

Down and Out in Syria and Lebanon: Media Portrayals of Men and Masculinities. Towards a Research Agenda

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ABSTRACT: This essay explores some directions for future research of media coverage of male refugees, particularly from Syria. I link the narration of refugee stories to their mobility, their loss of home, belonging, possessions, people and social networks. However, these stories also entail the discovery of new territories and locations, of families in transition, of men whose ongoing mobility constantly impacts their ability or inability to take care of their loved ones and thus live up to the prescribed roles of men in the constructed conservative society from which they came.

KEYWORDS: men, masculinities, media, refugees, Lebanon, Syria.

1. Introduction

“Nobody knows what’s happening to the men. They come here and they’re basically castrated”, pointed out the Lebanese filmmaker Carol Mansour during a recent interview (O’Regan 2019). Her latest documentary, “Men on Hold” (2019), narrates the life story of Syrian refugee men in Lebanon after 2011. Mansour portrays masculinity as an integral factor in the construction and development of the everyday life; the stories of Syrian male refugees, of a male identity formed by conflict, displacement, arrival, and resettlement.

Her film builds on the manner in which men are shaped by this multiplicity of contradictory experiences; how they express their expectations upon arriving in Lebanon; how they perceive men should behave according to their experiences in life so far; how they reacted to their ability or inability to live according to the patterns, values and norms thrust upon them in their new life. Through the narrative of five men, Mansour captures the mobility, feelings and struggles of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These experiences provide gendered, critical lessons on how to organize the



social space, the sociopolitical transformation of life, the long-term nature of displacement and the uncertainty of daily life during unsettled times.

Since he arrived in Lebanon, Abu Muhammad rarely engages in discussions in the informal refugee settlement. “He suffered a lot here,” said Ahmad Matar, the settlement leader or *shawish*; Matar continued talking about Abu Muhammad: “He is unable to adapt to his new social setting as an elderly man whose family is still very young. He prefers to stay in the camp away from everyone else.” While almost half of the men in the camp do not have a job, the main problem of an oriental Arab man, according to Matar, is the confrontation with the reality that the wife or any other female member of the family is working and earning an income. “Any man will feel a loss of his manliness in such situations”, states Matar.

The camera is focused on his hands and silhouette without revealing his face. The viewer is then introduced to Abu Muhammad, as a man still trying to get his bearings, who feels alienated and marginalized ever since he left Syria. “We went through several tragic phases. We thought that we will reach a safer shore, but it turned out to be a delusional and treacherous shore.” Abu Muhammad narrates, he then continues referring to his homeland Syria: “Over there, the wars are fought with military weapons, while here all types of weapons are used: psychological, economic, social and so on...”

2. “Structure of feeling”

As the war continues a sense of emergency and temporary displacement shifts to a feeling of ongoing crisis and gets worse as time goes on. This is expressed in the men’s stories, the narrative of which becomes more complicated as they realize how interlinked the political, social, economic and cultural factors are making the hostile shores, which are Lebanon, increasingly precarious and impenetrable. In his book *Spatial Formations* (1996), Nigel Thrift resurrects the “concept of a structure of feeling”, originally coined by the sociologist Raymond Williams in 1954 in his co-authored book with Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (Williams & Orrom 1954). In 1977 Williams integrated this notion, originally intended for cinematic criticism, into the study of material practices, stating that “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” are a key to understanding material expressions of our reality. In his book *Marxism and Literature* he

differentiated between “formal concepts of ‘world view’ or ‘ideology’” and the ‘structure of feeling’, emphasizing the necessity to understand feelings and emotions as historical and social incidents and circumstances, “thought as felt and feeling as thought” (Williams 1977: 132). When exploring the men and masculinities caught up in the hostilities in Syria and Lebanon throughout their lifetimes, this juxtaposition of feeling, world view, and historical narrative is essential.

Referring back to Thrift’s resurrection and re-application of the idea of “structure of feeling”, linking this concept to the lives and stories of Syrians in Lebanon reveals new layers of meaning. Thrift sees this concept in the context of mobility, change and the expressions thereof in patterns of communication. He refers to mobility as an interconnected network enabling us to make sense of time and space. Accordingly, mobility, migration, cultures, people, communication and all other types of routes will be a way of communicating meaning, transformation, identity and a resistance of authoritarian regimes (Thrift 1996). Grasping the mobility wrapped in the personal and political experiences discussed here will help us better understand how we are all affected by these shifting sands.

The film maker Carol Mansour links the narration of her refugee stories to their mobility, their loss of home, belonging, possessions, people and social networks. However, these stories also entail the discovery of new territories and locations, of families in transition, of men whose ongoing mobility constantly impacts their ability or inability to take care of their loved ones and thus live up to the prescribed roles of men in the constructed conservative society from which they came. Or so it seems.

Naji is a young hair dresser who got married in Lebanon and is the father of a 3-month-old baby girl. In Syria he lived with his family and worked as a hairdresser. His dream back then was to open up several branches of his hair salon. He was clearly intent on going places. The conflict as of spring 2011 put an end to that. As the war became increasingly unbearable, Naji came to Lebanon. He spent his first three nights sleeping under a bridge in Beirut until he found a job in Hamra Street, in a central downtown district. “I came to Lebanon penniless, my family was in Hermel in the Bekaa Valley close to the border with Syria. Even though I have my shop now and rented a house, the financial situation did not really improve due to lots of monthly payments. I sold my wife’s phone and her jewelry. Sometimes we find ourselves eating boiled potatoes for a few days.” Naji has been attacked several times by his Lebanese neighbors in Bekaa because he is seen as a threat to their businesses and livelihoods. This situation made him feel like a captive, he

cannot leave Lebanon and he cannot support his family properly. He declared “my wife is very supportive, but I am annoyed by this situation. I wish we could leave to a better place.”

By way of background, it is essential to note here that Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention Related to the Status of Refugees nor to its 1967 Protocol. As a result of this, the government has blocked the setting up of formal refugee camps and refused to pay for the upkeep of informal settlements. Furthermore, it has done its best to put bureaucratic hurdles in the path of refugee settlement, fearing a repetition of the Palestinian experience. Syrian refugees are required to have valid identification documents with them at all times. They must be able to provide an official entry permit and a housing pledge showing their place of residence in addition to paying an annual fee of 200 USD for each individual aged 15 and above in order to register with the Lebanese General Security Office (GSO) and thus legalize their stay. This fee is waived if the refugees were registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) before 1 January 2015 (UNHCR 2018). In the context of this study, the restrictive approach of the government towards refugee settlement goes hand-in-hand with their ability to move around freely within the country. Constantly maintaining updated papers is expensive and time-consuming. The Kafkaesque hurdles experienced especially by adult male refugees when dealing with the local authorities can make them shy away for contact with the government. Thus their papers expire, their mobility is curtailed, and they become increasingly dependent on their women and children. This vicious cycle of exclusion, alienation, and immobility has been replicated in many countries around the world.

3. On the historical roots of masculinities and power

According to a study titled *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa*, Syrian refugee men in Lebanon were between two up to three times “more likely than Lebanese men to report that they had been arrested, imprisoned, or detained by police, or to have experienced some form of physical violence in public spaces (either in their home country or elsewhere)” (El Feki et al 2017: 12). The cycle of violence, humiliation and oppression spans borders, cultures, social classes and ethnic groups. After having spoken about this issue with Syrian men myself, and discussed it with those

working with refugees and migrant workers professionally, a pattern of intentionality has become clear.

In her seminal analysis titled “Oppression”, the feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye tackled the oppression of women by comparing their situation to a bird in a cage in her book *Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* in 1983:

“The root of the word ‘oppression’ is the element ‘press’. The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button. Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gasses or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict, or prevent the things motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce” (Frye 1983: 11).

Using force to limit freedom of movement, a free development of the mind, and free expression of ideas has a long tradition in the Middle East and North Africa. A small segment of this reality – both in time and place – is the reality in both Syria and Lebanon from the 1950s to the present. This is a period in which the media portrayals of men and masculinities were strongly influenced by an increase in violence, oppression, the attempt to impose a mono-cultural approach to identity, and a rearguard struggle to defend protracted, traditional gender stereotypes, which by this period had little to do with reality on the ground.

4. Towards a research agenda

How can we study the gender-stereotypical portrayals of men and masculinities of Syrian men? First, by using an *intersectional gendered lens*, we will need explore the nuanced meanings and transformational practices of the word *oppression*. A classification of the power structures operating between social groups in Lebanon and Syria will help to identify how issues of gender, social class, sexual orientation, education, and ethnicity were overlaid by a dominant power elite closely allied with each other in both countries. After World War II these societies for the first time became independent of foreign rule. How did this experience bring Syrian and Lebanon closer together, how did it tear them apart and how did this impact the lives of men over the last half a century? This initial historical snapshot will begin in 1958 and take us up to the beginning of the

War in Lebanon in 1975. The working assumption here is that the perplexing relationship existing between geography, belonging, nationalism, common language, similar cultural identities, family ties, and shared colonial history will help us better understand the place Syrian refugees left as of 2011. It will also help us better comprehend the ‘hostile shores’ on which they were washed up during the last eight years of the War in Syria. The men in Syria, and later in Lebanon, who freed their countries from the French Mandate and established the structures of a free nation were largely the same men who controlled the introduction of mass broadcast media in 1959 and 1960. They were in power during the ongoing and escalating local, regional, and international conflicts in the MENA during the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and did their best to uphold their own version of hegemonic masculinity throughout the entire period of rapid transition. Several events are indicative of the increasing pressure on traditional concepts of masculinity in the region, but they are also examples of the determination of those in power to shore up and exert their domination over their countries and the highly diverse populations in them. Developments in communication technology, international relations, theater, cinema, and print media have all left their mark on the understanding and portrayal of men and masculinities. By using Thrift’s juxtaposition of ideology, politics, and ‘structure of feeling’, we will be able to better understand the complexities of Syrian society.

Second, we should use a *decolonial perspective while looking at the concept of hegemonic masculinity* when doing researching media portrayals of men. Sociologists have for some time pointed out that multiple masculinities exist and that there is a hierarchy among them, and that a hegemonic version, at the top of the hierarchy, connects the subordination of women to the subordination of marginalized groups of men. The concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ was developed in order to understand its role in sustaining oppressive societies; accordingly, contesting this mechanism is important. Robert Morrell and Sandra Swart in South Africa (2005) report on the situation of the poorest part of the world’s population as a key issue for masculinity studies, emphasizing that social justice is an essential element in studying oppression. Margaret Jolly (2008), while doing research on masculinities in the post-colonial Pacific, emphasizes the crucial importance of colonialism in the construction of indigenous masculinities in both the past and present. Gendered oppression doesn’t go away once a country becomes independent. Paul Amar (2011), in a critical review of Middle East masculinity studies, vigorously argues for a decolonial perspective, whereas Ford and Lyons (2012), introducing research on masculinities from Southeast

Asia, question universalized concepts and emphasize the need for local knowledge. In essence, we are looking at a reexamination of the perspective of masculinities in a temporal and spatial dimension/approach.

Third, we need to get a better understanding of *how masculinities and gender relations are affected by the post-conflict setting and by the impact of conflict-related displacement* in Lebanon. In the eight years since the 2011 Arab uprisings began, the challenges facing Syrian and other Arab men across the Middle East have been profound (Keedi et al 2017). They include various forms of war and displacement, political and economic instability, and social upheaval and societal rupture. The number of migrants in the Middle East has more than doubled between 2005 and 2015 (Connor 2016). Migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees and internally displaced persons increased worldwide from around 25 million in 2005 to 54 million in 2015. This overall increase of 120% is much higher than the average in North America and Europe (both around 20%) over the same period. Thus the lion's share of the burden shouldered by host communities is in the Global South.

How have Arab men responded? In 2016, a gender-advocacy, non-governmental organization called Promundo partnered with UN Women to conduct the “International Men and Gender Equality Study in the Middle East and North Africa”, in collaboration with local research partners in four MENA countries (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine). Based on quantitative and qualitative research with nearly 10,000 men and women aged 18 to 59, the study was the first large-scale survey of its kind to assess the lives of Arab men on a comparative basis—as sons, husbands, and fathers; at home and at work; and in public and private life—to better understand how Arab men see their positions as men and to assess their attitudes and actions toward gender equality. According to the survey, “traditional” attitudes about gender equality still prevail, including among younger generation men. However, the authors also stressed that at least one-quarter of Arab men surveyed held more “open” and “equitable” views, supporting women’s economic, social, and political equality. Personal histories, family influence, and life circumstances were among the factors that impacted men’s support for gender equality. Perhaps not surprisingly, men with higher incomes, higher education, whose mothers had more education, and whose fathers carried out traditionally feminine household tasks were more likely to hold gender-equitable attitudes. The study highlighted the tremendous levels of stress in Arab men’s

lives, mainly the challenge of finding paid work and fulfilling the traditional masculine role of a provider in times of economic uncertainty. Unsurprisingly, this was particularly true in those countries affected by conflict. The effects of conflict and unemployment were frequently cited as the main reasons for, or aggravating factors in, men's depressive symptoms. One-third to one-half of men in the four countries surveyed reported being ashamed to face their families because of their lack of work or income. On the positive side, there is also evidence for inter-generational cycles of care: although many traditional norms are reinforced at home, fathers can have a powerful role in breaking these norms. Fathers who encouraged daughters to take on nontraditional professions or to work outside the home, or who allowed daughters to choose their husbands, seemed to contribute to the emergence of more empowered women (El Feki et al 2017).

In this new millennium, when so many Arab men have been forced to leave their homes, either as migrants or refugees, detailed ethnographic research of how Arab masculinities are shaped and portrayed by the media in transit, as well as in new refugee and resettlement communities across neighboring Middle Eastern and European host countries, is vital. Lacking these detailed studies for past decades, we will now turn to cultural production, and the performing arts in particular, to better grasp from which backgrounds Syrian men in Lebanon originated.

5. Transporting history - the end of brave men

“Once upon a time there were mass media, and they were wicked, of course, and there was a guilty party. Then there were the virtuous voices that accused the criminals. And Art (ah, what luck!) offered alternatives, for those who were not prisoners to the mass media. Well, it's all over. We have to start again from the beginning, asking one another what's going on.” — Umberto Eco (Eco 1986: 146-150)

Damascus 1976, Nihad Qalal, a leading Syrian writer and pan-Arab comedian, collapsed on stage because of a severe stroke while performing in *Ghurbeh* (exile, homesick, or alienation) which tells the story of a fictional village in the seventies somewhere in the Arab world. In this story, the men are largely idle; productive labor is the responsibility of women and everyone is oppressed by an all-powerful Bek (ruler). This tragic event marked the beginning of a long period of alienation in Qalal's life; abandoned by most his friends. The sources available regarding

Qalai's sickness are contradictory, scarce and difficult to substantiate. Many stories were circulated about the reasons behind Qalai's illness, but as things were kept secret no one dared to share what happened. This much seems to be clear. In the late 1970s in a club restaurant in Bab Touma in the old city of Damascus a man ridiculed Qalai publicly, who returned the insults, just before he was beaten over the head with a chair. The attacker turned out to be an officer in the Syrian paramilitary 'Defense Company' commanded by Rifaat al-Assad, the younger brother of the dictator Hafez al-Assad. This attack cost Qalai his health and his career. It was seen as one of the major causes of his early retirement and subsequent death in 1993 (Awdat 2015; Enabbaladi 2017).

Despite the atmosphere of secrecy prevalent at the time, a fertile source of information about Syria and Lebanon could be found in alternative art, particularly in the rich repository of social realist literature which gradually spread in the MENA region via theater, radio and television, print media and cinema. Developments in the media sphere were largely influenced by political factors and rivalries among the powerful elites ruling during this period, be it emanating from Western powers or the MENA region. Lebanon, despite its short lived mini civil war in 1958, established its first television broadcasting service as a private company almost a year after the end of hostilities. Unlike Lebanon, Syria started television broadcasting in 1960, simultaneously with Egypt during the unification period. Radio and TV broadcasting in Syria was state controlled.

The real riddle to be solved in this context is how to craft a compelling narrative of the period if you are living under authoritarian rule? How to tell and retell stories which are part of your own past? Stories of brave men who shaped the region but faced a tragic fate! Framing these moments, connecting necessary dots, re-examining and revisiting history, as lived reality, is not an easy task. Much of the analysis below is filtered through my personal experience, as well as original Arabic language resources, both online and in print format.

In one of the opening scenes in *Ghurbeh*, a richly heated exchange ensues between men sitting in the village cafe singing and gossiping futilely about their life. The local midwife, who delivered most of them as infants decades ago, is furious about their display of helplessness and lethargy. She criticizes the fact that their wives are working in the fields and delivering their babies. Meanwhile, these men are still sitting around with no future perspective in sight. Finally, the

midwife has had enough and yells at them: “Why aren’t you budging? Get moving; aren’t you tired of doing nothing? If you were chickens sitting on eggs, they would have hatched by now.” Immediately, one the men replies and urges the waitress (also named Ghurbeh) in the café to: “Hurry up and bring me a few eggs and put them beneath me.” Ghurbeh answers: “Why do you need them?” He then declares: “Because I want to hatch a few male chicks for the nation.” Farmers traditionally have little use for male chicks and their fate is commonly death. Presumably, and referring back to the discourse in the play, this means that the male chicks will be slaughtered or oppressed later on by the Bek.

The dialogue in this play reflects how gendered roles were produced in the Levant. Arab men lived in a state of permanent distress, but also in denial and lack of courage. Muhammad al-Maghut, one of the icons of Syrian poetry, an accomplished playwright and the co-screenwriter of the play, discovered his ability to express his political view while he was imprisoned in Mazzah jail for nine months in Syria in 1955. This occurred after the assassination of Adnan al-Maliki, the deputy chief of staff of the Syrian army, by a member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) (Solomon 2017), the party of which Al-Maghut was a member. He was imprisoned on numerous occasions due to his criticism of respective Syrian regimes. During his years out of prison and in particular because of his opposition to the unification of Syria and Egypt, Al-Maghut lived in Beirut to escape censorship, where he worked as a writer and journalist (Outside the Text 2018, Geha 2010). As a writer, Al-Maghut had a sarcastic wit; as a poet his prose poems were admired by a general readership and intellectuals alike because much of his work reflected the day-to-day situation in which Arabs were living (Bin Hamza 2009). His literary achievements revealed his sharply critical mind; his work and characters traced an organic engagement with his own society. By refining and redefining his characters, Al-Maghut successfully broke with the stereotypical portrayal of men and masculinities in the Levant of his day.

Referring back to *Ghurbeh*, Nihad Qalai played the role of Abu Risheh [the father of a feather] who has been trying to leave his village, waiting for the plane to come and carry him away to the West. His ultimate dream is to leave and become a political refugee. Abu Risheh’s story, as narrated by the midwife in the play, was tragic. He was one of the most intelligent men in the village and had a beautiful wife. However, he lost his mind the day she was kidnapped and killed by the Bek. In the exchange with the midwife described above, she urges the men in the café to be

ashamed of their situation, and states: “Each one of your wives is expecting a child while holding her baby in her arms and working all day!” One of the men replies: “You are always complaining and only see them working (referring to their wives), but you would never consider what we are doing as work.” She replies: “You, what have you done?” He responds: “Producing more children”. Notably, this highly acclaimed play was cancelled following Nihad Qalal’s sickness, only to be reopened a few months later with a new actor. A brave man willing to put his convictions into action, Qalal paid a high price for his outspokenness.

Farjallah el-Helou was viewed by many in the Arab world as an archetypical example of ‘the brave man’ during this period, who paid the ultimate price for his convictions. Unlike Al-Maghut and Qalal, he was not able to weather the successive attacks by the Syrian regime and, as a prominent political activist, journalist and leader of the Lebanese communist party, met his death in 1959. The year 1958 was marked by heated political events in Syria and in Lebanon. That year the United Arab Republic (UAR) was created between Syria and Egypt and was led by the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. In Lebanon, these developments led to severe political tensions and were partially responsible for a short lived mini civil war between the supporters of Lebanese President Camille Chamoun and those backing the formation of a Pan-Arab state. Nasser took control of the UAR and quickly “banned political parties in Syria. Closed foreign embassies in Damascus, and grew increasingly authoritarian and intolerant of dissent” (Joubin 2013), which had negative implications for Lebanon. Relying on the Eisenhower Doctrine, Chamoun supported the landing of a US Marine Corps battalion in Lebanon in 1958 (Office of the Historian Foreign Service Institute 1957). Because of internal resistance, Chamoun’s reliance on American military might ultimately backfired and he was unable to run for a second term as Lebanese president. As a prominent Lebanese intellectual and communist leader, El-Helou opposed Chamoun’s internal power grab, American hegemony in the region and the expansionary ambitions of Abdel Nasser. Caught between various fronts, El-Helou was ordered by the Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon to travel to Damascus, where he was secretly arrested and tortured to death under mysterious circumstances.

Like Al-Maghut and Qalal, El-Helou was an accomplished author with creative abilities acknowledged by his contemporaries. Trained in the late 1950s as a Marxist-Leninist in France, his organizational and literary skills helped the head of the Communist party, Khalid Bakdash, run

successfully for parliament in Damascus in 1954. Known as “Little Stalin”, this supreme leader of both parties in Syria and in Lebanon demoted El-Helou during the years prior to his assassination, but ‘promoted’ him to the position of editor-and-chief of the party newspaper “Al Nur” in Damascus as a reward for his role in organizing Bakdash’s election campaign (Ismael & Ismael 1998; El-Helou 1988; Nagasaw 2017). Bakdash’s leadership style was similar to that of the Syrian regime. In his memoir, Frajallah’s cousin, Youssef Khattar el-Helou, illustrates how Bakdash used a cult of personality to dominate the party. “One day he told me, while we were preparing the hall for the party National Convention in 1943: ‘My words are law, and no one contradicts the law’” (El-Helou 1992: 16). Although a political rival, El-Helou followed Bakdash’s orders to return to Damascus and take up his responsibilities for the party in June 1959. Immediately after his arrival he fell into the hands of the Anti-Communism Department of the Syrian Intelligence. He disappeared, was tortured to death, and his corps dissolved in acid. In almost complete opposition to the characters in *Ghurbeh*, El-Helou put all his eggs in the basket of Arab Revolution, thus sacrificing his life, as well his future as a father and husband. Reflecting on his decision to go back to Syria despite the tremendous danger, his daughter Nada spoke in a recent documentary stating: “I would have loved it if he were with us, I wish we were raised by a father. I blame him; he had three children and he knew he wasn’t coming back” (Alaraby TV 2019).

Finally, I conclude with the 1990 novel the *End of a Brave Man* in order to re-examine the issues dealt with above. In this story by the prominent Syrian author, Hanna Mina, the protagonist Mufid El Wahesh [Mufid the Monster or the Wild] suffers at home and in school where he is brutalized by men who process their embattled masculinity through violence against their family members and students. Although his life ends tragically, Mufid became a better man after running away from home and ending up in jail. While in prison he discovers, through the care and positive male nurturing of a political prisoner, his good side. Thus various masculinities are portrayed in this novel, which is well known in Syria, in an overlapping and contradictory manner.

In the end, I find myself as an Arab feminist, writing my own story. In my experience, based on my relationship with my late grandfather, Youssef Khattar el-Helou, who introduced me to the legacy of my great-uncle Farjallah el-Helou, lived reality blends erratically with role models rooted in literature. These larger than life men in my past both directly and indirectly shaped my perception of how masculinity should be as well as my own female identity, how I see the world

and what I believe in. Speaking truth to power became organically part of my character, fighting oppression and prejudice impacted my journalistic work and my teaching. Whether in reality or in fiction, the portrayals of masculinities which I present in my research are rooted in my understanding of Lebanon and Syria, but they also influenced my perspective on the topic at hand. The play, novel, and political career described above are well-known representations of masculinities which I can assume many Syrian refugees are familiar with. In light of these research results and portrayals of men's lives one can see that these images of broken masculinity are inscribed with meanings that can only be understood when one makes sense of it in a historical and specific context of the region and by looking back into the diversity and hybridization of the region with an Arab gendered lens.

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