

What's in a Name? Writing the Intellectual Biography of a Late 20th Century Arab Cultural Magazine

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How can biography help us to reconstruct and understand the complex nature of an unanimated object, one that has shaped global intellectual history in the 20th century like nearly no 'thing' else? An object that has enabled transnational literary and intellectual communities to emerge and to sustain themselves, and which needs to be regarded as nothing less than the very materialization of these communities into printed matter? My dissertation "The Magazine as a Genre of Crisis: *Mawāqif* (1968-1994). A Biography" (completed in 2020 and to be published with Brill in 2022) is what I called an 'intellectual biography' of the cultural magazine *Mawāqif* (engl.: *Positions; Stations*) which was published between 1968 and 1994 in Beirut and later Paris. It was founded by the Syrian poet Adunis and produced by a changing editorial team of Arab writers, thinkers, and artists, most of whom are now central figures in Arab intellectual and literary history. Through the prism of this important but hitherto unexplored magazine, my dissertation tells the alternative story of a generation of Arab intellectuals at the end of the 20th century, whose intellectual trajectories were shaped by the *naksa* of 1967, May 1968, the Palestinian resistance movement, the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Lebanese civil war, and the increased emigration of Arab thinkers and cultural figures that peaked in the 1980s.

In the summer school, I would like to expand on some of my reflections related to the genre of biography when applied to a serial object like the cultural magazine. I intend to discuss how we can turn biographical writing into a critical methodology that allows us to examine the magazine not only as an "agent of change" (E. Eisenstein), but also as an agent *in change*. My general question – Why and how to write a biography of a serial non-human actor? – relates at some point to each of the summer school's main themes. The very practice of writing the biography of a historical print matter from the Arab region has to deal to a great extent with questions of data due to the magazine's unruly serial nature. In research on historical periodicals, *the hole in the archive* is a real one, a hole in between paper matter, not just one in memory; a hole the historian necessarily has to address, which forces her/him to consider how to weigh up 'dense' and 'dull moments' against each other. Further, writing a magazine's biography allows to challenge a prevailing understanding of biographies as single-man-accounts, and instead shift to a reflection of how to conceive of biography as a *connected, interactive, ongoing act of creation* with overlapping, not necessarily coherent, and surely not linear self-conceptions of the biographic individual and of historical collectives. A cultural magazine like *Mawāqif* might have had a central editorial figure from beginning to end, but its biography is the fragmentary work of a collective group, albeit one that was in itself inconsistent and constantly changing. Therefore, a magazine biography necessarily complicates the prevailing understanding of 'biography' as a genre confined to narrate the course of one biological individual. And last but not least, since the magazine as form upholds an intrinsic relation to temporality and (literary) history-writing, it seems most promising to reflect on how the temporal pattern of biographical writing is complicated when applied to the magazine, a form that is both structured by linear time while also producing its own temporalities in relation to its *social and historical context*.

Short Biography: Yvonne Albers is a postdoctoral researcher at the Cluster of Excellence *Temporal Communities: Doing Literature in a Global Perspective* at Freie Universität Berlin and an affiliated EUME fellow at the Forum Transregionale Studien Berlin. She studied Theater Studies, Philosophy and Arabic Literature in Leipzig and Damascus and obtained her PhD in Arabic Studies at Philipps-Universität Marburg. Besides several essays she has published a book on the question of spectatorship in theatrical practices of post-war Lebanon (2011), co-edited a volume on literary commitment since the 1950s (2015), and co-authored a textbook for modern Arabic literature and culture (2021). She is finalizing her second monography, an intellectual biography of the Beirut-based cultural magazine *Mawaqif* (Brill 2022). Her current research addresses the temporal dimension of the modern periodical and its function in shaping other temporal concepts like “revolution”, “modernity”, or “exile”. Albers is also co-founder and former editor of the open-access journal Middle East – Topics and Arguments, 2011-2021.