

Research Grant Proposal

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I. Project Summary

I am currently working on research to illuminate the status of francophone literature and film created in Lebanon from the Civil War to the present period of reconstruction (1975 - present). Lebanese literary and cultural production in the French language is a well-established institution. Yet in recent debates in francophone and postcolonial studies on the linguistic conflict of writing in the tongue of the former colonizer, the Lebanese francophone situation has not come under major scrutiny. This lack of attention to linguistic choice, I argue, becomes especially conspicuous in the light of the recent renaissance in Lebanese literature which has been deemed the birth of a new "Arabic" writing: it is essential to point out that this new "Arabic" literature is written in Arabic, French and English. My objective is to assess the apparent incompatibility of an "Arabic" literature written in French. Through analyzing the innovative strategies surrounding the use of French linguistic and cultural referents in selected works of writers Etel Adnan, Amin Maalouf, and filmmaker Jocelyn Saab, I hope to show that these French language writers succeed in reimagining the historical space of a new "Arabic" cultural field which establishes Lebanon's civility and opens its borders on a regional and global scale. Since this is an area of emergent literature that has been developing within exilic centers (especially Paris) and behind the closed doors of Lebanese civil strife, the difficulties of obtaining both primary and secondary materials that will enable me to properly contextualize the project have been paramount. A research trip to consult resources in Paris and Beirut will enable me to overcome this obstacle and achieve this interdisciplinary project that will take the form of a conference presentation and article for publication in a peer reviewed journal. My eventual goal is to edit a monograph of articles and essays on the contemporary francophone literature and film of Lebanon.

II. Narrative

1. Current Situation

My current research deals with the francophone literature and film of Lebanon from the Civil War (1975 - 1990) to the present period of reconstruction (1990 - present). It has been recognized that Lebanese writings in the French language represent the earliest emergence of a francophone literature in the wake of French colonial contact with the regions of the Arab world referred to as the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria) and the Machrek (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq). The first major work in this tradition, Checri Ganem's *Antar*, published in 1910, even predates the period of the French Mandate in Lebanon which extended from 1920 until Lebanese independence in 1943; the precociousness of this text is explicable from the long-standing French presence in the region of the Levant throughout the 19th century which oversaw the autonomy of "Mount Lebanon" from the Ottomans. Francophone cultural production in Lebanon is indeed well established: its most highly acclaimed writers Andrée Chedid and Georges Schéhadé were both recognized by the French Academy and have won such esteemed prizes as the *Prix Goncourt*; and Lebanese francophone literature is documented in both early and recent Paris and Beirut-based anthologies of francophone writing. Yet despite the evidence that this body of work is significant, it is perplexing to note that in the profusion of current academic debates on the cultural politics of francophone writing, the case of Lebanon is conspicuously absent.

An initial inquiry into this omission brings up a number of issues that pivot around the question of why the Lebanese situation has come under so little scrutiny through the recent paradigms of post-colonial discourse? Notably, why have the dialectics between colonizer and colonized analyzed by Algerian writer Albert Memmi--which has driven the debates in the burgeoning field of francophonie on the linguistic conflict within the colonized individual in the Caribbean, the Maghreb, West Africa, and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos)--not been applicable to the specificity of Lebanon thus far?

The basis for a response to this conundrum, I would suggest, might lie in the comparative difference in Lebanon's independence from France. While Algerian independence in 1962 was achieved through war against the oppressive colonizer and later entailed an extensive process of decolonization, it could be argued that Lebanon did not undergo such a unilateral movement of national resistance to French rule. In fact, under the French mandate, the rhetoric of Arab liberation and reform (which was at this time set against the Ottoman Empire) was born (no doubt nourished with French Enlightenment inspired notions of revolution) and was briefly envisioned paradoxically under the aegis of France. Yet tensions mounted as Muslims were alienated (their indignation was fueled by France's harsh treatment of nationalists in Syria) and favors were given to loyal Maronite Catholic politicians. Lebanese independence, which came about in 1943, coincided with the French Liberation forces struggle against Vichy rule (which was played out both in France and in the colony on Lebanese soil), and in the end, independence was arbitrated by the British (who favored Lebanese and Syrian independence). At the final hour, the French departure from Lebanon was endorsed by the United Nations. The birth of the Lebanese nation, a pluralistic entity, saw to a negotiation of the multi-confessional and multi-ethnic communities of the region through an agreement by which Christians renounce French and western protection and Muslims revendicate their Arab identity and allegiance to other Arab entities. Lebanese national identity, according to this logic, is conceived as a renunciation of both "Frenchness" and "Arabness."

This brief historical survey then demonstrates that though the colonial encounter between France and Lebanon did not contain the brutality involved in other regions, the use--and ultimately--persistence of "Frenchness" is undeniably symbolically charged and stands up to further scrutiny. Importantly, a second major obstacle to an assessment of the Lebanese situation in the context of Memmi's discourse on francophonie can be identified here: if "Frenchness" is to be resisted in Lebanon, it is not simply in the name of Arab identity. The dialectic between French and Arab identity--which gives force to the francophone conundrum in the Maghreb, breaks down in the case of Lebanon. Both

French and Arab identity are negated to make way for the pluralistic identity called for by the Lebanese nation--and which to complicate matters, is met with dissolution in the collapse of civil structure during the war from 1975 - 1990. The prospects of assessing the use of French language and culture--and francophone creation--are thus strained given the instability, fragmentation and dissolution of Lebanese identity during the Civil War.

The challenge of an analysis of Lebanese francophonie given 1) the historical specificity of French colonization which doesn't entail a conspicuous rhetoric of resistance to the colonizer and 2) opposes France with a precarious and ultimately disastrous conception of a pluralistic national identity, becomes imperative to take up when it comes to light that from the start of the Civil War in 1975 to the present, Lebanon has undergone a remarkable flourishing of literary activity--of which an important number of works are in the French language. Celebrated critic Edward Said has noted the creation of a new form of the novel and the remarkable achievements of women's writing that blends autobiography with journalistic writing. Moreover, he refers to this "renaissance" in Lebanon as the birth of a new "Arabic" writing, which in the wake of the dissolution of civil structure in Lebanon he characterizes as "nomadic." "Orphaned by history," Said writes, this literature gives voice to "rooted exiles and trapped refugees, to dissolving boundaries and changing identities, to radical demands and new languages."¹ While Said alludes to an "Arabic" identity underlying this project, in view of the shifting grounds on which the identification of "Arab" or "Arabic" identity has stood in 20th century Lebanese history, as I have signaled, I find that further inquiry into this concept is warranted. In particular, the proclamation of a "new Arabic writing" raises the question of whether Said is referring to a politicized linguistic choice to write in Arabic. While my research has brought to my attention the works of Arab resistance poetry (Adab al-Muqawamah), I have come upon only one inference (by writer Elias Khoury) that the days of francophone creation in Lebanon are over. My initial survey of francophone production in Lebanon seems to suggest the opposite: over 150 works of literature,

¹Said, Edward W., "Foreword" Khoury, Elias, *Little Mountain* Trans. Maia Tabet (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989) xxi

cultural criticism, history, and political science on Lebanon written in French were published in 1999 - 2000 alone. Moreover, to much ado, the Lebanese ministry has recently announced that the World Congress of Francophonie will be held in Beirut in October 2001, an event of political and cultural importance which renders the question of francophonie in Lebanon today an especially heated and pressing issue. The new "Arabic" literature in Lebanon, I would argue, is remarkably fluid from a linguistic point of view: it is trilingual, written in Arabic, French, and English.

2. The Project Plan

My objective, then, is to discern the status of French-language writings within this larger project of a new Lebanese "Arabic" literature which began to appear at the start of the civil war in 1975. My inquiry will address the following questions: Why write in French? What does it signify, during this period, to be Lebanese and to write in French? What symbolic capital—if any—does the French language and the French cultural referent contain in these works? Does the francophone work seek to insert itself in a common cultural field that could be distinguished as Lebanese or Arabic? What devices or strategies do these texts employ to reimagine this community which may or may not be delimited by the borders of Lebanon? Does the francophone text—in particular the exilic text of the last decade of reconstruction—deploy a rhetoric that envisions reconciliation in the Middle East and responsibility and civility on a global scale?

To begin to address the first question of linguistic choice, my project will require an assessment of the social and cultural institutions and conditions that dictate language use in Lebanon. A cursory understanding of francophonie in this context is traceable to the fact that the generation of writers publishing in the 1970's and 1980's counts many who were products of a French educational system under the mandate years. Moreover, historical documentation indicates that French education remained vital after World War II, and with the arrival of British educated Palestinian refugees, persisted alongside English and Arabic centers of learning. My look at recent authors who write in French (1990 - present) show that they were likely to have received a French education, and were

mainly living in exile in France throughout the Civil War. While my analysis of linguistic choice in Lebanon will weigh heavily on essays and other texts by writers--particularly Etel Adnan and Amin Maalouf who will receive the bulk of my attention, documentary research on education and socio-linguistics are essential to properly contextualize the writers perspectives. I also plan to investigate the institutions that have been in place to disseminate the work of francophone writers--particularly during the war, and to ascertain the balance of French language, Arabic Language, and English Language publishing houses, cultural centers, institutions, journals, newspapers, and presses in Lebanon. An accurate view of the francophone situation in Lebanon can only come from the total picture of linguistic use in the country. While it is maintained that publishing never stopped during the war, it is rather certain that data has not been sufficiently updated on anything pertaining to demographics, and scholarship that details the events and changes since the start of the Civil War is just starting to rapidly catch up now. It is for this reason, that I see the necessity of traveling to Beirut Lebanon, and to Paris, the center of the Lebanese intellectual community in exile, to carry out first hand research on the Lebanese linguistic context. In Beirut, I will consult the resources of the Dar an-Nahar cultural center, the Université Saint Joseph, and the Cénacle libanais; and in Paris, the significant resources of the *Institut du monde arabe* and *L'espace Harmatton* will furnish my research needs.

This first hand cultural encounter with the literary and cultural production and milieus that flourished during the war, will give me access to materials unavailable in the American academy, and importantly, to an audience that has been continuously in reception of works by Lebanese writers, filmmakers and thinkers. (The fact that the State department had closed Lebanon to Americans until very recently--though Europeans had continued exchanges with Lebanon--and had blocked funds to scholars during this time is undeniably an important factor for why so little scholarship, literature or film is published or disseminated in the United States). I have chosen to focus my analyses on two writers and one filmmaker whose works have led me to this domain of inquiry: writer Etel Adnan, Amin Maalouf, and filmmaker Jocelyne Saab. While I have access to half of the

works of Adnan and Maalouf, and one of the major works of Saab, research abroad should open up the other resources I haven't been able to attain. Since all of these figures are contemporary, I have prospects to interview them and address them directly about their work and francophonie in the Lebanese context. I have made this selection, because I find that Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose*, (1978), *L'apocalypse Arabe* (1980), and *Paris When Its Naked* (1993), Maalouf's *Les Echelles du Levant* (1996), and Saab's *Once Upon A Time: Beirut* (1994), while representing a panorama of works from the outbreak of Civil War (as in Adnan's famous novel *Sitt Marie Rose*) to the reconstruction (Saab and Maalouf), all represent an attempt to reckon with the French cultural referent, and what it means with regards to the shifting borders and identities where "Lebanon" may be located.

Adnan's work perhaps takes up most directly the question of the conflict of writing in the French language and the dual significance/ambivalence of the reference to the metropole Paris. An exiled writer with a most unique history of language use, Adnan's works have been written in French (*Sitt Marie Rose*), in English (*Paris When Its Naked*) and in a language (French in the case of *L'apocalypse Arabe*) that incorporates stunning images that are akin to hieroglyphs and could be interpreted as a representation of the Arabic language that was always forbidden and estranged from this daughter of multi ethnic Greek-Turkish parents and product of a French mandate education. My interest is in the extent to which Adnan employs such innovative--even indirect--strategies of integrating her "francophone" self and writings in the cultural destiny of the "Arabs." Moreover, I will analyze how Adnan's historical project of re-articulating an "Arabic" cultural space is undertaken through not just a reliance upon nor rupture from French signifiers; Adnan's francophonie moves beyond the French-centered nexus to borrows signs from other ancient cultures--especially the American Indian; and to deploy what I would call a form of cosmopolitanism in her writings to reconcile Arab difference with global or human citizenship. I will follow up on this thesis of how certain innovative francophone works envision not just reconciliation in the Middle East, but responsibility and civility on a global scale. A discussion of Saab's work *Once Upon A Time: Beirut*,

will analyze how her juxtaposition of nostalgic images of French Mandate Beirut with post-war footage attempts to represent both a history and possible future of the city and region. Maalouf's imaginative work of historical fiction *Les échelles du Levant*, which documents a labyrinth of unique moments and spaces (Résistance era France, Haifa and Beirut before and after 1948, a mental asylum in Beirut, Paris in 1968, Beirut in 1975) where borders are opened and tragically closed, visible and invisible, external and internal, religious, personal, and political--will also be evoked to show how the narrative (with its extensive representation of France as a site of mediation) succeeds in demonstrating how tolerance and reconciliation can prevail, even when it seems impossible.

While my project presents itself as being twofold, both components are indispensable to its success. On the one hand, my goal is to procure historical and socio-cultural information that will permit me to develop my arguments on the specificity of Lebanese francophonie and to situate them in the broader context of francophone criticism. Secondly, my aim is to analyze selected francophone works that were written from the beginning of the civil war to the present--which are deemed part of the flourishing of a period of "new Arabic writing" in Lebanon--and to assess the apparent incompatibility between an "Arabic" literature written in the French language. Through analyzing the innovative strategies surrounding the use of French linguistic and cultural referents in these works, I aim to show that these French language writers succeed in reimagining the historical space of new "Arabic" cultural field which reestablishes Lebanon's civility and opens its borders on a regional and global scale. My analysis will thus firmly establish the apparently precarious situation of francophone writing within the trilingual Arabic literature of Lebanon. This interdisciplinary study--which will straddle the fields of francophonie, post-colonial literature, Arab literature, 20th-century literature, and comparative literature-- aims to follow the critical model paved by Ammiel Alcalay's work *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking the Levant*, which weighs both social history with the possibilities afforded by writing to produce a compelling and convincing reconciliation--or remaking--of a region caught in an impasse of conflict. This genre of

analysis, then, has beneficial consequences for studies of other regions of conflict that call for negotiation and tolerance.

Expected Outcomes

My goal for this summer is 1) to acquire the necessary bibliographic materials through a research trip abroad to produce a historically informed and culturally contextualized study on the status of francophone literature and film in Lebanon from the Civil War to Reconstruction (1975 – present). 2) To complete a potential conference presentation and the proposal for a special panel on the subject of Lebanese francophonie. 3) To complete an article for publication in a peer reviewed journal. 4) Depending on the interviews I hope to procure with writers Etel Adnan and Amin Maalouf, I may have other material I could eventually publish. I hope to get an advanced student involved with this research project that will work on the transcription and translation of these interviews for eventual dissemination. As this project evolves, I hope to put together a monograph of collected essays on Lebanese francophonie. I would be excited to have a student work with me on the editorial aspect of this endeavor.

Links to the College and Applicants Ongoing Research

I view the opportunity to carry out this research project as an exciting prospect for myself as a scholar, teacher and member of the Elmhurst community. My mission at the college is to work towards the revitalization of French on campus. I believe that one of the most important steps to take in this direction is to make students aware of the breadth of French in the world. To this end, it is essential to take the study of French language and culture beyond the boundaries of hexagonal France and to show students the range of cultures that are part of the francophone world. Exposure to a French curriculum that stresses the worldwide presence of French language and culture enables students to see vital interdisciplinary connections (history, political science, business, economics, geography, urban planning, music, art) and the multi-faceted ways it can contribute to their education as a whole. More specifically, I will bring this research to bear upon my upper level curriculum in French literature and culture: in 2002, I plan to give a seminar on francophone literature and culture, and I would like to develop either a World

Literature section or a January-term course on the literature of Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel. I am also very interested in building a student-faculty research component to this project, and am enthusiastic about the interest that this project has already generated in two of my advanced students (these students are French majors and both have a Mediterranean background which gives them a personal investment in this project). Since this area of study requires diverse and fairly sophisticated research skills (involving French and Lebanese research centers, libraries and their databases), it would present an excellent learning opportunity for a student. I also envision the students doing some transcription, translation, and eventually editing work (should I succeed in interviewing the proposed authors) as well as original research on this rather poorly studied area of literature. Finally, research that pertains to the culture of the Middle East contributes to the college mission of recognizing diversity and fostering tolerance. Indeed, there is much to learn through the trials of this multi-cultural region of the world. From a personal point of view, undertaking this project would give me the opportunity of bringing my own personal identity to bear upon my scholarly commitments, which I view as an exciting step forward in my own path as a teacher-scholar.

3. Faculty Expertise

My area of expertise is in Twentieth-century French and francophone literature and culture. My dissertation, “Unity, Dissymmetry, Utopia: Visions of the Couple in Modern France” was an exploration of literary and philosophical fictions of the couple in post World-War I French writings. While this research area seems quite removed from my current project, I will stress that my dissertation engaged important debates within French Studies on community and sovereignty which I am excited about rethinking in the socio-political context of Lebanese francophone writing. Moreover, my interest in francophone Literature of the Levant or Machrek goes back to the beginning of my graduate work at Brown University: I consider it my secondary area of expertise. I worked with Algerian writer and francophone specialist Réda Bensmaïa throughout my years of graduate study; I took graduate seminars on francophonie, and attended

conferences and symposiums with notable writers and scholars. In addition, I studied Modern Standard Arabic for three years, building on my own native language background, and have acquired a fair enough working knowledge of the language to aid my research. My background involves considerable work and teaching in comparative literature, which has given me sufficient skills in straddling multiple national literatures. This project will require the skills I acquired through Ph.D. work in French Studies and Comparative Literature: close textual reading, critical and cultural analysis, and an interdisciplinary methodology integrating socio-linguistics, history and political theory.

4. Plans for Evaluation and Dissemination

Upon completion of my work this summer, I plan to submit the article to one of the peer reviewed journals that publish theoretically informed scholarship on francophone studies: *Boundary 2*, *Etudes francophones*, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, or *World Literature Today* are potential sources. I would also like to propose a special session on Lebanese francophonie (where I would present on the subject and establish a dialogue with other scholars who may have work in this area) for either the upcoming Twentieth-Century French Studies Conference in March 2002 or the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association in April 2002. I envision this work as part of a larger project that I will continue to build on in the near future. A possible outcome of this research would be a monograph of collected articles and interviews that I would edit. I would, of course, be delighted to present my work at a forum at the College if requested, and will be happy to make an informal presentation to students at International Club. I will also be willing to take part in any discussions involving the Middle East that may be organized during the year.

III. Time Line

I currently have assembled a working bibliography of literary texts, works of literary criticism, theoretical works, and historical works that pertain to Lebanese francophone writing and film from 1975 to the present. As I stated before, the challenge

in working on such an emergent literature is the difficulty in obtaining the necessary works. During these coming months I plan to continue to expand this bibliography, and to obtain what texts and articles I can get a hold of through interlibrary loan, the University of Chicago library, or colleagues in the field. I hope to obtain films that I have tracked down through mail order from *Arab Film Distribution, inc.* in Seattle. I have read, annotated, and made reflections on the thirty or so most relevant texts, especially the works of authors Etel Adnan and Amin Maalouf, and expect that I can make my way through a dozen more other essential works by the end of the semester. I will also make arrangements for my trip to Paris and Beirut, and will be in correspondence with a number of contacts.

If given the research grant, I would not be teaching during the summer. I plan to travel to Paris on June 10, where I will stay for two weeks and conduct research using the extensive resources of the *Institut du monde arabe* and *L'espace Harmatton*. I will hopefully have the opportunity to conduct interviews with Etel Adnan and Amin Maalouf while in Paris. The third week, I will travel to Beirut, where I will meet with writer Emily Nasrallah, scholar Mona Amyuni at the American University of Beirut, conduct research at the Dar an-Nahar cultural center, the Université Saint Joseph, and the Cénacle libanais. During the month of July, I will devote full time work to complete my review of the primary sources and scholarship that I will have obtained abroad. I expect to draft the article during the first three weeks of August. By the end of the month, I expect to send the text of the article to other scholars for comment. In September, I will send an abstract of my work with a proposal for a special session on the subject of Lebanese francophonie to one of the conferences I specified in Part 4 of the narrative above. I am confident that I will be able to send the article out for publication by the end of 2001.

IV. BUDGET

Travel

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| Airfare to Paris and Beirut in June | 1400.00 |
| Lodging (21 days) | 1500.00 |

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| Fees for use of Libraries, Cultural Centers | 100.00 |
| Photocopying and supplies | 200.00 |
| Student Stipend | 150.00 |
| Books, Videos | <u>150.00</u> |
| TOTAL GRANT REQUEST | 3500.00 |

Note: Films will be shown to the Elmhurst community and be open to the public. Books will be used for student-faculty research component to this project.

V. Current and Previous Grants

None. I am in my first year of an Assistant Professorship at Elmhurst.

VI. Publications of Past Three Years

Dissertation:

Unity, Dissymmetry, Utopia: Visions of the Couple in Modern France (August 2000).

Article:

"Vanguards of the Couple: Reinventions of Love from from Charles Fourier to Luce Irigaray." Forthcoming in Sodalitas, (Spring 2001).

Conferences:

"Sovereign Beginnings: Bataille, Nancy, and the Question of Relation." To be presented at *Beginnings*, the 25th Annual Conference of the International Association for Philosophy and Literature at Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia, May, 2001.

"Apocalyptic (Re)visions: The End of History and the Erotic Couple in Bataille's *Le bleu du ciel*." *Time, Memory, Text*, the Twelfth Annual Binghamton Conference on Romance Languages and Literatures, March, 2001

"*Commune présence: René Char's Poetics of Community*." Twenty-Seventh Annual Twentieth-Century Literature Conference at the University of Louisville, February, 1999.

“Erotic Phenomenology: The Rhetoric of the Image in Bataille’s *Les larmes d’Eros*.”
Interrogating Images, the 22nd Annual Conference of the International Association for
Philosophy and Literature at the University of California, Irvine, May, 1998

“The Couple and the Ethical Question: Reinventions of Love in Blanchot, Levinas and
Irigaray.” Twenty-Sixth Annual Twentieth-Century Literature Conference at the
University of Louisville, February, 1998