from politics and a foreclosure of real social oppressions.[1] In contrast with Ahmad's perspective, Mirza shows "the political significance of desire" (84). Mirza's analysis does not, however, end up celebrating the role of desire as a site of rebellion and political resistance *per se*. Instead, Mirza convincingly shows that sexual intercourse "is certainly constructed as an act of resistance against social oppression in Roy's text, but it is also ultimately an inadequate form of rebellion . . . Despite the lyricism of the closing passages, the reader is never lulled into forgetting the tragic destiny of the lovers" (84–85). This point reveals Mirza's thoughtful approach to South Asian fiction: on the one hand, her research reconsiders the representation of desire and love as an important literary aspect endowed with pressing political issues. On the other hand, she does not reduce the political to the personal, but rather assesses the constant overlap, disjuncture, and intersection between desire and politics, the personal and the social, intimacy, and community.

While recognizing the limitations in the ability of fictional writing in English to capture the complex structures of feeling of subaltern classes in the subcontinent, her analysis aptly tackles the "linguistic and literary techniques" that writers "employ to narrate conversations between the elite and the subaltern characters which could not have taken place in English, especially in the context of profoundly unequal relationships" (136–137). The South Asian novel emerges, through the prism of Mirza's analysis of class and desire, as a reconsideration of the powers of the literary representation to address political issues through the intimate lives of fictional characters. Mirza's study leads, in the end, to a reopening of the discussion about postcolonial fiction as a critique of inequality marked by complex class, gender, and cultural positions.

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Native Tongue, Stranger Talk: The Arabic and French Literary Landscapes of Lebanon
By MICHELLE HARTMAN
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Michelle Hartman has written an insightful and rigorous analysis of novels penned by francophone Lebanese women authors who inscribe Arabic into their French. Hartman's approach in *Native Tongue, Stranger Talk* hinges on linking

1 Aijaz Ahmad, "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically," *Frontline* 8 (1997): 103–08; Brinda Bose, "In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 29.2 (1998): 59–72.

liberatory politics to the aesthetic techniques of her authors, specifically in instances of Arabic disrupting French, be they transliterations, relexifications (literal translations of Arabic into unidiomatic French), or meta-commentaries on language. The book is an answer to her driving question, "How can a French text speak Arabic?"[1] It sheds light on the political implications of such bilingual speech and pays close attention to colonial power, gender, and social class.

Native Tongue, Stranger Talk contains a tripartite structure organized chronologically; each part examines an epoch of Lebanese literary and political history: the mandate period and early independence, the Lebanese civil war, and the postwar period. A chapter devoted to historical context begins each part and grounds Hartman's robust theoretical approach, which draws upon theories of world literature, Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of polyglossia and polyphony, and issues of translation, language politics, and novel writing broadly speaking.

"Gendered Interference," the first part of Hartman's book, explores the use of polyglossia—Arabic interfering with French—to "comment on gender roles and women's position in society."[2] Hartman contends that the strategy of layering Arabic words and phrases upon an otherwise standard French text highlights these gendered interferences, which carry feminist and anticolonial significance. Despite Hartman's beautiful feminist reading of Eveline Bustros's *Sous la baguette du coudrier* (Under the divining rod), these first chapters most strain her critical frame, for there is little evidence that these early authors are in fact "writing back" to the metropole. Furthermore, the gendered interferences that highlight outmoded customs are marked as Arabic, not French, challenging Hartman's anticolonial position.

Part two, "Arabic as Feminist Punctuation," addresses bolder uses of Arabic. Hartman's theoretical approach joining poetics and politics facilitates a convincing and nuanced feminist analysis of Arabic billingsgate, "franbanais" (Lebanese French), and metacommentaries on language. She is particularly attentive to the dynamics of distinct "insider" (Arabic-speaking) and "outsider" audiences.

Part three, "Writing as Translation," examines novels whose blending of Arabic and French "becomes part and parcel of the textual fabric."[3] Hartman argues that these novels should be understood as translations because their language is dissonant, foreignized, and self-reflective. This frame suits both Hartman, an accomplished translator, and the novels she explores.

In deliberately reading a Lebanese (and female) group of novelists against a nationalist grain, Hartman pushes her criticism toward alternative interpretive frames: world literature, as well as gender, class, and political exegesis of aesthetic forms. Her close reading of Arabic interrupting French insists upon its poetic and political significance, and illuminates the politics of language in both French and Arabic spheres. Ironically, in arguing for a world-literature approach that might link together authors of Arabic, French, and English, Hartman highlights the limits of her own book. Though she refers to francophone authors of the Maghreb such as Abdelkébir

1 Michelle Hartman, *Native Tongue, Stranger Talk: The Arabic and French Literary Landscapes of Lebanon* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), x.
2 Ibid., 53.
3 Ibid., 226.

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Khatibi and Assia Djebar as "useful points of comparison,"[4] Hartman never discusses bilingual aesthetics on a regional or global scale. Such a discussion might explore transnational patterns of French inflected by Arabic and further distinguish the particularity of the sectarian (not just colonial) politics of French in Lebanon. Similarly, Hartman passes over the related diglossic juxtaposition of Modern Standard Arabic and local dialects central to the development of the modern Arabic novel. Again, the Maghreb might prove a fruitful point of comparison due to its arabophone authors' frequent use of footnotes to gloss local vernacular foreign to readers from the Mashriq, much like many of the authors of Hartman's study. Hartman's world-literature framework is powerful and innovative; however, the rather narrow confines of her study limit its critical impact beyond the immediate Lebanese context.

This critique aside, Hartman reads against national and cultural paradigms in a thoughtful and welcome deviation from scholarly norms. *Native Tongue, Stranger Talk* is grounded in both theory and history, equally committed to politics and aesthetics, and merits recognition for its compelling feminist readings of Arabic written in French.

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4 Ibid., 153.

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