

Ottmar Ette

**Chronicle of a Clash Foretold?  
ArabAmerican Dimensions and  
Transareal Relations in  
Gabriel García Márquez and Elias Khoury**

**1. ArabAmerican Greetings from a Camp in the Caribbean**

Dear Mother,

I'm writing to you from the seaside resort of Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. After winning first prize in the competition, I was whisked to this nice resort with all expenses paid. I did not have to spend a penny. I and Jamil [Al Banna] are in very good health. Everybody is very nice. The neighbours are very well behaved. The food is first class, plenty of sun and pebbles, no sand I'm afraid. Give my salaam to everybody and my special salaam to Wahab. I wish him the very best with his life, religion and business. I hope to see you soon if you want. Your son, Bisher.

p.s. Please renew my motorbike insurance policy (Brittain/Slovo 2004: 30).<sup>1</sup>

With these well-calculated words in a letter to his mother, Bisher al-Rawi summarizes his situation as a long-term prisoner in the U.S. American Camp Delta, Guantanamo Bay, near the Cuban city of Guantánamo. Are we dealing with fiction here, or with a nightmare that is entirely true? With both at once, of course. And this irresolvable entanglement is both intentional and theatrically composed. For the words are taken from the second act of a play written by the South African writer Gillian Slovo, now living in Great Britain, and the British journalist and academic Victoria Brittain, staged in 2004 by Nicolas Kent and Sacha Wares in London<sup>2</sup> and New York. Sometimes with

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Peter Hulme (University of Essex) for alerting me to this play's existence.

<sup>2</sup> The world premiere was held at the Tricycle Theatre in London on May 20, 2004. Five of the British Guantánamo prisoners mentioned or appearing in the play were not released until late February 2004; in preparation for the play, interviews and conversations with them were conducted in late March and early April 2004 (cf. Brittain/Slovo 2004: 3-4).

subtlety, sometimes by means of striking agitprop,<sup>3</sup> Guantanamo denounces the fate of the incarcerated, the torture-like treatment of those inhabitants of a *univers concentrationnaire* set up on the U.S. base in the Cuban *Oriente*, under conscious disregard for international legal standards, as part of the “war on terror” campaign of a government whose official policy is to promote human rights all over the world. The plot is allegedly taken from reality, or, in the words printed on the title page of the book edition: “taken from spoken evidence”. The audience thus has every right to expect a veridical portrayal. Accordingly, the five British Guantánamo prisoners are joined by other real characters, including British Foreign Minister Jack Straw and U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, in the form of original quotes. Fiction **and** documentation: The greetings from a camp in the Caribbean are directed to viewers and readers; they apply to us and affect us.

The words of the “U.K. resident” Bisher al-Rawi play ironically, even sarcastically with the predominant Western perception of the Caribbean as a vacation paradise under palm trees, where Western tourists lack nothing for their leisure. Indeed, this reality can be observed just a few kilometers away from Camp Delta; yet the radical break dividing the camp on the military base from the no less island-like hotel facilities, where the very same nature is meant to serve an entirely different role and function, may remind us that Cuba is an island among islands and thus a highly complex island world.<sup>4</sup> For the largest of the Antilles is an archipelago, and, what’s more, a fractal world of islands, which face each other in such abrupt opposition that they might as well belong to different worlds.

And in fact: The Guantanamo Bay military base has its origins in the age of U.S. American troops’ intervention in Cuba’s colonial war of liberation against Spain, which, thanks to superior military technology, brought the U.S. a quick victory, dominion over broad sectors of the Caribbean, and expansion into the Latin American region. At the same time, Spain was banished once and for all from the American continent – as the colonial power that had set up concentration camps,

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3 On the effect of the performance in New York in October 2004, cf. the theater review by Kaya J. Chwals (2005).

4 On this, cf. Ette (2001a).

“campos de concentraciones”, against its enemies for the first time in history, during the war unleashed by José Martí in 1895.<sup>5</sup> The location for Camp Delta is well chosen indeed.

Hence concentration camps are not completely foreign to Cuba’s history; however, until Camp Delta was established by the U.S. military, they had been used only against residents of the island itself. Nothing apart from their shared localization on Cuba seems to connect the anti-terror camp with those **resorts** the camp inmate writes his family about. And yet both of these self-contained island worlds, situated within a Cuba disintegrated into many insular structures, participate in a common development of which Bisher al-Rawi makes us profoundly aware: They are part of a globalization process that began on these very islands, the Antilles, with the so-called ‘discovery’ by Christopher Columbus, alias Cristóbal Colón, and transformed the Caribbean into a zone of highly condensed globalization. For the four phases of accelerated globalization experience thus far have left particularly deep traces in Cuban history and geography; the developments at the end of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century, in the second half of the eighteenth century, in the last third of the nineteenth century, and in the final third of the twentieth and the start of the twenty-first century were felt more intensively in this region of the world than in any other region on earth. Evidence of this includes not only the existence of the military base and the initially U.S.-dominated tourism industry at the turn of the twentieth century, but also the installations and facilities for supposed terrorists and traveling tourists at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Tourists, like terrorists, reach Cuba by airplane – and this, too, constitutes one of the parallels cited at the outset – that very means of transport which, alongside the Internet in the networked age, dominates the transatlantic movement of people. In the age of the still extant U.S. economic embargo against Cuba, which makes it difficult for U.S. citizens to visit the island, it is a paradox that Guantanamo Bay is the preferred destination for transport airplanes of the United States to unload on the Caribbean island their freight of terrorists, or those who are held to be terrorists. Of course, in contrast to the tourists’ charter flights, the military transporters of the United States take off from

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5 On this, cf. Agamben (2002: 175).

Afghanistan or Iraq, thus linking them to the transatlantic migrations, primarily in the third phase of accelerated globalization in the final third of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, which led many Arab migrants first to the Caribbean and from there on to other parts of the American continent. Although Bisher al-Rawi may be unaware of this: His lines to his anxious family, constantly threatened by censorship, inscribe themselves in a history of Arab-American relations and, moreover, in a history of Arab-American writing, that has always been a “writing between worlds” in more than one sense.

The **friction** in these lines by the Muslim camp inmate of Camp Delta, oscillating between nightmare and fiction, consists in the very fact that they evoke the memory of this complex history of voluntary and compulsory migrations and transatlantic transfers in a condensed and dramatic form. For the long period of forgotten history of the ArabAmericas is just as multifaceted as it is fascinating. Literature, in particular, holds in store for us the life knowledge and survival knowledge which arises over its course, in the space where two heterogeneous cultural areas overlap.

## 2. On the Way to an ArabAmerican Library

It is certainly no coincidence that at this very point in time – in the context of the thesis of the “clash of civilizations”, so effectively mediated after its initial formulation by Samuel P. Huntington in the mid-1990s (Huntington 1996), and the “war on terror” propagated by the administration of George W. Bush as a counterstrike to September 11, 2001 – a number of Latin American and Arab governments also commemorated these multifarious historical and present connections between their countries. On May 10 and 11, 2005, representatives of the South American and Arab states met at the invitation of the Brazilian president in Brazil’s capital, where they formulated the shared goal of “strengthening biregional relations, expanding cooperation and establishing an association to promote development, justice and international peace” in a joint “Declaration of Brasilia”.<sup>6</sup> The

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6 Cumbre América del Sur – Países Arabes: *Declaración de Brasilia* (1, “Preamble”); quoted as it appears on the website of the Brazilian foreign ministry

specified goal was thus to draft a true “reorganization of world politics in the twenty-first century” under the flag of multilateralism, designed as an alternative to the “self-fulfilling prophecy” of the “clash of cultures”. The accord of this first summit meeting between the countries of Latin America and 22 member states of the Arab League, clearly directed against any and every form of unilateralism, dealt with issues as varied as the founding of a Palestinian state alongside Israel in the borders of 1967, the Iraq war and the U.S. sanctions against Syria, and even brought up the issues of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), the propagation of atomic weapons and the containment of the drug trade in the final declaration of the summit, to which representatives of the United States were not admitted even as observers.

The heads of government also paid special attention to cooperation in the area of culture, recognizing from the very outset the “positive role of South American citizens of Arab origin in the advancement of biregional relations” (*Declaración de Brasilia*. Paragraph 3.1). This formulation throws a new light on an old story: the history of Arab immigration, which for a long period was hardly reflected upon publicly, and of peaceful coexistence with Arab immigrants in the whole spectrum of Latin American countries. This was at least an attempt to bring a dynamic, transareal dimension into Arab-Latin American relations beyond the bilateral, state-sponsored level, insofar as it emphatically drew attention to the importance of a group in the population that connects both **areas** historically and culturally.

In addition to the agreement on mutual cultural dialog and exchange, and the creation of research institutions and programs designed to foster biregional cooperation, what stands out is the joint declaration of intent to create, with the help of specialists, an “Arab-South American Library”, and for each region to provide for the translation of works considered to be important by the other’s culture (*Declaración de Brasilia*. Paragraph 3.5).<sup>7</sup> The result was to emphasize, on the highest political level, the shared history of Arab and South American or – formulated more appropriately – Latin American countries, hastened by processes of migration, and further to accentuate the

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<<http://www2.mre.gov.br/aspa/Decl/espanol.doc>>. I thank Günther Maihold for pointing this out to me.

7 According to paragraph 3.7, a seminar of specialists for the founding of such a library in Aleppo, Syria, is to be conducted in October 2005.

necessity of developing forward-looking joint cultural projects like an Arab-Latin American library. In this manner, the paths of the migrants open up a new politics of advancement, and an awareness of paths of knowledge that were paved long ago, but as yet seldom reflected upon.

Not to underestimate other aspects of the “Declaration of Brasilia” – such as the planned economic, financial and social cooperation, and also collaboration on technology and information and in all areas of sustainable economics – the cultural sphere in particular appears to be experiencing a new biregional, or – in a more comprehensive sense – transareal expansion of horizons. This could advance relations between the two regions of the world considerably in the South-South context, independent of Europe and the United States.

Certainly, the summit meeting was overshadowed by numerous frictions among the countries of Latin America as well as the absence of many Arab heads of state; of course, the economic and trade policy goals linked with this summit, especially by the Brazilian government, were not directly realized; and the founding of a joint committee of Mercosur and the Gulf Cooperation Council with the goal of a free-trade agreement may be regarded with as much skepticism as many other ambitious declarations of the summit.<sup>8</sup> Further, one can take the stance that the political positions in the final declaration were more clearly in the interest of the Arab countries, as its criticism of U.S. policy in the Near and Middle East could not be overheard. However, categorizing the summit as a mere “Arab Summit” (Hofmeister 2005: 6) certainly does not do justice to the long-term importance of this meeting for the area of politics and, above all, for the cultural sphere – not to mention the fact that the Latin American countries, under the stern gaze of the United States, demonstratively increased their foreign policy latitude.

For this was the first time that a declaration was formulated not on a binational level, but on a level affecting the whole of both **areas** of the Latin American and Arab countries, which emphasizes the necessity of advancing “cultural identities” and mutual dialog about cultural aspects of coexistence (*Declaración de Brasilia*. Paragraph 3.3). Even

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8 Cf. the critical comments from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation by Hofmeister (2005).

the aspired cooperation in the area of audiovisual and other communications media, as well as in the area of education, including the university sector, points out the effort to strengthen South-South relations in the ArabAmerican field of conflict, as it attributes an important and meaningful function to culture, or at least to the “diversity of each group’s cultural heritage” (*Declaración de Brasilia*. Paragraph 3.11).

But at the same time this should open up new paths of knowledge that – as we saw – raise awareness of the inter- and transcultural experience of Latin Americans of Arab extraction, a group that may have fallen into oblivion in the public discourse, but much less so in the area of literature and their specific life knowledge. Perhaps the project of a “Latin American-Arab Library” may be understood primarily as a biregional attempt to assemble the literatures of Latin America and the Arab world and their respective main representatives in the form of a canon of reading, as this would harbor the chance to open up a dimension that is not only biregional and intercultural, but also transareal and transcultural, dedicating its main focus to the movements connecting and networking the two **areas** with each other. Instead of, or in addition to, a static addition of ‘great works’ that appear significant for the respective cultural spaces, a dynamic notion of cultural mobility would appear, which could interlace the two cultural spaces more closely. The following remarks are dedicated to such a **transareal** (and not only biregional) and at the same time **transcultural** (and not just intercultural/translating) ArabAmerican Library.

### 3. The Pattern of Arrival and Motion in an ArabAmerican Turnstile

The novel *La caída de los puntos cardinales* by the Colombian author Luis Fayad would doubtlessly occupy an important space in such a transareal ArabAmerican Library. Toward the end of the first part of this novel published in the year 2000, the arrival of a group of Arab immigrants on the Caribbean coast of Columbia at the beginning of the twentieth century unfolds before the eyes of the readers:

Yanira llevaba una blusa blanca con bordados cerrada en el cuello y una falda larga que no se distinguía de las faldas de las mujeres que vieron luego en el lugar. Se distinguía por el bolso de tela tramado con hilos de colores que le servía de equipaje de mano. Dahmar iba con una camisa blanca de seda y un pantalón de tela fina de corte europeo adquiridos a su

paso por Marsella. Sus paisanos quisieron bajar juntos por la pasarela y de todas maneras al final, cuando tocaron tierra, los hicieron formarse en grupo. El agente de aduanas anunció con tono alegre que los extranjeros debían apartarse unos pasos, entre ellos los turcos. Dahmar les tradujo la orden a sus paisanos y el más joven, de unos dieciocho años, se sintió maltratado.

–¿Turcos? –se preguntó y se dirigió a Dahmar–. Dile quiénes somos.

–Aquí somos turcos – dijo Dahmar.

Por las cartas que llegaban al Líbano sabían que en este lado les daban ese nombre por cargar el pasaporte de las autoridades turcas.

–Pensar que mi padre estuvo preso por culpa de los turcos –dijo el que se sentía maltratado–, y ahora me llaman turco (Fayad 2000: 84).

The travel literary place of arrival<sup>9</sup> always represents a semantically highly exponentiated literary **passage**, in the course of which the layers of meaning become entangled with each other and central patterns of meaning of a text are revealed. The scenery of arrival unfurled with such literary mastery by Luis Fayad is the setting for a game of similarities and differences that begins relating the group of immigrants from Lebanon to the local population even before the former disembark. In this game of distinction, in which Dahmar, with his European clothes purchased en route in Marseille, occupies an intermediary position between the Arab and the Latin American world, an important role is accorded to clothing. The clothing worn in this passage is important not only because it marks identity or bears symbolic importance, but also because trade with textiles will represent a significant economic pillar for many of the immigrants as the novel progresses – just as it does in the social reality of Columbia.

Dahmar again takes on an intermediary role, which involves translating in many senses, when he translates for the immigrants who cannot yet speak Spanish the order that all “foreigners”, including the “Turks”, should always remain separated from the other passengers. This interlingual activity at the very moment the passage from the Old World to the New is completed is illuminating insofar as the Lebanese immigrants experience the Colombian authorities assigning them not only a new nomenclature, but also a new identity: For the Colombians they have become Turks, although their families suffered under Turkish rule in the Ottoman Empire. Thus their flight from the Turks in the Old World paradoxically results in their being identified as Turks in

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9 On the concept of travel literary place cf. Ette (2001b: 62-80).



the New World. Yet the travelers were prepared for this, as the letters from other Lebanese emigrants had already reported in detail about the *Quiproquo*, this game of mistaking political and cultural identities. So the passage to a new world is connected with the attribution of a “foreign” identity, which is perceived by some as an immediate violation: Setting foot in the country of immigration quasi transforms the opponents of Turks into Turks themselves overnight.<sup>10</sup> Emigration from the Arab to the Latin American world – and with it a progression of de-territorialization and re-territorialization – changes attributions of identities in a fundamental manner, thanks to a radical recontextualization that recodes linguistic and conceptual, political and cultural positions, setting them in motion.

The refugees, who – as we will soon see – have just fled Lebanon, a country plagued by civil wars, know that civil war is also menacing Colombia, yet upon their arrival they encounter no indications of acts of war of any kind: The conflicts, an officer explains to them, were taking place far away in the country’s interior (Fayad 2000: 84sq.). So upon their very arrival all of those violent conflicts are heralded in which some of the immigrants will later become ensnarled. Quite soon the young Hassana and others familiarize themselves with fruits and manufactures, but also with linguistic expressions and everyday characteristics of the Colombian Caribbean coast (Fayad 2000: 91). On their trip to nearby Barranquilla, the Arab immigrants discuss the trees and the many birds whose song wakes them up in the morning (Fayad 2000: 92): It is the discovery of the New World as a world new to them, with which they attempt to become familiar bit by bit.

Thus the gently contoured development points out how the Lebanese ‘turcos’, and these ‘fake’ Turks and their children, gradually become inhabitants of the country as ethnically Arab Colombians, who initially secure their survival, and ultimately, thanks to their hard work, the organization of their own life with all of its cares, in a country repeatedly convulsed by acts of violence. The Latin American country becomes a second home for all of them. Consequently, Yanira, whom we met as Dahmar’s young wife in the arrival scene, says at the end of the novel:

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10 The Scottish traveler Cunningham held this nomination of the Arab population at the Caribbean coast he visited to be cruel; on this, cf. García Usta (1997: 127).

Yanira se había quedado pensativa. Recordaba que al nacer su primer hijo sintió que por fin tenía algo de aquí y ahora con Dahmar enterrado cerca de su casa ya no podía ser de otro lugar. Muhamed repuso que en ese último año había sentido lo mismo (Fayad 2000: 321).

In the triangle of her feelings and experiences between the birth of her first child, the death of her first husband and the imminent fulfillment of a second love, there is no other place where the woman who came from another place can live in her own house: In both senses of the word, Lebanon is **suspended** in Colombia. The experience of birth, death and love in her own house suspends not only the oppositions between the spaces, but also those between the times, as the lyrical-sensual end of the novel shows in its disrobing:

Yanira deshizo una punta de la colcha y una de la manta y empezó a desvestirse. La iluminación de la lámpara continuó toda la noche. El silencio se regó tejido en el aire. No hubo nada que decirse, ni para llamarse por sus nombres, ni para celebrar el encuentro. Fluyó la sensación de que si nunca se adelantaron para estar en ese momento, tampoco llegaron tarde a él (Fayad 2000: 322).

Although it is not possible to go into all twists and turns of migratory origin at this point, two other aspects important for this line of questioning should be highlighted. For one, it is no coincidence that this migration from a country in the Arab world torn apart by civil war into a country in the American hemisphere torn apart by civil war leads across the Caribbean, which has been the hub and a major re-loading point for centuries, not only for the slave trade, but for a multitude of large-scale migratory movements and displacements as well. The wave of migration from Arab countries that began in the second half of the nineteenth century and reached its peak at the turn of the twentieth century – especially from Syria, Palestine and Lebanon – follows the old transatlantic paths, which channeled the always asymmetrical “exchange” between the continents of the Old World and the different regions of the “new” continent. The Colombian coast of the Caribbean is just one part of a complex circum Caribbean and hemispherical lattice of relationships, which places the most opposite areas of natural space, sociopolitics, economics and culture in relation to each other. Translocal and transregional, transnational and transareal relations are mediated in this fractal, vectorial space, which is intersected by discontinuities of all kinds and literally translated into other logics. Luis Fayad’s novel illustrates this to us impressively by means

of many examples. As already heralded in the novel's title, in Luis Fayad's work the cardinal points of orientation fall victim to these unsteady and yet powerful movements and then dissolve. The novel by the author born in Santa Fé de Bogotá in 1945, who has lived temporarily in Barcelona, Paris, Stockholm and Berlin since the 1970s, makes an initially delocalized and subsequently translocalized knowledge, based on an oscillation between the places of reference in the Old and the New World, into the pivot and hub of a literature that can be characterized as a "writing without a fixed abode". For even the "puntos cardinales" of this Colombian writer readjust over and again within a constantly shifting magnetic field.

On the other hand, a complex intertextual network is erected in *La caída de los puntos cardinales*, although this is of interest to us here only insofar as it regards the texts of another Colombian author, whom we may also associate with the Caribbean. Muhamed, the character in Fayad's novel mentioned above, had fought several years long as a soldier among the insurgents, who ultimately succumbed to the superior force of the government troops. Once again, marching past his (and our) eyes in rapid succession, come the events of that civil war, which was only the most recent in a long series of civil wars:

En la lucha salvó de la muerte a un compañero y fue salvado él mismo por otro, tuvo que huir de una plaza, se escondió y volvió al frente, presencié el momento en que iban a fusilar al coronel Aureliano Buendía y no lo fusilaron, estuvo presente en la toma de pueblos, cuidó prisioneros y fue centinela de confianza en los cuarteles. Al ser derrotado no se orientó en la fuga y fue a dar a la casa de Ibrahim (Fayad 2000: 136).

Not only for Colombian readers does the mention of the name Aureliano Buendía call to mind Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad* (1967), the masterpiece by the Colombian winner of the Nobel prize for literature, which is marked by the family history of Buendía, but at the same time cryptically pervaded by many allusions to Arab immigration in the Caribbean coastal area of Colombia.<sup>11</sup> The Arab immigrants could not be lacking in this Latin American microcosm, as they indeed contributed decisively to the development of this part of Colombia and left their mark on its economic, social and cultural evolution.

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<sup>11</sup> On this, cf. García Usta (1997).

Yet the relationship to another novel by Luis Fayad's compatriot also obtrudes, whose protagonist hails from a family of Arab immigrants and in which – as in *La caída de los puntos cardinales* – Aureliano Buendía is also mentioned only a single time: *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*.<sup>12</sup> With this not only the **intratextual** relationship between the novels of García Márquez becomes evident, but also the **intertextual** relationship between Luis Fayad's ArabAmerican immigrant novel and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, published for the first time in 1981, a text that has long since advanced to become a classic of Latin American literature, and which for many reasons – as the following remarks intend to show – also deserves to be included in an ArabAmerican Library.

#### 4. Chronicle of a Clash of Cultures Foretold?

Gabriel García Márquez' familiarity with the ways of life and the life knowledge of the descendants of Arab immigrants on the Caribbean coast is beyond question. Even in his childhood and youth he kept company with many families of Arab extraction and later cultivated these contacts in his professional and his private life. So in view of both the historical development of Colombia and the personal life path of the writer, it is hardly a surprise that there are 'Arabs in Macondo', especially since García Márquez' wife, Mercedes Barcha, is the daughter of an Egyptian engineer, who was brought to the country by General Rafael Reyes to execute certain projects.<sup>13</sup> García Márquez thus occupied himself over and over again with the characteristics of the immigrants, chiefly from the Near and Middle East, from Syria, Palestine and Lebanon, who also went to other regions of the Caribbean and Central America such as Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Trinidad, but even Costa Rica and Honduras, and many of whom settled in Colombia, especially along the Rio Magdalena and the Carib-

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12 This single direct reference to Aureliano Buendía is located in García Márquez (1981: 55); there the father of Bayardo San Román, General Petronio San Román, is introduced as the hero of the nineteenth-century civil wars, "una de las glorias mayores del régimen conservador por haber puesto en fuga al coronel Aureliano Buendía en el desastre de Tucurínca".

13 Cf. García Usta (1997: 137). References to relationships between the writer and the ethnically Arab families Mattar, Janne, Kusse and Cassij during his time in Sucre are also found here.

bean coast – the main settings for the novels of García Márquez. The Arab immigrant groups living there today consequently constitute a component of the population that is just as significant as it was in the population of the narratives by Gabriel García Márquez.

The situation found there by the people from the Near and Middle East who arrived in the 1880s was that of a both economically and socially backward, peripheral part of the country, which forced upon them hard living conditions, but also offered them opportunities for social advancement. Without a doubt, the main economic support of the immigrant groups that came to the country in several waves until the mid-twentieth century was trade, such as that concentrated in the “Calle de los Turcos”, the “Street of Turks” in García Márquez’ Macondo. While García Márquez shifted the arrival of the first Arab migrants in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* to the first years of the twentieth century (presumably for reasons having to do with the diegesis of the novel), the way he depicts the socio-economic and cultural embedment of the population groups of Arab extraction is closely oriented to the historical realities in Colombia. This country’s stream of immigrants from Arab countries ran dry shortly after the middle of the last century, while continuing to increase toward the United States and Canada.

The circumstances surrounding the appearance of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* have been widely discussed. In 1982, with this short novel consisting of five parts, Gabriel García Márquez effectively broke his years of silence as a writer. He had maintained this silence as a signal for the entire duration of the U.S.-supported dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, who had come to power in Chile through a bloody coup on another September 11, that of the year 1973. The well-prepared international marketing strategy for the book, which involved collaboration by four different publishing houses so that the first print run totaled one and a half million copies worldwide, shone the spotlight on a specific ‘Latin Americanness’ in the **realismo mágico** style. For a long time, this ensured that the novel’s reception concentrated on certain aspects: the central plot line of the murder in response to violated family honor,<sup>14</sup> the bloodbath of a Latin American – Colombian – family tragedy semanticized as the New Testa-

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14 Recently this topic was picked up again in Zimic (2001).

ment,<sup>15</sup> the importance of elements specific to the genre of criminal and detective novels,<sup>16</sup> and the complex narrative structural arrangement of this text that contributes to the suspense it creates.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the levels of meaning of this *Chronicle* connected with the Arab American dimension, to be elaborated below, remain largely in the background.

The central strand, which García Márquez tackles by telling the story *in medias res* and developing it piece by piece through an elaborate sequence of prolepses and analepses, revolves around the fact that the extremely rich newcomer, Bayardo San Román, wants to take Angela Vicario as his bride, forces her to marry him, celebrates a boisterous wedding party to which the entire town is invited, but then gives the bride back to her family on the wedding night because she is no longer a virgin. On the morning of her “repudiation”, the apostolically named brothers Pedro and Pablo cleanse this family disgrace, soon common knowledge in the town, with the blood of the man Angela Vicario names as the supposed perpetrator: Santiago Nasar. The fact that the ArabAmerican element – that is, the complex relations between the Arab and the American worlds – plays an important role in this novel, which, thanks to the bundling of its strands, cannot hide its tendency toward a novelistic portrayal of the ‘unheard of event’, and that this element transverses the entire text and bears significant determinative power, has received at best marginal and fairly incidental mention in the research to date. When acknowledged at all, casual mention of short references to the Arab extraction of some characters in the novel has been regarded as completely sufficient. The structure of this *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* as a puzzle seemed to be associated primarily with the topics mentioned above – which are certainly important as well.

And yet even the first sentence, by now certainly one of the most famous, not only in Latin American literature, contains several references to the Arab-American level of meaning **incipit**: “El día en que lo iban a matar, Santiago Nasar se levantó a las 5.30 de la mañana para esperar el buque en que llegaba el obispo” (García Márquez

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15 Cf. recently, among others, Pelayo (2001).

16 Cf., among others, Pöppel (1999).

17 Here reference is made only to the detailed and illuminating narratological and intermedial analysis of the novel and its filming in Schlickers (1997: 280-373).

1981: 9). First of all, the very name of the protagonist, whose murder is at the focus of the entire plot and time structure of the novel, refers to an Arab-American isotopy insofar as the two components of his name are of both Spanish, that is, Christian-Western, **and** Arab provenience. Of course, the spelling of the last name draws attention to the fact that the Arab name has been Hispanicized and adapted to the writing habits of Spanish-speaking countries.

At the same time, the wait for the anticipated arrival of the bishop, who, accompanied by his 'Spaniards,' will bless the harbor and the city from the river steamer, but contrary to the hopes of the city's residents, will not actually set foot there, refers to the accentuatedly Catholic religious affiliation of the protagonist, who presumably comes from a Christian Arab family. This, moreover, corresponds to the especially high share of Christian migrants from the Near and Middle East, while at the same time indicating the pressure the local population placed on this group to adapt, which certainly played a role in this ostensive profession of Catholic faith. Luis Fayad had by no means forgotten these components in his successful fashioning of the arrival scene; indeed he has his border official, who knows the answers expected from the Arab immigrants, ask sullenly, "¿Qué religión tienen ustedes? Ya sé que me van a decir que son cristianos aunque no sea verdad" (Fayad 2000: 86). The religious suspicion of the receiving population with regard to the new arrivals of Arab, that is, 'Turkish' extraction, forces them into an ostensibly Catholic practice of faith.

Interspersed in the individual strands of the story are permanent elements, which blend into the diegesis of this seemingly simple novel the history of immigration – of not only the family, but of Arab groups of migrants in general. At the same time, the publicly proclaimed murder, which the Vicario brothers commit, killing Santiago Nasar because their sister Angela Vicario makes him responsible for her lost virginity, tears ethno-cultural lines of conflict back open, lines which had often been recognizable in the everyday life of the novel's characters only upon precise, 'investigative' reading.

An important indication of these concealed, if by no means invisible, zones of conflict and group memberships is offered by the spontaneous reactions to the bloody deed. While Pedro and Pablo Vicario had continued to celebrate lightheartedly and fraternally even after the wedding party was over, not only with the narrator, but also with San-

tiago Nasar, when pursued by a “grupo de árabes enardecidos” after murdering Nasar (García Márquez 1981: 79) they flee as quickly as possible into the protection of the church. Still, in the almost lovingly prepared jail of their hometown, in which at first they feel “a salvo de los árabes” (García Márquez 1981: 127), Pablo Vicario fears that his constantly urinating brother Pedro could have been poisoned by the Turks’ evil tricks (“vainas de los turcos” [García Márquez 1981: 129]). Fearing attacks, Coronel Aponte, the town’s mayor, harbors the brothers in his own home until the examining magistrate transfers them to the prison in neighboring Riohacha (García Márquez 1981: 129). The widespread fear of violent retaliations by the ‘Turks’ is an unmistakable indication of existing multicultural faults and fractures.

The homodiegetic narrator, instilled with the knowledge of local life, knows just as well as the town mayor that the twin brothers’ fear (**terror**) of attacks corresponds to the perception on the street, that is, the general population, which continues to fear “una represalia de los árabes” (García Márquez 1981: 130). Yet the townspeople are less concerned about poison than the possibility that the Arabs could pour gasoline over the prison and prisoners at night and set them on fire (García Márquez 1981: 130). What indications are there for this? Do the contours of a ‘clash of cultures’ become apparent here? The narrator attempts to pacify and calm his readership:

Los árabes constituían una comunidad de inmigrantes pacíficos que se establecieron a principios del siglo en los pueblos del Caribe, aun en los más remotos y pobres, y allí se quedaron vendiendo trapos de colores y baratijas de feria. Eran unidos, laboriosos y católicos. Se casaban entre ellos, importaban su trigo, criaban corderos en los patios y cultivaban el orégano y la berenjena, y su única pasión tormentosa eran los juegos de barajas. Los mayores siguieron hablando el árabe rural que trajeron de su tierra, y lo conservaron intacto en familia hasta la segunda generación, pero los de la tercera, con la excepción de Santiago Nasar, les oían a sus padres en árabe y les contestaban en castellano. De modo que no era concebible que fueran a alterar de pronto su espíritu pastoral para vengar una muerte cuyos culpables podíamos ser todos (García Márquez 1981: 130sq.).

The history of Arab immigration in the Caribbean region, outlined here in a few lines, projects the image of a minority closely united through linguistic, onomastic, cultural, economic and matrimonial ties, whose cultural orientation and socio-economic integration, in the eyes of the narrator, do not make it seem likely that it, as a group,



could take revenge for the murder of one of its own, for whom – as the narrator admits here – in a certain sense not only the Vicario brothers, but ultimately all inhabitants of the town are responsible or at least share responsibility. Even the suspicious fears of the seasoned Coronel Aponte, that a bloody “culture war” could be about to erupt in his little town, are dispersed once and for all when he visits each of the Arab families in town and is able to establish that they are wearing mourning, but not forging any kind of plans for revenge (García Márquez 1981: 131). What’s more: Even the ones who had pursued the murderers immediately after the bloody deed, amidst a population that had witnessed the murder without doing anything to prevent it, dispute that they had ever intended to take the murderers’ lives. The hundred-year-old Suseme Abdala even sends the Vicario brothers a special medicinal tea that relieves Pedro Vicario’s condition. The Arab, that is, the ArabAmerican community, takes pains to send out signs of reconciliation and to return to peaceful coexistence, as if nothing had ever disturbed this peace.

Thus the danger of a “clash of civilizations” feared by the residents of non-Arab extraction is dispelled in García Márquez’ Caribbean microcosm, at least on the side of the **turcos**. In the events surrounding the murder of Santiago Nasar, ‘the Arabs’ or ‘the Turks’ may well be discerned as a potentially dangerous group and kept under surveillance by the executive power, but they obviously present no danger to peaceful coexistence. Of course, the Arab immigrants are only one part of the heterogeneous population: that *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* also contains references to Spaniards, Catalonians, freebooters, other groups of European immigrants, and, above all, former slaves who had been transported from Africa, is virtually a matter of course. From the newlyweds’ house, just a few hours before his death, Santiago Nasar shows the narrator and the Vicario brothers a flickering light near the Cartagena de Indias, marking the place in the Caribbean Sea where a slave ship from Senegal sank long ago, and where the unredeemed souls of the slaves appear to this day (García Márquez 1981: 108). The image of the Caribbean as a migratory hub is omnipresent.

The ethno-cultural heterogeneity of the population on the Caribbean coast is an element of the Caribbean universe. At the same time, however, in this profound novel it has become clear that the Arab im-

migrant families, even in the third generation, are still recognizable as an independent group and are perceived as such 'from outside'. Thus it is worth looking more closely at the literary representation of these Colombians of Arab extraction in the novel. Should Santiago Nasar's belonging to this group – as most research so far has assumed – really be of only marginal importance?

### **5. Lines of Conflict in the ArabAmerican Context: Clash of Lineage and Clash of Cultures?**

Of course, within an immigrant society – and there is no mistaking that Colombia was an immigrant society in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century – these Arab immigrants constitute only one migrant group, albeit one that is relatively pronounced in the Caribbean. In particular, their marriage policy constitutes an unmistakably **multicultural** pattern of behavior, which can be interpreted as the coexistence of a parallel social sphere, insofar as it reaffirms a 'coexistence' of cultures, or of ethno-cultural groups, thereby anchoring its own future in an ArabAmerican genealogy.

Santiago Nasar, too, follows the rules of the game observed within this group for the most part. Certainly, he always keeps an eye out for sexual adventures with other women – just like the ones his father had with girls of inferior social status like Victoria Guzmán –, after having been initiated into the arts of love by the seductive owner of the brothel in his youth. Yet for his own wedding only a girl of Arab extraction comes into question. Therefore he respects unconditionally the contract his parents made years ago with the parents of his future – and by no means beloved – wife Flora Miguel (García Márquez 1981: 178).

The predominant patriarchal features, unchallenged within the Arab-American community, are unmistakable. They regulate even, and not least, the way men behave toward each other. Escapades by the male members of the community are tolerated as a matter of course. Nahir Miguel, the father of the bride and uncontested ruler in his home, is the first to grasp the danger threatening his future son-in-law, and makes him an offer in Arabic, to either hide him in his house or to arm him with his rifle so that he is not defenseless at the mercy

of the Vicario brothers. In complete contrast to his daughter, at no point does the man with an imperious manner, who wraps himself in his “chilaba de beduino” in his home, but never on the street (García Márquez 1981: 181), call into question the contracted marriage of the ethnically Arab couple. The patriarchal dominance constitutes a largely stable, secure and insular sphere, which defines the rules of marriage to which the women must subjugate themselves – even though it leaves Flora Miguel, desperate after Santiago Nasar’s murder, to throw herself at a “teniente de fronteras”, who later has her working for him as a prostitute (García Márquez 1981: 156).

Within his family, Santiago’s father Ibrahim Nasar also embodies the patriarchal type. As the narrator tells us, he had come to the town with the last Arabs at the end of the civil war (García Márquez 1981: 21) and rebuilt the warehouse on the main square, which had become useless because large ships could no longer put in at the inland river harbor, choked with sand. He was able to use the fundamental economic changes intimated here to his advantage, erecting a cattle hacienda and ascending to the town’s ruling class. Within just a few years his societal integration appears successful: The Nasars are respected both within the Arab-American community and in the structure of the town as a whole, and enjoy power and influence. Santiago himself is indisputably considered the best match in town – besides Bayardo San Román, who arrived for unknown reasons a few months before his wedding with Angela Vicario. Does this not amount to a perfect story of social integration?

To his son, with whom he is very close, Ibrahim Nasar speaks Arabic; when Santiago’s mother is present, they switch to Spanish so that she is not excluded (García Márquez 1981: 16). Santiago feels drawn to both parents, but his phenotype is clearly ‘branded’ as Arab: For the slim, pale man who has just turned 21 possesses “los párpados árabes y los cabellos rizados de su padre” (García Márquez 1981: 15). Numerous ‘orientalisms’ are interspersed in the text, always patrilinear in their reference to his father, quasi as markers of identity, for his father had taught him not only how to handle firearms, but also

how to hunt with falcons, to love horses, and instilled in him bravery and caution.<sup>18</sup>

Considering the exemplary character of his father, it is no surprise that Victoria Guzmán wants to spare her daughter Divina Flor the fate she once had suffered at the hands of Ibrahim Nasar: to be used as a sexual object, but then degraded to domestic servant while another takes on the position of official (although unloved) wife. When Santiago Nasar reaches for her beautiful daughter on the morning of his death, as he always did in what amounted to a standard routine, Victoria, long since aware that Angela Vicario's brothers and their knives are lying in wait for Santiago, threatens the **blanco**<sup>19</sup> with a kitchen knife. A short time later she uses this implement to cut open a hare, whose entrails she throws to the dogs. A few hours later Santiago Nasar will collapse in this very same kitchen, with his belly cut open and intestines oozing out. As this "mise en abyme" of the entire plot of the novel makes clear, there is a direct connection between Santiago Nasar's violent death and the presence of his deceased Arab father, in his external appearance just as in the sexual relations he practiced. Do the gender relations in this tragedy, whose seemingly inevitable course is triggered by the hierarchical relations between man and woman, thus constitute that mediating level on which the lines of cultural conflict burst open and endanger peaceful coexistence?

First of all it must be stated that we are not situated in multicultural coexistence on the level of gender relations. At the very latest, the designation of Santiago Nasar as *blanco* draws our attention to the fact that we are not dealing here with marriage behavior characteristic of the ArabAmerican community, but with gender-specific patterns of behavior and forms of life which Santiago Nasar, in the *machismo* tradition, shares with the overwhelming majority of the male population in Colombia, his country of birth. What is more, the designation as 'white' unmistakably evokes social difference, that is, his belonging to a white aristocratic class and caste of leaders. Although San-

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18 García Márquez (1981: 16): "de su padre aprendió desde muy niño el dominio de las armas de fuego, el amor por los caballos y la maestría de las aves de presas altas, pero de él aprendió también las buenas artes del valor y la prudencia".

19 García Márquez (1981: 19). Victoria's daughter knows that, very soon – if only temporarily – she is destined for Santiago Nasar's bed: "se sabía destinada a la cama furtiva de Santiago Nasar" (García Márquez 1981: 19).

tiago Nasar's cultural background may be more complex than that of the other residents of the town, he is nevertheless ensnared in the patriarchal world of values, which he clearly shares with Bayardo San Román, with the Vicario brothers and the narrator, as a matter of course. In a manner of speaking, the ArabAmerican influence of his patriarchal father cuts across the macho patterns of behavior shared by the entire population of this small town on the Caribbean coast of Colombia. In its overwhelming majority, it covers the murder of Santiago Nasar, proclaimed countless times and not prevented countless times, which takes place like an execution, right on the main square in front of everyone and in broad daylight,<sup>20</sup> in a kind of subversion or parody of the **locked-room** puzzle.<sup>21</sup> On the level of gender relations Santiago Nasar, by crossing different (gender) cultures, participates so to speak **transculturally** in the conditions that turn Bayardo San Román, Santiago Nasar and the Vicario twins into the protagonists of a tragedy, in which they are at the same time perpetrators and victims. Santiago Nasar, the son of an Arab migrant and a Spanish-speaking mother, does not represent a separable alterity, but an other **in** his self, that can not be assigned exclusively to his self, nor to the other, nor to a space in between. And even if he himself was not conscious of it even at the moment of his death: He embodies a world betwixt and between, which cannot be localized spatially – constituted by movements between different poles that can be ascertained but not fixed. In this sense the concept of 'strangeness' must be corrected in the declaration of one of the narrators the Lebanese writer Elias Khoury has concern himself with Santiago Nasar's death: "He experienced the strangeness at the instant of death, in that solitude which led him into spheres whose existence he had not thought possible" (Khoury 2000: 45). In the play between identity and difference, between Latin American and

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20 Cf. the application of this concept to Leonardo Sciascia's novel *Il giorno della civetta*, where the murder takes place not in some hidden place, but, like in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, right at the beginning of the text on the main square and in the morning light, in Buschmann (2005: 57). Despite all diegetic and plot-specific differences, the parallels between the novels of Sciascia and García Márquez are obvious.

21 The fiancée of one of the two murderers later deposes that she never would have married Pablo Vicario, had he not acted as he did to save the family honor; as it was, she waited patiently for three years until Santiago Nasar's murderer was released before tying the knot (García Márquez 1981: 102).

Arab worlds, Santiago Nasar stands for the complex entanglements and interconnectedness of the ArabAmerican, in whose 'world between' unfamiliarity and familiarity merge into one.

The gender-specific entanglements of the men apply in mirrored symmetry, in a reverse hierarchy, to the women as well, who play their culturally contingent role within the conflict of genders clearly developing in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*. Angela Vicario is the youngest daughter of a family living in humble conditions, which is altogether representative for this diagnosis.<sup>22</sup> Her father, Poncio Vicario, lost his sight while working as "orfebre de pobres" (García Márquez 1981: 50), and the corresponding precarity of the family's economic situation is what makes it possible for Bayardo San Román to use his money to "buy" the bride he happened to see one day and immediately desired. The bride's upbringing, for which her mother, Purísima del Carmen was responsible, was always divided gender-specifically and included strict sexual surveillance of the daughters to maintain the family honor, for: "Los hermanos fueron criados para ser hombres. Ellas habían sido educadas para casarse" (García Márquez 1981: 51). Thus it is no wonder that the mother of the narrator is convinced that these women would make their husbands happy, as they were raised to suffer from the day they were born (García Márquez 1981: 52). Angela's marriage to Bayardo is thus based on a double hierarchy, which takes both the gender relations and the socioeconomic situation into account. The will of the bride plays no role in this, for love can be learned as well: "También el amor se aprende" (García Márquez 1981: 56).

Nothing in the novel gives cause to the presumption that Santiago Nasar is actually responsible for Angela's lost virginity: The maternal supervision of the girl outside the home was perfect, and the investigating magistrate concerned with the case could not find any indications for this in Santiago's life, either. The narrator himself not only alleges that Santiago was much too stuck up to occupy himself with the girl; more importantly, he makes us profoundly aware that they had belonged to "two divergent worlds" ("dos mundos divergentes")

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22 In this comprehensive sociocultural and gender-specific sense, the Vicario family, in keeping with its name – *nomen est omen* – would be a family of vicars, of "representatives".

[García Márquez 1981: 144]). This remark is important, as it simultaneously provokes the question as to which divergent worlds are concerned here.

Not only the residents of the town in the novel, the representatives of research, too, never tired of developing the most widely diverging hypotheses about Angela's lost virginity. Could the narrator himself perhaps be responsible,<sup>23</sup> such that his developing the detective story ultimately would amount to a perfect deception in order to divert any suspicion from himself to others? But then, to counter this thesis, why should he refer to this very 'divergence' of the worlds of Angela and Santiago? For if he were the perpetrator, it would have to be in his interest to exonerate himself and cast a negative light on Santiago. In another vein, some things in the context of the evident patriarchal gender domination also speak for the fact that Angela could have become the victim of sexual coercion or rape within the family itself, especially since the blindness of her father Poncio, with a view to Oedipus, at least suggests a proximity to violation of the incest taboo in terms of mythical and literary history.<sup>24</sup>

Yet Angela Vicario, too, is at once both victim and perpetrator. She had barely named Santiago Nasar as the guilty party when her brothers, pork butchers by profession, grab their knives. Why does Angela give the name of Ibrahim Nasar's son? Perhaps because, as is speculated in the novel, she could not count on her brothers to attack a rich man who possessed great wealth? Did Angela and Santiago belong to two diverging worlds in this economic sense? Or are the "mundos divergentes" perhaps marked culturally as well? When, at the end of the second of five chapters, or acts of this tragedy, her brother Pedro interrogates Angela, who has been abused by her furious mother, her answer comes amazingly quickly:

Ella se demoró apenas el tiempo necesario para decir el nombre. Lo buscó en las tinieblas, lo encontró a primera vista entre los tantos y tantos nombres confundibles de este mundo y del otro, y lo dejó clavado en la

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23 This thesis appears to go back to a thought of Angel Rama's; cf. on this Silva (1998: 23).

24 Another factor that speaks for this is Angela's comment on the death of her father Poncio shortly after Santiago Nasar's murder: "Se lo llevó la pena moral" (García Márquez 1981: 133). On this thesis, cf. especially Rahona/Sieburth (1996) as well as Pöppel (1999: 36sq.), and Silva (1998: 21sq.).

pared con su dardo certero, como a una mariposa sin albedrío cuya sentencia estaba escrita desde siempre.

–Santiago Nasar– dijo (García Márquez 1981: 78).

The death sentence for Santiago Nasar comes as quickly as unexpectedly, and yet it was already written, had always been certain. Is it the artifice of the unconscious or of fate – as the investigating magistrate believes<sup>25</sup> – or perhaps of a kismet that cannot be determined by man, but only interpreted in the sense of a divine will? In any case, Angela's answer materializes with the same suddenness and directness as her brothers' fears that the Arabs could poison them, and the residents' fears that the Arabs could burn the Vicario brothers alive. No less abrupt is the reaction of Yamil Shaium, the Arab shopkeeper who laughed about an Arab pun with Santiago Nasar just a few minutes before his death, in setting off with his large-game rifle to chase after the two murderers, supported by other, albeit unarmed Arabs. Pedro and Pablo Vicario fled into the secure sanctuary of the church (García Márquez 1981: 190), following that diagonal of death inscribed by a revolver bullet in the geometry of the town years previously, when an unintentional shot broke loose from Ibrahim Nasar's pistol, crossing the main square on which his son later was to be stabbed to death, and reducing to rubble a life-sized statue of a saint on the high altar of the Catholic Church located opposite (García Márquez 1981: 13).<sup>26</sup>

Just seconds before the murderous attack by the two brothers, a disinterested spectator calls out to the unarmed Santiago Nasar that the "Turk" should take a different path (García Márquez 1981: 184). Thus the son of Arab immigrants turns back from *blanco* to *turco* immediately before his death, from white landed proprietor to Oriental migrant. As if in response to all of this, in the face of death Santiago Nasar appears more beautiful than ever, with his "rostro de sarraceno con los rizos alborotados" (García Márquez 1981: 192). Santiago, often admired for his exceptional skill as a quick-change artist (García

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25 On this, cf. García Márquez (1981: 180). There the investigating magistrate notes with red ink: "La fatalidad nos hace invisibles". Names and persons appear as out of nowhere and suddenly become invisible again, as if they were obeying a pre-determined fate.

26 The narrator adds that Santiago Nasar would remember this lesson for the rest of his life; from then on he always kept his weapons separate from his ammunition.



Márquez 1981: 106), is transformed by his public execution and death in front of everybody into a Saracen, an Arab.

In fractions of a second, so it seems, socio-cultural demarcations are activated, along with their associated mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, which have not changed in any significant way even in the third generation, despite all of the Arab immigrants' attempts to conform to the resident population. Although Ibrahim Nasar gives his cattle hacienda the ostentatious name of "divine face" ("Divino Rostro")<sup>27</sup> and no matter how much Santiago Nasar was able to donate to the bishop, whose ring he wanted to kiss: In the eyes of the citizens who do not have their roots in the Near and Middle East, the group of the 'Arabs' remained the 'Turks', the insulting designation assigned to their immigrated ancestors. Even if these 'Arabs' would not even think of committing the atrocities of which they are believed to be capable, hidden underneath the seemingly smooth coexistence are nevertheless faults and lines of conflict between the Spanish speakers and the speakers of Spanish **and** Arabic, which can break open at any time. Was the apostle Santiago, the 'true James' of all pilgrim legends on an Iberian peninsula still influenced by the Arabs, not also the patron saint of the Spaniards in the *Reconquista's* fight against the Saracens?

From the middle of the novel on, a peculiar dissemination of 'Orientalisms' – that is, textual elements that can be attributed to a specific 'Arabic' isotopy – can be discovered in unexpected places. Two examples of this should suffice. First, the investigating magistrate discovers that one of the two murder weapons the pork butchers used is a kind of miniature scimitar, an "alfanje en miniatura" (García Márquez 1981: 96).<sup>28</sup> And when the narrator attempts to forget the horror by visiting the brothel's madame María Alejandrina Cervantes after Santiago Nasar's funeral, he finds the high-class prostitute carrying out her work of mourning: As always when she is terribly sad, she is stuffing unheard of amounts of food into her mouth and sitting in front

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27 In spite of assurances of the narrator to the contrary, this name could also be an indication that Divina Flor, the daughter of Victoria Guzmán, is also the daughter of Ibrahim Nasar. Then, of course, a connection between Santiago and her would be an unconscious break of the incest taboo.

28 The narrator adds in explanation that no German knives could be imported at the time due to the war (García Márquez 1981: 95).

of her “platón babilónico” completely naked, “a la turca” on her queen-size bed (García Márquez 1981: 124). It’s as if the woman with the great erotic aura, who had held the youthful Santiago Nasar so spellbound that his father once had to banish him to the hacienda for a period, is mutating into an Oriental. She is so very ‘orientalized’ that she has to break off her attempts to kidnap the love-hungry narrator into the land of love as a professional “bestia de amor” (García Márquez 1981: 125), as she still detects on her lover the dreadful stink of the body of Santiago Nasar, so cruelly cut open and quickly decaying.

Let us not forget that the perspective of the narrator, to whom the smell of his dead friend’s decay is still clinging, is not an ‘objective’ position. His mother, Luisa Santiaga, may have been Santiago Nasar’s godmother and the person after whom he was named, but he himself obviously is not one of the *turcos*. Of course, between the time of the story and the time he tells it, he marries into an Arab-American family himself, reporting to us outright that in the middle of Bayardo’s and Angela’s turbulent wedding party, he proposed to Mercedes Barcha, who had just finished primary school and was not yet of age. His later wife’s reminding him of this proposal fourteen years later is a sophisticated autobiographical flashback, which also frictions the position of the text-internal narrator with that of the text-external, real author by the name of Gabriel García Márquez. For the flashback of the real author’s wife, as an only seemingly incidental biographical datum, flags his position as a Colombian of non-Arab extraction who married a Colombian of an Arab immigrant family. The question is interesting, but may appear at first sight: How would this *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* have turned out if it had been presented to us by an ‘Arab’ narrator?

## 6. Santiago Nasar’s Murder from the Lebanese Perspective

The Lebanese writer Elias Khoury, born in Beirut in 1948 to a family of Greek Orthodox faith, gives us a whole slew of possible answers to this question. For his novel published in 1994, *The Mysterious Letter* (Arabic: Magma’ al-asrar), the title of which literally means “A Col-

lection of Secrets”,<sup>29</sup> refers explicitly to García Márquez’ *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* on multiple occasions and, in so doing, cleverly draws attention to the altered position of the observers with regard to the characters of the Colombian novel to which it refers. The narration, consisting of several short, self-contained stories, told by different narrators and intricately woven together into a whole, does in fact present different possible literary answers, or at least different techniques of telling the story from the Arab perspective.

The transareal shift in perspective departing from the Latin American cultural area is signaled in many ways. For instance, the description of Santiago Nasar submitted in *Crónica* as a slim and pale young man with “Arabic eyebrows” and “his father’s curly hair” is cited precisely and associated with the appearance of an Ibrahim Nasar in Beirut, whose lover Norma describes him for her girlfriends from school. Yet Norma, as we find out, “did not speak of ‘Arabic eyebrows’, because she was Arab herself” (Khoury 2000: 37). With this the Arab internal perspective is designated clearly, not only of the unhappy lover, but of the entire novel, as evident in the various positions of its narrators. Thus *The Mysterious Letter* contains a message for García Márquez – and for his readers.

But what is the relationship between *The Mysterious Letter* and *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*? Elias Khoury’s novel, too, starts right off with a puzzle: The greengrocer Ibrahim Nasar is found dead in his bed in a quarter of Beirut, while his lover, who is found half-naked in a wardrobe, screams and cries that she is lost. For the man who had promised her marriage and deflowered her could no longer marry her and save her from destitution.

The text, which plays with elements of a detective novel just as García Márquez’ *Chronicle*, not only features the shared surname, to which we will come back later; from the very beginning it presents a series of intersections which at first glance concern connections between murder and love, lost virginity and patriarchally influenced gender relations, and a puzzle structure underlying all strands of narra-

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29 On this, cf. the fine survey study by Friederike Pannewick (2001). Cf. also the detailed interview with Elias Khoury in Mejcher (2001: 125-153), as well as Meyer (2001).

tion. Elias Khoury joins quite intimately and elaborately the intertextual links between the two, short novels of similar length.

It is therefore no surprise that *The Mysterious Letter* also places the central questions of *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* in direct intertextual reference:

Everyone knew that Santiago was to be slaughtered this morning. Why didn't anyone warn him? Perhaps because they did not believe it, as they maintained. Or did they let him walk into a certain death because he was an Arab? Why was the immigrant Lebanese, who spoke Arabic although his mother did not master this language, allowed to die in this brutal manner? [...] Because he was a stranger? Does otherness mean death? (Khoury 2000: 37).

The very formulation of these questions makes the shift in perspective alluded to above apparent, first asking about a possible relationship between the murder and the Arab, or Lebanese, origins of the victim, while at the same time moving otherness to the center – which is certainly the central complex of issues in all of Elias Khoury's work. As a 'stranger in a strange land' Santiago Nasar did not go into raptures over the cockscomb soup of the locals, but like his father, preferred to eat cooked yogurt and drink tequila alias araq (Khoury 2000: 38). A strategy of writing takes form: Elias Khoury's novel picks up on the Arab elements contained in the Latin American reference text, intensifies them and develops them further in the transareal horizon of issues. Reading and writing, the reading of the other and the writing down of his own novel go hand in hand: at a very early date the Lebanese author claims to have discovered for himself that reading is a way of writing and writing a way of reading.<sup>30</sup>

With a fine writer's sense, Elias Khoury attempted to pick up on a number of the Arab or Oriental elements shown here and to weave these into a dense network of relations linking the two novels together. Each of the various partial stories, which are introduced from the first line of the novel by the opening formula "The story started like this" (Khoury 2000: 5), sheds a different light on the puzzle structure of the novel 'itself,' and often of the 'other' novel as well: In this manner the 'collection of secrets' heralded by the Arabic title does in fact emerge. The puzzles illuminate each other. It is no coincidence that the carnage committed against Santiago Nasar in *Crónica de una muerte*

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<sup>30</sup> Elias Khoury in Mejcher (2001: 131).

*anunciada* reminds one of the narrators of the reports of Santiago's father Ibrahim Nasar, who had spoken "about the violence and the bloodbaths in the distant village with an unmentionable name" (Khoury 2000: 37sq.).

The connection thus produced at the start of the novel further unfurls at the end of the text in another of the complexly interwoven stories. Many long years ago, when Ibrahim Nasar was only ten years old, a letter had reported of the death of a distant relative in Colombia, thus frustrating with one blow all emigration plans of the relatives remaining in Lebanon, including Ibrahim himself. For evidently this letter, which Ibrahim was never to set eyes upon, instilled in everyone the fear that they could be persecuted as Arabs in Colombia and cruelly slaughtered just as Santiago Nasar was. Years later Ibrahim, disappointed by life, seeks traces of his own family history, hoping to find not only the golden treasure sworn upon time and again, but also the no less legendary letter from distant Colombia:

Besides, he believed he would come upon that mysterious letter with the report of Santiago Nasar's death, about which the Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez was later to write as if he were depicting the murder of Abd al-Djalil on the square in Ain Kisrin during the horrible bloodbath of 1860. As if he were depicting how Abd al-Djalil Nasar reeled under the blows of the short scimitars for an entire hour, how he tried to pick up his guts, which spilled out on to the ground, collapsed on top of them and died (Khoury 2000: 195).

With this, additional relationships between the two novels become apparent. For the mysterious letter that relayed the news of Nasar's death to Lebanon **corresponds** with a document in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* that is no less mysterious: A warning written by an unknown man, whose identity never could be ascertained, contained in an envelope stuck under the door of Santiago Nasar's house. This letter contained very detailed information about the imminent murder, the reasons brought forward, the murderers themselves and the planned location of the crime (García Márquez 1981: 26). Yet Santiago, like all other residents of the house, simply overlooked the envelope lying on the ground, which was not found until after his murder.

Taken together, these two mysterious letters, which announced the death of Santiago Nasar in the two novels, merge together the two bloodbaths which were, in actuality, temporally and spatially quite separate, such that the description of the one slaughter can serve very

well to depict the other. With this the settings in the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries, and in a small village in Lebanon and a small town on the Caribbean coast of Colombia, are made trans-temporally and translocally congruent. In so doing, the Lebanese author did not neglect to “anticipate” temporally the “Arab” murder weapon brought into play by the Colombian author – as we saw – in the form of the scimitar, which the murderers in Lebanon used to commit their horrible massacre. Another slaughter is recognized as a kind of backdrop behind the carnage, whose bloody trace runs through history and the stories. This *téléscopage* reveals a glimpse of a history of migration extending over centuries, in which the hope for a fixed, definitive residence is smothered in a bloodbath over and again.

Consequently, in a first step the intertextuality established by Elias Khoury can be characterized on the spatial level, as a transareal relationship on the transcontinental scale. In view of both locations – which will be overlaid by even more locations of migration over the further course of the novel – it also bears a main characteristic that is translocal and rural.<sup>31</sup> In other words: The Lebanese author links his text with the highly successful novel by a Colombian author, through which the Columbian diegesis is at once expanded translocally and transareally – and thus also has repercussions for the understanding of the reference text by García Márquez. At stake here is more than just writing the successive and preceding family history: Rather, Elias Khoury picks up on the elements of a history of migration in such a sophisticated manner that, in this translocal nature, a transtemporal and transareal network of relations emerges, cutting across different time-frames and spaces, not only making Colombia and Lebanon seem countries distant from each other, but also, in a vectorial sense, shifting the focus to the multifarious and complex **movements** between the two countries. Lebanon and Colombia are not simply the clearly distinct countries of origin and destination in a typical emigration history, but also stand in an intimate relation of exchange due to a multitude of indirectly and directly networked communications: What happens in one country has repercussions for the other.

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31 Elias Khoury establishes an analogous translocal urban relationship between the city planning reconstruction program in Beirut and the intensive construction activity in Berlin; cf. the Lebanese author’s statements in Borgmann (1996: 80).

The structural homologies illuminated in this manner concern the omnipresence of violence, of slaughter and bloodbaths, of wars and civil wars, of flight and emigration, of social, economic and gender dependence. In the context of their **areas**, moreover, both countries are linked through their colonial history with European hegemonic powers, or, respectively, with the Ottoman Empire and the regional powers that established themselves after its collapse, and are marked by these asymmetrical relations. Despite all cultural differences, the theme of lost virginity shared by both novels further refers to patriarchal-style gender relations, which play a decisive role in the plot of both texts, by no means coincidentally. In this, the transcontinental and transareal relation between the Middle East and the Caribbean emphasizes the essential equivalence of different forms of potential for structural conflict, especially including the gender-specific and cultural-religious dimensions. Thus there is every reason to speak of an Arab-American network of relations that makes any restriction to a purely national perspective appear insufficient.

However, the central question, the riddle running through both novels, remains: How did it come to the bloodbath? One of the narrators employed by Elias Khoury makes a note of the fact that the village of Ain Kisrin was initially unaffected by the massacres spreading through the Lebanon Mountains (Khoury 2000: 159). In the village everyone continued with everyday life, as if these altercations erupting since 1858 and their horrible excesses simply did not exist. However, on February 12, 1860 the Abu Amer family was massacred at the edge of the village. And immediately “the village divided into two families” (Khoury 2000: 160), the Abu Amers and the Nasars, Druses and Catholics who had lived together well and peacefully until that time. Actually there had been “no occasion” for hostilities (Khoury 2000: 160); yet the know-how of coexistence that had been stable for so long – despite the bloodily disputed battles between the Maronite church and Druse feudal rule in the surroundings – imploded abruptly. Unproven allegations that a priest from the Nasar family was responsible for the massacre were enough for the men to slaughter each other with knives and send the village up in flames.

Locations, times and cultural contexts change; but unproven charges continue to display their devastating effect. The story of a man from the Nasar family who ran for miles with a knife in his back

before collapsing to his death on the outskirts of Beirut foreshadows the final path of Santiago Nasar, cut open and brutally stabbed in his Colombian village: The stories, the places and times overlap, one bloodbath foreshadows the next. Memories “rise to the surface as if oozing from an old, unhealed wound” (Khoury 2000: 161). And thus not only the Nasar family thinks about flight and emigration:

Grandmother wanted to emigrate, everyone had dreamed of emigrating, and the ships setting sail for Marseille were crowded with people from the Western Bekaa Valley, from Zahle and from the mountains (Khoury 2000: 162).

And thus Nasar’s path via Marseille to Latin America is in the offing. Since the devastating civil war of 1858/1860 – about which a young Elias Khoury once wrote a study at the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* under the tutelage of Alain Touraine in Paris<sup>32</sup> – many Lebanese had been forced to set out on this path. The colonial – or historical – constellations varied, yet it seemed that the series of civil wars in Lebanon would never end: all the way to the self-destructive civil war that began in 1975, leaving the country to bleed dry for decades. Elias Khoury himself had participated in this war as a militant combatant and recorded his terrible experiences in the novel *The Little Mountain*, published for the first time in 1977 (1989 in English).<sup>33</sup> Without a doubt: Here there is a structural connection between the experience of the Colombian *violencia* described by Gabriel García Márquez and the battles in the Lebanese civil war described by Elias Khoury. Both novels are chronicles of proclaimed violence, which pose the burning question as to the puzzle of their respective emergence and toleration.

Back in Paris, young Khoury, as a student of sociology, certainly must have been aware that the descendants of the victims and survivors had laid by the horrors of the massacre starting in 1858 in the “the book of oblivion” (Khoury 2000: 159). This explains his endeavor to transform the necessity of historical science into the virtue of the novel, using the means of literature to expose the history and stories that had been neglected for so long. The young man, after taking up arms on the side of the Palestinian resistance after the Arab

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32 Cf. on this the interview with Elias Khoury in Mejcher (2001: 131).

33 On the importance of this novel in the context of contemporary Arab literature, cf. the foreword to the English-language edition of *Little Mountain* by Edward W. Said (1989).



defeat against Israel in 1967,<sup>34</sup> learned his lesson from the bloody conflicts over the course of his own life, and has become a militant, uncompromising representative and advocate of literature and its importance for (not only Arab) societies. Militantly espousing literature is quite different from using literature as a vehicle for militant purposes and messages alien to literature. Khoury's deployment of literature is based on the insight that literature and life cannot be separated from each other and that ideology has no place in literature.<sup>35</sup> The consequence of this is his project of writing, which learned the lesson of history and militantly advocates a life knowledge that feeds on the openness of literature, in order to keep history – and our own stories – radically open.

The (hi)stories shown in literature create and contain their own deceits. It is thus quite possible that the Catholic priest Abdallah Nasar, whom some blamed for the massacre in Ain Kistrin, is the very one who became the ancestor of the Colombian Nasars. He had fled to Beirut, from there to Marseille and finally further to Colombia, where he then is supposed to have founded “the emigrated branch of the family” (Khoury 2000: 159). A religious fanatic and provocateur as progenitor? Were his entanglements ever revealed, or did they flow into the “Book of Forgetting”? But how, in the tradition of forgetting and suppression, to halt the cycle of violence and the bloody recurrence of what is suppressed?

Just a century later – if Elias Khoury's narrator characters are to be believed – the mysterious letter with the news of Santiago Nasar's slaughter in Colombia will call to mind this almost forgotten, suppressed Lebanese (pre)history and frustrate all travel plans of the family of Ibrahim Nasar, the future greengrocer. Ultimately it becomes clear that the family patriarch Jakob Nasar has not entirely forgotten the bloodbath of Ain Kistrin and has a ready explanation for the brutal events: The curse of Abd al-Djalil, who – as we have seen – collapsed

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34 On this, cf. Elias Khoury's interview with Mejcher (2001: 129): “When I entered university, the June war of 1967 broke out. It changed my life”. In very similar terms, the Palestinian literature and cultural theorist Edward W. Said summarized the experience of this generation, as he, too, spoke of the Israeli defeat of Arab troops as a turning point in his life; cf. Said (1999: 101sq.).

35 Elias Khoury in Mejcher (2001: 134).

under the blows of the scimitar, continues to pursue the family (Khoury 2000: 163).

### **7. Four Times One Hundred Years of Foreignness**

The history of the family – and thus the history of the atrocities – goes back even further, of course. Ibrahim Nasar, whose murder opens the volume, knew it only vaguely from hearsay. What is known, however, is that the family was originally called Atwi and first received the sobriquet Nasar in Ain Kisrin. The family, which presumably originally came from Izra' in Hauran – so the stories say – long ago emigrated to Kana in southern Lebanon, in stages over a period of two hundred years. The last to emigrate, at the end of the eighteenth century, were the members of the branch that was to receive the name Nasar, and the reason for this was – what else – a murder, whereby this time “the emigrant was not the perpetrator, but the victim” (Khoury 2000: 25). Bedouins from the Golan Heights had attacked the family and killed three brothers; back in far-off Kana such an act had already compelled the Atwis, emigrants since the late sixteenth century, to convert to Islam in order to forestall further attacks. Although it is not possible to trace all of the details of the history presented as fragments in the novel, it is nevertheless apparent that the migration from Lebanon to Colombia was merely a new stage in a centuries-long succession of murders and emigrations, each of which involved further massacres and waves of refugees. Thus the younger generation in Elias Khoury's novel may no longer try to flee to Colombia, Venezuela or Mexico, but rather to Canada, since Canadian authorities are issuing immigration visas for Lebanese Christians after the most recent Lebanese civil war.<sup>36</sup>

This changed destination for emigration, no longer to the South, but to the North of the American continent, is merely a sign for the modified (and historically comprehensible) factors pulling Arab-American immigration in the face of ultimately unchanged factors pushing emigration. Migration upon migration – and always the danger of seeing the coexistence established with so much effort sinking

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<sup>36</sup> On this, cf. Khoury (2000: 15, 209, 214).

into a bloodbath, which, in turn, triggers new migrations – or prevents them elsewhere.

Here Elias Khoury links the endless succession of ever new migrations with the leitmotif of foreignness and otherness running through all of his texts, for it is not difficult to recognize that “it does not require any emigration or expulsion from paradise to be foreign” (Khoury 2000: 54). Indeed, it is certainly possible for man “to be a stranger in his own house and among his own neighbors” (Khoury 2000: 54).

In 1993, a year before *The Mysterious Letter* was published, Elias Khoury had already developed this leitmotif in equally poetic and multi-faceted form in his novel *The Kingdom of Strangers* (first English edition in 1996). It sounds like a mixture of intra- and intertextual references for Khoury to pursue the topic of foreignness from Gabriel García Márquez’ character Santiago Nasar in Colombia, via Albert Camus’ character of the stranger (Meursault in *L’étranger*) in Algeria, via his own novel’s characters in Lebanon back to Adam, the ultimate father-figure. Adam was not only “the first foreigner”, but also “the first Arab poet” and “the first human” (Khoury 2000: 42) – just like Camus’ *Le premier homme*.<sup>37</sup> He spoke the first language, “the language of Paradise and of Hell” (Khoury 2000: 42), which was, however, pursued by “the curse that ripped language apart in the Tower of Babel” (Khoury 2000: 42), just as the country lapsing into the Lebanese civil war in 1860 was transformed “into the Tower of Babel” (Khoury 2000: 160). From this time on people face each other as strangers, no longer speaking the same language and unable to find a way out of their Babylonian confusion of languages.

Not only does Khoury skillfully resort to the points of reference frequently interspersed in the text from the literatures of the twentieth century, as well as to Ancient Arab poetry and to stories from *The Arabian Nights*, but, in the tradition of world books, he also introduces the Bible and the Koran, in whose stories and figures the characters of Elias Khoury, the writer between cultures, are reflected time and again. Thus in his novel *The Kingdom of Strangers*, the question “What am I writing?” is followed by not only a timid response indica-

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37 This text from Albert Camus estate was published by Gallimard in Paris in the same year as *The Mysterious Letter*.

ting the insecurity of the narrator as well as of narration (“I don’t know. I feel the words decaying and disintegrating” [Khoury 1996: 39]); but by a vision of Christ at the Dead Sea:

Yet I see him today, in 1991, at the close of a barbaric century, which started with a massacre and ended with a crime. I see him, lonely, dead, crucified. He is walking on the water.

The only one who is a foreigner.

A stranger in the realm of strangers, which he, or so the white Cherkessian believed, wanted to found (Khoury 1996: 39sq.).

Widad, the “Cherkessian”, sees Jesus Christ as the quintessence of a stranger, in which her own image is reflected. The fact that the white Cherkessian is not a Cherkessian, as the Lebanese world around her and she herself believe, but rather a woman who was kidnapped as a young girl from her native village in Azerbaijan, enslaved and finally sold to Lebanon by way of Alexandria (Khoury 1996: 43), may explain why Widad begins to sing “The Stranger” with such fervor during religious services (Khoury 1996: 40). In the kingdom of strangers everyone – as victim or perpetrator – is a stranger to everyone else: having stirred up dust in countless migrations without any real origin and without a real future, time and again forced to laboriously build up a life knowledge that is good for the know-how of peaceful coexistence, at least for a time. Yet often an unforeseen coincidence is enough to set off the kind of chain reaction that so brutally characterized the twentieth century, and that already seems to be defining the twenty-first century as well.

Widad, stolen from her native village, will make herself understood in a foreign language her entire life, until she loses the mastery of this language foreign to her along with her memory at the end of her life: a Babylonian confusion of languages “in nuce”. This devoted, self-sacrificing, and yet unfathomable character – one of the most beautiful, most lovingly created female characters in the author’s fictional work – has long since been transformed into “a history of silence” (Khoury 1996: 98). But what does this history of silence have to do with the history of writing?

When the first-person narrator tells Widad’s story to Salman Rushdie in London in 1988, the author advises him to turn it into a novel. Yet the narrator confesses his fear, the fear of “being pushed to the edge or devoured by the story”, or even “becoming part of the

story without knowing how it will proceed and turn out” (Khoury 1996: 98). For the narrator, Rushdie himself serves as the best example for the fact that such fear is warranted, as Rushdie had not sensed, back before the publication of his *Satanic Verses*, that writing was to become “his undoing” (Khoury 1996: 99). All the greater the risk for an author who emigrates to London at the age of sixteen, writes his novels not in his native Urdu, but in English, and ultimately, like Widad, forgets the foreign language he learned in old age, so that in the end he will not even be able to read his own books! (Khoury 1996: 99).

Obviously, this story gets under the skin of the narrator – whom we cannot simply equate with Elias Khoury. It is too horrible not to be true. Incorporating Salman Rushdie into *The Kingdom of Strangers* introduces a frictional dimension, oscillating between the fiction internal to the text and the reality external to the text, which at the same time possesses a metafictional status reflecting upon the fiction of the novel. Yet what is contemplated in these passages is not only the fiction, but also this friction, so that at the same time one can speak of a metafrictional dimension. Here Salman Rushdie embodies the writer, who literally left his fatherland **and** his mother tongue, and who stands for the kind of writing without a fixed residence that strikes fear into the heart of the first-person narrator. The fact that tales can devour the people who tell them, and thus commit literary cannibalism against their creators, is demonstrated with extreme clarity in the example of men of letters writing without a fixed residence:

I remember saying to Rushdie that his choice would make him a potential hero of one of his novels some day. I had no idea that a life of suffering was in store for him, more terrible than any a hero had ever lived through (Khoury 1996: 105).

The warning to the writer is crystal clear: Bear in mind – you may have to live through what you write. Literature and life cannot be separated from each other, are so intimately related to each other, they evoke the fear that literature – as in Jorge Luis Borges’ *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* – could force its way directly into life and change it.<sup>38</sup>

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38 Cf. this text by the Argentinean writer in the horizon of frictionality with Ette (2001b: 227-268). Elias Khoury made a quite concrete and unpleasant experience with the “penetration” of a story written by others into his own life in France in October 2001, just a few weeks after September 11; on this, cf. Khoury (2001).

The metafictional and metafrictional passages in Khoury's *The Kingdom of Strangers* also include reflections about "the contemporary literature of the Third World" – which Western eyes all too readily dismiss as "unreliable" (Khoury 1996: 104). Yet how, the first-person narrator asks insistently in view of his narrated time and narrated situation in Lebanon, can we "combine and link together [the scattered stories] in a country in which all connections have been annihilated?" (Khoury 1996: 105sq.). There is good reason for Edward W. Said to emphasize that writing novels in societies as torn apart as those of Palestine or Lebanon is something very risky and highly problematic (Said 1989: xiv). In fact, Lebanese literature in particular offers an impressive demonstration of the way categories like national literature and world literature lose relevance as they no longer can be applied as descriptive elements.<sup>39</sup>

Yet the polyglottism and worldwide dispersion of such a literature without a fixed abode – which in many senses probably could best be compared with Cuban literature in the New World – does not mean that it loses any explanatory power, credibility or "authenticity" at all. Nevertheless, from the perspective of such a transcultural and transareal Lebanese literature, the question of truth is posed even more keenly, as it intends to consign and surrender its own painful history neither to the "Book of Forgetting" (Khoury 2000: 159) nor to the interests of certain ideologies. But how – as Khoury's narrator characters ask over and again with often agonizing persistence – can the danger of unreliability be countered, how can the truth be found and represented in a literarily convincing manner?

In today's "age of documentation" (Khoury 1996: 122), documentation for this age can hardly be the answer to such a question. Latin American authors, as the narrator knows, draw their "legends of the present from oral tradition" (Khoury 1996: 122), a method employed by many a story of Elias Khoury's before. Yet in response to his lover Maria's question of what truth is, back in the first part of the novel the first-person narrator found an answer that is characteristic of Khoury's profound humor, and disconcerting only at first glance: "The conjunction of two lies" (Khoury 1996: 37).

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39 On this, cf. Pflitsch (2003).

Writing, as not only Khoury's writer characters know, "means lying" (Khoury 1996: 66). Therefore, it could be formulated, the meeting of two written stories like *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *The Mysterious Letter* represents the literary meeting of two lies. But this, as we now know, drives the truth out into the open.

But which truth is at stake here? Thanks to Elias Khoury's story, Gabriel García Márquez' character Santiago Nasar can now look back on a history of not only one hundred years of solitude, but also of four hundred years of restlessness, of emigration and violence, so that the proclamation of his death is, in essence, shifted hundreds of years into the past, where it can be read between the lines of those oral histories that attempt to preserve in people's memory a family history as a history of migration. As we know, the history of the Colombian Santiago Nasar is based on a true story, which García Márquez transformed into his story three decades later. For his part, Elias Khoury transformed the story told by García Márquez into a story that tells of the foreignness of man, in a succession of murder and migration that appears hopeless and without end. Man appears as a prisoner of his own foreignness, as a stranger among strangers, who can attack, slaughter and devour each other at any time. But is there really no escape from the spiral of expulsion and emigration, violence and counter-violence?

### 8. ArabAmerican Writing between Worlds

For the novels of Elias Khoury, the strangeness and otherness of man is of fundamental importance – as was to be shown here. Nevertheless, despite the clearly accentuated transhistorical continuity of the cyclical time structure so frequently observed in his works, especially on this level of meaning, the structure does not entail an ahistorical perspective of an ontology of strangeness in the kingdom of strangers, detached from time and space. Even the connection between massacre and migration is by no means given and obligatory once and for all. A renewed look at the double network of specifically ArabAmerican relations, cleverly interwoven by García Márquez and consequently developed further by Elias Khoury, can elucidate this.

In this we should proceed first from the observation that the news of the murder of young Santiago Nasar, so to speak, on the boundary between *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *The Mysterious Letter*,

does not trigger any migrations. The family of the perpetrators is urged to leave the location of the murder, yet the population of Arab extraction settled in the small town endeavors not to endanger the way they live together with the other Colombian residents through acts of vengeance. Rather, the representatives of the Arab community, filled with deep mourning, emphasize their renunciation of violence and attempt to secure future peaceful coexistence with a gesture of good will, by sending medicinal herbs to Santiago's murderers. They do everything to avoid a collision of cultures.

In Elias Khoury's novel, the news of the death of a grandson of Lebanese immigrants results in the cancellation of all emigration plans, as the members of the branch of the family remaining in Lebanon apparently interpret the collectively committed murder as the sign of a collision which could be understood in the sense of a "clash of civilizations". While the Arab migrant families that have since taken up residence in Colombia draw the lessons from their story, as from their own family history (which can be read as the succession of massacres and migrations), the Nasars in Lebanon are conscious of the same family history and no longer believe that they will be able to escape such a history through emigration. Nevertheless they remain the prisoners of a history that seems to repeat itself over and again. For it is no accident that the time period central to the novel, which begins with multiple references to the founding of the state of Lebanon in 1943 (and consequently with the promise of a new chapter of post-colonial history), ends with the year 1976 and thus amid a new cycle of violence and counter-violence, of bloodshed and revenge, of massacre and counter-terror. The death – or murder – of the greengrocer Ibrahim Nasar in 1976 saves him – as the narrator tells us – from having to live through the renewed bloodbath that was to take place in Ain Kisrin and the surrounding villages once again in 1983 (Khoury 2000: 169).

For Elias Khoury, who was not only working on his novel *The Little Mountain* but also fighting in the civil war in 1976, the year in which his later hero Ibrahim Nasar died, the exit from the spiral of violence started on January 20, 1976. This was the date of a massacre committed by Palestinian freedom fighters against the Christian residents of a small town south of Beirut, which was unmistakably intended as an act of revenge for the atrocities committed by Christian



militias against the population of Palestinian refugee camps a few days earlier. Elias Khoury saw in this horrible experience the actual cause for his “exit” from the ideologically motivated “logic” of the civil war:

It was the crucial moment when I discovered that our ideology did not protect us from behaving in a savage, fascist way. What is the meaning of all our discourse and all our ideology if we kill children, women and men because they are Christians or Muslims or whatever?<sup>40</sup>

The writer grew up in a district of Beirut with a majority Christian population and came from a Greek Orthodox family. Taking up the Arab cause at an early age, he joined the Palestinian resistance in Jordan and received military training in a PLO camp in Syria. The scenario of mutual murdering on the basis of different religious affiliations appeared to him no longer justifiable with reference to a ‘just cause’, a ‘just war’. From this point on, the Lebanese author developed the hopelessness of such a suicidal cycle, not only in his life, but also in his body of literary work.

Insofar his novel *The Mysterious Letter* not only outlines the centuries-long entanglement of the Nasar family as both perpetrators and victims in a history of murder and migration, but also shows the life knowledge and survival knowledge yielded by this history to the family members who emigrated to the New World. In terms of literary theory, his novel can be understood as an allograph, that is, a continuation of *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* written by a ‘foreign’ author, whose spatial-temporal extension of the diegesis into the nineteenth century and to the Middle East effects a transareally-grounded resemantization of the reference text. Through this, Santiago Nasar no longer appears only in the light of a Latin American author from the Colombian perspective, but at the same time in the writing of an Arab novelist from the Lebanese tradition. As a consequence, the two novels begin combining into a shared history.

The **true** importance of this ArabAmerican experiment is located in this meeting of the two fictions. For literature becomes the place of movement, at which the allographic continuation of a reference text becomes an embedded record of different cultures and their (hi)stories. This transcultural, embedded writing, for its part, opens up a kind

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40 Elias Khoury’s interview with Mejcher (2001: 133).

of 'writing between worlds', which can be understood neither from the national literary perspective nor as world literature. For it does not concern static, literary territories, but rather vectorial ways and strategies of writing in the horizon of transareal patterns of movement. Hence the conjunction of the two novels could be described as Yoko Tawada explained the encounter of an original Paul Celan text with its translation: In the case of an optimal translatability, this encounter is not generated for the first time in its translation, but always already instilled in the 'original', in the text that came first chronologically (Tawada 1996: 129). In this very manner, García Márquez' *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* always contained its Arab-American continuation. The truth of both novels lies in the fact that each has always contained within its 'own' body of text the interstitial world of the other, 'foreign' text.

The transareal intertextuality aspired to by Elias Khoury thus shifts into consciousness a writing between worlds, which does not necessarily presuppose that it can be applied to a kind of writing without fixed abode – although the Lebanese author has commuted regularly between the Middle East, Europe and the United States for years. What it certainly does require is a high degree of familiarity with different cultural and religious contexts, which must not be 'written together', but embedded within each other. Transculturally cutting across Eastern and Western, Christian and Muslim, Arab and American horizons of cultures thus illuminates new configurations of meaning in García Márquez' complexly structured world of characters surrounding Santiago Nasar.

The interplay between *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and *The Mysterious Letter* elucidates the way in which a transareal scholarship, interested not in fixed spaces and territories, but in movements and mobile entanglements, can develop a new relationality, which is neither limited to a local or national perspective nor 'dissolves' into general, global contexts. This intertextually generated oscillation between different logics reveals a history of multiple migrations behind the character of Santiago Nasar and the members of his Arab (better: Arab American) community, which takes on the form of a specific life knowledge marked by the history of the Middle East. The family's migration to Colombia essentially delocalized this knowledge – as the excerpt from Luis Fayad's novel also showed, for at the same time

this delocalized knowledge supplied not only multicultural, but also inter- and transcultural areas of application and latitude.

The transformation of delocalized knowledge into a translocalized knowledge, by constantly translating the experiences between land of origin and land of destination into each other and generating self-similar fractal patterns of transcultural practice in the sense of a “mise en abyme”, by no means excludes the possibility that certain events in the country of immigration could foster a combative logic of cultural collision<sup>41</sup> or a “clash of civilizations”. In a discrete, but by no means concealed manner, *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* demonstrates how an element belonging equally to the patriarchal gender orders of both the Hispanic and Arab traditions – the problem complex of “lost” virginity – can evoke seemingly hidden lines of cultural confrontation and make them virulent. Even in García Márquez, the fact that Santiago Nasar was not able to make himself aware of these fault lines, which were hardly invisible in their explosive danger and would ultimately extinguish his own life, may certainly be interpreted as a warning that the societal integration of migrants should never be seen as concluded, not even in the third generation, and that cultural heterogeneity should not be conceived of exclusively as a cultural fortune, but also as a potential conflict ready to split open at a moment’s notice.

However, at the same time it becomes clear how much cognitive potential is located in a literature that can be designated as Arab American in the fullest sense of the word. For while the Colombian author transformed us into only seemingly uninvolved spectators of a proclaimed execution, whose reasons would not hold up to scrutiny even beyond the Caribbean coast of Colombia, the Lebanese writer presented us with a succession of violent acts that seemed never to stop, out of which he dissected the mechanisms of a society’s self-destruction, which can be observed not only in Lebanon.

Among the multifarious publicistic activities for which Elias Khoury, whom Edward W. Said certified a “fundamentally postmodern literary career” (Said 1989: xvii) – an oversimplification from today’s perspective – was responsible during a decade as editor of a leading publishing house in Beirut, was the translation into Arabic of a

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41 Cf. on this term and its historical manifestations Bitterli (1982: 130-160).

multitude of “major postmodern Third World classics” (Said 1989: xvii). Not least among these postmodern, Third World Classics were the Latin American authors Miguel Angel Asturias, Carlos Fuentes and, of course, Gabriel García Márquez.<sup>42</sup> No wonder: authors of the Latin American “boom” have enjoyed unbroken popularity in Arab countries for a long time. In view of the “Declaration of Brasilia”, we could say that Khoury thus made an active contribution to the establishment of a “Latin American-Arab Library” *avant la lettre*, in the sense of translating and propagating Spanish-language texts in the Arab-speaking world.

While there is no doubt that Khoury’s previous activities could be designated as “intercultural”, he opened the door for his work to enter the “Arab-American Library” himself with *The Mysterious Letter*, a book that bears unmistakably “transcultural” characteristics. An “Arab American Library” understood in this sense, which would include texts by Elias Khoury and Luis Fayad just as Gabriel García Márquez’ *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, opens up a new dimension of an Arab American ‘writing between worlds’, which would be important not only for uncovering a history believed to have been forgotten, but far beyond the political visions of the summit of Brasilia with regard to its potential for the future. The life knowledge stored and kept available there, because it is evidently bound to life, is important for our survival, especially in an atmosphere that is characterized more than ever by the thesis of a “clash of civilizations”. For we should be aware on the one hand “that only through telling stories does the past become extant” (Khoury 1996: 10); on the other hand we may not forget that unavoidable truth of which *The Kingdom of Strangers* reminds us:<sup>43</sup> In order to be able to tell a story, one must first survive it. Accordingly, in this both physical and narratological sense, literature is always not only life knowledge, but survival knowledge.

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42 At least in the original plans, because Márquez was then published by another editor.

43 Khoury (1996: 36): “Faisal did not tell any more stories, for he did not survive the next one”.

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