, its linguistic innovation or its fictive powers instead of as a political message in a different form. In Rancière's work literature, just or exactly by being literature, does politics (Rancière 2004b, 10).

Nonetheless, I would suggests that exactly in Rancière's definition of literature (and art) lies a fundamental problem. Namely, at certain points Rancière tends to a certain degree of ontologization for he seems to suggest that art has an inherently political character. Interestingly, although Rancière seems to be aware of the historical and constantly changing character of art (he for example has given an alternative history of art, thereby distinguishing between the ethical, representative and aesthetic regime of art[12]), he nevertheless seems to believe that works of art have an objective political being, an inherent politics that can be isolated (by him) from all other possible factors that can give a work its political meaning. Gabriel Rockhill has repeatedly criticized Rancière's for this reason and names this problem Rancière's "ontological illusion" (Rockhill 206). Although Rancière never explicitly mentions his view on art as having a political being, it is possible to derive to this conclusion if we look at the way in which Rancière writes about the politics of literature. For in Rancière´s abstract theories, work of literature and its inherent politics are without time, location, or addressees, while in practice all works of literature are written by a certain author (with a certain intention), in a specific time and subsequently read by an audience from a specific place, in a specific time. Rancière generally speaks about the politics of all literature, but never includes who is reading the work of literature, where it is being read and in which (historical) period.

In contrast to Rancière who discusses the politics of literature without including social dimensions that can possibly influence arts' politics, I do not believe that the politics of art can be separated from, what Rockhill calls, the *politicization* of art: "the social struggle over the political dimension of art, be it at the level of production, distribution or reception (206). Because Rancière's theory leaves all these social factors behind, his theories raise the following important question: Where does the distribution and its potential disruption take place? Since Rancière only concentrates on the character of the dissensus, but never specifies who or what is involved in this dissensual moment, it seems as if the dissensus or redistribution of the sensible is inherent in the artwork itself.

As Dennis Erasga rightly points out in his review of *The Politics of Literature*, the reader is the crucial element missing in Rancière's work. In all his works he does not seem to take into account "that it

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12. Rancière has outlined these three regime of art repeatedly in his works. In the oldest regime, the ethical regime that is based on Plato's critique of imitation, arts are judged according to its moral value for the community. In the representative regime of art–a regime that has its roots in the *Poetics* of Aristotle, but still characterized the general view on art in the seventeenth and eighteenth century–art was considered for the first time a unique regime with its own rules and principles. Although in this regime the ethical imperatives are left behind, the regime is still characterized by its internal hierarchies: hierarchies of subject matter, modes of expression, genre etc. (Rockhill and Watts 9). Finally, in the aesthetic regime of art, also the hierarchical rules of representation are abolished and people acknowledge there are no preexisting rules for aesthetically presenting people, subjects and situations of everyday life (Tanke 82).

is the process of reception that bestows upon literary works their political momentum" (Erasga, 545). Do we not have to argue that only at the moment a literary work is being read and a possible configuration or reconfiguration of the sensible world can take place, we can truly speak of the politics of literature? In that case it is the reader of a literary text who is the crucial agent in the process of distribution and redistribution. It is the reader who (partly unconscious) selects, out of the multiple possible meanings that a literary text offers, which meanings he conceives of as relevant, which ones irrelevant, which ones he does not even consider (see Citton 138). That is, in the end it is the interpreter who (unwittingly) determines which elements from the literary work he makes visible, and which elements remain invisible. The reader, therefore, cannot be excluded from the process of the (re)configuration of the sensible order, because a text can only lead to a potential disruption of the sensible world (in first instance *his* or *her* sensible world) at the moment it is actively being interpreted by a reader.

Yet, we have to be aware that, although the reader's agency should not be underestimated (as Rancière does), the reader's selection–what he reads as significant or insignificant–does not only depend on the reader's intentions. Many factors that are beyond the reader's will can influence the way a reader understands the literary text he is reading and, therefore, indirectly if and how a reading can bring about a change in the dominant distribution of the sensible world. We can think for example of the way in which the text and its author is presented to the reader or the dominant views on the place or time in which a text is written. Since the factors that can possibly determine the reception of a literary work are numerous, I want to focus on the novels I am going to analyze and discuss two elements that in all probability partake in the way these novels are being understood: The presentation of these works as novels *about* the recent uprisings and the presentation of their authors as "political intellectuals." If these two elements will indeed, as I fear, influence the manner in which people read these novels, the great disruptive potential the novels have, will not be put in motion.

The *essential* novel about the Arab Spring…

As I already explained in the introduction, before the 2011 uprisings in the Arab world the Arab writers Khaled Khalifa, Fadi Azzam, Ahmed Khaled Towfik and their works were unknown or relatively unknown outside the Arab speaking world. Only Hisham Matar who has spent most of his life in the United Kingdom and writes his works in English, is a familiar name in the Western world. Before the Arab Spring these novels, all originally written in Arabic (except for those of Matar) and untranslated (or only translated into French) had a small Arab readership that in some cases became even smaller after Arab countries started to ban these authors' novels. Khalifa's controversial novel *In Praise of Hatred* was directly banned in Syria (and still is forbidden) after its first publication in 2006 and also Azzam's *Saramada* was censored in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, primarily because the novel contained some quite explicit sex scenes.

However, because of the international interest in the Arab world after the highly mediatized events during the Arab Spring, the readership of these relatively unknown novels has changed. Since the start of the Arab Spring, the works of these Arab authors have been translated into English in a short period of time. Furthermore, after their translation into English these novels have been extensively reviewed in prominent newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* and their authors showed up in the media in interviews, with commentaries and columns. Also Hisham Matar's voice turns up in more places since the 2011 uprisings. In the introduction of her work '*Anticipating' the 2011 Arab Uprisings* (2013) Rita Sakr explains this phenomenon as follows: "What has started to happen recently is that publishing houses, international book festivals, the media, and the Arab and Western readership are showing considerable interest in democratizing the revolutionary 'republic of letters' by admitting previously acknowledged or little known voices of the revolts" (12).

As becomes clear from Sakr's description, these recently translated Arabic novels entered the Western 'republic of letters' in a particular way: as works about the revolution with their authors conceived of as "voices of the revolts." In reviews each novel is analyzed in the wake of the 2011 uprisings, thereby indirectly presenting these novels as works that inform or educate its readers on the recent situation in the Arab world. For example, in *The New Yorker* Azzam's *Sarmada* is introduced as the "Essential Novel of the Syrian Spring," as politically meaningful for it helps the non-Arabic reader to understand the complicated political situation in Syria (Nader). In a review of Towfik's novel Sofia Samatar states that it is impossible not to think of the Arab Spring when reading Towfik's *Utopia*. Similarly, in *The Guardian* a reviewer of Khalifa's *In Praise of Hatred* writes that passages from Khaled's novel read like descriptions "of today's Aleppo, in northern Syria, riven and bombarded" (Jaggi). Finally, in a 2011 article about Matar's novels *In the Country of Men* and *Anatomy of a Disappearance* Robert F. Worth argues that Western readers are in need for an "authentic interpreter […] someone who could speak across cultures and make us feel the abundant miseries that fueled the revolt" (Worth). According to Worth the novelist Hisham Matar perfectly satisfies this need. The link that these reviews make is clear: All five novels can be related to the Arab Spring and therefore are tagged as political literature.

Although I do not want to criticize the reviewers for making this link (after all, I want to argue that these novels can play a powerful role in thinking about the Arab Spring), there exists a risk in the way in which this connection is made. As Worth's argument illustrates, these novels are praised because their authors interpret a foreign situation that is unknown to most Western readers. That is, these novels are political because their content can inform and teach its readers about recent political events in the Arab world. Presented as such, the novel's literary character is easily overlooked. The tag "essential novel about the Arab Uprisings" is therefore problematic since it can easily stimulate readers to read these works as 'educational' literature instead of literary works. The Egyptian writer Youssef Rakha therefore faces the sudden interest in translated Arabic literature with apprehension. He argues that a Western reader

will only read an Arabic novel for 'information' about 'an unknown culture' or as Pierpont writes in *The New Yorker*, as an addition to newspapers and public television for answers to questions about the foreign Arab world. Rakha's concern is that Western readers are not interested in Arabic literature because of its literary character, but only because they are interested in the Arab world and its political conflicts. In other words, the only value of Arabic literature tagged Arabic literature, or even better, political Arabic literature will then be the tag itself (Rakha, 153). In that case, we can no longer speak of the situation described by Rancière—literature just by being literature partakes in politics—because these works of literature are no longer read or valued in their own right.

Furthermore, the attention given to the authors of these novels, already hinted at by Worth, only reinforces this problematic situation. Since 2011 attention for Arabic authors has highly increased and there are many more possibilities for Arabic authors to speak about their fictional works. However, more often, although they are interviewed as writers of fiction, the questions they are being asked requires from them to comment upon the political events in their home country. Presented as representatives of their home countries these authors are primarily asked to describe or explain as a kind of 'correspondents in the Arab world,' (or as Spivak has called it "native informants".[13]) the situation 'on the scene.' In many interviews with the Libyan author Hisham Matar, the most prominent author, we can see this phenomenon. After answering some questions about the fictional worlds of his novels, Matar is asked to respond in the same way on questions about the 'real' Arabic world: to explain the mood during the protests in the streets, to explain the impact of the uprisings or to describe his ideas about the future of his country (see for example Spiegel Online and Leyshon). In such interviews the interviewers do not make a distinction between Hisham Matar as an author of fictional works and as Hisham Matar as a Libyan commentator of real political events. The increasing attention for Arab authors of fictional work is thus primarily an interest in these authors, not as novelists, but as 'political intellectuals' or 'native informants.'

These two factors already make clear that the way in which an, in this case, Western reader interprets these novels does not only depend on his or her individual intentions. Already the centrality of politics in reviews of the novels and the role ascribed to the novels' authors in the media, highly influence all individual readings of a literary text. Most likely it will result in 'narrow' readings because, if readers go along with the realistic, political focus of most reviews and interviews, the literary character of a work,

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13. It is in her work *A Critique of Postcolonial Reading: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present* (1999) that Spivak "tracks the figure of the Native Informant through various practices" (Spivak ix). In Spivak's work the native informant is neither the ethnographer's object of knowledge (whereby an ethical relation between the ethnographer and its interlocutor is impossible), nor an autonomous speaking subject. Rather, as John Culbert explains, "the native informant lies in the margins of the dominant discourse of Western history as a figure paradoxically necessary to the truth-claims of that discourse, yet occluded from the scene" (26). That is, the postcolonial subject is not completely denied or silenced, but instead allowed to inform the Western people about his or her country at the margins in order to reaffirm the hegemonic Western discourse. It is for this reason that the presentation of these five Arab authors of fiction as such 'native informants' is even more problematic.

where Rancière's politics is located, is easily overlooked. For such social dimensions is no or little space in Rancière theorization of literature and its political capacities. While he does locate literature *in* the world since literature is just one sensible distribution that is part of the bigger sensible system, literature is nevertheless unlocated.

To illustrate literature's 'unlocated' character, Rancière often uses the metaphor of the "mute letter": writing that, in contrast to speech that has a clear speaker and referent, is wandering waywardly. Since writing makes no distinction to whom is should address itself and to whom it should not, it 'democratically' speaks to everyone. As Rancière phrases it: "Literature is this new regime of writing in which the writer is anybody and the reader anybody" (2004b, 13). It is in this inherent democratic character of literature where Rancière situates the potentiality for dissensus. Since literature can be read and appropriated by everyone, it has 'in principle' the possibility to disrupt (Davis, 111). Philosophically this line of reasoning may sound logical but if we only think of how the access to literature has always been bounded by the established social order, or of all the examples in which literature has had hierarchizing, homogenizing, and oppressive effects (Davis, 110, 114), we realize that in practice this argument does not hold up. In attributing agency and the potentiality for disordering to literature itself, there is little or no space in Rancière's theory for the agency of the individual reader and the communities that produce, circulate, and read works of literature. Therefore, in order to situate literature, while maintaining the idea of literature as partaking in the distribution and possible redistribution of the sensible I want to turn to the work of Edward Said who always has been securely aware of the origins of literary works and to the socio-cultural positions of those whom it addresses.

Worldly texts, worldly readers
In his essay "The World, the Text, and the Critic" Said dismisses exactly the argument Rancière makes: that is, the opposition between the situatedness of speech and the boundlessness of the written word. According to Said this, in his eyes, simple, diametric opposition is misleading. He does not deny that speech has a more clear addressee than texts that in principle can be read by anyone, but he rejects the idea that written texts, unlike speech, exist "in a state of suspension–that is, outside circumstantial reality– until they are 'actualized' and made present by the reader-critic" (1983, 34). Said believes this is a false assumption. Literary texts can maybe look uncircumscribed, but they are in fact always enmeshed in their specific situation: in time, place, and society. Therefore, in his works, Said insists repeatedly upon the 'worldliness' of texts: texts are in the world, they can never escape the conditions of their material existence and are therefore 'worldly' (1983, 35). Texts are affiliated to the real (historical) world to such an extent that they can never be separated from it, not even in theory (Said 2004, 48).

Since every literary work is so much affiliated to its worldly circumstances, every secure reader has to take both the work's body and the world's body into account (Said 1983, 39). In other words,

unlike critics such as Rancière who emphasizes the boundlessness of reading and interpretation–"the writer is anybody and the reader [is] anybody" (Rancière 2004b, 13), Said thinks that a text's situatedness places certain limits upon a critic's interpretation. Namely, in order to understand a text he has to take into consideration several dimensions: for example, when and where a text is written and where and by whom it is being read. This implicates that the critic also has to be extremely aware of his own position, his own situatedness for he is also 'restricted' in some way by the time, place and community from which he reads and interprets literary texts.[14]

Said's concept of worldliness (and his insistence on situatedness) would make an interesting contribution to Rancière's theory, because it would make his rather abstract and objective theory about the *inherent* politics of *all* art more 'modest.'[15] While Rancière seems to present himself as an objective observer who can identify the 'true' and 'ontological' politics of art, the notions of worldliness and situatedness can make us aware that the politics of a work differ from case to case (from reading to reading) and are influenced by diverse (unequal) power relations. A work's politics, a work's (re)distribution of the sensible, cannot be determined beforehand by an outsider from a distant position (as Rancière seems to do). Instead, the politics of a work are (re-)formed each time a text is being read by a reader who potentially can become aware of his own position, of the sensible order of which he forms a part, and at the moment the reader's sensible experience of the world could possibly be changed: a reconfiguration that can indirectly influence, react, or counteract the dominant political sphere. The notion of worldliness thus does not invalidate Rancière's idea that literature has a certain 'politics,' but makes us

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14. Importantly, this is also the case for myself, as critic. The position from which I am reading implies that I have certain limitations. As a critic, unable to read Arabic, and relatively unfamiliar with Arab culture, since I have never been in an Arab country, I know that it is impossible as a 'Western' reader to see and understand all the novels' references to Arab history, Arab customs and Arabic literature. That means I can never read these novels in the same way as an Arabic reader. Yet this should not keep me from discussing these works. As Said argues in his posthumously published book *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004) it cannot be true that only members of a certain community should be permitted the last or only word when it comes to expressing, representing (and I want to add, reading) that group's experience (48). As long as I am aware of my own worldliness and the worldliness of the novels I am discussing and, subsequently, of the restrictions this situatedness brings along, I believe it is possible to make an argument about how a precise reading of these novels can disrupt our Western understanding of the Arab world and especially of the recent Arab uprisings.

15. 'Modest' refers her to Donna Haraway's book *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium. FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™* (1996), in which she deconstructs the problematic figure of the ´modest witness´ of modernity in order to mutate this figure into a more usable vehicle in our contemporary world (Haraway 15). As Haraway explains in the first chapter, since modernity the Western, white man has been the "legitimate and authorized ventriloquist for the object world," an objective witness who can guarantee the clarity and purity of objects and who miraculously adds "nothing from his mere opinions, from his biasing embodiment" (24). Problematically, the Western, white man is given the remarkable power to establish the facts and explain the world to everybody. In contrast to this (not so modest) witness Haraway argues for the importance to be aware of the observer's historical and cultural subjectivity, and pleads for the construction of a real modest witness whose knowledge is situated. Since Ranciere's theories show some characteristic of this 'objective' modern witness (namely, he believes he can identify the 'true' and 'pure' politics of all art), the notion of situatedness and the figure of the modest witness (as constructed by Haraway) are helpful to acknowledge that the politics of a certain work of literature is 'situated': dependent on the situatedness of the work in question and the historical and cultural subjectivity of the reader/interpreter.

aware that we cannot ontologically define this politics, but have to locate literature's politics from work to work, from reading to reading. That is, we have to specify where, when and by whom the work is being read (and where the potential dissensus can take place) and, furthermore, take into account the limitations of this spatio-temporal and cultural position.

Furthermore, while in Rancière's argumentation all works of literature seem to be equally political, if we focus on singular moments of reading, we can understand why certain works of literature are at some times and in some places politically more significant than others. Thinking about the works of literature of this thesis, we can argue how their potential politics has changed over time. Although all these novels are written some years before the Arab uprisings, retrospectively they have gained an additional political dimension. Because these novels, as Rita Sakr explains, "unraveled the political geographies of injustice and popular discontent," it can be said that they are "'anticipating' or imaginatively envisioning and participating in some of the major transformations that we are now witnessing" (19). In other words, while these five novels have always been potentially political and can be read politically in various ways, in this thesis I will give a political reading from a specific time (shortly after the Arab Spring) and from a specific place (in the non-Arab world that has witnessed the uprisings from a distance).

Because of this specific position from which I am going to analyze these novels, Said's work is of extra relevance. Since I focus in this thesis on novels of Arab authors that are read in translation by a Western audience as political literature, we have to be aware of the disturbing history of the West 'reading' Arabic culture, the returning topic in most of Said's works. Said has powerfully argued that literary texts do not innocently affiliate the world in which they are written, but "incorporate discourse, sometimes violently" (1983, 47). That means that works of literature are involved in relations of power and have to do with "ownership, authority, power, and the imposition of force" (1983, 48). In the case of the West reading Arabic literature, the speaker (the Arab world) and the hearer (the Western world) do not meet on equal grounds. Already since the Christian crusades to Jerusalem, the Arab world–or to use the more pejorative terms 'The Orient' or 'the Middle East'–has been imagined and constructed as the West's quintessential 'Other.' Especially since the high days of European imperial and colonial involvement in the Arab world during the nineteenth century, the West has imagined itself with the Orient as its contrasting image. The 'Arab' (the use of the singular already points to the generalizing and overly simplified Western view on the Arab population) came to be seen as the exotic, dangerous en (yet) undeveloped counterpart of the Western civilized man. In short, the West's relation to the Arab world has a long-lasting history of "Orientalism": the political, military, sociological, ideological, and cultural practice of the West's construction, domination and control of the Orient, whereby European culture (and later also American culture) gained in strength and identity by opposing itself to the Orient, conceived of as its negative Other (Said 1979, 3).

It is in this context of Orientalism that Arabic literature and its Western readership meet each other. The Western attention for the literary production of the Arab world has long consisted primarily of a fascination for a foreign culture that produced 'exotic,' 'irrational,' 'mystic' and 'highly imaginative' pieces of literature, works that were not taken as seriously as the Western masterpieces. It is, for example, not without reason, as Roger Allen points out, that the 'exotic' *Thousand and One Nights* stories became so popular in Western culture (201). And because until very recently Arabic literature, of all the world literatures, has remained relatively unknown and unread in the Western world (Said 1995, 97) this sense of exoticism, foreignness and intangibility that for Western readers characterized Arabic literature, still persists to some degree.

Moreover, the development of modern Arabic literature is to a large extent tied up with the European colonial and imperial domination of the Arab world during the nineteenth century, as Stephen Sheehi elaborately describes in his book *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (2004). It was the Arab world's encounter with the European colonizers, both positively and negatively that stimulated the *Al-Nahda*, ('awakening') "the cultural and intellectual resurgence between 1870 and 1950 in Egypt and other Arab countries" (Pormann 4). As Sheehi explains, during this period Western genres such as drama and primarily the novel were borrowed by Arab culture and revitalized Arabic literature, but were, subsequently, adopted in such a way that it could be used to culturally resist Western imperialism (40). Yet despite this double response to Western cultural influences, Arabic cultural history is most often presented as predominantly 'unidirectional,' as if Western culture has only influenced Arabic culture and not the other way around.[16] In most historical accounts, scholars present Arabic literary histories in such a way that is seems as if Western genres, styles and movements are simply transplanted into the Arabic cultural milieu directly from Western tradition at the moment these same genres, styles, and movements were already common or even out of fashion in Western culture. Terri DeYoung accurately explains why the idea that Arab culture followed and imitated Western literary fashions and styles is problematic: "Arabic literature is represented as irremediably *belated*, caught up in an inexorable sequencing not of its own making, but with the saving grace that following the sequence will eventually allow the literature to become truly 'modern'" (159, emphasis in original).

As we can conclude from this short overview, in the West, Arabic literature has primarily be read and interpreted in relation to Western literature instead of in its own right. On the one hand, as literary works that are radically opposed to Western works of literature and thus appreciated for their, in Western eyes, exotic and foreign character. On the other hand, as literary works that are not yet as developed and modern as their Western models, and thus lag behind in time.[17] Reading these 'belated' works as a

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16. See for example Roger Allen "Arabic Literature and the Nobel Prize" *World Literature Today* 62.2 (1988): 201-203. Print.

17. Frederic Jameson mentions this interpretation of non-Western literature in his notoriously famous article ""Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986). He argues that there exists a 'damaging' tendency in which Third-World novels "remind us of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development

Western reader then goes together with a certain feeling of nostalgia, since these works seem slightly familiar and read as if they are outmoded literary works from Western culture. It is because of this complex political and socio-cultural relationship between the West and its counterpart, the 'Middle East,' with the West's problematic set of expectations and assumptions about Arabic culture, that we have to be careful to label Arabic literary works, as Western readers, 'political Arabic literature.' As I will explain in the next part, the tag 'political literature,' especially in the case of non-Western literature, is not an objective label–"this is a literary work that relates to politics"–but indirectly a negative value judgment based on a Western ideal of what literature should be. Again, as I will make clear, Rancière's ideal of an aesthico-political reading of literature is in danger because of this tag 'political literature.' Therefore, in order to prevent such a reducing reading it is important to discuss it, before coming to a conclusion about the way in which I am going to read these novels politically.

Reading Arabic literature politically

Corresponding to the idea discussed earlier that works of art are often thought of as located in an extra-worldly, private and ethereal sphere (Said 1988, 47), set apart from all political conflicts in the 'real' world, there is the Western ideal of 'detached' art: the romantic idea that 'true' works of literature should not be overly committed or clearly involve themselves with earthly political and social struggles of everyday life, but instead deal with universal values, with human themes such as love and death. This longstanding preference for non-political works of literature in which we read about subjects that transcend specific historical and cultural circumstances, is famously expressed by the French writer Stendhal who stated: "Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention" (qtd. in Harlow, 16). Against this Western ideal, non-Western literature, including Arabic literature, finds itself in a dubious position. For no matter its openly committed or non-committed content, non-Western literature will predominantly be seen by a Western readership as 'not as developed' as Western literary texts.

On the one hand authors from non-Western countries are being accused by Western readers and critics for always writing about political conflict and about the painful and violent histories of their countries: subjects that get a secondary or even inferior load when the Western, modern, and transcendental novel is seen as the highest aesthetic ideal an author can achieve. It is against this discrepancy that the Kenyan writer and literary critic Wa Thiong'o Ngugi writes the painfully ironic words: "Haven't we heard critics who demand of African writers that they stop writing about colonialism, race, color, exploitation, and simply write about human beings?" (76). As he subsequently explains it is only because of the West's mania for literary characters that are without history, solitary and free, and

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[that makes us] conclude that 'they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson'" (65). Such a negative valuation of non-Western literature, based on the argument of 'outmodedness,' is quite clearly based on an ultimately racist favoring of the West and Western culture.

with unexplainable melancholy, that Western culture requires non-Western authors to imitate their aesthetic ideal. While, as he points out, the idea of writers who live and write in situations of conflict, but forcedly try to avoid these important political themes is absurd (Ngugi 74).

On the other hand, when non-Western authors create literary texts that are more in line with Western standards, that is, about individuals with 'universal,' 'human' problems, these texts are still read differently than works of Western authors.[18] Because the West always perceives them as products of the so-called 'Third World,' they are, despite their non-political content, still read 'politically.' Frederic Jameson's controversial argument in his article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986) perfectly illustrates this attitude of a Western readership dealing with non-Western literature. Although Jameson's introduction shows that he is not unaware of Western cultural dominance (in his introduction he pleas for the inclusion of non-Western works in the canon and argues to accept the different character of these texts instead of seeing them as inferior versions in comparison to Western masterpieces) he nevertheless makes the following bold statement: "*All* third-world texts are *necessarily* (…) allegorical, and in a very specific way: They are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly Western machines of representation, such as the novel" (69, emphasis mine).

As many critics have argued in response to this specific statement,[19] Jameson's argument heavily generalizes and essentializes non-Western cultures. By taking together all non-Western literatures that are not from socialist countries (the so-called Second World) as "Third-World literature," he undermines the rich cultural heterogeneity of all diverse non-Western cultures and introduces a simplified binary opposition that makes all third-world texts *principally* different from Western literature. Based on the generalizing notion that each Third-World country can be characterized by its painful legacy of Western imperialism and colonialism (67) he states that: "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly dynamic—necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the third-world culture and society" (69). In other words, Jameson suggests to read every non-Western text, regardless of the explicit political content or the seemingly private subject matter, as a

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18. In his book *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading* (2004), Derek Attridge gives a good example of an author whose relatively 'Western' works are still read differently than Western literary texts: J.M. Coetzee. Attridge explains that all novels of Coetzee are read (allegorically) in light of South Africa's apartheid, even those novels that take place outside South Africa or in the years after apartheid. According to Attridge this specific way of reading stems from the assumption that "any responsible and principled South African writer, especially during the apartheid years, will have has as a primary concern the historical situation of the country and the suffering of the majority of its people" (33).
19. See for example Aijaz Amad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3-25. Print; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press, 1999) Print; Doris Sommer, "Love and Country: Allegorical Romance in Latin America" *Reading World Literature: Theory, History, Practice*, ed. Sarah Lawall. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994) 177-202, Print.

political allegory so that all characters, actions and developments come to represent the great struggles of a country in a colonial or postcolonial state.

Rather than questioning (again) Jameson's reductionistic formulation "All Third-World texts are necessarily…" I rather want to problematize his strong emphasis on allegorical reading. Each novel that I am going to discuss seems to meet the criteria to be defined by Jameson as a Third-World text: These are works written by non-Western authors from countries that have a history of imperialism or colonialism; literary texts that take the form of the novel, a genre that is, as Jameson's pointed out, primarily Western. Nonetheless, is it possible to, solely on basis of these characteristics, turn to a basic formula to analyze these novels?

Réda Bensmaïa who has questioned Jameson's thesis in regard to the novel *L'invention du désert* by the Algerian writer Tahar Djaout, rightly argues that James' allegorical reading does not do justice to the diversity and complexity of literary works. As he rhetorically asks:

> [I]s it possible for Djaout's novel to be reduced to the allegorical dimension I have described based on Jameson's definition? What happens when only this dimension is brought to light? And what, then, is left in the dark? Finally, are we done with *L'invention du désert* once we have exposed the framework that, using Jameson as our guide, we described as allegorical? […] Did we do justice to *L'invention du desert* when we emphasized this line of interpretation? (72)

To Bensmaïa's accurate questions I want to add the following question in regard to the idea of a singular politico-aesthetic reading of literature (specific to the position of both the reader and the work) as it is formulated so far in this chapter: Will readers equipped with such a ready-to-hand method of analysis–the political allegory–still have eye for the radical singular character of a literary work? Namely, if readers already assume that a text, because written by a non-Western writer, can be read as a political allegory and, subsequently, will read it as such, these texts will only confirm what Western readers think they know: that Third-World novels always deal with the political (an assumption that makes these texts indirectly inferior). Paradoxically, however, exactly because of this limited focus of always reading politics in non-Western literature, readers obstruct the possibility of literature to *be* political or have political effects, that is to destabilize the hegemonic sensible order. After all, as I already discussed, Rancière locates the politics of literature in the radical singular and individual character of literary writing.

Therefore, only readers that are open to literature's singularity and accept the possible unpredictable outcomes of such a literary reading, can set the potential redistribution of the sensible, the politics of literature, in motion. As Derek Attridge argues in his work the *Singularity of Literature* (2004) in which he pleads for an acknowledgment of literature's literary character, readers that judge literary works according to pre-existing schemes of value, such as Jameson's political allegory, will never read

literature as literature. Their biased attitude reflects their primary interest is somewhere other than in literature (in this case, an interest in politics, not in literature) (6-15). Reading the politics of literature thus means accepting literature's otherness, literature's literary character that distinguishes literature from overtly committed works or texts that are written with a clear political purpose.

The ethically responsive reader

Rancière's notion of the politics of literature is a fruitful starting point to think about recent Arabic literature and its relation to the political sphere of the Arab world (a sphere that is inextricably bound up with the Western political sphere): Literature partakes in the distribution of the sensible world, and has the potential to make readers aware of this seemingly natural order, can provide alternative sensible worlds and eventually can lead to a reconfiguration of the sensible order. Although each work of literature has the potential for political dissensus, literature is not, as Rancière seems to suggest, inherently politically disruptive. The opportunities for dissensus (and the closely connected possibilities for the reaffirmation of the hegemonic order) all start when a literary text is being read. If the potential redistribution of the sensible order successfully can take place (or, contrarily, fails) is dependent on the way in which the reader interacts with the potentially political text.

In summarizing the ideal reading that brings the disruptive politics of literature into being, I again want to refer to Derek Attridge since in his work on the South African writer J.M. Coetzee he expounds the idea of the "ethics of reading"[20]: an ideal that comes really close to the ideal reading for the novels of this thesis, as I have gradually formulated it in this chapter.

The two most important characteristics of literature to which the reader, according to Attridge, should correctly respond (that means openly, allowing possible unpredictably outcomes) is literature's singularity and literature's otherness. Therefore, first of all, an ethically responsive reading is a reading that does justice to the literariness of a singular, literary work; a reading, as he phrases it, "that brings into being the work as literature and not as something else, and as *this* work of literature and not another one" (2004b, 9, emphasis in original). In other words, Attridge pleas for specific readings that take into account the radically singular character of each work of literature. Secondly, an ethically responsive reading is a reading that accepts the 'otherness' of a literary text, that is, the potential of literature to give readers new ways to see and know the world by creatively transforming the reader's familiar norms and habits. As Attridge emphasizes, the otherness of a literary text is no inherent otherness, but an "otherness to a

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20. It is important to note that Attridge's notion of the ethically responsive reader has to be viewed in regard to a long tradition of reader-responsive theory. As Attridge's acknowledges himself, his ideas are based upon the various ideas of other scholars who concentrated on the moment of reading. In the appendix of one of his works, the *Singularity of Literature*, he mentioned all those scholars that have contributed to his theory. Important names he mentions are, for example, Wolfgang Iser who has argued in his works *The Implied Reader* (1972) and *The Act of Reading* (1976) how at the moment of reading a literary text, the reader's habits that constitute him or her as subject can be suspended, and Hans Robert Jauss who in his work *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982) has focused on the changing meanings of literature in changing socio-cultural contexts (Attridge 2004a, 144).

particular self or situation," an otherness that is only significant in relation to a specific reader and situation (2004b, 11). The otherness of a text, is the power of literature to change the reader's perspective on the world and thereby the reader itself.

Though Attridge does not call the ethically responsive reading political, I want to argue that exactly in the interaction between a literary text and an ethically responsive reader, the disruptive politics is put in motion and the redistribution of the hegemonic order reaches its full potential. Since, as Attridge argues, in the process of making the otherness of a literary text (that what is unfamiliar to the reader) readable, the reader experiences a transformation (2004b, 11): a transformation of the way in which he sees and understands the world, that is, a redistribution of his sensible order. Therefore, it is with the ethically responsive reader that a start is made to redistribute not only a singular reader's sensible experience of the world, but also a hegemonic sensible order.

Yet, while Attridge's elaboration of the ethically responsive reading of literature is a fruitful ideal to keep in mind while reading literature politically, we have to acknowledge that, especially in the case of the West reading Arabic literature politically, this ideal is hard to keep in mind. As I explained with the arguments of Said, the meeting of Arabic literature with a Western readership is marked by various power relations. The originally Arabic text and the Western reader do not meet on equal grounds because of the long-lasting history of Orientalism that has given all Arabic literary texts a sense of 'Otherness': more exotic, not as modern, and still more political than Western masterpieces of literature. Because of this tendency to conceive of Arab culture as radically opposed to Western culture, we have to be careful to label a Arabic novel 'political.' Namely, besides the politic of literature there exist a politics of reading literature politically that radically deviates from Attridge's ideal reading.

As I have discussed, such a 'political' reading of Arabic literature can have negative consequences for the work in question. It can come to be seen as aesthetically and culturally less valuable because of its political character. Moreover, it can result in simplified readings in which literature is approached as an overtly political message but in a different form or in almost 'prefabricated' readings that use Jameson's political allegory formula to read each and every Third-World novel in the same way. In these cases, the moment of potential transformation, the moment that otherness is turned into sameness to make the otherness readable, as Attridge phrases it (2004b, 11), does not coincide with the transformation of the reader's world of experience, since the otherness is too easily transformed into sameness, too quickly understood through frameworks that are familiar to the reader. In other words, when the West reads Arabic literature, there is a greater chance that readings will only reaffirm instead of redistribute the hegemonic order (an order that subordinates the Arab world, its people and culture in several ways).

However, as will become clear in the following chapters, these recent, translated Arabic novels do not necessarily lead to reaffirmations of Western disparaging ideas about the Arab world and its politics.

If Western readings are responsive to the novels' literariness and otherness, these works can give a significant politico-aesthetic response to the recent developments in the Arab world and to the Arab Spring narrative that has been constructed in the Western world. With Attridge's ideal reader in mind I will analyze in the following chapters how the novels, as works of literature, question the parameters of the Arab Spring narrative: the narrative's timeline (chapter 2), its spatial setting (chapter 3) and its main characters (chapter 4). By deconstructing these parameters, the novels partake in the reconfiguration of the hegemonic sensible order: a sensible world that determined which aspects of the Arab Spring are highlighted and which ones remain out of focus. The novels, in other words, have a politically significant role in the context of the problematic Arab Spring narrative, since only once the hegemonic sensible order is deconstructed (with its prejudiced assumptions about the Arab world and its people), there is the possibility to construct new and alternative Arab Spring narratives.

2.

The Timeline of the Arab Spring: Extended and Unsettled

In most of the innumerable books, articles, news items and columns about the recent protests in the Arab world, the Arab Spring starts with the cruel story of the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi: a Tunisian fruit vendor who set himself on fire before the governor's office on 17 December 2010. The compelling idea that the drastic act of one single man 'sparked' the massive protests through the Arab world was taken for granted soon after the first uprisings started and since then this anecdotal starting point has been perpetuated and confirmed repeatedly: not only in newspapers and academic works, but also in literature. Although I will argue in this chapter that literature can contribute to a more positive understanding of the Arab Spring as an important, political event by questioning and transforming the temporal framework most commonly used to narrate the Arab Spring, it is important to be aware that literature can also contribute to the establishment of a widespread idea; that, to speak in Rancière's words, literature can also partake in the confirmation of a particular distribution of the sensible.

As is the case with Tahar Ben Jelloun's story "By Fire," (2011) a story that reinforces the dominant timeline of the Arab Spring. Only a couple of months after the death of Mohammed Bouazizi this Moroccan writer started to write a fictional story, though close to the facts and written in a realistic style, about Mohammed and the events that leaded up to his decision for self-immolation. In his short story that was published in translation in *The New Yorker* in 2013, we can read how the life of the fictional Bouazizi has been marked by poverty, deprivation and humiliation. His decision to forget his academic ambitions and to become a fruit seller to support his family, does not give him any hope for a better future, as the government and the police constantly sabotage his attempts to make money. After his ultimate attempt to convince the mayor to at least listen to him fails, he pours gasoline over his body and sets himself afire. Although Jelloun's story can maybe help people to place Bouazizi's self-destructive act in a broader context, it primarily repeats the narrative that by then had already become familiar to most people: "[…] the story of a simple man, like millions of others, who, after being crushed, humiliated, and denied in life, became the spark that set the world ablaze" (Jelloun 71).

However, the decision to start the narrative of the Arab Spring with Bouazizi's death is not as obvious and 'innocent' as most accounts that do start with the self-immolation seem to suggest. All the decisions that are made in the process of narrating the Arab Uprising temporarily–Where does the narrative begin?; where does it end?; how can this revolution be placed in history?; can we make comparisons with other revolutions, and if so, with which revolutions?–are not only narratological and historical decisions, but decisions that have political and socio-cultural dimensions. Therefore, in addition to questioning the seemingly objective timeline of the Arab Spring that is often taken for granted, we have to ask: Who is framing and demarcating this revolutionary temporality and for what reasons?

As will become clear in this chapter, the specific timeline that is used in Western media to narrate the Arab Spring–a timespan of two years that starts with Bouazizi's self-immolation and ends with the beginning of the Arab Spring's violent aftermath–is questionable. Namely, it contributes to an understanding of the Arab Spring as an event that started 'suddenly', *ex nihilo*, and ended so quickly that it did not fundamentally change the Arab region. So in the end, despite the 'unexpected' uprisings that 'finally' promised the democratization of the Arab world in imitation of the Western world, the Arab world can still be approached with a Western Orientalist view: a view that maintains the idea that the Arab world is timeless, static, and immune to change in contrast with the Western world that is the embodiment of historical, political and scientific progress (McLeod 52).

The novels that I am going to introduce in this chapter contribute to a more positive understanding of the Arab Spring, as a non-Western, Arab event that has to be conceived of in its own right. These novels do so by putting into question the temporal framework that is most commonly used to narrate the Arab Spring. First of all, they establish a link between historical periods that preceded the events of 2011 and the Arab Spring, thereby extending the Arab Spring's timeline and present it as a *longue durée* event that was already in the making for a long time instead of as sudden uprisings, foreign to the Arab world, that occurred out of nothing. Secondly, by questioning the apparently clear and chronological course of Arab history, these novels bring into light alternative ways of narrating history that perhaps can do more justice to the history of the Arab world than the chronological and linear historical narratives to which we are so used in the West. Before I will introduce the five novels and the historical periods in which the stories take place, I will elaborate more on how the Western world has framed the Arab Spring temporally through a close analysis of the term "Arab Spring."

The term "Arab Spring" and its temporal implications

Since 2011 the notion 'Arab Spring' has become a popular and influential term in Western media[21] to refer to a complex web of different developments in an extensive region with multiple nationalities. The notion includes the initial uprisings, the counter-revolutions, the assassinations, depositions, or forced escapes of several autocrats, the conflicts between protesters with different ideological agendas, and the victims, both supporting and protesting the autocratic regimes. Though the term is far from unproblematic, as I will explain later, Ibrahim N. Abusharif is right in arguing that the West has never before used a more positive-resonating phrase to describe events in the Arab world (v). In contrast to the long-standing belief that the civil call for democracy is a phenomenon that only occurs in the Western world, and that Arab societies are thus as it were 'immune' to democracy (El-Mahdi), the term 'Arab Spring' allows for the

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21. It is important to note that the term "Arab Spring" is almost never used in Arab media, although later some journalists started to use the phrase in Arabic translation ('*al-Rabi' al-Arabiy*') in the Arabic-language press. The term favored in Arab media is 'Arab Revolutions' ('*al-Thawrat al-'Arabiya*') (Abusharif 10). In other words, the phrase 'Arab Spring' is a Western term, made popular in Western media to refer to complex events in the Arab world.

idea that Arabs could also long for a democratic society. This remarkable change in the socio-cultural understanding of Arab society–from the complete absence of a longing for democratization to the presence of such longing–has fueled the image of the Arab Spring as an unexpected, sudden uprising, as an absolute rupture with the past.

This idea is of course not new. Revolutions have most often be defined as abrupt breaks with the past, as events that mark the beginning of a new time and divide time in a 'before the revolution' and an 'after the revolution.' In an overview of the various definitions of revolutions, Isaac Kraminick writes that for many scholars (Kraminick gives the example of Hannah Arendt) the historical event in question, in order to be considered a revolution, must restructure and regenerate the world in all its aspects: "social, political, economic, cultural, and familial [because] true revolution seeks a new beginning" (Kraminick 31). Yet, according to Irène Herrmann the fact that the link between revolution and rupture seems so widely acknowledged might be the reason why this connection has not often been thoroughly questioned. In the introduction of a journal that is completely dedicated to the notion of "rupture(s) in revolution," she argues that the way in which a revolution is presented, influences how certain audiences perceive it. In other words, she states that the presentation of a revolution as rupture has a strongly political character. In the case of the Arab Spring, we could think that the Western world that advocated the Arabs' fight for democratization, therefore stressed the idea of the uprising as a break with the Arabs' past: a past characterized by chaos, violence, and a succession of autocratic regimes. However, Herrmann thinks this line of reasoning might be too simple. She suggests that stressing the revolution as rupture could also be a way of proving "the revolution to be alien to the country's history and political culture" (3). A compelling idea if we think, as William V. Spanos argues, that in Western media representations the uprisings are almost universally considered, above all, the initiatives of 'Westernized' dissident youth: "disaffected young men and women who have been educated according to 'progressive' western 'secular' standards" (86). In such accounts in which the revolution in the Arab countries is 'Westernized,' then, the Arab Spring ends up to be a 'Western' revolution taking place in an Arab region instead of a thoroughly Arab revolution.

Also the specific seasonal nomenclature, "Arab *Spring*," enhances the tendency to rather draw parallels with Western uprisings, than with Arab history itself. The use of the words "spring" and "springtime" have a long history in European languages to refer to optimistic periods of possible political change (Abusharif 7). For example the European 1848 revolutions were alternatively named "the spring of nations" or "the springtime of the peoples." Similarly, the years of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia that started in 1968 were known under the name "Prague Spring." This 'spring convention,' however, does not exist in the Arabic language. Although it is logical that Western media use this term for a Western audience that is familiar with the term's lineage and bearing (Abusharif 1), the use of a term that is exterior to the Arab world is not indisputable.

First of all, as Rami Khouri has argued, and many other scholars with him, inherent in the term spring is the notion that a dark winter preceded this sudden awakening. The histories of different Arab countries that have known many earlier conflicts, protests, and fights for democracy are thereby dismissed as significant periods that could be seen as preparation periods for the 2011 uprisings (or as uprisings in their own right). It is not that no comparisons are made, but primarily with Western historical uprisings: Several commentators see similarities between the 1968 revolutions and the Arab Spring because of the massive and nonviolent character of both protests (see Wallerstein; Kennedy); others make a comparison with the 1848 revolutions that just as the Arab Spring ended in violence (see Rapport; Steinberg); according to some commentators the early success of the 2011 protests bear resemblances to the 1989 protest and the domino effect that caused the fall of many communist regimes (see Way; Head). Nevertheless, almost no commentators seem compelled to look at the history of the Arab world itself. We can thus speak of a certain 'historical amnesia' in which significant and crucial historical periods are largely ignored.

Secondly, a revolutionary 'spring' also implies that the optimistic period of uprisings will be temporary, a brief transitional period, since in the end winter will inevitably start again. In the case of the Arab Spring, this seasonal timeline–a dark and violent period, a brief period of hope, followed again by a dark and violent period–indeed seems to be used to frame the Arab uprisings. Namely, according to many commentators, the current situation in most Arab countries, can better be described as the Arab or Islamist Winter than as a period still belonging to the first 2011 protests (Totten). More than three years after the start of the uprisings the political climates in Egypt, Libya and Syria seem far removed from the initial, civil uprisings that surprised the entire world: in Egypt the deposition and the arrest of the autocrat Mubarak followed by the first democratic elections, only resulted in a succession of temporary and interim presidents (President Morsi, President Mohammed el-Baradei) and finally in a society in which the army seems to be in power again. Meanwhile, Libya's interim government, officially in charge since Gaddafi's fall in October 2011, fails to come to grip with the country's violent and dangerous situation caused by myriad armed groups with various ideas about the country's future ("Libya – Human Rights Report 2014"). Finally, in Syria, the initial massive protests against President Bashar al-Assad's and his army soon ended in a bloody civil war when the army was deployed to restrain the persistent civil uprisings: a war without end in sight that already lasts for three years and has cost the lives of more than 140,000 Syrians (Omari). As columnist Thomas Friedman concluded in *The New York Times* already in April 2013: "I guess it's official now: The term 'Arab Spring' has to be retired. There is nothing springlike going on." In such accounts the Arab Spring then tends to refer to a brief period of democratization, 'unnatural' for the Arab societies, in between two periods that are characterized by civil conflict, chaos and violence.

But how fruitful is this temporal framework, short in time and broad in scope (since one term encompasses an enormous pan-Arab region with diverse cultures and societies)? Does such a temporal narrative that only allows for the positive, hopeful dimensions of a revolution, that primarily sees the protests between 2011-2013 in sharp contrast with the history of the Arab world, but encourages certain comparisons with Western uprisings, help us to understand the complexity and impact of the Arab Spring? The novels of Matar, Khalifa, Towfik and Azzam contribute to an alternative perspective, to a, what Nouri Gana names, "genealogical and polydirectional approach to the [...] revolution, one that can take stock of both the long-term and short-term factors (10). The stories of these novels take place in exactly these periods that preceded the recent uprisings but are ignored in Western media. Without completely dismissing the notion of revolution as rupture, these novels can make us realize how these histories, specific for each country, are crucial for our understanding of the ongoing uprisings nowadays. Karl Marx famously used the metaphor of the mole to explain the two-sided temporal nature of revolutions: The mole suddenly coming out of the ground might be the spectacular, most visible part of a revolution, but it is the earlier digging and making of tunnels that is the most significant (qtd. in Prashad 1).

But besides pointing to the long-term factors of the uprisings these novels have two more functions in relation to the revolution's temporality (and the presentation of this temporality): First, they make its readers aware of the singular character of each national revolution by providing an image of one country, in contrast to the whole 'Middle East.' Secondly, they make us aware of history's narratological character, of the inevitable narrativity, used for the representation of reality. Because the novels' complicated narrating structure blocks the reader attempts to construct a chronological, step-by-step history, narrated through a single, omniscient voice (the most frequently used form to narrate history), the readers starts to realize that there are more ways to narrate history. I will start with sketching the historical situations that these novels present in respectively Syria, Libya, and Egypt.[22] Subsequently I will illustrate how attempts to create chronological historical narratives are disrupted in several ways.

Libya

Matar's *In the Country of Men* provides an image of Libya as it was before the underground network of political activists and intellectuals, inspired by the spirit of the revolts in neighboring countries Egypt and Tunisia, dared to organize a massive protest in February 2011: a revolt that finally led to the brutal capturing and killing of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (never mentioned Gaddafi in Matar's novel, but instead referred to as "Our Guide" or "The Colonel"). The novel describes Suleiman's summer, in 1979–Gaddafi is still in power–the summer in which the country's political circumstances make the nine-years-old narrator Suleiman realize how his father, Faraj Bu Suleiman, is involved in dangerous, political

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22. Although there are far more Arab countries whose histories have to be discussed more in relation to the Arab Spring, I think that already these five novels that describe historical periods in Syria, Egypt and Libya make clear that the histories of the Arab countries (and thus the underlying causes of the Arab uprisings) are so differently that it is hard to bring them together with the (singular) notion *the* Arab Spring.

activities. As the novel makes painfully clear, a life under Gaddafi's repressive regime means a life of cautiousness, secrecy, and forced betrayal. The underground political life of the narrator's father is kept so secret that the reader, looking predominantly through the eyes of Suleiman, never knows exactly what his activist life entails: more clues than a typewriter (6), a red small towel (141), the book *Democracy Now* (92), and Faraj's bloodstained face, (202) are never given. The necessity for this absolute secrecy is made clear in the novel as it illustrates how Gaddafi's extensive security and paramilitary apparatus infiltrates the lives of all characters and how Gaddafi's regime does not tolerate any form of revolt against Libya's leader. One of their neighbor's, for example, is an "antenna," a man of the *Mukhabarat*, the national intelligence service or security police, that keeps the country under strict surveillance. The narrator is repeatedly warned of the power and influence of these neighbors, since they are "able to put people behind the sun" (32) as he is often told.

At the moment his father is taken away (without he or his mother knowing where they are going to bring him) the surveillance increases: Their telephone calls are tapped ("There was an echo; it was a bad line" (136)); an officer, "the gentleman in the car (162-163)," is permanently parked in front of their house in order to spy on them. Especially the naive Suleiman is the target of these investigations, and both the officials on the phone and in the car constantly try to tempt him to the disclosure of secret information about his family and their political agendas. Not the spectacular arrests, neither the heroic revolts are the subject of Matar's novel. On the contrary, *In the Country of Men* is characterized by the slumbering, almost invisible forms of protest that take place behind the scenes, but also by the continuous doubt about the purpose of these revolts, and the fear to continue the fight against the regime. Positioned between his father's initially strong belief in the anti-Gaddafi rebellion and his mother's aversion of it ("'Clouds,' she said. 'Only clouds. They gather then flit away. What are you people thinking: a few students colonizing the university will make a military dictatorship roll over? For God's sake, if it were that easy I would have done it myself" (53)), the narrator forcibly becomes involved in the political life of his family and country. Moreover, without realizing it himself, he contributes to the arrest of his father by revealing crucial information about his father's political friends and their clandestine office to the officials of Gaddafi's regime. As a result, his father is arrested, tortured until he betrays his political friends, and subsequently allowed to return home, though as a defeated man.

Betrayal in all its different forms is therefore one of the mayor themes of Matar's novel: Suleiman unwittingly betrays his father, both by questioning his role as a father (since Suleiman's father never clearly seems to show affection for him), and by literally betraying him after giving away information about his secret political life; similarly, his father gives away the names of his political friends; his mother abandons the friendship with her neighbor after the neighbor's husband is accused of being opposed to Gaddafi's regime. Yet Matar's novel does not condemn those betrayals between family members, friends, and neighbors, but instead suggests that the absence of loyalty and trust are inevitable in a society ruled

by such a strict and oppressive regime. As Matar's novel shows, Libyan citizens, continuously under surveillance, are so afraid to be accused of being a 'traitor' (that is, everybody who does not devotedly support Gaddafi's regime) that their public status as political citizen (pro-Gaddafi or seemingly pro-Gaddafi) has overruled their role as mother, father, son, friend, or neighbor. Therefore, Maria Joseph concludes in her review of *In the Country of Men*, betrayal in Matar's novel is rather portrayed as a "symptom of a sick regime" than as an "irredeemable flaw in individual characters."

The image Matar sketches of Libya's climate under Gaddafi's regime can both be read in contrast and in accordance with the uprisings in Libya nowadays. While the protests are now more public, aboveground, and massive than the older anti-Gaddafi activities of protesters such as Suleiman's father, the anti-Gaddafi sentiments and the longing for the fall of the regime is decades old. Similarly, the fear, the doubt, and the disbelief in the success of the revolution (embodied by Suleiman's mother) will always be a part of fights against oppressive regimes, also now.

Syria

Bodies on both sides fell like ripened berries; the atmosphere was oppressive, saturated with the fear of nameless chaos. The state, which had expected a resolution to this battle […], sought out its supporters as the situation grew even blacker and more complex; our previous coexistence became a memory, and the subject of a cautiously exercised […] Retreat was no longer an option and hostility became like ripened grapes, dangling from a vine left to the passer-by (Khalifa 133).

The above quote, a beautiful description of a horrific battlefield, would not be out of place in an article about the current situation in Syria, where a brutal fight between opposed political and/or religious groups has taken over the initial hopeful uprisings. Yet, this fragment from Khalifa's novel *In Praise of Hatred* does not describe the situation in Syria anno 2014, but the dark days of Syria in the 1980s.

Khalifa' novel is told from the perspective of young and dreamy girl, on the threshold of maturity, who grows up in a large and old family of conservative, religious Sunni Muslims in Syria's biggest city Aleppo. The novel is divided into three parts: the first part called "Women Led by the Blind" in which the reader follows how the narrator gradually becomes involved in the Muslim Brotherhood; "Embalmed Butterflies," the second part in which the narrator's activities for the organization are the central topic and which ends with the arrest of the narrator; and the final part, "The Scent of Spices," that describes the narrator's years in prison.

The narrator's belonging to a Sunni family, marks her political and ideological position in Syrian society: a society that is for centuries extremely divided along divers religious, political and regional lines. The narrator has learned to dislike or even hate people belonging to other religious or political groups: the Alawites, referred to in the novel as the "members of the other sect" (106), secular Syrians whose blasphemies, as the narrator is told, must be punished (83), and the authorities and their Ba'ath

party, "the party that threw us into the arms of infidel Soviets" as her uncle Bakr complains to her (106). The reader, following the narrator's involvement into Syrian politics and the decisions that make her decide to become affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, catches a glimpse of the complexity of Syrian history. As devotedly religious Sunni Muslim woman, moreover supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, the narrator occupies a problematic and marginal position in Syrian society.

First of all, the narrator is subordinated by society because she is a Sunni Muslim. Sunnis, though making up more than seventy percent of the total Syrian population, are since the French entry into Syria in the 1920s unrepresented in the government, police, and army. Namely, France, afraid that the Sunni majority would use their capacity to actualize an independent Syrian state, fueled separatist tendencies and recognized the Alawi community as a separate, minority group that should be given a more central position in Syria (Zisser 131). Since then the Alawites gradually raised to prominence in Syrian politics and from the 1960s occupied Syria's most powerful and important political positions. The Sunnis, contrarily, though being a majority in Syria, can be considered a minority in the political sphere, primarily taking political positions in opposition to the regime.

The narrator is furthermore marginalized by being a religious Muslim, consciously taking her religion as her guide. Though Khalifa's novel makes clear that the narrator is supported in her religion by other religious Muslims, the narrator and her family do not feel that they, as believers, are represented in president Hafez al-Assad's government. The Ba'ath Party–a political movement that originally promoted pan-Arabic and socialist ideas and believed in the equality of all religions, but after the Ba'ath Party seized power in 1963 turned into a secular regime that revolved around its leader al-Assad and his family–discriminately favored Alawites and those loyal to President Hafez al-Assad. As the Ba'ath party tended more and more towards secular views, the discontent among the religious Syrians grew.

Thirdly, it is out of dissatisfaction, especially with her position as Muslim woman, that the narrator decides to become an active political member of the Muslim Brotherhood: a decision that marginalizes her even more in Syrian society. Namely, members of the movement did not shrink from using force against their opponents. Since they saw the rising political prominence of the Alawites as a threat to the, in their eyes, 'original' Sunni Muslim culture of Syria, the Muslim Brotherhood was determined to fight for and defend this original and religious culture by violent means (Rogan 508). When the organization's use of violence increased, many religious Syrians were no longer convinced of the righteousness of their aims and means.

This doubt is also an important theme in Khalifa's novel. When the Brotherhood opens the all-out war between them and the al-Assad's regime, by assassinating young Alawites students from the military academy, the house of the narrator's family is occupied by the police. As it becomes abundantly clear that the narrator's brother and uncle are involved in this cruel act, some family members start questioning the validity of killing 'innocent' sons of other sects. However, the narrator only for a moment sympathizes

with the murdered victims. She remains convinced by the idea that her group has "been chosen by God to bring back Islam, His Word and His brilliance" (121). The narrator describes how she convinces the girls of her religious circle who quote the Quran and say it is forbidden to murder innocent souls, that they have to see those murdered as heretics, the murders as *mujahideen* ('Islamic fighters') (121).[23] The narrator thus, holding on firmly to her belief in the justice of the brotherhood, continues her political activities as a fanatic member of the organization.

For the narrator, the bloody fight against the regime's army ends with the massacre in the Tadmor prison. Taking revenge on the almost successful attempt to assassinate the president, al-Assad's troops had calmly entered the cells of the prison and "cold-bloodedly opened fire on the prisoners, whose brains they splattered all over the walls and ceilings. The corpses were piled up in the corridors like rotten oranges thrown carelessly on to a rubbish dump" (Khalifa 228). The narrator's brother, Hossam, is one of the more than eight hundred prisoners that have been killed in less than an hour. Soon after the attack on the prison, the narrator is suddenly arrested by a patrol of the *Mukhabarat* when she is walking outside at night. In the last part of Khalifa's novel the narrator spends more than eight years in prison where she shares her cell with people from different religious and ideological groups that are all considered a threat by the president's regime.

The strong belief in one's own group, the opposing ideas about Syria's future, the hatred for Syrian citizens with different ideologies, and the necessity of using violent means against dissenters are not only important themes in Khalifa's novel, but also in present-day Syria. Since Syrian history seems to repeat itself in many aspects, especially the sectarian dissension among the population and the intense use of violence by all parties, it is more important than ever to recall Syria's violent years in the eighties.

Fadi Azzam's novel, *Sarmada*, gives a significantly different perspective on protest and the experience of protest in Syria. The story does not take place in one of Syria's biggest and most important cities, but in a very small village in the northeast of Syria, close to the Turkish border: Sarmada. The narrator of Azzam's novel is a man originally born in this small village, but having lived most of his life outside Syria, he has suppressed the memories of his birthplace. However, when during a reception in Paris, he meets a woman, Azza Tawfiq, who claims to have lived in Sarmada in a past life as Hela Mansour, he returns to the village. Initially, the narrator disdains Azza's belief in transmigration: the belief that a soul after the death of a person starts a new life in a new body. However, triggered by the many details Azza can tell about her 'former life,' the narrator, being filmmaker by profession, decides to gather the facts of Hela Mansou's life and to turn these into a documentary that accurately records Hela Mansour's life in the village of Sarmada in all its details. In the story that follows, the reader indeed gradually starts to learn

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23. *Mujahideen* (also *mujahedin* or *mujaheddin*) is the term used for Islamic fighters who defend their faith and believe to be fighting a holy war, or *jihad.*

about Hela Mansour, but also learns about the various problems that the narrator experiences during his documentary project about Sarmada (a topic I will discuss in the last part of this chapter).

In the village of Sarmada most inhabitants belong to the Druze community, another minority group in Syria that constitutes around three percent of the Syrian population. The specific religion of the Druze includes elements from Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Greek philosophy and Hinduism ("Druze"). As is made clear to the narrator of the story, the citizens are proud of their tolerant religion and their village where people from different sects live peacefully together. The narrator is told, for example, how it is a custom in Sarmada to baptize every child, no matter their religion or sect, and how the people of Sarmada with a majority of Druze, saw no problems in having a Christian leader (Azzam 16). Yet the citizens of the small village are willing to defend, at all costs, the independence of their community to preserve their specific way of living, their customs and traditions. Refrained from politics, but determined to combat everybody who could possibly threaten their small community, the Druze consider all groups that try to rule Syria, but especially their community–through words or through violence–'invaders.' The French colonizers, their neighboring country Israel, Marxism supporters or al-Assad's Ba'ath regime are all approached in the same way by the citizens of Sarmada since they collectively believe that all ideologies "failed to permeate the spirit of the place, the specific social character; no ideology–not Ba'athism, nor anything else–could ever truly master the human character" (73). The novel's wide time span in which the readers follow the lives and stories of three Druze women, Azza/Hela, Farida and Buthayna, covers therefore a whole range of Syrian wars and revolts in which Sarmada's citizens are involved.

The dead father of the first narrator, Hela Mansour, is one of the greatest heroes of the village since he heroically risked his life in the struggle against French occupation (Azzam 111). This Great Druze Revolt (1925-1927) in which different groups with nationalist ideas–the Druze being the most prominent–fought for independence from French rule, did not succeed (Rogan 288-292), but it nevertheless made Hamad al-Mansour and his family the central, most influential family of Sarmada. When Hela Mansour returns to Saramada, after having been on the run with her forbidden lover for a couple of years, she finds the village in a desperate state. The city suffers from the heavy defeat of the Six Day War, also euphemistically called 'the setback.' After six days of intense war in 1967, Syria, Egypt and Jordan lost crucial parts of their lands to Israel. In Syria Israel took control over the Golan Heights where the majority of the Syrian Druze lived.

It is Sarmada's intense feeling of being defeated after the Six Day War that determines the fate of two of the three female narrators. Having lost their honor in war, the men of Sarmada try to maintain the honor of the Mansour family by brutally murdering Hela for her 'betrayal' of running away with a foreign man (a link on which I will elaborate in the next chapter). Secondly, compensating their feeling of being defeated, they include Farida in their community: a beautiful woman from outside the village who after

her entry into Sarmada soon becomes the free-spirited woman who opens her door to every young men of Sarmada to sleep with him once (Azzam 38). Is it through her interaction with the young boys of Sarmada, that Farida learns about the Ba'ath party and the promises it makes for a new future for Syria. If she hears on the radio about the Corrective Revolution, the reform program introduced by Hafaz al-Assad after his *coup d'état* in 1970, she does not understand a word of it, but when her visiting boys start "parroting strange new words about liberty, unity and socialism–all the brand-new Ba'ath party slogans" (96), she understand her country is slowly changing. As Farida decides to give up her prostitute activities, the course of history thwarts her plans for the future. Hamoud, the man whom Farida tempts to become the father of her bastard son, is wildly enthusiastic when the October War breaks out: a war fought by the coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria against Israel in 1973. Soon after their marriage, Farida sees her husband climbing up the roof to watch ecstatically at the burned up Israeli jets in the distance and sees him disappear after he unconsideredly volunteers to join the army. Farida never hears of him again. After the war is over, he does not return, and Farida remains the single woman of Sarmada.

Though the citizens of Sarmada try to keep those forces that could influence or change the course of events in Sarmada–Israel's expansion of territory, Marxist leftism, Ba'athism– to a minimum, the village of Sarmada cannot exclude Syria and its politics. Therefore, inclusion in political movements and especially in revolts against 'intruders' is rather a permanent stage in the lives of Sarmada's citizens than an exception. Although the 2011 Syrian uprisings are not covered in Azzam's novel, we could try to imagine how Sarmada would perceive the recent revolts if we think about Sarmada's relation to all those earlier protests. Would they see the 2011 uprisings as an exceptional revolution, as a radical rupture with Syria's past, such as many commentators have presented it, or would they see it as yet another protest that could be added to the long list of movements and events that "failed to permeate the spirit of the place" (73)? Though we can only speculate on this question, we can state that Azzam's novel, by presenting Syria's turbulent history from the perspective of one of Syria's many minorities, can let readers think differently about the Syrian uprisings during the Arab Spring.

Egypt

Hisham Matar's most recent novel, *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, bears many thematic and (formal) resemblances to *In the Country of Men*. Also in this coming-of-age novel the narrator, Nuri, is a young boy (though slightly older than Suleiman) whose father is disappeared because of his involvement in political activities against the regime. However, while in *In the Country of Men* the setting of the mysterious political life of the narrator's father is clear–1979, Libya under the Gaddafi regime–the reader of *Anatomy of a Disappearance* is even more left in the dark. The reader learns that Nuri's family has fled to Cairo, Paris, Geneva and London from "our country" but never gets to know which country that is. It remains unclear from which place the narrator's father had to flee because of his political role in the

country in question. Nuri never speaks directly with his father about his political life. He only discovers indirectly in his father's "fat books" that his father–Kamal Pasha el-Alfi–"had been one of the king's closest advisers […] who after the revolution moved gradually, but with radical effect to the left" (25), changed from a believer in a constitutional monarchy into a Marxist "because each age calls for its own solution" (90). On the basis of these scarce details some reviewers have assumed "our country" refers to respectively Libya (see Worth) or Iraq (see Lee). Yet for the narrator it is not important to name the country and to specify the country's history. For him it is the disappearance of his father and the mysterious events surrounding his kidnapping that matter, not his father political ideologies. *Anatomy of a Disappearance* is a story about a boy who struggles to deal with the disappearance and loss of his father: a disappearance that turns out to be a secret kidnapping in Geneva, far beyond the borders of the country in whose politics his father had been absorbed his whole life. However, although the narrator grows up and slowly understands better what kind of person his father was, both politically as well as personally, this does not decrease his feeling of loss. To him the disappearance of his father is an absence "as heavy as a child sitting on my chest" (1). The fact that the disappearance is the consequence of a regime that does not tolerate alternative, political opinions does not seem to aggravate or relieve this absence.

Hisham Matar's second novel, compared to the other novels I have discussed so far, is less concerned with presenting histories of Arab countries that could be significant in the wake of the 2011 uprisings. Nevertheless, the novel painfully illustrates one of the greatest problems in Egypt, a problem that according to many scholars has been one of the main causes of the general discontent in Egyptian society that led to the massive uprising during the Arab Spring: the great gap between the rich and the poor Egyptian population. Nuri comes from a wealthy family and grows up in a house full of servants, cooks and drivers. Nuri, for whom these servant's services were always something obvious, becomes aware of the class divides in Egypt when they visit the house of Naima, their most loved servant who in the end of the novel turns out to be Nuri's mother. Out of safety his father decides to let their driver transport them to Naima's house by car. In the narrow streets of the neighborhood of Naima the car almost gets stuck and Nuri notices the poor circumstances in which the inhabitants of Naima's neighborhood are living:

> Raw sewage meandered down the middle of the road, passing neatly between the wheels. Father asked Abdu to roll up his window, but by then the stench had already entered the car. Above us clotheslines sagged under the weight and veiled most of the sky. Every so often Abdu had to press the horn, which sounded like an explosion in the narrow street. People then had to find a doorway to stand in, and even then we had to pass ever so slowly, brushing against their bodies. […] These people who lined the road stood still and kept their arms by their sides (51-52).

In this fragment, the bodily position of the inhabitants of this poor neighborhood illustrates their minor position in relation to rich citizens such as Nuri and his family. The 'aggressive' vehicle forces the poor

Egyptians to retreat themselves in their houses and to line themselves up in a row. It is in this submissive position that they are looked upon with both pity and fear by the passengers that are sitting in the safe environment of the car.

This same theme of the strong class divisions in Egyptian society is further developed and continued to the extreme in Ahmed Khaled Towfik's novel *Utopia*. In Towfik's futuristic, dystopian novel that takes place in Egypt, in the year 2023, readers follow the lives of two completely opposite characters whose paths accidentally cross. In the sections named "Predator" the reader looks through the eyes of an adolescent boy who lives a life of extreme luxury and boredom as a resident of Utopia, an "artificial paradise" (Towfik 9) created by rich Egyptians outside the city to isolate and defend themselves "from the sea of angry poverty outside" (11). To escape his bored life that consists of nothing more than sleeping, taking drugs, eating himself sick, and having sex (9), he decides to proof his manhood and starts 'hunting': an activity whereby Utopian residents sneak unnoticed into the territory of the "Others"–that is, the poor–catch one of them, and cut off a limb as souvenir. When, during his hunt, the Others discover he is from Utopia, Gaber, one of the Others, saves him. The sections of Gaber are titled "Prey" and tell the same story, but from the perspective of the Others. Gaber tells his readers how he has no chance to survive, since he believes that he is "born to lose" (54). His days do not pass in boredom, but instead in search of food without being violated or killed by other hungry people. Just as the ultra-wealthy narrator, Gaber suffers from the belief in the meaninglessness of life, but for totally different reasons. As he phrases it, a life without dreams or hope is "one looooo(what are you waiting for?)oooooo(nothing)ooong, grim present" (52).

By bringing those two perspectives together in one (textual) space, Towfik is pointing to a long, still persisting problem in Egypt: the growing apart of the extreme poor Egyptians and the ultra-wealthy. Although Towfik's novel is clearly fictional and Utopia, as it is written on the first page of his novel, "is an imaginary place," Utopia nonetheless refers to a real existing building project in Egypt. As Jack Shenker explains in an elaborated article on the so-called "satellite towns" of Cairo, during Hosni Mubarak's reign (1981-2011) in the early 1990s plans were announced to build luxurious residential complexes for the elites in the outskirts of the overcrowded and contaminated city. According to Shenker, the great differences between the lower and upper ranks of Egyptian society are a consequence of Mubarak's dictatorship that "relied on a rhetoric of 'stability' and the value of 'security' over freedom"; a rhetoric that finds its most extreme expression in the building project of the satellite cities. Only in an extremely divided society such as Egypt it is possible that glossy catalogues promote these residential complexes named "Beverly Hills," "Dreamland, "Utopia," in the desert, "promising 14 different underfloor-heated bathroom configurations" while "42% of the population lives below the poverty line" (Shenker).

In Towfik's novel the divided Egyptian society is doomed to explode. As the intelligent Gaber already predicts "a society without a middle class is a society primed for explosion (108)." The novel's ending in which the poor collectively turn against the Utopia residents confirms Gaber's statement and seems to give the dystopian novel a more positive ending. Yet, the promise for a better future remains precarious in *Utopia*. As Gaber recounts an earlier 'explosion' *at the beginning of the twenty-first century* (a sentence that just as the revolutionary ending, as some commentators have argued (see Samatar; Sakr (43)), foreshadowed the 2011 Arab uprisings) only turned Egyptian society more "into two poles and two peoples" (108). Instead of giving all Egyptians more equal chances, the uprising only widened the gap between rich and poor. Therefore, also in the case of the uprising with which the novel ends, it remains unclear if it promises a revolutionary change in Egyptian society.

Narrativity in historical representation

As I have illustrated so far, all five novels focus on important periods of Syrian, Libyan, and Egyptian history and thus, read in light of the recent 'events,' establish links between Syrian, Libyan and Egyptian pasts and their 'revolutionary' present: a link that, as I explained in the introduction, is not made in most popular accounts of the Arab Spring. To phrase it in line with the mole metaphor, the novels explore the subterranean 'earlier diggings' shortly before the 2011 Arab uprisings, the ground on which these recent revolutionary changes occurred. It is because of these alternative revolutionary worlds that the novels provide, that the works can make readers aware of the limits of the media's temporal framework. Moreover, these works offer an alternative temporal framework that includes a wider and more country-specific time period that can put the most recent uprisings in a different light. Namely, the 2011 protests, mostly conceived of as a unique event in the Arab world that marks a significant break with the Arab past, can alternatively be seen in line with earlier discontent under the Arab population, with underground protests and revolutions (successful and unsuccessful) of which these novels narrate.

However, these literary works do more than establishing a link between the past and present of diverse Arab countries, thereby extending the timeline of the call for democracy and uprisings in the Arab world. That is, the complex narrative structure of each of the novels destabilizes the dominant rectilinear and chronological way of telling history. As many scholars, Hayden White most famously, have argued, the most common historical discourse uses narrative to structure historical reality. As White explains in his essay "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" (1980), within this tradition of historical writing there is no clear narrator. "The events are chronologically recorded as they appear on the horizon of the story […] The events seem to tell themselves" (White 7). Yet, although most historical accounts take the form of an 'untold story'–after all, the subjective narrator does not clearly appear in the text–the historian still *narratives* a story, thereby selecting, structuring and highlighting certain events. In her book *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation* (1990) Ann Rigney points out how two of the most

important tools to give complex, collective events such as uprisings that are carried out and experienced by diverse groups and are taking place in different places at the same time, a certain coherence and particular significance, are linearity and chronology. Yet, as Rigney explains, although linearity and chronology are both important structuring tools, they also know certain limitations. With linearity, for example, it is impossible to relate more than one event to a certain point in time, even if events happened simultaneously. Similarly, the use of chronology obviously does not allow for other ways of ordering events than that of chronological sequence (Rigney 16-17).

Furthermore, as Kai-wing Chow accurately notes in his work about the writing of Chinese history, *Publishing, Culture, and Power in Early Modern China* (2004), the linear, chronological progressive story is the "specific temporality of Western Europe" (6). Since this specific way of history writing has been predominantly developed in Western societies, Chow argues that using this temporal format to study non-Western cultures, runs the risk of "reproducing Eurocentric narratives" and "misrepresenting the histories of non-Western cultures" (3). Although I do not want to argue that linear, chronological stories used to narrate the recent uprisings in the Arab world, are necessarily Eurocentric and inevitably misrepresent the uprisings because of their form, I think nonetheless that we have to keep Chow's warning in mind and prevent that we overlook all heterogeneous temporalities by conceiving one single and homogeneous temporality– the linear, chronological, progressive history–as natural and universal (Chow 6).

In this context, what the literary texts can achieve is to question this dominant historical discourse that is often taken for granted. By presenting historical and fictional elements in such a way that it is very hard to create a chronological, linear story of all these parts, these novels make readers realize that there are other forms of representing history. That does not mean that with these novels we can claim that nonchronological and nonlinear narratives are per definition better to represent certain events than chronological and linear historical accounts. Instead, they make readers aware of the tension between the diverse and complex historical material and the narratological means to construct a coherent historical story and, most importantly, with the ideological implications of the author's decisions (Rigney 106). After all, the narratological choices (how and in which order events are presented) inevitably guide readers in their interpretation of the narrated and narrativized events.

Although each of the five novels has its own complex narrative structure that precludes attempts to construct chronological stories, I will discuss two different examples from *Utopia* and *Sarmada* that are the most striking.

Encircling the Arab Spring

As stated by a reviewer of Towfik's *Utopia*: "Reading *Utopia* in 2011, it's impossible not to think of what's being called the 'Arab Spring,' and particularly the uprising that led to the fall of former Egyptian

President Hosni Mubarak" (Samatar). The most clear element of *Utopia* that leads to such statements is the novel´s ending in which the narrator of the "Predator" parts, meanwhile safely returned to Utopia, sees an enormous group of Others approaching their resident. Less than two years before the protests against Mubarak´s regime broke out, Towfik ended his novel with an, as Sakr has phrased it, "prophetic image of Egyptian popular unrest" (43).

> I gasped.
> I saw them there, advancing along the horizon. They were carrying torches and shouting in anger. […]
> They would be among us. […]
> All of them there. […]
> I wrenched the machine gun from the hands of a Marine standing beside me, and aimed it at the mass of humanity advancing on the horizon. I ignored the fact that I had never done this before, and the forceful slam I received in my upper arm from the recoil didn't weaken my courage. (156)

With this compelling end, Towfik did not only foreshadow the massive rise of the Egyptian people against those in power, but also anticipated the bloody confrontation between the citizens of Cairo and the regime's armed forces. Moreover, not only the novel's end, but also the novel as a whole can be read as a work of which the Egyptian uprisings of 2011 can be imagined a plausible continuation. After all, as I already explained, in *Utopia* Towfik refers to the quite recent controversial history of the building of satellite cities in the deserts surrounding Cairo as well as to an already longer existing problem: that is, the spatial and socio-economic marginalization of the poor in Egyptian society. As the novel suggests, a society that contains such extreme class differences will soon or later collapse. The collapse, in this case, is then the 2011 uprising in Egypt. Nevertheless, to state that Towfik's novel only anticipates the Egyptian uprisings is reducing the novel's complex, temporal relation to the Arab Spring, for the novel temporarily relates in two more ways to the rise against the Egyptian regime.

First of all, if we consider the novel a futuristic novel, the novel's temporal relation to the recent protests in Egypt changes. If we see the novel as a futuristic account of Egyptian society in 2023 (as the novels tells its readers) and take into account that, as the author writes himself, "The Utopia mentioned here is an imaginary place […] even though the author knows for certain that this place will exist soon" (Towfik), the Egyptian uprising can no longer be imagined the novel's imagined future, but only an event that preceded the novel's story. The earlier mentioned remark of one of the main characters, Gaber, about a failed revolution that took place in the beginning of the twenty-first century (Towfik 108) can in this light be read as a direct reference to the rise against Mubarak and its consequences.

Secondly, if we emphasize the utopian/dystopian character of the novel and the author's remark that his narrative takes place in an imaginary place, we can argue that the story is located outside normal conceptions of time, that Utopia describes a parallel world that temporally lies beyond the world the reader lives in. In that case, we can still bring Towfik's novel into relation with the Arab Spring, but do not have to temporally define this relation.

In other words, the Egyptian uprising can be connected to Towfik's fictional narrative in several ways: as an imaginable future of the novel if we look at the problems and rising unrest that the story depicts and the anticipation of an uprising in the end of the novel; as an event that preceded the story, and in the novel is presented as a 'failed revolution' since it has caused even stronger tensions between the "predators" and the "prey" in Utopia; Finally as an political event that lies outside the utopian world of the novel, as a political event that is located in a parallel world. Encircling the Egyptian protests in several ways (as its past, its future, and as a parallel world), Towfik's novel (read after 2011) refuses to place the 2011 protests unquestionably in a chronological timeline, whereby the uprisings signify the end of a dark history, and the promise of a new beginning.

Azzam's *Sarmada* it is the confrontation between the narrator and the inhabitants of Sarmada with each their own way of storytelling that is interesting in the context of the temporal framing of the Arab Spring. As I already described, the novel starts with one narrator who wants to turn Hela Mansour's life into a documentary. However, in the process of "collecting and comparing all the different versions [of Hela's life and especially her death]" (Azzam 7) the narrator realizes the impossibility of his project. The various ways in which the citizens of Sarmada tell about Hela's life make him realize that Hela's story cannot be told without introducing other stories: stories that both precede and follow Hela's death. Several times, the narrator tries to tell Hela's story "from the beginning" (7), but every citizen that he interviews about Hela, takes a new starting point, thereby collectively showing him that it is impossible to speak about 'the beginning' of a certain history. Furthermore, as the interviewees narrate about Hela's life in Sarmada, they constantly depart from their subject. So in the end, while the narrator promises his readers to give one story, the story of Hela, the novel finally tells about the lives of three women in Sarmada, and about numerous other citizens, important moment of Syrian history, the village of Sarmada, etc.

While on the first pages the narrator clearly introduces himself as 'the narrator' of the novel, he gradually loses his initially claimed authority. When he starts interviewing, the citizens of Sarmada take over his story in such a way that it becomes completely unclear in the end who is telling the story. Therefore, at the beginning of the second part he informs his readers he will "disappear" as narrator and "let the place tell its own story" (44). Yet, he also cannot maintain his role as objective observer, watching "from a distance, but with every sense piqued," no interfering, but simply recording (44). As the novel arrives at the climax of Hela's story–the brutal murder of Hela by her own brothers–the narrator becomes so involved in her story that once reporting about her brutal death he feels the pain of Hela himself: "Had she not come over me? I'd taken the stabs alongside her. I'd chocked on the sour blood in her throat. I watched her memories soar and touched the awesome darkness as she lay there, motionless" (36). At that moment, although the murder of Hela is an event of the past, to the narrator it becomes an event he experiences himself in the present.

By foregrounding the struggle of the narrator between, on the one hand, his historical material about Hela's life and, on the other hand, the narratological means to present this history, Sarmada illustrates the inevitable, narratological choices that have to be made, and the numerous narrative forms that can be used in representing history. It is not only the 'grand narrative' the narrator is trying to write about Hela that is unsettled in Azzam's novel, but the idea of 'the historical grand narrative' itself.

In this chapter I have focused on the relation between the temporality of the Arab Spring narrative and the alternative temporalities the literary texts offer. In contrast to the notion of the Arab Spring as an event that breaks with the past, the novels provide stories of protests and revolutions in the past of which the Arab Spring uprisings can be imagined a continuation. At the same though, all the novels question such a clear linear and chronological course of events. As I have illustrated with examples from *Sarmada* and *Utopia* past, present and future are intertwined in a complex way. Therefore, we can conclude that the stories of these five novels not only precede the recent Arab uprisings, but inextricably encircle them.

3.

(In)visible Spaces of Resistance: Protest beyond Tahrir Square

A political event occurring everywhere is something that does not exist.
The site is the thing whereby the Idea, still fluid, encounters popular genericity.
A non-localized Idea is impotent.

-       Badiou, *The Rebirth of History*

One of the first images that comes to mind if we think about the Arab Spring is an image of Tahrir Square (Liberation Square) in Cairo, overrun with protesters: a public space where thousands of Egyptians gathered to meet other protesters, built up encampments, displayed their posters and shouted their protest slogans, both in the days leading up to the downfall of Mubarak and in the tumultuous days that followed. That these images are the most prominent in our (recent) collective memory of the Arab Spring is not surprising. Although it can be said that Tahrir Square has indeed functioned as the geographic epicenter of the Egyptian uprisings, the media also has confirmed and reinforced the centrality of Tahrir Square in the protests with its numerous photographs of the square and the masses of protesters that occupied this public space. The enormous amount of images and descriptions of Tahrir Square contributed to the transformation of Tahrir Square into a symbolic space: a place that has come to be seen as the ultimate center of protest, not only of the Egyptian uprisings, but of all uprisings in the Arab world.

However, although the symbolic image of Tahrir Square has incited protests all over the world (think for example of the Wall Street movement in New York or the Spanish protesters at Puerta del Sol in Madrid who compared themselves to the protesters on Tahrir Square), the visible omnipresence of Cairo's public square problematically causes the exclusion of several groups and contributes to a one-sided image of resistance and domination. Namely, people who only focus on the masses of protesters on Tahrir Square risk to think in the context of the Arab Spring exclusively about one single form of oppression (the autocratic regimes of Arab countries and its supporters) and one single form of protest (everybody who acts against the regime). With such a view on protest versus domination several groups are excluded who experience more or different forms of domination while exactly these diverse images of protests are indispensable in the process of constructing a complete image of the 2011 uprisings and their significance.

This is problematic first of all, because the spatial framing of the Arab Spring enhances the tendency to simply generalize the Arab people that are all involved differently in the protests and think about the protesters of the Arab Spring in an undifferentiated way: a tendency that is very characteristic of Orientalist discourse. Secondly, as long as those people beyond Tahrir Square are not acknowledged as protesters, they will never be released from oppression, no matter if the autocratic regime is still in power or not. After all, the image of the Arab protesters as a unified mass, protesting in *one* place, from *one*

position, allows for the conclusion that all the inhabitants of the Arab region are 'freed' at the moment the autocratic regimes are toppled.

Contrarily, Rita Sakr approaches the omnipresence of Tahrir Square more positively. According to her, we reduce the strength of Tahrir Square if we only consider it a "limited space that has become iconic in the international media." Therefore, in her book *Anticipating the 2011 Arab Uprisings* (2013), she considers Tahrir Square both a "symbolic political geography" that extends to the whole nation of Egypt and to the other revolting countries of the Arab Spring, and as a "language and practice of 'Tahrir/'liberation'" that includes the decades of resistance against imperial and authoritarian regimes that preceded the Arab Spring (24). In her view Tahrir Square would thus work as both a physically and symbolically central space that not only draws international attention to itself, but also to an extensive Arab region and its history of protest against oppression. However, can Tahrir Square be, as Sakr proposes, such as symbolic political geography and language/practice of liberation, if those protests beyond the square fall outside the hegemonic distribution of the sensible, as Rancière would say? How can a public space encompass spaces of resistance that are not (yet) visible, sayable or thinkable since they are not included in the dominant sensible order? Although I agree with Sakr that Tahrir Square could function as an extensive space/language of protest, the less central and visible spaces in the margins first have to be made thinkable and have to be brought quite literally 'into view' in order to become part of the central space of revolt.

In the novels of Azzam, Matar, and Khalifa these protests from the margins are explored. Exactly by providing these various spaces of revolt, the novels block the reader's tendency to generalize the Arab world and its people. Moreover, through the novels' alternative spaces of domination and resistance it becomes moreover clear that there are various power structures beyond the regime and its opponents that are not simply enfeebled when the autocratic general or president renounces his position. Before discussing two marginalized spaces that are centralized in the novels, the countryside and the domestic sphere, I will first discuss how foregrounding space in the context of protest can enrich our understanding of resistance.

Foregrounding Space

It is remarkable that despite the centrality of Tahrir Square in the media, especially in the form of photographs, the role of public space such as Tahrir Square has hardly been discussed (for an example of such a photograph, see figure 1). In a *TIME Magazine* article Josh Sanburn argues how the functioning of space in the Arab uprisings is overshadowed by the crucial role that is ascribed to social media in stimulating the protests throughout the Arab world. While "a tremendous amount of ink has been used for Facebook and Twitter" (Vishaan Chakrabarti qtd. in Sanburn), almost nobody has discussed the role of space in the Arab Spring.

Helga Tawil-Souri explains in her article "It's still about the Power of Place," in which she fervently argues that territorial place continues to be a crucial element for political change, why this foregrounding of social media is so problematic. According to her, the risk with these numerous articles and books that discuss the role of social media in the Arab Spring is that they tend to assume that media are the (new) spaces of revolution themselves. Therefore, in her article she criticizes these analyses that suppose the protests primarily took place 'online,' on Facebook, twitter and other social networks, thereby underestimating or even ignoring those citizens who were not part of the digital community, but whose protests on Tahrir Square (or other public spaces) were indispensable for the beginning and continuation of the protests (87). Although she does not want to argue that new media have not played a significant role in the Arab uprisings, she insists that new media have not replaced the physical public spaces, since the uprisings could not have taken place without the masses of protesters gathering together on the streets and squares in Arab cities. As she concludes:

> [W]hat the uprisings confirmed [...] is that places, and presence and action in places continue to matter in these days of 'flows'. Where, when, and for how long people gather, [...] is a fundamental requirement for political change. What the uprisings also equally confirmed is that media provide a means of navigation, not the migration of politics to a virtual realm. (95)

Yet, although Tawil-Souri importantly centralizes geography and physical space in relation to the Arab Spring, in her article she does not really elaborate on the different functions of space in the Arab uprisings or why exactly it is fruitful to centralize space in analyses of the recent protests in the Arab world. Her article does not go beyond arguing for the importance of Tahrir Square as a public space where the citizens of Cairo could come together for protests. However, the role of space, geography, is far more significant and wide-ranging than Tawil-Souri presents it. It raises many questions such as: How is space used by both the ones in power and the protesters? How does centralizing the role of space in thinking about resistance change our view on the uprisings? How does space make certain forms of resistance possible (and visible) and others not (Pile 2)?

In the introduction to his collection of essays on the geographies of resistance, Steve Pile argues that despite the fact that we characterize resistance mostly by action–"the strike, the march, the formation of community organizations, and so on" (4)–and that, consequently, the spaces of resistance are often conceived of as unimportant, as the "back-drop to the real stuff of politics and history" (4), a focus on space can transform our understanding of domination and resistance. In his *Geographies of Resistance* (1997), several scholars analyze how foregrounding the locations of protest can unsettle all notions of a singular, isotropic and universal experience of domination and resistance (4).[24] Domination and

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24. Steve Pile's call for a more active understanding of space, does of course not come out of nowhere, but is closely related to diverse scholars such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault and David Harvey who have all pointed to the importance of space in our understanding of knowledge, power, the functioning of societies and social relations. Henri Lefebvre, for example, already argued in his groundbreaking work *La Production de l'espace* ('The

resistance, as it is argued in the collection, are experienced differently from various *positions* and *places*. Furthermore, the contributors of the collection show how it is too simple to clearly divide between spaces of resistance and spaces of domination. Though they acknowledge that those in authority have the power to produce and control space through, for example, differentiating between parts of territory or controlling movements within and across borders, "these spatial practices of oppression do not mean that resistance is forever confined to the authorized spaces of domination" (3) To the contrary, according to Steve Pile resistance has its own distinct spatiality, often related but never completely confined to spaces produced and controlled by those in power. One of those spaces in which the hegemonic order can be resisted is literature. As I will explain in this chapter, the novels of this thesis can function as literary 'heterotopia's,' a term used by Michel Foucault to refer to counter-spaces (spaces that are both physical and mental) that can be characterized as non-hegemonic: it are "other spaces" (Foucault 1986) that differ in a certain way from society's hegemonic space and unsettle this hegemonic space (Hetherington 39-54).[25] Before illustrating how the novels can be considered heterotopia's in relation to the hegemonic space of the Arab Spring (narrative), I first want to analyze how the dynamic between space, domination, resistance, as Pile has described it, is thematized in Matar's *In the Country of Men*.

Figure 1: "The scene in Tahrir Square earlier this evening as protesters awaited President Mubarak's address." *The Guardian* 1 February 2011. Web. 7 July 2014.

Production of Space) (1974) that space is more than "the passive locus of social relations" (Lefebvre 11). As he has famously explained, space (not conceived of as a thing, but rather as a set of relations between things (83)) is constantly produced and reproduced. Since this production of space is a social process it is also inevitably related to power. Therefore, according to Lefebvre, if we want to change life, we have to change space (190). Also Foucault and Harvey, each in their own way, have argued for the active production of space. See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces" (1984) and David Harvey, *Spaces of Capital: Towards a Critical Geography* (2001).

25. Strictly speaking, in Foucault's article "Of other spaces," in which he most elaborately discusses the notion of heterotopia, he does not mention literary heterotopia's since he wants to emphasize that heterotopia's are not only metaphorically spatial, but are also located in actual space (Thacker 28). However, if we realize that literature does not only relate to space in the sense that stories are located in imaginary worlds, but also are situated in actual space, since, as Said has argued, texts are worldly and therefore always contain within it (the conditions of) their material existence, we can see how Foucault's understanding of heterotopia's can also be used for literary heterotopia's.

Foregrounding Martyr's Square in *In the Country of Men*

In the first scene of *In the Country of Men*, the young narrator Suleiman is asked by his mother to wait for her at the central square of Tripoli, Martyr's Square. In the scene this public space takes on a central role and illustrates how Libya has a history of various protests and dictatorships and how the public space has opposing meanings for various persons:

> She took me downtown to […] Martyr's Square. […] 'Listen, she called after me, 'Wait for me by Septimius Severus. […] I leaned against the cool marble pedestal of Septimius Severus. The Roman Emperor stood above me, his silver-studded belt curving below his belly, pointing his arm towards the sea, 'Urging Libya to look towards Rome,' was how Ustath Rashid [his best friend's father, a teacher of Art History] described the pose. […] I remembered our Guide standing in one of his military uniforms like this, waving his arms as the tanks passed in front of him on Revolution Day. (4)

Before giving a close analysis of the role of space in this fragment, it is useful to give a short history of the square and of the different names that are given to the square. Originally the square was constructed by the Italian colonizers who ruled the area that is now present-day Libya from 1934 to 1951. During the Italian colonial period the square was called *Piazza Italia*. However, after Libyan independence (1951) the square came to be known as Independence Square or Martyr's Square. When colonel Gaddafi took over power in 1969 with a successful *coup d'état* against King Idris I of Libya who reigned the country since 1951, Gaddafi renamed the square. The official name became Green Square, a name in line with Gaddafi´s Green Book in which he had written down his political philosophy. During the Arab Spring, when massive groups of protesters came together on the square, protesters started to use again the name ´Martyr´s Square,´ to make clear their dissociation from Gaddafi´s regime.

After this short overview of differ names of the square, I want to focus on several elements of this fragment–the statue of Septimius Severus, the use of the name Martyr's Square, the comment of Ustath Rashid–that indirectly point to the various layers of colonial, monarchical, and dictatorial occupation of Libya that all come together in the public space of Martyr's Square. First, the statue of Septimius Severus refers to the times in which Libya was part of the Roman Empire (146 BC - 670 AD) and Septimius Severus the Roman Emperor, a despotic emperor who even killed his own sister to remain in power (193 – 211 AD) ("Septimius Severus"). However, the statue of Severus and the origins of the construction of Martyr's Square itself go back to colonial times in which Libya was under Italian rule and the square was called *Piazza Italia*. The grandeur of the square showed the Libyan citizens at that time the incontestable power of the Italian empire and reminded them who their ruler was, as the subtle comment of Ustath Rashid indicates. Moreover, since in Matar's novel Gaddafi is still in power, it is significant that the narrator Suleiman knows the square as Martyr's Square–probably a name he has copied from his parents. By refusing to use the official name Gaddafi gave to the square and instead referring to the square with an older name, the name it had during the Kingdom of Libya (1951-1969), it becomes immediately clear that

Suleiman's family does not support Gaddafi's regime. Thus, while the square was the central place of demonstrations and mourning for the victims in Libya during the Arab Spring, the square in Matar's novel refers to a history (and present) of domination and protest that all took place on this same public space. The square in this fragment maps the history of Libya, almost never linked to the Arab Spring as I have explained in the previous chapter. A focus on space thus brings to light the 'forgotten' years of Libya's past that preceded the 2011 uprisings and makes the connection between Libya's history and presence of protest thinkable.

Furthermore, the square becomes the focal point of a tension between Suleiman, his father and mother, whereby each person experiences the square and its connotations of both domination and revolt in their own way. For Suleiman's father, Martyr's Square signifies primarily a site of underground protest. Namely, while waiting for his mother Suleiman discovers that his father who told him that he would be abroad on business trip, has secretly stayed in Tripoli to carry out clandestine plans:

> But then, not looking for but falling directly on my target, I spotted Baba […] followed by Nasser [his father's office clerk], carrying the black shiny typewriter under one arm […] They entered one of the buildings overlooking the square. It was a white building with green shutters. Green was the colour of the revolution, but you rarely saw shutters painted in it. (5-6)

Although Suleiman himself only later understands that his father is involved in the anti-Gaddafi movement, the reader learns that the square, under the authority's nose, is the risky location of the movement's office where they type leaflets to fan the flames of resistance under the Libyan population. Yet for Suleiman himself, Martyr's square becomes both a space of occupation and revolt. Before he sees his father enter the building where the movement's clandestine office is located, he imagines the sculpture as the ultimate symbol of occupation, bringing three different oppressors–the Roman emperor, Italian colonial rule, and Gaddafi–together in one statue. In Suleiman's imagination the statue, towering high above him, takes on the appearance of colonel Gaddafi in military uniform, no longer pointing towards Rome, but to the tanks that celebrate the Gaddafi regime on Revolution Day: "The Roman Emperor stood above me, […] pointing his arm towards the sea, 'Urging Libya to look towards Rome,' […] I remembered our Guide standing in one of his military uniforms like this, waving his arms as the tanks passed in front of him on Revolution Day" (4). Though the narrator is too young to realize it himself, with his unconscious comparison, he puts colonel Gaddafi on par with leaders from the past who tried to rule and control the Libyan population.

While for the young Suleiman the size and the bustle of the square, and especially the grandeur of the statue is somewhat frightening, for his mother, to the contrary, the statue means safety (for herself and her son). As she returns and sees that her son has strayed far from the statue of the emperor she says "Didn't I tell you to wait by the sculpture?" (6). As Rita Sakr rightly analyzes, straying too far from the

statue, a statue that has just been transformed from Septimius Severus into Gaddafi, signifies "the frightening possibility of dissent" (63), especially since Suleiman unwittingly walked away from the statue after following his father during his father's rebellious activities. While Gaddafi's regime, embodied by the statue on Martyr's square, maybe does not give Suleiman's mother complete freedom, she knows that following the rules of the regime, that is remaining within the boundaries of the square, can offer the most hope for the safety of her family. As we can conclude from the analysis of this fragment, Martyr's square, during the Arab Spring the most visible space of resistance, functions both as space of oppression and space of revolt. Although a public space shared by all characters, Martyr's square has a different meaning for each of the characters who experience the existence of domination and protest that the square evokes all in their own way.

Lastly, though in Matar's *In the Country of Men* the anti-Gaddafi activities, quite unlikely, are carried out in sight of Libya's authorities, on one of the most central and busy spots of Tripoli, their secret office is nevertheless located on the borders of the square. Also, while the readers know where Suleiman's father carries out his dangerous businesses, throughout the novel these practices remain out of sight. The reader never gets to see what Suleiman's father is exactly doing. In this way Matar's novel introduces an important theme in the context of centralizing and emphasizing one space of resistance: the resistance from the margins. Some resistance maybe more visible than others, but that does not mean there exists no protest outside the center of revolt. In the novels of Azzam, Matar, and Khaled two of these marginal spaces are centralized: Syria's countryside and the space of the home.

Syrian Peripheral Protests

Lila Abu-Lughod, professor of Anthropology and Women´s and Gender Studies, has described her experiences of watching the unfolding of the protests in the Arab world from a distance, by watching, like most people in the world, prominent television channels such as *Al-Jazeera* and *BBC*. In her article "Living the Revolution in an Egyptian Village" (2012) she describes how she was struck by the strongly consistent vantage point of various networks: "A reporter speaking from a balcony or rooftop overlooking the masses below in Tahrir Square" (21), only occasionally alternated by interviews with individuals from the crowd and by sporadic reports "from the streets of Alexandria, Suez, or Port Said, where people were also demonstrating" (21). As Abu-Lughod writes, although she was thrilled by the uprisings, she missed something: Why did reporters not leave Tahrir Square or even Cairo to interview people who were not protesting on Tahrir Square? What was happening outside Cairo? How were people experiencing the uprising in small villages? Focusing in her article on a small village in the South of Egypt, where citizens felt part of the protesting crowd on Tahrir Square, but simultaneously experienced the revolution differently, Abu-Lughod concludes that every village has its own unique "Tahrir Square" and that the Arab revolution is not only lived nationally or even pan-Arabically, but mostly locally.

Following Abu-Lughod's analysis of Egypt, we could similarly look critically at the covering of Syria's uprising in the media. Since also in Syria, the news reports of the protests in Syria focused on the public spaces of the country's big cities such as Saba Bahrat Square in Damascus and Saadallah al-Jabri Square in Aleppo where both supporters and opponents of al-Assad's regime gathered to voice their opinions. However, even more than in Egypt, the reports from the big cities offered only a partial view of a broader and more complex political and social situation: a situation in which the Syrian citizens did not raise against the Ba'ath regime in unity, but where many groups, for various reasons, protested against President Bashar al-Assad or against the protesters themselves (Pinto 207). For example, the peasants living in Syria's country side–a group marginalized for years by the Ba'ath regime–and their relation to the regime and the protests against it, can provide an alternative view on Syria's political situation. In contrast to the bird's-eye view on public squares in Aleppo and Damascus, Azzam's novel gives its reader an insight in Syria's often overlooked countryside where the citizen's adherence to or interest in Syria's regime does not stem from their political ideologies, but more from their local identity that they try to preserve.

The first image the narrator of Azzam's novel sketches of Sarmada, a Syrian mountain town close to the border with Turkey, is the image of a village were everything happens according to the easy pace and the age-old customs of the town and its inhabitants. The radical political changes Syria goes through– the different wars with Israel, the coming into power of general Hafiz al-Assad–just as the gradual modernization of the country, do not seem to change the life in the remote hills of Syria. While the inhabitants of the area that since 1951 is officially known as Libya struggle against big forces such as the Ottoman Empire, the French colonizers and the strict Ba'ath regime, the inhabitants of Sarmada are keeping themselves busy with conflicts within their specific Druze community, with family quarrels and love affairs. For the people of Sarmada "politics seemed like it took place on a different planet" (73). At the moment that Farida, one of the main characters, hears on the radio about the Corrective Revolution that changed Syria drastically, the narrator (the 'voice of Sarmada' that consists of the various voices of Sarmada's citizens) comments: "Yet there wasn't a force on earth that could alter the routine she established. She was like Sarmada: whatever was going on in this world marched along easily until it got to this volcanic plain where its seeds might be accepted, but its roots always failed to penetrate the ground" (96).

However, in contrast to the many statements of Sarmada's inhabitants in which they declare their village has nothing to do with Syrian politics cities, the attentive reader will notice how all the important events of the novel coincide with or are caused by Syria's national politics. For example, the two most violent events of the novel, the slaughter of Hela Mansour and the accidental shooting of Farida's husband on her wedding, run parallel to the violent Six Day War that took place in 1967 (Nader). Furthermore, with both incidents, the men of Sarmada act cruelly and rashly to compensate the painful experience of

defeat after the Six Day War, also euphemistically called 'the setback.' Under the guise of family honor, Hela's brothers, with tacit consent of the rest of the village, brutally slaughter their own sister with several knifes. Though the entire population feels incredibly guilty after the incident, nobody accuses the brothers or other passive witnesses since "the Six Day 'setback' […] had absolved a young woman's beastly slaughter" (48). In a similar way, nobody blames the murderer of Salman al-Khattar, just happily married with the stunning Farida. Drinking away their defeat in the Six Day War, the male wedding guests become incredibly drunk and start to expose their manhood–"they still had their self-respect, you know, even after the Six Day 'Setback'" (48)–by shooting and saluting with their pistols in the air. As the party raged one bullet is accidentally fired in the wrong direction and ends up in Salman al-Khattar's chest, making Farida a widow, only a couple of hours after being married. However, also the men's frenzied behavior that causes the death of a citizen, is taken for granted and conceived as a 'logical consequence' of the heavy defeat in the Six Day War.

As these two examples make clear, the course of events in the novel are in conflict with the statements of the characters who declare that their lives are not affected by political decisions and developments beyond the borders of their village. This interesting tension complicates the readers view on resistance. In *Sarmada*, the resistance against external forces that try to dominate their land, is no longer presented as a massive, unified revolt against imperial or national regimes, but as a resistance with a twofold character. First, the citizen's involvement, whether or not unwittingly, in the 'classic' revolts of the Syrian population against various forces such as the Ottoman empire, France, Egypt and al-Assad's Ba'ath party. Second, the resistance against the idea that their lives are determined and ruled by Syria's national politics, the resistance against choosing a political position or joining a resistance, the resistance against resistance itself. After all, the citizens of Sarmada have not only been dominated, just as the Syrian population, by several regimes, but also by Syria's national politics, as it is played in the capital.

Furthermore, as the two examples illustrate, the village of Sarmada also has its own internal power struggle between people who try to dominate the village and determine the course of events, and people who try to resist these people. This 'local' tension between domination and resistance sometimes mirrors national power relations, but sometimes radically contradicts it. The narrator of the novel reflects on this sometimes painful contrast, during the village's mourning of their martyr: one of the Mansour brothers who died as a soldier during the October War:

> The Mansour family was the most freedom-loving and independent-minded family in the whole   of   the mountain region and they took pride in their long legacy of repelling anyone who came and tried to impose their will and laws on them. Their ancestor had refused every last Ottoman edict [...] The martyr's father had been a wanted fugitive until the French finally left Syria and his uncle had taken part in all the great uprisings, but then how could the heir of a family who considered freedom so sacred bring himself to kill

his sister, who wanted only the same right to choose her own life partner and as a result was slaughtered like a lamb? (111)

Who is the oppressor in this fragment? Who is the one oppressed? Where can we locate resistance? Who is resisting whom? Looking at Syria's politics and history both nationally and locally unsettles all clear distinctions between oppressor and oppressed, ruler and protester. It forces us to reconsider the easy divide between those in power, those who use "oppressive, injurious and contemptible means to secure their control" and those who stand in opposition to power, "the people fighting back in defence of freedom, democracy and humanity" (Pile 1). Instead, attention for the diverse geographies of resistance makes us aware that human beings are positioned in various ways in unequal power structures; how not only those who are most clearly holding power constitute and maintain relationships of authority, but also less powerful people; how the relation between domination and resistance is not definite, but always in motion; how this relation has to be redefined, depending on the point (and place) of perspective (Pile 3).

With *Sarmada* Fadi Azzam includes Syria's periphery into the history of Syria, into the events that anteceded the Syrian uprising that started in March 2011. Rather than a 'secondary space' where conflicts and protests are carried out and experienced to a lesser degree, in Azzam's novel Sarmada (representing similar mountain towns) is been given the power to incite a revolution:

> What was waiting there in that silent, stoic village? […] You could tell it was on the verge of erupting. The Hauran Plain and its spirit fields, yellow as if sickly, stretching across the surface of the poor, confused forgotten place in the south. Here, power lies exclusively in the dried-up bush and chaff and all it takes is one match to set everything alight. [...] Sarmada's the centre of the world […]. (105-106)

In the novel Sarmada asks for recognition, for the acknowledgment of Sarmada as a geographic place and space of resistance that has a unique relationship to Syria's history and politics. Sarmada as a space of resistance cannot be equated with central places such as Damascus or Cairo's Tahrir Square. Similarly, the citizens of Sarmada cannot be equated with the most visible protesters on public squares in big cities because for them the stakes are completely different. Therefore, the inclusion of Sarmada into the (national) space of protest does not simply enlarge the boundaries of the revolutionary space, but transforms Martyr's Square, "both as symbolic political geography and as language/practice of revolt" (Sakr 24).

Furthermore, especially in light of the post-uprising situation in Syria, this attention for the diverse positions of protesters in times of resistance is convenient. Syria, that has always been a 'divided' country because of its religiously mixed population, has even become more divided after the uprisings started in 2011. Soon after the first massive protests against the government started in March 2011, a violent conflict erupted among the internally divided protesters that is still ongoing. Protesters are now

not only fighting against the regime and the increasing pro-government paramilitary groups, but also with each other. The group opposing the regime consists of a broad range of opposition movements, from strict Islamists to youth rebellion groups, and leftist, secular organizations. While they all fight for the downfall of President Bashar al-Assad, they all disagree with each other about what should happen after al-Assad's departure. Therefore, in order to understand the situation in Syria, attention for the diverse forms of domination and resistance (an attention that Azzam's *Sarmada* clearly has) can be a means to understand and judge the post-uprising dissension of Syria.

After having discussed the spaces on the margins, we turn our attention to another space that is brought into being in the literary works: the home, the household, the 'indoor' experience of resistance.

The Domestic Space of Oppression and Resistance

The limited focus on the public sphere in the narration of the Arab Spring fits within the long-standing tradition to locate politics predominantly in the public sphere: the space of civil society where citizens can discuss their common affairs; a site, distinct from the state, that can be a potential space of resistance since it is a "site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state" (Fraser 57).[26] This restriction of politics to the public sphere has been contested for a long time, especially by feminist critics of the second wave who have argued in various ways that the public-private dichotomy is a false dichotomy that excludes women (and children) from the political life. Furthermore, they argued that this dichotomy does not allow for the acknowledgment that certain important issues such as rape and domestic violence are no private problems, but are also structured by public factors and, consequently, have to be challenged through political means and actions (see for example Pateman 118-140; Okin). This criticism is most famously expressed in a slogan that became a common phrase of the feminist movements of the 1960s, "the personal is political": a slogan used to make people aware of the connection between women's problems that were considered personal, and various power structures in society. Since then, in critical studies, politics have mostly be understood in a more encompassing and subtle way, as Rancière's broad definition of politics, for example, illustrates.

Although this problematic dichotomy is thus no longer as established as it used to be, and although I do not want to claim that the Arab Spring has reintroduced the dichotomy, thereby completely excluding women from the political sphere, it is apparent that in the media coverage only those protests in the public sphere were brought into view. By reading the newspapers and watching television, outside spectators of the Arab Spring never saw or heard how the uprisings where experience or carried out within the homes of the Arab population (the 'former' private, domestic sphere, considered non-political)

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26. If I use the term 'public sphere' I refer exclusively to the sites of public discourse. As Nancy Fraser rightly argues the notion of public sphere (especially in opposition to the private sphere) has become a very broad term that denotes everything that does not belong to the familiar or domestic sphere. However, in my use of the term, the public sphere is the site of civil society, not to be conflated with the state or the market of paid employment (Fraser 57).

by the inhabitants of the home (mainly women). Simply said, women were only partly visible as protesters. While women were not completely excluded from the public sphere of protest–female protesters were clearly visible after all[27]– women who were resisting from less visible spaces (such as the home) and their activities of resistance are undervalued. In other words, the scarce attention for spaces in times of protest that were less visible than the public square, has caused a lack of recognition for the various roles that women and children have and can play in revolutionary periods and under oppressive regimes: as victims of domination, as persons experiencing resistance (both positively and negatively), and as active participants of revolt.

It are exactly these roles that are explored in the literary works of this thesis. In contrast to the media's exclusive attention for the public sphere where the Arab Uprising and the regime's resistance to those uprisings so clearly took place, the novels narrate stories of oppression and revolt from the inside, from the point of view of those whose lives are mostly lived in spaces beyond the public space. Again, just as with the inclusion of the peripheral areas of Syria, the novels' focus on these alternative spaces in relation to protest, forces readers to reconsider the traditional definitions of domination and resistance. As the novels make clear, those people that predominantly live their lives inside their homes, do not simply copy the roles of the 'public protester' in revolt, neither do they take positions in resistance that radically oppose those of the public protester. Rather, *In the Country of Men*, *Sarmada* and *In Praise of Hatred* show how the inhabitants of domestic spaces experience several forms of domination and how they, therefore, participate in the resistance in their own way, thereby creating alternative spaces of resistance.

As I already explored in the previous chapter the reader of *In the Country of Men* only receives scarce information about the political struggle that takes place in the public sphere. Although the reader learns that there is a heavy struggle going on between Gaddafi's regime and the leftist underground movement in which the narrator's father takes part, the novel is primarily focused on the ways in which the oppressive regime influences life inside the house, the domain of the child narrator Suleiman and his mother. The novel reminds us again that also here, in a space outside the public sphere, life is determined by politics. From the very first page of the novel it becomes clear that the lives of Suleiman and his mother are very determined by the espionage practices of the regime and the antigovernment activities of the father. Although he and his mother try to keep it outside the doors of their house, politics infiltrates their household, penetrates into their private life. At the moment the father is suspected by the regime to be a traitor, Suleiman and his mother are the ones who have to save his reputation by burning in secret all the evidence–the books, the pamphlets, the letters–and by hanging an enormous portrait of Colonel Gadaffi on the wall of their living room (91-92). Besides, at the moment Suleiman's father disappears, Suleiman and his mother become the targets of the officials who surround or even enter their house to

27. Although women were clearly part of the protesting crowds on public squares (as photographic coverage of the protest evidently shows) I will discuss in the next chapter why the (visible) coverage of women and the Arab Spring is problematic.

keep an eye on all their daily movements. The notion of home, understood as a safe place, a place that is determined by family affairs, is called into question. What is the meaning of home when your home is everything but a safe place?; when everything you do (what you say on the phone and to whom; how you behave towards neighbors; who is visiting your house) can possibly become a reason for Gaddafi's officials to round you up? The house is everything but free from the political struggle that terrorized Libya. As *In the Country of Men* illustrates, both the oppression of the strict regime and the resistance of Suleiman's father and his movement continue in the domestic sphere.

The boundaries of the political sphere are even extended further in the novels of Azzam and Khalifa where not only the family house, but the (female) body is entirely politicized. For example, in *Sarmada* the geography teacher Hamoud, completely obsessed with Syria's continuous war with Israel, brings this political conflict to the private space of the marital bedroom where he passes on his political frustration on the body of his wife Ibthial. Filled with anger at the defeat of the Arab nation in the Six Day War, he transforms his wife's body into the Arab nation by drawing a map on her naked body:

> On that day, he transmigrated the souls of Sykes and Picot as he divided up the parts of his wife Ibtihal's body up into the territory of the former colonial powers. When he came to her vagina, he drew Palestine and looked at her as he shouted […] 'You tricked us, you sons of bitches!' […] As he gripped the scalpel in his hand, he knew he wanted to kill international Zionism and a terrified Ibtihal got up and ran into the bathroom. (98)

Ibtihal's naked body becomes the barren territorial ground that Arab, Jewish (and colonial) forces all try to control. The most intimate part of her female body, her vagina, is transformed into the most contested ground, Palestine, over which opposing groups with both pan-Arab and Zionist ideas, fight: the region that in the course of the Six Day War was captured by Israel. Hamoud, not able to control the political situation of his country, instead tries to take control over his wife's body by drawing himself the borders of her body, his country. Yet, as a result, his wife can no longer experience her body on her own terms, but only in political terms. On the one hand, her body becomes her husband's property, substituting the territorial ground he (or Syria) no longer possesses. On the other hand, her body is imagined the enemy, the embodiment of the Zionist ideas that Hamous wants to eradicate. In other words, by politicizing his wife's body Hamous tries to deprive her of the right to experience her body positively, or even as something that belongs to herself (nevertheless Hamous' attempt partly fails, since Ibtihal flees away).

This same theme also returns in Khalifa's *In Praise of Hatred*. Also here the female body of the young narrator becomes part of a religious and political conflict, the conflict between the ruling secular Ba'ath party and the religious Muslim Brotherhood opposing the regime. In Khalifa's novel, the struggle of becoming familiar with the maturation of her child body is not only presented as a personal struggle, but primarily as a political dilemma about which political side she will choose. Namely, the religious

Muslim community to which her Alawite family belongs, and especially her aunt Maryam, teaches her to despise her femininity: she has to disgust her body, her nakedness must be veiled, and she is repeatedly warned that she should not let desire take possession of her. The narrator described her aunt's influence on her as follows: "She always insisted to me that my body was filthy and rebellious, and these words embedded themselves in me like a irrefutable truth. I began to guard myself against this rebellion named 'body'; I obdurately hated my incipient breasts, their two brown nipples beginning to blossom" (16-17). This despise for her own female body is also extended to the bodies of other girls: "When I saw uninhibited girls undoing their bras and showing off their cleavage to the breeze and the sun in the small square […] I felt rage at their filth" (17).

As the narrator becomes aware of the political situation in her country, the narrator starts to link the, in her eyes, 'immoral' tolerance for girls who openly expose their filthy bodies, with the ruling regime, the Ba'ath party whom she thinks stimulates these girls in their behavior. After all, at her school, exactly those girls who sympathize with the *Mukhabarat* or flirt with the regime's officers, display offensive behavior: they walk around without a veil, dance provocatively on pop music, openly discuss the secrets of their love lives with the regime's officers, and make sarcastic comments about Islamic jurors (58-62). Partly because of these 'scandalous' scenes at school, the narrator starts to develop a hatred for the ruling party: a hatred that later makes her decide to join the Muslim Brotherhood. In other words, her aversion of physical desire, nakedness and the clear exposure of femininity is inextricably bound up with her politics: with her hatred for the ruling regime and her belief in the rightness of a radically Islamic political movement.

The examples from *In the Country of Men*, *Sarmada* and *In Praise of Hatred* all show how politics heavily determines those people whose lives are not so visible as those people publicly operating in the public sphere. Furthermore, all examples illustrate how women's lives are influenced negatively by politics: how politics deprives women of the freedom to feel at home in their own house or to feel 'at home' in their own female body. Yet, while such portraits of women as victims of a certain political regime are most easily recognized in these novels, it is important to also pay attention to the ways in which these novels unlink women from the stereotypical roles of the passive, peaceful, female victim (Moser and Clark, 3-4). As Sharon Pickering explains, there is a tendency in feminist studies of women in conflict situations to primarily expose, name and analyze the structural oppression of women in times of conflict. Yet, as Pickering argues, emphasizing only the victim roles of women in political conflict reaffirms instead of resists the victimization of women in political situations. Therefore, it is important to look at the "multiple forms of women's rebellion and agency when confronted by the power of the state and their creativity and endurance in resistance" (Pickering 50). This other 'rebellious' side of women in political conflict is also explored in these same three novels. The works make its readers aware how also in the case of women, power and resistance are always intertwined by transforming examples of the

victimization of women in political conflict into examples of women's resistance. Furthermore, besides giving women the traditionally 'male' role of rebellious political protester (as I will discuss in the next chapter with *In Praise of Hatred*), the novels also create alternative spaces of (female) resistance.

Extending the boundaries of the political sphere means extending the boundaries of the space of resistance. Including the home and the female (body) into a sphere that is dominated and determined by politics, means that the home and the female body can also be seen as spaces of protest and revolt. As I just argued, the maturing female body of the narrator of *In Praise of Hatred* is strongly politicized in such a way that politics has taken away the personal, positive experience of her own body. In this sense a reader could clearly see the narrator as a female victim of an oppressive political system. Yet, in line with Foucault's famous remark "Where there is power there is resistance" (1978, 95-96), the narrator's dealing with her body is at the same time transformed into an act of rebellion. Namely, no matter if she rejects or embraces her femininity, in both cases she resists political movements. First of all, as I just explained, the predominant aversion for her femininity (and the femininity of others girls) that, for example, reveals itself in the complete covering of her female body and her hatred for girls who openly show their female bodies, is connected in the novel with the narrator's resistance against Syria's official political regime: al-Assad's Ba'ath party who, in her eyes, allows girls to immorally expose their bodies. Her (sometimes unsuccessful) efforts to 'kill' her desire (35), to reject her female body and to hate other unveiled girls (122), goes together with her belief in the goals and ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood and her firm disapproval of the dominating Ba'ath party. That is, the resistance against her female body is simultaneously a resistance against the ruling regime.

However, although the narrator is firm in the rejection of her body, she cannot always stop her desires and sometimes gives in to these desires. Also these moments of accepting and exploring her female body can be considered an act of rebellion since it signifies a protest against the Alawite religious community and the Muslim Brotherhood who both have taught her to control the desires of her rebellious body. Therefore, even the most intimate and private acts of the narrator can be understood in political terms as we can see in the following fragment in which she describes her act of masturbating:

> I lay on my be bed and felt my body, starting with my breasts. I let out a soft gasp of surprise at the lightness of my fingers as they moved over my stomach and returned to my nipples, fearing to complete my *rebellion*. […] I felt a surge of *defiance* which I tried to suppress for a short time, but I returned, blissful and squirming, on to the soft cushions. (205, emphasis mine)

As the words the narrator uses to describe her act of masturbating, already indicate '(rebellion,' 'defiance'), giving away to the desires of her body means for her being rebellious against the political-Islamic movement of which she is a member. In other words, since the political and religious community of the narrator politically determine her body, all the interaction between the narrator and her female body

can be conceived of as potential moment of resistance: either a resistance against the national regime, the Ba'ath party, or a resistance against the strict Islamic, political community to which she belongs.

Also in *In the Country of Men* the notion of resistance is redefined, although in a completely different way. In this novel, the passive role of women in political protest is no longer perceived negatively in opposition to men's active, heroic rebellion, but is alternatively presented as another way of heroic behavior under restrictive, political circumstances. The more positive view on women who refrain from active, political rebellion is presented through the famous Arabic figure of Scheherazade: the female storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights* who distracts the Persian king from killing her (as he does after one night with all the virgins he marries) by telling exciting stories. In the beginning of the novel, Suleiman's mother rejects her son's admiration for the bravery of this literary figure because of the, in her eyes, unheroic behavior of Scheherazade. As Suleiman's mother tells her son, the "brave" Scheherazade was in fact a "coward" since she asks–after having told a thousand stories, after having lived with the king for many years, bearing him three sons–the most unheroic question ever:

> 'What was it?' Mama shouted […] 'Was it to rule one of the corners or even a dirty little cave in his kingdom […] Or was it to be given a writing desk in a quiet room in his palace of endless rooms, a room the woman could call her own, to write in secret to truth of this monster Shahryar? No […] 'Your heroine's boldness was to ask to be allowed to … live […] 'And not because she had as much right to live as he, but because if he were to kill her his sons would live 'motherless.' (16)

As Suleiman's mother makes clear, Schezerade, despite her heroic behavior to prevent the king of killing her, turns out to be a coward, since she does not take revenge on the king, nor does she expose his cruelty, but only asks him to let her live for her children.

However, as Margaret Scanlan, rightly analyzes, Suleiman's mother, who often keeps her son awake by telling stories, gradually starts to mirror the Scheherazade figure (Scanlan 269). When her husband is taken away by the authorities, she fears for the life of her son and husband and does not take over his resistance against Libya's regime. Instead, she saves her husband and son by baking a cake for the neighbor family of the *Mukhabarat* policeman, pleas them to forgive her husband's behavior and begs them to put in a good word for him (Matar 157-164). Still, despite her pleas to the regime against which her husband so fervently fought, in Matar's novel it is the mother–although she start to copy Scheherazade's 'coward' behavior, and not the father with his classical heroic behavior–who is presented as the real hero of the story. After all, although Suleiman's mother distances herself from 'traditional' resistance, her 'coward' behavior can still be considered heroic revolt. Because the novel shows how Libya's autocratic regime deprives its citizens of their 'home place' by controlling and judging all movements that take place within the space of the home, the efforts of Suleiman's mother to create a safe home for Suleiman in times of oppression and domination, can be interpreted as acts of resistance.

In this chapter we have seen how foregrounding multiple spaces of resistance in the context of protest can enrich our understanding of oppression and protest and thus prevent non-Arab people from generalizing the Arab world and its inhabitants. The inclusion of marginal spaces into the sphere of protest that are often excluded (also in the coverage of the Arab Spring), can make us aware of the various experiences of domination and the various forms of resistance than can never be reduced to the simple divide between oppressor (the autocratic regime) and the protester (the person openly acting against the hegemonic regime). In Azam's novel the small village of Sarmada is transformed into a center of revolt where not only the nation's regime, but also the dependence on national politics is resisted. Similarly, in Khalifa's and Matar's novels the home is changed into a political overdetermined place, both a site of political domination and victimization of women, and a site of women's "resistance and liberation struggle" (Bell 6). The novels therefore can be considered literary heterotopia's because the novels are spaces from which (other) hegemonic spaces can be questioned, juxtaposed and unsettled.

Reading the alternative spaces of resistance that are explored in these novels, in the context of the Arab Spring, can make readers aware of the limited spatial view on Tahrir Square in relation to the Arab uprisings and raises many unanswered questions: How does a focus on places beyond Tahrir Square change our understanding of the Arab Spring? How do people that are not represented by the masses on Tahrir Square experience the uprising? In which multiple forms of domination and resistance are these unrepresented people involved? Although the novels do not directly answer these questions, they can contribute to a certain distribution of the sensible because they question one of the parameters of the Arab Spring narrative: space. Since the novels provide alternative (fictional) spaces of resistance, they put into question the dominant focus on public space in relation to protests and make new spaces of protest visible and sayable. In this way, the novels offer a sensible world from which these (still) unanswered questions become thinkable.

4.

From the Protesting Crowd to the Protesting Agent

In the introduction of this thesis I have argued how at first sight most accounts of the Arab Spring presented the Arab world in a relatively positive light, especially in light of the long-lasting tradition of Orientalizing the Middle East. Had the Arab world long been considered a primitive, inferior world with uneducated people–characterized as irrationally aggressive about insignificant issues, yet passive when they are in the possibility to really make a change[28]–in the context of the Arab Spring much of these images seemed to have disappeared. Within the Western imagination of the Arab world, it was suddenly thinkable that the Arab, young, educated middle class could long for democracy, that they could protest peacefully against their autocratic regimes, that they, united by social media, could overthrow their oppressive governments.

Yet, while the (textual) reports about the first uprisings at the start of the Arab Spring narrated in positive terms how the Arab world made a progress towards democracy, if we look at the photographic images accompanying such news reports, we see how the photographed protesting Arabs are not presented as agents causing this positive change. Both photographed as part of a protesting crowd and individually, the Arab protesters do not seem to be responsible for the uprisings themselves. Before analyzing how the novels of Matar and Khalifa presents their readers with actual, agential protesters, I will first discuss these photographs of the protesting crowd and the singled out protester, that is, those protesters of the crowd that are portrayed individually to give the massive, anonymous crowd a face.

In contrast to the 'nonviolent,' 'peaceful' group of educated protesters, as the protesters were presented in many accounts of the Arab Spring, the protesting crowd is mostly photographed as an "Islamicist mob," thereby following the long-established figure of the mob (Edwards 448). The multitude, the crowd and revolt have often been photographed in the same way, as Steve Edwards explains in an article about photography and the crowd. In photographic figurations of the multitude, the crowd is often viewed from above, photographed from such a distance that the individual members of the group are no longer discernible.[29] From such a bird's-eye view the crowd becomes an anonymous massive group: a

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28. As Asaf Bayet illustrates in his article "The 'Street' and the Politics of Dissent in the Arab World," we can see this problematic dichotomy of aggressively hot-tempered versus passive behavior, in the figure of the 'Arab Street,' that is, the image of the Arab street (Arab people on the street) in Western media. Bayet explains how the Arab actions are so often visualized (and described) as mobs and protests that the Arab Street evokes images of strange places with angry and irrational people. Yet in the context of important protests of the Arab people (Bayet uses the example of the many demonstrations in the Arab world against U.S. invasion into Iraq) the protests were dismissed in Western media and considered insignificant. Bayet therefore concludes: "In the narratives of the Western media, the "Arab street" is damned if it does and damned if it doesn't–it is either 'irrational' and 'aggressive' or it is 'apathetic' and 'dead.'"

29. Interestingly, also in Towfik´s *Utopia* the protesting crowd is often perceived from a perspective that is quite similar to this photographic perspective in which the group of protesters is perceived as an aggressive, anonymous mob. When one of the main characters–the rich adolescent boy who out of pure boredom has escaped from Utopia

multitude that often even extends beyond the frames of the photograph and thus looks uncontrollable; an endless amount of impersonal bodies without faces, a multitude that looks as if it could violently explode any moment.[30] Many photographs of the protesters on Tahrir Square fall within this photographic tradition if we, for example, look at the photograph *The Telegraph* posted in November 2011 (figure 1).

Figure 1: "Protesters Gather in Tahrir Square in Cairo." *The Telegraph* 28 November 2011. Web. 21 June 2014.

Edwards discerns in his article four key features that characterize the multitude when photographed from above: characteristics that thus also apply for the photographs of the protests on Tahrir Square. First of all, the multitude is both plural and singular, simultaneously one and many. The multitude is portrayed as one group consisting of many people, though people who are indistinguishable from one another. Secondly, because the crowd is portrayed as 'faceless,' the multitude is presented bestially or monstrous rather than

to secretly visit the territory of the "Others"–is discovered as an inhabitant from Utopia, he described the confrontation with the "Others" as follows: "The hatred in their eyes was clear. They probably had the same look in their eyes when they stormed the Bastille. They were one and the same […] In their hands flashed blades that weren't part of knives; instead, they were parts of car frames that had been turned into murder weapons" (71). Also at the end, the group of Others that are about to attack the village of Utopia is described as a "mass of humanity advancing on the horizon," while they are "carrying torches and shouting in anger" (156). However, because of the two-sided character of the novel–the chapters are, in turns, written from either the perspective of a Utopian, or the perspective of one of the Others–as readers, we also get an image of individuals that are part of the crowd and learn about their poor circumstances that made them decide to attack Utopia. With these individual portrayals of human beings, the main character's view on the crowd as a bestial, aggressive mob are put into question. Contrarily, in the case of the Arab Spring, the photographic visualization of the crowd is problematic because individual photographs of various individual protesters are (mostly) absent.

30. Although this is a general issue of photography, and not only of crowd photography in the Arab world, I will later explain how this way of visualizing protests is, in the case of the Arab Spring, extra problematic First of all, because of the long legacy of Orientalism in which the Arab people are considered naturally aggressive. Secondly, because of the way in which certain protesters of the crowd are portrayed individually.

human. The crowd is portrayed as an unruly "many-headed hydra" that can act furiously, hot-headed and ungodly, as well as mechanically and slavishly, as Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker argue in their book *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000) in which they trace the many metaphors that are used to describe crowds. Thirdly, the multitude may be presented many-headed, but at the same time it is a headless, irrational animal. Within this view, the bestial crowd is driven not by reason or virtue, but by its drifts and impulses and thus can act wildly, without any control. Lastly, Edwards characterizes the multitude as a "horizontal sort of beast" (451) which means that the differences between the crowd and external forces are recognized, but that internal differences between members of the crowd are not acknowledged.

Especially in the case of the West photographing, visualizing and imagining the protesting crowds during the Arab Spring, this specific way in which the multitude has been photographed, has consequences for the way in which the protests have been perceived. There might exist a strong narrative of a nonviolent, peace-loving Arab uprising, but in most photographs we see the crowd of protesting Arabs still captured as a massive, inhuman fearsome group of protesters. In the classic 'crowd photography' used to cover the Arab uprisings, the protesters were barely given a 'face' and could hardly be imagined human since they were only presented as an aggressive group Even in those cases where the protests were photographed more horizontally and where the camera focused on a couple of faces in the crowd, these persons are often portrayed with faces contorted by anger, captured while shouting slogans (figure 2): angry faces that do not illustrate the peaceful character of the uprisings that was initially so much emphasized in the media.

While the photographs of individual protesters, on the other hand, at first sight present the protester more in line with the hegemonic narrative of the Arab Spring, in an extremely positive light, the photographs nevertheless deprive the protesters of most agency. A perfect example of this 'seeming' idealization of the protester can be found in a photo series of the Egyptian protesters on Tahrir Square, published in the popular American journal *Vanity Fair* in May 2011: a photo report of, as the article phrases it, "Egypt's 18-day miracle," made by photographer Jonas Fredwall Karlsson who captured "face-to-face the thrilling, tech-savvy tide that drew all eyes to Tahrir Square" (Porter) and caused the downfall of Hosni Mubarak's rule. The magazine's photo series contains eighteen photographs that all show men and women under thirty-five, (the women mostly without headscarves) wearing jeans and other modern-looking outfits. Many protesters are photographed in their home environments that clearly show their material comfort. Furthermore, in almost all photographs electronics such as MacBooks, smartphones and Ipads are placed very prominently into view. The photographs are accompanied with detailed captions in which the protester's 'digital' participation in the protests is explained and in which protesters praise the revolutionary potential of their digital possessions. The photo series ends, for example, with a photograph of a young women, Gigi Ibrahim, making a peace sign with both hands while overlooking Tahrir Square (figure 3). The caption tells the viewer that she lived for a couple of years in the United States, that she

studied political science at an American university in Cairo and that she gets most of her news on Twitter. "'These are our weapons,' she says, brandishing her smartphone" (Porter).

Figure 2: "Egyptian protesters wave their national flag and shout slogans in Cairo's Tahrir Square" *The Guardian* 15 July 2011. Web. 21 June 2014.

While these are photographs of people who were indeed part of the Egyptian uprising, the selection of people portrayed and the way in which these protesters are presented in *Vanity Fair*, perpetuated the myth that a homogeneous group of Westernized, tech-savvy, and peaceful youth caused the collapse of several strongly-established, autocratic regimes (Abul-Magd 565). The very selective group of protesters who were chosen to problematically represent the heterogeneous multitude on Tahrir Square stimulated an understanding of the Arab Spring that left out all those protesters that did not directly resemble the ideal protester. Moreover, while at first instance it seems as if the modern and digital protesting Arabs receive all the credits for the positive changes in the Arab world, if we take a close look at how these protesters are portrayed we understand that even these ideal protesters are given false or little agency. After all, not the Arab people themselves but predominantly the digital media, typical for this generation and praised so much by these protesters themselves are presented as the actual "agents of empowerment" in the Arab uprisings (Savigny 15). If, as Heather Savigny asks, the public narratives emphasize more the presence of digital media in the uprisings than the wider political context or the backgrounds, interests and ideas of protesters themselves, who is empowered? According to Savigny the answer is clearly the media technologies themselves. He argues that by presenting new media technology as the "site of empowerment for the revolutionaries" the Arab revolutions are framed in Western, technological and rational terms (14). So that, in the end, it is rather the Western media technology that

caused political and social transformation in the Arab world than that the Arab protesters themselves are presented as agents of change. The importance and agency that is given to a selective group of protesters in reality turns out to be primarily attention and praise for Western media technologies that even in the Arab world could bring about revolutionary change.[31]

Figure 3: Karlsson, Jonas Fredwall. "New-Breed Blogger" *Vanity Fair* May 2011. Web. 21 June 2014.

An analysis of the visual representation of the protesting crowd and of individual protesters selected out of the crowd, reveals that despite the positive narrative about the Arab Spring, the Arab people themselves who, in fact, are the most crucial elements of the uprisings are represented in negative light, either as a massive, irrational and wild crowd, or as Arab people who only with the help of Western technologies can make a significant change. Photographed as an anonymous, uncivilized mob, the protesting crowd is presented in such a sharp contrast with the media's dominant narrative about the peaceful, smooth revolution (a narrative that is predominantly told in the case of the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings)[32] that it seems almost impossible that these photographed crowds are responsible for

31. The question how much exactly social media and digital technologies have influenced the Arab Spring is a question that is repeatedly asked by (mostly Western) academics and journalist and is answered in different ways. Although I do not want to go into these studies it is apparent that directly after the Arab Spring started, the topic of the use of digital media became a very hot topic, while there are not a lot of studies that examine the role of social media in the Arab region before the 2011 uprisings. However, as Regina Salanova argues, digital media tools had already been used in most Arab countries long before the uprisings started (53). Exactly because of this 'sudden' interest in the use of media technologies in a region that (because of the (almost) zero attention for the population's digitalization, and because of the Orientalist stereotypes about the primitiveness of the region) was never represented as being a 'digital' region, there is a risk that digital technologies are conceived of as 'naturally' Western and thus technologies end up being seen as external, Western influence.
32. See for example Yasmeen El Khoudary who has argued that "In Tunisia and Egypt, we were able to carry out massive civilized and peaceful revolutions that resulted in the ousting of the world's most stubborn dictators" and

the socio-political changes in the Arab world. Yet, when they are presented as human beings, as Western-looking Arabs, the primary focus on their digital tools deprives them partly of their agency. So, although the Arab Spring narrative tells about uprisings that take place in the Arab world, the Arab people themselves are not presented as the (main) characters of the narrative.

In the novels of Matar, Khalifa, Azzam and Towfik, however, Arab people are presented as real characters, as human beings whose actions make a change and have real consequences (though not directly in the Arab Spring but in times of earlier uprisings). These characters are thus empowered, are even given agency in a double sense: They are not only presented as people who can make political change, but also as people who are powerful enough to choose to refrain from politics, to protest a life that only revolves around politics, to escape political determination. Moreover, the novels' protesters deviate from the image of the Arab Spring protester. The novels present their readers naive child protesters (*In the Country of Men, Anatomy of a Disappearance*), female protesters (*Sarmada, In Praise of Hatred*), violent protesters (*Utopia, In Praise of Hatred*), fundamentally Islamic protesters (*In Praise of Hatred*) and in this way changes our image of what a protester looks like and how he protests. Again, although the novels do not directly present protesters of the Arab Spring, but protesters of the past, the diversity of protesters these novels provide, can question the one-sided image of the Arab Spring protester and makes other protesters thinkable.

In the rest of this chapter I will analyze three images of protesters. I will start with the child protester as presented in Matar's *Anatomy of a Disappearance* and explain how he not only protests against the regime who has deprived him of a father, but also revolt against the Western imagination that reads all Arab characters politically[33] by refusing to lead a political life. Secondly, I will continue with a close analysis of the female protester of *In Praise of Hatred* whose revolt is so much entangled with her femininity that readers can only understand her protest as 'female' protest if protest continues to be 'naturally' ascribed to men. Lastly, I will build out the analysis of the female character of Khalifa's novel and focus on how the complicated figure of the violent, Islamic female protester forces readers to accept the idea that violence is also part of protests, whether we like it or not.

The 'human' protester

Matar's most recent novel, *Anatomy of a Disappearance*, starts with a description of a family situation that is negatively determined by politics. The novel begins with the mysterious disappearance of Nuri's father who already has lost his mother (he never discovers why his mother has died, but the novel suggests it is related to his father's secret political activities). Although the novel primarily takes place

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Matthew J. Gordner who uses the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia as examples of "successful nonviolent democratic revolution[s]."
33. As I will explain, this is related to the discussion about the overpoliticization of Arabic literature, as I discussed it in the first chapter)

inside the house and is told from the perspective of a young, naive boy, Nuri's actions can be interpreted in relation to the repressive political context in which the novel takes place. His research into his father's kidnapping (over which Libya's regime refuses to take any responsibility) as well as his choice to keep certain information secret for the regime's officials are subversive actions against the government. As we can see here, the novel's reminder that the home is also an important space of resistance contributes to a more inclusive understanding of protest. However, reading the home and its inhabitants politically also has a negative side. On the one hand, those who are often considered people that less likely will make significant political changes, can be recognized as political agents who can potentially contribute to political change. On the other hand though, there is the risk that everything the characters say, do, and think becomes politicized: That, in other words, characters are deprived of a private life, since everything that was before primarily considered private is now interpreted in a broader political, public context.

In line with this problem, we can recall Jameson's problematic argument about the allegorical reading of third-world texts that I discussed in the first chapter. Jameson argued that all third-world literature is necessarily allegorical which means that even those novels that seem to deal with private lives and individual problems of a single character have to be read in a national-political context: "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69). Jameson grounds his statement on an assumed difference between first-world and third-world societies. While in Western capitalist cultures there is a radical split between "the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have to come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power [...] Freud versus Marx" (69), this split, according to Jameson, does not characterize third-world cultures. Therefore, in Jameson's argumentation everything private can be understood as a political allegory. Thinking about this argument we can ask ourselves the following question: How empowered is a character who is completely politicized, whose actions and thoughts are not interpreted as belonging to the character itself, but as elements that represent and symbolize a political situation in a national context? While a politicization of the domestic sphere can lead to a recognition of the home's inhabitants as political agents, it can also lead to a reduction of these same people to merely allegorical figures who do not represent themselves, but rather abstract political ideas and situations.

Yet, in *Anatomy of a Disappearance* this tendency to politically allegorize 'third-world characters' is blocked. While in the coming-of-age story the narrator's growing to manhood coincides with his becoming aware of the nation's politics–which means the narrator starts to recognize his own status as political subject–at the same time the narrator also realizes that politics cannot completely define his personality and in this way he keeps his own individuality. In his novel Matar plays with this division between the Freudian private and libidinal sphere of unconscious thoughts, sexuality and poetics and the public sphere of politics, economics, power and rational considerations: a split that, according to Jameson

only characterizes modern literature written in first-world, capitalist countries. Namely, Matar gives its readers a narrative that can be read as a Freudian story with an Oedipus complex as well as a story about a boy whose father's political life forces him to follow in his father's footsteps, without giving the reader the possibility to choose between one of the two readings.

Anatomy of a Disappearance starts with Nuri's father finding a new wife in a luxurious beach hotel in Alexandria where he spends the summers with his son ever since his wife has suddenly passed away. Soon after their first meeting, Mona, a beautiful, Westernized women, half Egyptian, half English, who leads a very comfortable yet superficial life, becomes his second wife although she is fifteen years younger than him. From the very start, Nuri is jealous of his father and continuously claims he and Mona belong together, since their ages are closer together, and because he "saw her first" (3). Already in these first moments, even before she becomes his new mother, Mona reminds Nuri of his mother: "Her hair was tied sensibly in a ponytail, and she had on an outrageously bright yellow swimsuit […]. For a moment, the yellow strap running across her back brought to mind the yellow hospital bracelet that had been bound round my mother's wrist" (10). In this fragment as well as in most of the novel, Mona performs both the role as mother and lover. Nuri feels affection for her, on the one hand, because he misses his mother and, on the other hand, because Nuri has his first sexual urges towards his stepmother:

> 'You know what is the best thing about turning fourteen?'
> Alexei [a friend of Nuri] was one year older, and I was in no mood for advice.
> 'Wet dreams […] You see the women of your dreams, the woman you will marry one day. That's what my father told me, and it's true.'
> I shut my eyes and tried to see her [Mona's] eyes, hear her voice, smell that place on her neck that she said was mine and only mine. And that was how I slept. (94)

His feelings for Mona determine his behavior toward his father. He distances himself from his father, considers him his rival and sometimes even hates him. When his father decides to put his son in a prestigious boarding school in England, he believes his father wants to keep him away from Mona (73-75) and when on his birthday Nuri is told he has a visitor, he is disappointed when it turns out to be his father and not Mona: "And whom did I find standing in the hall, […] but Father, smiling. I almost cried but then remembered what Mother had told me about how I must be careful with my sadness. I expected Mona to be outside standing on the gravel driveway with open arms. And when she was not there, I thought, Maybe in the car. But she was at home" (85). Only when his father is kidnapped and Mona in his eyes betrays him, since he discovers she has other 'lovers' (179), he becomes obsessed with his father´s absence and wants to discover at all costs what has happened to him. The novel can thus be read as a personal Freudian story of a motherless boy on the verge of manhood who cannot yet distinguish between his sexual feelings and his feelings of love for a woman who fills the void left behind by his mother's absence.

At the same time though, the novel cannot be completely interpreted in terms of newly developing sexuality, feelings of loss, family ties and other private, individual emotions. Behind the apparent Freudian relations lies a world of dark political games. His father's decisions are not only, as the naive Nuri believes, made in relation to his wives (both Nuri's mother and Mona), but are also influenced by politics. For example, his father long absences are not escapes from the home because he does not care about his wife, or does not like to look after his son (39), but because he believes in his political ideals and want to make the country in which he is born, a better country with the best possible political government. He is also aware that in the repressive political climate of his country his political convictions can endanger the people around him. His decision to keep certain things secret for his wife and son and to give his son an education in England can be understood in this light.

But also Nuri's constantly changing preference for his mothers (his dead mother, Mona and the house's maid who in the end of the novel turns out to be Nuri´s real mother) or his father can be read as Nuri's dilemma between consciously choosing a political life and becoming his father's successor, or willfully refraining from choosing a clear position within the nation's political conflict. While his moms' side represents Nuri's withdrawal from politics–his dead mother, for example, always said: "Don't transfer the weight of the past on to your son" (26)–his father's side symbolizes Nuri's gradual introduction into the world of politics for his father always argued that "You can't live outside history" (26).[34] While in the novel the conflict between his father and his moms predominantly determines the story, in the end Nuri does not choose for one side, but for both. When he finally discovers who his biological mother is, he decides, after having lived in England for years, to return to Cairo to start living in the house she has prepared for his arrival: "But as the days passed I began to long to get back to the Cairo apartment, to see Naima again" (235). Yet, thereby he also leaves behind the stable political situation in England and chooses to embrace a country with a repressive climate characterized by political conflict. Besides, after he learns more about his father's political life, he gradually accepts his father as a father despite his detachment and still waits for his return in his house in Egypt.

Also the novel's genre contributes to the development of character who is both a politicized subject and an individual person. At first sight *Anatomy of a Disappearance* seems to have all the characteristics of the traditionally Western genre of the *Bildungsroman*, a novel that narrates the transformation of a naive and innocent teenager into a matured, civic subject (Lowe 98). Matar's novel has the typical narrative structure of the *Bildungsroman* in which the by now matured narrator retrospectively tells his life story, that is, how he has become the man he is now, through the eyes of the

34. It is has to be said that, although the way in which Nuri is positioned between both his parents, between a withdrawal from politics and a devotedly dedication to politics, contributes to the construction of Nuri as a political agent, yet a human being that is not completely politicized, the way in which this conflict is gendered is problematic, especially if we think about how women have often been subordinated or even completely excluded from the political sphere. The fact that in this novel women symbolize the aversion to politics, while men stand for the dedication to political ideas, reaffirms again that politics is primarily the domain of men: a domain to which women not belong (or not in the same way).

naive young boy he was back then. Also thematically the novel can be defined as a *Bildungsroman*. The novel begins with an innocent, unworldly, slightly foolish boy who lives his life in the safe environment of his family, but in the course of the story the narrator is confronted with the world of politics and forced to mature when his father suddenly disappears and he experiences a great emotional loss. He also revolts, as the traditional *Bildungsroman* protagonist, against his father who attempts to initiate his son into their country's political situation by telling him how to survive in a society with a repressive regime: "'From now on, never do that [Nuri leaving his food to go to the bathroom]. And don't frequent the same places. Don't make it easy for anyone to know your movements. […] Understood?' […] I nodded. 'Understood'" (89). However, at the end of the novel, although his father has not yet returned, he reconciles with him. At the core of the novel there is thus a "conflict between individuality and socialization," (Moretti, 16) between the young Nuri who interprets everything that happens around him in a very personal self-centered way and Nuri's father who believes that his son has to understand that society and society's politics influence Nuri's life. Generally, classic *Bildungsromane* end with the solution of this conflict between the individual and society. The protagonist normally reconciles with the social order, integrates into society and transforms from a self-centered character into a society-centered character and becomes a matured civic subject.

Yet, as Kirstin Morrison argues, political *Bildungsromane* (such as *Anatomy of a Disappearance*) do not end like this, since the repressive political climate that is introduced in those novels problematizes such an easy solution. Morrison argues how in these political works the maturation and education of the protagonist do not bring him to politics, do not integrate him within society, but bring him "to something deep within himself" (141). The protagonist's reconciliation with himself instead of society can also be found in Matar's novel. In the end Nuri, who has become aware of the politics of his country and of himself as political subject, does not converge with the nation's political society, as most reader would probably expect, but instead primarily reunites with himself (he learns for example who is real mother is and in the end of the novel accepts this by moving in with her in their old house). Although society (and his father) seems to force Nuri to choose a clear political position he refrains from politics and makes a start to determine his own life in Egypt, and not in the (unnamed) country in which his father played such an important, political role. While he absolutely does not agree with the politics of the country's regime–namely, he refuses to accept his father's disappearance–he also does not take over his father's role in the underground anti-regime movement. Though in the end of the novel he symbolically puts on his father's old clothes and discovers he fits them, he puts them back in the closet to save them for his father: "He will need a raincoat when he comes back. This might still fit him. I returned it to its place" (246).[35]

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35. The same argument can be made about Matar's first novel, *In the Country of Men*. Also this novel can be described as a political *Bildungsroman* whose protagonist does not reconcile with society, but primarily with himself. The narrator Suleiman does not become an important political figure just as his father, but a "pharmacist in a city where it is nearly impossible to look down any of its streets without spotting at least one pharmacy's flashing sign of a serpent coiling up a Martini glass" (231). Furthermore, after his parents force him to start living in Egypt,

In theme as well as in form, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* plays with Jameson's division between the private and the public life, the split between the world of sexuality and the world of politics: a division that, according to Jameson, only characterizes first-world countries Although in Matar's novel these two sides cannot be separated, the private thoughts and actions of the protagonist cannot be interpreted only in light of the national-political situation. In the end, after Nuri has learned in what kind of society he lives, he refuses to simply converge with either the regime's politics or with his father's politics and instead starts a life of his own in Egypt: a decision that is partly political indeed, but that is mostly a personal decision to return to his biological mother. Through the genre of the political *Bildungsroman* and a political Oedipus complex narrative, Matar provides his readers with a novel in which a 'marginal' inhabitant of the domestic sphere becomes included into the nation's political regime and the resistance against this politics without having to represent the nation and its politics, without losing his individuality.

Although *In Praise of Hatred* introduces a completely different protester than the child protester in Matar's novel, namely the female protester, I will analyze how the novel also blocks the reader to read the female narrator as being representative of a political development, in contrast to the media coverage of protesting women.

The female protester

In the previous chapter I have discussed how women whose lives primarily take place in the domestic sphere, are often not recognized as protesters since the international media reporting on the Arab Spring mainly focused on public spaces such as Tahrir Square, thereby acknowledging only those people who visibly protest in these public spaces as protesters. Yet, although Arab women were maybe less visible than men in the protesting crowd, we cannot argue that women were completely absent from images and discussions of the 2011 Arab uprisings. On the contrary, in many photographs of the protesting crowd, Arab women (both with and without headscarf) are visible, women who clearly join the protesting men (see figure 4). Furthermore, there are several articles that discuss the active role of women in the protests of the Arab Spring (see Cole and Cole; Heideman and Youssef; Wolf; Shanahan; Coleman; Krajeski). Yet, as I will illustrate, the images of women are often not used to really discuss the roles of female protesters, but are predominantly co-opted into the problematic, political narrative of the democratization of the Middle East: a Western narrative used to understand the events in the Arab region. While the visible female Arab protester in Western media is primarily used as a symbol of democratization in the Arab world, the atypical female protester of Khalifa's *In Praise of Hatred* unlinks protesting women from democratization and in this way makes a start to think about the various roles of women in the Arab Spring.

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he never returns to his native country and observes the political developments in Libya from a relatively safe distance.

Figure 4: "Protesters, who are against Egyptian President Mohamed Mursi, react in Tahrir Square in Cairo July 3, 2013" *Al-Arabiya News* 12 November 2013. Web. 21 June 2014.

In a critical analysis of discussions of the Arab Spring in relation to women, Laura Sjoberg and Jonathan Whooley state there have been several attempts to understand the role of women in the Arab Spring (13). In their discussion of these attempts they distinguish between those who argue the Arab Spring has had a positive effect on gender emancipation and those who think the Arab Spring has rather deteriorated the process of gender emancipation. An article written for the American journal *The Nation* in April 2011 is a good example of the positive voices. The authors explain how women have been at the forefront of the protests, how women "couldn't have been more visible" in the uprisings, a fact that, given women's suffering under the decades of autocratic regimes, "should in itself have been news" (Cole and Cole). And although the authors acknowledge that there is a chance that Muslim fundamentalist groups that are "determined that women's rights should not be expanded in the wake of these political upheavals," take over power, they end their article with a positive note: "Before, women could be marginalized at will by the dictators whenever they made demands on the regime. Now, at least, they have a fighting chance." In other words, the authors make a clear connection between the old, autocratic regimes and gender inequality on the one hand, and potential, democratic regimes and gender equality on the other hand.

Yet, there are many other voices that exactly oppose these accounts and argue that the Arab Spring has absolutely not freed women from oppression. Although at first sight it seems as if these negative accounts exactly oppose the optimistic voices, Sjoberg and Whooley explain that, in fact, these pessimistic scholars make exactly the same connection between the status of modernization,

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democratization, and secularization and the status of women. These negative commentaries question primarily the democratization of the Middle East and are sceptical about the long-term effects of the 2011 uprisings, since they are afraid that conservative, Islamic groups instead of more liberal and secular governments will start ruling those countries where autocratic rulers have been toppled. As, for example, 2003 Nobel Peace Winner Shirin Ebadi argues: "The true 'Arab Spring' will dawn only when democracy takes root in countries that have ousted their dictatorships, and when women in those countries are allowed to take part in civic life." Also in this negative argumentation we can see how democratization and the liberation of women are connected to each other.

In both accounts thus women are used as a sign for indicating the degree to which the Arab region is democratized, modernized, and secularized. In the positive accounts the apparent presence of protesting women, standing on equal terms with the protesting men, is interpreted as a sign that the Arab world is developing in a positive way, that is, that it is on its way to become a liberal, secular democracy in imitation of Western societies where women are treated well. Therefore, female bodies crossing the boundaries to the public sphere symbolize the destruction of Islamic regimes and the construction of liberal 'Western-like' democratic regimes. In the pessimistic accounts of women and the Arab Spring the same argument is made, but in another way. Because the Arab Spring has not given Arab women more rights (which would have been a sign for democratization), we can conclude the Arab Spring has failed and that not enough progress is made in the process of democratization, modernization and secularization. So, here too, women and their rights are associated with a specific sort of regime.

Furthermore, as Sjoberg and Whooley rightly point out, many optimistic commentaries hint at the idea that the democratization of the Arab world, which means, the liberation of oppressed Arab women, make these women more 'like us' (29). The political activist Naomi Wolf writing for *Al Jazeera*, for example, writes how women protesters in Tunisia and Egypt were nothing like the Western stereotype of the "doe-eyed, veiled, and submissive, exotically silent, gauzy inhabitants of imagined harems, closeted behind rigid gender roles." A similar comment can be found in Mathieu van Rohr's article in the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* in which he argues that Western people "recognized themselves in the faces of the young female protesters, and they were pleased that people in these countries were not as different as many had previously believed," thereby destroying the cliché of the Arab woman as passive, oppressed beings. While both Wolf and Van Rohr acknowledge that the image of the submissive, veiled Arab woman is a stereotype in the Western imagination, they do not completely deconstruct this stereotype because of the way in which they make their argument. It seems as if only those women visibly protesting in the public sphere are 'like us,' and that only now the women are more apparently visible, the West can identify with the protests, but that before the Arab Spring this identification was not possible (since, before the uprisings Arab women were seemingly not visible). In other words, Arab women *used to* fit those Western stereotypes, just as Arab societies *used to* be different from Western societies, but

since the Arab Spring this is no longer the case (Sjoberg and Whooley 20).

As we can see on both sides of the discussion, women and their rights are never discussed without being linked to the form of government (and the values that this government propagates) or to religion. And although it can be fruitful to include those elements in discussions about gender, Sjoberg and Whooley are right in arguing that there is a risk that women become "signifiers of politics to which their actual lives and actual rights are secondary" (30). That is, the presence of women becomes a small element in a political Oriental narrative of the Westernization of the Arab region (or, in the pessimistic account, the failure of Westernization), an indicator for the degree of democratization, secularization and modernization while the actual roles of women in the protests and the gender equality/inequality of the Arab Spring remain undiscussed. Therefore, before we can really start answering the question "What were the roles of women in the Arab Spring and what has the Arab Spring meant for women?" the West's assumptions of how women are treated in the Arab world should be disrupted. The West should stop privileging the Western ideal of a secular, liberal democracy and use the presence of women, protesting in the public sphere, to measure the progress of Arab countries towards this Western ideal (Sjoberg and Whooley 39). To conclude, women have to be detached from the politico-cultural significations that turn them into symbols within a story of the Arab's world democratization.

A start for such 'de-symbolization' is made in Khalifa's *In Praise of Hatred* in which various connections are made between religion, protest, and feminization: connections different than the link between women's oppression and Islam on the one hand, and women's liberation and democratization on the other hand. In the first part of Khalifa's novel named "Women Led by the Blind" the reader gets to know the teenage, insecure protagonist who grows up between women, in the house of her three aunts: Maryam, Safaa and Marwa. While Safaa and Marwa who are clearly preoccupied with their bodies, continuously washing and perfuming it, try to teach their naive niece about men and the male body, the serious and religious Maryam tells the protagonist that the female body is dirty, "a dark vault, damp and crawling with spiders," (34) and that a woman always has to keep this in mind in order to reach Paradise (17).

While at first sight it seems clear that Safaa and Marwa with their free-minded, liberal ideas can offer the protagonist the most freedom and a life in which she can accept herself as woman, the story continues against these first expectations. Not Safaa and Marwa but Maryam bring the protagonist a certain freedom within the repressed climate of Syria during the Ba'ath regime. While her two aunts can only enjoy a relatively free life within the claustrophobic home and only among women, Maryam brings her niece into contact with members of the Muslim Brotherhood who allow her to carry out operations for them: She distributes pamphlets to spread the ideas of the organization, she carries weapons and volunteers to kill unbelievers (121). While before, she only left the house together with her aunts to visit the hammam, accompanied by their male servant, Blind Radwan, her new role as secret Islamic protester

against the Ba'ath regime gives her the freedom to leave the house and to operate all by herself. Although the strict rules of the organization demand of her that she completely covers her body, the protagonist does not necessarily experience this as a hindrance: "It was difficult to see the city from behind the twilight of my black face-covering, and I loved it; Aleppo seemed mysterious, cruel" (122). Furthermore, though her belief in the goals and ideals of the Muslim Brotherhood incite her to radically reject her female body, she nevertheless sees herself, as woman, as part of the group protesting against the Syrian regime. No longer the "shy girl who used to stand on the doorsill afraid of loneliness and orphanhood" (122-23) she believes the organization has made her a "hard woman" and has accepted her as woman, as an useful member of the brotherhood:

> Sometimes we felt like we were flying. We entered every house, and women were praying for our men. They wept when they imagined the danger surrounding us. We gathered donations, we went letters, we distributed pamphlets […]. Every day, we felt that we were approaching our final pilgrimage when the soul of the Prophet would come out to welcome us, blessing our strength, and with his immaculate arms he would surrender to us the keys of Paradise. (122)

As we can see in this fragment, Khalifa gives its readers an alternative view on a woman living within a conservative Islamic context (such as the Muslim Brotherhood) by presenting a protagonist who can escape her oppressive family home and can gain a relative freedom after joining a non-liberal, undemocratic organization. The Muslim brotherhood does not turn her into a passive, female victim, but into an agential protester who finally believes that her individual acts make a difference and will turn Syria into a better country. While the first half of the novel deconstructs the often assumed link between Islamic movements and oppression of women, the other half of the novel disrupts the idea that liberalism always goes hand in hand with gender equality.

In the third part of the novel the protagonist serves a prison sentence of more than eight years for having been a member of the Muslim brotherhood. During those prison years in which she shares her cell with women who have different ideas about the future of Syria, she renounces her faith in the ideals of the Muslim Brotherhood. Her hatred for people with opposing political ideas turns into an acceptation of all her cell mates, no matter their religious or political beliefs. A liberal community is created in the female prison: a community in which the protagonist changes her radical Islamic commitment for a liberal commitment (McManus 99-100). In this part Khalifa's novel tends towards a 'sentimental' narrative in which the protagonist realizes the mistakes she has made in life and adopts a liberal, more tolerant standpoint that will bring her a happy and safe life. Yet, while the narrative indeed presents us with a protagonist who seems to have found the most peace and happiness in the small liberal, women's community within the radical undemocratic prison world (the narrative tells its readers how the female prisoners are repeatedly beaten and even assaulted during interrogations), if readers focus on the topic of gender we can see how the protagonist's conversion to liberalism and her inclusion into the liberal

women's community incites her to adopt a conservative gender identity. In prison she loses her role as radical protester against the Ba´ath regime and instead takes on the traditional role of mother. She joins in with the preparations for the birth of "our child," the unborn child of the pregnant Souheir that reunites the twenty one female prisoners, and later helps with the raising of "our child." Because of her motherhood the protagonist seems to have lost the zest and fanaticism that characterized her before. The liberal community can thus give the protagonist a certain peace in life, but only when she confirms to the image of the traditional woman.

So, rather than a narrative about an insecure girl that after a period of radical behavior finds peace with herself by becoming a mother, I want to argue that Khalifa presents us a narrative about a young woman who comes into contact with various ideological groups of Syrian society and discovers that within each group women get a subordinated position, though in different ways. *In Praise of Hatred* thus makes clear that readers have to leave behind their persistent preconceptions about oppressed women in Islamic, non-liberal societies and 'free' women in liberal democracies in order to really understand what roles women do have in diverse circumstances and how important political events (such as the conflict between the Ba'ath regime and Islamists or the Arab Spring) influence the position of women in Arab countries.

Khalifa's novel, however, also introduces another important subject. Next to liberating protesting women from their assigned roles as signifiers of democratization, the novel forces its readers to face an element that is mostly dissociated from the (successful) struggle for democratization or the (successful) fight for political freedom: violence.

The violent protester
Thinking back of the *Vanity Fair* photo reportage I introduced in the beginning of this chapter, we can analyze how the series of portraits particularly emphasized the nonviolent character of the protests in which the portrayed persons were involved. The protesters were photographed apart from the protesting, potentially violent crowd, and the photographs (in combination with the captions) made clear how all protesters had used creative or digital means (such as protest songs, documentaries and Facebook pages) to express that they demanded "the downfall of the regime."[36] This idealization of the protests' nonviolent character in the photo series is representative of the way in which the first months of the Arab Spring are represented in text and image. Although, as Philip Rizk has written, while violence (used both by the protesters and those in power) has been a significant part of the Arab Spring revolutions as early as the first massive protests in Cairo in January 2011, only the protesters' nonviolent resistance was glorified as a step towards democracy. In the media coverage of the Arab Spring the nonviolent actions of the protesters had made the protesting masses so powerful that they successfully could topple the rulers of

36. "The people demand the downfall of the regime" was the most popular, widespread slogan that people first started to use on Tahrir Square in Cairo, but later all through the Arab world.

Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen while the protesters violent actions were ignored or even denied. We can see such argumentation for example in an article of Stephen Zunes who ends his article for *The Huffington Post* as follows: "It is a reminder that, for democracy to come to the Arab world, it will not be through armed struggle [...] but from Arab peoples utilizing the power of strategic nonviolent action."

While in the first months of the Arab Spring especially the creative and nonviolent means of protesting were praised as a successful way of causing the downfall of autocratic regimes and to start forming democratic societies–with the 18 days of protest in Tahrir Square that ended with the overthrow of President Mubarak as the ultimate example–later, when the violence became too prevalent to be ignored, violence was presented only as a threat to the process of democratization of the Arab world. In December 2011, for example, The American international affairs magazine *The National Interest* published an article with the title: "The Arab Spring's Violent Turn: Praise for the Arab Spring's democratic motivations is premature. Recent sectarian clashes suggest a much darker outcome." As already the title and subtitle of the article indicate, violence is often imagined as the antithesis of democracy and the struggle for democracy, as a phenomenon that absolutely does not belong to the domain of democratic politics. It is therefore that the violence used in the Arab Spring protests used by all parties is often seen, just as in this article, as an 'evidence' that the Arab Spring is over, thereby problematically reducing the Arab Spring to a very short period of miraculously peaceful and effective protest in a region that normally, in the Western imagination, only knew violent times (a topic I discussed in the second chapter).

But what if, as Koenraad Bogaert asks in a reflection on violence on democracy, "violence constitutes an integral, even inevitable, component of democratic struggle?" Without approving of or idealizing violence, and without denying the crucial contribution of protesters who used nonviolent means of resistance, Bogaert rightly argues how we have to be careful with the glorification of the nonviolent protests that have become symbolic of the 2011 uprisings. Moreover, if we truly want to theorize protest and the political struggle for democracy, we have to keep in mind, as Hannah Arendt has argued in her book *On Revolution* (1963), that the line between revolution and war is thin and that the struggle for political freedom cannot be conceived of outside the domain of violence:

> Yet, however needful it may be to distinguish in theory and practice between war and revolution despite their close interrelatedness, we must not fail to note that the mere fact that revolutions and wars are not even conceivable outside the domain of violence is enough to set them both apart from all other political phenomena. It would be difficult to deny that one of the reasons why wars have turned so easily into revolutions and why revolutions have shown this ominous inclination to unleash wars is that violence is a kind of common denominator for both. (18)

Thus rather than conceptualizing violence and democracy (or more broadly, the struggle for political freedom) as two separate spheres, it is important to accept the idea of political violence that makes a real

and effective contribution to political change.

This is especially important in the case of struggle for political freedom that takes place in the Arab world. Bogaert explains how the history of nonviolent revolutions such as the Prague Spring of 1968 and the revolution of 1989 in the former Soviet bloc have a privileged position within European history. These events have become so powerful in the Western imagination of revolution that the West had a, what Michael Kennedy calls, ready-to-hand "world historical narrative" that they used to interpret the 2011 uprisings throughout the Arab world. Therefore, when the West was still optimistic about the Arab Spring uprisings and believed that the Arab world could create democratic societies such as in the Western world, they only emphasized the nonviolent character of the uprisings and made comparisons with the 1968 and 1989 revolutions. However, when the transformations to democratic societies turned out to be a lengthy, not-so-smooth process, the violence (that had been part of the protests from the beginning, but now became more apparent) gradually became a topic of discussion. Commentators roundly condemned it, used it as a reason to start talking about 'failed' revolutions and argued how the revolutions had turned into violent situations that were just as bad as before the uprisings started. This two-piece narrative therefore once again perpetuated the idea that the Arab world can only achieve democracy through Western-like, that is, nonviolent, revolutions, but that this progress will be hard to achieve in a region that is (by nature or "because of a lack of democratic culture among the masses" (Bogaert)) violent. In other words, in such accounts non-violence becomes a characteristic of developed, modern, Western states while violence is typical of allegedly more primitive Arab states.

Hence, in order to deconstruct the dichotomy between the Western and Arab world, in order to analyze the struggle for political freedom in the Arab world in its own right, without interpreting it as a succeeded or failed revolution according to Western models, we have to acknowledge and accept violence as a fundamental (sometimes even crucial) element of all political struggle. In other words, we have to start accepting the idea of the violent protester.

In all five novels of this thesis readers are confronted with violence. In Towfik's *Utopia*, for example, we see how violence is used by those in power, that is, the inhabitants of Utopia (a village that is reserved for the wealthy, privileged Egyptians), as well as by those resisting those in power, the so-called Others. One of the two narrators, one of the Others, summarizes his life among the Others with the following words: "Punches. Stabs. Kicks. Gobs of Spit. Curses. Fists. Blades. Sweat" (59). The Others do not only use this violence against intruders from Utopia, but also to each other. Yet, the violence is also used by the privileged Utopians as, for example, the end of the novel illustrates in which the other narrator, a Utopian, opens fire against the approaching mass of protesters: "I wrenched the machine gun from the hands of a Marine standing beside me, and aimed it at the mass […] the forceful slam I received in my upper arm from the recoil didn't weaken my courage. So I started to shoot. I shoot. I shoot" (156). As the 'double'

story of Towfik that narrates the conflict between the powerful and suppressed Egyptians from both sides, makes clear: In times of political conflict, violence is used by all parties. Yet, while in *Utopia* the violence is still describe from a certain distance, the hate and clearly visible violence of Khalifa's *In Praise of Hatred* interestingly comes even more close. Is it through the atypical narrator, a female teenager who joins the Muslim Brotherhood, that the reader is confronted with the violence, without the reader being able to distance him or herself from the narrator to rationally condemn her actions, or to psychologize her violent actions, thereby victimizing the narrator.

Before discussing how violence is presented in *In Praise of Hatred*, it is interesting to note that while the actions carried out by the narrator are never phrased as terrorism by Khalifa himself, almost all analyses and reviews of the novel mention how the story is about a young Muslim girl who turns into a terrorist. This easy-made connection between terrorism and Muslim fanaticism is, however, precisely something the novel questions. If we think of the definition of terrorism, "The unofficial or unauthorized use of violence and intimidation in the pursuit of political aims" (Oxford Dictionaries), on what basis do we decide which violence is 'unauthorized' and which not? Without clearly disapproving or justifying violence, the novel illustrates how in countries with such a strict and oppressive regime as in Syria all violence used against the regime is 'unauthorized,' but in spite of that not more crude or more violent than the legitimate violence used by the regime itself.

In an overview of the representation of 'unauthorized violence' in novels, written between 1970 and 2001, Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel conclude that there are few novels about unauthorized violence that narrate their stories from the point of view of the 'perpetrator' himself (408). In most novels about violence the violent acts are described from a certain distance, thereby offering the reader the possibility to judge the violent perpetrator from this same ´safe´ distance. In comparison with this ´traditional´ terrorist novel, *In Praise of Hatred* is a remarkable novel. Not only is the story told from the perspective of the perpetrator herself instead or from the point of view from a "rational, liberal narrator,"[37] but also the inner thoughts of the narrator are shared with the reader, thereby pulling the reader "into the narrator's inner world rather than staging her deeds as an object for [the reader's] observation" (McManus 96). The narrator, for example, shares with her readers her violent thoughts about girls of her age who do not comply to the strict Islamic dress code: "In my heart I threatened unveiled girls. I imagined myself passing judgment on them; I would spray acid in their faces and disfigure them with mercy, hitting their delicate fingers so they wouldn't take hold of men's hands and laugh while dawdling and eating ice-cream" (122).

Although this fragment makes clear the cruel and aggressive thoughts of the narrator, it is hard for the reader to completely reject the thoughts and behavior of a narrator to whom they have been so

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37. *In Praise of Hatred* is of course not the first novel who shows the side of the perpetrator. Rather, the novel falls into a (perhaps marginal) tradition of novels that narrate from the perpetrators point of view such as Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) to Updike's *The Terrorist* (2006).

sympathetic from the beginning. After all, from the first page of the novel the narrator is introduced to the reader not as a cruel, evil person without any emotions, but as a shy dreamy teenager who is insecure about her maturing female body. Gradually, the reader goes along with her development into a person full of hatred: "By the end of that summer, hatred had taken possession of me. I was enthused by it; I felt that it was saving me. Hatred gave me the feeling of superiority I was searching for. […] 'We need hatred to give our lives meaning,' I thought as I celebrated my birthday alone" (98). Since we learn how the repressive Syrian regime and the patriarchal society that both deprive the narrator of all freedom (which she can only partially retrieve by becoming a member of the Muslim Brotherhood), make her into a person possessed by hatred, the reader stays sympathetic towards her, although she performs violent acts that go against the reader's values.

While *In Praise of Hatred* thus contextualizes the radicalism of the narrator and explains how the narrator has come to adopt and praise violent thoughts and deeds, the novel does not psychologize and individualize the narrator's development to such a degree that she turns into a "tragic individual, driven to violence by occupation, poverty, gender inequality, sexual assault and more" (McManus 86). Anne-Marie McManus who has analyzed some of these upcoming "sentimental terror narratives" argues that male terrorists are mostly portrayed in novels as men driven by religion and political fanaticism, while female characters only turn violent out of very personal reasons (86). In her article in which she also discusses *In Praise of Hatred* she argues how Khalifa's novel introduces, in contrast to these sentimental terror narratives, a protagonist that is pushed towards violence by the combination of both socio-political inequality and private suffering. I want to add that it is furthermore through the atypical character of the female, violent narrator that arouses enough sympathy in the readers, that readers start to accept the narrator's violence as inevitable in the conflict between Islamist groups and the Ba'ath regime.

According to McManus, Khalifa's novel, despite its unconventional point of view on terror, stops short in completely dismantling the sentimental terror narrative. She argues how in the third part of the novel, in which the narrator takes on the role of a mother, the conventions of the sentimental narrative are restored (99). Though it is true that during her years in prison, the narrator almost completely loses her violent thoughts, her hatred towards the regime is still there. On the very last pages of the novel, in order to be released from prison, the narrator does not object the prison guard's words when he says that "the past few years had guided me on to the right path and convinced me that my group was criminal, and that they themselves were patriots who wanted nothing more than to safeguard the country" (295). However, as the last words of the novel make clear, the narrator's hatred has not disappeared entirely: "I didn't open my mouth. When he got up and handed me the piece of paper which authorized my release, he reached out to shake my hand, so I reached out to transfer the poison of my hatred. I shook the hand of my enemy and looked into his eyes, and I knew that he was dead" (295-96). So, although she realizes that to her the hatred she possessed sometimes worked as a poison, she still wished her political enemies to be dead.

Especially because of the persistent dichotomy between violent Islamic fundamentalism and nonviolent liberal democracy the violent end is of crucial importance. It shows that, despite the narrator's transformation from an Islamic radical believer into a supporter of more liberal ideas, she has not completely lost her hatred. After all, it is not only her religious beliefs that determine her embrace of hate, but predominantly her country's discordant political situation. In other words, violence does not only belong to the, in our Western eyes, 'wrong' political, religious party, but to all political protests in general.

In this chapter I have analyzed how the novels of Matar and Khalifa present their readers no anonymous, homogeneous protesting crowds, as most photographs of the protests did, but diverse individual protesters. These protesters however, were not idealized Westernized protesters who are only seemingly considered to be responsible for political change, but 'real' fictional protesting agents whose rebellious acts have actual consequences. I have diversified the one-sided image of the protester with three alternative protesters: the naive child narrator who gradually becomes aware of his political status, but refuses to become an entirely politicized being; the female narrator, no longer only a symbol for the (failed) development toward liberal democracy; and the violent (female) narrator whose violent acts are maybe unwished-for but have to be acknowledged and understood in order to analyze the political conflict in all its diversity.

By now we have discussed three of the main elements that make up the Arab Spring narrative: its temporal framing (chapter 2), its spatial setting (chapter 3), and in this chapter, its main characters: the protesters. I started each chapter by explaining why the predominantly used timeline, setting and main characters simplified and reduced the complexity and diversity of the Arab Spring and, furthermore, how they sustained problematic preconceptions and images of the Arab world. Secondly, I have explained through various analyses of the diverse novels, how the timeline, setting and main characters of the (Western) popular narrative about the Arab uprisings are questioned, unsettled and transformed. After having explained and analyzed diverse aspects of the Arab Spring narrative and the novel's interaction/reaction to the narrative's various elements, I will conclude in the next chapter how the novels' interaction with the diverse elements of the Arab Spring narrative together contribute to a redistribution of the sensible order through which the 'grand narrative' of the Arab Spring is brought into question and simultaneously new, alternative and diverse Arab Spring narratives can be narrated in the future.

5.

Arab Spring Narrative(s) and the (re)Distribution of the Sensible

In the previous chapters I have focused on certain thematic aspects of the dominant Arab Spring narrative as it is told in the media to an international audience and I have analyzed how the five translated Arabic novels of this thesis can be read 'politically' in relation to these thematic aspects. At first sight it might be unclear what the relation is between the Arab Spring, on the one hand, and the literary works, on the other hand, since this important political event and the literary texts are generally classified into different spheres: namely, the political sphere (the Arab Spring) and the aesthetical, literary sphere (the works of literature). In order to conclude how the literary works politically respond to the Arab Spring, I will return to Rancière's notion of the distribution of the sensible to emphasize the 'aesthetical' side of the Arab Spring and, subsequently, the 'political' side of the novels. In this way I will bring the seemingly separated political event and novels more together, to analyze, subsequently, how the literary works intervene into the politico-cultural sphere of the Arab Spring and question, object, and transform the Arab Spring narrative.

The Arab Spring and the aesthetics of politics

From its very start the Arab Spring has been considered by political figures, academics and journalists all over the world an important political event: an event that shook the Arab world to its core and caught the attention of the whole world. Statements such as the one made by Mohammad Sayed Rassas who argued in an article for *Al-Monitor* (a platform for news from and about the Arab region) that the Arab Spring has not only altered the Arab region but the whole world were no exception, but ubiquitous in academic works, news articles and commentaries about the 2011 Arab uprisings. Yet, if we look which data are analyzed to make such claims, we can see how most journalists, critics and commentators predominantly looked at the changing governmental powers within the Arab region (and between the Arab region and the rest of the world), to make such statements. Mohammed Rassas discusses, for example, which autocratic rules are toppled, which people have taken over power and how Western influence in the Arab world (primarily the U.S.) has changed because of the change of regimes.

However, if we recall Rancière's theory of politics and aesthetics, we can argue how, according to Rancière, commentators such as Mohammed Rassas hold on to a limited notion of politics. As I explained in the first chapter, Rancière defines politics not as politics is often defined, namely as the exercise of governmental power, the potential shift of those who hold governmental power or the enactment of laws. Rancière does not argue that these elements are not a part of politics, but he believes that these are merely the outcomes or side effects of the aesthetics that lie at the core of politics: the distribution of the sensible, the distribution of what is sensible, visible, sayable and thinkable; a sensible order that determines which

persons are recognized as political subjects that can speak for themselves and are heard by others, and which people are silenced; a sensible order that determines which elements are considered important and which ones are labeled irrelevant (Rancière 2004b, 10).

Rancière's notion of politics can give us a different view on the Arab Spring and can put into question the dominant view of the uprisings in the Arab world as transformative, political events that radically changed the Arab region: an event that, furthermore, came of out nowhere and that is unrelated to the history of the Arab world. We can ask ourselves if the massive groups of protesters in the streets that demanded the downfall of autocratic regimes, the overthrow of a couple of Arab dictators, and the subsequent establishment of several new regimes are enough to declare that the Arab Spring has changed not only the Arab region but the whole world. I would argue, based on Rancière's notion of politics, that this is a hasty conclusion, since we should not only look at the changes of those in power, but also if a redistribution of the sensible order has taken place: that is, if not only the political rule, but also the dominant way of thinking about the political sphere has changed. Furthermore, if we want to examine the world-changing character of the event, we also have to locate this potential redistribution of the sensible: Where did this redistribution take place, only in the Arab region or all over the world? Did the Arab Spring effectively change the ways in which 'outsiders' looked at the Arab region and its people and, as a consequence, to themselves?

In line with this more encompassing notion of politics, Hamid Dabashi makes the compelling argument in his work, *Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012) that in the Arab protesters' famous slogan "The people demand the overthrow of the regime" the word 'regime' does not only point to the autocratic regimes that ruled for so long, but also to the *régime du savoir*: "the regime of knowledge production," the language with which we understand and criticize things" (26, 75), the language used to narrate, among other things, the Arab uprisings. In his book Dabashi states how the language we use to narrate the Arab Spring is of crucial importance because only if the uprisings are narrated in a language that does justice to the revolutionary character of the revolts, we can speak of an actually revolutionary event. Therefore, Dabashi repeatedly cautions his readers that 'we,' that is, the Western spectators, should not place the novelty of what is taking place in the Arab world into the familiarity of what we already now (78). In other words, the Western narrator/interpreter of the Arab uprisings should not assimilate the events of the Arab Spring retrogressively to familiar, age-old frameworks, "to what we know, and what we fear, and waste time picking fights with ghosts of bygone times, with 'Orientalism'" (75). According to Dabashi, the (Western) people that witnessed the Arab Spring from a distance, must therefore decipher the new revolutionary language so that the Arab Spring will not be read in light of the long-lasting assumptions about Islam, the process of democratization in the Arab world, the difference between the Western world and the non-Western world, or generalizing ideas about the 'Arab people:' that is, in light of "the tired old clichés of Orientalism" (63).

Hamid Dabashi is quite optimistic that if the Arab Spring is conceived of as an important political and socio-cultural event, it is possible to overcome (post)colonial notions of the 'Orient' and thus argues that the Arab Spring marks the "end of postcolonialism." One of the arguments behind his statement is his conviction that it has become harder for the West to 'speak for' Arab people or to misrepresent Arab cultures. After all, with the digitalization, diversification and democratization of media and the rise of Arab media with a worldwide audience, Dabashi is convinced that the protesters of the Arab uprisings can now speak for themselves. As Dabashi vigorously argues:

> Who cares what 'the media' say – what does the term mean today? Globalized media must now compete with Egyptian bloggers, Syrian tweeters, Tunisians on Facebook, Yemenis on Youtube, Bahrainis writing opinion pieces of *Al Jazeera*. […] 'Western' representation no longer has the authorial power to misrepresent anything. We who are resisting power and tyranny have, by virtue of the new media and by virtue of our numbers, more agility to represent than those in power do. (68)

In contrast to Dabashi's optimism about 'truthful' representations of the Arab uprisings, I have argued in this thesis how despite the cacophony of different voices in the media that all narrate the Arab Spring in their own way, nevertheless a 'grand narrative' of the Arab Spring is created: a problematic narrative that reduced the novelty of the uprisings and the potential shifts in the Western imagination of the Arab world that the Arab Spring could have brought about. As we have seen, this grand narrative is predominantly produced by Western news media such as *The New York Times*, *World Affairs*, *The Washington Times* and *The Huffington Post*, but is also repeatedly (maybe unconsciously) confirmed in Arabic news media such as *Al Jazeera* and *Jadaliyya*: media sources that, primarily through the Arab Spring, got an international audience. Although I do not want to claim that all media coverage of the Arab Spring misrepresented the uprisings, I have illustrated in this thesis how many news reports, analyses and commentaries of the Arab Spring perpetuated a certain hegemonic sensible order. The short timeframe of the Arab Spring narrative that was furthermore put in sharp contrast with the periods preceding and following the Arab Spring, the limited focus on the public, mostly visible spaces of resistance, and the way in which only certain protesters, that is, 'Western' protesters were brought into view, reaffirmed the idea that the Arab world is radically different from, and subordinated to the West and that, therefore, the democratization of the Arab world is a difficult process. In other words, the remarkable events of the Arab Spring are not used to see the Arab world in a different light, but rather to confirm the Western images of the unfamiliar Arab world.

In all the chapters we have seen how various news media at first sight seemed to present the events in the Arab world in a very positive light (as a successful, nonviolent protest of young and enthusiast Arabs who longed for democracy), especially if compared to the long-lasting subordinating, Orientalist, Western gaze towards the 'Orient.' However, we saw that behind the positive narrative of the Arab Spring still lie certain Orientalist assumptions about the Arab world, the nature of Arab people, Arab women and Islam that maintain the binary opposition between the developed, superior Western world and

the Arab world, undeveloped, ruled by repressive dictators and trying to (or failing to) reach the level of Western societies. Throughout this thesis I have discussed in several chapters some of these underlying assumptions that I will discuss now in more detail. Subsequently, in the second part of this chapter I will explain how I believe that literature undermines these assumptions.

In the second chapter I analyzed the term "Arab Spring" and its temporal connotations and explained that already this single term labels the historical periods that preceded the Arab Spring and also have known diverse uprisings (though less massive, and less public), as a dark winter that contrasts sharply with the 2011 uprisings. As a result, the 2011 revolts (also because they were only compared with uprisings from Western history) were framed as Western-like uprisings that occurred in an Arab region instead of revolts that, given the decades of protest against the regimes, were likely to happen (or on their way to happen) in the Arab world. In other words, in many accounts the Arab world was conceived of as a region in which successful uprisings against the regime were quite unlikely to happen. The Arab Spring often became considered an exception: a revolution in 'Western style' that was a relative success (it caused the downfall of several autocrats after all) but soon gave way again to times of chaos and violent struggle between groups with diverse religious and ideological convictions that had characterized the Arab world for so long.

In the next chapter in which I focused on the geography of resistance, I discussed how the media focused mainly on one public space of protest (Cairo's Tahrir Square or similar public squares in other countries) and how this limited focus generalized the protests and the protesters in the Arab world. Only those visibly protesting in public space were recognized as protesters, thereby excluding protesters revolting from less visible spaces (the countryside or the interior space of the home). Besides, only one single form of oppression (the oppression of the Arab people because of the autocratic regimes) and one single form of protest (the demonstrations of the Arab people against the regime) are brought into view if media focus on one space, while the struggle for power was of course different in each country and each Arab country also had its own internal power relations between various groups of people. A study of the spaces of resistance that were made visible in the media, shows how despite the sincere, worldwide interest in the developments of the Arab world, there is still a tendency to simply generalize the different countries in the Arab region with its diverse populations and speak about 'the Arab world' and 'the Arab people': a tendency that is very characteristic of Orientalist discourse).

Finally, in chapter four we saw that only those protesters who resembled the Western, political subject were brought to the attention. Yet, although these protesters were made visible in the media, they were not presented as agential Arabs that started and continued the uprisings all by themselves since most accounts of the Arab Spring emphasized so much the protesters' digital 'Western' gadgets that these Western tools appeared to be indispensable for the success of the revolts. Because of this focus on the protesters' digital possessions it seemed as if the Arab people still needed external 'Western' influence,

were, in other words, still dependent on the Western world to democratize their societies. Furthermore, I discussed the problematic relation that was often made between the visible presence of women and the degree of democratization. Finally, I illustrated how especially two elements that are presented as radically non-Western–Islamism and violence–were not included in the narrative of the Arab Spring, or only as signs that indicated the Arab Spring was over or had failed.

Although there are certainly more aspects of the Arab Spring narrative that can be discussed, these examples already illustrate that to a large extent the Arab Spring is still narrated by Western media in 'Western' terms. That is, the 2011 Arab uprisings despite their revolutionary character, were assimilated to familiar frameworks and were interpreted in light of old assumptions about the character of the Arab region and its people. Consequently, the Arab Spring, although it has the potential to change age-old conceptions of the Arab world, to redistribute the hegemonic sensible order–that is, the way in which we see, think and talk about the Arab world–has rather affirmed and perpetuated a certain sensible order. In other words, if we not only focus on the struggle for governmental power in the Arab region (on those elements that are considered traditionally the 'core' of politics) but also include, what Rancière calls "the aesthetics of politics" or the distribution of the sensible (and its potential redistribution) we got a different image of this important political event and its consequences. It shows that predominantly Western subjects are allowed to speak for the Arab protesters, that only 'Westernized' protesters are made visible, but simultaneously are silenced, that other protesters remain completely invisible. Moreover, that in the grand narrative of the Arab Spring all elements that are associated with Western societies–democratization, nonviolent protest, digital media, secularism–are allowed to appear and are selected as relevant, while all other elements that are considered radically non-Western–primarily Islamism and violence–are not allowed in the narrative and considered irrelevant or even antithetical to the Arab Spring.

Dabashi is right in arguing that if we want to decipher the new revolutionary character of the uprisings, we have to listen carefully "to the new language that people are singing" in all the different Arab countries (69). However, before we are able to hear this revolutionary language, we first have to deconstruct and unsettle the Western frameworks with its assumptions and stereotypes about the Arab region that are used to narrate the Arab Spring. This means that, if we think about Dabashi's statement that Arab citizens not only protested against their regime, but also against the Orientalist discourse used to represent the uprisings, the struggle still continues. In contrast to those commentators who argue that the Arab Spring has ended, based on the successful downfall of some regimes or the setbacks in other countries, we can argue that the struggle against the hegemonic *régime du savoir* that perpetuates the idea that the Arab world 'lags behind,' still continues. After all, we have seen how this hegemonic thought is still reaffirmed in the media coverage of the Arab Spring.

While Dabashi is convinced that this new revolutionary language can be found in upcoming new Arab media, in this thesis I have focused on other spaces where the old Orientalist notions of the Arab

world are disrupted and where the basis for such a new revolutionary language is constructed: in Arabic literature, in the novels of Khaled Khalifa, Hisham Matar, Ahmed Khaled Towfik and Fadi Azzam.

Translated Arabic literature and the politics of aesthetics

As I have illustrated in this thesis, literature can intervene into the political sphere, can partake in the distribution of the sensible. Literature can be a space where a language is created that contradicts, unsettles and nuances the narrative of the Arab Spring. It is furthermore a space where Arabic political subjects that are unseen or silenced in the hegemonic sensible order can 'speak' for themselves and, in this way, can protest against the Western narrative that speaks *for* the Arab people. It is because of this potentiality of literature that Rancière calls literature 'political' and not because the author or the literary text itself is directly involved with politics.

Yet, as I explained in the first chapter, literature is not, as Rancière seems to suggest, inherently political. That is, literature does not by nature partake in the redistribution of the sensible. First of all, as the example of Ben Jelloun's short story "By Fire" that I introduced in the second chapter, illustrated, literature can also contribute to the affirmation of certain ideas (in this case, the idea that the Arab Spring 'suddenly' started with the self-immolation of Bouazizi). Moreover, literature can be potentially unsettling, but nevertheless can still be read in the light of the dominant sensible order, whereby the potential dissensus that the literature in question could bring about, is undone. In other words, in the end the potential redistribution has to take place in the interaction between the reader and the literary text. Therefore, the fact that these works are written by Arab authors and read, in English translation, by an international audience does not necessarily mean that through these literary works Arab people are given a voice and can respond to the Western world that has a long history of speaking for the Arab world and its inhabitants. These novels may present unheard or silenced people as political subjects that are allowed to speak for themselves, but at the moment these political characters are interpreted in line with familiar frameworks, it can be possible that these characters still end up as being unheard.

As Edward Said has argued repeatedly in his works, there exists a long history of the West 'reading' the Arab world in such a way that their Orientalist assumptions–for example, the Middle East is exotic; Arab people are primitive and dangerously violent; the Middle East always lags behind on the Western world–will only be confirmed instead of refuted. There is a risk that Western readers will read in these works what they want to read or what they beforehand expect to find in these literary works. In these cases, the works' potential for disrupting politics will not be put in motion by the reader, and the works can end up being read instrumentally according to pre-existing assumptions and schemes of value, or in harmony with the hegemonic distribution of the sensible.

The potential 'political' function of literature, as Rancière has theorized it, is even more at risk when, firstly, the literary works are written by Arabic authors because, as we have seen with Jameson's

argument about allegorical readings, Western readers have the tendency to read all 'third-world texts' in a political light and, secondly, when literature is presented as political literature (often in the context of an important political event). In the case of the novels of this thesis both potential risks are present. When we look at the way in which these novels are presented to an international (primarily Western) audience we can see that they are indeed presented as political novels that can inform 'us' (in the Western world) about the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011. Yet, these novels are not simply 'informative' and should not be seen as texts that are political despite their literary form. To the contrary, the novels of these Arabic authors are works of literature, and precisely as works of literature, they can be political. Therefore, in order to prevent such Western 'instrumental' readings I have continuously taken into account in this thesis the *literary* qualities of these novels and analyzed how these works intervene into the political sphere as *literature*.

Although literary works are always potentially political, the novels' politics–the way in which the novels redistribute the sensible order of a certain time and in a certain space–is continuously in motion. I have chosen in this thesis to read these works in relation to a specific context, namely, to focus on how these novels politically respond to the Arab Spring, and particularly, the narrative of the Arab Spring. [38] Most of all, because the 2011 Arab uprisings have aroused renewed interest for the Arab world in the West: an interest that, on the one hand, as I have discussed in each chapter, can sustain even more certain Western assumptions about the Arab world and can maintain the notion of the Arab world as inferior to the Western world; an interest that, on the other hand, has given these novels a bigger and more international readership that, potentially, can give these novels an even more significant, political-literary function. It is with these considerations in mind that I have analyzed in various ways how the novels of Khalifa, Azzam, Matar, and Towfik partake in the redistribution of the sensible, how they contradict and unsettle certain elements (the dominant timeframe, the central space of resistance, and the most visible protester) of the Arab Spring narrative and in this way lay the foundations for alternative narratives of the uprisings in the Arab world.

In thinking about how exactly literature can contribute to the distribution of the sensible I have followed Joseph Tanke who distinguished three different forms of disruption in Rancière's texts that all take place at the same time. First of all, the disruption of the self-evidence of the hegemonic sensible

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38. It is important to know, as I emphasized several times in this thesis, that all five novels that I have analyzed in this thesis are published some years before, or during the first uprisings of the Arab Spring, in the last month of 2012 and the first months of 2011. Therefore, none of these novels directly narrate or reflect on the Arab Spring uprisings.

Overview publications:
Hisham Matar, *In the Country of Men*, (originally written in English), 2006.
Hisham Matar, *Anatomy of a Disappearance* (originally written in English), March 2011.
Fadi Azzam, *Sarmada*, (originally written in Arabic), January 2011, English translation: October 2011.
Khaled Khalifa, *In Praise of Hatred* (originally written in Arabic), 2006, English translation: 2012.
Ahmed Khaled Towfik, *Utopia* (originally written in Arabic), 2008, English translation: December 2011.

order. While normally people often take the hegemonic sensible order for granted, literature can break through this self-evidence and reveal the possibility to change the dominant distribution of the sensible. The second form of dissensus is the creation of a space where unheard and unseen people can identify themselves as political subjects. Thirdly, literature (or more generally, art) sketches an alternative world through which readers can both question the hegemonic order that they normally conceive of as 'given' and can start thinking about alternative sensible orders. These three forms of dissensus can be found in each chapter in which I analyzed how the novels react to a certain thematic aspect of the Arab Spring narrative: the timeline of the Arab Spring narrative, the space of protest on which the narrative focused, and, thirdly, which protesters were given a role in the Arab Spring narrative.

In this second chapter I have discussed the time frame used to demarcate the Arab Spring and explained how this very short time frame is problematic. Subsequently, I have analyzed how each of the novels introduces a historical period from a specific country that is almost nowhere included in the Arab Spring narrative. The introduction of these historical works unsettles the hegemonic sensible order in different ways. First of all, it can make us aware of the contingency of the chosen time frame, since the novels illustrate that we could also start the story of uprisings and conflict in the Arab world on a different moment. Secondly, the novels establish a link between certain uprisings of the past and the recent uprisings and thus provide its readers with an alternative world, an alternative time frame. Thirdly, since the periods before the Arab uprisings are often conceived of in the West as dark and violent periods that are finally overcome with the rise of the Arab Spring, people who before the 2011 uprising already rebelled against the autocratic regime, were not acknowledged as significant protesters. Yet, since the novels present these historical periods as periods that have to be seen as part of the Arab Spring time frame, the protesters of the past are presented as political subjects that made an important contribution to the political changes in the Arab world and not as 'primitive' people that obstructed the development of the Arab region towards democracy.

The works, however, do not intervene in the political sphere as historical texts, but as literary texts. It is the complex narrative structure of each novel that enhances the novels' dissensus and really, as Tanke has phrased it, "destabilizes the parameters of the sensible world" (104) since they disrupt the notion of a chronological story with a clear, beginning, middle, and end (the most common form, constructed in the Western world, to narrate history). In every novel the narrative is not presented in a chronological way, but in such a non-chronological way that it is hard for the reader to point to the 'beginning' or 'end' of the narrative. Furthermore, in Azzam's novel for example, the narrative is told through so many voices and in so many ways, that it is impossible to speak of one single narrative. In other words, it is the literary way in which these novels present these historical periods that the dominant Arab Spring narrative is broadened, disrupted and unsettled at the same time.

Also in the third chapter in which I focused on the spaces of resistance, there are different ways in which the novels diversified the spaces of resistance and the notion of resistance itself. The media's primary focus, as I explained, was Cairo's Tahrir Square and the protesters on the square that publicly revolted against Egypt's autocratic ruler. Besides Tahrir Square the media focused their attention on similar public spaces. Yet, since the novels' stories primarily take place in spaces that differ from the central space of resistance, but nevertheless can be considered 'protest stories,' the novels question the seemingly 'natural' choice of the media to focus only on public squares of protest. As the novels illustrate with their alternative spaces of resistance, protest can also take place beyond the boundaries of public squares and thus reveal the idea that if we want to narrate resistance we have to take diverse spaces of resistance into account. The novels of Matar and Azzam concretely provided two alternative spaces of revolt that we can place in contrast to the dominant protesting space: the outskirts of a country (in this novel, Syria) and the domestic space of the home.

With these alternative spaces of resistance that the novels offer, we could not only expand the limited focus on public squares as the centers of protest during the Arab Spring, but also question the dominant notion of resistance itself. As I illustrated with *Sarmada*, *In the Country of Men* and *In Praise of Hatred* the novels present characters who are oppressed in different ways and thus their protest also takes on different forms. Because these forms of protest deviate from the 'traditional' protester who protests publicly in the streets, the novels therefore problematize our tendency to take one form of oppression and one form of protest as a standard to subsequently define oppression and protest for the whole Arab region. In other words, through the alternative spaces of protest that the novels present, it becomes clear that we should not define the Arab Spring simply as a conflict between those in power (the regime) and those who are oppressed by the regime (and thus protest in public against the regime). Instead, we have to take into account the diverse power relations between groups and acknowledge the idea that oppressed people can simultaneously oppress other people (or the other way around) or that people can be oppressed in several ways.

Thirdly, the novels' alternative spaces of resistance also allow new political subjects to arise. For example, the recognition of the small mountain villages of Syria and households as spaces of revolt, subsequently leads to the recognition of the inhabitants of these spaces–peasants, women and children–as political subjects and potential protesters. The diversification of the space of protest thus can also bring about the diversification of those people recognized as protesters.

In the last chapter I zoomed in on these protesters after first discussing the ways in which the protesters are presented in the media coverage of the Arab Spring. Through an analysis of photographic representations of the protesters, I concluded that protesters were, on the one hand, presented as an uncontrollable group of protesters, with none of them given a human face. On the other hand, if the protesters were portrayed individually, they were presented as Westernized, peaceful protesters who were

in need of 'Western' technological tools to count as people who made a significant contribution to the uprisings. Since the media only presented the protesters in groups or otherwise in a very specific way, the novels' protagonists who are both presented as protesters (protester that often contrasted sharply with the Western ideal of a protester) and as human individuals already put into the question the ways in which the media portrayed the Arab Uprisings protesters. Also in this case, the novels both question the 'naturalness' with which the protesters are presented in a certain way and provide alternative ways to introduce protesters.

Again, it is the literary space of the novels that allows the disruption to take place since it offers a space where, in contrast to the media images of protesters, Arab people can identify themselves both as specifically *Arab* protesters and as human beings. For example, as the close analysis of Matar's novel *Anatomy of a Disappearance* illustrated, in this novel it is through the 'double' narrative (both a psychological Freudian and a national-political narrative) and the novel's deviation from the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre that the main character can develop himself into an individual, political subject.

From the Arab Spring narrative to Arab Spring narratives

As has become clear throughout this thesis, the five novels that are presented in the Western world as the 'essential' novels about the uprisings, do not directly interfere in or react to the Arab Spring narrative. That is, the novels are no literary works that directly tell about the Arab Spring uprisings, its effects and the people that were involved in the protests. Yet, as I illustrated in the different chapters, the novels can nevertheless be read in regard to certain thematic aspects of the Arab Spring narrative (time, space and characters) as it is predominantly told by the media to an international audience, to the outside, distant spectators of the Arab uprisings that are relatively unfamiliar with Arab cultures. It is partly because of these thematic aspects of the Arab Spring narrative that certain Orientalist assumptions, stereotypes and generalizations about the 'Middle East' are perpetuated while the renewed, relatively positive international interest for the Arab Spring and the developments in the Arab region itself have the potential to, as Hamid Dabashi has phrased it, mark the "end of postcolonialism."

It is in the context of the narration of the Arab Spring that the novels of Khalifa, Matar, Azzam and Towfik have an important political function since these works contest the 'parameters' of the hegemonic narrative about the Arab Uprisings: the timeframe, the spatial setting and the main characters of the Arab Spring narrative. Because these parameters of the narrative are unsettled in the literary works, the novels construct a political space where they offer their readers new ways to think, speak and look at the Arab Spring. By describing historical periods of uprisings, other spaces of resistance, and diverse protesters, the novels diversify what is sensible, visible, sayable and thinkable in the context of the Arab Spring and thus contribute to a reconfiguration of the sensible. It is in this way that the novels open up a space where a variety of new narratives about the Arab Spring can be told.

In the future the narratives of the Arab Spring will most likely change. Since the uprisings in some Arab countries still continue, the narratives of the uprisings will probably be adapted to these future developments. Therefore, it will remain important to pay attention to the ways in which the Arab Spring will be imagined and represented and to analyze how literary narratives react to or intervene in these narratives. Besides, also the corpus of 'Arab Spring literature' (to which the novels of Matar, Khalifa, Azzam and Towfik can be included as long it remains clear that these novels do not directly describe the uprisings themselves) will change. While at the moment there almost exist no literature about the Arab uprisings, such literature will be written in the future. It remains to be seen what kind of Arab Spring narratives these future novels will bring us.

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