


modernization as a complete rupture from tradition; rather, they believed that their society should not discard tradition and instead achieve through modernization and Westernisation the ideal social order that also characterized the ‘golden age’—that is, the early Ottoman period” (p. 190). A crisis plays out within the psyches of Tanpınar’s and al-Hakim’s characters as they struggle to come to terms with themselves as modern subjects.

At times, Arslan veers from such fresh readings of late Ottoman works in Arabic and Turkish in deference to other scholars’ work. Although I consider *Ottoman Canon*’s use of contemporary scholarship well-curated—for instance, the author cites necessary critical works from Stephen Sheehi, Karim Mattar, Shaden M. Tageldin, Nergis Ertürk, and Özen Nergis Dolcerocca, to name only a few—some chapters begin with long digressions into these and other scholars’ contributions rather than centering the book’s own unique perspective and overall argument. Nevertheless, Arslan’s use of secondary material is thorough and enlightening for specialists, which makes *Ottoman Canon* both an indispensable reference for scholars in Middle Eastern literatures and a path to a Middle Eastern comparative literature. Arslan’s study also highlights his impressive knowledge of late Ottoman fiction, literary historical writing, and journalism. I find the book’s argument that “classical works ‘haunt’ modern texts” (p. 200) an auspicious starting point for further investigation. If I had my druthers, Arslan would have aimed this portion of the study directly at the discipline of comparative literature by engaging with Derrida’s notion of hauntology, but Derrida goes unmentioned, for better or worse. Similarly, I would have appreciated a more thorough explication of the theoretical apparatus behind Arslan’s invocation of deterritorialization at various points throughout the analysis. The book currently cites Sheehi’s and Ertürk’s uses of the concept and moves on, rather than situating its application in relation to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. These absences, in the end, leave room for future work in such directions, subtracting nothing from how deftly Arslan plumbs the depths of the Ottoman reservoir.

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Sacred Language, Vernacular Difference: Global Arabic and Counter-Imperial Literatures

Annette Damayanti Lienau (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023). Pp. 400. \$95.00 cloth, \$39.95 paper. ISBN: 9780691249834

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How should place affect the way one reads Arabic literature? Should a given national context be taken for granted in the framing of a work, as is the tradition for the study of literature in the Euro-American university that has colonized the world? That is, should Naguib Mahfouz’s Cairo Trilogy be read as three Egyptian novels, whereas the work of Adonis be read as Syrian poetry? And if so, where is Ghassan Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun* placed, given it tells a story that crosses other borders and tragically ends with displacement from the nation of Palestine? Or should these national contexts, when grouped together by their linguistic unity, be rendered into a coherent area that conveniently enough finds its home in



university departments called Middle or Near Eastern studies? Or do the hegemonies of place limit the way one might read, and instead invite a diasporic reading that follows Arabs wherever they may be found with their literatures of migration? Or do these questions still take for granted notions of identity and difference that have developed by the histories of thought that have shaped the particular experiences of Euro-America? What gets left out of the story of Arabic literature and its own embedded notions of self and community, of solidarity and difference? What remains untranslated?

According to scholar of comparative literature Annette Lienau in her book *Sacred Language, Vernacular Difference: Global Arabic and Counter-Imperial Literatures*, the dominant paradigms of reading Arabic literature along national, areal, or diasporic lines cede the possibility of reading a global Arabophone literature. Such a spatial orientation promises to open new ground for South–South comparison, alternative notions of difference, and possibilities of solidarity. Animated by the spirit of Bandung, she argues that Arabic as a contact language has been a medium of literary expression across Asia and Africa. As a result, Arabic represents an axis of comparison for the study of postcolonial literatures, anticolonial nationalisms, and the global circulation of pluralist ideas. By following language debates, reading literary works, and tracing colonial language policies in Egypt, Senegal, and Indonesia from the 19th and 20th centuries, Lienau challenges both the circumscription of Arabic as a language of Islamic ritual or premodern trade and its reduction to being a vector of a closed or singular modern identity.

Lienau's key move consists of mobilizing emic notions of ethnolinguistic difference as boundary concepts within Arabophone, or Arabic-speaking, contexts. These concepts include the markers 'Arab and 'Ajam. Beyond being herself a scholar of comparative literature, this concern with language is justified by the observation that the etymology of 'Arab refers to eloquence and the intelligibility of speech, whereas the etymology of 'Ajam points to unintelligible or inelegant speech of the non–native-born speaker of Arabic. Lienau shows how this distinction was both misread by European Orientalists such as Ernest Renan and Snouck Hurgronje as a racial and national marker and read by Arabophone authors such as Jurji Zaydan, Shaykh Amadou Bamba Mbakke, and Hamka as a path to parity, religious pluralism, and counterimperial possibility. In performing this work across four chapters in Section 1, "Re-Framing the Arabophone," Lienau persuasively shows how from the 1820s to the 1940s the Arabic language and script were simultaneously subordinated as a hemispheric contact language by colonial policy and politicized in the process as a counter-imperial mode of expression.

Section 2, "Vernacular Difference and Emerging Nationalisms," considers the poetics of anticolonial resistance in the competition between Arabic and vernacular expression. Divided across three chapters, the section covers the waning years of European colonization between the 1930s and 1960 in Egypt, Senegal, and Indonesia. Across these three sites, the memory of the Bandung Conference of Asian and African Countries speaks to dynamics of universalist claims on freedom and equality and assertions of pluralism that found distinct national poetic canons and their most cherished forms. Questions of translation and its practices and limits are borne out in close readings and contextualization of poets and politicians such as Fu'ad Haddad, Ahmed Sukarno, Chairil Anwar, and Léopold Senghor.

Moving to the postcolonial context of the second half of the 20th century, Section 3, "Connected Histories and Competing Literacies," offers meditations on a turn away from Arabic by leftist writers from the three countries, who sought to popularize a secular outlook that valorized vernacular languages such as Wolof and "people's Malay." In two different chapters, close readings of historical fiction in a number of media by Ousmane Sembene, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, and Naguib Mahfouz provide an account of and method for a literature of linguistic egalitarianism and religious pluralism.

The book's conclusion offers a bold vision for a global Arabophone studies in comparative literature. Importantly, it does so with both a sense of promise and cautionary tales from the development of Francophone and Sinophone studies.

Accordingly, the book's intended contribution is most explicitly directed to a comparative literature field that has at times struggled to think of literature in global terms beyond English or a North–South comparison in which the postcolony always speaks back to empire. But it also makes an important contribution to a rapidly calcifying debate on race in the study of West Asia and North Africa. One side resists the applicability of a racial framework largely derived from the context in which legacies of Atlantic and more specifically American slavery are definitive. Instead, other forms of difference, in particular religion, appear more salient. From this perspective race is only analytically valid analogically. The other side refuses the use of race as an analogy of difference and insists instead on the singularity of racial difference, particularly in the form of regionally specific formations of blackness. By pivoting to the ethnolinguistic, Lienau pays careful attention to the ways that difference and identity are discursively, and therefore historically, formed, and are not simply sociological categories that are universally available. The work also contributes to the ongoing work of decentralizing the study of Arabic and Arabic script literatures by identifying shared questions like the debate over the use of Latin script and common points of departure such as the inheritance of Arabic as a prestige language in geographies across Africa and Asia instead of the all-too-common diffusionist model of center to periphery influence.

One might register a question that emerges all the same. Throughout the book, Lienau deploys several figures of race-critical thought, including “linguistic passing,” “code-switching,” and “segregation.” The use of these phrases is rhetorically clear when deployed in the text. However, given the sophistication of these concepts, and others, in Black studies, there remains an exciting opportunity for a greater engagement with Black studies theory in Arabophone studies.


All of that said, Lienau has produced a fine work that promises to be a model in the study of global Arabophone literature. It offers original interpretive work in several languages from Asia, Africa, and Europe, and abundantly demonstrates a mastery of vastly different scholarly literatures and traditions of criticism. It is a feat to be celebrated and a work to be engaged.

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The Rebellion of Forms in Modern Persian Poetry

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In the field of Persian literary history, mainstream narratives have frequently overshadowed the contributions of lesser-known poets who were instrumental in advancing the boundaries of poetic form and content. The book under review offers a substantial contribution by critically reassessing the roles of these marginalized poets. Through a