Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations: Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, Palestine
By LINDSEY MOORE
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Lindsey Moore's *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations* produces an essential reorientation of "the nation" within the literary and political contexts of Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, and Palestine. In doing so, Moore draws on a number of novels and memoirs from these four countries, thus tracking the various ways in which a definition of "the nation" hinges upon an interplay between (post)colonial politics within the national frame and the conditions that gave rise to the events of the "Arab uprisings." *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations*, in other words, articulates a necessary conceptualization of the exclusionary hostile politics that defined "the nation" in the region. It then moves to locate, within the literature it examines, an imaginative restructuring of a subversive, more inclusive, and more hospitable definition of "the nation."

Moore proposes that the ultimate locus of undoing exclusive nation-state formations in contemporary Egyptian literature is what she introduces in chapter one as "the house of the nation." For Moore, the "narrative chronotope" of this literature both registers and produces revolutionary desire that transcends (post)colonial hierarchies of power. It also establishes a nuanced understanding of the extent to which the disjuncture between "the nation" and "the state" becomes a sustainable paradigm of the modern Egyptian state. With this in mind, Moore critically traces the evolution of the dwelling spaces that *house* this disjunction, to use Moore's terminology, as well as the overlap between "the nation" and "the state." These spaces include, as Moore demonstrates, the prison in Naguib Mahfouz's *Sugar Street*, the Alexandrian *pension* in *Miramar*, and the apartment building in Alaa Al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*. Moore's reading of these spaces reveals the scene where the terms that have set the balance between "the nation" and "the state" are contested at every instance.

Moore's rereading of Camus within an alternative Algerian national imaginary in chapter two enables an understanding of how the precarity of the contested nation-state dynamic she identifies in chapter one can also be symptomatic of a (post)colonial dialectic. Theorizing the postcolonial reframing of the nation-state, Moore illustrates the way in which a number of Algerian writers, including Assia Djebar and Rashid Boudjedra, recontextualize Camus. Moore's conceiving of this recontextualization as a literary and political articulation of a national quest for inclusivity and belonging offers a critical diagnosis of the challenges to the nation-state dynamic that are to shape and arise from "Arab uprisings" within Algeria and beyond.

Lebanon's contemporary political reality not only reflects this contested nation-state dynamic, but is, more importantly, symptomatic of a search for a consolidated post Lebanese Civil War redefinition of the notion of "the nation" itself. Examining Etel Adnan's *Sitt Marie Rose*, Rashid Al-Daif's *Passage to Dusk*, and Rabih Alameddine's *I, the Divine: A Novel in First Chapters*, Moore, in chapter three, offers a postcolonial analytical lens to look at contemporary Lebanon. However, she simultaneously moves beyond a postcolonial reading by revealing the extent to which these novels dramatize a

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frontline that is not always necessarily material, as is evident in the case of checkpoints, for example, but is also symbolic, including that of the frontline of gender and identitarian, sectarian, and confessional politics. Moore reveals how, at this imaginative or queer frontline, "the self" comes to challenge a predetermined outside in search of an alternative recontouring of a postwar Lebanese "nation."

Examining the reconfiguration of the nation in the aftermath of *Nakbah* in chapter four, Moore brings together a number of Palestinian narratives and memoirs, including Edward Said's *Out of Place*, Jean Said Makdisi's *Teta, Mother and Me*, Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima* and *Return*, as well as Raja Shehadeh's *Strangers in the House*, *Palestinian Walks*, and *A Rift in Time: Travels with my Ottoman Uncle*. Moore tracks the way in which the fact that Palestine remains an ongoing colonial situation has resulted in a memorialization and a reimagination of it in a way that not only departs from Palestinian official rhetoric, but also resists the sanctioning of public memories by Israeli authorities.

Moore's analysis of the various ways in which the literary canons of Egypt, Algeria, Lebanon, and Palestine imagine, unimagine, and reimagine the contours of "the nation" develops a complex historical, conceptual, and critical theorization of how the concept of "the nation"—which I believe cannot afford but to be an exclusive political doctrine of belonging—remains, within these four cases, elusive, if not contested and infinitely malleable. *Narrating Postcolonial Arab Nations* articulates an urgent critique of nation-state formations, a deeper understanding of what contributed to twenty-first-century "Arab uprisings," and a reorientation of "the nation" beyond repressive definitions of nationalism, (post)colonialism, and neo-imperialism.

MADONNA KALOUSIAN
Lancaster University
m.kalousian@lancaster.ac.uk

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