

THE ORGANIC AND THE TRADITIONAL INTELLECTUALS: A CRITICAL STUDY IN THE CONTEMPORARY ARABIC NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

This study falls into the rubric of Power and Intellectuals in the Arab World. It draws up on the framework of Gramsci's critical theory, as well as, Edward Said's book Representations of the Intellectuals. Gramsci believed that "Organic intellectuals are actively involved in society"(Said 4). Benda defines intellectuals as a "tiny band of super-gifted and morally endowed philosopher-kings who constitute the conscious of mankind" (Said 4). On the light of these two definitions, this study attempts to trace the relationship between Traditional Authority and Organic Intellectuals in the Arab World through the works of Abdul Rahman Munif. It also shows that traditional intellectuals ruled the organic intellectuals by force. Therefore, the clash between the intellectuals and the authority became an inevitable one. Abdul Rahman Munif is an organic intellectual who chose to stand up with weaker and the less well-represented. The novels to be analyzed in this study are Cities of Salt and East of the Mediterranean. These novels exclusively deal with the themes of Power and Intellectuals. They have put power, ideology, culture, hegemony and intellectuals as their settings between fictionality and actuality by going into the very details of the clash between the states and the intellectuals. Arab intellectuals have completely lost their freedom because of the Arab dictatorial regimes. The intellectuals, who chose to explore the darker side and to unveil the veil of the image so carefully constructed by the dictatorial regimes-controlled media, have ended up in stuffy dark rooms. Such places are the most frequently resorted where intellectuals are habitually taken into prison as a kind of exile in order to be silenced. The same thing happens to Rajab Ismail, the hero of East of the Mediterranean. Rajab Ismail is imprisoned for many years under deplorable situations of mental and physical torture. He loses his eyesight because of the brutal torture.

Keywords: Power, Ideology, Culture, Hegemony and Intellectuals.

Introduction:

At the outset, let us mention a brief definition of the intellectual. Intellectual is "relating to your ability to think and understand things, especially complicated ideas" ("intellectual" *Cambridge Dictionary Online*). In general, the intellectual is defined as a man who has a higher degree of knowledge. Others assure that intellectual is the creator in the fields of literature, arts and science. "An intellectual is a person who engages in critical study, thought, and reflection about the reality of society, and proposes solutions for the normative problems

of society, and by such discourse in the public sphere gains authority from public opinion” (“Intellectual” Wikipedia).

In fact the relationship between the states and the intellectuals has provoked much discussion among writers and critics. If the intellectual criticizes the states, the government will consider him as an enemy; therefore they should arrest and punish him. If he accepts compromising with the states, the people will accuse him of being a mouthpiece of trumpets and if he decides to keep his knowledge for himself this means that he does not take concern of his people. Hence the Arab- Intellectual became as a strange man.

This study tries to answer the following questions through the novels of Abdulrahman Munif: Do the organic intellectuals have power in the community of the Arab world? Or do they move between the hammer of power and the nail of society? Is the space of the relationship between Arabic intellectuals and the states considered as a hostile relation or exclusionary relation? Can we describe the relationship between the intellectuals and the states as a relationship of clash or harmony? On the other hand, is the relationship between the intellectuals and their societies a complementary relationship or not? At the same time, this study shows the reader how the traditional intellectuals in the Arab world are ruling the organic Intellectuals by force. It tries to analyze *The East of the Mediterranean and the Salt Cities* novels. All of them written by an organic Arabic intellectual who – according to Gramsci- has the real role of the intellectual. Abd al-Rahman Munif (1933-2004) is a typical example of the Arabic organic Intellectual for the outstanding role he has played. He is considered as one of the most influential figures in the contemporary political history of the Arab world. As a many sided unique figure, Abd al-Rahman Munif was encyclopedic intellectual, a modern novelist and writer with wide relationships with famous Arab thinkers and literary celebrities. He is also a leftist thinker and theorist. He is a symbol of the Idealist patriot who devotes his life for the nation. In brief, Munif proves through his writing how effective the intellectual could be in societal and political life and how he can take part in the process of change and making history. As Foucault claims that “the intellectuals should shift their focus from a battle *“on behalf” of truth to one that raises questions about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays*” (qtd. in Ransom par. 3).

The western organic intellectuals stand up with less representation culturally, morally and politically. Therefore, there is no clash between the states and the intellectuals. The organic intellectuals are the real rulers of the west. There is a little role for the traditional intellectuals in the west. In brief, the traditional intellectuals in the west became as the guests behind the doors. The western states also are not based on coercion but on the degree of popular support. On the other hand, the traditional intellectuals in the Arab world are the real rulers in the Arab world.

The traditional intellectuals such the religious group, sectarian groups, militia groups, tribal leaders and militaries coup are ruling Arab societies till today. For example, there are religious states such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Iraq. There are also tribal states like Yemen and the Gulf states. At the same time we have military states like Egypt, Algeria, Syria and Morocco. These states or regimes are based on coercion, suppression and oppression; and not on a great degree of popular support. These regimes believe of power and suppression.

Antonio Gramsci (1891- 1937) assures that “hegemony should be based on consent and not coercion” (Sakwa181).

These regimes failed to save and develop their nations. In Yemen most of college professors, activists and journalists are arrested by the militias and children or traditional authority. How can these countries develop while the majority of the people are uneducated, unsophisticated and uncivilized? “The 2002 UN report on the region notes the failure of development in the Arab world” (Memmi 29). This report had proved that Arab regimes failed in everything.

Power and Arab-Intellectuals after Independence

Since the time of the independence of Arab countries the clash between the organic intellectuals and the states in the Arab world has become a recruiting subject both in fictional and autobiographical writings. From 1950 till today Arab countries lived under the military coup and the traditional intellectuals. After independence these regimes started to put the poets, critics and everyone talk about the regime in the prison. Many people have been killed without crimes just because of their attitudes. These regimes create a great sense of paralysis within the nations and within the people themselves. The stability and security of authoritarian regimes cannot create peace and harmony between the states and the nations but terrorism, violence and destruction.

Some of the Arab countries like Yemen, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Iraq and Tunisia adopted democracy. These regimes by democracy mean a government of the people, by the people for some people against others. The militias, uneducated, uncultured, uncivilized people (traditional intellectuals) are ruling Arab nations today. These elites are the scum of the earth. These militias want to impose their ideas on others by force. That is why today Arab world kill each other. They do not accept each other. They do not believe of each other. These corrupted and tyrannical regimes destroyed everything in the Arab world. These regimes arrested and killed most of the intellectuals in the Arab world. The rule of the organic intellectuals is absent. The organic intellectuals could not achieve their aims and help their societies because the absent of justice and the dictatorial regimes.

The intellectuals in the Arab countries today completely lose their freedom because of dictatorial regime. They cannot do anything except to write and express their pains and views into papers for the next generation. As Rogger Allen emphasizes in his book *Introduction to Arabic literature*, that those writers who chose to explore the darker side of the image so carefully constructed by the government-controlled media found themselves imprisoned or worse; for them the most frequent resorts were to silence or exile (49).

In fact Arabic organic intellectuals do not stay silent. They found themselves into two choices as Edward Said says that “*The intellectual always has a choice either to side with the weaker, the less well-represented, the forgotten or ignored, or to side with the more powerful*”(24). According to Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, we can find many great intellectual in the Arab world who could be offered as organic intellectuals due to the organic and effective role they have played in their societies and their contribution to the progress and prosperity of their nations. Those intellectuals do not stay silent. They are so

active that they take part in making history. Such figures are turning points in the progress of humanity towards better future and they are celebrated icons for generations to come.

Thus, the relation between the states and the intellectuals of the Arab world can be described as a hostile relation. As Elisabetta Benigni assures that *“this is a consequence of the wave of arrests that involved intellectuals, political activists and opponents. After independence, in fact, in many regions of the Arab world, the colonial authorities and their local cronies were succeeded by national regimes that have surpassed their predecessors in the various methods of tyranny.”* (12) This relation also can be described as a relation of clash because Arab intellectuals live in a region full of torture, sectarian killing, depression, suppression, dictatorship and societal pressure. Narrative texts are rich in endless codes and message due to the clash between the intellectuals and the states in the Arab world. In his Article, *Intellectual Rape: the Image of the Political Prisoner in the Egyptian Novel*, Ashraf Zidan emphasizes that these narrative texts are also *“rich in endless codes and messages due to types of oppressions and suppressions practiced against writers and intellectuals”* (163).

The Concepts of the Organic and Traditional Intellectual

Arab people share many things in common that unify them and create cohesion in the society. These things are derived from the Arabic culture which is mainly rooted in Arabic customs and traditions. This can be explained by Gramsci's perspective that culture can present a unifying tool in the society.

In Arabic context, there are intellectuals who are organic and others who are traditional. The organic intellectuals are the university professors, politicians, writers and philosophers etc. The traditional intellectuals are tribal leaders, preachers, religious scholars, and so on. Antonio Gramsci believed that *“organic intellectuals are actively involved in society, that is, they constantly struggle to change minds and expand markets; unlike teachers, priests or preachers, who seem more or less to remain in place, doing the same kind of work year in year out, organic intellectuals are always on the move, on the make”* (Said 4). The Organic intellectuals, whom Gramsci also saw as directly connected to classes or enterprises that *used intellectuals to organize interests, gain more power, get more control”* (Said 3).

Edward Said emphasizes in his book *Representations of the Intellectuals* that *“an intellectual is like a shipwrecked person who learns how to live in a certain sense with the land, not on it, not like Robinson Crusoe whose goal is to colonize his little island, but more like Marco Polo, whose sense of the marvelous never fails him, and who is always a traveler, a provisional guest, not a freeloader, conqueror, or raider”* (44). He assured that *“intellectual belongs on the same side to the weak and unrepresented”* (17).

Power and the Intellectuals Relationship in the Arab World through the Texts of Munif's *East of the Mediterranean and the Salt Cities*

Arab intellectuals can be divided through the works of Munif into three categories. The First category stands up by the state and becomes as a part of the power. This category become as a part of the problem. This group supports the unjust regimes. The reason of making them to stand up by the authority is torture and prison. These intellectuals are suppressed and

imprisoned by the national governments and later be changed into tools of the authority. They justify the authority crimes.

The second category is those who are separated from the states. This category seems to be faithful to its principles. Unfortunately this category does not support neither authority nor mass. They prefer silence.

The third category seems the most influential category. It is the category that tries to hold the stick from the middle. This category characterized by its loyalty to the principles of the free and an organic intellectual. These intellectuals prefer exile or prison instead of supporting tyranny and unjust regimes. Those organic intellectuals are suffering and still suffering from the ruling parties in the Arab world. They prefer death to stay under torture, alienation, exile, loss of freedom and expatriation. They want to see peace and stability in their countries. They sacrifice their lives for others. They live for their nations and not for themselves. Most of them killed in prisons and the others still in exile until today. Those intellectuals cannot do anything. They cannot destroy the ruling parties in the Arab world because they have just their pens and voices. They do not have army or weapon to destroy the unjust regimes in the Arab world. Most of the Arab- states censored their writings as what happened with Abdul Rahman Munif. The states of the Arab world can be described as the states of intelligence agents.

Abd al-Rahman Munif and others choose to stand up with weaker and the less well-represented. They share their people's pain and suffering. They started to attack the national regime and criticized them using a variety of approaches and styles.

Munif describes the relationship between the states and the intellectuals as a conflict relation.

In his novel *Sharq al-Mutawassit*, (*East of the Mediterranean*), Munif explains the extreme and harsh relationship between the states and the Arab intellectuals. This novel is also deals with strong theme of freedom, based around the central hero Rajab Ismail who is subject to eleven years of extreme torture and is eventually made blind during the dreadful tribulation. Munif shows in this novel how the intellectuals in Arab countries are deprived of freedoms and basic rights.

The intellectual's personality in both novels *East of the Mediterranean* and *Salt of Cities* always appears in a conflict with the authority.

Rajab Ismail's crisis did not happen between him and the tribal or ignorant people of his homeland. His crisis was with the state because suppression, oppression, torture and terrorism against the intellectuals. The oppressive state killed the ambition and dream of the intellectuals in the Arab world. Rajab Ismail was worried when he saw inside the prison "*a dozen of bodies which have not had even a chance to dream, they killed the people*" (Munif 2) (*Translated by Self*).

In both novels Munif assures that the traditional states always represent torture and murder. The traditional regimes achieve poverty, corruptions; lack of speech, lack of freedom and

lack of political activism. These novels emphasize that the Arabic regimes represent fear, terror, horror and suppression. On the other hand, an organic intellectual represents peace, culture and tolerance. Munif proves in his two novels that the power of the people is much stronger than the people in power. The authority does not find any solution for social and political problems except torture and murder to ensure its survival and continuity and the intellectual does not surrender, always refuses tyranny, injustice and suppression against innocent people in their homeland. Therefore, these intellectuals became the victim of this clash because they live for others and not for themselves. Munif assures that if the intellectuals stand with less- represented and weak people, the matter is very simple. The authority will find the intellectuals with thousands of ready- made charges. They will accuse them and put them in prison as what happened with Rajab. Nobody can ask about their arrest.

Munif emphasizes that the clash between the intellectuals and the states in his novels end into death by the power. When the authority killed Rajab Ismail, the battle or clash had moved between his sister's husband and the state, and then the clash transformed between Rajab's nephew and the state. This means that intellectual did not surrender because they live for other not for themselves. The physical death of Rajab does not mean the death of the idea for freedom and dignity.

Intellectual between Exile and Torture

Belkabir Boumediene emphasizes that "more than thirty two of the Arab intellectuals are living in exile and sixty eight in their homeland"(YouTube Video)(Translated by self). Arabic an organic intellectual became as strange, orphan and innocent man because both society and the state refuse him and his ideas. Rajeb Ismail, the main character of *East of the Mediterranean* novel, a political activist enters prison and meets various kinds of torture. At the end, he finds himself compelled to sign a pledge to leave politics. After his release from prison, he assures that there is no distinction between a man and a chimpanzee or any animal in the Arab world. The authority deals with its intellectuals and citizen as a master with his slave. Therefore, Munif shows in the novel of *East of the Mediterranean* that an intellectual does not have any choice except to leave for another country or to live in underground. He did not find peaceful place to save himself and his family. He emphasizes in both novels that the intellectuals prefer exile on their homeland. The intellectuals believe that in exile they will find freedom of speech. As Edward Said says:

Exile is a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even beset and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yea- saying, settling in. even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins, where you see things that are usually lost on minds that have never travelled beyond the conventional and the comfortable. (46-47)

At the same time, Rajab Ismail, the hero of the Mediterranean prefers exile and hates to come back to his homeland because of the prisons and an oppressive government.

Beware O! Ashilos, if you go back to the eastern beach, you will find yourself in a small basement. And there you have to resist madness, alienation and isolation. All the creatures there became crazy and mad. Even, the kittens became crazy. It cannot purr there like cats in other areas. The cat can bear hunger. Its appeal for freedom is stronger than the call of hunger. (Munif 96) (Translated by self)

The novel of *Cities of Salt* started to explain the searching for oil in the desert of the Gulf countries and then how the tribal leaders or traditional intellectuals like sheikhs, religious leaders and tribal leaders of the Gulf countries started to suppress their nations. The authority of Saudi Arabia stripped Munif's citizenship because of this novel and exiled him from his homeland.

Munif describes the relationship between the intellectuals and the sultans or kings and their colonialist advisers as the relation between the oppressed and the oppressor. On the other hand he emphasizes in this novel that the oppressed regimes do not come from another space. He assures that both the Arabic intellectuals and the ordinary people helped these unjust regimes to continue of suppression and killing the innocent people. Finally they are afraid. He also describes the space of the relation between the traditional intellectuals in the Gulf countries and the organic intellectuals as a painful relation. He also depicts how the authorities have changed these places into monstrous and savages places because of arrest and pursuit of the intellectuals. The characters of *Cities of Slat* novel distribute between the intellectuals and popular characters, facing the unjust regime and power. This novel proves that Arab nation will not see stability, security, peace and tolerance unless old regimes change and new states emerge based on justice, democracy, freedom, equal citizenship and human rights. Then the intellectuals will find a chance to participate and to play an important role in civil society.

Finally, it is very important to assure that the concept of power is based on Justice. Kareem Abu Halawa mentioned in his article "Arab Intellectuals: the Power and the Community", the story of Chinese philosopher "Confucius" with an old woman in a desert. He found an old woman crying on a grave in a wasteland. He sent one of his students to ask her, why she is crying near graves. She replied that the father of her husband was killed by a tiger in this place, and then the Tiger killed her husband here in the same place. Finally her son met the same fate. When he asked her about the reason for staying in this desert, where she is alone with no company. She replied "I prefer this place because there is no oppressive government here" (par.1) (Translated by Self).

Conclusion:

It appears that Arabic Intellectuals have had more influence in the past decades especially after independence than in our own time. All the characters represent Arab citizens and intellectuals. Both characters in the novels of Abd al-Rahman Munif do not surrender and abandon their nations. Munif approves in drawing the realistic relation between the intellectuals and the states of the Arab world. The battle between the states and the intellectuals is unequal battle. The intellectuals do not have anything except their voices and

pens. On the other hand the authorities have money, power and everything. Therefore, the intellectuals became victims and could not achieve their dream. Intellectuals refuse to live the present situations under torture and absent of freedom. They seek to achieve a better life, justice, democracy and freedom. Thus, the major problem is that the confused relationship between the intellectual and the Arab states. At the same time, the intellectual of Munif novels is always in a clash with the power. Most of Munif characters such as Mansour Abdel-Salam, a university professor, Rajab Ismail, a university student and the rest of the intellectuals like Arifi, Khalidi and Zaki are always in clash with the authority. The relationship between the intellectuals and the states in the novels of Munif is considered as a hostile and non-harmonious relation. Thus, the intellectuals of Munif's novels are the victims of this relation.

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