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"The Poetry of Jawdat Haydar in a Transnational Framework"

My talk today will focus on the works of Lebanese poet Jawdat Haydar (1905-2006), placing his poetry in a transnational framework in order to analyze how such a framework can be used to link, for example, the US and the Arab world in ways that exceed and trouble neat divisions of here and there, the West and the East. Also, this transnational framework would help us to read and study writers like Jawdat Haydar alongside Arab immigrant writers in the US (most notably the mahjar writers, whom I will speak about in a bit). In other words, part of my talk will show how the works of writers like Jawdat Haydar who did not necessarily reside long term in the US nevertheless include an important transnational link between the US and the Arab world (as well as other places) that helps us in thinking about literary and poetic production beyond the limits of national contexts. And then I will move to discuss some specific poems from Haydar's body of works. I would argue that the poems of Jawdat Haydar provides us with an important lens to consider a vision that straddles multiple national locations without necessarily taking on ethnic or hyphenated identities such as Arab American, for example.The transnational aspect of Haydar's poetry navigates multiple belongings, literary influences, and humanistic investments in ways that necessarily complicate the neat divisions between here and there, the Arab world and the West, and by doing so reject the limited and rigid values attached to these binary divisions, with the Arab world often depicted as backward and the West as civilized and progressive.

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I have taken up this focus on the transnational in my own work whereby I discuss the literature of Arab American writers (mainly focusing on the 1990s onwards) to show how these works exhibit forms of connection to the Arab world (and to the US) that point to fluid, multiple, and complex forms of national belonging that cannot be simply contained by single citizenships or national identities. And we see that in a variety of ways in the works of the Arab American writers I study, whether it's Lebanese American writers, Palestinian American writers, Iraqi American, Egyptian American, etc.

Before I continue I want to give a quick note here on how I'm defining the transnational and people who perform transnational belonging: mainly focusing on how transnationals embody a simultaneous physical or metaphorical placement in dual or even multiple locations that cut across national boundaries. Transnational enactments are far from being uniform or consistent, however. They include physical mobility but also extend to imaginative attachments…. These transnational enactments vary depending on the conditions that enable or prohibit people's access to multiple national locations, whether by virtue of geopolitical conditions, generational

divides, or economic means. It is with these understandings in mind that I argue for the development of a complex transnational discourse, a discourse that overturns fixed and conventional adherences to diasporic, national, and ethnic labels and underscores larger structures of belonging, citizenship, and national membership that transform the limits of the nation-state. At the same time, it places racial, ethnic, gendered, religious, and sexual identities outside the rigid constructs of traditional or normative cultural and national frameworks (and we see that in evidence in Jawdat Haydar's poetry).

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A transnational consciousness, however, is not a new phenomenon. For as Sarah Gualtieri points out in her historical study of early Arab immigrants, transnational connections between Arab homelands and the diaspora wereevident during the first period of Arab immigration, from the nineteenth century up till the 1920s.

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The various literary movements in the US shaped by writers of Arab origin roughly follows these three waves of immigration (early, middle, contemporary period), with the mahjar writers coming to the forefront in the first period (1880s to 1920s). During this first period, we have the mahjar writers (including Khalil Gibran [1883-1931], Amin Rihani1876-1940), MikhaelNaimy (1889-1988), and Elia Abu Madi (1890-1957) among others, who immigrated to the US and eventually resettled in their original homelands…they wrote in both English and Arabic. In 1920, they established in New York what came to be known as Al-Rabita al-Qalamiyya, or the Pen League, consisting of both Syrian and Lebanese writers. They maintained a solid transnational outlook in their physical and intellectual negotiations of Arab and American identities.

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Turning to the life and works of Jawdat Haydar, we see how Haydar cannot be easily placed within a specific or rigid hyphenated identity, because he himself was not an immigrant, but came to the US to study, after which he returned to his native Lebanon. But as I will address here in a bit, his poems nevertheless point to a multiple and varied perspective that cannot so easily be defined as either US-based or solely Lebanese per se, for they exhibit a rootedness in a range of places, themes, commitments, and relationships. Writing primarily in English, Jawdat R. Haydar published his first anthology *Voices* (Vantage Press, New York) in 1980, which was followed by *Echoes* in 1989, and *Shadows* in 1998. In 2006, he published his last book *101 Selected Poems* at the age of 101.

After graduating from North Texas State University in 1928, and upon his return to Lebanon, Haydar kicked off his career as Principal of the Universal College in Aley, Lebanon after which he assumed the directorship of the Najah National School in Nablus, Palestine. In 1932, Jawdat Haydar became the first national staff employee in the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), initially appointed as Assistant Employer Officer in Syria. He then became Industrial Relations Adviser in 1956. Haydar subsequently served as General Manager of the Mid-East Auto and Trading Company until his retirement in 1965. Haydar was the founder and President of *Wahat al Adab (*Oasis of Literature) in the Bekaa Valley, and a member of the Union of Lebanese Writers. His poem *The Temple in Baalbek* has been incorporated into the official curriculum for the Lebanese

national baccalaureate, while a copy of the said poem currently hangs at the Museum of the Temple of Baalbek. More recently, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the Lebanese University also passed an official decision incorporating Haydar's poetry into its national curriculum at the university level (information adapted from Haydar's webpage http://jawdathaydar.org/Biography.html).

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It is during his time in the US (after he graduated from AUB) that Haydar first started writing poetry, (he graduated in 1928 with a B.S. in Education from North Texas State University), and wrote his first published poem *Dear Old Texas*, which was released in the Dallas News University paper:

Dear Old Texas
There's no land but dear old Texas for me,
'Tis paradise 'tis the home of the free
That's why I long to cross the ocean bar,
To dwell in my country to hail its star.

I am visiting the old world somehow,
Wandered in the East and in Europe now.
But oh! how I miss Texas and the plow
The hat, the pistol, the horse and the cow.

The skies of Switzerland are clear and blue
The old German castles are pretty, too,
France is charmful and England not less
But there's no place like dear old Texas.

For ten by ten days I moved here and there
But now my soul roves in the Western air.
Farewell, long farewell to Europe, my Jo,
Like spring I came and like winter I go.

Home again, home again to Dixieland
The ship will sail and marrily I'll land.
On the shore, and straight I go to the plow,
The hat, the pistol, the horse and the cow.

I love thee old Texas, I love thy land
I love the plains, rivers, rocks, hills and sand
I love thy flag, heaven, nature and sea
God keep you, God safe guard your liberty.

In fact, this love of and attachment to the US, specifically Texas, is also elucidated in the poem "Sweet Home", which he wrote while he was working in Nablus:

Sweet Home
So often in my vernal clays did I roam
And outlandishly spent my manhood years
But alas! Ne'er did I find a place like home
That I could love with adoration and tears.

Home sweet home I come to remember the years.
The years of my childhood the years which are no more,
And now on a distant soil I am all fears
'Bout going back to live where I lived before.

Yes those days of old were resplendent and fair,
When nigh the sycamores with dear Jack and Lee
I jovially rallied played and learned to care
For the land of the real the land of the free.

Oh! no more never more those homely sunsets,
No more never more those song sparrows to hear;
Ah! for the Queen moon to take me where she sets
On the horizon in old Texas, the dear.

Nablus, Palestine
Christmas December 25, 1930

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Reading Haydar's poems through a transnational lens enables us then to place poems like Dear Old Texas and Sweet Home (both temporally and spatially) alongside poems like Lebanon and others like it (below), in which the concepts of freedom, democracy, and national pride are not restricted to one nation or country, but one that Haydar locates in multiple and interconnected spaces that are connected through his transnational location within and across them.

Lebanon
I would that you were with me hence, sharing
This celestial view seen, unseen, before
Where Sannin eternally up staring
At the evening star glaring at the shore.

The deep is rising, the ships heading east
The green mountains capped with snow behind
Perhaps the eye of an artist possessed
May contain such a paradise in mind.

Come to me, darling, and look at the strand
The edge breaking foam lay miles apart

Amidst a galaxy topping the land
Looming a sky within heaven a heart.

Come, darling, to see what I see, and more
Stars above, stars below, moon in between
A brigade of cavalry charging the shore
Falling back on sand in glorious sheen.

O life! There's nothing more to enchant me
Than this vision of growing ecstasy
I feel dissolved and carried fancy-free
Where beauty and dreams meet in poesy.

That's the Lebanon the heart of the world
Where the cedars living for ages unknown
And the flag of liberty always unfurled
In a democracy without a throne.

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In thinking about Haydar and his work within a broader transnational framework, what is noteworthy about Haydar's writing, in relation to, for example the mahjar poets who lived and wrote in the US for most of their adult life, is that Haydar's writing enacts a similar investment in a transnational viewpoint as that of the mahjar poets, but from the location of the Arab world, which again contributes to a sense worldview that is not restricted to singular and simple notions of national expression (and I would argue that that is what is primarily unique about Jawdat Haydar's work and in fact distinguishes him from the mahjar poets in that he was located in the Arab world but wrote in English, a combination that complicates (in a positive way) and captures the interconnected aspects of what is often presented and perceived as East and West, here and there. So thus we see here how a transnational poetic vision does not necessarily have to emanate from a US context but can be based in an Arab context while asserting the fluidity of belonging that literary articulations bring forth in varied ways (and that is something that the mahjar poets collectively struggled with and worked on throughout their lives because they ultimately occupied a different positionality than that of Haydar's). I want to emphasize though that such a transnational poetic vision that I've been discussing is often juxtaposed with the restrictions and limitations of physical boundaries and borders. We see that affecting Jawdat Haydar himself when, for instance, we see him in France after having graduated from AUB, trying at first unsuccessfully to get a visa to study in the US while he was in France (the story goes that he by chance met the American Consul's wife in a movie theater and she offered to help him procure a visa—Munro 31)…and we also see the difficulties of border crossings and the conundrums of national identities , especially for colonized peoples (even when supposedly returning home) when Haydar could not procure a passage to Lebanon from the US because he would be entering "French mandated territory and that he was still identified as a Turkish subject" (35).

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Moreover, even though, as Munro writes in his book *Jawdat Haydar: The Voice from Baalbek*, that "Haydar's sense of alienation was quite different from alienation as experienced by the Mahjar writers" (68), it is inevitable that Haydar was quite cognizant of the negative representations of Arabs in the US, and the extent to which these representations were internalized by many Arabs and Arab Americans themselves. For here we have a context of a long history of Orientalism that defines Western attitudes toward the East.

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Some of the incipient Western perceptions that shaped the portrayal of Eastern thought were initially transmitted by the waves of Christian missionaries who flocked to the Near East in the early nineteenth century, specifically to Syria, Lebanon and Egypt in pursuit of converting the masses into Christianity, and hence redeeming their own souls in the process. The reactions emanating from such Western encounters with the East greatly contributed to shaping the manner in which Eastern characteristics and images were absorbed by and imprinted on the American mind.
This intellectual and even dominance-oriented expansion towards the East, however, may be offset by a countermovement towards the West led by Arab immigrants seeking their fortunes in the New World.

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However, the US's early "benevolent" role in the Arab world presented it in a largely positive light for Arabs (especially when compared to the colonial roles of France and Britain in the region), which is why it is not surprising that Jawdat Haydar's attitude to the US and his coming to the US was a largely positive one (Munro 81). His relatively short sojourn in the US might have helped maintain that positivity, which differs from the increasing disillusionment faced by many of the mahjar poets in America and what they described as the country's excesses and greed.

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Haydar's poetic vision spans a long historical period and charts different historical, geographical, and political moments and the poet's specific position in relation to them, but also that his poems take up thorny and difficult topics of war trauma and the devastating effects of conflicts on individual and collective psyches. While the mahjar poets for one, as well as the more contemporary Arab American and other diasporic writers of the late twentieth century onwards to the most part accessed the wars, unrest, and political conflict from the vantage point of the diaspora, Haydar lived those experiences from within the Arab world and wrote about them in English, which provided access to a wider audience. For one, Haydar wrote extensively about the Lebanese war in his poems, mourning the destruction of Beirut and denouncing the violence that overtook his country, again, writing about it not from the vantage point of the diaspora but from within Lebanon itself.

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Haydar dedicated the rest of his years to farming and poetry. Insisting he is a “farmer” at heart, Haydar over ninety years older relates, “I still farm my land to get the fresh smell of the earth.” In an interview shortly before his death Haydar states, “My secret for long life is always being thankful. Life is a gift. Be happy when you can.”

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