The Politics of Arabic Script

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Statement of originality

I certify that this thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Australian National University is my own original work and did not involve joint investigations. Where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

Abstract

This thesis explores the politics of Arabic script. Across multiple time periods and geographies, I open up the ways in which the Arabic alphabet has been politicised and strategically deployed in cultural debates. Focussing on the cultural dimensions of Arabic - the idea and visual form of script - I investigate how persistent, historical discourses have come to shape the way Arabic has been understood and used to effect complex political outcomes for individuals, communities, and nations.

I situate the core of this thesis in the context of contemporary politics – in terror, war, and security – and argue that the ways in which individuals come to 'know' the alphabet are often racially coded and can work to reinforce systematic discrimination. While scholarship has begun to open up the field of 'alphabet politics', the political role of Arabic had not yet been comprehensively explored. My question therefore required that I build a conceptual foundation – a way of understanding the political work of Arabic script – as well as identifying how the script has contributed to certain social and political environments. Moving between past and present, I demonstrate that the Arabic script has been consistently used to articulate social threats and exclude unwanted identities. In this role, the Arabic script has been used to draw the line between the civilised West and the barbaric East, to inflame fears about immigration, and bolster orientalist discourses. Perhaps most critical of all, the script itself has come to act as a sign of terror. However, the construction of threat is only one aspect of Arabic politics. This thesis also examines the ways in which the script has been used as a powerful tool of art and revolution, particularly in events such as the Arab Spring. To this end, I explore the way in which aesthetic forms of Arabic script have been taken up to challenge totalitarian regimes, define community identities, and produce resistant, urban space. Here, I focus on disciplines such as Arabic calligraphy, digital typography, graphic design, and graffiti. These practices have created a space whereby the Arabic alphabet can be viewed through the frame of active, creative expression rather than simply threat, extremism, or the potential for violence.

The Arabic alphabet operates as a complex political artefact, caught by historical discourse but always evolving to meet the demands of the contemporary world. A focus on Arabic script allows for a new lens on a familiar situation and discourse. As a result, this thesis sheds new light on an important cultural artefact - the Arabic script – as well as historical events and the macro-level discourses and practices that have shaped ways of thinking and seeing for decades, and continue to inform our world.

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Introduction

This thesis explores the politics of Arabic script. Distinct from both the Arabic language and any linguistic function, the Arabic alphabet operates as a political artefact and accrues meaning in distinct, traceable ways.[1] Across multiple time periods and geographies, I open up the ways in which the script has been politicised and deployed in cultural debates. Focussing on the cultural dimensions of Arabic - the idea and visual form of script - I investigate how persistent, historical discourses have come to shape the way the Arabic alphabet has been understood and used to effect complex political outcomes.

I situate the core of this thesis in the context of contemporary politics – in terror, war, and security – and argue that the ways in which individuals come to 'know' the alphabet are often racially coded and can work to reinforce systematic discrimination. Moving between past and present, I demonstrate that the Arabic script has been consistently used to articulate social threats and exclude unwanted identities. In this role, the Arabic script has been used to draw the line between the civilised West and the barbaric East, to inflame fears about immigration, and bolster orientalist discourses. Perhaps most critical of all, the script itself has come to act as a sign of terror. However, the construction of threat is only one aspect of contemporary Arabic alphabet politics and only one way in which the Arabic script comes to be known. This thesis also examines the ways in which the script has been used as a powerful tool of art, communication, and activism in the Arab World. The art of calligraphy has had a long and influential history of shaping the visual aspect of Arabic script and Arab visual culture more broadly. Recognising its continued importance, I explore the role of Arabic calligraphy and its continuing impact on Arabic letter design and visual culture. Turning to more contemporary practices, most notably Arabic typography and graffiti, I explore the way in which aesthetic forms of Arabic script can be used to challenge totalitarian regimes, define community identities, and produce resistant, urban space.

A historical view is critical to understanding the operation of Arabic script. I argue that the cultural shape of Arabic is influenced by the conjunction of historical discourses and the sensitivities of a particular geo-political context. Taking a thematic approach, this thesis therefore moves between past and present to demonstrate that the Arabic script has been deployed in similar ways throughout history for political goals, even though the specific use and meaning may

[1] Note that in this thesis, the term 'script' is used interchangeably with 'alphabet': both of these terms refer to the written aspect of a language. Contestable terms such as 'Arab', 'West', and 'East' are clarified towards the end of the introduction and in more depth throughout the thesis.

change. In this way, my thesis is topic based and thematic, rather than chronological. In each chapter, I unpack a particular use of script in terms of the way it is represented and deployed within particular situations - as an object of discourse - but also how it has actively been used in both the East and West to effect complex political outcomes for individuals, populations and nations.

History

The Arabic language and script began to extend its reach during the Umayyad dynasty. As the first great Muslim empire to rule the empire of the Caliphate (661–750), Umayyad conquests established a centralised empire across North Africa and the Iranian plateau. Under the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik (685–705), Muslim armies took Spanish territory in Western Europe, invaded Mukrān and Sindh in India, and conquered large areas of Central Asia. These conquests introduced the Arabic language across the empire. Declared the official language of governance in the seventh century, Arabic spread across all territories under Umayyad control.[2] Previously, the early Islamic bureaucracy had used local languages such as Greek, Syriac, and Persian for the collection of taxes and local affairs. Under ʿAbd al-Malik however, the financial administration of the empire was reorganised and a new bureaucracy was created: Arabs replaced Persian and Greek officials and a new Arabic-based coinage was introduced. As a result of this change, Arabic began to replace local languages and many non-Arabs and non-Muslims were forced to learn the language in order to take part in the new system of governance, especially if they hoped to achieve social or political prominence. The vast nature of the empire required civil servants to combine a good knowledge of literary Arabic with a wide range of other subjects. Knowledge of *fiqh* (Islamic law) was necessary as the official basis of social order but at the same time, the civil servant was also expected to know pre-Islamic poetry and command a broad understanding of history and geography, courtly precedents, literary allusions and the natural sciences.[3] Alongside this shift in role, the Arabic language and script also came to be adopted as a defining characteristic of Islamic practice. Since the Quran had been revealed to the prophet Mohammed in the Arabic language, knowledge of Arabic was seen as a necessary part of religious instruction and a tool for fostering cultural cohesion.[4] The language allowed Muslims to both read the Quran and demonstrate piety and commitment to the Islamic faith.

In the Western medieval world, the Arabic language came to be valued in terms of its intellectual worth. Although Arab and Islamic populations had been feared as both a military and cultural

[2] Carl W Ernst, "The Global Significance of Arabic Language and Literature," *Religion Compass* 7 (2013).

[3] Ibid.

[4] See Thomas Irving, "How Hard Is Arabic?," *The Modern Language Journal* 41, no. 6 (1987). This role of Arabic in religious instruction is explored in chapter 4 and the link between Arabic and community identity is explored in chapter 5.

threat to Europe, this perception began to shift with the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in 711.[5] While crusaders were attempting to protect Europe from the threat of Islam, Western scholars were also travelling to Islamic Spain to study the Arabic language. The establishment of Islamic rule on Spanish territory opened the door for Western Europe to regain the knowledge that had been lost after the fall of the Roman Empire. Western medicine and philosophy became highly dependent on Islamic Spain for the transmission of classical Greek knowledge, and Northern European scholars actively commissioned or collaborated in the translation of Greek texts from Arabic into Latin. A substantial number of these translations dealt with Greek and Hellenistic authors such as Aristotle, Euclid, Galen and Ptolemy, and covered a broad selection of works in the fields of medicine, geography, astronomy, mathematics, physics and philosophy. As a result, Christian theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas were able to study these texts in the thirteenth century.[6]

Translations were also produced across the Islamic world, where Arabic was recognised as a language of religious and scientific thought. A large number of translations were developed from Arabic into other Islamic languages, such as Persian and Turkish. Even highly renowned Muslim scholars of non-Arab origin produced their most famous works in Arabic, such as the Persian astronomer and encyclopaedic scientist al-Biruni (973-1052), the philosopher and physician Ibn Sina ('Avicenna', 980–1037), the Persian historian and theologian al-Tabari (839-923), and Ibn Rushd ('Averroes', 1126–1198), whose commentaries on the work of Aristotle had a significant influence on theology and philosophy.[7] The range of subjects available in Arabic at the end of the tenth century is indicated in the index of a surviving bookseller's list, outlining all the titles that could be found and bought in Baghdad at the time. Not limited to writings on scriptural religions (Jewish, Christian, and Islamic), grammar and philology, history and biography, poetry, theology, law and *hadith*, the index included secular topics such as philosophy and the sciences, legends and magic, the religions of India and China, and alchemy.[8]

In addition to its scholarly value, the script was also celebrated as the ideal vehicle for the visual expression of the Arabic language and the Quran. By the late ninth and early tenth century, the art of calligraphy had become one of the hallmarks of Islamic civilisation, with Arabic script increasingly inscribed on objects as diverse as textiles, glassware, and jewellery, public buildings, mosques and tombs. As early as the tenth century, the first known masterpieces of Islamic

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[5] Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[6] See Ernst, "The Global Significance of Arabic Language and Literature" Arnoud Vrolijk Richard van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2014), and Michael Carter, "The Study of Arabic," *Diogenes* 58, no. 1-2 (2011).

[7] See Hazrat Hasanuzzaman, "Arabic Language: Characteristics and Importance," *The echo (online)* 1, no. 3 (2013), Marwan M Obeidat, "Arabic and the West," *The Muslim World* 88, no. 2 (1998), and van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies in the Netherlands: A Short History in Portraits, 1580–1950*.

[8] See Ernst, "The Global Significance of Arabic Language and Literature".

calligraphy were produced, including the caliph 'Uthman's first complete written Quran and the mosaic inscription in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem: the former provided a cornerstone for the Muslim faith while the latter became a symbol of Islam as a world religion.[9] By the fourteenth century, the art of Arabic calligraphy had been firmly embedded in Arab and Islamic cultures.[10] Sponsored by political and religious leaders, calligraphers were held in higher esteem than other artists such as painters and architects due to their role in copying the word of God. The visual qualities of the Arabic alphabet were also appreciated in Western Europe. As a result of both trade and crusades between the eleventh and fourteenth century, real and imitated Arabic writing became a fashionable decoration in European medieval arts, with many European books including these 'exotic' characters in their decoration and iconography. The alphabet was seen to hold connotations of wealth and sophistication, such that Arabic texts were considered able to convey the prestige of Islamic aesthetics and a sense of unassailable erudition on their owner.[11]

While interest in the aesthetic qualities of the script continued, the scholarly value of the language gradually declined. By the end of the fifteenth century, the last independent Muslim territories in Spain were conquered and the country began unification under royal Christian authority. The resident Muslim population were forced to convert in 1502, beginning in Granada and extending to all kingdoms in the monarchy. The practice of Islamic faith was increasingly perceived as intolerable in European territory and the presence of those who followed different laws was considered unacceptable.[12] In this period, Arabic was targeted as an audible and visible sign of racial and religious difference. A threatening sign, the use of Arabic script was considered proof that despite conversion, Muslim communities (the *Moriscos)* were incapable of integration. An assembly therefore met in the Royal Chapel of Granada in 1526 and banned Arabic speech along with the use of Arabic script for public documents. To bolster this approach, a law was passed in 1567 that forbade all uses of spoken and written Arabic and gave the Moriscos three years to learn Castilian Spanish: Arabic surnames were banned along with clothing and other

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[9] Vlad Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use," *Studies on Architecture, History and Culture: Papers by the 2003-2004 AKPIA@MIT Visiting Fellows* (2006).

[10] See Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (University of Florida Press, 2007), Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), Yasser Tabbaa, "The Transformation of Arabic Writing: Part I Quranic Calligraphy," *Ars Orientalis*, no. 21 (1991), and Wijdan Ali, "Modern Arab Art: An Overview," in *Forces of Change*, ed. Salwa Mikdadi Nashashi (Washington: International Council for Women in the Arts, 1994). Note that the role of calligraphy is explored in more depth in chapter 4.

[11] See Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use". On the use of Arabic writing on Christian royal garments as an elite sign and reflection of a shared Mediterranean aesthetic, see Isabelle Dolezalek, "Fashionable Form and Tailor-Made Message: Transcultural Approaches to Arabic Script on the Royal Norman Mantle and Alb," *The Medieval History Journal* 15, no. 2 (2012). On the prevailing connection between magic and Arabic (and pseudo-Arabic) letters within medieval European imagery, see also Alicia Walker, "Meaningful Mingling: Classicizing Imagery and Islamicizing Script in a Byzantine Bowl," *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 1 (2008).

[12] José María Perceval, "The Discourse Strategies for Constructing Expellable "Moorish" Subjects," *Human Architecture* 8, no. 2 (2010).

differentiating marks of culture such as music and public baths.[13] Ultimately, Spanish authorities agreed that expulsion was the only solution to the issue of Islamic integration. The year 1609 saw the remaining Islamic populations in Spain expelled to North Africa and the territorial link between Islam and Europe was severed.

In another key shift, Western scholarship became less reliant on Arabic texts when humanists 'rediscovered' the Greek language in the fifteenth century. Interest in classical Greek materials had steadily grown and scholars were increasingly able to engage with the original texts directly, rather than requiring an Arabic translation. This new wave of scholarship revealed that the quality and accuracy of Arabic translations had often been quite poor, since many had drawn on Syriac translations rather than the Greek source material. As a result, the study of Arab science seemed increasingly unnecessary and the Arabs came to be regarded by many scholars as defilers of Greek heritage.[14] Nonetheless, there remained a number of Renaissance scientists who could read scientific Arabic competently and continued to find inspiration and value in the Arabic scientific tradition. Rather than reject the language, these scientists produced a series of new, complete translations of Arabic scientific texts to improve on the failings of earlier medieval translations.[15] But the decline of Arabic in one domain was paralleled by its rise in another. In a concurrent trend, Arabic was increasingly studied for evangelist purposes by those who viewed Islam as a false religion and the arch-enemy of Christian civilisation. In this role, the language was seen as a useful tool for missionaries who sought to polemicise against Muslims in their own tongue.[16] For instance, in 1539, the Renaissance scholar Guillaume Postel (1510-1581) received the first professorial appointment of an 'Arabic Chair' in Paris.[17] A renowned orientalist, Postel saw the study of the Arabic language primarily as a means for spreading the word of Christianity in the Islamic world.[18]

In terms of the broader geo-political context, the ties between Western Europe and the Islamic world were slowly rebuilt after the expulsion of Muslim populations from Spain. Since the end of the fifteenth century, Istanbul had begun to extend power over the Balkans and Arab areas of the Levant and North Africa, while trade between the Europeans and the Mediterranean coasts had steadily increased. Diplomatic missions from Europe were more frequent and European consuls came to settle in the main towns of the Levant to encourage trade. Although the Ottoman,

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[13] See Már Jónsson, "The Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain in 1609-1614: The Destruction of an Islamic Periphery," *Journal of Global History* 2 (2007).

[14] Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*.

[15] See George Saliba, "Arabic Science in Sixteenth-Century Europe: Guillaume Postel (1510-1581) and Arabic Astronomy," *Suhayl* 7 (2007).

[16] Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*.

[17] Maxime Rodinson and Roger Veinus, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: IB Tauris & Co, 1988).

[18] Saliba, "Arabic Science in Sixteenth-Century Europe: Guillaume Postel (1510-1581) and Arabic Astronomy".

Safavid and Mogul empires were seen as military and religious threats, they were also recognised as economic partners. Here, the desire to establish trade with India and the Far East was an important factor in European dealings with the Muslim countries through which the luxury goods had to pass.[19] To support these relationships, it was customary to engage scholars to translate letters and documents written in Arabic script. A number of prominent Arab scholars also came to Holland and France to help establish the study of Arabic at Western universities. With advances in printing, European scholars were able to access a range of Arabic language materials, and by the seventeenth century, an increasing number of Western scholars were studying the medieval 'Orient' and its languages. Once again, a driving force behind the growth of this discipline was the papacy. Due to their similar linguistic structures, the study of Arabic was considered an essential tool for improving a student's knowledge of ancient Hebrew and gaining a deep understanding of Biblical history.[20] As a result, Christianity and the missionary purpose remained central to the study of Arabic in the Western European world, and the duties of the Arabic Chair at Oxford included the task of enlarging of the borders of the Church and bringing the Christian religion to those who 'sit in darkness'.[21]

Moving into the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the scholarly discipline of orientalism became the vehicle by which the cultures and languages of the 'Orient', notably Arabic, were analysed, codified, and identified within a framework of "otherness."[22] In nineteenth-century European usage, the term 'Orient' referred to the Arab world or the Middle East more broadly. Orientalism was both a scholarly discipline that studied this territory and the means by which ideas of 'Eastern' difference were expressed and gained hold. Critically, representations of the East produced by the West served to define the nature of the 'East' in Western knowledge and ultimately contributed to Western political control over Arab and Islamic territories.[23] As Said argues in his classic formulation:

> Orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them').[24]

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[19] Carter, "The Study of Arabic".

[20] Rodinson and Veinus, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam*.

[21] Ziauddin Sardar, *Orientalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), 29.

[22] See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

[23] On the role of orientalist visuality in creating knowledge and fuelling the imperial enterprise, see Todd B Porterfield, "Western Views of Oriental Women in Modern Painting and Photography," in *Forces of Change*, ed. Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi (1994), Karina Eilerass, "Disorienting Looks, *Ecarts D'identité*: Colonial Photography and Creative Misrecognition in Leila Sebbar's *Sherazade*," in *After Orientalism: Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks*, ed. Inge Boer (New York: Rodopy, 2003), Neil Macmaster and Toni Lewis, "Orientalism: From Unveiling to Hyperveiling," *Journal of European Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998), and Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).

[24] Said, *Orientalism*, 41. Said's approach is commonly criticised for being too mechanistic and assuming an essential dichotomy between East and West, just as his relentless focus on western gaze resulted in hyper

As a figment of Western imagination, the Orient was granted those qualities that the West rejected and this worked to consolidate a self-reinforcing discourse of superiority. Where the West was produced as a dynamic, complex, and ever-changing society, the "Orient" and the world of Islam were understood as static, barbaric, and despotic. Where the West valued rationality, progress, and enterprise, Islam was believed to foster servility, stagnation, and indolence. In this way, orientalism employed Islam as a surface onto which Europeans could project their fears about who and what they were.[25] Knowledge production around Islam and the Orient can accordingly be read as expressing the specificity and identity of Western culture. As a system of representing and building reality, these discourses produced identity around the self and its other. As a discursive structure, orientalism worked by producing the idea of the 'West' through negative constructions of the 'Other'. In contrast to medieval scholarship, and in striking denial of Arab scientific achievement, this logic of difference held that science and rational thought were alien to the Arab World. Rather, the East was imagined as a contradictory world of spontaneity, barbarism, irrationality, and passion. Defined by sensuality and violence, it was desired or feared as a mythical, ungraspable, and unreal space, conveying sadness, delirium, yearning, brutality, and ecstasy.[26] Imagined as a threat, the Orient achieved significance as a

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objectification of the Arab, as an object controlled by Euro-US discourse. For instance, see Hosam Aboul-Ela, "Is There an Arab (yet) in This Field? Postcolonialism, Comparative Literature, and the Middle Eastern Horizon of Said's Discursive Analysis," *Modern Fiction Studies* 56, no. 4 (2010), Richard Van Leenwen, "The Cultural Context of Translating Arabic Literature," in *Cultural Encounters in Translation from Arabic*, ed. Said Faiq (Cleveton UK: Multilingual Matters, 2004), Maryam Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 23, no. 1 (2011), Ismail Taub, "Orientalism and the Semiotics of Non-Representation," *Social Semiotics* 4, no. 1-2 (1994), M Sprinker, ed. *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), Inge Boer, ed. *After Orientalism: Critical Entanglements, Productive Looks* (New York: Rodopy, 2003), Michal Buchowski, "The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: From Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother," *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (2006), and Sardar, *Orientalism*.

[25] See Zachery Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Universe Press, 2010). For instance, on the figure of the English sheik as exemplifying lost possibilities of authenticity against the restrictive responsibilities of "civilization", see Elizabeth Gargano, "'English Sheiks' and Arab Stereotypes: E. M. Hull, T. E. Lawrence, and the Imperial Masquerade," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48, no. 2 (2006). For other 19th century articulations, see Robert Battistini, "Glimpses of the Other before Orientalism: The Muslim World in Early American Periodicals, 1785-1800," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 2 (2010), and Peter Drucker, "Byron and Ottoman Love: Orientalism, Europeanization and Same-Sex Sexualities in the Early Nineteenth-Century Levant," *Journal of European Studies* 42, no. 2 (2012).

[26] Ralph Locke, "Cutthroats and Casbah Dances, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East," *19th-Century Music* 22, no. 1 (1998). On the Orient as the West's feminised Other, see Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). On contemporary exoticisation of Middle-Eastern cultural practices, see Akihiko Hirose and Kay Kei-Ho Pei, "'No Asians Working Here': Racialised Otherness and Authenticity in Gastronomical Orientalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 9 (2011), Jessica Taylor, "And You Can Be My Sheikh: Gender, Race, and Orientalism in Contemporary Romance Novels," *Journal of Popular Culture* 40, no. 6 (2007), Anthony Shay and Barbara Sellers-Young, "Belly Dance: Orientalism-Exoticism-Self Exoticism," *Dance Research Journal* 35, no. 1 (2003), and Sanjay Sharma and Ashwani Sharma, "White Paranoia: Orientalism in the Age of Empire," *Fashion Theory* 7, no. 3/4 (2003).

'lasting trauma' for the traveller and the wider homeland, known to the West in terms of terror, devastation, and hordes of hated barbarians.[27]

These discourses also shaped the way Arabic was understood, both as a language and a script. For nineteenth-century European knowledge production, 'knowing' or understanding something involved a process of investigating stages of internal development. Just as the discipline of geology explored rock strata and biology the fossil, orientalism turned to ancient texts as a way to discover evolutionary insights into the gradually advancing condition of the human race.[28] The development of language was equated to an organism, evolving in accordance with natural historical laws: individual words could be traced back to an etymological origin and each stage of their growth could demonstrate the evolutionary stages of the human mind. Like fossils to the biologist, modern non-European languages could be analysed as remnants from human past, preserved at various stages of 'backwardness'.[29] Arabic, Turkic, and Semitic languages more broadly were ranked as inferior, and their speakers denied the ability to produce knowledge or rational thought. As a Western Semitic language, Arabic was considered inferior, belonging to the family of languages with alphabetic scripts that all ultimately descend from ancient Phoenician (such as Hebrew, Aramaic, and Ethiopic). In contrast, languages of the Western world - Greek, Latin, and a core set of modern European languages – were correlated with civilisation and human achievement.[30] For instance, one model proposed a root-based classification of languages, whereby all human languages fell under three basic categories: isolating, agglutinative, and inflectional.[31] These categories corresponded to ascending levels of civilisation and human achievement. Unsurprisingly, nations such as Germany that spoke inflectional languages were considered more creative and civilised than speakers of isolating and agglutinative languages, such as those used across Turkic territory.

These linguistic models worked to maintain the privilege of Western Renaissance and Enlightenment institutions and categories of thought, while consolidating the perceived inferiority of racial groupings associated with irrational speech.[32] For instance, in 1887 CE the

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[27] Said, *Orientalism*, 59.

[28] Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[29] Ibid. As explored in chapter one, even the system of phonetic writing has been placed at the roots of Western civilisation and considered to influence the development of thought patterns, social institutions, and sense of self. For instance, for a notable (and often criticised) account of the role of phonetic writing systems in promoting cognitive skills, see R Logan, *The Alphabet Effect* (New York: William Morrow, 1986).

[30] See Ilker Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004), and Bill Ashcroft, "Language and Race," *Social Identities* 7, no. 3 (2001).

[31] See Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey".

[32] Walter Miglio, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience," *Postcolonial studies* 14, no. 3 (2011).

influential orientalist Ernest Renan argued that the greatest mistake the 'Semitic race' ever made was in regards to verb tenses:

> The Aryan language was highly superior, especially as regards verb conjugations. This marvellous instrument, created by the instinct of primitive men, contained the seeds of all the metaphysics that would be developed later on by the genius of the Hindus, the Greeks or the Germans. The Semitic language, on the contrary, got off to the wrong start where verbs are concerned...Even today the Arabs are still struggling against the linguistic error committed by their ancestors ten or fifteen thousand years ago.[33]

According to his framework, contemporary speakers must suffer an inferior culture because their Semitic 'forefathers' failed to conjugate verbs properly. At its foundation, this deterministic understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and race takes the view that:

> Language is thus almost completely substituted for race in the division of humanity into groups, or rather the word 'race' changes meaning. Language, religion, laws, mores brought the race into being much more than blood did.[34]

A French expert of ancient Middle Eastern languages and civilisations, Renan was highly regarded in his time for his work on nationalism but criticised by later scholars for his anti-Semitic and essentialist approach to race.[35] He believed that the Semitic 'race of religions' was destined to give way to the Indo-Germanic race, whose implicit rationality endowed them with responsibility for the philosophical search after truth.[36] Renan saw Christianity and Islam as products of two different racial characteristics: while Christianity developed from the genius of the Aryan race, the fanaticism and decadence of Islam rested with the Semitic race.[37] While insupportable, claims such as Renan's – and orientalist linguistic discourse more broadly - gave support to the racialised logics of imperial discourse, including the idea that races were primitive due to the deficiencies of their ancestors. Here, the oriental mind was deemed incapable of rational thought and philosophy, and as a result, was responsible for blocking the development of science and learning in the Islamic world. Given the racialised core of these models, this scholarship provided a powerful foundation and rationale for both linguistic hegemony and racial marginalisation. On one hand, political distrust of the West increased within nineteenth-century Ottoman geographies in response to orientalist claims that Turkic languages and cultures were lacking in civilisation.[38]

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[33] Cited in Ashcroft, "Language and Race" 322.

[34] Cited in ibid. 320.

[35] See Said, *Orientalism*.

[36] Tzvetan Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[37] See Sardar, *Orientalism*.

[38] Aytürk, "Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey".

On the other, these linguistic flaws were seen by Western scholars and politicians as grounds to intervene and forcibly civilise Arab and Islamic territories.[39]

Understandings of the Arab and Islamic world – and in turn, the role and use of Arabic – have continued to evolve. By the start of twenty-first century, Arabic had achieved the status of a global language, with an estimated 450 million speakers in the 'Arab world' and more than 1.5 billion Muslims using the language worldwide.[40] The Arabic alphabet (including modified forms) has also been used as a writing system for a wide variety of languages, including Pashto, Kurdish, and Balochi, several Berber languages in North Africa, the Indo-Aryan languages of Urdu, Sindhi and Kashmiri, and Austronesian Malay. Many other languages have also taken up the Arabic script for short periods of time, such as Turkish, Azeri, Swahili in central Africa, Hariri in Ethiopia, and Slavic Serbo-Croatian in Bosnia.[41] Due to this diversity, there is no single history or common understanding of the Arabic language or script. To consider the politics or the Arabic language in the contemporary world is in fact to consider a 'language family' of some thirty different varieties, across a vast and complex geographical, linguistic and cultural terrain. The dialects often labelled 'Arabic' consist of five dialectal clusters that can be classified into: Greater Syria, including Lebanon and Palestine; Mesopotamia, including the Euphrates region of Syria, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf; the Arabian Peninsula, including most of what is Saudi Arabia and much of Jordan; the Nile Valley, including Egypt and the Sudan; and North Africa and parts of sub-Saharan Africa.[42] Between and within these Arabic-speaking regions, there is generally a form of mutual comprehension: however, difficulties emerge when crossing significant boundaries. For instance, an Arabic speaker in Beirut would understand another from Aleppo, but the difference between the dialects of Morocco and Iraq can hinder comprehension.

This thesis argues that across its many histories and geographies, the Arabic script has been put to cultural, political and aesthetic uses in rich and often contradictory ways. As explored in each

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[39] Ashcroft, "Language and Race".

[40] Ernst, "The Global Significance of Arabic Language and Literature".

[41] Hasanuzzaman, "Arabic Language: Characteristics and Importance". On the role of Arabic script and script reform politics in India, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Arabic in India: A Survey and Classification of Its Uses, Compared with Persian," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 127, no. 3 (2007), Rizwan Ahmad, "Urdu in Devanagari: Shifting Orthographic Practices and Muslim Identity in Delhi," *Language in Society* 40, no. 3 (2011), M.S. Prabhakar, "The Politics of a Script: Demand for Acceptance of Roman Script for Bodo Language," *Economic and Political Weekly* 9, no. 51 (1974), W. Norman Brown, "Script Reform in Modern India, Pakistan and Ceylon," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 73, no. 1 (1953), and Sohina Ray, "Writing the Body: Cosmology, Orthography, and Fragments of Modernity in Northeastern India," *Anthropological Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2009). On the textual and aesthetic role of Arabic script in Pakistan, see Anonya Jahanara Kabir, "Remediated Script and Partition Effects in Pakistan," *Cultural & Social History* 6, no. 4 (2007).

[42] As outlined in Franck Salameh, "Does Anyone Speak Arabic?," *Middle East Quarterly (Online)* 18, no. 4 (2011). Note that Classical Arabic is the liturgical language of Islam, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is widely used in the government and formal media, while dialectal Arabic refers to many national or regional varieties of everyday spoken language, which can differ enough from each other to be mutually unintelligible.

chapter, the way the Arabic language and script is 'known' is continually shaped by changes in the political and cultural landscape. Although certain frames of meaning persist (for instance, the connection between Arabic and Islam), cultural knowledge of the Arabic script remains contingent and in flux. This thesis explores a few, select moments in this history but there are many other stories of Arabic script that are beyond the scope of this work. To recognise this diversity, I view each discursive instance of Arabic script as singular, heterogeneous and contradictory. This approach is in line with recent scholarship on orientalism. That is, rather than maintaining a fixed opposition between East and West, orientalism has been reimagined to consist of an uneven matrix of orientalist situations across different cultural and historical sites.[43] This orientalism adapts itself to various historic situations while maintaining a thread of continuity: old ideas are retained while new nuances are added, in an ongoing accumulation of meaning that never entirely unmakes its past.[44] The Arabic script, like the orientalist framework, has been pressed into new shapes according to the demands of a particular moment. Each instance is internally complex and unstable while remaining bound together by a coherent set of common features. This thesis explores these contradictions and threads of continuity across each instance, reflecting old and new forms of orientalism - moments that are necessarily incomplete but that provide critical insight into the political, cultural, and aesthetic uses of Arabic script.

Alphabet politics

Before providing an outline of each chapter, I turn to the question of how alphabets are able to interact with their political environment – an operation that provides the theoretical underpinning to this thesis. At the time of writing, there has been limited scholarship on the question of how alphabets (or the Arabic script more specifically) operate as cultural artefacts and political instruments. For instance, Johanna Drucker's book *The Alphabetic Labyrinth*, examines the history of the Roman alphabet and letter design in direct relation to intellectual movements and cultural trends. For Drucker, the desire to create meaning on the arbitrary shapes of letters is perhaps the strongest feature of human imagination in its relation to the alphabet.[45] As she explains, a letter is variously a shape, a tool, and a sign:

> A letter is a pre-existing shape or model; a ductal form created by a sequence of strokes with varying pressures; an arbitrary sign; an image fraught with history and reference; an

[43] See Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) Dorinne Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), Bohrer (1998), Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Sardar, *Orientalism*.

[44] *Orientalism*.

[45] Johanna Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995). See also Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000). Note that the terms 'Latin' script and 'Roman' script are used interchangeably in this thesis.

> arrangement of vectors or pixels on a screen; a digital file capable of being manipulated as an image or algorithm.[46]

She explores the way the Roman alphabet has been understood as a symbolic matrix whose letters can express the history of their origins as well as fundamental truths. Here, imaginative speculation about the hidden 'life' of letters occurs across a number of alphabets and cultures, from philosophy and humanistic thought to Kabbalistic doctrine, Gnostic beliefs, mystic and oracular practice.[47] In these traditions, letters are interpreted as symbols of spiritual significance, as codes for mystical or cosmological knowledge. While Drucker's history focuses on the Latin script, Arabic letters have participated in similar symbolic systems. In mystic traditions, Arabic letters have been understood as ciphers for mysteries that are otherwise insoluble, while the specific science of *al-jafr* sought to understand the significance of letters through the numerical symbolism of letters.[48] For instance, *alif*, the first letter of the alphabet, has been associated with the breath before the world was created.[49] It is a respected letter of divine wisdom and considered to have particular depth as a symbol representing Allah. With the numerical value of one, it has symbolised the unity of God. Since the letter is constructed as a tall vertical stroke, *alif* is often compared metaphorically, particularly by mystics, to a standing person who refuses to prostrate. The third letter of alphabet, *ta*, represents monotheism and faith in the oneness of God, the state of ecstasy, and the discovery and return to science and God.[50] It also signifies the number 400 and belongs to the element of air.

Rather than focus on the rich philosophical and religious meaning associated with Arabic script, this thesis attends to its deliberate use in more political domains. It has been well recognised that linguistic environments are influenced by a range of geographic, political, psychological, economic and socio-cultural factors, with research demonstrating that issues in a society can be displaced onto language.[51] Here, linguistic difference manifests as an enduring issue of politics

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[46] Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination*, 300.

[47] Ibid.

[48] On the significance of Arabic letters within the framework of Sufism, see Carl W Ernst, "Sufism and the Aesthetics of Penmanship in Siraj Al-Shirazi's Tuhfat Al-Muhibbin (1454)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 3 (2009).

[49] Juergen Wasim Frembgen, ed. *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam* (Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 13-14.

[50] Gabriel Mandel Khan, *Arabic Script: Styles, Variants, and Calligraphic Adaptations* (NY & London: Abbeville Press, 2001). On the bodily significance of letters, see Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*.

[51] For instance, see Florian Coulmas, *Language and Economy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), Pia Lane, "Identities in Action: A Nexus Analysis of Identity Construction and Language Shift," *Visual Communication* 8, no. 4 (2009), Yasir Suleiman, *Arabic in the Fray: Language Ideology and Cultural Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), William Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), M. G Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), Sally Johnson, "On the Origin of Linguistic Norms: Orthography, Ideology and the First Constitutional Challenge to the 1996 Reform of German," *Language in Society* 31 (2002), and Dareg A. Zabarah, "The Language That Unites and the Language That Divides Us: Why Was

and identity. The link between language, race, and nation has been comprehensively debated, with language continuing to operate as a major component of identification for individuals, communities, and nations.[52] The idea of the Western nation state has worked hand in hand with essentialist theories of language to support both European nationalism and colonial practices. In an aligned role, specific languages have also been understood to accrue civilisational or cultural identities according to established binaries such as pagan/Christian, sacred/profane, and primitive/civilised.[53]

As the visual representation of language, alphabets have been caught up in similar structures, dynamics and processes. For instance, scholarship has demonstrated that the same conceptual categories and tools that apply to language choice can be applied to the way language communities choose scripts.[54] Equally, scripts have also been used to reflect ideologies and lend weight to certain conceptions of the world. In this role, alphabets have served as a means for differentiating, supporting, and debating the difference between the modern and the traditional, the global and the local, progress and primitivism. In the early modern period for instance, different scripts marked divisions of geography and religion. Defining civilisational borders, the Cyrillic and Greek scripts of the Orthodox world in the East bounded the Roman alphabet of the Catholic West, while the Arabic alphabet of predominantly Islamic cultures was located to the south and southeast.[55] The Roman alphabet had at this time been strongly associated with Western Christendom, following the consecration of Latin by the Roman Catholic Church. In this civilisational role, alphabets worked to mark boundaries and delineate cultures. The operation

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Arabic Kept and Serbo-Croatian Abolished?," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 40, no. 4 (2012).

[52] For recent commentary on the links established between language, race, and nation, see Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood, eds., *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* (Princeton University Press, 2005), Patrick Eisenlohr, "Creole Publics: Language, Cultural Citizenship, and the Spread of the Nation in Mauritius," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 9 (2007), Daniel Gade, "Language, Identity and the Scriptorial Landscape in Québec and Caraloma," *Geographic Review* 93, no. 4 (2003), Ashcroft, "Language and Race" and Stephen Wood, "Sprachpolitik: Some Socio-Political Effects of English in Germany," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 14, no. 3 (2001). On the politics of translation across these constructed borders, see Etienne Balibar, "Europe as Borderland," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, no. 2 (2009).

[53] See Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), and Suzanne Romaine, "Planning for the Survival of Linguistic Diversity," *Language Policy* 5 (2006). For instance, in modern Europe, German, English and French became symbols of urbanity, finery, and high social status, while Scottish Gaelic and Breton were stigmatised as inferior forms of language. On the threat of 'nuclear English' (a modern concept attached to English) see also Roger Chartier, "Languages, Books and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text," *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 1 (2004).

[54] For the use of the term 'script charisma' to refer to this operation, see Ilker Aytürk, "Script Charisma in Hebrew and Turkish: A Comparative Framework for Explaining Success and Failure of Romanisation," *Journal of World History* 21, no. 1 (2010). On sociolinguistic parallels between choosing scripts and languages, see also Peter Unseth, "Sociolinguistic Parallels between Choosing Scripts and Languages," *Written language and literacy* 8, no. 1 (2005), and on the role of ideological qualities in language choice, see Wood, "Sprachpolitik: Some Socio-Political Effects of English in Germany".

[55] Aytürk, "Script Charisma in Hebrew and Turkish: A Comparative Framework for Explaining Success and Failure of Romanisation".

was at times quite explicit. For instance, when the Armenian King Vramsapuh officially sanctioned the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century, he specifically adopted a writing system that did not resemble the neighbouring systems.[56] The Armenian language had previously been based on Greek and Syriac forms but the new alphabet introduced glyphs that helped the language stand out as visually distinct. In this way, the alphabet was used to distinguish Armenians as a group from all other Christians in the area - especially the dominant group of Greek Orthodox Christians, whose language, like Armenian, was also Indo-European in origin.[57]

Rather than remaining a historical quirk, alphabets are still used within existing political debates to differentiate identities and strengthen national identity. As a major component of identification alphabetic difference can participate in enduring issues of conflict and unity. Moving into the late twentieth century, script was still used as a political tool to signify clan identity, ethnic identity, political allegiance, or a sense of perceived prestige. For instance, when Yugoslavia divided into Croats and Serbs, the language was divided on the basis of script. Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian languages were in practice, the same language (Serbo-Croatian). However, the language was split along political lines and script was used to emphasise ethnic and national belonging: Croat used the Roman alphabet and Serbian used the Cyrillic alphabet.[58] So pronounced was this sense of alphabetic identity, there was an attitude that Cyrillic was the only true alphabet for anyone considering themselves a Serb, and one of the main nationalistic slogans at the time was 'be a Serb and use Cyrillic'.[59] In this role, the choice of alphabet as well as the style of script was able to signify broad national or religious formations as well as particular localities and communities. For instance, various styles of Roman letters have had strong associations with different groups, providing a point of difference between pagans and Christians or between followers of the Bishop of Rome and those of Constantinople.[60] Not limited to the Roman script, the *Rashi* rounded style of Hebrew script is associated with ultra-Orthodox groups while the square letter is associated with broader Jewish culture.[61] Arabic letterforms can also be differentiated according

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[56] Irene A Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[57] Ibid.

[58] Mark Warshauer, "Language, Identity and the Internet," in *Race in Cyberspace*, ed. Lisa Nakamura Beth E Kolko, Gilbert Rodman (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 154.

[59] Ljiljana Gavrilovic, "Serbian Minority/Refugees on the Internet: In the Midst of Denial and Acceptance of Reality," in *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, ed. Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 155. On the political role of script in the Former Yugoslavia, see also ibid., Robert Greenberg, "Language Politics in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia: The Crisis over the Future of Serbia," *Slavic Review* 59, no. 3 (2000), and Robin Okey, "Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian? Language and Nationality in the Lands of Former Yugoslavia," *East European Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2004).

[60] Stanley Morison, *Politics and Script: Aspects of Authority and Freedom in the Development of Graeco-Latin Script the Sixth Century BC to the Twentieth Century AD* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). Morison's work contributes significantly to the discipline of alphabet politics in its examination of the role played by written forms of Latin in reinforcing and marking boundaries of political identity and control during the period from approximately sixth century to the medieval era.

[61] In Unseth, "Sociolinguistic Parallels between Choosing Scripts and Languages".

to particular regional and cultural influences, and it has been argued that every major style of Arabic calligraphy is the successful aesthetic expression of a particular cultural community.[62] For instance, 'hanging' forms of calligraphy were particularly suitable for the Persian language and while popular in Iran, were rarely used for recording the Arabic language.

Invested in this way, alphabets can be taken up in cultural debates or charged with the expression of national identity. Of particular relevance to this thesis, alphabets have been used as tools of nation building to construct a sense of symbolic integrity and exclude unwanted identities. Scholarship on the link between script and modern nation building has been rich, particularly in relation to the political role of script in reforms across Europe and Central Asia.[63] This link between alphabet and nation has been most comprehensively explored in relation to the German blackletter – a script that has often been treated as a visible manifestation of broader cultural identity. Developed in the Middle Ages, different styles of blackletter evolved according to the regions of Europe in which they were used. For instance, *textura* and *rotunda* were associated with Catholic Europe and the Latin bible, while *schwabacher* was linked to Luther's German Bible of 1522 CE, and the Protestants turned to the *fraktur* style, which was less associated with social change.[64] Since Luther's bible represented the beginning of the slow coalescence of small German speaking states into the German nation, the origins of blackletter and its dominant forms have been viewed as purely German in nature.[65] Since Roman type was born in Renaissance Italy and embraced by French printers in the sixteenth century, the antagonism between Germany and Italy, and Germany and France, came to be played out the divisions between scripts: the conflict embraced the difference between medievalism and modernity, Protestantism and Catholicism, Lutheran Pietism and Italian Humanism, and German Romanticism and the French

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[62] Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use".

[63] See Peter Bain and Paul Shaw, eds., *Blackletter: Type and National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), and Johnson, "On the Origin of Linguistic Norms: Orthography, Ideology and the First Constitutional Challenge to the 1996 Reform of German" On modern Germany, see Inouye (2004), Nanette Gottlieb, "Language on the Internet in Japan," in *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, ed. Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (London & New York: Routledge, 2009). On Japan, see "Language and Politics: The Reversal of Postwar Script Reform Policy in Japan," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 4 (1994). On proposed alphabetic reform in Iran, see Hamid Algar, "Malkum Khan, Akhundzada and the Proposed Reform of the Arabic Alphabet," *Middle Eastern Studies* 5, no. 2 (1969), John Perry, "Language Reform in Turkey and Iran," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 5 (1985). On the attempted reform of Arabic in the 1930s and 1960s to cope with illiteracy and promote cultural renaissance, see Youssef Mahmoud, "On the Reform of the Arabic Writing System," *Journal of Reading* 23, no. 8 (1980), and Salih Al-Toma, "The Arabic Writing System and Proposals for Its Reform," *Middle East Journal* 15, no. 4 (1961).

[64] Albert Karr, *The Art of Lettering: The History, Anatomy, and Aesthetics of the Roman Letter Forms* (New York: K.G. Saurr, 1983).

[65] Hans Peter Willberg, "Fraktur and Nationalism," in *Blackletter: Type and National Identity*, ed. Peter Bain and Paul Shaw (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998). In 1933 the National Socialists required that all printed material be reset into Blackletter, but reversed this in 1941 in order to adapt to the "world type" of Roman. Highlighting the implicitly political nature of these decisions, Hitler had originally promoted Blackletter as the 'people's script' *(Volksschrift),* but upon embracing Roman, he declared that Blackletter designs were Jewish Letters *(Judenlettern).* See Bain and Shaw, *Blackletter: Type and National Identity*, and Karr, *The Art of Lettering: The History, Anatomy, and Aesthetics of the Roman Letter Forms*.

Enlightenment. Roman characters were perceived as simple, rational, balanced and graceful, while blackletter was judged to be dark, cramped, and fussy. Roman capitals were considered the epitome of all letterforms, while blackletter was defective, described as vulgar, frightful, and hideous, and an obstacle to Germany's entrance into the civilised world.[66] In response to these criticisms, eighteenth-century Germany continued to cling to blackletter as a matter of prestige and national identity, especially to regional typefaces *schwabacher* and *fraktur*.[67] So deeply had these letterforms become embedded in political and cultural difference that the topic of script became a matter of Parliamentary debate in 1911. A petition was put to the Reichstag - referred to as *Schriftstreit*, a dispute of scripts – to decide which form of script should be sanctioned by the state. Debate was split evenly between those who argued that the blackletter was integral to national character versus those who saw no harm in adopting Roman forms.[68]

In this way, the issue of blackletter provides unique insight to the way alphabets have been used as a prism for both heated geo-political rivalry and the construction of national identity. As Mark Sebba argues, societal issues can be displaced onto alphabets: in this role, they function as a scapegoat for divisive issues or symbol for a battlefield.[69] Alphabets therefore accrue meaning and like languages, can be deployed within political debates as a vehicle for wider issues. In particular, script reform debates have provided valuable insight into alphabet politics as they reveal, through often quite heated argument, an over-investment of nationalist and historical meaning in the alphabet. As the alphabet scholar Florian Coulmas notes, discussions about the reform of a given orthography or script often resemble a religious war more than a rational discourse.[70] For this reason, the opening chapter of this thesis turns to the issue of Arabic script reform and what it meant to choose or reject the Arabic script as a symbol of a nation.

In chapter one I examine the role of Arabic script in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives of civilisational progress and decline. In particular, I explore post-Ottoman script reform debates to demonstrate the way the Arabic and Latin alphabets have been employed for their deep cultural, geo-political, and religious significance. I begin with Turkey's language

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[66] See Peter Bain and Paul Shaw, "Blackletter Vs. Roman: Type as Ideological Framework," in *Blackletter: Type and National Identity*, ed. Peter Bain and Paul Shaw (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), and Hans Peter Willberg, "Fraktur and Nationalism," ibid. In this context, there was the sense that the German language printed in Roman script would be an act of coercion or submission to a dominant power. For a similar debate around the use of Gaelic and Roman for printing Irish language texts during the Irish Revival of the late nineteenth-century, see Brian Ó Conchubhair, "The Gaelic Front Controversy: The Gaelic League's (Post Colonial) Crux," *Irish University Review* 33, no. 1 (2003).

[67] Karr, *The Art of Lettering: The History, Anatomy, and Aesthetics of the Roman Letter Forms*.

[68] Christopher Burke, "German Hybrid Typefaces 1900-1914," in *Blackletter: Type and National Identity*, ed. Peter Bain and Paul Shaw (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

[69] Mark Sebba, "Ideology and Alphabets in the Former USSR," *Language Problems and Language Planning* 30, no. 2 (2006). On the cultural politics of the 1998 reform of German orthography as an example of this displacement, see Sally Johnson, "The Cultural Politics of the 1998 Reform of German Orthography," *German Life & Letters* 53, no. 1 (2000).

[70] Florian Coulmas, *The Writing Systems of the World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

reforms of the 1920s which aimed to modernise the new nation by removing all traces of Arabic and non-Turkish words from the language. Proponents of this change often judged the Arabic script as responsible for cultural backwardness and in contrast, saw the Latin script as a tool for producing modern, technological progress. While Arabic is not an exclusively Islamic language, both the language and script had become closely tied to Islam and the declining power of the Ottoman Empire. For Turkish reformers, Arabic stood for civilisational decline and something that must be left behind in order to achieve modern democracy and Western secular, technological mastery. Accordingly, the Arabic alphabet was to be purged from the state. Turning to similar examples from Albania, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan, it is clear that these fraught links between civilisation, nationhood and Arabic script were echoed more broadly in this period. Taken together, I argue that these instances of reform reveal the way in which the difference between Latin and Arabic script has been politicised as a choice between civilisational progress and decline.

These script reforms are placed within the context of broader orientalist discourses in this period. Nineteenth-century orientalist scholarship and colonial practice were marked by a notion that cultures could be located at different points along a continuous evolutionary stream of time. Taking the side of progress, the Latin alphabet was used within colonial discourses to bolster arguments for the superiority of Western cultures and as evidence of the need to forcibly bring colonised people out of a pre-modern, and often barbaric past. Building on the outline of linguistic orientalism introduced above, I explore the way in which the technical differences between Latin and Arabic script were taken up within orientalist and colonial scholarship to substantiate the inferiority of Arab cultures. I argue that this scholarship, together with post-Ottoman reform debates, confirm a powerful discursive link between the Arabic alphabet and civilisation. Both draw on or politicise alphabetic difference to substantiate the choice between a primitive religious past and a secular, technologically advanced future.

Geo-political shifts

Moving into the late twentieth century, the cultural shape of Arabic continued to change in line with broader understandings of the Arab World and Islam. It is near impossible to understand the contemporary politics of Arabic script without reference to key events in twentieth- and twenty-first century history. I outline these shifts below as they provide direct context for the second and third chapters and, perhaps more fundamentally, shape the cultural and political horizon in which the thesis was written.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, popular stereotypes in North America and Western Europe emphasised Arabs as a culturally backward, sexually depraved and congenitally violent

people.[71] As per eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forms of orientalism, Islam was understood as a monolithic, inherently violent religion while Arab cultures were deemed incapable of rationality and science. But the specific notion of terrorism increased in significance and came to define this new discourse. A number of political events worked to reinforce these stereotypes and increased a sense of hysterical suspicion around Arab bodies. Key events included the 1972 Munich Olympics 'massacre' by a Palestinian group, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Iran Hostage crisis (1979-81), the first Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993), and the spread of fundamentalism into the Maghreb. In particular, Islamic terrorism was believed to pose an immediate threat to the West. The terrorist label came to be more closely linked to Middle Eastern bodies following the destruction of a U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 and the rise of militant Muslim organisations across Lebanon, the Occupied Territories and Egypt. The U.S. rhetoric of terror acquired growing force and persistence, especially following a series of attacks against the U.S. military and diplomatic presence in Saudi Arabia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Yemen, and the 1993 attempt to blow up the World Trade Centre.[72] As a result, Muslims and Arabs came to be regularly portrayed as threats in Western public discourse, presented as either oil suppliers or potential terrorists.[73] The terms Jihadist, Islamist, fundamentalist, militant, radical, extremist, fanatic, and terrorist came together to confirm the notion of a homogenous, unified Islamic enemy.[74]

A discourse of cultural and civilisational difference also gained prominence in the late twentieth century. Across the many strands of historical orientalism, Islam had been viewed as a distinctive civilisation and culture, and ideas of Islamic societies and the ways Muslims behaved were perceived as an expression of Islam's unchanging cultural essence.[75] Classic orientalist scholarship took as its object a distinctive 'Islamic man' with a fixed mindset that was fundamentally different

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[71] See Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945. Third Edition.* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), Louise Cainkar, "No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion after September 11," *Middle East Report* 224 (2002), Deepa Kumar, "Framing Islam," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, no. 3 (2010), and Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World.* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

[72] See Salah D. Hassan, "Enemy Arabs," *Socialism and Democracy* 17, no. 1 (2003) and McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*. Note that terrorism originating from non-Western civilisations against Western targets, and inter-civilisational terrorism originating from Islamic cultures, did not systematically increase after the end of the Cold War. Rather, attacks on Western targets increased when the West became more actively militarily involved as part of the 'war on terror'. See Eric Neumayer and Thomas Plümper, "International Terrorism and the Clash of Civilizations," *British Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 4 (2009).

[73] See Said, Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World.

[74] C Hellmich, "Creating the Ideology of Al Qaeda: From Hypocrites to Salafi–Jihadists," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 31, no. 2 (2008). See Kumar, "Framing Islam" and Meghana Nayak, "Orientalism and 'Saving' US State Identity after 9/11," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 1 (2006). On the reduction to the category 'Arab' as a deprivation of social and political agency, see also Greg Noble, "The Discomfort of Strangers: Racism, Incivility and Ontological Security in a Relaxed and Comfortable Nation," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26, no. 1 (2005).

[75] Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*.

from 'Western man'. This figure was produced as separate from his European counterpart and sealed off in 'his' own specificity – as the distinct *homo islamicus*.[76] Drawing on these established concepts, more contemporary stereotypes evoked the image of Islam as a hermetically sealed, monolithic cultural bloc whose adherents were theologically incapable of coexistence with other cultures and religions, either as minorities or majorities.[77] Focussing on the incompatibility of cultures, proponents of this view emphasised the harmful consequences of allowing Arab bodies to live within Western space. The cultural distance between Islam and the West was portrayed as so vast that integration was considered both impossible and undesirable. Most notably, Samuel Huntington described this difference in terms of a clash of civilisations.[78] He proposed in 1992 that the increasing interaction between Islam and the West would result in a heightening of civilisational consciousness, and with the fall of communism, religion would rise again as the ultimate root of political conflict. The difference of Islam was positioned at the core of this antagonism. Modifying Cold War notions of the West facing an adversary, Huntington updated the familiar category of the Oriental and presented Islam as a clear danger to Western values. Here, the categories of Islam and the 'Islamic World' were instrumental in defining enemies, friends, and strategies for hegemony and control in the newly redrawn post-Communist geographies.

In particular, conflict was considered inevitable due to what Huntington saw as the cultural tendency of Islamic societies toward large-scale political violence. Building on existing discourses of Arab-Islamic cultural difference, acts of violence were coded as a product of religious affinity rather than political grievance.[79] Considered integral to cultural practice, Islam was deemed to

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[76] Maxime Rodinson, *Europe and the Mystique of Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

[77] Carr (2006), 12. This view has been broadly challenged. For instance, see Kathleen Moore, "A Part of the US or Apart from Us? Post September 11 Attitudes toward Muslims and Civil Liberties," *Middle East Report* 224, Autumn (2002), Wai-Yip Ho, "Crossing the Cultural Divide between Muslim and Non-Muslim: Formation of Ambassadorial Identity," *Social Identities* 11, no. 1 (2005), Ervand Abrahamian, "The US Media, Huntington and September 11," *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (2003), Ismael Hossein-Zadeh, "The Muslim World and the West: The Roots of Conflict," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2005), T.Y Ismael and John Measor, "Racism and the North American Media Following 11 September: The Canadian Setting," ibid.25, no. 1/2 (2003), Jaqueline S Ismael and Shereen T Ismael, "The Muslim World and the West: Patterns of Conflict and Avenues for Convergence" ibid. 31 (2009), M. Steven Fish, Francesca R. Jensenius, and Katherine E. Michel, "Islam and Large-Scale Political Violence: Is There a Connection?," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 11 (2010), Neumayer and Plümper, "International Terrorism and the Clash of Civilizations", and Kumar, "Framing Islam".

[78] See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). This work is based on his 1992 lecture.

[79] On the discourse of Arab violence and its consequences, see H Karim, *Islamic Peril: Media and Global Violence* (New York: Black Rose Books, 2003), Samiei (2010), Stephen H. Jones and David B. Clarke, "Waging Terror: The Geopolitics of the Real," *Political Geography* 25, no. 3 (2006), Joseph Pugliese, "Asymmetries of Terror: Visual Regimes of Racial Profiling and the Shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes in the Contexts of the War in Iraq," *Borderlands E-Journal* 5, no. 1 (2006), Paula Abood, "The Arab as Spectacle: Race, Gender and Representation in Australian Popular Culture" (University of New South Wales, 2007), Scott Poynting et al., *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other* (Sydney: The Federation Press, 2004), and Michael Humphrey, "Culturalising the Abject: Islam, Law and Moral Panic in the West," *The Australian Journal of Social Issues* 42, no. 1 (2007).

inspire an inherent predilection towards violence. Personified by the image of a fanatical Muslim terrorist, this construct built on established forms of orientalism and reinforced the notion of a dangerous East. The attacks on the World Trade Centre towers in New York on 9 September 2001 (also referred to as 9/11) powerfully reinforced this association between Islam and terror - a connection that was only strengthened by the Bali bombings in 2002, the Madrid train bombings in 2004, and the London underground bombings in 2005. Confirming the historic link between Islam, irrationality, and violence, former U.S. president George W. Bush frequently marked the Islamic 'enemy abroad' as inferior, backward and uncivilised. For instance, explaining that while Islamic terrorists plan, promote and commit murder, he argued that there was no rationality governing their behaviour:

> They have no justification for their actions. There's no religious justification, there's no political justification. The only motivation is evil.[80]

Media presentations confirmed understandings of Islamic violence and emphasised the confrontation between Western civilisation and an array of barbarian enemies.[81] For instance, when Major Nidal Hassan killed thirteen of his comrades at Fort Hood in 2009, dominant explanations of the event linked Islam to violence. Even in scholarship, it was suggested that Major Hassan's actions could be better understood through the phrase 'going Muslim' – a process whereby a Muslim "discards his apparent integration into American society and elects to vindicate his religion in an act of messianic violence against his fellow Americans."[82] This rhetoric positioned Muslims as inevitably propelled toward violence and refreshed orientalist discourses that divided the world into two distinct civilisations. Here, the Islamic East was understood as a hotbed of terrorism, ignorance, poverty, oppression, racism and misogyny, while the democratic West was portrayed as a saviour, a beacon of light and leader of democracy and equality.

The contemporary historicity and specificity of terrorism has in many ways been shaped by the conjunction of media and political rhetoric.[83] In particular, the immediacy of global media

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[80] Quoted in Richard Johnson, "Defending Ways of Life: The Anti-Terrorist Rhetorics of Bush and Blair," *Theory, Culture and Society* 19, no. 4 (2002), 221.

[81] See Matt Carr, "The Barbarians of Fallujah," *Race & Class* 50, no. 1 (2008). On the construct of the barbarian, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Civilization, Culture and the New Barbarians," *International Sociology* 16, no. 1 (2001).

[82] Quoted in Kumar, "Framing Islam". Note that in contrast, Western violence has been considered 'legitimate' since it was used against barbaric people implicitly deserving of this force. See Nancy Ehrenreich, "Masculinity & American Militarism," *Tikkun* 17, no. 6 (2002).

[83] See Andrew Hoskins, "Temporality, Proximity and Security: Terror in a Media-Drenched Age," *International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2006), Philip Seib, "Hegemonic No More: Western Media, the Rise of Al-Jazeera, and the Influence of Diverse Voices," *International Studies Review* 7, no. 4 (2005), James Castonguay, "Conglomeration, New Media, and the Cultural Production of the 'War on Terror'," *Cinema Journal* 43, no. 4 (2004), Brigitte L. Nacos, "Terrorism as Breaking News: Attack on America," *Political Science Quarterly* 118, no. 1 (2003), and Jones and Clarke, "Waging Terror: The Geopolitics of the Real" on the remediation of

enabled the spectre of Islamic terrorism to take on an iconic, fetishised, and highly optical character.[84] Repetitive visual narratives on popular news shows and incendiary political speeches reinforced a monolithic picture of Islam, defined by criminality, irrationality, and terror. Powerful visual narratives inevitably accompanied discussion about the inherent violence or barbarity of Islam, and with 24-hour news channels presenting breaking news images of planes flying into the World Trade Centre towers and videos of Osama Bin Laden, the media provided a visual framework for recognising terror. As Homi Bhabha writes:

> The age of terror "disfigures our pictorial vision". It is difficult in the west to invoke "Islamic" images without calling up the Abu Ghraib album, the televised beheading of American businessman, etc. war and terror.[85]

These images were continually reimagined and reproduced through media and communications channels, such that the Arab body came to function as a recognisable, legible sign of Islamic terrorism. For instance, when Bernard Lewis published an essay entitled *Muslim Rage* in the Atlantic Monthly, the cover featured an angry, bearded, turbaned man, and when *The Progressive* published an article in 2005 that reiterated the clash of civilisations model, it featured a bearded, turbaned man on the cover, brandishing a scimitar and waging war against a tiny Anglo-Saxon figure.[86] These images allowed religious fanaticism to be translated and made perceptible on the bodies of Arab men, with essentialised categories of hair, skin, and physiognomy working to conflate physical with cultural and moral attributes.

Significant infringements of civil liberties had resulted from these stereotypes long before the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre. Joseph Wakim, speaking on behalf of the Australian Arab Council of Victoria in 1999, cited incidents of police being instructed to look for an 'Arab looking suspect' in the wake of the 1986 bombing in Melbourne, the fourfold increase in racialised harassment as a result of the Gulf War, and the screening of Arab visa applicants to see if they conformed to a racial profile drawn up by counter-terrorism experts.[87] Testimonies of

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terrorism. On visual representations as forms of securitization, see Matt McDonald, "Securitization and the Construction of Security," *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008).

[84] James Der Derian, "Imaging Terror: Logos, Pathos and Ethos," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005).

[85] Homi Bhabha, "Another Country," in *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Seeing*, ed. Fereshteh Daftari (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 30.

[86] Kumar, "Framing Islam". See John Namjun Kim, "Südländisch: The Borders of Fear with Reference to Foucault," *Social Identities* 15, no. 3 (2009), Potvin (2003) and Pugliese, "Asymmetries of Terror: Visual Regimes of Racial Profiling and the Shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes in the Contexts of the War in Iraq" on the racialised regimes of vision that make bodies of Arab appearance legible.

[87] Joseph Wakim, "Guilty until Proven Innocent," in *Restoration for Victims of Crime* (Melbourne, Australia 1999). On the impact on civil liberties, see also Inderpal Grewal, "Transnational America: Race, Gender and Citizenship after 9/11," *Social Identities* 9, no. 4 (2003), Ghassan Hage, *White Nation* (Sydney: Pluto, 1998), Grant Farred, "Foreigners among Citizens," *Cultural Critique* 67, Fall (2007), and Scott Poynting and Victoria Mason, "'Tolerance, Freedom, Justice and Peace?' Britain, Australia and Anti-Muslim Racism since 11 September 2001," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 27, no. 4 (2006). On the limits of tolerance, see Wendy

racialised violence revealed the way in which public spaces were becoming off limits to Arab and Muslim subjects, such that they were primarily appearing in civic spaces in the context of mediatised and theatricalised police raids.[88] At the same time, Muslim women were presented in the media as outsiders and members of a religion that promoted anti-Western values such as indiscriminate violence and gender oppression.[89] These discourses were easily taken up within security practices to form the basis for profiling and exclusion, resulting in the increased insecurity of those identified as of Arab origin or association. This insecurity was evidenced in the years following 9/11, when individuals were subject to deportation, extraordinary rendition, interrogation, surveillance, random searches, acts of vandalism, hate crimes and various other forms of discrimination.[90] In this era, the intensification of surveillance systems within and beyond North America aimed to uncover enemies who posed a threat to national security. These systems were designed to identify potential threats through a complex system of data collection and analysis, enabling analysts to track suspicious activity and prevent acts of terror.

The conjunction of orientalist discourses, surveillance practices, and racial profiling worked to reinscribe visual signifiers of Islam and the Middle East, such as certain beards, clothing, and the Arabic alphabet, within a frame of terror. As a result, the script itself functioned as a distinct sign of threat. This specific prejudice had nothing to do with the way the language was lived, used, and

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Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006) and Eve Haque, "Homegrown, Muslim and Other: Tolerance, Secularism and the Limits of Multiculturalism," *Social Identities* 16, no. 1 (2010).

[88] See Pugliese, "Asymmetries of Terror: Visual Regimes of Racial Profiling and the Shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes in the Contexts of the War in Iraq", Scott Poynting, "Hate Crimes of the State?: Some Anti-Muslim Instances since 2001," in *The Australian Sociological Association* (University of Tasmania 2005), and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Isma - Listen: National Consultations on Eliminating Prejudice against Arab and Muslim Australians* (Canberra: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004). See Grewal, "Transnational America: Race, Gender and Citizenship after 9/11" on the discourse of political freedoms and liberties used to restrict these civil liberties, and Hage, *White Nation* on how these experiences are processes for controlling national space through social exclusion. See Noble, "The Discomfort of Strangers: Racism, Incivility and Ontological Security in a Relaxed and Comfortable Nation" on how they serve to disenfranchise Arab populations from full participation in civic life.

[89] Katherine Bullock and Gul Joya Jafri, "Media (Mis)representations: Muslim Women in the Canadian Nation," *Canadian Woman Studies* 20, no. 2 (2000). On the role of gender and the differential impact of racism on Arab women, see also Grewal, "Transnational America: Race, Gender and Citizenship after 9/11", Abood, "The Arab as Spectacle: Race, Gender and Representation in Australian Popular Culture", Sunaina Maira, "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and U.S. Orientalisms," *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009), Maryan Khalid, "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'Other' in the War on Terror," *Global Change, Peace and Security* 23, no. 1 (2011), and Laura J. Shepherd, "Veiled References: Constructions of Gender in the Bush Administration Discourse on the Attacks on Afghanistan Post-9/11," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 1 (2006).

[90] For instance, on the escalation of racism against Arab communities in Australia, see Poynting and Mason, ""Tolerance, Freedom, Justice and Peace?" Britain, Australia and Anti-Muslim Racism since 11 September 2001", Greg Noble, "Respect and Respectability Amongst Second Generation Arab and Muslim Australian Men," ibid. 28, no. 3 (2007), Minerva Nasser-Eddine, ""The Raging Beast within Us All'? Civil Liberties and the "War on Terror"," *Borderlands E-Journal* 1, no. 1 (2002), Poynting et al., *Bin Laden in the Suburbs: Criminalising the Arab Other*, Goldie Osuri and Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, "White Diasporas: Media Representations of September 11 and the Unbearable Whiteness of Being in Australia," *Social Semiotics* 14, no. 2 (2004), and Suvendrini Perera, "Race Terror, Sydney, December 2005," *Borderlands E-Journal* 5, no. 1 (2006). The racial bias of anti-terror measures is explored in more detail in chapter two.

experienced in the world, but was grounded in the idea of terrorism and excluded all complexity. While the Arabic language has been broadly framed in terms of violence and barbarism for more than a century (as outlined above) it become specifically attached to the notion of Islamic terror in modern, Western security cultures. By the early twenty-first century, the Arabic script had become firmly implicated within discourses of risk and threat, such that the practices of viewing and knowing Arabic script was implicitly tied to terrorism and the apparatus of the modern security state. Reporting on the demand for Arabic language classes in the years after 9/11, one article captured this association explicitly with the title 'The Language of Terror'.[91]

The 2003 Queens Museum of Art exhibition *The Arabic Alphabet* was designed to explore and challenge this connection. The conceptual artist Wendy Ewald asked for student volunteers from a local school to create an Arabic 'primer', using a constructed photograph for each letter of the alphabet. Immediately following 9/11, there were a number of introductions to key Arabic words such as *jihad* and *Al Qaeda*, but this exhibition sought to construct a primer to the language with 28 common Arabic words, such as neighbour, peace, and orange. Ewald explained that the goal of this work was to question the connection between the Arabic script and terrorism, noting that Arabs and their language have become a charged topic in the U.S.:

> "Just looking at the Arabic language now triggers something in people," she said "they don't know anything about it, and they see it as a threatening thing".[92]

In the second chapter, I turn to the complex implication of Arabic script within the modern, Western security state – both as a sign of risk and a way to combat the threatening figure of Islamic terrorism. The first part of the chapter focuses on how the Arabic script operates as a sign of threat. To this end, I turn to a broad set of instances where the Arabic script has been used to amplify cultural anxieties and manage the risk of Arab populations in Western space. Continuing with a deeper exploration of modern security regimes, I argue that an equivalent operation is evident in the contemporary security state at the level of discourse and practice. Relying on fear and the proliferation of hidden enemies, this model holds that an omnipresent enemy could be anywhere, could strike at any time, and could be 'among us'. The chief enemy is the Muslim terrorist, understood as a relentless agent of anti-Western violence. Through reference to a number of recent media incidents involving the Arabic script, I argue that the alphabet works alongside other cultural artefacts of Arab-Islamic origin as a recognisable, legible threat of terror.

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[91] Kady Martin, "The Language of Terror." *Washington Business Journal,* 26 October 2001.

[92] Corey Kilgannon, "A Single Alphabet Bridges Children's Two Cultures," *The New York Times*, 7 April 2003.

But the Arabic script functions as more than simply a sign. In the second part of the chapter, I unpack the ways in which the script is also entangled with the processes of surveillance as an object of analysis, a tool for tracking suspicious activity, and a potential weapon in the so-called war against terror. Through surveillance, the modern security state deploys tactics of vision and control in an effort to render all spaces knowable and known: in effect, surveillance systems strive to achieve a kind of all-seeing authority which enables power and rules out surprise. I argue that the Arabic script functions as a key weakness at the heart of these efforts to monitor, track, analyse, and control dangerous populations. In particular, information systems have not yet been able to effectively capture the difference posed by the Arabic script. By corrupting data streams with errors and preventing meaningful analysis, the Arabic script has hindered the efforts of security agencies to use it as a reliable tool for surveillance. I conclude by turning to initiatives that aim to 're-arm' with the Arabic language and use linguistic knowledge and literacy as a tool to support security objectives. Here, the Arabic language and script are deployed as weapons against the enemy - the Muslim terrorist, the hijacker, and the insurgent. Implicitly tying language to the objectives of the security state, the field of 'security Arabic' works to consolidate the racially coded danger at the heart of counter-terrorism regimes. Already perceived as a signifier of 9/11 and an artefact of terrorism, the second chapter argues that these roles are reflective of a higher-level trend toward the militarisation and securitisation of the Arabic language and script.

In chapter three, I turn to the Arab Spring of 2011 and the shifts in discourse that were produced in this period around the Arabic alphabet and Arab World more broadly. The Arab Spring refers to the revolutionary wave of demonstrations that forced rulers from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, and gave rise to civil war in Bahrain and Syria. The chapter explores the role of Arabic graffiti in the Arab Spring, and more broadly, the use of Arabic script in the production of resistant, urban space. Historically, the Arabic script has been used in the Arab World as a political and aesthetic instrument to reinforce existing power structures and beautify public space. But Arabic graffiti has also been a powerful tool of resistance, enabling protestors to communicate, mobilise, debate, and challenge authoritarian rule. After exploring the use of Arabic graffiti in occupied Palestine, I turn to its unprecedented popularity during the Arab Spring. The practice of graffiti in this series of events reveals the way in which the Arabic script was used as a key element of the broader political challenge. Operating as both a symbol of creative dissent and a practical tool of communication, graffiti allowed protestors within Cairo and across the region and diaspora to challenge existing political orders and assert a right to free and unregulated speech.

As outlined above, the Orient has traditionally functioned as an absolute point of otherness outside the framework of Europe. In this construct, the concept held that both civilisational difference and an implicit tendency towards violence prevented Arab societies from joining the

modern community of nations. Moving into the early twenty-first century, highly militarised discourses extended these orientalist understandings of place and presented the region in terms of a geo-political threat to be contained. Shaped by visions of protestors and armed conflict, Arab space was broadly popularised within Western media as a site of irrational violence, ruled by an unthinking, mob force. The Arab Spring marked a shift in these imaginative geographies and enabled a more complex understanding of Arab space at the level of the street. I argue that the initial phase of the Arab Spring and the explosion of Arabic graffiti brought with it a new fascination with the creative potential of urban space, reducing the perceived distance and difference associated the imagined geography of the Arab World and challenging orientalist assumptions of place. With a high volume of images of Arabic script distributed quickly over social media, the alphabet came to be widely reproduced in international news outlets, and later, presented in galleries and published across a range of media. The popularity of Arabic graffiti allowed both script and urban space to be viewed through the frame of creative expression rather than simply the potential for violence. Brought into proximity through the effective use of new media technologies, this event also helped to challenge, if only briefly, imaginative geographies of barbarism, difference and distance. Across both the physical and imagined space of the city, and against the background of geo-political shifts outlined above, I argue that the Arabic script and the space of the Arab street (if only briefly) came to be seen and known otherwise.

Aesthetics

Continuing the focus on visual culture and the creative use of Arabic script, the final two chapters explore complex dimensions of aesthetics in relation to social and political situations.

Contemporary aesthetics is an often neglected aspect of the Western focus on Arab cultures and politics. According to the art historian and curator Salwa Nashashibi, knowledge of Arab culture and arts in the United States has been distorted and minimal at best, with academics often treating Islamic Spain as the last significant Arab contribution to art.[93] In the late twentieth century, exhibitions were frequently criticised for bracketing off the aesthetic glory of the Orient to the past, serving to marginalise contemporary aesthetics and lock Arab cultural production in a different space and time. Such a focus reproduced a range of assumptions about the Arab World and its culture, and in particular, the idea that the Orient remained fixed in its essential character, permanently backward and resistant to change. Importantly, these discourses reinforced the idea that Arab culture had ceased to contribute to global culture. The wake of 9/11 witnessed a new

[93] See Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, ed. *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World* (Lafayette, California: International Council for Women in the Arts, 1994), "American-Arab Artists and Multiculturalism in America," in *Displacement and Difference: Contemporary Arab Visual Culture in the Diaspora*, ed. Fran Lloyd (London: Saffron Books, 2001), and Jessica Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (2008). Some critics have also resorted to essentialist explanations, arguing that the non-representational phenomena of Islamic art arose from the natural instinct of Islamic artist: see Modjtaba Sadria, "Figural Representation in Islamic Art," *Middle Eastern Studies* 70, no. 4 (1984).

trend to 'discover' the art and cultural production of Arab regions, with many in the West viewing this as uncharted territory and wanting to partake in its 'emergence'.[94] Local and national arts institutes, universities, and grassroots organisations launched Middle East events for the first time or included Muslim artists in their permanent collections. This focus on the 'newness' of contemporary Arab art denied a long history of aesthetic innovation in the Arab World, built on rigorous civil societies and robust independent art scenes. For instance, a generation of artists in Iraq flourished in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s, establishing renowned artistic associations and collective exhibits.[95] Defined by a distinctive style of painting and sculpture, a second generation of Iraqi artists in the 1960s sought to bring together various branches of modernism in Arab countries and opened the door for participation in international painting, graphics and poster art. Beirut also held the status of a cultural centre for the Arab world in the 1960s, and was known for work characterised by experimentation with Western influences and inspiration drawn from rich, indigenous cultural sources, including classical and Islamic.[96]

This thesis considers the political use of Arabic script in contemporary aesthetics and global design culture, in the context of a long and varied history of aesthetic innovation with the written word. While there have been genres of Western aesthetics interested in exploring the philosophical, cultural and decorative connection between word and image, the Arab contribution to this link is substantial, due in large part to the role of Arabic calligraphy. From its emergence in Iraq in the seventh century, the practice of classical Arabic calligraphy spread across the Islamic world by way of religion, empire, and bureaucracy. By the fourteenth century, the art had permeated everyday life in the medieval Islamic world, embedded across social practice and evident at the heart of systems of power, knowledge, and authority. Numerous works across various genres and mediums – such as sculpture, painting, graffiti and graphic design – have explored the uses and potential of Arabic script. But the art of Arabic calligraphy has been most widely celebrated as the supreme artistic achievement of Islamic art, regarded as the ideal form of visual expression for the Arabic language and the Quran.

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[94] See Maymanah Farhat, "Depoliticizing Arab Art: Christie's and the Rush to "Discover" the Arab World," in *Contemporary Practices: Visual Arts from the Middle East (Online)* (2006) and "MOMA's's without Boundary Exhibit: Contemporary "Islamic" Art in Context," *Counterpunch* 25/26 (2006). On the politics of exhibiting contemporary Arab art, and more broadly, the politicisation of Arab art, see also Winegar, "The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror", Linda Komaroff, "Exhibiting the Middle East: Collections and Perceptions of Islamic Art," *Ars Orientalis* 30 (2000), Gilane Tawadros, "Reading (and Curating) from Right to Left," *Tate Papers* 12 (2009), Saatchi Gallery, *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East*, ed. Lisa Farjam (UK: Boot-Clibbon Editions, 2009), Omar Kholeif, "Arabic Agendas," *Art Monthly* 353 (2012), Nashashibi, *Forces of Change: Artists of the Arab World*, Sandra Dagher et al., "Curating Beirut: A Conversation on the Politics of Representation," *T. J. Art Journal* 66, no. 2 (2007), Maymanah Farhat, "Circuit Breaking: New Approaches to Art in the Arab World," in *Contemporary Practices: Visual Arts from the Middle East (Online)* (2009), Fundació Antoni Tàpies, *Tamaas: Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut/Lebanon 1* (Amsterdam: Idea Books, 2002), and Fran Lloyd, ed. *Displacement and Difference: Contemporary Arab Visual Culture in the Diaspora* (London: Saffron Books, 2001).

[95] Rafa al-Nasiri, "Survival through Art and the Art of Survival," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009).

[96] Ali, "Modern Arab Art: An Overview".

More broadly, the practice became one of the hallmarks of Islamic civilisation, operating simultaneously as an aesthetic discipline, a spiritual form of expression, and a lever at the heart of socio-cultural systems and power structures. Beginning with an early history of Arabic calligraphy, chapter four outlines how the practice came to achieve this high status and authority. This overview provides a critical entry point to understanding the intersection of art, power and Arabic script, revealing multiple ways in which calligraphy became entwined with social life and politics in the Arab and Islamic world. While the continued importance of calligraphy cannot be overstated, the close relationship between art, power and Arabic script extends beyond its practice. Taking a dual focus on politics and aesthetics, the second part of the chapter explores the evolution of Arabic letter design during key moments of innovation and technological change. Moving from early experiments with the printing press into the space of digital media and contemporary typography, I explore the evolution of Arabic writing practice and letter design. These transitions mark an important shift in the history of Arabic script and demonstrate the continued intersection of technological challenges, aesthetic concerns, and religious debates. I argue that technologies of Arabic letter design have been consistently entwined with, and caught up in, broader political and social agendas. Here, a porous connection exists between new technologies and the socio-political context in which they are designed, built and used. Revolutions in writing technology offered new ways to visualise and reproduce the Arabic word but they also revealed new connections between script, culture and power. As with the alphabet more broadly, I argue that the practice of Arabic script design reflects its socio-political horizon, and as a result, a focus on aesthetics is able to provide a new lens on key periods of social and technological change.

In the fifth chapter, I continue this focus on contemporary design and argue that Arabic typography mobilises complex, fraught, and often conflicting, notions of modern Arab identity and 'Arabness'. In particular, I turn to dual-script typography and the cross-cultural narratives that frame the act of placing two alphabets together on a page. Drawing on a range of case studies, these narratives place a distinct emphasis on engaging with local heritage, cultural and aesthetic traditions to capture a sense of Arab identity. Here, the Arabic alphabet is used to navigate questions of cultural difference and to articulate a view of how Arabic script – and by extension, the Arab and Islamic world - should interact with other global cultures. I argue therefore that the practice of typography reveals the way in which the Arabic alphabet continues to play a key role in constructing complex, modern identities for global markets. To place these visual experiments with Arabic in their broader context, I outline the ways in which the concept of 'Arab' identity has been mobilised in recent history. Aesthetically, the notion of shaping a modern Arab aesthetic through a rich engagement with both heritage and global influence is not unique to modern typography: rather, these design narratives are the continuation of strong, well

established connections between the Arabic script, art practice, politics of identity, and the quest for cultural authenticity. Politically, the notion of a unified Arab identity has been fraught by failed movements of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, such that the internal differences between and within various Arab countries and cultures are now recognised as so significant as to undermine the usefulness of any singular concept.

Many designers are therefore challenging broad-based expressions of 'Arab modernity' and 'Arab experience' and choosing instead to create letterforms that are sensitive to specific national or community-based identities. Here, there is a growing trend towards exploring localised, particular experiences of identity through Arabic letter design. I argue that these experiments support the evolution of Arabic script through the responsive integration of letters across multiple communities, and in the process, move the discourse from homogeneity towards a recognition of diversity. In terms of both aesthetics and politics, the desire to express local identity has been a key driver in the creation of new styles of script. Historically, alphabets have come to reflect regional and cultural differences, such that it is possible to look back on the transformation of script styles in terms of broad national or religious formations as well as particular localities and communities. A similar process is underway in contemporary typographic practice. New Arabic letterforms are being created in engagement with a range of influences, such as Islamic aesthetics, modern Latin alphabet typography, and global market forces. These forms are creating a complex image of what 'Arab' identity and Arabic visual culture means today, defined from the bottom up and across a landscape full of contradictions and diversity.

Although a particular focus of this final chapter, this issue of identity recurs throughout the thesis. Even in this introduction, it is difficult to speak of the 'Arabic language', of 'Arab populations', the 'West' or the 'Arab World', without recognising the impossibility or danger implicit in these categories used to describe collective identity and place. For instance, any deliberate reference to Arab identity is obliged to deal with the term's history, its close connection to the Arabic language and script, its status as a tool of political and ideological resistance, and its complex relationship to Islam, race and nationalism. Contemporary political movements and intellectual leaders have broadly moved away from the notion of a unified Arabic-speaking Middle East towards an emphasis on the heterogeneity of local cultures and states. While instances of strategic unity do occur, they do not necessarily imply a monolithic identity and it is broadly recognised that Arab identity is bisected multiple times by different histories, geographies, languages, and class. This complexity is particularly evident across geographic constructs of identity. The region referred to as the 'Islamic world' stretches from Indonesia to the Atlantic coast of Africa, and includes the Middle East, and occasionally, the greater diaspora living in Western Europe and North America. While the region referred to as the Orient has also taken on many names, including the Arab World, the Islamic World, the Middle East, and the

Levant, the majority of these terms are unsupported by any clear agreement on where the spaces start and end.[97] Economic policies and systems vary greatly across the region, alongside development levels, political systems, the effects of colonialism, and factors such as displacement, nationalism, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. While the Arabic language could provide a point of commonality, the Arab world contains a wide range of dialects, linguistic minorities, and a significant number of people who have non-Arab descent and who do not speak the Arabic language locally.[98] Equally, Islam is composed of over a billion adherents who experience their faith in many different ways. Rather than presenting a unified voice or belief system, Islam is fractured according to different histories and minorities – as well as by matters of politics, community, and schools of interpretation.[99] And while Islam is the predominant religion in the region, there are also significant Christian minorities in Egypt and Lebanon.

Therefore, despite many religious, cultural, and linguistic similarities, the modern 'Middle East' or 'Arab World' remains a patchwork of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and narratives, and the internal differences in the region seem to fracture any attempt at systemic definition. Accordingly, when I refer to categories of identity in this thesis (such as the Arab World or Islamic culture), I do so in recognition that these terms are necessarily incomplete and do not imply a unified concept. The notion of the West is used with similar scepticism. The concept of the Western world originated in the fifteenth century and has become an imagined geopolitical community of nations that purportedly share a common history, traditions, religion and racial heritage.[100] The West was originally limited to Europe, but as colonies became independent or gained Commonwealth status, they also made claims to this status. After the end of the Cold War, debate about where Europe properly ends has revealed ongoing limitations in the construct. For instance, the Balkans have been viewed as ambivalent lands between the East and West, with the region acting as an unstable presence along the European peripheries where geographic categories are cast into confusion.[101] Nonetheless, the notion of the West continues to be used in political discourses to express its geo-political and economic power as well as its conceptual privilege and dominance in relation to the non-West. In this thesis therefore, the terms 'East' and

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[97] See Seib, "Hegemonic No More: Western Media, the Rise of Al-Jazeera, and the Influence of Diverse Voices". Elsheshtawy also notes that the distinction between cities within each category can be so vast that it also challenges the usefulness of terms such as 'traditional', 'fringe' and 'oil rich'. See Yasser Elsheshtawy, "The Middle East City: Moving Beyond the Narrative of Loss," in *Planning Middle Eastern Cities: An Urban Kaleidoscope in a Globalizing World*, ed. Yasser Elsheshtawy (London and New York: Routledge, 2004). This issue is addressed in more detail in chapter 5.

[98] Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[99] As Said cautions, it is better to speak 'Islams' rather than Islam: see "Impossible Histories: Why the Many Islams Cannot Be Simplified," *Harpers Magazine*, July (2002).

[100] See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "'This Is a White Country': The Racial Ideology of the Western Nations of the World System," *Sociological Inquiry* 70, no. 2 (2000).

[101] Andrew Hammond, "Typologies of the East: On Distinguishing Balkanism and Orientalism," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 29, no. 2-3 (2007). See also Ezequiel Adamovsky, "Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, 1810-1880," *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (2005).

'West' are capitalised to indicate this scepticism: the terms are presented as concepts rather than used in a descriptive sense or tied to any particular geographic space. I recognise that the meaning of these words shift according to who uses them, their context, and the location of this speaker in the world. They indicate imaginative spaces, defined by a shifting differential of power and mutually constructed opposition.

Reflections

This project began in 2010 when terror and violence were at the forefront of political, media, and academic discussions around the Arab World. The first decade following the World Trade Centre attack had sparked intense knowledge production, witnessed particularly in the growth of terrorism and security studies. By this date, a U.S. led coalition was in the midst of a long war in Afghanistan (from 2001) and Iraq (from 2003), and there was a corresponding intensity in images of conflict and violence produced around the Arab World. In December 2010, the Arab Spring began and changed the shape of contemporary Arab politics, resulting in a short-lived revolution and the return of military rule in Egypt. In 2013 the whistle-blower Edward Snowdon revealed the extent to which surveillance systems had intensified in North America – a disclosure that sparked international debates over mass surveillance and resulted in the passing of legislation in 2015 to wind back the powers of the U.S. government. While the Global War on Terror officially ended in 2013, the group known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) gained prominence in 2014 and gave rise to new fears of Islamic extremism.

This project is situated in these moments of transition and change, where complex understandings of Arabic language and script were swiftly transforming through their use in global media and political discourse. As a result, this research project continued to evolve – extremely quickly – over a period of five years. Given the fast moving terrain of contemporary politics and the historical focus of much of this work, I take a point in time approach and attend primarily on events prior to 2013. Across each area of focus, I unpack a particular use of script in terms of the socio-political context, underlying discourses, and political tensions, opening up each site in terms of two central, interrelated questions: how has the Arabic script been politicised? And how has it been used for political ends? In this way, I am able to explore the way the Arabic alphabet is represented and deployed within particular situations as an object of discourse, but also how persistent, historical discourses have come to shape the way the script is understood and used to effect complex political outcomes.

While scholarship has begun to open up the field of 'alphabet politics', the political role of Arabic had not yet been comprehensively explored. My question therefore has required that I build a conceptual foundation – a way of understanding the political work of Arabic script – as well as identifying how the script has contributed to certain social and political environments. This

framework allows for insight into how Arabic script works as a political artefact as well as key aspects of its operation and 'cultural shape' in contemporary history. Across multiple time periods and geographies, I demonstrate that the Arabic script has been used as a vehicle for articulating social threats, mobilising nationalism, and reinforcing structural prejudice. To balance this view, I also explore the way in which aesthetic forms of Arabic script have been taken up to challenge totalitarian regimes, define community identities, and produce resistant, urban space. As a result, I argue that the Arabic alphabet operates as a complex political artefact, caught by historical discourse but always evolving to meet the demands of the contemporary world.

I therefore locate my conclusions across two levels: the underlying conceptual framework as well as the detail of a situation and the way in which a focus on Arabic script allows for a new lens on a familiar situation. As a result, I hope that this thesis sheds new light on an important cultural artefact - the Arabic script – as well as historical events and the macro-level discourses and practices that have shaped ways of thinking and seeing for decades, and continue to inform our world.

Script reform and civilisation

The Arabic alphabet played a leading role in late nineteenth and early twentieth century narratives of civilisational progress and decline. In this chapter, I explore post-Ottoman script reform debates to demonstrate the way the Arabic and Latin alphabets have been leveraged for their deep cultural, geo-political, and religious significance. I begin with Turkey's language reforms of the 1920s which aimed to modernise the new nation by removing all traces of Arabic and non-Turkish words from the language. Proponents of this change commonly judged the Arabic script as responsible for cultural backwardness and in contrast, saw the Latin script as a tool for producing modern, technological progress. While Arabic is not an exclusively Islamic language, both the language and script had become closely tied to Islam and the declining power of the Ottoman Empire. For Turkish reformers, Arabic stood for civilisational decline and what must be left behind to achieve Western secular, technological mastery. Accordingly, the Arabic alphabet was purged from the state as one among many efforts to build a modern democracy. Turning to similar debates in Albania, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan, it is clear that these links between civilisation, nationhood and script were echoed more broadly in this period. Taken together, I argue that these instances of language reform reveal the way in which the difference between Latin and Arabic script has been politicised as a choice between civilisational progress and decline.

These script reforms must be placed within the context of broader orientalist discourses in this period. Nineteenth-century orientalist scholarship and colonial practice were marked by a notion that cultures could be located at different points along a continuous evolutionary stream of time. Taking the side of progress, the Latin alphabet was used within colonial discourses to bolster arguments for the superiority of Western cultures and as evidence of the need to forcibly bring colonised people out of a pre-modern, and often barbaric past. In the latter half of this chapter, I explore the way in which the technical differences between Latin and Arabic scripts were taken up within orientalist and colonial scholarship to prove the inferiority of Arab cultures. Of particular note, the development of Western civilisation was premised on the specific qualities of the Latin writing system. This notion is particularly evident in discussions of the Arabic script and the notable 'absence' of the Arabic vowel. Compared to the fully vocalised word produced by the Greek and Roman alphabets, this absence meant that Arabic-speaking cultures were unable to produce analytic thought, and thus, were unable to progress Arab and Islamic civilisations toward scientific reason and philosophical precision. Therefore, I argue that taken together, orientalist scholarship and post-Ottoman reform debates reveal a powerful discursive link between the

Arabic alphabet and civilisation. Both draw on or politicise alphabetic difference to substantiate the choice between a primitive religious past and a secular, technologically advanced future.

Turkish script reform

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk became the first president of the new Turkish Republic in the aftermath of the 1919–22 Turkish war of independence. Amidst the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, he saw Islam as an obstacle to modernisation and sought to build a modern Turkish identity in line with European models. Atatürk's program of rapid modernisation aimed to induce westernisation across cultural, legal, and political spheres. Culture and civilisation were deemed inseparable: if Turkey was to be westernised, it would need to take on the fundamentals of the West. More than this, Atatürk rejected the possibility of combining the old with the new. True reform must sweep away every aspect of the former culture and society, transforming or eliminating all that was deemed backwards and resistant to progress. As I explore below, proponents of these reforms presented the Arabic alphabet as one such obstacle to progress, seen as variously holding back literacy, technological modernity, and Turkish civilisation. As Atatürk argued:

> So long as Turkish was written from right to left, it could never properly express the ideas of European civilization. The picturesque involutions and intricacies of Arabic script afforded a psychological background to the Oriental mentality which stood as the real enemy of the Republic.[1]

Here, the Arabic language and its script was seen as an enemy of progress and must be excised along with all other traces of Ottoman influence and 'Oriental mentality'. To this end, the official script of the New Turkish Republic became Latin, and by 1929 it was unlawful to use the Arabic alphabet for the Turkish language. The day before the change in script came into effect, the following text was published in the *Cumhuriyet*, a semi-official mouthpiece of the administration:

> The difference between Arabic letters, which we are burying today, and the Turkish letters that we shall start using tomorrow, is as big as that between a camel and a car. Just as the camel, which comes from the deserts of Arabia, is the symbol of primitivity, backwardness, and sluggishness, so is the car, which we have taken from the West, the emblem of progress, civilisation, and speed…The camel brought pilgrims to the Kaba in order for them to fulfil their obligation to perform the *hajj*. The car will bring our nation, which is thirsting for progress and advancement, to the Kaba of civilization.[2]

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[1] Yilmaz Çolak, "Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004). See also Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use".

[2] Quoted in İrvin Cemil Schick, "The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 53/54 (2008), 220.

More broadly, Atatürk's reform measures aimed to overturn six hundred years worth of Ottoman structures and remove almost a thousand years of Islamic influence. Placing Turkey on the level of contemporary Europe meant rejecting or limiting the influence of cultural elements perceived as Arab or Middle Eastern. In its place, the Turkish Historical Society and the Turkish Language Society promoted a uniform national identity that emphasised ancient Anatolian Hittite civilisation, supported by a newly reformed Turkish language and introduction of the Latin script.[3] This identity was to provide the cornerstone for Turkey's progress as a modern nation state.

The significance of Atatürk's reforms must be placed in the context of the Ottoman Empire's modernising efforts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *Tanzimat* (1839-1876) was a period when the Ottoman Empire sought to reorganise itself into a modern, bureaucratic state. Under the Sultan 'Abd Mahmud II (1789 –1839), a series of modernising reforms were developed in direct response to the rise of European military supremacy. At this time, the Ottoman Empire had been plagued by military defeats: the defeat at Vienna in 1683, the loss of Crimea to Russia in 1774, and the Greek war of independence in the 1820s. Faltering self-confidence led Ottoman statesman to send missions to Europe and open embassies in Western capitals to discover the key to their new military superiority.[4] One solution was thought to lie with science and technology. To this end, Ottoman reformers began importing Western military equipment, techniques, and instructors. The impetus for modernisation and official nationalism expanded during the reign of Sultan Abdül Hamid II (1876-1909). Engineering, medical, military, and civil service schools were established and founded on secular and positivist curricula. Even one of the Sultan's critics, the influential journalist Hüseyin Cahit, agreed with the need for Western education. Writing in 1898:

> We are bound, whether we like it or not, to Europeanize… Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history belongs to the infantile age of the science of history. Since then, the child has grown; he became a boy in German; he even grew to old age… The modern science of history is to come from Europe not from the Arabs."[5]

Although the reform program had initially been quite narrow in scope, by the nineteenth century many western laws and cultural practices had also been adopted. For instance, a School of Fine Arts was founded in Istanbul in 1882 CE as part of an administrative effort to institutionalise European styles of architecture, music, ballet, opera, and painting that had emerged in the

[3] See Zoe Griffith, "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 3 (2011).

[4] Yücel Bozdağlioğlu, "Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008).

[5] Quoted in Ussama Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002), 792.

Ottoman cultural sphere.[6] In an effort to promote literacy, the *Tanzimat* elite aimed to simplify the legal and administrative language. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the purification and simplification of Ottoman Turkish accelerated and new terms of Arabic and Persian origin were coined to express Western terms.[7]

Islam played a key role in these reforms. Ottoman reformers felt compelled to respond to what they saw as European misrepresentations of the Islamic East, and in particular, the notion that the Ottoman Empire was despotic and incapable of progress.[8] Islam was upheld as a symbol of the Empire's historical and cultural difference from the West - a difference that was both compatible with, and central to, the modernising agenda. For instance, Sultan Abdül Hamid II reacted to the loss of many of the Empire's remaining Balkan territories in the 1877–78 Russo-Ottoman war by emphasising the unifying glue of Muslim identity.[9] His reforms included an upsurge in state-sponsored Islamic education, and in 1890, an educational institution known as the *Darultalim* was founded to promote the Arabic language and religious education. In recognition of the significant Turkish contribution to the Islamic calligraphic tradition, Ottoman calligraphers were also favoured and granted positions of prestige. They played a key role in helping to run the internal bureaucracy of the empire and promote an image of vitality around the state. In particular, calligraphers were tasked with visualising the Ottoman state in the form of the imperial *tuğra*, a royal insignia that conflated the dynastic and Islamic identity of the sultan. The *tuğra* was used in the decoration of state-sponsored mosques and monuments, and in the composition of official documents for use at home and abroad. In this role, the Arabic script served to symbolise the prestige of individual leaders and confirm the importance of Islam to the Ottoman Empire.

Under the Ottoman Empire, Islam had helped provide a basis for state legitimacy. Being a Muslim was a fixed requirement for entry to the rank of rulers and the highest levels of the social system: at the pinnacle, the Sultan also held the position of Caliph. In addition, religion and ethnicity were crucial markers of difference in an empire composed of primarily Islamic, Christian, and Jewish faiths, and populations including Turks, Arabs, Armenians, Albanians, Kurds, Bosnians, and Greeks. Religion helped to demarcate these ethnic groups and defined their

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[6] Griffith, "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic". On the 'borrowed' colonialism of the Ottoman Empire toward nomads on their periphery, see Selim Deringil, ""They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery": The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post Colonial Debate," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 2 (2003).

[7] Çolak, "Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey".

[8] See Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism".

[9] Griffith, "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic".

identities and opportunities.[10] But *Tanzimat* reforms aimed to modernise this system by launching an official nationalism that strove to cohere different ethnic groups, religious communities, regions, and levels of development into a unified, civilised Ottoman modernity.[11] Previous delineations between the centre and periphery, Muslim and non-Muslim, and Ottoman elite and tax-paying subject were abandoned as the Turkish state sought to create a single Ottoman form of progress. Imperial decrees in 1839 and 1856 abolished legal discrimination against non-Muslims to increase the loyalty of all subjects, and alongside equality before the law, government employment and military service were also opened up to non-Muslims.

However, Atatürk judged the *Tanzimat* reform measures to be ineffective since they had failed to strengthen the Ottoman Empire and liberate it from European interests. Young Ottoman reformers had believed that the Empire should continue to rest on Islam and that Islam contained all the necessary bases for democracy, justice, civilisation, and progress. In contrast, nationalist elite discourse presented Islam as the opposite of progress and civilisation.[12] Taking the above reforms further, the new Turkish Republic aimed to disestablish the institutional power of Islam and limit its powers to matters of worship and belief. To this end, Islamic institutions considered political and economic threats were closed and Quranic schools came under State control.[13]

A regulation of foreign and Islamic influence occurred across multiple spheres, as a series of initiatives were undertaken to limit 'Oriental' elements and demonstrate the strength of the new nation. Shifts in foreign policy kept interaction with the Middle East to a minimum, and in the cultural domain, negative images and stereotypes of Arabs and their cultures were circulated. For instance, images of the 'untrustworthy Arab' were produced alongside representations of the 'uncivilised, backward' Arab states governed by *Sharia* law.[14] Laws adopting European dress were not only passed to mimic the West, they also carried the implication that traditional Ottoman dress should be rejected as a sign of backwardness. The man's fez and the woman's veil were singled out as targets for regulation through both legislation and social pressure, since the fez was the most common headgear of - although not exclusive to - Arab and Persian men. As Atatürk proclaimed in a speech from 1927:

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[10] Fatma Müge Göçek, "Ethnic Segmentation, Western Education, and Political Outcomes: Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Society," *Poetics Today* 14, no. 3 (1993).

[11] Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism".

[12] R Kasaba, "Kemalist Certainties and Modern Ambiguities," in *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, ed. R Kasaba and S Bozdogan (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 29.

[13] See Emelie Olson, "Muslim Identity and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey: "The Headscarf Dispute"," *Anthropological Quarterly* 58, no. 4 (1985).

[14] Mahmut Bali Aykan, "The Palestinian Question in Turkish Foreign Policy from the 1950s to the 1990s," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (1993).

> Gentleman, it was necessary to abolish the fez, which sat on the heads of our nation as an emblem of ignorance, negligence, fanaticism, and hatred of progress and civilization, to accept in its place the hat, the headgear used by the whole 'civilized world', in this way to demonstrate that the Turkish nation, in its mentality as in other respects, in no way diverges from civilized life.[15]

In their place, western artefacts and ideas were introduced. For instance, a new secular legal code was developed on European lines and the Gregorian calendar was endorsed along with metric system of weights and measures. Notably, the Latin alphabet was introduced to signal a new political and cultural alignment towards Europe.

Language reform

Atatürk's reform agenda targeted the official imperial language of Ottoman Turkish, viewing the Turkish language as a key platform on which the new nation could unify the population and project its role in a post-Ottoman context. A change in alphabet was intended to mark a defining shift in Turkish culture, identity, and politics.

Turkey's alphabet reform began with a motion for romanisation at the Ízmir Economic Conference in 1923. Although the chairman Kazm Karabekir did not allow this motion to be considered on the grounds that Latin characters were "harmful for the unity of Islam", the event went on to spark debate more broadly.[16] When Karabekir's view was reported in newspapers, the benefits and potential harm of Latin letters began to dominate public debate. Articles were published refuting his position, arguing instead for the necessity of a script reform to free Turkey from the burdens of 'ignorance and illiteracy'.[17] This claim was a key pillar of the reform movement, with supporters of Latin drawing on the linguistic incompatibilities between the Turkish language and the Arabic script.[18] The problem with Arabic script, according to this view, was that Ottoman Turkish was constructed around a few consonants and many vowels but the Arabic script was primarily composed of strings of consonants and did not mark vowel sounds. Ottoman Turkish speakers therefore had difficulty using the Perso-Arabic script because it was not suited to Turkish pronunciation, but it also led to multiple, confusing vocalisations derived from the same written word. As the British diplomat Sir Charles Eliot (1862–1931) observed, the same written Turkish word could be read in two widely distinct and contradictory ways - as either

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[15] Quoted in Olson, "Muslim Identity and Secularism in Contemporary Turkey: 'The Headscarf Dispute'," 164.

[16] Quoted in Çolak, "Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey," 70.

[17] Quoted in ibid. 70.

[18] See Thomas Winner, "Problems of Alphabetic Reform among the Turkic Peoples of Soviet Central Asia 1920-41," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 31, no. 76 (1952).

oldu (he became), or *öldü* (he died).[19] In Eliot's view, the Arabic script had been naturally adapted to the Arabic language but could not easily accommodate Turkish, with its few consonants and many vowels. Critics of the Arabic script commonly blamed this technical incompatibility for widespread illiteracy and ignorance and proposed the Latin alphabet as a solution. Other, more moderate reformers did not accept the correlation between the Arabic script and illiteracy, arguing instead that low levels of literacy stemmed from economic backwardness and the lack of a true national education.[20] The discussion reached Parliament in 1924 and by 1926 the alphabet was a hotly discussed issue in intellectual and political circles.

Another point of contention in these debates was the concern that the adoption of the Latin alphabet would force an irrevocable break with the past. Many of those who argued in favour of retaining the Arabic script wanted to preserve a link to the Ottoman past and protect their cultural heritage. Both the semi-official newspaper *Hakimiyet-I Milliye* and Parliament recorded fears that the use of Latin script would lead to 'utter confusion'.[21] Romanisation could lead to the permanent loss of cultural heritage, and eventually, the destruction of a significant religious and historical literary tradition. Yet for those in favour of rapid modernisation, abandoning the Arabic script meant cutting ties with a suspect literary past and cleansing the Turkish language of unwanted Arabic and Persian elements.[22] Under the Ottoman Empire, the Arabic language had been positioned as the language of religion and scientific thought while Persian was valued as the language of art, refined literature, and diplomacy. In contrast, Turkish was a language of bureaucracy. In this context, reformers did not consider Turkish documents written in Arabic script to have attained an equal tradition to those recorded with the Persian or Arabic language. Any loss of heritage was considered both a necessary and acceptable choice in the transition to modernity. More than this, language reform was seen as a way to bridge the gap between the language of the elite and the people. For the New Republic, this was a necessary step in terms of gaining legitimacy and mobilising the people in the service of its goals.

Following the transition to the Latin alphabet, broader language reforms were instituted to limit, regulate, or excise signs of foreign influence from the language, and thus, the body of the new nation. Many of the institutions for the transmission of calligraphic skills and knowledge were ordered closed, with calligraphers forced to practice clandestinely.[23] Those who retained teaching

[19] See N Ertürk, *Grammatology and Literary Modernity in Turkey* (Oxford Scholarship Online: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[20] Çolak, "Language Policy and Official Ideology in Early Republican Turkey".

[21] Frank Tachau, "Language and Politics: Turkish Language Reform," *The Review of Politics* 26, no. 2 (1963), 194.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Turkish calligraphers in the Arabic script are still broadly regarded as technical masters throughout the Islamic world, despite the fact that the national language continues to be represented by the Latin alphabet.

posts at the Academy of Fine Arts did not dare teach Arabic calligraphy while the modernisation reforms were still underway.[24] Eventually swayed by arguments that rested on the Turks' unique contribution to the art, Atatürk reversed this ruling and allowed the teaching of calligraphy on the condition that Arabic letters could be used only as an artistic script - not in the context of daily life.[25] In addition, the vocabulary was targeted for reform since Ottoman Turkish was seen as an unwelcome conglomeration of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian, with minor elements of Italian, Greek, and Armenian. Established in 1932, the Turkish Language Institute set out to purify the language of non-Turkish components and coin new words to replace them. For instance, viable replacements included any Turkish word found in the vernacular of an Anatolian village, a Turkish tribe in Siberia, or a manuscript of an eleventh-century Turkish-Arabic dictionary.[26] Once a Turkish equivalent could be found, the word of Arabic or Persian origin was outlawed.

In this way, the Arabic alphabet was one element in a broader series of linguistic reforms that aimed to distance Turkey from its Ottoman history and build a new, modern identity. These efforts were broadly framed in terms of nationalism and the protection of cultural borders. As Atatürk argued:

> The Turkish nation which knew how to defend its country and noble independence must also liberate its language from the yoke of foreign tongues.[27]

This approach to language was consistent with broader trends. By the twentieth century, language had become a major component of nationalism across Europe, with leaders using linguistic difference as a powerful way to mobilise populations around a unique identity. In line with this approach, nationalists in the new Turkish Republic drew on language as a tool for building a sense of 'Turkishness' in the population and also for defining a clear line of difference from neighbouring states and foreign influence. As the vocabulary reforms demonstrate, nationalists in the 1920s deliberately pursued the homogenisation of space, population, and language to create a unified nation with a unique political identity. When Besim Atalay, a central political figure of the Republican era, addressed the Grand National Assembly in 1920, he reinforced Atatürk's emphasis on autonomy from foreign influence:

> No language is so adulterated as ours... Just as yesterday's [elite] without ideals amply added Arabic and Persian into our language, today they are adding Frankish and whatever else. If

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See David Simonowitz, "A Modern Master of Islamic Calligraphy and Her Peers," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6, no. 1 (2010). Note that chapter four explores this history in more detail.

[24] Griffith, "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic".

[25] Ibid.

[26] Tachau, "Language and Politics: Turkish Language Reform".

[27] Quoted in ibid, 196.

> today we fail to save our language from foreign rules and foreign capitulations... we will not be a complete and mature nation... If we are a nation, [our] language [will be] our vehicle to bring forth our sentiments and feelings to the people.[28]

His insistence on a purified language was echoed by a number of speeches delivered in the Grand National Assembly. For political figures in this period, language reform provided a vehicle for expressing nationalist rhetoric of vulnerability to foreign control. As a result, the shift away from Ottoman Turkish enabled leaders to mark a change and prove that the new regime was not simply a continuation of the Ottoman Empire. Here, a language devoid of foreign elements such as Arabic and Persian would allow them to demonstrate the strength of the new nation.

But while Atalay was concerned about undue Arab and Persian influence, he nonetheless stressed that Islam was the constitutive element of Turkish nationhood. This attitude is revealing. Despite the broad trends outlined above, it is important to recognise that there was no singular, agreed view of Turkish modernisation or nationhood: rather, the question of nationality, Islam, and Turkish identity involved constant debate and often contradictory lines of inclusion and exclusion.[29] What remained consistent across these forms or visions of nationalism was the importance attributed to language. A key advocate of language reform, Atalay believed a national language should reflect the character of that nation. As he argued in his speech to the Assembly:

> We all know that our language, the medley of a language we have now, was never seen anywhere in the world, at any time...[Language] is classified everywhere, separated into communities...If we were to bring together the words that are used by our common people, and thus comprise a national body, surely, we would be demonstrating, without doubt, that we are a civilised and modern nation.[30]

The question of linguistic practicality aside, the Latin alphabet provided the visual form for this new national body, a symbol that could be recognised as both civilised and modern. But the value of Latin can only be understood in relation to the set of meanings attributed to Arabic in this period, with both the language and script troubled by connotations of a faltering Ottoman Empire and an equally problematic relationship to Islam. Reformist leaders politicised these symbolic differences between Arabic and Latin to substantiate the choice between a primitive religious past and a secular, technologically advanced future.

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[28] Quoted in Yeşim Bayar, "The Trajectory of Nation-Building through Language Policies: The Case of Turkey During the Early Republic (1920-38)," *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 1 (2011), 112.

[29] See Şerif Mardin, "The Ottoman Empire," in *After Empire*, ed. K. Barkey and M. von Hagen (Oxford: Westview Press, 1997).

[30] Quoted in Bayar, "The Trajectory of Nation-Building through Language Policies: The Case of Turkey During the Early Republic (1920-38)". The relationship between Arabic language, script and nationhood will be explored in greater detail in chapter five.

While the specifics of this debate were unique to Turkey, this link between civilisation, nationhood and script was expressed more broadly in the region. In the following section, I explore the use of similar discourses in nations undergoing modernising reforms in this period, including Albania, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan. Across these states, the transformation from multilingual empire to monolingual nation created a similar need for nationalist unity and linguistic reform. I argue that taken together, these language reforms reinforced a distinct discourse of civilisational backwardness around the Arabic script, whereby both the language and script were positioned as artefacts of the past. Using a linear model of progress, the Arabic script was taken up reformist discourse as a symbol of what must be left behind to achieve Western technological mastery.

Post-Ottoman geographies

Albania was an early pioneer of romanisation. In 1879, Albanian presses in Bucharest and Sofia adopted a Latin-based alphabet. Designed by Shemseddin Sami Bey, this 'Stamboul' alphabet was made up of thirty-six letters representing seven vowels and twenty-nine consonants. While primarily designed around the Latin alphabet, it also included a select number of Greek and Cyrillic characters. The alphabet went on to spread through southern and central Albanian lands, with populations that were largely Muslim and still under Ottoman rule. However, the Albanian leaders in Istanbul who adopted the Latin-based script in 1879 had no established power base and as such, were still under political control of the Ottoman government. As a result, the alphabet could not survive the censure and heresy charges that reflected attitudes to alternative scripts in the Ottoman Empire at that time. The Latin-based script did not become the official alphabet of Albania but the desire for romanisation notably continued into the twentieth century.

As with the Turkish Republic, proposed changes to the script in this time engaged with the ways Albanians defined themselves as moving from a distinct people in a multiethnic Empire to a separate nation in the Balkans. Albanian is an Indo-European language that, by the mid nineteenth century, had been variously represented by Latin, Greek, and Arabic scripts. The Arabic alphabet had been introduced in Albania during the gradual process of Islamisation after Turks took control in 1468. In the Ottoman Empire, Albanians had been divided among two *millets* (Muslim and Orthodox) and three religions (70% Muslim, 20% Eastern Orthodox Christian, 10% Roman Catholic).[31] The *millet* system was an official institution of the Ottoman Empire that aimed to maintain peace between diverse populations: organised by religion, each community was able to interpret and implement the rules and regulations of the empire differently. Albanian lands were further divided into four *vilayets* (Yanina, Shkodër, Kosova,

[31] Frances Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bei: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 255-272 (1999).

Monastir), which can be likened to provinces. These administrative divisions served to institutionalise difference within Albanian territory and increase the need for a unifying element. In addition, the population was further divided by two dialects - Tosk in the south, and Gheg in the north.

In this context, Albanian patriots in the late nineteenth century sought to be recognised as a people and a unified entity, as a basis for resisting the absorption of Albanian lands by their neighbours.[32] The unifying function of language was therefore critical to the creation and promotion of a new national identity, especially since other forms of collective identity – such as religion - were lacking. The alphabet was recognised as a tool for producing internal cultural coherence and building connections between formally divided communities. These two operations are linked, with script working to reinforce or build particular homogenous identities while also marking the exclusion of alternative state, ethnic, or religious groupings.[33]

For Albanian communities, Latin, Greek, and Arabic scripts were tied to particular religions - Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Islam, respectively. Usage had been primarily restricted to the propagation of these religions. Therefore, decisions about which script should be made the official standard engaged directly with this religious context and broader geo-political concerns. The Orthodox clergy anathemised the Latin alphabet, arguing that any proposed deviation from Greek was the work of enemies of the faith. However, the Greek alphabet was also problematic for many citizens since it was closely associated with the Greek nationalists who had laid claim to Albanian lands in 1879. The Greek occupation of southern Albania from 1912 strengthened this distaste for anything Greek, including the earlier Stamboul alphabet, with its seven lower-case Greek letters. In contrast, the Arabic script was complicated by its close alignment with Islam and the Ottoman Empire, with the language itself a reminder of the policies and administrative divisions that aimed to keep Muslim and Christian Albanians separate, and therefore vulnerable to their neighbours. Within Albania, the Latin script had been associated with Roman Catholicism, but in the wider Ottoman context, the alphabet was aligned with the 'infidel' Christian West and the secular social ways that were seen as posing a threat to traditional Islam.[34]

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[32] Ibid.

[33] This function also occurs within the same script: on the political and symbolic use of orthography within and between communities, see Sebba, "Ideology and Alphabets in the Former USSR", *The Culture and Politics of Orthography around the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Megan Thomas, "K Is for De-Kolonization: Anticolonial Nationalism and Orthographic Reform," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 4 (2007).

[34] Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bei: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform", 258. See also Aydan Babuna, "The Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia: Ethnic Identity Superseding Religion," *Nationalities* 28, no. 1 (2000).

Ulemas, the Islamic educated class, exhorted against the Latin alphabet. Muslim leaders in the more isolated, less literate north instructed their communities that Arabic was only proper alphabet for Muslims and the Latin alphabet was an instrument of the infidel.[35] Such opposition to a Latin-based alphabet became more effective when members gained the support of the Young Turks in 1909. Those Young Turk leaders who favoured the centralisation of the Ottoman Empire saw the Latin alphabet as contributing to the separation of Albanians from the Empire. To this end, they helped to organise opposition to romanisation and supported its replacement with the Arabic script. As in Turkey, the choice between the two alphabets became a politically and emotionally charged contest over the future of the nation. For instance, 15,000 people gathered in Korçe in 1910 to demonstrate against Arabic letters. When a southern Albanian town learned of a demonstration in favour of the Arabic-script, local protestors sent a telegram to Istanbul claiming that they "will shed the rest of our blood for the Latin alphabet."[36]

In this way, political concerns intersected with matters of faith, with debates regarding script reform reflecting existing religious divisions and the growing need for unity in response to the forced divisions of Ottoman Empire. When faced with the choice between equally problematic options, the Latin script was considered most practical and in the best position to overcome its negative associations. It became the default political choice since it was the only alphabet not associated with any immediate danger to Albanian lands: it was the "least alienating" and most pragmatic.[37]

In a similar way, reform debates in Uzbekistan considered Latin, Cyrillic, and Arabic scripts in terms of which script would be most able to advance the society. At the First Uzbek Language and Orthography Congress held in Tashkent in 1921, romanisation was proposed as an alternative to the reform of the Arabic-based Uzbek alphabet. Although unsuccessful, the proposal was put forward again in 1922 and 1923. While the Congress was not strongly opposed to romanisation as such, they felt that Uzbekistan was not politically ready for such a reform. Conservative authorities at the time were against any change that would break ties between Uzbeks and the rest of the Muslim and Turkic world. In 1922, the Ministry of Education of Bukhara published a regulation declaring that:

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[35] O Hegyi, "Minority and Restricted Uses of the Arabic Alphabet: The *Aljamiado* Phenomenon," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, no. 2 (1979), 266.

[36] Quoted in Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bei: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform", 264. As Coulmas argues, written norms attract emotional attachment so strong that discussions about the reform of a given orthography or script often resemble a religious war more than a rational discourse. See Coulmas, *The Writing Systems of the World*.

[37] Trix, "The Stamboul Alphabet of Shemseddin Sami Bei: Precursor to Turkish Script Reform", 259.

> Our aim is progress, the free and enlightened world. If we go on the right way, we can reach our purpose with the Arabic alphabet, as well.[38]

This vision of a modernising Arabic script is notable. In contrast to Turkey, official discourse created a vision of Arabic that aligned with notions of progress and advancement – notions that had typically accrued around the Latin script. Yet rather than accepting the standard oppositions between Arabic and Latin – the now predictable choice between a backwards, religious past or a technological, secular future – this statement supported Arabic as a viable tool for modernisation. However, this vision was contingent on the existing political elite and by the end of 1922, conservative authorities had lost power and romanising reforms were passed the following year. A linguistic cleansing took place in 1924 just as Uzbekistan became a member of the USSR. All Arabic and Persian loan words were targeted for elimination and replaced with Russian borrowings.[39] As outlined below, there were two major external motivations for the Uzbek leadership to adopt the new alphabet: the wish to go along with other Turkic peoples and Moscow's push for romanisation across post-Ottoman geographies.[40] Discourses of progress were linked to existing political strategy and prejudice, targeting Arab and Islamic elements for exclusion in the creation of a new, regionally unified political system.

By the mid 1920s, Turkic alphabet politics were broadly shifting towards acceptance of Latin script. Many Tatars feared for their long literary heritage and printing tradition while Kazakhs preferred Arabic, as they felt they had made great progress with their reformed Arabic script. Despite these reservations, the following resolution was proposed at the Baku Turkological Congress of 1926:

> The Congress ascertains the superiority and advantage of the new Turkic Roman alphabet vis-à-vis the Arabic and reformed Arabic alphabets, and the importance of the new alphabet from the point of view of civilization and progress, in comparison with the Arabic one. The Congress also considers that the transition to, instruction and implementation of the new alphabet is the duty for every republic and people in each and every Turkic republic.[41]

In the background of these reforms, the Soviet Union was actively supporting Latin and the move away from Arabic script. In 1923, a Commission for Reform of the Arabic Script had been created within the Peoples Commissariat of Nationalities. Driven by the agenda of Soviet leaders, the objective of this Commission was not, as the title would suggest, to reform the Arabic script

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[38] Quoted in Mehmet Uzman, "Romanisation in Uzbekistan Past and Present," *JRAS Series 3* 20, no. 1 (2010), 50.

[39] D Hasanova, "English as a Trademark of Modernity and Elitism," *English Today* 26, no. 1 (2010).

[40] Uzman, "Romanisation in Uzbekistan Past and Present".

[41] Quoted in ibid. 51.

but rather to oversee a union-wide departure.[42] In addition, an All-Union Central Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet was established in 1927 after the Baku Congress in order to coordinate the shift for Turkic languages in the USSR. For instance, supported by Lenin and influenced by socialist ideology, Azerbaijani cultural leaders were among the first to identify the western script as a means for attaining modernisation. Samed-aga Agamaly-ogly, a leftist revolutionary who later became chairman of the All-Union Central Executive Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet, argued for the reform on the grounds that:

> The Arabic alphabet is an instrument of the old Muslim culture, while the Latin alphabet was a tool of the new socialist one."[43]

In Azerbaijan, socialist ideologies intersected with the perceived utility of Latin letters. A member of the original Azerbaijani Committee for the New Turkic Alphabet and editor of the Azerbaijani newspaper *Sarqi Rus,* Shakhtatinski was a prominent Azerbaijani intellectual and key advocate for Romanisation. In a 1922 manuscript entitled "On the Light of the Latin Alphabet" Shakhtatinski argued for the romanisation of Azerbaijan on the grounds that:

> The Latin alphabet is not only international; it is pananthropic. It is known also to those nations which, like the Russian, do not use it. The Latin alphabet is known even by educated Moslems in Asia and Africa.[44]

With Lenin's support, Azerbaijan adopted the Latin script in the summer of 1924. By 1929, a government decree forbade publications in Arabic characters and prohibited the importation of Arabic typographic material.[45]

Soviet support was primarily framed in terms of literacy. Letters were the building blocks of literacy, and literacy in turn would provide the foundation for an enlightened socialist society. But the adoption of the Latin alphabet for Uzbek, Azerbaijan and other Turkic languages of the Soviet Union was also a tangible way for the Bolsheviks to undermine ties with Islam in the 1920s. By supporting these reform movements, the Soviet Union sought to undermine the power of the Muslim clerical establishment and break the connection between Soviet Muslims and fellow believers abroad. With Latin as the favoured medium of literacy, rather than Cyrillic, the party believed they could 'mount an impassable barrier' between traditional Islamic print culture

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[42] See Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953*.

[43] Quoted in Victoria Clement, *Rewriting the "Nation": Turkmen Literacy, Language, and Power, 1904-2004* (Ohio State University: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 85.

[44] Quoted in ibid, 78.

[45] Hegyi, "Minority and Restricted Uses of the Arabic Alphabet: The *Aljamiado* Phenomenon".

and new Soviet literates.[46] Not only did the Soviets aim to establish standard forms of communication by which they could teach the population communist ideals, but they also sought to crush any local cultural forces, such as ethnicity or religion, that might spark a separation from the Soviet Union.[47] Language was a key component of this work.

However, by the 1930s the USSR had become concerned by the pan-Turkic movement that had built around the Latin alphabet and pushed instead for a process of russification. A Central Scientific Institute of Languages and Alphabets was formed in 1937 to oversee a process of russification across North Caucasian and Northern Siberian writing systems. Cyrillic was the preferred tool for building an international proletarian culture. Under Stalin, the Soviet government's position was that the Latin alphabet had played a positive role in the struggle against Arabism but it had ceased to satisfy the ideological requirements of the USSR.[48] Cyrillic was also justified on the grounds of linguistic compatibility, arguing that Cyrillic could represent Turkic and Persian utterances without having to resort to diacritical marks. However, Cyrillic proved no better at representing Turkic and Persian languages than the Latin alphabet. By 1939 Stalin imposed the Cyrillic alphabet across the Soviet Union in an attempt to create internal unity as well as distance from neighbouring Persian and Turkish influences. By this time, the Soviet government claimed the need to forge new identities for Central Asians: this process of integration would be in line with Marxist-Leninist ideals yet would also incorporate components of local character. However, a unified Soviet identity quickly came to take precedence over local identifies and expressions of Islamic faith were repressed. The adoption of the Cyrillic script in place of Latin was a clear sign of cultural power and the shift away from the Ottoman Empire and the European West to a Soviet centre. The era of Turkic alphabet reform ended with many intellectuals marginalised, arrested, or killed.[49]

Such alphabet politics were not a quirk of the early twentieth century. Uzbekistan went on to adapt and abandon four different alphabets within a period of 80 years. Cyrillic was used between 1940-1993 when the Latin alphabet was considered a language of Western imperialism. A second linguistic cleansing occurred in the 1980s and 1990s as result of declining Soviet strength. Here, those Russian loanwords introduced to replace Arabic and Persian elements were themselves eliminated in an attempt to undo previous russification policies. Finally, in 1993, Uzbekistan passed a law to convert the national alphabet from Cyrillic to a modified Latin alphabet, indicating a distancing from Russia and a new openness to the West. The Latin script had shifted

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[46] See Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953* and Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience*.

[47] *Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience*.

[48] See William C. Rowe, "Geolinguistics, Culture, and Politics in the Development and Maintenance of Tajiki," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 28, no. 2 (2011).

[49] Clement, *Rewriting the "Nation": Turkmen Literacy, Language, and Power, 1904-2004*.

from a symbol of imperialism to one of education, technology, modernity, prestige and elitism.[50] By the early 1990s, the Muslim republics of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan also moved to throw off the Cyrillic alphabet as an unwanted Soviet legacy.[51] In Azerbaijan for instance, new reform debates were torn between anti-Russian and anti-Iranian sentiment. The Republic of Azerbaijan declared independence from Russia in 1991, with a return to Turkic roots winning support alongside a policy of derussification. In the same year, a *Law on the Restoration of Latin based Azerbaijani Alphabet* was passed, as leaders echoed debates from the 1926 Congress in Baku. A new era of linguistic purification was expressed through the replacement of Persian, Arabic, and Russian words with those of Turkic origin.[52] In 2000, the government of Turkmenistan began full-scale implementation of a 1993 Presidential decree that Turkmenistan would adopt a Latin-based writing system in place of the Cyrillic alphabet it had used since 1940.[53] Concurrent with this script reform, the government reduced the role of the Russian language and raised the status of Turkmen in its place.

Notably, the Republic of Tatarstan also transitioned the Tatar language from Cyrillic to Latin during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Tatarstan is a federal unit within the Russian Federation and homeland of the largest ethnic minority in Russia, the Tatars, a Turkic speaking people who traditionally practice Sunni Islam. Cyrillic had been imposed by the Soviet regime in 1939, but prior to this, a specially developed Latin script called Yanalif was used between 1927 and 1939, and prior to this, the Arabic script. The transition to Latin script in the 1900s was framed in public discourse as a means to strengthen the sovereignty of Tatarstan and support the Tatar people to survive and develop as a distinct cultural group. In response, Moscow accused Tatarstan of ethnonational separatism and framed the political agitation as a threat to the security of the Russian Federation. In 2002, the Russian Parliament mandated the use of Cyrillic for all official languages within the Russian federation.[54] Speaking in support of Soviet leadership, the leader of the Islamic community of Russia, the supreme mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin, claimed that:

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[50] On contemporary script issues in Uzbekistan, see Carolyn Wei and Beth Kolko, "Resistance to Globalization: Language and Internet Diffusion Patterns in Uzbekistan," *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 11, no. 2 (2005).

[51] For consideration of the "integrating or differentiating" functions of script, in relation to the more recent process of Romanisation in the six newly independent Muslim states of the former Soviet Union, see Jacob Landau, "Alphabet Reform in the Six Independent Ex-Soviet Muslim Republics," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Series 3* 20, no. 1 (2010).

[52] See Jala Garibova and Matanat Asgarova, "Language Policy and Legislation in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan," *Language Problems and Language Planning* 33, no. 3 (2009) and 'Anar', "Reading between the Lines," *Azerbaijan International* 8, no. 1 (2000).

[53] See Clement, *Rewriting the "Nation": Turkmen Literacy, Language, and Power, 1904-2004*.

[54] See Dilyara Suleymanova, "International Language Rights Norms in the Dispute over Latinization Reform in the Republic of Tatarstan," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2010).

> The introduction of the Roman script could destroy the integrity of the Tatar nation and cause other nations in Russia to oppose Tatars.[55]

In the context of post-Soviet fragmentation, the Kremlin returned once again on the Cyrillic alphabet as a means for enforcing a unified cultural identity.

Across these post-Ottoman and Soviet geographies, script reform decisions engaged a complex web of political, religious, and cultural factors. Nationalists, activists, conservatives, and reformers alike drew on the rich histories associated with each script in order to put forward a vision for the future. In the instances explored above, one script was put forward as more able than another to move a society forward, and across these particular nations, Latin and Cyrillic were the strongest candidates. These scripts were not only chosen as a way of moving towards a new secular or socialist model, they were also implicitly a rejection of the backwardness and failures of Empire that had come to be associated with the Arabic script and language more broadly. As outlined in the introductory chapter, linguistic researchers have shown that cultural and political issues can be displaced onto language. As the visual representation of language, the alphabet was caught up by such broader debates - inextricably aligned with the past and judged unable to either function in the modernising present or produce the desired vision of the future.

I suggest that these discourses are firmly rooted in a racialised understanding of progress as a linear movement, following a path from barbarism to civilisation. The Arabic language, its script, and associated cultures were mapped onto a point in the past, while European languages and the Roman alphabet were interpreted as more evolved artefacts of the future. In the following section I argue that not only is Arabic perceived as being unable to leverage the civilisational change required for a nation to operate in a modernising world, but the script and language have also been understood as holding its speakers (the 'Arab race') in the past – in a position that has been coded to imply inferior humanity.

Script, race, and civilisation

The link between language, nation and race was deeply implicated in Western thought by the twentieth century and held a central place in both European nationalism and colonial practices. These discourses shaped linguistic reform in the early twentieth century but they also reveal a relationship between Roman and Arabic alphabets that has been highly fraught by notions of civilisation. The idea of the Western nation state as a discrete entity figured prominently in accounts of language and presented identity in nationalistic, essentialist terms. Johann Gottfried Herder's equation of language with nation in the eighteenth century led to the terms becoming virtually synonymous by the nineteenth century. German romanticism was a key influence, and in

[55] Sebba. *The Culture and Politics of Orthography around the World.*, 144.

particular, Herder's contemporaries such as August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Wilhelm von Humboldt. For instance, von Humboldt saw language as the expression of the spirit of a nation and considered the ways in which language could determine thought. Here, each language was believed to hold a distinct worldview - a worldview that could only partially and incompletely be rendered into another language. Taking a similar approach, Herder warned against the influence of the French language on German. Foreign languages were likened to an invading force, able to threaten the worldview of an individual and their culture.[56] Here, the spirit of the people was at stake, and this spirit was closely mapped onto a congruence of racial, national and linguistic boundaries.

The rise of language studies paralleled the rise in race thinking, such that theories of the origin, 'work', and impact of language became bound up with the production of new, racialised national identities. For instance, language relations were primarily understood in relation to a 'family tree' - a framework that supported Darwin's theory of species evolution and its associated doctrine of the survival of the fittest.[57] While languages may have originated at a similar point, a hierarchy of branching was thought to have occurred over time in a movement from the primitive to an ever more complex and highly developed structure. Imperial conceptions of the modern were mapped against the languages of different cultures, drawing on existing divisions between the West and East, developed and under-developed. Modern colonial racism therefore ranked all languages beyond Greek, Latin, and six modern European languages as inferior, and denied their speakers the ability to produce knowledge or rational thought. These discourses worked to maintain the privilege of Western Renaissance and Enlightenment institutions and categories of thought, while also consolidating the perceived inferiority of those racial groupings associated with irrational speech.[58] The 'science' and arguments of philology were not simply abstract, intellectual exercises: they extended into the political realm and were used in the nineteenth century to promote the political, economic, and military superiority of Europe.

Despite the many differences between various racialised models of language, a common thread was the deterministic link between the form of a language and its speakers. As explored in the Introduction, the influential orientalist Ernest Renan argued that the greatest mistake the 'Semitic race' ever made was in regards to verb tenses. According to this view, contemporary speakers must suffer an inferior culture because their Semitic 'forefathers' failed to conjugate verbs

[56] Spiros Moschonas, "Relativism in Language Ideology: Greece's Latest Language Issue," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 22, no. 2 (2004). Post-colonial theorists such as Franz Fanon continued to privilege language as a site of battle over cultural hegemony: see Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 (1952)). See also Balibar, "Europe as Borderland" on the protection of European linguistic borders. On associated language planning and protective legislation, see Gade, "Language, Identity and the Scriptorial Landscape in Québec and Caraloma".

[57] Ashcroft, "Language and Race".

[58] Miglio, "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience".

properly. While insupportable, orientalist claims such as these gave support to the racialised logics of imperial discourse and the notion that races were primitive due to the deficiencies of their ancestors. The assumption of a deterministic link between language and race continued well into the twentieth century. Writing on the 'psychology of the Arabs' in the 1950s, Shouby characterised the language by a 'general vagueness of thought':

> Any Westerner who has attempted to comprehend Arabic will agree that thoughts expressed in that language are generally vague and hard to pin down. […] Naturally, Arabic that deals with simple or familiar questions creates no difficulties; but the more novel or abstract the content, the more difficult it is to understand Arabic with accuracy. Literate Arabs, unless they have full mastery of a Western language, seem to be inadequately aware of this laxness.[59]

He attributes this 'vagueness' to the Arabic language, arguing that the language consists of diffuse, undifferentiated, and rigid units and structures. Returning to the familiar notes of progress, he explains that the initial stage of all perceptual and conceptual processes is characterised by differentiation, diffuseness, and rigidity. To his mind, Arabic had not yet outgrown this stage.

> Evidence that such is the case is provided by enlightened foreign observers in Arab countries who have wondered why the Arab who exhibits a high intelligence with reference to the field or fields of his specialization does not show as high a competence with reference to other fields generally. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that the linguistic restrictions are at least partially responsible for the low performance of those superior Arabs as well as for the general vagueness and ambiguity found in Arabic writing - general lack of organization governing life in the Arab world of today.[60]

Although their role has been less well recognised, alphabets have also taken part in these debates as another means of differentiating the civilised from the primitive and justifying colonial practice. Taking the side of progress over barbarism, the Latin alphabet was used within colonial discourses to bolster arguments for the superiority of Western cultures, and as evidence of the need to forcibly bring colonised people out of a pre-modern past. For instance, in an account from the late nineteenth century, the scholar Isaac Taylor granted clear superiority to European alphabetic writing, arguing that the complexity of Eastern scripts led to the:

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[59] E. Shouby, "The Influence of the Arabic Language on the Psychology of the Arabs " *Middle East Journal* 5, no. 3 (1951).

[60] Ibid.

> Degeneration of religion into magic, knowledge into superstition and the increased caste separation of the learned rulers from their unlettered subjects.[61]

Almost a century later, a scholar, Norman Brown, proposed romanisation in India and Pakistan for the purpose of modernisation. He noted that while the principal scripts of these countries have provided a "usually successful" means of writing in the past, they needed to be adapted to new conditions.[62] Since they developed from Indic and Arabic-Persian script families, they held too many "disadvantages for use in the modern world".[63] For instance, the large number of symbols led to difficulty in learning to read and write, and were a handicap to future literacy and technological uptake. In the 1920s and 1930s, some of India's leading linguistic scholars also advocated for the romanisation of Indic scripts, drawing on evidence that similar reforms had been successful in Indonesia and Turkey.[64] As such, the opposition between Arabic script and modernity circulated widely through colonial discourse, beyond Turkic and Ottoman geographies. However, the relationship between Arabic and Latin scripts was framed by the specific political history of India and played out quite differently. As a result, those in power never seriously considered romanisation, despite its supposed benefits. Powerful opposition to this change framed the choice in terms of cultural imperialism: local scripts functioned as symbols of nationalism while the Roman script remained an unfortunate and irrevocable reminder of British imperialism.[65] As with language politics more broadly, scripts worked as both symbols of domination or resistance, linked to broad hierarchies of civilisation and the need to contest unwelcome power structures.

A sense of civilisational superiority has also found its way into political histories of the Latin and Arabic alphabets. For instance, recent scholarship has been largely been torn between a Nabataean and Syriac origin for the Arabic script. Those who argue for a Nabataean origin cite reasons such as monopoly over trade routes, political organisation, economic viability, and a 'deep sense of self' that allowed them to develop their own script. For instance, in 2001 the academic Issam Mousa considered the Nabataean's nascent nationalism and long years of steadfastness as key factors that gave them greater precision in controlling their immediate environment.[66] In Mousa's account, the Romans and Greeks developed vowels by changing the

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[61] Quoted in Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination*, 31.

[62] Brown, "Script Reform in Modern India, Pakistan and Ceylon", 1.

[63] Ibid, 3.

[64] See also ibid.

[65] On imperialism and alphabet politics in this region, see Kabir, "Remediated Script and Partition Effects in Pakistan", Prabhakar, "The Politics of a Script: Demand for Acceptance of Roman Script for Bodo Language", Ray, "Writing the Body: Cosmology, Orthography, and Fragments of Modernity in Northeastern India", and Ahmad, "Urdu in Devanagari: Shifting Orthographic Practices and Muslim Identity in Delhi".

[66] Issam Suleiman Mousa, "The Arabs in the First Communication Revolution: The Development of the Arabic Script," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 26 (2001).

'unused' consonants borrowed from Phoenician: the inclusion of these vowels allowed the Latin script to become more 'flexible' than the Nabataean script. Therefore, he argued that the annexation of Nabataea was made possible because the Romans used a superior medium of communication.[67] Compared to other eastern scripts however, the Arabic script proved stronger. After annexation, the Nabataeans became intermediaries between southern Nabataea and Rome and Greece. Due to this strategic location and the continued strength of their civilisation, the Nabataean-derived Arabic script was able to expel the Greek alphabet from Anatolia, Syria and Egypt, the Latin from Northern Africa, and the Cyrillic from Bosnia.

A linked discourse attributes the so-called unique development and strength of Western civilisation to the specific qualities of the Latin writing system. These narratives propose that the Greek and Latin alphabets should be regarded as one of the greatest triumphs of civilisation, and thus, of the (European male) human mind. By implication, Arabic and Semitic alphabets were deemed to lack the qualities that gave rise to this achievement. In this way, the invention of writing has been underpinned by civilisational discourses with clear racial implications: writing made it possible for (European) humanity to progress from barbarism to civilisation. Accordingly, dominant nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship minimised any Semitic or Oriental influence on early alphabetic development to ensure that the achievement remained racially 'pure'.[68] This effort proved somewhat difficult however, due to the many visual and phonetic similarities between Greek, Arabic and Semitic forms. For instance, the first two letters of each alphabet suggest a shared origin: alpha, alif, and 'alep; beta, bā, and bêt (Greek, Arabic and Semitic forms respectively). Contemporary scholarship has come to acknowledge the key role that Phoenicia played in the development of writing and recognises that its location on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean (corresponding to modern Lebanon and the coastal planes of Syria) was a significant factor in the transmission of writing. In contrast, scholars in the eighteenth century broadly dismissed the ample ancient testimony that the Phoenicians had given the alphabet to the Greeks, while nineteenth-century scholars grudgingly came to admit a limited form of Semitic influence. That is, rather than absolute denial of a Phoenician origin, they focussed on questioning the period of transmission and the location of first contact.

To this end, the site of transmission from the Orient to the West was moved as far from Mainland Greece as possible: for instance, Crete was proposed in one account, while others

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[67] Ibid.

[68] For a comprehensive and critical survey of these debates, see Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

suggested the eighth century BCE Greek colony at Al Mina on the Syrian coast.[69] Racial concerns underpinned these arguments, as one scholar in 1900 makes clear:

> The Phoenicians, doubtless, had marts here and there on coast and island; but there is no reason to think that Canaanites ever made homes or themselves on Greek soil or introduced Semitic blood into the population of Greece.[70]

Bernal argues that these narratives demonstrate the need to maintain a racially pure childhood for Greece, and thus for Western civilisation. It was crucial that alphabetic transmission be located outside of mainland Greece, since to imply otherwise would suggest substantial Phoenician settlement and 'racial mixing'.[71] This tension continued into twentieth-century scholarship. In 1927, one work even argued for an Aryan origin of the Latin alphabet in order to redefine the racial nature of Phoenicians as Aryans rather than Semites, while another sought to locate the origin of alphabet in England.[72] Of particular note, Stanley Morison's renowned history of the Roman script, published in 1972, begins with the observation that Roman letters are an inheritance of Greece. He explains:

> As it seems profitless to push this inquiry back to Phoenicia, we may recognize that the alphabetical forms, whatever their remote origin, are found in Greece in the 6th century BC; secondly, that they were appropriated by Rome two or three centuries later.[73]

Here, the previously fraught debate about the racial origins – or rather, the racial 'purity' - of the script is obscured from view. Given the way in which the alphabet has been framed by notions of unique civilisational achievement, it is clear that the stakes of this debate were high: the outcome would have challenged the superiority of the West. By implication, allowing for a Semitic origin or influence would collapse the associated civilisational hierarchies and undo the logic that allowed for the differentiation of the Western mind from its inferiors.

This tension is particularly evident in discussions of the Arabic vowel – or rather, the absence of the Arabic vowel. In the 1930s, the classical art historian Rhys Carpenter proposed that the

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[69] Ibid. Bernal notes that the challenge to this position finally came from the Israeli epigrapher Joseph Naveh in 1973, allowing the dates of transmission to move forward, until the tenth century was more common.

[70] Quoted in ibid, 396.

[71] Ibid.

[72] See Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination.*

[73] Stanley Morrison, *Politics and Script: Aspects of Authority and Freedom in the Development of Graeco-Latin Script f the Sixth Century BC to the Twentieth Century AD* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 5. In contrast again, White's work on typography places the origin of typography at 20,000 BCE, with the cave painting of a bison: see Alex White, *Thinking in Type: The Practical Philosophy of Typography* (New York: Allworth Press, 2005).

alphabet was likely introduced to Greece in 720 BCE but that vowels were created after this transmission: this "brilliantly Greek creation of the vowels" was beyond the capacity of Semitic cultures.[74] While acknowledging limited Semitic influence, the creation of the vowel allowed the Western alphabet and its civilisation to rise above any Eastern origin. This focus on vowels as the unique European achievement continued even into the late twentieth century. In 1982, Walter Ong argued in his best-known work, *Orality and Literacy*, that writing was responsible for transforming human consciousness.[75] Within literate civilisations, different alphabetic systems have had varying abilities to promote qualities such as analytic thought. Accordingly, the Greeks "did something of major psychological importance when they developed the first alphabet complete with vowels."[76] While he recognises that early Semitic cultures invented the phonetic alphabet, Ong argues that the Greeks 'perfected' it with vowels. The system of vowels, this staggering 'Greek achievement', both presaged and enabled their analytic exploits in scientific reason and philosophical precision. Through these accounts, the overall narrative of Western superiority could be rescued from Semitic influence by crediting the Greeks with the invention of the first 'true' alphabet.

While the Arabic alphabet does not contain a clear set of vowels like the Roman alphabet, this difference should not be interpreted as absence or deficiency. Each consonantal letter in Arabic is pronounced with a particular 'movement' of the mouth and vocal cords: this is referred to as either 'opening', 'fracturing', or 'contracting'. The same letters can be moved in three different ways to produce differences in meaning. For instance, the string of letters k-t-b can be vocalised as *kataba* (he wrote), *kutiba* (it was written), or *kutub* (books), depending on which way the letter is moved, while the sequence m-I-k can be pronounced *malaka* (he possessed), *mulika* (was possessed), *malik* (a king), *mulk* (possession of a kingdom) or *malak* (angel).[77] According to the linguist Mouçef Chelli, the key difference between the Arabic movement and the European vowel is that Arabic movements cannot be produced independently of a letter and a letter cannot be produced without a movement: in contrast, European vowels and consonants seem to exist independently of each other.[78] Arabic script does allow for movements to be marked for clarity and consistency when required. For instance, reproductions of the Quran record these movements with vowel-like markings to indicate correct pronunciation. However, differences in dialects between Arabic speaking regions have given rise to multiple and quite distinct variations in pronunciation. Accordingly, written Arabic for a broad audience often excludes marking to allow for these possibilities. In addition, these unstable vocalisations can be used specifically for

[74] Quoted in Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, 395.

[75] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Techologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), 89-91.

[76] Ibid, 90.

[77] Al-Toma, "The Arabic Writing System and Proposals for Its Reform".

[78] Cited in Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.

literary expression as they allow writers to emphasise and play with the relative indeterminateness of the written form.

As Timothy Mitchell argues, the vowel is a peculiar European invention but it is not something 'missing' from the Arabic language.[79] Nonetheless, the Arabic alphabet continues to be assessed in terms of absence and ambiguity. As the writer and scholar Jonathan Raban reflects in 1971:

> The very language of Arabia…is a labyrinth of ambiguities in which there are hardly any literal meanings, only symbolic gestures. It is a language in which the same word, with a slightly different inflection, means both `sexual intercourse' and 'socialism'. Is it any wonder that Arabs are difficult to understand?[80]

Here, the Arabic script is exoticised via a lens of sexual and political disorder, an implicitly ambiguous object that the Western observer is unable to comprehend. But more insidious accounts draw a link between linguistics and race, from the Arabic language to the nature of the Arab people. For instance, Ong argues that the reader of Semitic writing is forced to draw on non-textual as well as textual data: they must already be familiar with the language they were reading in order to know which vowels to supply between the consonants. Accordingly, Semitic writing is still "very much immersed in the non-textual human lifeworld."[81] In contrast, the Greek alphabet was able to stand at a distance, in a position of isolation where sound could be analysed more abstractly into purely spatial components. In this way, the fully vocalised vowel of the Roman alphabet is used to judge the written Arabic text as an incomplete consonantal fragment, indicative of a primitive state of being and thought.

This approach to script has also entered modern aesthetic discourse and come to frame the way in which both Latin and Arabic alphabets are understood. In such accounts, Arabic letters are considered to have a mystical, decorative flow while Latin letters are practical and structured: once again, both of these qualities are linked back to the biological and cultural essence of the populations who use these scripts.[82] For instance, in 2003 the design commentator Sherry Blakenship described Latin letters as formal, impersonal, rigid, separate, symmetrical, static, grey,

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[79] Ibid, 148-149.

[80] Quoted in Obeidat, "Arabic and the West".

[81] Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Techologizing of the Word*, 88. As Jacques Derrida deconstructed in his early work, these logocentric frameworks value mastery over indeterminate meaning: see J Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

[82] For similar accounts, see Mourad Boutros, *Talking About Arabic* (New York: Mark Batty, 2009) and Randa Abdel Baki, "Bilingual Design Layout Systems: Cases from Beirut," *Visible Language* 47, no. 1 (2013). For instance, Arabic and English can be viewed as incompatible, "aesthetically, logistically, linguistically": see Shannon Mattern, "Font of a Nation: Creating a National Graphic Identity for Qatar," *Public Culture* 20, no. 3 (2008), 389.

geometric, vertical and mechanical.[83] They compliment technology and commercial application, and exist to serve the demands of efficiency, profit, and production. In contrast, she saw Arabic forms as influenced by their calligraphic history: as such, they are musical, rhythmic, fluid, dynamic, decorative, individualistic, contemplative, mystical, and asymmetric, expressing a sense of timelessness through rhythms and endless repetitions and decorative patterns.[84] Here, the ambiguity and shape of Arabic script is not judged on its linguistic merits or ability to give rise to rational thought (as per previous accounts): rather, it is celebrated as a vision of exotic otherness, timeless, yet somehow still outside the contemporary world of technology and the logic of modern production. In this account, both scripts are reified in their difference and forced to signify familiar, racialised terms of opposition. As she explains:

> Arabic calligraphy can be traced through an unbroken chain of masters each of whom labored countless hours in patient imitation of their predecessors. The resulting elegance comes through this repetition in which a nearly mystical attachment binds the writing to the religion of Islam despite distances and cultures. Latin instead reflects Western thinking, with an emphasis on the individual, and with rewards for innovation and diversification, as well as concerns about efficiency, progress, profit, and production. It is concerned with legibility and clear communication.[85]

Just as scholars sought to justify the implicit inferiority of Eastern scripts through reference to technical qualities, such as vowels or agglutination, contemporary design discourse refers to the structural qualities of the two scripts. For instance, Latin letters have upper and lower cases, and have only one shape per letter: they can extend above and below the line, stand independently, or join in connection. In contrast, Arabic letters have varying heights, no capital letters, and are physically linked by a continuous horizontal stroke in the lower half of the letters. Each letter can change into three or four forms, depending on its position in the word, while up to eight diacritical marks exist across the alphabet. When the two scripts are placed in proximity, Arabic seems smaller to the eye – an experience that can result in a sense of visual dis-coordination, or 'visual schizophrenia', as the eye attempts to create a textual balance between two alphabets that can't be reconciled.[86] This difference has been extrapolated to the level of archetype. As Richard Harrison reflects:

> If the old adage that art represents the people is true, then there are stark differences between the two archetypes; Arabic is a free-flowing, organic, symbolic representation; and the other,

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[83] Sherry Blackenship, "Cultural Considerations: Arabic Calligraphy and Latin Typography," *Design Issues* 19, no. 2 (2003), 60-61.

[84] Ibid, 60-61. The significance of Arabic calligraphy is explored in more depth in chapter 4.

[85] Ibid, 61.

[86] Boutros, *Talking About Arabic*, 38.

> the English type, is aligned, articulate and rigid. If this adage is true, then the soul of the Arabic culture is in safe hands.[87]

Once again, both scripts are understood to reflect, produce, or contain the soul of a culture. For Blakenship, this difference is one of worldview:

> The East and West hold different worldviews. The West is deeply committed to the idea that the real world is external to the observer and that knowledge consists in recording and classifying data as accurately as possible. The East has retained the belief that the real world is almost totally internal to the observer. Arab artists do not imitate the forms of the world that surround them, but instead express an idea in the mind; an ideal to become manifest; and a concept in which complexity, symmetry, and perfection are superior to nature. Each of these orientations of the world permeates the respective languages and the forms in which they are writing.[88]

Blending nineteenth-century romantic notions of language and nationhood with Edward Said, Blakenship argues that orientalism promoted the difference between a familiar West and the strange East, and this resulted in polarisation and limitation of human interaction between the two cultures, including their writing system.[89] While this argument recognises that writing systems are caught up within the structure of orientalism, she nonetheless upholds this difference rather than attempting to challenge it. She accepts these essentialist oppositions as an opportunity for an 'encounter' with the Other without judgment or preconception.

Just as nationalist conceptions of language sought to establish an essentialist connection between language and worldview, these accounts of Arabic script draw a line between language, thought and civilisation. Within this logic, the qualities of the Arabic alphabet are believed to determine or reflect a type of thinking, the potential of a population, and thus, in this instance, the progress Arab and Semitic civilisations.

Reflections

A racialised logic of time and progress was implicit to orientalist, colonial, and post-Ottoman discourses on the alphabet. These discourses rested to varying degrees on the notion that cultures could be located at different points along a linear stream of time. For Said, the idea of Eastern backwardness follows directly from European ideas of positional superiority that have permeated Western thought from the late Renaissance to the present.[90] Within this framework of knowledge

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[87] Richard Harrison, "Jerome 10," in *Arabic Tattoos*, ed. Jon Udelson (Thames and Hudson, 2008), 107.

[88] Blackenship, "Cultural Considerations: Arabic Calligraphy and Latin Typography", 61.

[89] Ibid, 60.

[90] See Gerald MacLean, "Strolling in Syria with William Biddulph," *Criticism* 46, no. 3 (2004).

production, the difference between the Roman and Arabic alphabets was understood in relation to an evolutionary continuum that placed related cultures on a line stretching from East to West, under-developed to developed, barbarism to civilisation. Accordingly, the progress of those people considered Eastern or 'Oriental' could be stimulated by the introduction of Western artefacts, such as the Roman alphabet, along with European systems of education, culture, and law.

Turkish leaders used an explicit discourse of progress in their effort to move the nation toward a Eurocentric modernity and away from the perceived stagnation of the Orient. Drawing on the failures of the Ottoman Empire, Atatürk politicised script reform as a choice between corrupt, Eastern stagnation and Western style modernity. Here, total reform was necessary to sweep away every aspect of Ottoman culture and society, transforming or eliminating all that was deemed 'backwards' and resistant to progress. Due to its connection to the Ottoman Empire, proponents of these reforms presented the Arabic alphabet as a key obstacle to progress. By the mid 1920s, Turkic alphabet politics more broadly were shifting away from the Arabic script, with states such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan also taking up the Roman alphabet in an act of self-transformation. This period was a critical juncture for Turkic alphabet politics, as newly formed political entities turned to the Roman script as a means to unify their populations, eliminate perceived inferiority, and propel themselves into modernity. While the Soviet Union undid the majority of these reforms, what remained constant was the notion that the alphabet was a lever of civilisation – able to evolve a population into the kind of political organisation and culture they desired.

These script reform movements should be placed in the context of broader orientalist discourses that used the Roman alphabet to bolster arguments for the superiority of Western civilisation. Here, the script was not simply a symbol of the West – it was seen as an invention that shaped the analytic excellence of the classical Greeks, and in so doing, gave rise to technologically advanced modernity. These discourses were underpinned by clear racial implications: writing made it possible for Western Europe to progress from barbarism to civilisation. In contrast, Arabic and Semitic alphabets lacked certain qualities (notably, vowels) that enabled rational thought. To protect this achievement, dominant nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship denied any non-Western influence on early alphabetic development to ensure that the achievement remained racially 'pure'.

Therefore, when Turkic leaders chose the Roman alphabet as a key element of their new national identities, they also took on an artefact that had been fiercely guarded by these discourses of racial exceptionalism. While scholarship sought to tie the Roman alphabet to biology and structures of thought in an effort to protect the unique Western mind from its others, Turkic states used the script to define their own identity and challenge their perceived inferiority. This

move upheld the logic of civilisation but also challenged its biological, racialised overtones. By implication, the use of the Roman script by Turkic populations undermined the civilisational hierarchies established between the West and the Orient and muddied the logic that allowed for the differentiation of the Western mind from its inferiors.

The Arabic alphabet has therefore played a leading role in narratives of civilisational progress. By the twentieth century, both the language and script had become inextricably tied to Islamic practice, cultural backwardness, and a broad sense of civilisational decline. In the following chapter, I turn to the representations of Arabic script within Orientalist and contemporary imaginative geographies to further unpack these associations and in particular, the notion of irrational barbarism.

Surveillance and security

The appearance of Arabic script has come to signify the risk of terror in the contemporary U.S. security state. In the post-9/11 era, the intensification of surveillance systems within and beyond North America aimed to uncover enemies who posed a threat to national security. These systems were designed to identify potential threats through a complex system of data collection and analysis, enabling analysts to track suspicious activity and prevent acts of terror. The conjunction of surveillance and racial profiling has worked to reinscribe visual signifiers of Islam and the Middle East, such as the Arabic alphabet, within a frame of terror. As a result, the script is now understood as a threat to be assessed, monitored, and neutralised. I argue that the intensification of surveillance has led to the greater implication of Arabic script within discourses of risk and threat, such that the practices of viewing and knowing Arabic script have become implicitly tied to the apparatus of the modern security state.

The first half of this chapter focuses on how the Arabic alphabet is able to operate as a sign of terror. Consistent with the approach taken across this thesis, I argue that the contemporary shape of Arabic must be understood in relation to persistent, historical discourses that have shaped the way the Arabic script is viewed, given meaning, and put to work in a particular cultural-political moment. To this end, I turn to instances where the Arabic script has been used by authorities to amplify cultural anxieties and manage the risk of Arab populations within Western space. I begin by exploring a narrative from post-colonial France in order to consider the way in which the appearance of Arabic script on Parisian streets was able to signify an influx of dangerous immigrant bodies and an impending cultural invasion. Reaching back even further, the use of Arabic script in fifteenth-century Granada was outlawed as part of a raft of measures to manage Arab populations within Spanish territory and eliminate visible signs of cultural difference. The Arabic script was isolated as a key site of difference to be managed in direct relation to the perceived risk posed by Islamic populations. Returning to modern security regimes, I argue that an equivalent operation is evident at the level of discourse and practice. The contemporary security state relies on fear and the proliferation of hidden enemies. According to this model, an omnipresent enemy could be anywhere, could strike at any time, and could be 'among us'. This enemy has been Islamic terrorism - understood as a relentless anti-Western force, intent on committing acts of violence from within or beyond the Western state. Within security discourses, the figure of the terrorist was built around the familiar shape of prejudice and extended over new figureheads of Islamic extremism such as Osama bin Laden, the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Through reference to a number of recent media incidents involving the Arabic script, I suggest that the

alphabet works alongside other figures and cultural artefacts of Arab-Islamic origin as a recognisable, legible threat.

I explore the specific use of Arabic within modern security discourses in relation to a broader, historical trend whereby the Arabic alphabet has provided a vehicle for articulating and managing cultural anxieties about dangerous populations. But the Arabic script functions as more than simply a sign of terror within modern security regimes: in the second half of the chapter, I unpack the ways in which the script is also entangled within the processes of surveillance as an object of analysis, a tool for tracking suspicious activity, and a potential weapon in the so-called war against terror. Through surveillance, the modern security state deploys tactics of vision and control in an effort to render all spaces known and knowable: in effect, surveillance systems strive to achieve a kind of all-seeing authority which enables power and rules out surprise. I argue that the Arabic script functions as a key weakness at the heart of these efforts to monitor, track, analyse, and control dangerous populations. In particular, information systems have not yet been able to effectively capture the difference posed by the Arabic script. By corrupting data streams with errors and preventing meaningful analysis, the Arabic script has hindered the efforts of security agencies to deploy it as a reliable tool for surveillance. I conclude by turning to initiatives that seek to 're-arm' with the Arabic language and use linguistic knowledge and literacy as a tool to support security objectives. Here, the Arabic language and script are deployed as weapons against specific enemies - the Islamic terrorist, the hijacker, and the insurgent. Implicitly tying language to the objectives of the security state, the field of 'security Arabic' works to consolidate the racially coded danger at the heart of counter-terrorism regimes. Already perceived as a signifier of 9/11 and an artefact of terrorism, this chapter argues that all of these functions are reflective of a higher-level trend toward the militarisation and securitisation of the Arabic language and script.

Signifying threat

In the opening section to Juan Goytisolo's *Landscapes after the Battle*, the protagonist finds that over night the Arabic script has transformed an entire Parisian quartier. Set in 1980s France, the short story begins with the discovery that the Arabic language and script had invaded the city, taking over the familiar space of newspapers, shops, and traffic signs. Goytisolo writes that this 'evil' had:

> Infiltrated gradually, in silence, by seemingly harmless stages, perhaps with the deliberate intention of not alarming the local residents.[1]

[1] Juan Goytisolo, *Landscapes after the Battle* (New York: Seaver Books, 1983), 1.

These foreign elements had finally transformed the city, resulting in what could only be understood as an unmistakable invasion. This conquest had occurred by way of public signs, which had accumulated then swelled and broadened, an irresistible rise drawn together by:

> One distinctive trait: their lack of intelligibility. They were written in a strange alphabet, and the longtime residents of the neighborhood passed by without even noticing them, as though they were mere idle scrawls.[2]

The narrator believed that the increased presence of script was the result of foreigners invading the buildings of the neighbourhoods and offering their labour to local merchants. In another time, this script would have been contained in Arabic-speaking countries, but now it was being scrawled on the walls of France 'like a plague'.[3] Since the language was incomprehensible to the protagonist, he feared that these lines of thick spray paint could signify an insult or a threat. The writing was perceived as both insolent and provocative.

In this context, the appearance of Arabic script conveyed the fear that immigration would force out and transform what is familiar and known. The encounter draws on the broad cultural anxieties that developed in the post-colonial period, and in particular, the influx of Arabic-speaking migrants into France and the shifting political relationships between France and the Maghreb.

The French colonial period began with the conquest of Algeria in 1830 and ended with the war of independence, from 1954-1962. France had ruled the second largest empire of the modern age. At its peak in the 1920s and 1930s, Greater France extended across ten million square kilometres and one hundred million citizens and subjects. Empire played a crucial role in modern French history and its citizens were deeply touched by both direct and indirect effects of imperialism: even after the war of independence, the memory of Empire continued to haunt the French consciousness.[4] Spain, Italy, Greece, Great Britain and Germany have all built distinct relationships with the Arab-Muslim world – the combined history of which contributes to the broader 'Euro-Arab' cultural relationship. But France arguably has one of the more intense and conflicting cultural relationships with the Arab world.[5] Defined by either seduction (as with Egypt) or domination (as with Algeria), French culture has deeply influenced Arab societies and produced a complex intermingling that French citizens have been forced to confront. The period

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[2] Ibid, 2.

[3] Ibid, 2.

[4] See Robert Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

[5] As argued by Jean-Robert Henri, "France, the Arabs, and the War of Cultures," *Journal of Arab Affairs* 11, no. 2 (1992). Regarding the impact of Algeria on French identity during this period, see also ibid.

of collapse and independence after World War Two marked a shift in the relationship between France and Algeria but also between France and the Arab World more broadly. Goytisolo's short story is a satire of one of the most direct consequences of this cultural interaction for French citizens – the increase of immigration from Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. Using the symbol of Arabic script, Goytisolo engaged this conjunction of declining power, shifts in national identity, and an influx of foreign bodies.

The colonial and post-colonial exodus had been prompted by the economic need for cheap labour. Faced with limited employment, struggling economies, and pressure on local resources, people from the colonies responded to the French call for work. In addition, the Algerian war for independence resulted in an influx of pro-French Algerians. Although France formally ended this migration in 1974, initiating a period of anti-immigration policies, the presence of existing immigrants within France remained a site of conservative political anxiety.[6] Even before the conservative National Front Party made an electoral breakthrough in 1983-1984, French workers had been expressing racist views toward 'guest workers' from the colonies and were among the first to oppose immigration. Despite the presence of many Anglo-Saxon immigrants at the time, nationalist rhetoric was specifically focused on those defined as 'Black', 'non-Western', and 'un-christian'.[7] In this same period, politicians were exaggerating the extent to which Muslim immigrants would undermine French identity and culture. From the late 1970s, Muslims inside France were achieving a much higher level of visibility in terms of increased immigration but also a process of more overt religious practice and mosque construction. These changes threatened the construction of white, French identity, particularly when it became clear that the immigrants who first appeared in the 1970s were remaining in France: they were, or inevitably would become, 'French' and therefore legally inseparable.[8] The Arab spectre became the French enemy within, framed as a threat to a 'true French identity' unless it could be fully integrated and divested of all cultural, linguistic, and visible difference. Politicians, particularly in the National Front Party, exaggerated the extent to which Muslim immigrants would undermine French identity and culture, or in later versions, act as a fifth column for fundamentalist terrorists.[9]

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[6] See Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (Hong Kong: MacMillan, 1993) and Brian Jenkins and Tony Chafer, eds., *France: From the Cold War to the New World Order* (London: Macmillan, 1996). This feeling was expressed in a poll from 1989, in which 68% of the French who took part stated that they believed "the limit of absorption" had been reached. See Georges Ubbiali, "Towards the Institutionalization of Prejudice?," in *New Xenophobia in Europe*, ed. Bernd Baumgartl and Adrian Favell (London: Kluwer Law International, 1996). Note that a more detailed account of terror attacks in twenty-first century France are out of scope, as outlined in the introductory chapter.

[7] Bonilla-Silva, "'This Is a White Country': The Racial Ideology of the Western Nations of the World System", 193.

[8] See Maxime Cervulle, "French Homonormativity and the Commodification of the Arab Body," *Radical History Review* 100 (2008).

[9] Macmaster and Lewis, "Orientalism: From Unveiling to Hyperveiling".

In *Landscapes after the Battle,* Goytisolo uses the Arabic script to illustrate this threatening difference within, this sense that a force that refused to assimilate was steadily invading the local and the familiar. The text represents this encounter visually, interweaving Arabic letters through more familiar paragraphs of Roman script to help recreate the protagonist's experience of disorientation and fear (figure 1):

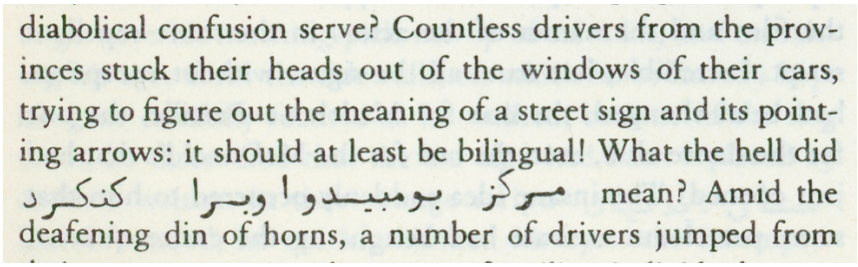
diabolical confusion serve? Countless drivers from the provinces stuck their heads out of the windows of their cars, trying to figure out the meaning of a street sign and its pointing arrows: it should at least be bilingual! What the hell did مرکز بومبیدوا وبرا کنکرد mean? Amid the deafening din of horns, a number of drivers jumped from

Figure 1: Use of Arabic script in Juan Goytisolo, *Landscapes after the Battle* (New York: Seaver Books, 1983), 3.

In regards to the inclusion of untranslated Arabic in the text, the literary critic Emily Apter argues that the non-Arabic speaking reader is forced into a semantic impasse and must question whether they have been provided a trustworthy translation or a joke at the reader's expense.[10] The presumption of danger and deceit is conveyed by these moments of linguistic uncertainty. Translation within the text becomes untrustworthy and the reader must wonder whether they are as vulnerable as the protagonist, uncertain of what dangers are present and lost without any legible signposts.

As a narrative device, the embedding of this uncertainty in street signs is particularly significant since these are understood to function as key sites for imprinting a nation's self-image, ambitions, and memories.[11] Street signs have provided a means for recording French collective memory – to honour famous men, commemorate battles, recall historic associations, or embody the concept of liberty and revolution. Around 275 Parisian streets across twenty *arrondissements* make explicit colonial references.[12] These street names commemorate explorers and colonial soldiers, colonial military units and writers, as well as a vast geography of colonial places in French - from *Annam*, *Combodge*, *Madagascar*, and *Soudan*, to the cities of *Alger*, *Constantine*, and *Tunis*. Most of the major colonies appear in the streets of France along with the names honouring often obscure sites of battle or settlement. As the historian Robert Aldrich argues, French colonies have been quite literally inscribed on the street and the underground map of Paris.[13] When Goytisolo rewrites this

[10] Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature*, 95.

[11] Aldrich, *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories.*

[12] Ibid, 27. See also "Putting the Colonies on the Map: Colonial Names in Paris Streets," in *Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France*, ed. Tony Chafer and Amanda Sackur (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

[13] *Vestiges of the Colonial Empire in France: Monuments, Museums and Colonial Memories.*

map of names into Arabic script, he threatens a key site of French history and identity. Transforming these names into Arabic had the effect of rewriting French space, culture, and identity while also emphasising the colonial imprints already present in France. While traces of the Arab East were present in the streets of France, he exaggerates the nature of this mark so that it overwhelms the familiar and known. Here, the Arabic script becomes understood as a threat in terms of its ability to invade public space and the semantic comfort of intelligibility.

The text also draws on a broader European discourse equating immigration to Islamic expansionism, such that the movement of workers is made analogous to the invading armies of the Ottoman Empire.[14] With varying levels of support, this sense of danger has been perceived across Western Europe more broadly, founded in discourses of Islamophobia and orientalism. Islam has occupied a unique place in the imaginations of Western Europeans from the eleventh century onward, with the relationship between Western Europe and the so-called Orient taking shape through centuries of consequent political, cultural, and religious conflict. The threat has been understood as predominantly religious and geographic in nature, with Islam seen as an invading force and threat to both territory and Christianity. For instance, early medieval European writers depicted the Saracens as a plague on Christendom, spreading devastation in their wake, and for centuries both were engaged in territorial and ideological conflict over the Holy Land. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, led by Ottoman leader Mohammad II, Islam was more clearly defined as a military threat. Their forces seemed invincible and the Arab World was feared in terms of its perceived fanaticism, tyranny, and unpredictable savagery. When the Ottoman Empire began to lose strength and hold a weaker position in relation to Western Europe, they were no longer perceived as an unstoppable force. But the sense of fear and hostility remained, with Arab bodies imagined as an enemy with a regularity and singularity of violent purpose, a unified cultural adversity.[15]

Due in large part to this history, there has been a distinct undercurrent of conservative political fear throughout the twentieth century that European cities will be overrun by Arabic-speaking foreign immigrants, the continent will fall under *Sharia* law, and Christianity will either cease to exist or become subservient to Islam.[16] In Goytisolo's work, the Arabic alphabet operates as a vehicle for articulating complex political shifts in post-colonial France as well as these broader Islamophobic discourses. Operating along the vulnerable conjunction of familiarity, assimilation and threat, the geography of fear expressed in *Landscapes after the Battle* turns around the notion that the colonial guest-worker will rewrite French identity and overtake French space. Here, the Orient is positioned as an enemy that has begun to invade Western space through the bodies of

[14] Matt Carr, "You Are Now Entering Eurabia," *Race and Class* 48, no. 1 (2006).

[15] Hammond, "Typologies of the East: On Distinguishing Balkanism and Orientalism". See also Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*.

[16] Carr, "You Are Now Entering Eurabia".

Arab immigrants – an infiltration that has been gradual but should not be seen as harmless. The incomprehensive Arabic script wraps around the fear of these invading colonial bodies, of a newly awakened Islam and the cultural transformation of Western space. Space and script work together to enact a distinct cultural anxiety – that of the Arab-Islamic Orient threatening Western space from within and without.

The particular shape of this threat is particular to the French context but it is also reflective of a long, antagonistic history of managing Islamic bodies and cultural difference within European space. For instance, the issue of Islamic integration also played out through the Arabic script in sixteenth-century Spanish Granada. By the fifteenth century, Spain had come to administer non-Christian subject populations in its overseas colonies as well as large religious minorities within its borders. In this period, the *convivencia* (coexistence) established between Christians, Jews, and Muslims – a situation that had permitted religious minorities to maintain their traditional practices and customs - began to deteriorate.[17] The practice of Islamic faith was increasingly perceived as intolerable in European territory and the presence of those who followed different laws was considered unacceptable.[18] As infidels living within the borders of Christian Spain, they were perceived to compromise both the security of the state and the authority of the Church. On the one hand, the existence of Islam on Christian territory might encourage Christians to embrace Islam and heresy, and on the other hand, these Muslims might ally with North Africa or the Ottoman Empire in the event of invasion or war. With rhetoric similar to that expressed in late twentieth-century France, Muslims were described as "multiplying like weeds" and taking jobs away from Christian populations.[19] Christianity was presented as the religion of civilisation and humanity while Islam was viewed as irrational and barbaric.

By the end of the fifteenth century, the last independent Islamic territories in Spain were conquered and the country began unification under Christian, royal authority. To support this process, the threat posed by Muslim communities was managed at multiple levels. The resident Muslim population were forced to converted in 1502, beginning in Granada and extending to all kingdoms in the monarchy. Those who chose to remain in Spain and convert were known as the *Moriscos*. Legally, Islamic religious practices and traditional customs were defined as both deviant and heretical: socially, the community was enlisted to police this deviance.[20] The sixteenth century witnessed evangelising experiments, proposals for integration, and various regulations and prohibitions on religious expression. As part of these measures, the Arabic language and script were targeted as a visible sign of Arab and Islamic difference. An assembly met in the Royal

[17] Deborah Root, "Speaking Christian: Orthodoxy and Difference in Sixteenth-Century Spain," *Representations* 23 (1988).

[18] Perceval, "The Discourse Strategies for Constructing Expellable "Moorish" Subjects".

[19] Root, "Speaking Christian: Orthodoxy and Difference in Sixteenth-Century Spain".

[20] Ibid.

Chapel of Granada in 1526 and banned Arabic speech along with the use of Arabic script for public documents. A law was passed in 1567 forbidding all uses of spoken and written Arabic and giving the *Moriscos* three years to learn Castilian Spanish: Arabic surnames were banned along with clothing and other differentiating marks of culture, such as music and public baths.[21] In this period, efforts were also made to cleanse Castilian of all words of Arabic origin and replace them with Greek or Latin neologisms. A key figure behind this work, the Latinist grammarian Antonio Nebrija (1441-1522) framed these measures through the vision of military threat:

> Arabic words are written in the opposite direction to the rest of the world and look like soldiers advancing in formation.[22]

The Arabic script became a threatening sign of Islam and an indication that despite conversion, the communities were incapable of integration. Inquisition trials against *Moriscos* relied on external manifestations of an Islamic way of life – *indicios exteriores* - and the Arabic script served as one such sign. In this context, evidence of an individual's possession of Arabic texts, regardless of whether they contained religious, poetic or scientific content, was in itself considered proof that they had not truly converted.[23] Even the possession of Arabic texts by the illiterate was considered heresy since they could be used as Islamic talismans. The script was perceived in such threatening terms that when *aljamiado* writing was discovered – the transliteration of Spanish into Arabic script – it was feared to be a type of cryptography, devised to obscure the contents of the documents and deceive Christian neighbours.[24]

As a result, educated *Moriscos* were forced to hide their literacy. For instance, a Belgian humanist travelled to Seville in 1539 to clarify questions of Arabic grammar: upon arrival, he reported that the *Morisco* physician he sought out had refused to help him. This doctor was intent on maintaining his Christian reputation and hiding all indications of his origins: showing any knowledge of Arabic would compromise his good reputation and invite punishment.[25] Another educated *Morisco* recorded his panic when summoned by the Archbishop Castro of Grenada to help translate the *Sacromonte plomos*, a series of texts composed in both Arabic and Latin:

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[21] See Jónsson, "The Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain in 1609-1614: The Destruction of an Islamic Periphery".

[22] Perceval, "The Discourse Strategies for Constructing Expellable "Moorish" Subjects".

[23] Hegyi, "Minority and Restricted Uses of the Arabic Alphabet: The Aljamiado Phenomenon".

[24] Ronald Surtz, "Morisco Women, Written Texts and the Valencia Inquision," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 32, no. 2 (2001).

[25] Cited in Kathryn Woolard, "Bernardo De Aldrete and the Morisco Problem: A Study in Early Modern Spanish Language Ideology," *Society for the Comparative Study of Society and History* 2 (2002).

> How shall I save myself, as the Christians kill and burn everyone on whom they find an Arabic book or about whom they know he reads Arabic.[26]

Following these measures, Spanish authorities eventually decided that expulsion was the only solution to the issue of Islamic integration. 1609 saw the expulsion of Muslim populations, with approximately 300,000 *Moriscos* forcibly removed over the following four and a half years.[27]

In both France and Granada, I argue that the Arabic script was used as a marker to manage the perceived risk associated with Arab and Islamic populations occupying Western space. In Granada, Arabic was primarily a sign of religious culture that needed to be excluded, alongside other visible Islamic practices. Critically, in both case studies the Arabic script was a sign that stood for more than just a particular language or religion: it was able to signify threats associated with invasion, a lack of integration, or heresy. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the cultural shape of Arabic is influenced by both persistent, historical discourses and the sensitivities of a particular context. I argue that this cultural component allows it to function as a tool of politics: in this role, the script has been caught in a nexus of beliefs and attacks on Arab populations, used to reinforce structural prejudice and the perception of irreconcilable difference. In the next section, I explore the way this role has continued into the contemporary world, with Arabic retaining this implicit link to Islam while also taking on a form of threat specific to the geo-political moment.

The Security State

In 2007, British graffiti artist Mohammed Ali was invited to Chicago to promote a dialogue about Islam and the arts. As negative representations of Islam began to increase after 9/11, Ali saw his particular fusion of street-art and Islamic script as a vehicle for cross-cultural dialogue and a way to challenge the 'clash of civilisations' model.[28] Ali's visions of peace and unity have gained an international audience, with media from CNN to Al-Jazeera describing his projects in terms of constructing a 'bridge of understanding' between faith communities.[29] As seen by the mural painted in Birmingham, England (figure 2), Ali's designs emphasise positive messages – such as 'hope' – through a blend of Islamic calligraphy and modern graffiti, Arabic script and Roman letters.

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[26] Cited in ibid.

[27] Matt Carr, "Spain's Ethnic History," *History Today* 59, no. 2 (2009). Carr draws parallels between this expulsion and the current experiences of Arab populations in the Netherlands, in terms of the perceived clash with 'core' European values.

[28] Abu Ali Bafaquih, "Islamically Sprayed," *Islamic Horizons* 36, no. 5 (2007).

[29] Mohammed Ali, "Aerosol Arabic," http://www.aerosolarabic.com.

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 2: Photo of a mural by Mohammed Ali in Birmingham, England.
Digital image. Available from: Mohammed Ali, "Aerosol Arabic," http://www.aerosolarabic.com.

Ali began to design the mural on the side of a local Mosque in Chicago but an anonymous complaint was placed with the local Council and the work was never completed. The mural contained the text *salaam* in Arabic script – meaning 'peace' - but the shape of the letters had been interpreted by an anonymous viewer as support for the World Trade Centre attacks. As a reporter from the scene explains:

> The letter 'a' in Arabic looks like a slanted column, and the a's in the last syllable of the word 'Salaam' may have looked like the falling World Trade Centre towers.[30]

Despite the message of peace, the Arabic script was perceived as a threat. I argue that this (mis)perception must be understood in relation to the expansion of the U.S. security state in the decade following 9/11, and in particular, the heightened sense of risk and insecurity that came to be produced around the Arabic language. I propose that the Arabic script has come to achieve a particularly militarised meaning within the signifying regimes of the early twenty-first-century western security state, due in large part to the racialised link between Arab bodies and terrorism. Media presentations and official responses to terrorist events have worked to consolidate the notion that Islam, or Islamic extremism more specifically, as a global ideology at war with the West. Accordingly, the danger at the heart of counter-terrorism regimes has been racially coded as Arab in origin, with figures 'of Middle Eastern appearance' positioned as potential threats to national security.[31] As witnessed in the anonymous viewer's (mis)perception of Mohammed Ali's graffiti in 2007, this sense of threat extended to the Arabic script. I turn now to the operation of the security state to explore the increasing militarisation and securitisation of Arabic, both

[30] Ahmed Azam, "Breaking Down Cultural Wall with Graffiti," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 April 2007.

[31] On the racialised regimes of vision that make bodies 'of Middle Eastern appearance' legible within the terms of terror, see Kim, "Südländisch: The Borders of Fear with Reference to Foucault" and Pugliese, "Asymmetries of Terror: Visual Regimes of Racial Profiling and the Shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes in the Contexts of the War in Iraq". On the 'misperception' of Sikh men as Arab, as a result of these frames of terror and the power of representation to homogenise racial difference, see Rapul Oza, "Contrapuntal Geographies of Threat and Security: The United States, India and Israel," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (2007) and Pat Ahluwahlia, "Afterlives of Post-Colonialism: Reflections on Theory Post-9/11," *Postcolonial studies* 10, no. 5 (2007).

language and script, and the way in which processes have been used to manage the threat of so-called dangerous populations.

The contemporary security state relies on fear and the proliferation of hidden enemies. Previous forms of military power were based around the defence of territories from an outside threat. The enemy at the heart of these regimes was typically located beyond the borders of the state and had the ability to attack with equivalent force. The state, as an autonomous, territorially organised political entity, was required to position itself strategically against the competing interests of other states in order to achieve security. The Cold War typified this approach. But with the fall of the Berlin Wall and an increasing number of international terrorist attacks against Western targets, a new model of military conflict began to achieve dominance. Military organisations shifted their attention away from symmetrical state-versus-state warfare towards a new enemy – the terrorist.

According to this model, military activity is required to work endlessly against an omnipresent enemy who could be anywhere, who could strike at any time, and who could be 'among us'. This enemy could potentially be anyone inside or outside state borders, whether citizen, undocumented migrant worker, tourist, refugee, or asylum seeker.[32] The rhetoric of terror acquired growing force and persistence, and a wide spectrum of global insurgencies and sleeper cells was feared to operate across social, technical, political, cultural and financial networks. This new threat lacked traditional territorial boundaries or infrastructure, was unable to be clearly defined or identified, and could utilise unpredictable tactics to take advantage of vulnerable national borders. This enemy had already been able to successfully smuggle nonconventional weapons into Western spaces and implement multiple attacks against domestic, civilian targets. In this context, military processes were forced to address the risk that there could be another enemy currently operating inside the spaces of daily life and planning violence against domestic targets. This shift in approach to the enemy's location and tactics is reflected in the change of language from 'national defence' to 'national security'. More broadly, this shift reflects the transition towards what has been called the 'security era.'[33]

One concept driving the transformation in military thinking and practice is the shift from 'battlefield' to 'battlespace'. This latter concept removes all delineations of scope and scale from security practices, such that they are able to take up everything from the molecular scales of

[32] On the figure of the terrorist disrupting the distinction between the inside and outside of the nation, see Farred, "Foreigners among Citizens" and Michael Shapiro, "Every Move You Make: Bodies, Surveillance, and Media," *Social Text* 23, no. 2 (2005).

[33] Magnus Hornqvist, "Risk Assessments and Public Order Disturbances: New European Guidelines for the Use of Force?," *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 5, no. 1 (2004). See also Frédéric Volpi, "Constructing the '*Ummah*' in European Security: Between Exit, Voice and Loyalty," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007) and Jordan Crandall and John Armitage, "Envisioning the Homefront: Militarization, Tracking and Security Culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (2003).

genetic engineering and biotechnology, through the everyday economies of work and urban experience, to cyberspace and outer space. In contrast to the traditional geographical and temporal space of the battlefield, battlespace has no front or back, start or end, and there is no clear demarcation between the battle-front and civilian space. As Stephen Graham argues, nothing lies outside the multi-dimensional and multi-scale concept of battlespace, either temporally or geographically.[34] With its disregard for traditional boundaries, the concept of security also takes in its scope a vast array of dangers under the umbrella of 'insecurity' and risk. International organised crime, money laundering, drug trafficking, immigration, and weapons proliferation all come to the forefront of national security agendas.[35] Equally, the operational borders of security agencies have merged with police and military-related activities, such that each exceed their traditional field of action. Alongside this shift, sectoral borders become increasingly blurred as security-related issues are handled by private agencies and security concerns come to bear on business and finance. Under the banner of 'global terrorism', any space, activity, or individual could hold the potential for terrorist threat, be weaponised by an enemy, or mobilised in an attack. Accordingly, the scope of contemporary security regimes continues to be expanded beyond traditional limits.

As a key instrument of security, surveillance has become a routine, everyday occurrence. The perceived need to combat the always-anticipated terrorist attack has established surveillance systems across urban centres, transport nodes, financial systems, workplaces, and the internet. Drawing on discourses of risk and prevention, surveillance activities have been justified as a necessary step to achieving security. Giving evidence at a US Congressional hearing in 2002, a federal business manager of the technology company IBM testified that "in this war, our enemies are hiding in open and available information across a spectrum of databases".[36] Rather than relying on missiles or traditional weapons, good data has become key to security. With far reaching powers of surveillance and the ability to interrogate across an array of data sources, agencies would be able to find or track their enemies: without this, nations would be left helpless to defend against the next attack. This perceived vulnerability can be understood in direct relation to the aftermath of 9/11. Management consultants and IT specialists made the case that the activities and intentions of the hijackers would have been visible to authorities if they had not been hidden across a diverse, disconnected set of databases.[37] Had the databases been integrated

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[34] Stephen Graham, "When Life Itself Is War: On the Urbanization of Military and Security Doctrine," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36, no. 1 (2012).

[35] Jef Huysmans and Anastassia Tsoukala, "The Social Construction and Control of Danger in Counterterrorism," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 33, no. 2 (2008). On cyber-threats and security, see Mary McEvoy Manjikian, "From Global Village to Virtual Battlespace: The Colonizing of the Internet and the Extension of Realpolitik," *International Studies Quarterly* 54 (2010).

[36] Quoted in Louise Amoore, "Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror," *Antipode* 41, no. 1 (2009).

[37] Louise Amoore and Marieke De Goede, "Governance, Risk and Dataveillance in the War on Terror," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 43, no. 2 (2005).

and structured according to suspicious patterns of behaviour, the threat could have been identified and prevented. This position was accepted by the 2003 Joint Inquiry. They concluded that by the time of attack on September 11, enough relevant data was housed in existing databases: "had the dots been connected", the events could have been "exposed and stopped".[38] Consequent surveillance and security activities therefore placed emphasis on the development of new surveillance technologies, techniques of data mining, and advanced computerised algorithms to track, identify and target threats.[39] The collection and organisation of data was positioned as a precondition for security in the new threat environment, allowing intelligence agencies to better understand who comprised a potential threat and when an attack was likely to occur. With this information, they could anticipate the enemy's next steps and prevent the next major attack.

'Information dominance' therefore became a key strategic imperative, understood as the ability to access more timely and complete information than one's opponents. In the initial years following 9/11, the desire to secure 'Total Information Awareness' was developed into the dream of 'fusion centres' whose purpose was to collate and coordinate data processing and sharing.[40] To overcome ambiguities, surveillance experts sought to capture ever more detailed information and develop more advanced technologies to create specialised categories of threat.[41] This search for detail began with the bureaucratic numbers assigned to an individual by the State and the marks made by communication and commerce. Continually drawing on advances in technology, data was drawn from a matrix of interlinked collections: ATM cards and financial databases; GPS transponders, barcodes and global satellites; radio frequency chips and biometric identifiers; mobile computers, phones and e-commerce sites. Among the most significant of these new collections were: IDENT, an automatic fingerprint identification system storing biometric data on all foreign visitors, immigrants and asylum seekers; ADIS, storing travellers' entry and exit data; APIS, containing passenger manifest information; SEVIS, containing data on all foreign and exchange students in the U.S.; IBIS, a 'lookout' watch list interfaced with Interpol and national crime data; and CLAIMS 3, holding information on foreign nationals claiming benefits.[42] In turn, these linked to local law enforcement, financial systems and educational records. In an effort to record data that might escape these channels, systems were also extended from optical to non-

[38] Quoted in Amoore, "Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror".

[39] See Alan Ingram and Klaus Dodds, "Counterterror Culture," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011) and Amoore, "Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror".

[40] David Lyon and Kevin D. Haggerty, "The Surveillance Legacies of 9/11: Recalling, Reflecting on, and Rethinking Surveillance in the Security Era," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 27, no. 3 (2012). While this particular dream was never achieved in this form due to public outrage, Krikke notes that a survey of the US General Accounting Office in 2004 found that 52 government agencies operated or planned nearly 200 data mining programs, with at least fourteen of these focusing on counter-terrorism objectives: see Jan Krikke, "Intelligent Surveillance Empowers Security Analysts," *IEEE Intelligent Systems* 6 (2006).

[41] See Vida Bajc, "Debating Surveillance in the Age of Security," *The American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 12 (2007).

[42] Amoore and De Goede, "Governance, Risk and Dataveillance in the War on Terror".

optical regions of the electromagnetic spectrum, with a multiplicity of sensors deployed around bodies by way of antenna farms, spy satellites, and cable-traffic intercepts.[43] These systems also penetrated the body to capture uniquely distinguishable marks that could be used to identity and categorise threats. Referred to as biometrics, this information aimed to mark the body as distinct from all others. To properly support the tracking capabilities of the security state, individuals must be documented in such a way that each human body becomes inseparable from information about that body and the identity assigned to it. Such efforts have led to the development of technologies that are thought to reliably extract information from the body, such as fingerprints, a sequence of the DNA from bodily tissue, or retina patterns from the eye. The results of biometrics perform a key role by reducing ambiguity around individual bodies, allowing for better identification and categorisation.

These initiatives continued to mature quietly through two wars and a change of presidency, until in 2013 under the Obama administration, Edward Snowden famously leaked classified information to the *Guardian* newspaper. Snowden revealed that the National Security Administration (NSA), his former employer, had been collecting and storing the telephone and e-mail records of millions of Americans and international citizens. The government had the power to draw on this information with only the suspicion that the object of their investigation might be connected to terrorism, espionage, or domestic crime. As Snowden argued:

> The NSA and intelligence community in general is focused on getting intelligence wherever it can by any means possible. It believes, on the grounds of sort of a self-certification, that they serve the national interest. Originally we saw that focus very narrowly tailored as foreign intelligence gathered overseas. Now increasingly we see that it's happening domestically and to do that they, the NSA specifically, targets the communications of everyone. It ingests them by default. It collects them in its system and it filters them and it analyses them and it measures them and it stores them for periods of time simply because that's the easiest, most efficient and most valuable way to achieve these ends.[44]

While the surveillance powers of the state were initially directed only toward those who were considered a risk – those identified as likely to commit a crime – contemporary surveillance powers have extended to cover the majority of the population. This type of mass surveillance is a distinct shift away from the individualised surveillance that characterised the first half of the twentieth century.[45] The project of data collection, like the scope of security operations and the

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[43] See Manuel de Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

[44] Quoted in Susan Landau, "Making Sense from Snowden: What's Significant in the NSA Surveillance Revelations," *IEEE Security & Privacy* 11, no. 4 (2013).

[45] See Bethan Loftus and Benjamin Goold, "Covert Surveillance and the Invisibilities of Policing," *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 12, no. 3 (2012) and David Lyon, *Surveillance Society: Monitoring Everyday Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2001).

never-ending field of 'battlespace', now seems to be without limit. Here, the logic of information gathering and processing not only concerns the speed with which data is accumulated but also the accuracy of the detail that can be captured, the clarity and irreversibility of bodily markers, and the totalising scope it strives to achieve.[46] It is therefore unsurprising that the Snowden revelations, together with the lack of overwhelming public outrage or surprise, have led many to claim that the United States has become a fully-fledged surveillance state.[47]

As a key signifier of Islam and the Middle East, the Arabic script has become a highly invested sign of risk within the contemporary security state. As a result, I argue in the following section that the alphabet functions as a key target for surveillance - an object that must be made visible, captured within information systems, and dissected through complex analytics.

Risk and insecurity

As witnessed by the hostile (mis)perception of Mohammed Ali's graffiti in 2007, I argue that a generalised, somewhat hysterical sense of risk and threat has been produced around the Arabic script. A decade after 9/11, examples of perceived threat continue to circulate within the popular media. For instance, in 2011 there were reports of 'mysterious Arabic graffiti' on the bottom of a U.S. airplane, prompting an FBI investigation.[48] An Arizona-based television channel cited multiple sources saying that the markings appear to be Arabic words, while an employee of the airline noted they had seen these markings multiple times on the exhaust pipe of the engines and described them as looking like swords.[49] Both aviation and language experts confirmed that the markings were not Arabic. This (mis)perception can be understood in relation to the heightened sense of risk and insecurity produced around the Arabic language by the operation of the U.S. security state, and in large part, the racialised link between Arab bodies and terrorism.

This sense of risk is intensified when the script is made visible in public space – and particularly in spaces of global mobility. For instance, in 2010 a young Pennsylvania man was interrogated, handcuffed and detained for five hours at Philadelphia's airport because he carried a set of English-Arabic flashcards.[50] The student was returning to school when Transportation Security

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[46] As argued by Bajc, "Debating Surveillance in the Age of Security".

[47] See Jackson Lears, "Editor's Note," *Raritan* 13, no. 1 (2013) and Krikke, "Intelligent Surveillance Empowers Security Analysts".

[48] Mark Duell, "It's Not Arabic but Experts Say Mystery Marks on Southwest Airlines Are Graffiti," *Daily Mail Australia*, 24 September 2011.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Spencer S Hsu, "Suit Says PA. Man Was Detained over Arabic Flashcards," *The Washington Post*, 11 February 2010: A2. On the experience of airport space, see Rabab Abdulhadi, "Where Is Home? Fragmented Lives, Border Crossings and the Politics of Exile," *Radical History Review* 86, no. Spring (2003) on reading Arabic while surveilled. See also bell hooks on being racialised and 'terrorised' by whiteness, claiming, "I am (not) startled when I am asked if I speak Arabic", in bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 174.

Administration (TSA) screeners saw the Arabic language flashcards he had been using as part of his college language studies. A supervisor asked him his views on the September 11 attacks, whether he knew who carried them out, what language Osama bin Laden speaks, and whether he understood why the flashcards were suspicious. FBI agents also interrogated him on who he met during a semester as an exchange student in Jordan and his travels through Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Malaysia and Indonesia. Insisting that he was not a terrorist, communist, Muslim or member of any campus 'pro-Islamic group', the FBI agents eventually determined he was not a threat and released him.[51]

This was not an isolated incident. Equally, this sense of threat was not restricted to the United States. A British Airways flight to Miami was delayed by more than seven hours after cabin crew found what they thought were Muslim prayer cards on board the plane. The crew refused to take off and the airline was forced to ground the flight. The suspicious items turned out to be a playing card and a calendar written in Arabic script, but as a British Airways source explained:

> Obviously if you find something like this and aren't sure what it is or who it belongs to you can't take any chances…We know it's a real inconvenience for passengers but we can't take any chances.[52]

An Arabic pamphlet caused similar panic at an Indian airport in 2011. It was found on a chartered plane that flew from Manchester to Goa – one day after the Goan government had announced they had received intelligence regarding a possible terror strike. The Arabic pamphlet was found in an aisle after the passengers exited and the crew were readying for a return journey: as a result, a security alarm was triggered even though the contents of the pamphlet were unclear.[53]

Indeed, Arabic has become so entangled within modern security cultures that even learning or understanding the language can function as an indicator of risk. The Arabic-teaching profession in the United States has been faced with the problem of finding competent instructors who are either residents of the country or considered admissible to it in line with agreed security requirements. Security checks of Arab immigrants interested in serving as linguists must be conducted, but this process has been rife with complications since the process of achieving advanced competence in Arabic has, in itself, been perceived as a suspicious activity.[54] Acquiring a high degree of competence in Arabic is usually the result of forming meaningful associations

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[51] Hsu, "Suit Says PA. Man Was Detained over Arabic Flashcards".

[52] Anon., "Arabic Playing Card Sparks Security Alert," *Evening Standard*, 12 December 2000.

[53] Anon., "Arabic Pamphlet Causes Security Alarm at Indian Airport," *Xinhua News Agency*, 6 November 2011.

[54] Mary Louise Pratt, "Language and National Security: Making a New Public Commitment," *The Modern Language Journal* 88, no. 2 (2004).

with speakers of the language, gained through the experience of living in an Arab region and participating in local communities. Since connections to the Middle East would render an individual suspicious, the experience of gaining literacy rules out many potential instructors from obtaining a security clearance. In this way, the Arabic language has become implicitly associated with risk. Taken to an extreme, this association has led critics of Arabic language schools in the U.S. to claim that the study of Arabic by American children would lead to terrorism.[55] While this claim might seem to lack evidence, the connection between Arabic and risk has nonetheless become established within policing institutions. Research into the New York Police Department (NYPD) surveillance practices found that the act of speaking Arabic was enough to trigger surveillance:

> The NYPD premises its surveillance of American Muslims not on suspicious activity, but on their speech and expressive activities. Law enforcement officers focus on markers of expression when choosing whom to monitor and what locations to mark as "hot spots." The NYPD considers a spectrum of political and religious speech to be "of concern." Such speech includes mainstream Arabic-language news channels, religious texts and discussions of political figures. NYPD's Assistant Chief Thomas Galati also testified that merely speaking in certain languages, particularly Urdu and Arabic, could trigger surveillance.[56]

Taken together, these incidents suggest that the Arabic script works alongside other artefacts of Arab origin as signifiers of terror. Recalling the treatment of *Moriscos* in Granada, authorities saw an individual's knowledge of Arabic, in itself, as a threat that must be controlled.

Reporting on the demand for Arabic translators following 9/11, one article captured this position explicitly with the headline, "The Language of Terror".[57] Just as the language had been primarily inflected by associations of civilisational backwardness throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century (as discussed in the previous chapter), the cultural shape of Arabic continued to evolve to articulate a new frame of difference and threat. Without losing the implicit connection to Islam, the Arabic script gained an additional sense of danger within contemporary surveillance culture. In particular, the language has come to signify the threat of terror – a frame of meaning that can be directly tied to the rise of the security state and the established link between Islam and terror.

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[55] Wendy Chamberlin, "How Do You Say 'Friend' in Arabic?," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, 10 September 2007.

[56] Diala Shamas and Nermeen Arastu, "Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and Its Impact on American Muslims," Creating Law Enforcement Accountability & Responsibility, http://aaldef.org/Mapping%20Muslims%20NYPD%20Spying%20and%20its%20Impacts%20on%20American%20Muslims.pdf.

[57] Martin, "The Language of Terror," *Washington Business Journal* 26 October (2001).

Security practices, such as those deployed by the NYPD, rely on racial profiling and established categories of risk. In the profiling process, the individual is broken down into a set of measurable and actionable risk factors in order to be classified as either safe or dangerous.[58] Each risk factor is judged according to patterns found in surveillance data. As an individual moves between different spaces of a city, the electronic traces of the subject become a means of judging their legitimacy, rights, or degree of threat.[59] In this way, connections between seemingly unrelated activities can be developed into profiles of threat, built from traces of everyday association, commerce, and mobility. Once individuals have been coded according to categories of risk, these profiles can then be translated into actionable security decisions. For instance, individuals passing through airports are measured against the security profile of a terrorist and classified into categories such as 'terrorist', 'no-fly list', 'watch list', or 'no-entry list'. According to their category, an individual's mobility can be constrained.[60] To support this process, authorities must deploy data in such a way that allows global mobility while securing those who are deemed threats.

The process of profiling has been considered particularly critical to this objective, particularly in spaces such as airports that require movement but that have also become determined by concerns over border security and direct attack. Supported by the growth of screening technologies for passengers and baggage, airport and wider border security deploy biometric profiling to identify one person from the next, and single out those who align with an established profile of threat. Facial and gait recognition surveillance, biometric identity cards, and airport security clearance programs all come together to determine identity and threat status, which in turn can be used as the basis for belonging and expelling.[61] Here, the individual who attempts to cross a national border would be welcomed or excluded on the basis of an identity that had already been produced by surveillance data and codes.[62]

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[58] See Bajc, "Debating Surveillance in the Age of Security" and Richard Ericson and Kevin Haggerty, *Policing the Risk Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

[59] On the use of dataveillance to identify 'risky groups', see Michael Levi and David Wall, "Technologies, Security, and Privacy in the Post-9/11 European Information Society," *Journal of Law and Society* 31, no. 2 (2004). This occurs within a larger shift towards 'targeted governance' which reflects the shift away from a Foucauldian sense of discipline to risk: see M Valverde and M Mopas, "Insecurity and the Dream of Targeted Governance," in *Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces*, ed. W. Larner and W. Walters (London: Routledge, 2004).

[60] Amoore, "Algorithmic War: Everyday Geographies of the War on Terror". As Amoore argues, the objective of these spaces is not to arrest mobility but to govern mobility in such a way as to allow circulation and to sustain the impression of securability.

[61] See Amoore and De Goede, "Governance, Risk and Dataveillance in the War on Terror" and Louise Amoore, "Vigilant Visualities: The Watchful Politics of the War on Terror," *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007). Didier Bigo argues that this process of exclusion is indicative of a new regime of surveillance – a 'Ban-opticon' that has emerged under the security state: see Didier Bigo, "Globalized-in-Security: The Field and the Ban-Opiticon," in *Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference*, ed. N. Sakai and J. Solomon (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006).

[62] See David Lyon, *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Digital Discrimination* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

This type of assessment works by drawing on established categories of threat that define what a terrorist would look like and how they might act. Racial categories are key to this assessment, with the likelihood of threats predicted on cultural or geographic background. Referred to as racial profiling, this practice positions certain groups as more threatening than others based on an intersection of culture, race, and association. People from 'suspect' countries of origin or with risky ethnicities can therefore expect different treatment from others. As noted above, the danger at the heart of contemporary counter-terrorism regimes has been racially coded as 'Arab' in origin. Therefore, this identity has become central to contemporary profiling activity. The events of September 11 and prior did not create anti-Arab and anti-Muslim suspicion: negative images and racialised exclusion existed long before these attacks occurred. But the combined weight of historical and contemporary discourses were powerful enough that they could be taken up within security practices to form the basis for profiling and exclusion.

Islam had been routinely positioned as backward and uncivilised in colonial and orientalist discourses. But the spectre of a dangerous and monolithic Islam gained new life in the late twentieth century around notions of fanaticism, threat, and cultural annihilation, with fundamentalist Islam perceived as radical, resurgent, and a threat to Western dominance. Racialised narratives of Arab history, culture and identity were updated to legitimise acts of securitisation, discrimination, and public hostility. Since the body of the soldier, terrorist, citizen, immigrant and refugee can appear indistinguishable on the surface, security discourses dictate that each individual of Arab origin must be surveilled, biometrically identified, risk-rated, and tracked to prevent future acts of violence. The implicit risk inherent in all Arab bodies was made clear during the Tampa standoff of 2001, when then Australian Defence Minister Reith deployed the rhetoric that a ship containing asylum seekers could include 'sleepers for terrorism'.[63] Within this framework, any Arab body allowed within a Western nation is a risk that must be managed.

The racial premise at the heart of security regimes has resulted in the increased insecurity of those identified as being of Arab origin or association. This was clearly evidenced in the years following 9/11, when individuals were subject to deportation, extraordinary rendition, interrogation, surveillance, random searches, acts of vandalism, hate crimes, and other forms of discrimination. Legislative changes added to this insecurity by enhancing the powers of the security state. Here, the demands of security deemed it necessary to enable emergency measures and suspend 'normal politics' to adequately deal with the threat of terrorism.[64] The USA *Patriot Act* was passed in 2001

[63] On this incident, see Osuri and Banerjee, "White Diasporas: Media Representations of September 11 and the Unbearable Whiteness of Being in Australia" and Suvendrini Perera, "What Is a Camp?," *Borderlands E-Journal* 1, no. 1 (2007).

[64] See McDonald, "Securitization and the Construction of Security" on the securitisation perspective. On the work of securitisation and Islamophobia in the UK, following the London bombings, see Yasmin Hussain and Paul Bagguley, "Securitized Citizens: Islamophobia, Racism and the 7/7 London Bombings," *The Sociological Review* 60, no. 4 (2012)

in an effort to increase levels of domestic surveillance and security. An acronym for 'Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism', the provisions of the Act permitted more extensive surveillance procedures and intelligence gathering. In addition, the legislation aimed to bolster border security, curb money laundering and financial contributions to terrorist organisations, and strengthen criminal law related to terrorism. For instance, it gave the FBI the power to search, investigate and intercept telephone calls, e-mail or financial records without a warrant or court mandate. Unlike the 2002 *National Security Entry-Exit Registration System* that required men over a certain age from twenty-four Muslim countries to undergo fingerprinting and interrogations, the Patriot Act did not explicitly state that its provisions applied to those of Middle Eastern descent or the Islamic faith. However, the Act contained provisions that have disproportionately targeted or impacted on the civil liberties of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S.[65] According to Salah Hassan, such practices dismiss the legal principles of 'innocent until proven guilty' and 'preponderance of evidence', and instead rely on 'probable cause', 'reasonable suspicion' and, perhaps most importantly, 'compelling interest' to justify arbitrary interrogations and detentions.[66] Legislation with security objectives therefore increased racialised internment, alongside already extensive surveillance, discrimination and harassment.

In Australia, the 2005 *Anti-Terrorism Bill* (No. 2) was designed as an equivalent attempt to enable what was seen by authorities as a necessary security measure.[67] The law substantially lowered the standard of juridical control over law enforcement activities and gave a broad range of new powers to law enforcement agencies. Regarding these anti-terror laws, then Australian Prime Minister John Howard stated that "there is nothing in our laws, nor will there be anything in our laws, that targets an individual group be it Islamic or otherwise".[68] However, many safeguards were removed and the laws were drafted so broadly that they were open to interpretation based on racialised understandings of risk.[69] As in the U.S., these measures increased the insecurity of those who had been targeted as a potential figure of terror. Drawing on the power of citizen surveillance, the public was called on to prevent terrorism through an increased awareness of threat. Individuals were asked to actively embed themselves within security cultures by reporting suspicious behaviours, packages, and ideas – to be alert to all signs of threat, and to be aware of how this threat might present. In one attempt to help the public understand and recognise risk,

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[65] Theoganis Verinakis, "The Exception to the Rule," *Social Identities* 13, no. 1 (2007).

[66] Hassan, "Enemy Arabs". See also Louise Cainkar, *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience after 9/11* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009).

[67] See Maria Giannocopoulos, "Terror Australis: White Sovereignty and the Violence of Law," *Borderlands E-Journal* 5, no. 1 (2006).

[68] Quoted in Agnes Chong, "Anti Terror Laws and the Muslim Community: Where Does Terror End and Security Begin?," ibid, 3.

[69] See ibid.

Michael Roach, former Assistant Director of ASIO, asked citizens to deploy their mobile phone cameras to photograph figures "of Middle Eastern appearance acting suspiciously".[70] These security measures were designed to heighten the vigilance of a public around the fear of hidden enemies. In doing so, the process of looking became overtly structured by racialised categories of threat. Citizens were primed to view Arab bodies and hear Arabic speech within a specific frame of risk, consolidating a sense of fear around visual signs of difference. In this structure of vision, the Arab or Islamic body was positioned as a recognisable, legible threat of terrorism.

In addition to these measures, there was increasing evidence of the 'hyper-legalisation' of visual cues associated with perceived cultural threats. Reminiscent of the laws passed in Granada almost 400 years prior, Western governments proposed additional policies to strip Islamic citizens of symbols perceived to be radical or fundamentalist. For instance, the French government prohibited the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in public schools, while in 2006, debate was sparked in the United Kingdom around whether or not the *niqab* was an impediment to normal social interaction: since material covered the face, it was thought to symbolise segregation rather than integration.[71] In Switzerland, measures were designed to outlaw the wearing of Islamic clothing in secular contexts: in addition, restrictions were placed on the building of minarets.

Muslims have long been regarded as culturally dangerous when refusing to conform to secular and 'civilising' culture, opting instead to maintain a commitment to so-called archaic signs of faith. In this context, Muslim signifiers and symbols have been highly invested with essentialised meanings, described with terms such as foreign, violent, aggressive, and misogynist. However, before September 11, these signs of difference (including the Arabic script) were primarily framed in terms of cultural compatibility - of what should and should not belong within a Western cultural space.[72] After September 11, this difference was re-encoded via the new security landscape as the surface manifestation of a deeper hidden threat. As a result, I argue that the Arabic script came to function primarily as a sign of risk and threat within modern security regimes. This framing enabled the types of misperceptions outlined above (such as Mohammad Ali's graffiti), as well as the racialised targeting of those who could read Arabic script.

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[70] Quoted in Joseph Pugliese, "Asymmetries of Terror: Visual Regimes of Racial Profiling and the Shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes in the Contexts of the War in Iraq," ibid.5, 14. Such incidents confirm what David Lyon refers to as the contemporary 'culture of suspicion', in which 'ordinary' citizens are called upon as the eyes and ears of police and intelligence: see David Lyon, *Surveillance after September 11* (London: Polity, 2003).

[71] See Humphrey, "Culturalising the Abject: Islam, Law and Moral Panic in the West", Macmaster and Lewis, "Orientalism: From Unveiling to Hyperveiling", and Paul Silverstein and Chantal Tetreault, "Urban Violence in France," *Middle East Report Online* November (2005).

[72] June Edmunds, "The 'New' Barbarians: Governmentality, Securitization and Islam in Western Europe," *Contemporary Islam* 6 (2012).

But the link between Arabic script and terror is more complex than simply signifying threat. The Arabic alphabet has also become a key vulnerability to these surveillance systems and a necessary 'weapon' in the limitless fight against terror. I argue below that the Arabic script confounds the desire for ultimate visibility and knowledge, enabled by recent security legislation. In doing so, the script becomes even more deeply implicated within modern security discourses as a sign of threat, a calculation of vulnerability and risk, and a weapon against terrorism.

Visibility and vulnerability

Information dominance is a dream of absolute visibility and knowledge, aimed toward mastery over the object that is seen. This dream is not unique to the surveillance landscape but is reflective of broader operations of power, vision, and knowledge. In relation to a fantasy of vision he believes to be dominant in the modern West, Paul Virilio argues that omnivoyance enacts:

> The will to see all, to know all, at every moment, everywhere, the will to universalised illumination: a scientific permutation on the eye of God which would forever rule out the surprise, the accident, the irruption of the unforeseen.[73]

This fantasy of vision is most notably embedded in Foucault's concept of panoptic power - a model that is dependent on an understanding of 'the gaze' as a specular authority.[74] Here, the ability to see is likened to the ability to control, with a chain of equivalence and effect assumed between visibility, vulnerability, and subjectification. This form of power acts on its chosen object from a distance. This fantasy of an all-seeing, all-knowing authority was, for Foucault, inseparable from the institutions of the military and the law. His model of modern surveillance was rooted in the military camp – a structure that deployed power through exact observation, such that a network of gazes would supervise one another and form part of the overall functioning of power.[75] The camp offered a diagram of power that acts by means of visibility. Also established within penal settings, surveillance and sight were granted a type of prophylactic power, and as such, were deployed to prevent potential transgressions of the law.

Arguably, this form of vision was a mechanism for discipline and was extended for the control of populations. For Foucault, populations offered a biological subject that could not only be disciplined but also made more productive. The exercise of discipline presupposed a mechanism

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[73] Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 70.

[74] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

[75] Ibid, 171-92.

that could coerce by means of observation: an apparatus by which the techniques that made it possible to see would also induce the effects of power.

> The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly. A central point would be both the source of light illuminating everything, and a locus of convergence for everything that must be known: a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned.[76]

This fantasy of visibility and power was increasingly taken up in twentieth-century narratives of warfare. With advances in technologies, such as aerial targeting and precision missiles, maximum visibility ensured maximum destruction. As W.J Perry, a former U.S. Under Secretary of State for Defense explained:

> If I had to sum up current thinking on precision missiles and saturation weaponry in a single sentence, I'd put it like this: once you can see the target, you can expect to destroy it.[77]

The argument for aerial bombardment and enhanced bombsights rests on key European Enlightenment precepts of distance, precision, and the truth-value of sight. Each of these concepts requires an underlying belief in the mastery of technology and the superiority of information systems that privilege vision.[78] Here, war is no longer a matter of escalating forms of armament and projectile weaponry. Rather, the preservation of national security has become redefined in terms of the logistics of perception, with seeing as its foremost function and means of pre-emptive combat.[79] The practices of the modern security state therefore replicate existing fantasies of vision and control through their desire to render all spaces known and knowable: in effect, surveillance systems strive to achieve a kind of all-seeing authority which enables power and rules out surprise.

The modern construction of terror is inextricably linked to the invisible. The terrorist threat established itself as diffuse and decentralised, created by an enemy that had learned how to hide its transmissions from electronic satellites, that could camouflage itself within cities at home and abroad, and draw strategic advantage and invisibility from the 'clutter' provided by the rapidly urbanising and increasingly mobile world.[80] The logic of surveillance aims to address this threat

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[76] Ibid, 173.

[77] Quoted in Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 31.

[78] Caren Kaplan, "Precision Targets: GPS and the Militarization of U.S. Consumer Identity," *American Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2006).

[79] Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*.

[80] See Marie-José Mondzain, "What Does Seeing an Image Mean?," *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (2010) and Charles Peña, "A Smaller Military to Fight the War on Terror," *Orbis* 50, no. 2 (2006). On urban surveillance and the role of cities, see Graham, "When Life Itself Is War: On the Urbanization of Military

through complete visibility and knowledge, working to reduce uncertainty and rule out the element of surprise. With visibility comes the ability to assess and manage risks, control the movement of the enemy, and pre-empt further attacks.

It is important to note that while this focus on strategic visibility and information is not a new approach to engaging an enemy, it has developed a particular focus on uncertainty and risk under the contemporary security state. Gathering military intelligence about an enemy's geographical location, hostile intentions, and destructive capabilities has always been an essential component of warfare. Such activities went hand in hand with efforts to prevent the enemy from obtaining knowledge about one's own forces and misleading them with false intelligence.[81] For both practices, control of information was key. However, the difference at the heart of contemporary security practice is a greater emphasis on the notions of uncertainty and risk. For late twentieth-century warfare, what had previously been invested exclusively in the deployment of forces came to be invested in dissimilation, with decoy research and development playing a leading role in the military-industrial complex.[82] This was a reversal of deterrence strategy: unlike arms that had to be known to be genuinely dissuasive, 'furtive' weapons could only work if their existence was concealed. This emphasis on deception techniques undermined the principle of nuclear deterrence (favoured during the Cold War) in favour of the uncertainty principle.[83] As a result, uncertainty and risk have since displaced the enemy as the organising logic of contemporary security and military thought.

Security practices are therefore required to focus more on prevention, probabilities, and possible future scenarios, than on deterring foes or defending against identifiable and acute threats.[84] Unpredictable in occurrence, characteristics, and effects, the concept of twenty-first-century terror epitomises this shift toward this problem of 'the aleatory'.[85] While the event of terror will, by its very nature, likely exceed attempts to predict and control, the fantasy of security nonetheless aims to manage this uncertainty so that the next attack will be *less* likely to occur. Accordingly, intelligence activities began to focus more on data-mining and profiling to both predict and manage future risk. These information-based activities became a key weapon in the attempt to incorporate the uncertain future into the present. In a key shift, algorithmic logics – rather than missiles – were deployed in the fight against terrorism.

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and Security Doctrine". On the problematic notion of space that underpins the military approach to "locating the enemy" within "knowable" places, see Terence Chong, "Practicing Global Ethnography in Southeast Asia: Reconciling Area Studies with Globalisation Theory," *Asian Studies Review* 31, no. 3 (2007).

[81] De Landa, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*.

[82] Virilio, *The Vision Machine*.

[83] Ibid.

[84] See Huysmans and Tsoukala, "The Social Construction and Control of Danger in Counterterrorism".

[85] On the radical ambiguity of security that can never be fully achieved, see Ben Anderson, "Security and the Future: Anticipating the Event of Terror," *Geoforum* 41, no. 2 (2010).

Within the network of ever more intrusive surveillance processes and data collection methods, the Arabic script functions as a key vulnerability in a variety of ways. In the first place, the script has resisted efforts to control and track the movement of identities within systems that are highly reliant on the Roman alphabet. Despite recent innovations in the field of bio-identifiers (such as fingerprints and eye scans), personal names remain the single most important means for labelling information about people. A person's biometric data is often used to verify an identity (since names can be forged or stolen) but this data is stored alongside a given name and passport number. For data gathered through intelligence and law enforcement efforts, a name may be the only identifier linking crucial pieces of information, or the only way for agencies to differentiate potential threats from so-called harmless citizens. In effect, names hold together contemporary security practices, with identity-based data used to support a number of key counter-terrorism instruments. For instance, post 9/11 regulations have compelled U.S. companies in industries such as banking and tourism to check their customers against a central list of potential terrorists. All airlines flying into the United States must check the names of passengers and crew for potential security risks, and when presented with documents such as passports or credit cards, federal agencies are legally required to check whether the name on the document is also on watch lists of suspected terrorists and their supporters. In addition, border control processes rely heavily on the quality of identity-based data contained within key systems such as the Interagency Border Inspection System, which allows agencies to access information on suspect individuals in relation to a network of known businesses, vehicles, aircraft and vessels.

Given that the figure of threat targeted by modern security regimes has been primarily racialised as Arab and Islamic in origin, these systems must accurately capture and share the names of individuals from a select number of geographic locations. To support these efforts, an intelligence company called Language Analysis Systems has compiled a searchable database of around a billion names, with variants, cultural and ethnic identifiers, and primary countries of origin.[86] However, the founder of this company, John Hermansen, explained that the biggest problems for security-oriented databases arise around names that do not use the Latin alphabet. Transliteration from Arabic, Chinese or Cyrillic names can give rise to multiple errors, creating gaps in border control procedures that could potentially threaten national security. These errors commonly occur due to a lack of centralised standards governing the representation of Arabic letters in the Latin script: for example, the name Qaddafi can be represented at least sixty ways by the Latin alphabet. As a result, names with an Arabic linguistic origin can elude security procedures when they are recorded with one spelling or format and searched for with another. If one name is entered as Ayman el-Zawahiri but a database is queried for Aman el Zawari, the first name will

[86] See Joe Sharkey, "Name Game Complicates Air Security," *The New York Times*, 6 October 2002.

not be found.[87] This gap would allow an individual on a most-wanted list to evade authorities at airports and border crossings. As Hermansen explains:

> There are over 200 ways 'Mohammed' is spelled in our alphabet, but there's only one way in Arabic…You have to find all of them, if the guy is coming across the border.[88]

Here, the difference of Arabic script is explicitly framed as a security issue, such that the spectre of Islamic fundamentalism is positioned behind the disjuncture between the two alphabets, evading systems of record and leaving the nation vulnerable to attack. Yet, even if transliteration standards were agreed and deployed, the cultural variation between Arab names can create additional discrepancies. For instance, to obtain all the relevant information on individuals from Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, intelligence professionals must deploy different algorithmic treatments since Indonesian records can be found under names written with either Dutch or English systems of spelling.[89] There are also cultural discrepancies in the ways that names are organised: names such as 'Abd al-Rahman' can be properly recorded as either a given name or a surname, depending on the individual's culture of origin. As a result, multiple variations of the name are commonly recorded in security databases, with 'Abd' or 'al' stored in fields for first or middle names, or 'Abdurrahman' or 'Abdurahman' in one field, or 'Abdul Rahman' across two fields.

Tracking the movement of bodies across cities and borders therefore requires that a system recognise multiple variations of the same name across diverse information sources. However, the Arabic language has so far avoided this form of capture. As a result, the disjunct between the Roman and Arabic script in existing surveillance systems has reduced the ability of Western security regimes to govern movement or achieve the fantasy of ultimate vision and knowledge.

These difficulties with the Arabic script do not end with the capture of names. According to Richard Wagner, the president of Intelligent Search Technology, the future of name-searching surveillance lies not in watch lists but in sifting through vast quantities of digital documents.[90] When relevant data is found on a computer or intercepted online, machine automated translation and analysis could assist in identifying a critical name, city, or corporation. But the Arabic script resists these efforts. To properly manage a range of intercepted material, documents need to be easy to read, translate, organise, and find across a range of intelligence databases. A critical step in

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[87] Paul Thompson, "Text Mining, Names and Security," *Journal of Database Management* 16, no. 1 (2005).

[88] Sharkey, "Name Game Complicates Air Security," 2J. On the implications of bad for security regimes, see Won Kim, "On U.S. Homeland Security and Database Technology," *Journal of Database Management* 16, no. 1 (2005).

[89] Paul Thompson, "Text Mining, Names and Security," ibid.

[90] Sarah Milstein, "Taming the Task of Checking for Terrorists' Names," *New York Times*, 30 December 2002.

the management of surveillance material therefore lies in the transformation of text into digital form, making it both machine-readable and machine-tractable.[91] This allows documents to be manipulated across different systems, fed into translation software, and transformed in meaningful ways. In addition, making intercepted documents machine-readable allows for the development of advanced software that could look for key words and flag suspicious documents. This function would be of great value to security professionals, and optical character recognition software should be able to fulfil this requirement, as these programs follow language-specific rules and look for distinct letter shapes that they have been programmed to recognise. But this type of software generally lacks performance in the Arabic script. Since they were developed primarily for the Roman alphabet and major European languages, such software has difficulty recognising printed Arabic characters and rendering them in a standard digital form. While the technology does exist for Arabic script based languages, it is reliable only on clearly printed documents and so remains insufficient for security activities that deal with the type of text that is most common - handwritten or smudged.

Efforts to develop fast and accurate Arabic-English machine translation have also encountered difficulties. These projects have mainly been driven by military objectives: that is, to develop a means for engaging with enemies in the context of espionage, interrogation, and military communication. Spearheaded by the U.S. Department of Defense and technological leaders such as Google and IBM, work to develop a functional machine translation tool has focussed on military requirements such as the ability to record conversations and identify suspicious words, translate an interrogator's question on the spot, or enable a conversation between a soldier and a civilian.[92] However, the structure of the Arabic language and script has prevented developers from achieving satisfactory results. A specific difficulty has been located in the Arabic system of diacritics. As the liturgical language of Islam, classical Arabic uses vowel diacritics for representing the Quran, classical poetry, and classical books. However, Modern Standard Arabic rarely uses diacritics to indicate vowels, and they are usually omitted from Arabic text except in special cases (such as children's books and language learning material), or to differentiate between similar words. As the contemporary standard for representing the Arabic language in written form, MSA is used widely in workplaces, government, and formal media such as news channels. It is a form that can enable communication across dialects and regions, despite significant variation between spoken forms. Translation machines must be able to grasp MSA in order to successfully communicate with the 'enemy' or translate their words. However, the absence of diacritics creates ambiguity in both pronunciation and meaning that has so far exceeded the ability of software to comprehend. For instance, two different words can share the same non-

[91] Michael Erard, "Translation in the Age of Terror," *Technology Review* 107, no. 2 (2004).

[92] See Günter Neumann, *Challenges for Arabic Machine Translation* (John Benjamins Publishing Company 2012) and Pratt, "Language and National Security: Making a New Public Commitment".

diacritised form in Arabic script. Individuals are able to rely on the context and their knowledge of the lexicon to resolve this ambiguity: however, automatic translation tools have not been able to adequately process this complexity.[93]

The ability to translate vast amounts of intercepted Arabic material gained specific resonance in the aftermath of the 2001 World Trade Centre attacks. Through inquiries following the event, it was made public that the National Security Agency had intercepted two Arabic language messages on September 10 but these texts had not been translated until September 12, 2001. One message read "Tomorrow is zero hour" and another "the match is about to begin." At the time, the FBI held a backlog of thousands of hours of audiotape and pages of written material in Arabic awaiting translation, but they lacked the resources or the linguistic capacity to work through the material until it was already too late. The development of more effective information management systems and machine translation capabilities has therefore been a focus of subsequent security efforts to predict and preempt future attacks. However, the Arabic script continues to function as a key weakness in these efforts to monitor, track, analyse, and control. The script has proved incompatible with the technology at the heart of information systems, with efforts to overcome the ambiguity of the script being partial at best. By corrupting data streams with errors, preventing automated analysis, and shrouding intercepted material in ambiguity, the Arabic script continues to hinder the efforts of security agencies to discover a hidden enemy, build a profile, or predict the future – to achieve 'Total Information Awareness'.

I argue therefore that the Arabic script takes on multiple roles within modern security regimes. In addition to acting as a sign of risk and threat, the alphabet is also entangled within processes of surveillance as an object of analysis and a tool for tracking suspicious activity. In an aligned but distinct role, Arabic has also been used as a weapon in the so-called war against terror. As I argue below, initiatives to re-arm with the Arabic language are a reflection of this complex implication of Arabic within modern security regimes and the broader trend toward the militarisation of Arabic. These roles constitute specific, interlocking functions of Arabic within the U.S. security state and help shape the way the script is viewed, given meaning, and put to work in this particular cultural-political moment.

Weaponising Arabic

In the years following 9/11, military and civilian agencies involved in the Homeland Security apparatus recognised that foreign language proficiencies should be integrated into operational and contingency planning as additional war fighting skills.[94] As noted above, it was discovered that a

[93] See Erard, "Translation in the Age of Terror".

[94] See Stephanie E Hap, "Intelligence Support to Homeland Security: Languages and Cultural Awareness," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* 31, no. 2 (2005), Burton Bollag, "A Failure to Communicate," *The*

lack of translation resources had significantly contributed to the failure of intelligence agencies to pre-empt the 2001 terror attacks. As a result, military and intelligence communities began to recognise that they did not have sufficient linguists and translators to sustain a full-scale counterterrorism effort.[95] Military language needs have traditionally been understood in terms of adequate linguists who could translate intelligence-related texts. However, the potential military applications of language in an unfamiliar but limitless war against terror required that leaders think beyond this scope. Foreign language skills were therefore repositioned as a core military capability, and in a statement before the Subcommittee on International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services, Ellen Laipson, Vice Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, testified:

> One cannot overstate the centrality of foreign language skills to the core mission of the Intelligence Community. Foreign languages come into play at virtually all points of the intelligence cycle — from collection to exploitation to analysis and production.[96]

This capability is particularly critical to the contemporary threat environment. With terrorists deploying asymmetrical techniques of warfare rather than direct applications of military force, agencies are required to use foreign language intelligence to both understand and track the always mobile, often invisible, enemy. As Clifford Porter of the Defense Language Institute explains, when the enemy is unconventional and hides within civilian populations, the foreign language capability of intelligence and special operations are critical.[97] Satellite technologies and global positioning systems can enable the U.S. military to understand where enemy forces might be located, but these technologies are unable to shed light on how the enemy thinks. From the perspective of organisations such as the Defense Language Institute, such insight can only come through learning the language and understanding the culture of key leaders and principal actors in terrorist networks.

Once again, the spectre of the terrorist appears in the role of the enemy that must be fought with techniques of visibility and knowledge. However, in this instance, the enemy is brought into the

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Chronicle of Higher Education 53, no. 34 (2007), Paul Anderson and Yasir Suleiman, "Arabic on Campus and Beyond," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 1 (2009), and D J Western, "On the Military Need for Linguistic Skills - How to Say "National Security" in 1,001 Languages," *Air and Space Power Journal* 25, no. 3 (2011).

[95] For instance, it was reported in 2001 that only half of the Army's eighty-four positions for Arabic translators and interpreters were filled. See Scott Wible, "Composing Alternatives to a National Security Language Policy," *College English* 71, no. 5 (2009).

[96] Quoted in Kurt E. Müller, "Addressing Counterterrorism: US Literacy in Languages and International Affairs," *Language Problems & Language Planning* 26, no. 1 (2002), 2.

[97] As reported in Wible, "Composing Alternatives to a National Security Language Policy". On the need for cultural intelligence under conditions of permanent war, see Keith P. Feldman, Anoop Mirpuri, and Georgia M. Roberts, "Affect, Ethics, and the Imaginative Geographies of Permanent War: an Interview with Derek Gregory," *Theory & Event (Online)* 12, no. 3 (2009).

light and fought with Arabic. This increase in the instrumental value attached to the Arabic language did not lead to significant enhancement of linguistic capability within the United States. A lack of qualified speakers in key security languages (such as Arabic, Farsi, and Hindi-Urdu) continued to provide an ongoing obstacle to a range of security activities in the years following 9/11, hindering military, law enforcement, intelligence, counter-terrorism, and diplomatic efforts.[98] In particular, difficulties in Afghanistan and Iraq confirmed that cultural and linguistic skills were necessary for effective operations. Senior leaders and planners have cited the lack of qualified language professionals and regional experts as a major shortcoming in the planning for combat and contingency operations, the execution of the combat phase, and for post-combat reconstruction and stabilisation efforts.[99] In addition, when the Iraq Study Group was convened to assess and report on the U.S. occupation of Iraq, they noted that of an embassy of a thousand in Baghdad, only thirty-three members of staff had some knowledge of Arabic and only six were fluent.[100] These findings confirmed this linguistic lack as a significant drawback for the war effort. In their report, the panel emphasised the fundamental need for Arabic proficiency by U.S. diplomats and government officials working in Iraq, claiming that all U.S. efforts in Iraq had been held back by their lack of language and cultural understanding.[101]

Responding to this need, former President George W. Bush argued that language education would provide a means to defeat terrorists in foreign battlefields so they would never strike again on U.S. soil.[102] Articulating the key role that Arabic could play in the war effort, he claimed that then Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld:

> Wants his young soldiers, who are on the front lines of finding these killers, to be able to speak their language and be able to listen to the people in the communities in which they live […] We need intelligence officers who when somebody says something in Arabic or Farsi or Urdu, knows what they're talking about.[103]

Playing a now familiar role, the language is positioned as a necessary tool for protecting the homeland. But just as the many failed attempts to track Arabic names through information systems have caused ongoing gaps in the surveillance apparatus, so too has the lack of Arabic linguistic skills functioned as an endemic barrier to securing military objectives. Rather than

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[98] See Samuel G. Freedman, "After Sputnik, It Was Russian; after 9/11, Should It Be Arabic?," *New York Times*, 16 June 2004.

[99] Wible, "Composing Alternatives to a National Security Language Policy".

[100] James A Baker and Lee H Hamilton, *The Iraq Study Group Report* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

[101] Ibid. Recommendation 73 of the report addresses this issue directly, calling on the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defence, and the Director of National Intelligence to "accord the highest possible priority to professional language proficiency and cultural training, in general and specifically for U.S. officers and personnel about to be assigned to Iraq". Ibid, 92.

[102] Wible, "Composing Alternatives to a National Security Language Policy", ibid.

[103] Farah Stockman, "Today's Assignments: Reading, Writing and Arabic," *Boston Globe*, 6 January 2006.

leading to the effective deployment of Arabic as a weapon in the war against terror, these efforts have instead highlighted critical weaknesses in the national security framework.

The notion that language ability could be weaponised is not unique to the contemporary field of war. The nineteenth-century patriot Anton Tien famously held forth on his concern that the English were falling behind in espionage, warning readers that:

> There is no country in Western Europe to which the encouragement of the study of Arabic should be a matter of more vital interest than England.[104]

He lamented the superior training of the Russians and Italians (in contrast to the low linguistic standard of the British armed forces) and queried "does not this savour of unreadiness?"[105] This same rhetoric was taken up within Western military policy and institutions throughout the twentieth century. For instance, Army Specialized Training Programs were established in the 1940s to enable Allied soldiers to learn Asian languages for military purposes. These courses were taught at fifty-five universities and focused on defensive capabilities such as interrogating the enemy and gathering intelligence.[106] In the United States, the link between language and defence was formalised most notably within policy and legislation passed during the Cold War. In response to the Soviet Union launching the Sputnik satellite in October 1957, the U.S. enacted the *National Defense Education Act*. The statute directed federal money into stimulating the study of mathematics and science (disciplines that were most relevant to the arms race) but a portion of this funding also provided incentives for universities to develop skilled speakers of designated 'strategic' languages, such as Russian and, to a lesser extent, Arabic. Language teachers were called on to perform their patriotic duty and defend the nation, with foreign language education positioned as not simply a resource for national security, but an essential component for realising such security.[107] As a consequence of these initiatives, approximately 30,000 American university students took Russian courses each year to become translators, cryptologists and intelligence agents, as well as scholars and diplomats.[108] Notably however, the languages associated with the Middle East, such as Arabic, were among the least funded in the first ten years of the program.[109]

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[104] Quoted in Carter, "The Study of Arabic" 108.

[105] Ibid.

[106] See Chong, "Practicing Global Ethnography in Southeast Asia: Reconciling Area Studies with Globalisation Theory" and Biray Kolluoglu-Kirli, "From Orientalism to Area Studies," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003).

[107] See Jeff Bale, "When Arabic Is the "Target" Language- National Security, Title vi, and Arabic Language Programs, 1958—1991," *Tertium Comparationis* 16, no. 2 (2010).

[108] Freedman, "After Sputnik, It Was Russian; after 9/11, Should It Be Arabic?".

[109] Ibid.

During this period, foreign language education was broadly housed within the now infamous body of knowledge called Area Studies. Activities undertaken under its rubric, such as language training, were closely entwined with the politics and ideology of war, such that the boundary between academic practice and the state security apparatus was rendered indistinct.[110] The discipline divided the world into friendly and unfriendly regions, identifying enemies, training experts on the political, linguistic, and cultural aspects of each constructed region, and making policy recommendations for various administrations.[111] With its origins in the Cold War threat environment, key regions were those defined by communism and its spheres of influence, such as Russia, Central and Eastern Europe, and East Asia. Area Studies re-imagined these geo-political spaces in a way that made intelligible the complexities of (and between) different regions but also allowed these areas to be systematically studied by the social sciences and considered in foreign policy discussions. In this way, the teaching of the histories, languages, and literatures of foreign countries was tied to geo-political interests and helped to both guide security matters and legitimise U.S. foreign policy. The administration needed to understand the enemy before it could be defeated, and Area Studies was called on to provide these insights. According to Rey Chow, key regions consequently took on significance as fields of information retrieval and dissemination that were necessary for the perpetuation of U.S. political and ideological hegemony.[112] The systemic reinforcement of language acquisition was a means for making the target culture more legible, more accessible, and more available for Western use. The production of knowledge about geographical areas of interest therefore became an institutional practice that substantiated and elaborated a militaristic conception of the world, shaping the enemy, and providing tools - in the form of knowledge and language - for fighting a new form of warfare.

The importance ascribed to the military potential of language has carried over into contemporary U.S. national security policies and programs. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, regions associated with the so-called Islamic World have taken over from Communism as objects for analysis – defined, categorised, and approached in terms of strategies for engagement and control.[113] Building on the success of previous incentive-based programs, the Bush administration committed significant funds to expanding national capacity in those languages deemed critical to the national interest - Arabic, Farsi, Hindi-Urdu, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Pashto, Russian,

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[110] Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*. On the university as a 'militarized knowledge factory' in the broader context of militarisation and its increased influence and power within American society, see Henry A. Giroux, "The Militarization of US Higher Education after 9/11," *Theory Culture Society* 25, no. 5 (2008).

[111] Hossein Khosrowjah, "A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3-4 (2011). See also Harry Harootunian, "Postcoloniality's Unconscious/Area Studies' Desire" *Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (1999).

[112] Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*.

[113] Khosrowjah, "A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies".

Swahili, and Turkic languages.[114] In 2006, former President Bush announced a National Security Language Initiative that would expand existing government-supported programs for language study and create new programs at elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges. This funding was intended to provide training to 400 students and 400 teachers in 2007 and up to 3,000 students and 3,000 teachers by 2011.[115] In addition, the Department of Defense and the federal National Security and Education Program established two modules for the advanced study of Arabic at Georgetown University and the University of Maryland. In a mirror of 1950s rhetoric, these teachers, schools, and universities were called on to play a greater role in the war against Islamic extremism.[116] In effect, the courses were designed to reduce the multiple functions of a language into isolated warfighting skills, with students gaining capability in very specific vocabulary. For instance, in an interview with a military journalist, a soldier explained how a basic Arabic course proved to be instrumental in the success of "Bravo" Company:

> "The course crammed one year of college Arabic into a one-month class," said Rourk. "I am not fluent, but I learned the basic essentials and how to apply it to questions like, 'Do you have any weapons?' or 'Have you seen any insurgents?' Basically, the who, what, where, when and why."[117]

These initiatives resulted in the greater implication of Arabic script within discourses of threat and warfare. For instance, the 2013 vocabulary resource *Security Arabic* highlights the extent to which the language has been brought under the objectives of the modern security state. The text groups Arabic vocabulary into thirteen key areas, including 'global security', 'weapons of mass destruction', 'law enforcement', 'counter terrorism', and 'intelligence analysis'. Designed for a North American intelligence analyst, Arabic is implicitly militarised and framed as an artefact of terrorism:

> What is the Arabic term for sleeper cell? How would you say hijacker? Could you recognise the phrase operational planning? Or money-laundering investigations?[118]

Here, the Arabic language and script are deployed as weapons against specific enemy figures - the Islamic terrorist, the hijacker, the insurgent, and the indistinct body of Middle Eastern appearance. Implicitly tying language to the objectives of the security state, the field of 'security

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[114] Bale, "When Arabic Is the 'Target' Language- National Security, Title vi, and Arabic Language Programs, 1958—1991".

[115] Stockman, "Today's Assignments: Reading, Writing and Arabic,". On the rise and limitations of these programs, see also Roger Allen, "Arabic: Flavor of the Moment: Whence, Why, and How?," *The Modern Language Journal* 91, no. 2 (2007).

[116] Stockman, "Today's Assignments: Reading, Writing and Arabic".

[117] Quoted in R. R. Keene, "The War on Terror: Amtracker Translates Success," *Leatherneck* 88, no. 8 (2005).

[118] Mark Evans, *Security Arabic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

Arabic' works to consolidate the racially coded danger at the heart of counter-terrorism regimes. Already perceived as a signifier of 9/11 and an artefact of terrorism, these initiatives have embedded Arabic even more deeply within the frame of warfare and threat, such that teachers, learners, and children are called on to position themselves against the figure of the (implicitly Arab-Islamic) terrorist.

Reflections

This chapter explored the multiple ways in which the Arabic language and script operates within the militarised discourses of the U.S. security state. With a greater focus on the Arabic language more broadly, I opened up each of these roles as specific, interlocking functions of Arabic that help shape the way the script is viewed, given meaning, and put to work. With reference to similar global contexts (such as Australia), I argued that the Arabic script has become ever more deeply implicated within discourses of threat and functions of warfare.

I explored the way in which the use of Arabic within the modern security apparatus could be understood in relation to a broader, historical trend that treats the script as a vehicle for articulating complex cultural anxieties about 'dangerous' Islamic populations. As seen in the case of post-colonial France, the Arabic script was used to think through the perceived danger of increased immigration from the Orient, while in Granada, concerns about *Moriscos* took root in the Arabic language: prejudice was enshrined in law and the script was used to manage issues of visible cultural difference from Spanish territory. Across current and historical examples, the Arabic script has played a central signifying role within discourses of risk and threat. This danger has been racially coded and articulated in a way that is particular to the current geo-political moment. Under the security state, the conjunction of surveillance and racial profiling has worked to reinscribe visual signifiers of Islam and the Middle East within a frame of terror and uncertainty. I argued therefore that as one of these signifiers, the Arabic script has been increasingly placed at the heart of these security regimes as the target for surveillance and a key sign of risk to be managed. It is important to note that these discourses have resulted in consistently negative consequences for Arab and Islamic populations, resulting in increased discrimination, harassment, and in some instances, internment. Just as racialised narratives of Arab history, culture and identity have been attached to Arabic script to justify acts of surveillance, they have also been used to legitimate profound securitisation, discrimination, and public hostility.

But the Arabic script functions as more than a sign of terror within modern security regimes. In the second half of the chapter, I turned to the use of Arabic script within surveillance processes as an object of analysis and a means for tracking suspicious activity. To this end, I examined the ways in which data collections and intercepted Arabic text have become militarised within

modern surveillance systems, such that the control of information has been positioned as a necessary requirement for identifying and preventing future threats. However, the differences between Arabic and Roman scripts challenged the ability of institutions to achieve 'Total Information Awareness' or to identify, monitor, and control the movement of suspect Arab bodies.

Here, the Arabic script acts as a resistant object of surveillance. On the one hand, Arabic has provided a clear target to be monitored and risk-assessed, but on the other, its very structure, operation and form has undermined the ability of surveillance organisations to track the movement of bodies or analyse intercepted material. The script therefore acts as a site of irresolvable risk as it evades the desire of surveillance institutions to see all and know all. This contradiction can also be witnessed in efforts to position Arabic as a weapon to serve both the military and security agenda. Knowledge of Arabic has become key to deciphering the artefacts collected by surveillance regimes and engaging the enemy across multiple spaces of battle. To this end, the government has developed a number of Arabic language initiatives aimed toward increasing the linguistic capability of its own citizens, defence forces, and security agencies. Despite these efforts, Arabic has continued to function as an endemic barrier to securing military objectives, serving only to highlight critical weaknesses in the national security framework.

Script and space

On 17 December 2010, a street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in the town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, in protest against ongoing harassment by local authorities. His act triggered a wave of protests across Tunisia, forcing then President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to resign after twenty-three years in power. Referred to as the Arab Spring, the revolutionary wave of demonstrations that followed this event forced rulers from power in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen, and gave rise to civil war in Bahrain and Syria.

This chapter explores the role of Arabic graffiti in the Arab Spring, and more broadly, the use of Arabic script in the production of resistant, urban space. Historically, the Arabic script has been used as a political and aesthetic instrument to reinforce existing power structures and beautify public space. But Arabic graffiti has also been a powerful tool of resistance across the Arab World, enabling protestors to communicate, mobilise, debate, and challenge authoritarian rule. For instance, graffiti emerged as an important system of communication for Palestinian protestors during the first Intifada, working to simultaneously affirm resistance, debate tradition, and envision possible futures. The practice continued into and beyond the second Intifada, reaching new prominence as a form of local activism and a site for international tourism. After exploring the use of Arabic graffiti in Palestine, I turn to its unprecedented popularity during the Arab Spring. In the first wave of protests against then President Mubarak in Cairo, Arabic graffiti was spray-painted, stencilled, and drawn by hand on walls, vehicles, and the bodies of protestors. The practice of graffiti in this period demonstrates the way in which the Arabic script was used as a key element of the broader political challenge. Operating as both a symbol of creative dissent and practical tool of communication, graffiti allowed protestors within Cairo and across the region to challenge existing political orders and assert a right to free and unregulated speech.

These images of Arabic script were immediately distributed over social media and reproduced in international news media, and later, presented in galleries and published in books. Drawing on the concept of imaginative geography, I question the visibilities and discourses surrounding these protests and the use of script. Orientalist notions of barbarism and violence dominated imaginative geographies of the Arab World in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Moving into the early twenty-first century, highly militarised discourses extended these orientalist understandings of place and presented the region in terms of geo-political threats to be contained. Narratives associated with the so-called Global War on Terror (GWOT) reinforced the cultural distance between 'Eastern' and 'Western' space and confirmed widely held notions

that the Arab World lacked civilisation. Shaped by visions of protestors and armed conflict, Arab space was broadly popularised within Western media as a site of irrational violence, ruled by an unthinking, mob force.

The Arab Spring marked a shift in these imaginative geographies and enabled a more complex understanding of Arab space at the level of the street. I argue that the explosion of Arabic graffiti in the initial phase of the Arab Spring brought with it a new fascination with the creative potential of urban space, reducing the perceived distance and difference associated the imagined geography of the Arab World and challenging Orientalist assumptions of place. The use of graffiti in these protests therefore offers fresh insight into the role of Arabic script and its relationship to physical and imaginative space.

Urban inscriptions

The Arabic script has played an important role in decorating the architectural landscape of Arab cities and shaping the experience of public space. As the most visible and respected expression of Arabic script, calligraphic designs have been used to decorate the interiors and exteriors of buildings such as mosques, shrines, palaces, private residences and tombs.[1] Through these inscriptions, calligraphy became an intrinsic part of everyday life and helped to shape the experience of urban space.

As distinct from sectarian space, public space in Arab cities has typically been open to the whole of the society, from traders, servants and foreigners, Muslims, Jews and Christians, and men and women. For this reason, the public use of Arabic script was also a practical way to communicate to a broad audience and enabled authorities to deploy power in a highly visible way. Most notably, Fatimid rulers (909 to 1171) used this function of Arabic script in Egyptian public space to further their political objectives and consolidate power. Here, officially sponsored public writing was a powerful way to continually reinforce their official position. Inscriptions were placed on facades along Cairo's thoroughfares to address the general public and confirm Fatimid military power and political legitimacy.[2] These texts consisted primarily of Quranic quotations, secular salutations, and the names of authorities and sponsors. A number of inscriptions were more explicit and specifically addressed the Fatimids' legitimacy and right to rule as descendants of the Prophet.[3] In a similar function, public script also worked to reinforce privileged spaces of

[1] On Islamic architecture and the use of script on exteriors to produce Islamic identify, see Lorenz Korn, "Religious Inscriptions in Islamic Architecture," in *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam*, ed. Juergen Wasim Frembgen (Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2010). The fourth chapter of this thesis will examine Arabic calligraphy in more depth.

[2] Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text*.

[3] Zeina Maasri, "In Praise of the Word: Political Graphics in and through the 'Arab Street' of the '60s and '70s," in *Typographic Matchmaking in the City: Propositions for a Pluralist Public Space*, ed. Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès (Amsterdam: Khatt Books, 2010).

power. For instance, inscriptions were used to indicate which buildings were restricted to the members of the ruling group, such as the Caliph, his family, the wazir, as well as various dignitaries and heads of bureaus, poets, and writers of the court, and the army.[4]

The Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1260) and consequent Mamluk dynasty (1250-1517) continued this tradition. For instance, the name, honorifics and achievements of the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun were clearly cited on a foundation inscription that ran the length of the façade of his *madrasa* complex. Ruling from 1279 to 1290, this building allowed Qalawun's power to be clearly displayed to the public along *al-Mu'iz* Street in the heart of Cairo. For lesser, if still powerful, figures of authority, exterior surfaces were used to tell the story of the building and display the patron's name, titles, honorifics and eulogies. Notable examples of this type of script include *waqf* texts and patrons' emblems. Designating an endowment in Islamic law (commonly a donation of land), *waqf* texts carried economic and religious connotations. On the one hand, they contained clear references to the patrons' wealth and power but on the other, they demonstrated the patrons' pious intentions and good deeds. Taken together, these texts contributed to the construction of a powerful figure's image as militarily powerful, politically legitimate, and religiously pious.[5]

In this way, the purpose of public texts was not limited to the communication of literal content but held a range of functions across political and aesthetic domains. For those in authority, the public text held a clear function of power and was used explicitly to reinforce existing sources of authority and privilege. But their full significance could be located in the relationship between the text, the power of rulers or patrons, the interpretation of viewers, and the environment in which that writing was placed.[6]

Rather than passively accepting this authority, the Arabic script has also been used to speak back to rulers and challenge existing relations of power. Since the early twentieth century, Arab public space has been a site for marching crowds of protesters with posters, banners and graffiti. For instance, the public banner, or *yufta*, has formed an intrinsic component of the street vernacular of major Arab cities. A *yufta* consists of a calligraphic inscription hand painted on a length of cloth, either mounted along a street or carried in a public march. As a means of political commentary, it has appeared at moments of popular uprising, political campaigning and public

[4] Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text.*

[5] Howayda Al-Harithy, "Inscriptions and the Making of Public Space in Mamluk Cairo," in *Typographic Matchmaking in the City: Propositions for a Pluralist Public Space*, ed. Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès (Amsterdam: Khatt Books, 2010).

[6] Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text.*

commemorations of significant historic events.[7] Combining aesthetics with politics, the decorative nature of Arabic calligraphy has been used to assert a political message in public space. These banners brought the written word into the street as a multilayered form of expression, claiming space through the combination of image, text, and voice.

Politically engaged artists have also used poster art as a way to engage a wide audience and expand their practice from the limited space of a gallery to the city walls. In the mid twentieth century, artists from across the Arab World (most notably from Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt) contributed political posters to the thriving activist movements of their time. For instance, posters urging unified Arab struggle for the liberation of Palestine filled the streets of Beirut from the late 1960s: in turn, these posters led to a dramatic flourishing of political graphic design during the Lebanese civil war.[8] These posters were notable for their use of Arabic script, with text often acting as the primary component of the poster's visual composition.[9] In particular, Lebanese posters tended to employ the heavy use of script, rendered in classical calligraphic or modern abstract style. In this respect, these political posters were quite distinct from design practice in the West, since European design tended to privilege the image over the word when it came to communications in public space, with artists relying heavily on the iconic and symbolic capacity of the image and seeing little use for words.[10] But like their counterpart, the street was seen as an ideal platform for expression by those who were structurally excluded from positions of privilege. Street art, whether primarily text or image, was used as a way to speak back and challenge the legitimacy of those in power.

Arabic graffiti emerged as a highly visible and popular form of urban inscription in the late twentieth century. The practice dates back to key events in the Arab World, including the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the first Intifada of 1987, and the civil war in Lebanon.[11] As explored below, Arabic graffiti offered activists and dissidents a simple but powerful engagement with public space 'from below'. I outline graffiti practice in Iran, Palestine, Syria and Egypt to demonstrate the way in which the vernacular expression of the Arabic word in public space can be a powerful tool of communication, debate, and resistance.

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[7] Zeina Maasri, *Off the Wall: Political Posters of the Lebanese Civil War* (New York and London: I.B. Taurus, 2009).

[8] See "In Praise of the Word: Political Graphics in and through the 'Arab Street' of the '60s and '70s," 31-42.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] See Safa Samiezade'-Yazd, "Revolution 2.1. The Dictator Will Be Tagged: Power, Revolution Graffiti and the Deconstructed Superhero," *Art21 Magazine (Online)* 16 August (2012). Note that the practice does have a long history prior to these events. For instance, scholars have been able to trace three thousand years of graffiti carving, including Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions and Arabic expressions, on the rock face of El Kanais in the Wadi Mia. See John Lennon, "Assembling a Revolution Graffiti, Cairo and the Arab Spring," *Cultural Studies Review* 20, no. 1 (2014).

In the 1970s, graffiti started to appear in the streets of Iran calling for an end to the Shah's regime. During the period of civil unrest from October 1977 to January 1979, protesters in Iran created political posters and covered urban surfaces with Perso-Arabic script. Several artists recreated this graffiti in the form of graphic design, preserving in poster form the anti-imperial slogans and chants that were commonly scribbled on city walls.[12] Together, both forms of protest art echoed and encouraged dissent in the streets of Iran and praised leaders of the revolution, such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Ali Shariati. At this time, modern graffiti was only a decade old but the practice had established strong ties to social revolt. Given the presence of American cultural references among the Iranian youth and the high percentage of young people involved in the revolution, revolutionary graffiti in Iran was keenly inspired by its Western counterpart.[13] But inspiration did not lead to imitation. Instead, artists established a unique style in line with Persian aesthetics. Rather than transforming the shape of letters into accentuated twists and curves (a practice common to western graffiti), Iranian graffiti was commonly written in the traditional *nasta'liq* style of calligraphy.[14] Developed in Persia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the *nasta'liq* style has been the dominant form for literary Persian and poetry. Despite being exceptionally difficult to compose, an estimated 75 per cent of everything written in Persia from the mid fifteenth century has been created in this script.[15] As a result, graffiti in Iran came to develop a unique blend of traditional aesthetics and vernacular, Western inspired forms of political dissent.

On 16 January 1979, Mohammad Reza Shah fled Iran and Ayatollah Khomeini returned on 1 February from his exile in Paris. The international media captured jubilant supporters celebrating in the streets of Tehran and cheering the triumphant homecoming of the exiled Ayatolah at Teheran's airport. The event demonstrated the power of the masses in the Arab and Muslim world, resulting in the production of iconic images of public protest for international audiences.[16] As is explored in the second half of this chapter, these images came to have a powerful effect on the way in which international audiences understood the dynamics of Arab protest and public space, particularly in relation to the increased visibility of graffiti and street art. Khomeini emerged as the clear leader and worked quickly to consolidate power. Results from a referendum the following month declared the formal dissolution of the monarchy and the formation of the

[12] Note that the Perso-Arabic alphabet is a writing system based on the Arabic alphabet, and differs in terms of four additional letters. For this reason, the Persian graffiti is included within the broader category of 'Arabic script-based graffiti' in this chapter.

[13] On the significance of graffiti in Western cities as a form of urban resistance and way of claiming space, see Kristine Somerville, "The Urban Canvas and Its Artists," *The Missouri Review (Online)* 34, no. 3 (2011).

[14] Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use".

[15] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*.

[16] Mohamed Zayani, "Courting and Containing the Arab Street: Arab Public Opinion, the Middle East, and U.S. Public Diplomacy," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (2008).

Islamic Republic of Iran: this change was immediately taken up in posters and other graphic media. Despite their revolutionary origins, these forms of protest art were quickly co-opted by authorities. As a result, Iranians were bombarded with slogans, themes, and motifs designed by the government to maintain the fighting spirit of the population. For instance, buildings and walls were covered with the faces of Iranian youth and martyrs who had lost their lives during the Iran-Iraq War.[17] The graphics used in these posters were reminiscent of those common during the revolution: however, the power relation had shifted and the content was now endorsed by authorities and aligned to the grand-narrative of the Islamic Republic. Independent visual art continued to exist but the most visible forms of graphic design, street art, and graffiti expressed the policies and ideologies of those in power.

Arabic graffiti also played a key role during the first Intifada of 1987 and has remained central to resistance movements in occupied Palestine. Graffiti emerged as an important system of communication for protestors during the first uprising, working to simultaneously affirm resistance, debate tradition, and envision possible futures.[18] Arabic graffiti was a silent narrative accompanying Palestinian acts of resistance yet was, in itself, an ongoing act of resistance. In her work on the use of graffiti during the first Intifada, Julie Peteet demonstrates the way in which messages on city walls demanded, critiqued, and provided running political commentary on the uprising.[19] At the same time, Israeli forces quickly painted over this graffiti with large blotches of black or white to prevent it from being read. During the first Intifada, Israeli authorities used fines and imprisonment to deter graffiti artists and often forced local youth at gunpoint to erase any writing that had successfully made it to the walls. This constant back and forth between the Arabic word and its erasure was a clear reflection of the ongoing conflict between resistance fighters and Israeli soldiers. But unlike their Western counterparts, the practice was not merely symbolic or a mirror of broader social conflicts: Palestinian street artists operated under conditions of warfare and constant threat. For instance, the writing of graffiti often led to violent encounters, with soldiers occasionally beating or shooting artists for civil disobedience.[20] Nonetheless, the symbolic element of graffiti gained new prominence with the Oslo peace accords of 1993. An instruction went out that all graffiti and murals were to be painted over in advance of President Arafat's arrival. The peace process was to begin with the walls washed white and bare.

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[17] Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use".

[18] Peter Hermann, "Gaza's Walls Become Public Bulletin Boards," *Montreal Gazette*, 23 December 2002.

[19] Julie Peteet, "The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada," *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1996). See also Pascal Zoghbi, "Palestinian Graffiti," in *Arabic Graffiti*, ed. Pascal Zoghbi (Berlin: From Here to Fame, 2011).

[20] Peteet, "The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada".

Palestinian graffiti returned in force in 2000 with the second Intifada and grew in popularity as the quickest way to communicate and spread news. For instance, Gaza's walls became public bulletin boards that spoke to the Palestinians who lived there.[21] These inscriptions took on communication functions that would have usually been provided by local media - announcing the news of the day alongside a list of the week's dead, marking deaths, births, and weddings alongside advertising and sales. The graffiti also expressed political goals, boasting of bombings against Israel, denouncing the United States, or reflecting disputes between rival Palestinian factions. Used by all sides, these inscriptions ranged from isolated words or names to messages and literary texts, from quick stencils to complex street art. In contrast to the first intifada, there was markedly less intervention by the Israeli military. This new freedom helped to boost the use and visibility of graffiti, with some artists even spraying graffiti near armed checkpoints, security towers, and gates with a military presence. The emergence of new media technologies in the early 2000s also allowed for greater connectivity and a global audience for their work: artists began not only to inscribe graffiti on physical sites but also to capture and transmit the images via the internet. These acts held powerful implications for culture and the resistance movement. As literary scholar Tahrir Hamdi explains, writing, drawing, and documenting the Palestinian narrative enabled a mass witnessing of that experience and helped to keep the idea of Palestine alive.[22] In this way, the wall was treated as a site of local and virtual expression, a space where the identity and idea of Palestine could be (re)produced through the word, image, and narrative.

The practice of graffiti also revealed fault lines in the resistance and the growing conflict between Hamas and Fatah during the second Intifada. In the midst of their rivalry, specific areas of the city were identified with each faction and delineated as a space for their words alone. For less clear territory, factions would publicise their intention to use a wall by marking it private: this served as a warning to others against hijacking their space.[23] Rather than presenting a united front against occupation, graffiti also became a way of demonstrating support for distinct political groups and expressing conflicting ideologies. Urban space was carved up to mirror these political differences, with territory clearly identified through distinctive forms of Arabic script design. For instance, as an Islamist organisation, Hamas primarily painted words from the Quran on their walls with the greatest care and attention. Hamas even offered courses for graffiti artists in the six main Arabic calligraphic forms, expecting the artist to be proficient in these styles before being trusted to paint on the walls.[24] Due to this training, even the more secular messages created by Hamas took on a distinctively decorative style. While the secular faction of Fatah was less concerned with calligraphy, leaders soon came to realise the need to present messages more

[21] Hermann, "Gaza's Walls Become Public Bulletin Boards".

[22] Tahrir Hamdi, "Bearing Witness in Palestinian Resistance Literature," *Race and Class* 52, no. 3 (2013).

[23] Bill Rolston, "Messages of Allegiance and Defiance: The Murals of Gaza," ibid. 55, no. 4 (2014).

[24] Zoghbi, "Palestinian Graffiti".

aesthetically and developed their own style.[25] In this way, the styles of script that developed in this time emerged from the active expression and negotiation of difference between local communities and divergent political beliefs. Just as Iranian graffiti reflected clear Persian characteristics, the rivalry between Hamas and Fatah gave rise to distinctive, identity-based forms of Arabic graffiti.

Arabic graffiti continued after the second Intifada to achieve heightened prominence and international visibility. Currently, it is a common rite of passage to spray-paint defiance of Israeli occupation on the Palestine wall. Understood as either a 'security fence' or an 'apartheid wall', this wall covers approximately 708 kilometres and annexes 9.4% of the West Bank, integrating eighty Israeli settlements and separating about 55,000 Palestinians from their relatives in East Jerusalem.[26] Palestinian popular resistance to the wall has included mass protests, weekly marches, sit-ins to obstruct Israeli bulldozers, formal legal petitions, and international advocacy campaigns. But the failure to divert or stop the wall's construction around East Jerusalem has also increased creative resistance strategies such as graffiti and protest art.[27] In turn, images of wall art have attracted international interest, particularly that of so-called 'conflict tourists' and graffiti artists. For instance, in 2014, Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organisations and tourist companies were running approximately nine 'wall tours' in East Jerusalem.[28] Key sections of the separation wall have become sites for graffiti artists, activists, and tourists to view iconic murals or add their own paintings, graffiti, and messages of resistance. This increased interest in the separation wall is due in large part to the actions of infamous British graffiti artist Banksy. Since 2005, Banksy's satirical murals left behind in Palestine have generated international media coverage and publicity.[29] Often criticised as irrelevant or disrespectful by locals, these murals have also served to highlight the immutability of the separation wall and the limited freedoms of Palestinians in comparison to international tourists and artists. Despite this, the separation wall has nonetheless served to increase the visibility of Palestinian art and confirm the key role of Arabic graffiti as a tool of communication, community and resistance.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] See David Fieni, "What a Wall Wants, or How Graffiti Thinks Nomad Grammatology in the French Banlieue," *diacritics* 40, no. 2 (2012). Fieni turns more broadly to the ways graffiti practice is currently positioning itself in relation to the proliferation of new walls, border structures, and security fences.

[27] As argued by Craig Larkin, "Jerusalem's Separation Wall and Global Message Board: Graffiti, Murals, and the Art of Sumud," *Arab Studies Journal* 22, no. 1 (2014).

[28] On whether such practices may inadvertently reify the wall's presence and permanence, and equally, whether they encourage Western graffiti artists and international peace activists to further the physical and discursive colonisation of Palestinian space, see ibid.

[29] Ibid.

The Arab Spring

Arabic graffiti gained new heights of popularity in Egypt during the Arab Spring. The Egyptian revolution was ignited by the murder of Khalid Muhammad Sa'id by police in June 2010. This act galvanised long-standing opposition to Husni Mubarak's regime, and from 25 January 2011 to 11 February 2011, six million Egyptians took part in a pro-democracy uprising.

During the first few days of the uprising, the regime shut down cell phone and internet networks in an attempt to prevent activists from communicating. But hundreds of thousands of people continued to gather in the streets following Friday prayers and found ways to communicate via informal networks and graffiti. Activists occupied Tahrir Square and waged small battles throughout the city, including acts of clear civil disobedience, such as burning down the iconic headquarters of the National Democratic Party. The police responded with tear gas, rubber bullets, shotguns, and live ammunition. Describing the protests as a plot to destabilise Egypt, the army took over all remaining installations from the police in Cairo and warned citizens to respect a curfew, firing on any protestors that remained in the streets. Activists responded to these measures by holding election campaigns, press conferences, sermons, demonstrations, and strikes. By 30 January 2011, the Internet was still down but activists took pictures with their mobile phones. Boosting international attention, the broadcast station al-Jazeera presented live coverage of the protests despite attempts by the government to shut it down.

Arabic script was ubiquitous in the background of images and reporting on the uprising, with banners, graffiti, and signs commonly produced in both Arabic and English (figure 3). The use of both scripts was designed to engage a larger audience than the one present in the streets of Cairo. When the internet was finally re-established, the combination of broadcast and social media allowed these images to travel quickly to a global audience.

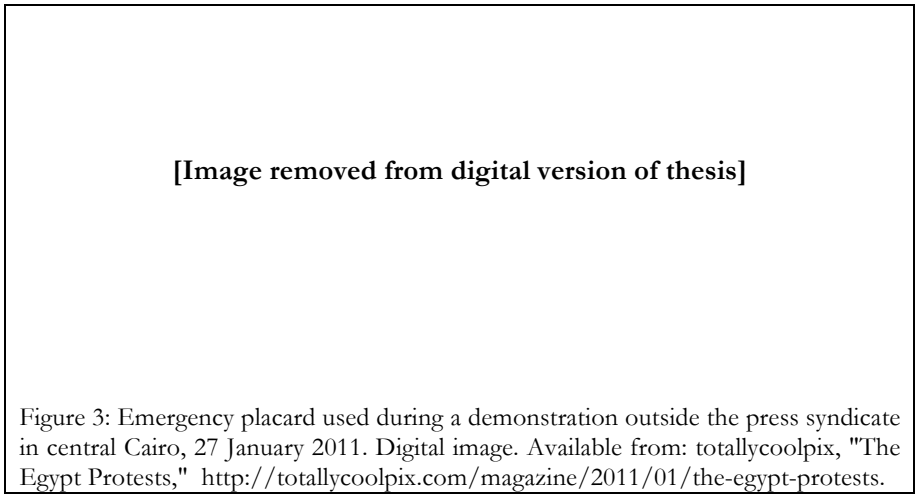

Figure 3: Emergency placard used during a demonstration outside the press syndicate in central Cairo, 27 January 2011. Digital image. Available from: totallycoolpix, "The Egypt Protests," http://totallycoolpix.com/magazine/2011/01/the-egypt-protests.

Graffiti had rarely been seen in Egypt during Mubarak's 29-year rule, with authorities maintaining tight control over public space and political expression. Collective public expression had been limited, if not simply prohibited, by the security apparatus. It must be recognised that artistic resistance was not a new phenomenon in Egypt or the Middle East, and creativity as a form of dissent has been evident for a long time in art, film, literature, and music.[30] But under Mubarak, these practices largely existed underground. As Egyptian-Lebanese artist Lara Baladi explains, the era was stagnant: as such, the primary role of art had been to unsettle the quiet river bed and make noise.[31] Dissident art during this period tended to criticise the state, break established discourses, and reflect on traditions, social dynamics, and rules. Broadly speaking, its objective was to raise socio-political awareness and challenge what was seen as passivity toward the system. But during the revolution, Baladi explains that:

> There is a dam that broke so fast and so forcefully that it gave way to a huge cascade of creativity, a massive long-repressed need to express oneself that was finally freed. Young artists have grabbed the revolution's momentum and responded - at the surface of the fast-running water - to the constantly evolving political situation.[32]

This creativity was expressed through an explosion of graffiti, with street art becoming the ideal medium for the leftist and progressive youth activists who led the protest against Mubarak.

As a powerful fusion of street art, urban culture, and the written word, graffiti enabled protesters and artists alike to honour the dead, hold perpetrators accountable, and demand justice. Arabic graffiti and street art offered forms of resistance that helped to take power away from a corrupt regime and break down the heroic myths that had legitimised these dictatorships for so long.[33] Authorities in Egypt (and police state countries more broadly) had used public art as a means of propaganda and a projection of autocratic state power. Recognising the political significance of public space and its power to make meaning, authorities created a situation in which forms of image production that were not prescribed by the state were censored or confined to the private sphere.[34] As a result, the use of art and text in public space primarily defined the state's political stance and reinforced the regime's ideology.

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[30] Samiezade'-Yazd, "Revolution 2.1. The Dictator Will Be Tagged: Power, Revolution Graffiti and the Deconstructed Superhero".

[31] Dorothea Schoene, "Art in a Revolution: A Conversation with Lara Baladi," *Afterimage* 39, no. 5 (2012).

[32] Ibid. On the ways in which resistance to power has manifested in art during the Arab Spring, see Charles Tripp, "The Art of Resistance in the Middle East," *Asian Affairs* 43, no. 3 (2012).

[33] As argued by Samiezade'-Yazd, "Revolution 2.1. The Dictator Will Be Tagged: Power, Revolution Graffiti and the Deconstructed Superhero". Note that human rights discourses in this graffiti broadly turned to security service excesses, women's rights, and statements about human potentiality: see Ken Seigneurie, "Discourses of the 2011 Arab Revolutions," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012).

[34] Chad Elias, "Graffiti, Social Media and the Public Life of Images in the Egyptian Revolution," in *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution*, ed. Don Stone Karl and Basma Hamdy (From Here to Fame, 2014).

Public space under Mubarak was shaped by images of coercive consent and ideological control. During the Arab Spring, street art and graffiti came to populate the public landscape and take over spaces that had previously been exploited by authorities. For instance, artists created numerous caricatures of President Mubarak and Field Marshal Tantawi, the leader of the military junta that succeeded him.[35] In this regard, street art remained an extension of the previous model of consciousness-raising, employing playful strategies to engage the public and challenge the fear and passivity promoted by state television.

But due in large part to its simplicity and low cost, graffiti also made new forms of democratic participation possible. Rather than simply commenting on current events, graffiti was used as a vehicle for citizens to actively participate in public debate about how to live together and declare their rights under authoritarian power structures.[36] By provoking public discussion, these artists challenged the previous regimes of silence and enforced ignorance. Artists were quick to refute facts presented by government run media, offering members of the public a counter image and narrative that encourage critical viewing and further debate. In this way, dissident image production made new forms of public participation possible, challenging dominant ideology through parodic images and counter-narratives. But the use of Arabic graffiti also allowed activists to create new relationships with urban space, rather than simply negotiate those that had already been established. As Judith Butler argues, public space is not a given - it is a geography produced through collective political action.

> The collective actions collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture. As much as we must insist on there being material conditions for public assembly and public speech, we have also to ask how it is that assembly and speech reconfigure the materiality of public space, and produce, or reproduce, the public character of that material environment.[37]

As activists reclaimed Cairo's public spaces in downtown streets and Tahrir Square, they also transformed them into sites of public protest. Graffiti became a way to contest the use and meaning of urban space.[38] As a result, key sites of protest gained new symbolic and political significance.

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[35] Rolston, "Messages of Allegiance and Defiance: The Murals of Gaza".

[36] Elias, "Graffiti, Social Media and the Public Life of Images in the Egyptian Revolution".

[37] Judith Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street," *transversal - eipcp multilingual webjournal* 9 (2011).

[38] Wael Salah Fahmi, "Bloggers' Street Movement and the Right to the City. (Re)Claiming Cairo's Real and Virtual "Spaces of Freedom"," *Environment & Urbanization* 21, no. 1 (2009). See also Anon., "Artists Save Egypt's Revolutionary Graffiti," *Bozeman Daily Chronicle*, 8 October 2012 and Seigneurie, "Discourses of the 2011 Arab Revolutions".

Colonial authorities had typically established plazas and squares in Arab cities in an effort to create a familiar European urban environment. This was the case in most cities of the Maghreb from Morocco to Algeria and Tunisia.[39] In Egypt, Khedive Ismail built Cairo's downtown area between 1863 and 1879 as part of an ambitious city planning initiative that focussed on creating broad boulevards and public squares.[40] Baron Haussmann, a French urban planner, reordered Tahrir Square with wide streets and large traffic circles, wanting to model the city on the boulevards of Paris.[41] But in the 1950s, Tahrir Square began to assume new revolutionary meaning when the nationalist movements of the early twentieth century used the square to protest Egypt's colonial powers. Protestors were injured or killed as they demonstrated for independence and clashed with colonial forces. After the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, as the country moved from being a constitutional monarchy to a republic, Egypt's new leadership sought to remove all traces of the old regime, and in particular, all Ismailian names: to this end, fourteen streets and squares in Cairo were renamed. *Midan Ismailia* was changed to *Midan al Tahrir* (Liberation Square). In more recent history, Tahrir Square has held various youth protests and demonstrations, including the 1972 student-led democracy movement and a five-day protest by activists and bloggers in the spring of 2006. In this latter event, youth activists transformed the Square and nearby streets into zones for public protest, employing urban installations and street graffiti, and creating a meaningful site of urban resistance.[42]

As the combined result of these actions, Tahrir Square, and the surrounding section of the city more broadly, came to be regarded as a contested site for collective action - a symbolic space for urban youth's political participation and spatial appropriation. During the Arab Spring, Tahrir Square became a symbol of hope. As the activist and graphic designer Caram Kapp explains:

> Tahrir has become far more than just a square. It is an ideological territory, a symbol of progress and freedom that has to be protected and defended from the surrounding decay and corruption… Tahrir Square, during those 18 days of utopia, was an act of patriotic love. It was love for Egypt and Egyptians desire for change in their country that brought together those

[39] Nasser Rabbat, "The Arab Revolution Takes Back the Public Space," *Critical Inquiry* 39, no. 1 (2012).

[40] Lennon, "Assembling a Revolution Graffiti, Cairo and the Arab Spring".

[41] Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, "Arab Contemporary: Architecture, Culture and Identity," http://www.louisiana.dk/.

[42] Salah Fahmi, "Bloggers' Street Movement and the Right to the City. (Re)claiming Cairo's Real and Virtual 'Spaces of Freedom'". Recognising that the space itself was a threat, the government of Bahrain tore down a monument in Pearl Square, a central traffic roundabout in the capital Manama. It had been a gathering spot for Shi'ite protesters and pro-democracy activists demonstrating against the minority Sunni regime. See Josh Sanburn, "Square Roots: How Public Spaces Helped Mold the Arab Spring," *Time*, 17 May 2011.

> who staged the sit in. It was faith in their compatriots around the world that a better Egypt was possible.[43]

The Arabic script was a key element of this operation: the urban environment, and Tahrir in particular, was produced and (re)articulated as a space of Arabic script. Graffiti allowed protestors to rewrite the meaning of space and create a new set of civic meanings, founded in notions of free speech and democratic participation.[44] As explored above, the work of Arabic graffiti is inseparable from the political, social, and material dimensions of the space in which it is inscribed. During the initial phase of the Arab Spring in Egypt, the meaning of urban space was reproduced anew through the use of script. Whether used to reinforce or challenge power, the inscription of Arabic worked to produce the meaning of place and shape the way in which populations engage with, and progressively transform, its space.

Graffiti also offered a way to resist the State's attempt to make people forget, and to turn victims into statistics with no voice or identity.[45] To this end, artists recorded the names of those killed by security forces during demonstrations and kept their stories alive. By February 2011, the United Nations had placed the overall death toll at 300, with approximately 3000 reported injured.[46] As with occupied Palestine, the symbolic and artistic resistance of graffiti was only one among many forms of protest – all of which took place under the constant physical threat of injury or death. Mubarak supporters used clubs, stones and knives to attack protestors while the Egyptian army secretly conducted systematic torture and mass arrests. Under these conditions, human rights organisations reported hundreds of missing people and horrific mistreatment by the army. In response, field hospitals were erected in Tahrir Square and demonstrations included shrine-like installations, with posters, banners, and flags displaying portraits of the dead. Murals of martyrs became extremely popular, ranging from iconic saint like depictions to stencil portraits, from simple inscriptions of the victim's names to messages that directly addressed them as though they were still alive.[47]

In this way, public space was used as both a symbolic and literal battleground: graffiti and protest art allowed activists to capture the likenesses of those who had died and keep the memory of

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[43] Don Stone Karl and Basma Hamdy, eds., *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution* (From here to fame, 2014), 49.

[44] See Samiezade'-Yazd, "Revolution 2.1. The Dictator Will Be Tagged: Power, Revolution Graffiti and the Deconstructed Superhero". For a powerful example of this transformative use of street art, the 'No Walls' project, launched on March 9, 2012, sought to transform seven military blockades into virtual open spaces with painted landscapes, to re-open the blocked streets by making the walls invisible. These images remade the meaning and appearance of space through realist representations of absent streets and a denial of existing, constrained public space: see Mohamed El Dahshan, "Art Conquers Walls in Cairo," http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/03/19/art-conquers-walls-in-cairo/.

[45] Hani Naeem, "Graffiti and the Arab Uprisings," *Heinrich Boll*, 6 March 2013.

[46] Karl and Hamdy, *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution*.

[47] Ibid.

victims alive (figure 4). One of these portraits became an iconic symbol of the revolution. The face of Khaled Sa'id – the young man who had been arrested, tortured and murdered in June 2010 – was stencilled on walls across Egypt next to the words 'We are all Khaled Sa'id' (figure 5).[48]

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]		**[Image removed from digital version of thesis]**
Figure 4. Mural to a protestor killed in Tahrir Square in February 2011, with the words 'Glory to the martyr Mohamad Gamal el-Din' in Arabic. Digital image in Karl and Hamdy, *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution*, 57.		Figure 5: Mural of Khaled Sa'id, with the words 'Interior Ministry police are thugs'. Digital image. Available from: suzeeinthecity, "For the Love of Graffiti: Cairo's Walls Trace History of Colourful Revolution," http://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/.

The first stage of the Egyptian Revolution came to a close on 10 February 2011, when the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) announced its support for the people. The next day, Mubarak's resignation was confirmed after rumours that he had fled Cairo by helicopter for the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

Regional connections

The use of Egyptian graffiti in these events went on to influence protestors in other Arab states. For instance, Arabic graffiti played a key role in the early stages of the Syrian civil war. On 18 March 2011, the Syrian uprising began with the arrest of fifteen schoolchildren in the southern agricultural town of Dar'aa near the border with Jordan. These young boys were brutally tortured for writing "the people want the overthrow of the regime" on a wall - a slogan they had learned from watching coverage of the Egyptian uprising on Al-Jazeera. The detention and torture of these boys drove protesters to the streets, with the movement quickly gaining strength.

Syrian graffiti was usually limited to short slogans that were improvised and written in haste. Largely devoid of sophisticated visual imagery, this style was strongly reflective of the constraints on expression and civil liberties characteristic of their political context. The Baath Party had ruled Syria since the 1960s, curbing speech and imprisoning or executing anyone who dared oppose its rule. As a result, any form of protest was inherently dangerous as activists were liable to be abducted or murdered by security forces. In addition to limited freedoms, Bashar al-Assad's modernisation efforts had created a wider chasm between those close to the regime and the

[48] Naeem, "Graffiti and the Arab Uprisings".

majority of the population (especially young people) who were left behind.[49] The 2011 public uprising against the regime sought to challenge the authority of al-Assad, just as their counterparts in the region had done with Mubarak and Ben Ali. Of particular note, graffiti emerged a key form of political expression by both rebels and Assad loyalists (figures 6 and 7).[50]

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]	**[Image removed from digital version of thesis]**
Figure 6: Stencil of Al-Assad with the words 'The People Want the Downfall of the Regime'. Digital image captured in 2011. Available from: suzeeinthecity, "Protest Graffiti: Solidarity with Syria Spreads from Cairo," http://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/.	Figure 7: Graffiti in Damascus, Syria with the words "We are sorry for the inconvenience…we die for you". Digital image captured in 2012. Available from: The Revolting Syrian, "Graffiti by the FSA in Damascus, Syria," http://www.therevoltingsyrian.com/.

Early victories in Syria and Egypt were not sustained. The revolution in Syria escalated quickly and took an increasingly sectarian form from 2012. State security forces cracked down on the growing number of uprisings across the country, killing and arresting peaceful protestors.[51] As noted above, SCAF assumed control of Egypt after Hosni Mubarak fled. Composed of twenty-one senior military officers, SCAF ruled Egypt from February 2011 to June 2012. Under SCAF, basic human rights were violated, citizens were tried in military courts, and the armed forces killed or injured protestors *en masse*. For instance, on 9 April 2011 the army and police attacked the remaining protestors in Tahrir Square, using electric batons and live ammunition to drive them out of the space.[52] The Egyptian revolution continued but the popular movement underwent a noticeable decline in intensity.

[49] See Philippe Droz-Vincent, ""State of Barbary" (Take Two): From the Arab Spring to the Return of Violence in Syria," *The Middle East Journal* 68, no. 1 (2014) and Hafizullah Emadi, "Requiem for the Baath Party: Struggle for Change and Freedom in Syria," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (2011).

[50] See Samiezade'-Yazd, "Revolution 2.1. The Dictator Will Be Tagged: Power, Revolution Graffiti and the Deconstructed Superhero" and Rima Marrouch, "Graffiti War in Syria," *Arte: The Arab World in Revolution(s)* 12 March (2012).

[51] See Christopher Phillips, "Syria's Torment," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 54, no. 4 (2012) and Emadi, "Requiem for the Baath Party: Struggle for Change and Freedom in Syria".

[52] See Naeem, "Graffiti and the Arab Uprisings".

Egyptian graffiti came to reflect a depth of frustration over the perceived failure of the revolution to realise its main goals.[53] Graffiti denouncing the military began to spread soon after SCAF came to power and artists continued to use public space to denounce the new military dictatorship and strive for revolution. Some artists even took considerable risks to place their work on buildings that were controlled by the State: for instance, a portrait of Khaled Sa'id appeared briefly on the walls of a building that housed the interior ministry and security headquarters.[54] But anti-military graffiti had a relatively short lifespan before it was painted over or defaced with black spray paint. Members of the public also supported the military against artists during this time, helping authorities to remove offending images. These acts of censorship often incited the creation of more images and text in their place.

For instance, when the mural of a martyr was censored by the State, a 'mad graffiti' weekend was launched in response. Notable street artists, including Ganzeer, invited Egyptians to create as much graffiti as they could within the weekend of 20-21 May 2011.[55] The response was overwhelming, with graffiti artists and activists working intensely over both days to repaint censored pieces and produce fresh ones. In December 2011, Ganzeer sent out a second appeal.

> This is an appeal to help save lives. The Egyptian Military Council has unleashed a brutal crackdown on peaceful protests by the Egyptian people. Calling for the resignation of the military council and a cancellation of the sham elections that they've been running under their supervision. Soldiers have shown us no mercy. Hitting fallen women with their batons. Stomping on skulls with their boots. And shooting unarmed civilians dead. I've seen this happen with my own eyes and was unable to stop it. It's a soul-shattering pain like no other […] Our only hope right now is to destroy the military council using the weapon of art. From January 13 to 25. The streets of Egypt will see an explosion of anti-military street art. It you are a street artist elsewhere in the world. Please do what you can in your city to help us.[56]

Here, the production of Arabic graffiti is explicitly understood as a cornerstone of revolution and a necessary response to authoritarian rule. Not simply a 'war of the walls', Ganzeer's call for support also highlights the ongoing interplay between physical threat and artistic resistance in Egypt – a situation shared more broadly by activists across occupied and police state countries. The appeal received a strong response within Egypt and spread internationally, with artists from across disparate sites such as Germany, Canada, and Jakarta creating work to support the protest

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[53] See Anon., "Artists Save Egypt's Revolutionary Graffiti,". On graffiti during this period, see Ameral Warea, "Writing on the Walls: Transition, a Photographic Series by Myriam Abdelaziz," *Art and architecture in the Arab World*, 15 April 2012.

[54] Elias, "Graffiti, Social Media and the Public Life of Images in the Egyptian Revolution".

[55] See Karl and Hamdy, *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution*. Ganzeer is the pseudonym of an Egyptian artist operating between graphic design and contemporary art since 2007: see Ganzeer, "Ganzeer," http://www.ganzeer.com/.

[56] Karl and Hamdy, *Walls of Freedom: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution*, 120.

against SCAF. The success of both events led to a Mad Graffiti Week Iran and a Mad Graffiti Week Syria.

Building on this momentum, a number of prominent activists went on to organise a Freedom Graffiti Week from 14 to 21 April 2012. Drawing on a sense of regional solidarity, protestors from Syria and across the Arab world were encouraged to take up spray cans in an coordinated act of resistance.[57] Freedom Graffiti Week was indicative of the way the Arab Spring developed as both a local and regional phenomenon, demonstrating clear differences across each site while also inciting a shared challenge to entrenched, authoritarian power. While each protest movement articulated their own unique circumstances, fundamental to the Arab Spring as a whole was the demand for accountable government and an end to autocracy. Arabic graffiti spanned the many different types of protest that exploded throughout the region, connecting them together while also reflecting their specific political projects.

This regional connection can be witnessed at a linguistic level through the use of the word *irhal*, the Arabic imperative for "leave" or "go out", that had been used in protests against Ben Ali in Tunisia.[58] A few weeks after these demonstrations, *irhal* was also used by Egyptian protestors as they called on Mubarak to leave. The word was practical in the Egyptian context, as it made simple, literal sense, but there was also an underlying connotation of common purpose with Tunisia, representing a convergence of the local and regional concerns. In one notable example, rocks were laid out to translate *irhal* into multiple languages (Figure 8). In this image, the Arabic word *irhal* is presented in translation as a clear sign of integrated protest for local, regional and international audiences. As with graffiti more broadly, this commonality was not limited to the realm of linguistics or symbolism: rather, the Arabic word was used as one tool among a range of protest activities. Here also, Tunisian protesters acted as a prototype for their Egyptian counterparts: for instance, after the success of their uprising, Tunisian activists provided advice on how to employ creative tactics against the Egyptian Anti-Riot Forces.[59] But graffiti was a powerful, visible sign of protest that brought the various movements together as a regional event: here, it is worth remembering that the school children who sparked the initial protests in Syria were inspired to use graffiti they had seen in the Egyptian revolution.

[57] Tarun Nagesh, "Protest and Poetry: Recent Graffiti from the Arab World," *Artlink* 34, no. 1 (2014).

[58] Helga Tawil-Souri, "Egypt's Uprising and the Shifting Spatialities of Politics," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 1 (2012).

[59] Jacqueline S. Ismael and Shereen T. Ismael, "The Arab Spring and the Uncivil State," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (2013).

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 8: Stones placed in Tahrir Square to form the phrase 'Go out' in different languages. Digital image captured on 1 February 2011. Available from: The Guardian. "Egypt Protests in Pictures," http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2011/feb/07/egypt-protests-in-pictures

Common to the Arab uprisings as a whole, I argue that Arabic graffiti reflected the connection between these two scales of protest through the development of distinct, local styles and the creation of a shared, regional practice. As explored above, Arabic graffiti has been a powerful tool for protesters across the Arab World, enabling protestors to communicate, mobilise, debate, and resist authoritarian rule. As artists developed local forms, Arabic graffiti also came to express the needs of populations resisting different forms of political and social constraint. As seen in both Iran and occupied Palestine, graffiti as a practice was transformed in the process: in the former, the style of words were shaped by calligraphic aesthetics, while in the latter, graffiti styles came to reflect the ideologies of different factions. Broader regional connections established during the Arab Spring demonstrated the way in which Arabic graffiti is also a shared practice. Tied together by a shared script and a sense of common purpose, graffiti artists drew on the Arabic word to express resistance to authoritarian rule and solidarity across the region and diaspora.

I argue that this increase in popularity and reach has enabled a more complex, nuanced presentation of Arab public space for global audiences. During the Arab Spring, Arabic graffiti became extremely visible to international audiences as images exploded across the media and virtual spaces. In conjunction with increased media attention on street art in occupied Palestine, the Arabic script has, as a result, taken on a fresh set of meanings. In the following section, I turn to the 'imaginative' production of space and argue that urban space in the Arab World has increasingly become visualised and articulated in terms of its creative potential. I draw on the notion of imaginative geographies to explore the significance of this shift and place Arabic graffiti within the context of broader discourses of Arab cities and space. As a symbol of creative dissent and modern, technological protest, I argue that Arabic graffiti enabled an imagination of place that briefly challenged (if not negated) dominant notions of barbarism attached to Arab cities and space.

Imaginative Geographies

For Edward Said, imaginative geographies were discursive formations that link power, knowledge, and spatiality in order to dramatise distance and difference.[60] These constellations are centered on 'here' and projected towards 'there', referencing both material place and dominant cultural narratives. The imaged space of the Orient was a clear focus of Said's project. As part of the colonial empire, the Orient was a physical space with clear political territory and functioned as part of European material civilisation. In nineteenth-century European usage, the region referred to the Arab world or the Middle East more broadly - a region that lay immediately to the east of Europe. But the Orient also worked as a mode of discourse, and in this capacity, remained geographically ambivalent. In its discursive role, the Orient functioned as an absolute point of otherness outside the framework of Europe, defined more by a sense of distance and difference rather than any line on a map. For Said, the representation of space is closely linked to the relations of power in which they are implicated. As colonising technologies of knowledge, such discursive representations are taken as truth, and in turn, are able to produce material effects. In this respect, orientalism functioned as a system of knowledge production that represented and created geography in terms of occidental desires.

> Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.[61]

In Orientalist constructions, these figurations of place took the form of a line between West and East, demarcating Occident from Orient, safety from the dangerous unknown. As the threatening continent from without, its role was to be a clear and powerful opposite.

More recent work on imaginative geography has stressed the way in which this division of the Occident from the Orient consistently re-writes these borders and re-creates this opposition, but in doing so, remains geographically ambivalent. Slavoj Žižek describes this process in terms of the insistent desire to be west of the East. For right-wing nationalists in Austria, an imaginary border between East and West runs along the mountain range between Austria and Slovenia, and beyond it begins the realm of the 'Slavic hordes'.[62] But for national Slovenians, this border operates along the Kolpa River that separates Slovenia from Croatia, demarcating central Europe from the Balkans.

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[60] See Mildred Mortimer, "Representing the Orient: A New Instructional Approach," *The French Review* 79, no. 2 (2005), Derek Gregory, "Imaginative Geographies," *Progress in Human Geography* 19, no. 4 (1995), and Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*.

[61] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 7.

[62] As outlined in Inke Arns and Andreas Broeckmann, "Small Media Normality for the East," in *ZK Proceedings 4: Beauty and the East*, ed. P. Schultz, et al. (Ljubljana Digital Media Lab, 1997).

> For the Croatians, this all-important border is naturally the one between them and the Serbs, that is the one between Western Catholic civilization and the Eastern Orthodox collective spirit which cannot fathom the values of western individualism. And finally, the Serbs believe they are the last line of defense for Christian Europe against the fundamentalist danger embodied by the Islamic Albanians and Bosnians.[63]

In this way, a clear border between East and West continues to be reproduced in order to mark the line between Western civilisational space and what lies beyond – chaos and threat.[64] The same division of meaning is reproduced with each border, such that the demarcation of East from West operates across and between multiple locations. Alongside this, a particular form of 'Eastern' threat is enacted according to the specificity of the political context, local conflicts, and deep-seated discourses of cultural difference.

The imagination of place can also enable or reinforce political and spatial realities. The imaginative geographies associated with Palestinian land in the mid twentieth century are a notable example of this process. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, the British Mandatory government in Palestine supported Zionist settlement efforts and the goal of establishing a homeland for the Jewish people. Drawing on established orientalist discourses, Zionist settlement goals aligned Jewish populations with modernity, civilisation and colonial 'development', at the same time as they framed Palestine as a deserted, savage place.[65] On the one hand, these discourses helped to gain the support of Western powers by validating the European sense of self as powerful, articulate, rational, developed, and modern. On the other, the distant and unfamiliar space of Palestine was rendered meaningful by creating a powerful sense of distance, absence, and difference. Here, the idea of 'place' came to possess those meanings that were imposed on it via orientalist regimes of spatiality. These imaginative geographies were so effective they were able to deny evidence that late nineteenth century Palestine was a well-populated, agricultural space, with an active economy and complex political system.[66] Zionist settler activity sought to recreate the imaginative geographies of the homeland, and in a sense, rewrite the geographic and political meaning of Palestinian land. To this end, settlers focussed on creating a green, agriculturally rich promised land: nurseries were established

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[63] Quoted in ibid, 4.

[64] See Oliver Marchart, "The East, the West and the Rest: Central and Eastern Europe between Techno-Orientalism and the New Electronic Frontier," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 4 (1998).

[65] See Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992). Note that Zionism is an area of Judaic thought concerning how and when Jews will return to the land of Israel, having been exiled since the first century.

[66] On the multiple, entangled geographies of Palestine-Israel and an exploration of the ways in which territory, sovereignty and security are bound up with bodies, mobility and identity, see Joanna Long, "Geographies of Palestine-Israel," *Geography Compass* 5, no. 5 (2011).

across Palestine, trees were planted, and European agricultural techniques were rolled out.[67] This work came to reinforce Zionist claims to belonging, particularly in the eyes of the British mandatory government that brokered the partition plan that enabled the establishment of the state of Israel on Palestinian land. Here, orientalist imaginations of place played a role in creating a geo-political reality. Subsequent violence against Palestinian populations through possession of their land followed this pattern, with practices of meaning-making enabling authorities with territorial ambitions to take - and remake - the urban and rural landscape.[68]

This operation continues to affect the modern geopolitical world. Modern military strategies both contain and create imaginative geographies, specifying the way 'the world is' and, in so doing, actively re-making that world.[69] This process has been particularly evident in contemporary military approaches to the Arab World by the United States. Here, imaginative geographies have been closely tied to foreign relations and international security policy: these approaches have been both enabled by and productive of specific geographical imaginations.[70] As part of this operation, military discourse and public policy have repeatedly positioned the Orient as requiring intervention. In the late twentieth century, these locations were presented as zones of instability, rogue states, 'states of concern,' and 'global hotspots'. For instance, from the late 1970s, military discourse referred to an 'arc of crisis' stretching from the Horn of Africa through to the Middle East and Afghanistan.[71] In late twentieth-century geopolitics, these sites came to be primarily located in the Muslim world and in particular, the Middle East. Drawing on long-established colonial and orientalist tropes, Middle Eastern culture and land was represented as intrinsically barbaric, infantile, backward or threatening. Media presentations supported these discourses by presenting images that both confirmed deep-seated spatial understandings of Islamic violence and emphasised the confrontation between Western civilisation and an array of barbarian enemies.[72]

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[67] See ibid.

[68] See Gary Fields, "'This Is Our Land': Collective Violence, Property Law, and Imagining the Geography of Palestine," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 29, no. 3 (2012). On the organised, political violence that has been legitimised and sustained through complex imaginative geographies, which in turn have sustained orientalist treatments of the Arab world as Other amongst Western colonial powers, see Said, *The Politics of Dispossession* and Derek Gregory, "Between the Book and the Lamp: Imaginative Geographies of Egypt, 1849-50," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 20, no. 1 (1995).

[69] As argued by Luiza Bialasiewicz et al., "Performing Security: The Imaginative Geographies of Current US Strategy," *Political Geography* 26, no. 4 (2007). On the relationship between the imaginative geographies of Middle Eastern cities and resultant military action, see Stephen Graham, "Cities and the 'War on Terror'," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30 (2006).

[70] See John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2003), Marcus Power and Andrew Crampton, "Reel Geopolitics: Cinemato-Graphing Political Space," *Geopolitics* 10, no. 2 (2005), Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), Neil Smith, "Scales of Terror and the Resort to Geography: September 11, October 7," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19 (2001), and Merje Kuus, "Europe's Eastern Expansion and the Re-Inscription of Otherness in East-Central Europe," *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 4 (2004).

[71] David Campbell, "Geopolitics and Visuality: Sighting the Darfur Conflict," *Political Geography* 26 (2007).

[72] For instance, see Carr, "The Barbarians of Fallujah". Presented as an irredeemable site of barbaric violence, military advisors sought to erase the location from the map. The classical distinction between civilisation and barbarity has been replayed through centuries of European military expansion and used to

A distinct trend across these accounts is the notion that these regions remain uncivilised and outside the arc of history, resistant to neoliberal globalization and the spread of formal democracy. For instance, controversial North American commentators such as Thomas Friedman, Dennis Ross, Samuel Huntington, Daniel Pipes, and Bernard Lewis launched media campaigns to promote the argument that the Arab World has failed, or is implicitly unable, to either progress and modernise.[73] This sense of backwardness was attached to both populations and their cities. The typical narrative associated with modern Middle Eastern cities is loss and decline: through colonisation or internal failure, Arab cities have been trapped within a perpetual state of under-development.[74] Equally, it is assumed that the Arab and Muslim populations within these cities have been unable to develop, grow, and in turn modernise. In self-reinforcing logic, the figure of the Arab was judged incapable of producing contemporary urban spaces or modern structures. These discourses were so effective, they were able to overwrite significant evidence to the contrary. For instance, between 1950 and 1963, the urban space of Baghdad was reshaped by a confluence of modernist movements in architecture, post-World War Two development discourse, and an expanding colonial apparatus. These forces produced a modern urban order characterised by an aesthetics of technology, a strong visual culture, and robust abstract art scene. But Baghdad's urban space and its objects were still interpreted as 'shabbier' versions of the modern.[75] To be properly modern, the discursive strategies of modernity required that objects of modernity be geographically located in West.[76] Since the city was located in the Orient, it was necessarily distant, backward and threatening. Here, a sense of civilisational difference and geographical distance was understood to be preventing Arab societies – its cities and its populations - from joining the modern community of nations.

These spatial imaginations of backwardness have validated geostrategic objectives and provided a means for understanding and responding to sites of perceived threat across the Middle East. In doing so, they work by designating familiar space and opposing it to distant geographies inhabited by an Other— understood here as select Arab and Islamic cities that have been transformed into legitimate targets for military action. For instance, neo-conservative commentators Richard Perle and David Frum depicted this region as a 'cesspit' of violence, hatred, and religious fanaticism

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justify gratuitous acts of slaughter by armies and states that claimed to be acting in the name of civilisation: see Al-Azmeh, "Civilization, Culture and the New Barbarians".

[73] Stephen Sheehi, "Arabic Literary-Scientific Journals: Precedence for Globalization and the Creation of Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 2 (2005). See also Najob Hourani and Ahmed Kanna, "Arab Cities in the Neoliberal Moment," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 36, no. 2 (2014).

[74] Elsheshtawy, "The Middle East City: Moving Beyond the Narrative of Loss," 1-18.

[75] Haytham Bahoora, "Modernism before Modernity: Literature and Urban Form in Iraq, 1950-1963" (New York University, 2010).

[76] Ibid.

that could only be cured by limitless western military interventions.[77] In 2000, the conservative U.S. think tank Project for a New American Century (PNAC) argued that U.S. economic and military interests could only be preserved by actively addressing these zones of conflict.

> There exists an 'arc of instability' stretching from the Western Hemisphere, through Africa and the Middle East and extending to Asia. There are areas in this arc that serve as breeding grounds for threats to our interests. Within these areas rogue states provide sanctuary to terrorists, protecting them from surveillance and attack.[78]

According to this position, the major military mission was no longer to deter Soviet expansionism but to secure and expand zones of democratic peace, deter the rise of any new great-power competitors, and defend key regions.[79] Exerting influence over high-level officials during the George W. Bush administration (particularly in relation to military and foreign policies), PNAC's understanding of chaos and threat helped to shape new visions of international politics and geography. To counter contemporary threats, they argued that the U.S. was required to station its troops more broadly, such that their presence in critical regions around the world would be a visible expression of North America's status as a superpower and guarantor of liberty, peace and stability.[80] These U.S. forces were to provide the first line of defence and an international 'American security perimeter' - a frontier that would be continuously adjusted to reflect the shifting strategic landscape.

Through these adjustments, the regional imagination in the Pentagon continued to evolve, with new regions of potential conflict conjured in the process of specifying threats to American interests. This has been evident in the new international geography created by the GWOT. On a local scale, new spaces specific to this new geography of threat were created, from 'black sites' to extraterritorialities of legal jurisdiction and detention camps. In a broader sense, a new understanding of the international and regional threat was produced. A distinctive aspect of this imaginative geography is the notion of integration, whereby states must be either with the U.S. or against them. In 2002, then U.S. national security advisor Condoleeza Rice spoke in terms of a fundamental divide between the forces of chaos and those of order, and argued that nations needed to decide whether they were on the side of civilisation or terror.[81] Asserted as the

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[77] Carr, "The Barbarians of Fallujah".

[78] Joint Chiefs of Staff, "The National Military Strategy of the United States of America: A Strategy for Today; a Vision for Tomorrow."
http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/d20050318nms.pdf.

[79] Project for the New American Century, "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century," http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Quoted in Carr, "The Barbarians of Fallujah". On the role this rhetoric played in producing a geographic bond between Israel, India and the US, see Oza, "Contrapuntal Geographies of Threat and Security: The United States, India and Israel". On the imaginative geographies formed as a result of the GWOT, see

principal foreign policy and security strategy of the George W Bush administration, the phrase 'axis of evil' produced a new geography of fear based around the notion of eternal conflict, warfare, and threat. North Korea, Iran, and Iraq were identified as the primary locations of threat, alongside any State that aligned with them. In this discursive geography, the core nations of 'the West' stood at the centre of the world, surrounded by a dark periphery of weak states ('rogue states') and ungoverned areas ('lawless wild places') inhabited only by terrorists and homicidal death cults - by jihadists, Taliban and al-Qaida.[82] These zones of barbarism and disorder ranged from the badlands of Helmand province and the 'failed state' of Somalia to the 'terrorist nests' of Lebanon and sands of Afghanistan. George W. Bush claimed that these states, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil and were arming to threaten the peace of the world.[83] This enemy was inferior, backward and uncivilised. Even though the men plan, promote and commit murder, he argued that there was no rationality governing their behaviour:

> They have no justification for their actions. There's no religious justification, there's no political justification. The only motivation is evil.[84]

This rhetoric brought nations into new configurations around this dividing line, fixing 'evil' to States that could be legitimately attacked.

These discourses took place at the level of cities, states or regions. But a complementary, more specific set of imaginative geographies is also evident at the scale of the street and has come to shape the way observers have typically made sense of Arab streets and urban protest. I return now to the street and explore the role of Arabic graffiti in challenging these well established, Orientalist discourses. Operating between the frames of cultural barbarism and technological protest, of irrational violence and creative expression, I argue in the final section that the use of graffiti in the Arab Spring offers fresh insight into the role of Arabic script and its relationship to the production of imaginative space around contemporary Arab cities and the region more broadly.

The Arab Street

The 'Arab Street' is a key site of contemporary imagined geography, referring simultaneously to the geography of the city and the actions of those who occupy the space. In line with broader

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Angharad Closs Stephens, "Beyond Imaginative Geographies? Critique, Co-Optation and Imagination in the Aftermath of the War on Terror," ibid. 29 (2011).

[82] See Carr, "The Barbarians of Fallujah". Note that these narratives occurred prior to the rise of ISIS.

[83] Quoted in Bialasiewicz et al., "Performing Security: The Imaginative Geographies of Current US Strategy". On the geography of terror, see Gerry Kearns, "The Geography of Terror," ibid. 27, no. 3 (2008), Stuart Elden, "Terror and Territory," *Antipode* 39, no. 5 (2007), and Simon Dalby, "Regions, Strategies and Empire in the Global War on Terror," *Geopolitics* 12, no. 4 (2007).

[84] Quoted in Johnson, "Defending Ways of Life: The Anti-Terrorist Rhetorics of Bush and Blair", 221.

discourses of threat, the concept of the Arab Street has been primarily understood as a threatening force of collective dissent and potential violence throughout the twentieth century. This imagined street has functioned as a subject of profound anxiety in the media as well as an object of condescension, invoking a strange place filled with angry people who shouted their hate for the West.[85]

The specific notion of the Arab Street as a powerful and cohesive body of protest gained momentum in the mid twentieth century, particularly in response to political shifts in Egypt and Iran. For instance, in the aftermath of the 1956 tripartite aggression on Egypt, popular protests were increasingly visible across Egypt, the Levant, and Iraq. Mass crowds took to the street to support Gamal Abdel Nasser and demonstrate defiance against the West, transforming Nasser from a president of Egypt to a leader of Arab nationalism.[86] Building on these images almost twenty years later, media presentations of jubilant Iranians in the streets of Tehran demonstrated the power of the crowd in the Arab-Islamic world as they celebrated the fall of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The first Palestinian Intifada (1987-1993) enhanced the sense of threat associated with popular action, and in turn, the first Gulf war (1990-1991) carried with it the potential to spark further uprisings across Arab countries. Broadly, the Arab Street was approached as a security threat to be managed and viewed as powerful enough to become a destabilising force in the region.

These events have been typically described in terms of mobs, riots, and revolts that are able to take down governments: the Arab Street has been portrayed as both irrelevant and dangerous, as irrational, aggressive, liberating, omnipotent, submissive, apathetic and dead.[87] This language framed Arab public opinion as reactive, violent, and largely irrational, such that the Arab public was understood as a "dormant human volcano" that could erupt at any moment.[88] Presented as an extension of the unrestrained, irrational violence of the Arab, its brute force was expressed in terms of mob violence and a lack of clear leadership.[89] For instance, in 2001, the front cover of the *New York Times* provided the following description:

[85] Asef Bayat, "The "Street" and the Politics of Dissent in the Arab World," *Middle East Report* 226 (2003).

[86] Zayani, "Courting and Containing the Arab Street: Arab Public Opinion, the Middle East, and U.S. Public Diplomacy".

[87] Ibid.

[88] For an analysis of this framework in Western scholarship, see ibid.

[89] See Bayat, "The "Street" and the Politics of Dissent in the Arab World" and Dale Eickelman and Armando Salvatore, "The Public Sphere and Muslim Identities," *European Journal of Sociology* 43 (2002).

> The Arab street: the well-worn phrase evokes men clustered around dusty coffee - house tables, discussing the events of the day with well-earned cynicism between puffs on a hookah - yet suddenly able to turn into a mob, powerful enough to sweep away governments.[90]

In effect, this type of narrative ensured that Arab popular protest was denied agency or forethought in the international media – presented as a dangerous force that was only able to respond or react. As Regier and Khalidi note, the term 'Arab public opinion' was rarely mentioned in the US media.[91] Protest was not seen as the result of considered debate or the logical response to political or socio-economic pressures. Rather, the Arab Street achieved meaning and identity as an unthinking, collective force. The dehumanising nature of this concept is further evidenced in the way in which protestors and the space intersect. As the *New York Times* narrative demonstrates, the notion of the Arab Street refers simultaneously to the actions of the so-called mob and the urban, material background they occupy. The individual with complex motivations disappears: at the same time, this collective force is brought into conceptual alignment with the space in which it operates. As a result, the notion of the street replaces the individual and both are subsumed within the terms of broader imagined geography – the irrational, threatening, barbaric Orient.

The Arab Spring of 2011 marked a shift in these imaginative geographies and enabled a more complex understanding of Arab space and populations at the level of the street. I argue that the initial phase of the Arab Spring and the explosion of Arabic graffiti brought a new fascination with the creative potential of urban space. In the first instance, reporting on the Arab Spring departed from the narratives associated with GWOT. For instance, a *Guardian* article from 2011 led with the following line:

> Not 1989. Not 1789. But Egyptians can learn from other revolutions. Ecstatic crowds in Cairo prove there is no clash of civilisations – everyone wants freedom. The question is, how to get it?[92]

The reporter argued that one victim of the revolution was the fallacy of cultural determinism – specifically, the notion that Arab and Muslim populations were not culturally interested in or able

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[90] Anon., "Street Brawl; the New Power of Arab Public Opinion," *The New York Times*, November 11 2001. Note that the female body holds a different relationship to public space due to long held binaries between public-male/private-female, and the often punitive ways this division has been enforced. The male body is the most visible in these discourses but it is important to remember that this visibility is in many instances premised on the invisibility and/or systemic repression of female bodies.

[91] Terry Regier and Muhammad Ali Khalidi, "The Arab Street: Tracking a Political Metaphor," *Middle East Journal* 63, no. 1 (2009). Note that this analysis was based on the period prior to 2009, and so does not take into account shifts in reporting brought about by the Arab Spring.

[92] Timothy Garton Ash, "Not 1989. Not 1789. But Egyptians Can Learn from Other Revolutions," *The Guardian* 2011. On the role of the media during the Arab Spring, see Butler, "Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street" and Miyase Christensen and Christian Christensen, "The Arab Spring as Meta-Event and Communicative Spaces " *Television & New Media* 14, no. 4 (2013).

to achieve freedom, dignity, and human rights. Here, the entrenched idea that revolution could never happen on Arab streets was believed to have been refuted along with essential notions of civilisational difference. The most frequent analogy made in the Western media was between the Arab Spring and the fall of communism. The series of uprisings marked the Arab world's 'Berlin Wall moment' (or variously 1917, 1848, and 1789), with Western revolution and triumph referenced as the default model and metaphor for revolution.[93] In this framework, protest was seen as an act of legitimate dissent, in stark contrast to the previous visions of the crowd as an irrational, collective force. As the *Guardian* article concludes:

> New in Cairo 2011 is that it is now Arabs and Muslims standing up in large numbers, with courage and (for the most part) peaceful discipline, for basic human dignity, against corrupt, oppressive rulers.[94]

Rather than confirming the essential 'evil' or barbarity of Arab populations, protestors were represented in terms of their heroic struggle for human rights, freedom, and democracy. In this way, broader discourses of the Arab Spring aligned with, and thus validated, Western notions of individual freedom and democracy. This frame of meaning arguably resonated with Western powers, and the protests were broadly legitimised rather than presented as an event to be feared. Images that foregrounded the individual and their informed, political aspirations, rather than the collective 'mob', supported this shift (figures 9 and 10).

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 9: A young Egyptian girl holding the national flag, inscribed with Arabic script, captured 7 February 2011. Digital image. Available from: The Guardian. "Egypt Protests in Pictures," http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2011/feb/07/egypt-protests-in-pictures.

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 10: An anti-government protester near Tahrir Square, 7 February 2011. Digital image. Available from: The Guardian. "Egypt Protests in Pictures," http://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2011/feb/07/egypt-protests-in-pictures.

[93] Ash, "Not 1989. Not 1789. But Egyptians Can Learn from Other Revolutions,". See also Seigneurie, "Discourses of the 2011 Arab Revolutions" regarding the dominant 'human rights, progressive commitment and elegiac humanist' discourses associated with the early months of the Arab Spring.

[94] Ash, "Not 1989. Not 1789. But Egyptians Can Learn from Other Revolutions".

The figure of the Arab Spring protestor emerged from text and image as distinct from the dominant stereotype of the barbarian, religious Sheikh, irrational mob, or terrorist plotting the destruction of the West. These stereotypes did not disappear: rather, a space opened for a diversity of individuals to be represented as other than violent and irrational. Protestors may have been primarily seen *en masse* but they were also captured in the everyday acts of reading and thought.

As seen within the following set of images, media presentations of the protestor are also foregrounded by Arabic script (Figure 11, 12 and 13). In addition to inscribing Arabic on the walls of the city, Egyptian protestors presented their bodies to the camera as a moving surface for protest.

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 11: Hands inscribed with the text, "The youth will carry you out with their hands". Digital image, captured 6 February 2011, Cairo. Available from: ArteEast, "Signs of the Times: The Popular Literature of Tahrir," in *Shahadat* (2012).

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Figure 12: Protestor inscribed with the text 'Free People'. Digital image, captured 30 January 2011, Cairo. Available from: ArteEast, "Signs of the Times: The Popular Literature of Tahrir," in *Shahadat* (2012).

Figure 13: Protestor inscribed with the words, "The paper ran out. What more can I do for you (to get it)?". Digital image captured 7 February 2011, Tahrir Square Cairo. Available from: The Telegraph, "Egypt Crisis: Protesters in Tahrir Square, Cairo, Wear the Colours of the Egyptian Flag," Image gallery, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/worldnews/8314088/Egypt-crisis-protesters-in-Tahrir-Square-Cairo-wear-the-colours-of-the-Egyptian-flag.html.

This act is significant in its refusal to separate the individual from their message. Typically, graffiti is a disembodied act that covertly appears within urban space and is quickly removed by authorities. As noted above, graffiti can be a particularly dangerous practice, with artists beaten or even killed. When protestors allowed their message to be embodied and preserved in the image, this act directly challenged the authority of the State to regulate either their speech or their bodies. In this way, the Arabic script continued to provide a complex, multimodal tool for communication and protest. In its placement on walls, tanks and bodies, the alphabet and its

surrounds therefore also came to be seen, and understood, through the frame of 'legitimate' (that is, Western-endorsed) dissent and creative expression.

The use of the 'virtual street' intersected with, supported, and in many instances, directly enabled this shift in discourse around the Arabic script. New media technologies helped to challenge existing discourses of backwardness, as activists took advantage of digital media to mobilise and share images on the ground with global audiences.[95] Egyptian bloggers created physical and virtual spaces of protest, supporting citizen journalism by producing careful, informed accounts of demonstrations on the street and pictures of police abuse. As noted above, social media helped protestors to mobilise and communicate, but these technologies also brought international audiences into the protest via virtual interaction. Here, the use of new media technologies during the Arab Spring elided any practical separation between the wall, the virtual public sphere of the internet, and international media.[96] Protestors used new media to bring observers into the scene, such that action on the street was communicated in live time rather than witnessed after the fact. Most notably, the use of the social media platform Twitter helped to reduce the perceived distance between protestors and international observers. A substantial volume of tweets, mainly in English, converged with an equally significant number of tweets in the Arabic language under the hashtags #egypt and #libya. This dialogue was aided in part by platform limitations that forced users to create hashtags in the Roman alphabet, since right-to-left Arabic text had not yet been fully supported.[97] In this way, international observers were able to engage with the event as it unfolded and recognise the revolution as a highly mediated, technologically advanced event. Given the dominant notions of barbarism and a lack of modernity, this shift in viewing is significant and an indication of a more complex frame of meaning developing around Arabic script and space.

Of particular note, Arabic graffiti also garnered increased international attention and recognition. In the early days of the Arab Spring, commentators praised the so-called authenticity and courage of Arabic graffiti. For one scholar, Western graffiti had long since been co-opted by consumerist culture or sold itself as art: in contrast, Arabic graffiti was seen as a 'true' means of communication and spoke truth to power.[98] Despite this optimism, Arabic graffiti was quickly co-opted by both the economics of consumerism and the art establishment. As a measure of its new popularity, many Egyptian street artists exhibited their work in international art galleries, were

[95] The specific contribution made by the platform remains debatable. See Axel Bruns, Tim Highfield, and Jean Burgess, "The Arab Spring and Social Media Audiences: English and Arabic Twitter Users and Their Networks," *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 7 (2013), Tawil-Souri, "Egypt's Uprising and the Shifting Spatialities of Politics", and Brian T. Edwards, "Tahrir: Ends of Circulation " *Public Culture* 23, no. 3 (2011).

[96] See Elias, "Graffiti, Social Media and the Public Life of Images in the Egyptian Revolution".

[97] Bruns, Highfield, and Burgess, "The Arab Spring and Social Media Audiences: English and Arabic Twitter Users and Their Networks".

[98] Blake Gopnik, "Revolution in a Can," *Foreign Policy* 189 (2011).

commissioned for magazine cover art, gave lectures, and took part in documentaries about their work.[99] For instance, in 2012, an exhibition entitled *Egyptian Street Art and Arabic Graffiti* was held in Frankfurt as part of a wider art event *(A Festival of Egyptian Culture)*, reflecting the new appreciation of graffiti as an artefact of contemporary Egyptian culture.[100] In the realm of fashion, Louis Vuitton's 2013 *Foulards d'Aristes* saw collaboration between the French label and street artists from around the world.[101] As part of this initiative, individually selected Arabic graffiti was printed on a scarf, then reproduced and sold globally under the brand. Due to the increase in visibility and popularity, international graffiti artists also began to embrace the Arabic script in their work and develop signature styles of calligraphic graffiti.[102] In addition, art galleries in Cairo took advantage of Arabic graffiti's new cultural capital, with the Townhouse Gallery and the Articulate Baboon Gallery holding Egyptian 'street art' exhibitions, somewhat paradoxically, indoors.[103] In this way, graffiti that was originally produced under condition of threat on the streets of Cairo was relocated and reframed to create a legitimate, safe viewing experience for local and international tourists.

In so doing, the practice of Arabic graffiti helped to open up dominant frames of meaning produced around script, space, and protest. As Said argued, imaginative geographies are a form of representation and knowledge production: they work to both frame and create the space of the Orient – to make it known. Moving from discourses of violence and barbarity, the practice of Arabic graffiti enabled script and space to be seen and known otherwise. This shift did not replace dominant narratives: rather, I argue that Arabic graffiti created a space whereby script and urban space could be viewed through the frame of creative expression rather than simply the potential for violence. Brought into proximity through the effective use of new media technologies, this event also helped to challenge, if only briefly, imaginative geographies of difference and distance.

Reflections

The French-Tunisian street artist known as 'El Seed' believes that after the revolution of 14 January 2011 in Tunisia, graffiti has become associated with positive political action: it is an expression of the freedom that people fought and died for, and as such, has become a legitimised

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[99] Soraya Morayef, "Cairo's Walls of Graffiti Trace History of a Colourful Revolution," *The National*, 18 August 2012.

[100] Anon., "Egyptian Street Art Alongside the Pharaoh in Frankfurt," *Daily News Egypt*, 16 April 2012.

[101] Anon., "From Walls to Vuitton," *The National*, 20 March 2013.

[102] Nagesh, "Protest and Poetry: Recent Graffiti from the Arab World".

[103] See Morayef, "Cairo's Walls of Graffiti Trace History of a Colourful Revolution,". This trend is consistent the Western re-evaluation of graffiti as a legitimate art practice: for instance, see Somerville, "The Urban Canvas and Its Artists".

form of art.[104] Before the revolution, street artists in Tunisia were largely underground. He argues that there has been a significant rise in the number of people reclaiming public space through graffiti and street art:

> All the artists painting in the street are brought to the stage, and it's not seen as vandalism or anything like this. People recognize it as a true form of art, because it was linked to a big historical change in the country.[105]

In a fairly monumental demonstration of this change, El Seed spray-painted a 57 metre high mural on the Jara Mosque in Gabès Tunisia (figure 14). Inspired by a verse from the Quran, the work stands as a towering, highly visible call for tolerance and mutual understanding between individuals and nations. The work specifically sought to address the growing power of extremist, ultra-conservative Islamist groups since the 2011 revolution. To this end, the text reads "Oh humankind, we have created you from a male and a female and made people and tribes so you may know each other".[106]

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 14: Jara Mosque in Gabès, Tunisia, 2012. Digital image. Available from: el Seed, "Street: El Seed Art," http://elseed-art.com/artwork/.

Chairing the foundation that sponsored this work, the Tunisian Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi explained that the practice of Arabic graffiti is being reconsidered in terms of its artistic potential:

> When El Seed approached me, I immediately jumped in. I think the graffiti installation in Gabès is a critical step to change people's perception of what graffiti are and can be. […] We are not talking about foul language sprayed on an abandoned wall, but rather a true piece of art

[104] Adeline Sire, "The Arab Spring Brings Wave of Graffiti Art," *PRI's The World*, 10 September 2012. See also Anon., "Arab Graffiti: Vandalism or Art?," *The Guardian*, 9 September 2012 and Dounia Georgeon, "Revolutionary Graffiti," *Wasafiri* 27, no. 4 (2012).

[105] Sire, "The Arab Spring Brings Wave of Graffiti Art".

[106] As discussed at the artist's website: el Seed, "Street: El Seed Art," http://elseed-art.com/artwork/.

> that leverages the society's sense of art, and sends a message of tolerance. A message that is much needed in post revolution Tunisia." [107]

El Seed's work provides insight to the role of graffiti post revolution. On one hand, the visibility of El Seed's work demonstrates the new acceptance of graffiti (although notably, in its Islamic, calligraphic form), as a means for beautifying public space and shaping public debate. On the other hand, less well known artists reveal the ongoing relevance of graffiti as a tool of dissent. In 2013, two men from the Tunisian art collective Zwewla were charged with harming public order and morals for inscribing 'the people want rights for the poor' on a city wall.[108] This message criticised the high level of unemployment and lack of progress by the government in the two years since the revolution. The two men were eventually cleared of all charges but this incident shows the continued tension between free speech and social control. Here, the contrast between Zwewla and El Seed highlights the continued relevance of Arabic graffiti as a social and political practice, engaging multiple power relations as it seeks to communicate and reshape the way in which people experience public space.

This chapter has explored the multiple roles of Arabic script in the creation of both physical and imagined space. Historically, the Arabic script has been used to reinforce existing power structures and beautify space. But graffiti has also come to offer a powerful tool of resistance across the Arab and Islamic World, enabling protestors to communicate, mobilise, debate, and challenge authoritarian rule. During the Arab Spring, graffiti spanned the many different types of protest that exploded throughout the region, connecting them together while also reflecting local political projects. As artists developed new forms, Arabic graffiti also came to express the needs of populations resisting different political and social environments. The role of script in these instances was to speak back to power but also to claim and reproduce the meaning of the city and the streets. Through street art, protestors transformed the materiality of the street but they also created a new relationship with place.

Due to its popularity, the Arabic script has also come to shift imaginative geographies. As outlined in the second half of the chapter, discourses of violence and barbarity have dominated the way in which Arab space and populations have been understood. The Arab Spring created a shift in discourse and image production around certain sites in the region, such that protestors came to be captured in poses of individual heroism and lauded by Western audiences for their advanced technological methods. This change also came to effect the practice of Arabic graffiti, as it was reproduced across social media, exhibited in galleries, and even taken up within the sphere of international fashion. This shift did not replace dominant narratives: rather, I argue that

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[107] Anon., "Arab Graffiti: Vandalism or Art?".

[108] Rachel Shabi, "Graffiti Case Shows Tunisia's New Battle with Free Speech," *The National*, 26 April 2013.

the popularity of Arabic graffiti allowed script and urban space to be viewed through the frame of creative expression rather than simply the potential for violence. Brought into proximity through the effective use of new media technologies, this event also helped to challenge, if only briefly, imaginative geographies of barbarism, difference and distance. Across both the physical and imagined space of the city, I argue that the Arabic script and the space of the Arab street came to be seen and known otherwise.

Aesthetics and technology

The art of calligraphy has been celebrated as the ideal form of visual expression for the Arabic language and the Quran. From its emergence in Iraq in the seventh century, the practice of classical Arabic calligraphy spread across the Islamic world by way of religion, empire, and bureaucracy. By the fourteenth century, the art of Arabic calligraphy had permeated everyday life in the medieval Islamic world and was evident at the heart of systems of power, knowledge, and authority.

I begin this chapter with an early history of Arabic calligraphy and outline how it came to achieve its authority and status. This overview provides a critical entry point to understanding the intersection of art, power and Arabic script, revealing multiple ways in which calligraphy became entwined with social life and politics in the Arab and Islamic world. The practice became one of the hallmarks of Islamic civilisation, operating simultaneously as an aesthetic discipline, a spiritual form of expression, and a lever at the heart of socio-cultural systems and power structures. While the continued importance of calligraphy cannot be overstated, the relationship between art, power and Arabic script extends beyond the practice of calligraphy. Taking a dual focus on politics and aesthetics, the second part of this chapter explores the evolution of Arabic letter design during key moments of innovation and technological change. Moving from early experiments with the printing press into the space of digital media and contemporary typography, I explore the evolution of Arabic writing practice and letter design. These transitions mark an important shift in the history of Arabic script and demonstrate the continued intersection of technological challenges, aesthetic concerns, and religious debates.

I argue that technologies of Arabic letter design have been consistently caught up in broader political and social agendas. A porous connection exists between new technologies and the socio-political context in which they are designed, built and used. Revolutions in writing technology therefore offered new ways to visualise and reproduce the Arabic word but they also revealed new connections between script, social systems, and power structures. As with the alphabet more broadly, I argue that the practice of Arabic script design reflects, and in certain respects, produces its socio-political horizon. As a result, a focus on aesthetics provides a new lens on both the work of script and key periods of social and technological change.

Classical Arabic calligraphy

The art of Arabic calligraphy developed in the first Arab empire in Iraq in the seventh century Under the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258), the focal point of Islamic political and cultural life shifted eastward from Syria to Iraq. Here, a style known as *kufic* emerged in the Iraqi town of Kufa - a form would come to definitively influence Arabic calligraphy (Figure 15). *Kufic* is the oldest and most refined style of lettering, commonly considered the most worthy of transcribing the Quran.[1] Reaching a high level of formal perfection in the eighth century, *kufic* grew more ornate as the Arab empire became more prosperous. The style evolved in two main directions in the western and eastern regions of the empire, changing its form in line with new cultural influences and local styles. In the east, the work of Persian artists saw *kufic* letters becoming elongated and slimmer by the late tenth century, and changing in form from broad to high. In contrast, western styles of calligraphy were defined by the smoother, curvilinear Maghrebi styles of North Africa and Spain.

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 15: Kufic script from a Quran manuscript, late ninth or early tenth century, thought to originate in Syria. Digital image. Available from: Islamic Arts, "Leaf from a Quran Manuscript, Late 9th-10th Century," http://islamic-arts.org/2011/leaf-from-a-quran-manuscript-late-9th%E2%80%9310th-century/.

Other calligraphic styles evolved in this early period, shaped primarily by local aesthetics and the demands of bureaucracy and empire. The expansion of the Muslim empire required a common way to transmit religious precepts and govern a vast territory in accordance with these rules.[2] As noted in the introductory chapter, Arabic was the standard language of imperial administration and governance in this period: this role significantly contributed to the expansion of script across the empire. In the seventh century, the second Umayyad caliph, Umar I, established the first government office to organise payments, register the army and regulate the treasury. As a result,

[1] See Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès, "Brief History of the Arabic Script," in *Arabic Graffiti*, ed. Pascal Zoghbi (Berlin: From Here to Fame, 2011).

[2] Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*.

he needed scribes, account books, records, and vast quantities of writing material to support the burgeoning bureaucracy.[3] The availability of Chinese paper from the eighth century and its widespread manufacture in the Islamic world supported both the increasing demands of governance and the development of calligraphic aesthetics. Here, the practical and political uses of Arabic script were brought together, in its path of aesthetic development. By the late ninth and early tenth century, the number of scribes increased and so did the range of letterforms.

Due to this growth, a wide variety of cursive styles came to be used to inscribe the Arabic language. However, many of these were judged to be of inferior quality.[4] In a defining moment for classical Arabic calligraphy, the Abbasid caliphate took measures to establish a standard, efficient and legible style to keep bureaucratic documents in order. Ibn Muqla (885–939), geometer and vizier to the Abbasid court in Baghdad, developed a proportioned Arabic writing system based on the principles of geometric design. This system (still used in modern calligraphy today) established mathematical rules for designing Arabic script and structuring the relationship between individual letters. The size of the first letter of the alphabet (the *alif*) was used as a key standard of measurement. By giving each letter a proportional relation to the *alif*, Ibn Muqla was able to construct a canon of proportions for the entire alphabet. Further geometric principles provided a consistent structure for determining the relative proportions of letters. For instance, the Arabic dot was used as a key unit of measurement. According to the guiding principles, the height of the *alif* could be varied from three to twelve dots but the width of the *alif* was to be equivalent to a single dot.

Ibn Muqla's rules of proportion were not originally intended for the Quran but rather for the diverse and disordered cursive styles used by scribes. Nonetheless, his geometric principles achieved a degree of acceptance that led its use in both sacred and secular documents. By the late ninth and early tenth century, copyists were using the system to transform regular scripts into calligraphic styles worthy of transcribing the Quran and other important texts.[5] In the next key development in the history of calligraphic aesthetics, Ibn Muqla's system was extended by the Persian calligrapher Ibn al-Bawwab at the end of the tenth century: this system, the *khatt al-mansub*, was considered a 'softer', more elegant and aesthetically pleasing way of composing letters.

Following standardisation, a small number of calligraphic styles were accepted into the reformed, standardised canon, while others were neglected and gradually slipped out of use. The favoured styles became the primary elements of classical Arabic calligraphy and each had its own qualities

[3] Jonathan Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001).

[4] See Tabbaa, "The Transformation of Arabic Writing: Part I Quranic Calligraphy".

[5] Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*.

and purpose. For instance, the *thuluth* style was viewed as the most elegant and exalted, due to its use in monumental inscriptions, religious inscriptions, epigraphs, and *sura* headings in the Quran. A large, elegant, cursive style, *thuluth* translates in Arabic to 'one-third', referring to the principle that one-third of each letter should slope. In contrast, *naskh* became the preferred style for literary manuscripts and small Qurans, especially during the Ottoman period. It is a balanced, clear style, with half of the strikes round and half straight: as such, it has been admired for its respect for proportions, with letters written in consistent size and shape. Originally a minor and somewhat disdained script, the *naskh* script evolved to become the most commonly used form for transcribing the Quran.[6] As noted above, in addition to its religious role, calligraphy also played a critical role in governance and bureaucracy. Of the other classical Arabic styles, *riqa* was employed somewhat more informally for correspondence while the use of *tawqi'* was restricted to royal decrees and official letters.[7]

As early as the tenth century, the first known masterpieces of Islamic calligraphy were produced, including the caliph 'Uthman's first complete written Quran and the mosaic inscription on the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. The former provided a cornerstone for the Muslim faith while the latter became a symbol of Islam as a world religion.[8] More broadly, the use of Quranic inscriptions on objects as diverse as textiles, jewellery, and buildings ensured that the word of Allah became inseparable from everyday life. Arabic calligraphy was displayed on a range of household objects - woven into domestic textiles and painted on ceramics and glass. More than simply decoration, such artefacts were designed to be read aloud. For instance, messages on eating and drinking vessels were intended for recitation by guests at a meal as a way for hosts to bestow wellbeing on the reader. Metal objects were commonly inscribed in *kufic*, and it became a trend during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries to decorate boxes and candlesticks with Arabic letters, as well as bronze and iron mirrors.[9] These items were prize possessions of the wealthy, and their sumptuousness emerged as a common theme in medieval Persian poetry. As explored in the previous chapter, the calligraphic form of Arabic script has also played an important role in decorating the architectural landscape of Arab cities and shaping the experience of public space. As the most visible and respected expression of Arabic script, calligraphic designs were used to decorate the interiors and exteriors of buildings such as mosques, shrines, palaces, private residences, and tombs.[10] Most notably, a form of square *kufic* was used as the favoured form of architectural ornamentation from the eleventh century onwards, and was often inscribed across whole facades of buildings. Through these inscriptions, calligraphy became a part

[6] See Abi-Farès, "Brief History of the Arabic Script".

[7] Tabbaa, "The Transformation of Arabic Writing: Part I Quranic Calligraphy".

[8] Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use".

[9] Annemarie Schimmel, *Islamic Calligraphy* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992).

[10] On Islamic architecture and the use of script on exteriors to produce Islamic identify, see Korn, "Religious Inscriptions in Islamic Architecture".

of everyday public life and helped to shape the experience of urban space. As noted previously, the purpose of this calligraphy was not limited to the communication of literal content but held a range of functions across the political and aesthetic: for those in authority, the public text held a clear function of power and was explicitly used to reinforce existing sources of authority and privilege.

Underpinning all of these developments, Islam played a critical role in the growth of Arabic calligraphy and was the primary vehicle for its expansion across social systems, power structures, and artefacts of everyday life. Since the Quran was revealed to the prophet Mohammed in Arabic, a complex relationship between writing, calligraphy and the Quran led to writing itself becoming considered holy.[11] Tradition holds that after the revelation was handed down, the words were accurately transcribed onto parchments and meticulously copied to preserve the integrity of the initial speech. As a result, thousands of pious scribes have copied the Quran and regarded the text as the absolutely binding divine word. The act of recording the Quran and beautifying the script was driven by a desire to elevate Arabic letters to a level worthy of divine revelation. Supporting this, a scribal tradition dedicated to the transmission of books in the manuscript age developed specialised techniques and methods of dictation, collation and illustration. The commitment of scribes and scholars in the Islamic world to preserving and transmitting the Quran, as well as supporting collections of the Islamic sayings and deeds, helped to maintain the authority and accuracy of these early texts. Once codified, their preservation and transmission remained free of many problems affecting books in the European world.[12]

Calligraphy held additional value for Islamic practice beyond the completed work: the art form also offered calligraphers a way to evoke sacred experience. By copying the Quran, it was believed that a scribe would receive heavenly reward. For this reason, calligraphers that wished to copy the Quran had to enter a state of ritual purity, with purity of writing explicitly equated with purity of soul.[13] In addition, the act of inscribing the Quran was considered a form of prayer since it involved repeating the words spoken by God.[14] The practice was thought to induce profound religious insights and create visual encounters with the spiritual, with the forms and movement of calligraphy symbolising a union between the values of the exterior, material world and those of the interior, intimate, and spiritual.[15] In the process of creating each stroke and form, the worshipper was pulled toward the divine. In a similar fashion, tools such as the calligraphic pen

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[11] Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*.

[12] Muhsin Mahdi, "From the Manuscript Age to the Age of Printed Books," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George Atiyeh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

[13] Schimmel, *Islamic Calligraphy*.

[14] See Laura Marks, "Taking a Line for a Walk, from the Abbasid Caliphate to Vector Graphics," *Third Text* 23, no. 3 (2009).

[15] See Frembgen, *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam*.

(qalam) were also granted theological weight. The *qalam* was an important symbol in Islamic traditions and linked closely to the transmission of knowledge. For instance, the first verse of the Quran explained that teaching occurred by means of the pen, while the first word revealed to the Prophet Mohammed was *iqra* - an injunction to read, to recite.[16] A number of revelations stressed the importance of writing in the process of learning, with ink compared to the water of life that bestowed immortality.[17] In this discourse, the power to inscribe Arabic letters has been linked to the power to preserve knowledge and extend thought over time and space. The value of Arabic writing – and in particular, the calligraphic form of writing – was therefore closely tied to religious practice and, perhaps more fundamentally, to the purity and faith of the believer.

The spiritual element of written Arabic was also important to Islamic mystic traditions such as Sufism. Through the vehicle of calligraphy, the mystics of Islam discovered that each letter held mysteries that should be properly understood. It was thought that the Divine Word was expressed through letters, and like these letters, human beings were written by the hand of the Creator.[18] This belief system has been reproduced in poetry and treatise. For instance, in 1454 the mystic Sirāj al-Shīrāzī composed a work entitled *The Bounty of the Lovers* in the Deccan kingdom of Bïdar. A rich source of insight into the early cultural significance and mystical interpretations of the Arabic script, this work reveals the way in which the letters of the alphabet were approached by master calligraphers as vehicles for the manifestation of God, and understood as part of a cosmic unfolding.[19] For Sirāj, the art of penmanship was an all-consuming passion, a tradition that enhanced the practice of Sufism and enabled a profound mystic experience. Of particular note, the failure of block printing in Central Asia has been attributed in part to the strength of Sufism.[20] This early technique involved cutting out a full page of text from a block of wood and printing the letters as a whole. Since the handwritten form was thought to hold a spiritual value that could not be transferred to the printed text, followers of mystic traditions (primarily the lower classes, in this instance) preferred handwritten chants, prayers and mystical texts to any form of mediated textual reproduction. In this way, spiritual beliefs were linked so closely with writing and reading practice that they were able to inhibit the uptake of early print technologies.

By the fourteenth century, the art of Arabic calligraphy had been firmly embedded at the heart of Arab and Islamic cultures.[21] Calligraphy permeated life in the medieval Islamic world and was tied

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[16] Nadia Al-Bagdadi, "From Heaven to Dust: Metamorphosis of the Book in Pre-Modern Arab Culture," *The Medieval History Journal* 8, no. 1 (2005), 89.

[17] See Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*, 63.

[18] See Schimmel, *Islamic Calligraphy*.

[19] See Ernst, "Sufism and the Aesthetics of Penmanship in Siraj Al-Shirazi's Tuhfat Al-Muhibbin (1454)".

[20] Frerik Kampman, "Arabic Typography: Its Past and Its Future" (Utrecht University, 2011).

[21] See Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*, Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, Tabbaa, "The Transformation of Arabic Writing: Part I Quranic Calligraphy", Frembgen, *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam* and Ali, "Modern Arab Art: An Overview".

to systems of religion, aesthetics, and governance: more than an art form, calligraphy had become a culture.[22] While all of these remain important, religion in particular has continued to hold considerable influence over letter design and the development of Arabic script. In the next section I explore how this connection between religion, writing, and power has come to shape the use of Arabic script as an aesthetic, commercial, and political artefact.

Knowledge and power

The importance of writing in Islam, combined with the primacy of the Quran as scripture, has fostered an undeniable sense of value and authority around the written Arabic text. But the value of writing must be understood in terms of a more complex relationship between the written and vocalised word.

The revelation of the Quran was auditory before becoming material in the written text, and the primary means of understanding, transmitting, and preserving the revelations has been aural and mnemonic.[23] Muslims have therefore learned the Quran as an oral text, with memory and gesture providing important ways to transmit Islamic teachings and culture. To support this practice, tradition holds that knowledge cannot be entirely captured in the written word: the text is more than a collection of words and its reality cannot be exhausted by letters inscribed in ink on a page.[24] To gain a more complete understanding of the written text, the reader must reference the memory of an original oral transmission. This memory would form the latest link in a chain going back from their master through generations of teachers to the original author of the text, and ultimately to the founders and major figures of the school in question.[25] In effect, the reader must access an unbroken oral tradition that has unfolded over the centuries, consisting not only of what the founding figure had written but also the auditory traces they left behind. Knowledge was therefore believed to consist in both the written text and a highly structured genealogy of oral transmission: the written word alone was insufficient.

The importance of this oral dimension, founded on the authority of former masters, can also be witnessed in the structure of the Islamic intellectual tradition and educational system. For instance, learning the Quran began with the memorisation of its text but the manuscript was also used as a material support for the process of face-to-face transmission. In the literary realm, live assemblies provided a forum for the dissemination of established works and creation of new

[22] See Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use".

[23] Bloom, *Paper before Print: The History and Impact of Paper in the Islamic World.*

[24] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education: The Spoken and the Written Word," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George Atiyeh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

[25] Ibid.

ones.[26] Here, the transfer or enhancement of knowledge took place through the performance of a written text, passing from one body to another. In the context of formal learning, the proper way to read a text and retain its authority was to hear it read aloud phrase by phrase, by one who had already mastered it. A student would begin by reading it aloud three times, following recitation by a teacher. On the first reading the teacher would give only brief comments outlining the key issues. In the second, the teacher would give a full interpretation of every phrase, including any differences in interpretation among the different schools. The third would be an opportunity to explore even the most vague and ambiguous terms.[27] In this context, the teacher must be the one who wrote the text, or failing that, someone to whom the author read the text, or one who read it under one of them.[28] These vocalisations formed an unbroken chain of recitation leading back to the original author. In consequence or design, this system supported a monopoly of knowledge by a traditional elite group, the *uluma*, whose control over the scribal transmission and dissemination of texts served to reinforce established patterns of authority in Muslim society.[29]

The practice of teaching calligraphy employed similar methods. A sustained pedagogical relationship was established between teacher and student, in which a master practitioner imparted their knowledge and skill – and by extension – the authority of generations of master calligraphers to their student. To be formally called a *khattat* (calligrapher), a long period of study with a master was required, and on graduation the calligrapher received the right to sign their products with their own name. Over the centuries, this practice engendered an elaborate genealogical system that was able to trace lines of authoritative calligraphic instruction.[30] This chain of connection, or pedigree, was embedded within the material supports for calligraphy. Serving as a record of the calligrapher's act of writing, the written text was believed to retain a trace of their creator. For instance, statements from as early as the tenth century indicate that calligraphic artefacts were thought to contain impressions of their makers' moral being.[31] In a more practical sense however, engagement with the paper of a master calligrapher provided a source of instruction: the student could learn about letter shapes and ligatures, initial, medial and final letter forms, and gain insight into formal aspects of writing including the contrast between light paper and dark ink, the spacing of words, intervals between lines, and the relative sizes of letters in exercises combining two different scripts.

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[26] Alain George, "Orality, Writing and the Image in the Maqamat: Arabic Illustrated Books in Context," *Art History* 35, no. 1 (2012).

[27] See Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Geoffrey Roper, "Faris Al-Shadyaq and the Transition from Scribal to Print Culture in the Middle East," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George Atiyeh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

[30] See Simonowitz, "A Modern Master of Islamic Calligraphy and Her Peers".

[31] David Roxburgh, "On the Transmission and Reconstruction of Arabic Calligraphy: Ibn Al-Bawwab and History," *Studia Islamica* 96 (2003).

Pens in particular were considered great treasures because they preserved the master calligrapher's unique method of pen preparation, showing the final stage in the process of trimming the pen and of cutting its nib.[32] The shape of the pen could indicate the way the pen was held, how it was placed on the page, and how it moved across it. As Ibn Muqla advised, it was important to prepare the nib correctly since the point determines the handwriting.[33] Apart from unknowable variables, such as the relative viscosity of ink, the pressure applied to the pen, or the posture of the body in writing, the pen offered the least mediated instrument for knowing the master calligrapher's work after their death.[34] The original text and material supports therefore allowed later calligraphers to write themselves into a chain of master-student relationships, by emulation or the reconstruction of a lost technique. In effect, these materials enabled a student to write themselves into established power structures and a pedigree of important 'men'.[35]

In addition to reinforcing elite patterns of authority, Arabic calligraphers were also valued participants in formal political and bureaucratic structures. Here, the Arabic alphabet was closely tied to the signification of belief, power and legitimacy, such that calligraphy became a measure of elite status and comparative worth. For rulers across the Arab and Islamic world, the commissioning of books bearing royal names and titles became an attribute of princely status and power, and was used as a tool to reflect the competition among different cities and dynasties.[36] For instance, from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, Persian rulers employed calligraphers to produce texts for their personal libraries. As a result, calligraphy became a sign of social value and the art form flourished as patrons encouraged new styles in an effort to attract prestige. A considerable number of rulers in the Islamic world, from North Africa to India, also came to excel in calligraphy themselves, with the art of Arabic letters taught to many gentleman and some women.[37] Sponsored by political and religious leaders, calligraphers were held in higher esteem than other artists (such as painters and architects) due to their role in copying the word of God. Calligraphers that served in a princely or royal library enjoyed the highest favour and were given important titles: very few reached the rank of court calligrapher, but those who did were well paid and given high honours. While ordinary copyists were relatively low on the social ladder,

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[32] Ibid.

[33] See Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 173.

[34] Roxburgh, "On the Transmission and Reconstruction of Arabic Calligraphy: Ibn Al-Bawwab and History".

[35] While there is comparatively little documentation on women who have practiced calligraphy, scattered references do mention female masters: see Simonowitz, "A Modern Master of Islamic Calligraphy and Her Peers".

[36] Priscilla Soucek and Filiz Cagman, "A Royal Manuscript and Its Transformation: The Life History of a Book," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East*, ed. George Atiyeh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995).

[37] Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1984).

recognised masters drew students around them and wrote for the nobility. Such was the socio-economic value of Arabic calligraphy that a secretary, Ibn-al-Muqaffa, is recorded as writing that:

> The script, *khatt*, is adornment for the prince, perfection for the wealthy, and wealth for the poor.[38]

In Ottoman Turkey, calligraphers reached the highest echelons of the religious establishment. As explored in chapter one, Arabic calligraphy was arguably one of the strongest visual signifiers of the Ottoman Empire over its centuries of rule. Calligraphers used Arabic letters to symbolise the Empire in the form of the imperial *tuğra* (royal insignia), in the decoration of state-sponsored mosques and monuments, and in the composition of official documents within the Empire and beyond. But the role of calligraphy in the Ottoman Empire was much greater than aesthetics. During the period of reform and imperial centralisation in the nineteenth century, noteworthy calligraphers were employed in the Empire's most vital posts. Until its demise, it was common for calligraphers to take on roles as military *qadis* (judges trained in *Sharia* law) and as scribal instructors in Western-influenced military academies. For example, one chief imperial calligrapher in the 1840s served during his career as the *qadi* of Istanbul, governor of Mecca, and chief judge of both Anatolia and European Turkey.[39] In contrast, less skilled or fortunate calligraphers produced inferior works that attracted significantly less economic return and social capital.

Moving into the period of Kemalist reform, nationalists initially sought to remove the practice from the nation. As outlined in chapter one, major components of the new independent Turkish national identity were premised on the rejection of Islam and 'foreign' elements, such as Arabic script and Arab culture. As a result, there was a strained relationship between the state and the master calligraphers working in the 1930s. Many of the institutions for the transmission of calligraphic skills and knowledge were ordered closed, with calligraphers forced to practice clandestinely. However, nationalists found it difficult to separate calligraphy from the modern Turkish state, and supporters of the practice continued to hold power and influence. Eventually swayed by arguments that rested on the Turks' unique contribution to the art, Atatürk allowed the teaching of calligraphy on the condition that Arabic letters could be used only as an artistic script - not in the context of daily life.[40] On this basis, a number of republican elites patronised calligraphers and amassed calligraphic collections, emphasising the 'artistic' nature of the calligraphic arts over its symbolic, pious, or iconic aspects.[41] To be acceptable in the modern age, their argument went, the art should be enjoyed in the abstract as a form of modern art – not as a

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[38] Quoted in ibid, 35.

[39] Griffith, "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic".

[40] "Calligraphy and the Art of Statecraft in the Late Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkish Republic".

[41] Schick, "The Iconicity of Islamic Calligraphy in Turkey".

script to be read. In this guise, calligraphy retained its social capital through the twentieth century, and collecting Ottoman antiques became a class signifier for the newly affluent strata that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.[42] Here, this new economically and culturally dominant class found a tangible form of heritage, rather than religion *per se*, in artefacts of Arabic calligraphy. As a result, calligraphic genres like the imperial edict of the Ottoman Empire once again became status symbols *par excellence*.

Although the Turkish and Ottoman experience may have had a closer and more complex relationship with calligraphy than most, the art has nonetheless been critical to many aspects of life in the Arab and Islamic world. An examination of calligraphic practice therefore offers insight into the intersection of power structures, social systems, and script – an intersection, I argue in the next section, that becomes apparent at times of aesthetic innovation and technological change.

Innovation and technology

While the continued importance of calligraphy cannot be overstated, the relationship between art, power and Arabic script extends beyond the practice of calligraphy. Taking a dual focus on politics and aesthetics, I turn now to the evolution of Arabic letter design during key moments of innovation and technological change. Moving from early experiments with the printing press into the space of digital media and contemporary typography, I explore the evolution of Arabic writing practice and letter design. In comparison to the European print revolution, the history of Arabic alphabet print has been fraught with ongoing complications. These difficult transitions mark an important shift in the history of Arabic script and demonstrate the continued intersection of technological challenges, aesthetic concerns, and religious debates.

The transition from the manuscript age to the age of the printed book marks an important shift in the history of Arabic script. The technology for Arabic print has been available since the early days of book production. Rather than originating in the Arabic-speaking world, the first texts were made possible through the power and financial support of the Catholic Church. The first movable type printing press was created in Europe for the Roman alphabet in the mid fifteenth century. In contrast, the first book printed in Arabic script was a book of prayers for Christians in Syria, created on the request of Pope Julius II. In the early sixteenth-century, the Papacy in Rome sought to intensify contact with Christians in the Middle East, after the capture of Istanbul in 1453 had seen both the end of the Christian Byzantine Empire and Christian states in the Levant. In this context, the first Arabic printed text was an important tool of connection across geographic and political divides. The second oldest book printed in Arabic text also arose from

[42] Ibid.

the Papacy's desire to reach out to Christians in the Orient. In 1516, the first volume of a polyglot bible was published in Genova, with translations in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Arabic and Chaldean. In Western Europe, Arabic print became an expensive and rare commodity. For three centuries, the technology was closely guarded by ecclesiastical and university printers who owned a limited number of sets. Such was the value of these sets that Napoleon was forced to steal Arabic type from the Vatican in order to introduce printing to Egypt in 1798: when retreating with haste in 1801, he carried the typesets back to France.[43]

There was very little interest in the printed form of Arabic script in the Arab and Islamic World.[44] The rejection of early print technologies can be partly understood as a manifestation of the value and aesthetic beauty attributed to the calligraphic text, but also a lack of practical and cost effective alternatives.

Print technologies were laborious, time consuming, and expensive, offering little financial or practical incentive to innovate or change existing practices.[45] Perhaps more importantly, the technology did not support the technical requirements of the script or convey the level of aesthetic quality achieved by Arabic calligraphy. For instance, between 1537-8, a pair of Venetian brothers produced a functional system for Arabic print. But among its many faults, the system printed texts in an ungainly typeface that did not distinguish between certain letters of the Arabic alphabet, such as *dal* and *dhal* (letters that contain the difference of a single dot).[46] Chapter titles were equally graceless, with distorted proportions between low letters and tall strokes, and did not represent the level of standardisation and sophistication to which Arabic readers were accustomed. A version of the Quran printed in Hamburg in 1694 was equally faulty and visually unappealing, while the Arabic script version of Avicenna's *Canon* (a handbook on medicine and medicaments) included serious grammatical faults and many printing errors.[47] Experts in Arabic calligraphy could have vastly improved the quality and accuracy of these texts. However, Ottoman calligraphers were wary of collaborating with printing press operators on a product that paled in comparison to the spectacular manuscripts they were able to produce by hand.

Early Arabic print was unable to reconcile the beauty, corporeality, and emotion of handwritten calligraphy with the limitations of mechanical typography. A key aspect of calligraphic beauty was thought to lie in the irregular mark made by a human hand and the emotions that a body could

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[43] Nile Green, "Persian Print and the Stanhope Revolution: Industrialization, Evangelicalism, and the Birth of Printing in Early Qajar Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010).

[44] Walter Tracey, "Advances in Arabic Printing," *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 2, no. 2 (1975), 87.

[45] Khan, *Arabic Script: Styles, Variants, and Calligraphic Adaptations*.

[46] See Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*.

[47] Mahdi, "From the Manuscript Age to the Age of Printed Books".

convey through lines traced on the page. Here, the line is formed from the posture, hand and breath. According to the contemporary artist Hassan Massoudy:

> The Arabic calligraphy I do literally comes directly from the heart, the movement of my arm and the heartbeat work together. When I direct the brush, I stop breathing. This also limits the size of the calligraphy: a brushstroke cannot last longer than it takes my heart to beat. If the writing becomes any bigger, it has to be constructed and thus it is not calligraphy anymore, but a design.[48]

When a calligrapher begins a work, their spiritual, physical, emotional experience shapes the visual language of the composition: they inhale, hold their breath and complete the composition in one cycle of breath. The work is formed by the breath and rhythm of the whole body.[49] The calligraphic form is first shaped through the calligrapher's body and then projected onto the page: as such, the dynamic structure of the pictorial image can communicate an implicitly corporeal feeling to the viewer. By following the line of script, the eye catches the rhythm produced by the calligrapher's body and breath at the point of composition. Without this corporeal aspect, the Arabic letter is merely a 'design' - a mechanical process that can offer only exact repetition and order. For early print technologies, even the value of repetition was undermined by inaccuracies and flaws.

Many of these aesthetic issues arose from the fact that print technologies had been developed according to the configurations of the Latin alphabet. As the first to use the movable type technique in 1439, Johannes Gutenberg famously printed the Bible in 1455 Gutenberg's technique spread quickly but was specifically designed for Latin script. Compromises and sacrifices had to be made in order to adjust the technology for the Arabic alphabet. As a result, printers were forced to simplify the Arabic script to better correspond with the qualities of the Latin alphabet. They used less ligatures, took a horizontal straight baseline (ignoring the natural obliqueness of Arabic writing), and lined up letters rather than linking them. In effect, printers adapted the Arabic script to meet the demands of the Latin-based printing technique, rather than modifying the technology to accommodate the qualities of Arabic script. Subsequent evolutions in print technologies continued to present a clumsy form of Arabic script and offered little improvement over the original. For instance, metal type involved a time consuming process of inserting ligatures between letters, making it impossible to adequately overlap joined letters – an important aesthetic requirement for the Arabic script. This technique left small but distinct gaps between Arabic letters that, in the case of calligraphy, would have been effortlessly filled by the

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[48] Hassan Massoudy, "Two Daughters of the Same Parent," in *Arabic Graffiti*, ed. Pascal Zoghbi (Berlin: From Here to Fame, 2011).

[49] Adviye Ayça Ünlüer and Oğuzhan Özcan, "Sound and Silence in the Line: Re-Reading Turkish Islamic Calligraphy for Interactive Media Design," *Leonardo Music Journal* 43, no. 5 (2010).

uninterrupted flow of ink. Some of the difficulties associated with print technologies were alleviated with the introduction of the linotype machine in 1884. Since lines of words could be produced as single strips of metal, print became cheaper and more efficient. Rather than lifting and positioning the individual 'sorts' by hand (as with previous technologies), the composer was now able to operate a keyboard that translated letters into a bar length of metal type. However, the technology was not perfect and it was impossible to make corrections after a line had been cast: the smallest change required resetting and recasting the line while the addition of three or four words meant resetting the whole page.

Setting aside these technological challenges, cultural and religious factors also played an important role. The Quran and books on religious matters were exempt from print, alongside many scholarly and scientific texts that were also considered too valuable for print. Thought to hold important and sacred knowledge, their status deserved calligraphic form and appropriate ornamentation.[50] As a result, the adoption of print in the Islamic world was also delayed as a result of strict rules around what types of texts were appropriate for print. For instance, when a functional printing press was taken up by the Ottoman Empire as part of its modernisation efforts, religious and political authorities limited its use to administrative purposes.[51] In effect, an Arabic-type print house was licensed and able to begin operating in Istanbul in 1726-27, but a *fatwa* from the Sheikh Al-Islam together with a decree from the Sultan ensured that it could only print non-religious texts.[52] A similar restriction was placed on texts printed in Egypt. Following Napoleonic occupation and the departure of French soldiers, the Egyptian government set up its own printing press. After taking office, Muhammad Ali realised that the key to successfully opposing the Ottoman Empire and aggressive Europeans lay in education along Western lines, particularly in practical, technical subjects.[53] Therefore, while the bulk of what was printed at this time was for the purpose of military instruction, printing houses also published texts in the pure and applied sciences.

Despite these early hurdles and slow, staggered uptake, print technologies eventually took root in Egypt, Iran and the Ottoman Empires in the nineteenth century (approximately 400 years after Western Europe) as part of the progressive movement toward modernisation and the renewal of literary and intellectual culture. The spread of printing in the second half of the nineteenth

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[50] Al-Bagdadi, "From Heaven to Dust: Metamorphosis of the Book in Pre-Modern Arab Culture", 89. Robinson argues that these print technologies also attacked the heart of Islamic systems for transmitting knowledge, in terms of what made knowledge trustworthy and how it achieved value and authority: see Francis Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1998).

[51] See J.R Osborn, "Narratives of Arabic Script: Calligraphic Design and Modern Spaces," *Design and Culture* 1, no. 5 (2009).

[52] See Kampman, "Arabic Typography: Its Past and Its Future," Utrecht University, 2011.

[53] George Atiyeh, ed. *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East* (NY: State University of NY Press, 1995).

century went hand in hand with the rise of national sentiment. In particular, print became widely adopted in those areas where regimes still wielded power but were threatened by the expansion of the West, or where some form of colonial rule was in effect and the threat of the West was immediately present. In addition, print media was taken up by Muslim communities as a practical tool for the integration of the wider Islamic world and a useful weapon to defend the faith.[54] Print contributed to a growing pan-Islamic identity and allowed for new discussions of social and religious identity. By the 1820s, there were seventeen Islamic presses in operation in Tsarist Russia, and Muslim reformist leaders in the Indian subcontinent were printing tracts to support their cause. The first Muslim newspapers were published in the 1830s, and by the 1870s there were tens of thousands of religious books for sale.[55] An era of vigorous religious experimentation with new technology commenced via pamphlet wars and partisan newspapers - each attempting to find answers to contemporary challenges. Revolutionary in impact, printing served to break a monopoly on knowledge production by providing new ways to transmit texts and enabled a fresh approach to selecting, writing and presenting them. In the process, print contributed to a cultural revival. As in early modern Europe, print technologies helped to redefine people's relations with the sacred, with power and authority, and with community. The key actors in this movement were *litterateurs* who came from the old literary and scribal elite, but who had evolved into the vanguard of the new culture when it was felt that Islam was at stake.

Despite this sudden uptake, it would still take over a century for the Quran to be printed on a large scale in the Muslim world. The first edition of the Quran printed by Muslims was produced in St Petersburg at the behest of Catherine the Great in 1787.[56] Having just occupied and annexed the Crimean Khanate four years earlier, thereby incorporating many Kirghiz into her empire, the text was intended as a mark of both tolerance and expansionist plans. But the idea of printing the sacred text remained controversial and received very little support. The first version to gain an initial degree of acceptance was produced in Cairo in 1923-4, following a decade of collaboration between Muslim specialists in the Quran. Under the patronage of Fu'ad I, the publication was intended to promote unity in the Muslim world, which had just been rocked by events such as the abolishment of the sultanate in Turkey.[57]

In this way, it can be seen that technologies of print have been consistently caught up in broader political and religious agendas. In addition to being visually unappealing, early print technologies challenged highly structured social systems of Islamic knowledge production and transmission, and threatened sites of ingrained power and privilege. But despite these initial technological

[54] Robinson, "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print".

[55] Ibid.

[56] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*.

[57] See ibid.

challenges, religious concerns, and restrictions on the reproduction of the Quran and other sacred texts, the use of print technologies slowly evolved. By the twentieth century, the ability to print Arabic texts *en masse* held distinct value for Muslim communities and became a powerful tool for building social cohesion and fostering political debate. As a result, Arabic calligraphy retained its value and authority but was no longer the dominant, or only legitimate, way to reproduce Arabic script.

Moving into the mid twentieth century, the advent of personal computers and desktop publishing solved many of the traditional issues associated with early Arabic typesetting. Gaps between connecting letters could be easily filled, ligatures and extenders could be automatically inserted, and letters could be overlapped without a physical block of metal type. Despite this, the early use of Arabic script on computers still met with limited success due to a now familiar range of cultural, aesthetic, religious, political and technological challenges. But these challenges took a new shape, specific to the broader context. As with the introduction of print, the main barrier was the Latin alphabet. Reflecting the close connection between culture and technology, the use of digital technologies for Arabic script was structured around the requirements of the politically and technologically dominant English-speaking West.

Digital technology

As with print technology, early computers were predominantly designed around the requirements of the English language and parameters of the Roman alphabet. As a result, they did not immediately lend themselves to the expression of Arabic script. This core linguistic bias was embedded in the design and function of later digital spaces, and affected the ease with which Arabic speakers were able to navigate and engage with new technologies.

Initially, the technology did not even allow users to directly input Arabic letters. For instance, early website designers and newspaper publishers were forced to convert entire pages of Arabic into a single image since they could not input the script directly.[58] This difficulty was common across all non-English languages in the 1960s, with character-encoding schemes reflecting the geo-political dominance of North America and its technology. The American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) scheme, first published in 1963, included definitions for only 128 characters. Due to high percentage of early users who were North American, the computer scientists who designed personal computers and the Internet did so on basis of this Code, making the use of other alphabets or character sets inconvenient or impossible.[59] This was true even for the Latin-based scripts of Western Europe. Since English did not use accents or diacritics, users

[58] George Kandalaft, "Multilingual Web Design," in *Talking About Arabic*, ed. Mourad Boutros (New York: Mark Batty, 1999).

[59] Warshauer, "Language, Identity and the Internet," 156.

were unable to transmit basic text in Spanish, French, or German. As a result, the constraint has been referred to as 'graphic imperialism', forcing languages like French and Spanish to eliminate accents and tildes from the screen.[60]

In contrast, the subsequent introduction of Extended ASCII in the 1980s allowed for the encoding of the major languages of Western Europe, but not enough for less politically powerful Latin-based languages such as Czech, Latvian, Navajo, Turkish, or Vietnamese. For this reason, the extended ASCII system has been described as an alphabet of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a technological memento of the Cold War.[61] The renowned Canadian typographer Robert Bringhurst argued that the fact that ASCII was considered adequate for so long is a reflection of the cultural narrowness of U.S. civilisation and technocracy in the twentieth century.[62] The introduction of the Unicode standard was a key breakthrough for digital representation of Arabic script, giving designers the freedom to design a functional and aesthetic form of script. In the 1990s, Unicode allowed for the input and recognition of up to 536 characters, but successive updates increased this capacity and enabled the use of 1,114,112 different characters.[63] The typographer Johannes Bergerhausen has explicitly drawn this connection between character encoding and global politics. When asked of the time he first became aware of the political and social aspects of typography, he explained:

> It was when I discovered that the ISO-Latin1 code of the 1980s was like something from the Cold War: special characters like the German umlaut, French cedilla or the Spanish tilde are encoded – but try writing a name like Milošević![64]

In contrast, he refers to Unicode as a sort of typographical U.N. General Assembly. As the current standard for character encoding, it reflects a more global emphasis while underlining the limitations of former schemes.

Unicode can therefore be symbolically understood to reflect shifts in international politics and priorities, moving from a strategic Cold War division of the world into globalising markets, technology, and cultures. As a practical result of this shift, innovations in the technological representation of script have enabled a move away from a restrictive North American centre to embrace Eastern Europe, and more recently, a plurality of global scripts including Arabic. Although it should be noted that the broader geo-political structure retained certain aspects of its

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[60] As argued by Chartier, "Languages, Books and Reading from the Printed Word to the Digital Text".

[61] Robert Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style (Second Edition)* (Vancouver: Hartley and Marks, 1996), 180.

[62] Ibid.

[63] See The Unicode Consortium, 2000.

[64] John Walters, "The United Nations of Type," *Eye Magazine (Online)* 64 (2001). See also Decode-Unicode, "Project," http://www.decodeunicode.org.

influence: for instance, until the early twenty-first century, Persian was excluded from online character sets.[65]

The promise of Unicode was not realised immediately. Although in decline, Anglophone monolingualism remained a basic linguistic feature of the Internet even into the early twenty-first century.[66] As Bringhurst argues, the ethnocentricity and racism that thrived in last hundred years became institutionalised in typographic practice, in the workings of machines, fonts, and keyboards.[67] As a result, the linguistic norm of English and the Roman alphabet was firmly embedded in the design and functionality of Internet spaces and mobile technologies. Despite the rapid development of a multilingual environment, English had been built in the architecture of the Internet itself. For instance, search engines such as Google developed their algorithms based on the English language and the Roman script, and so have been less able to comprehend queries in Asian character-based languages.[68] Equally, the 'qwerty' keyboard, the main input device for most of the world's languages, required that users of different scripts familiarise themselves with Roman letters. In the late 1990s, Western specifications also structured the most heavily visited sites by Arabic-speakers, such as forums, blogs, and electronic magazines, with templates for these sites designed for alphabets that read from left to right.[69] Interviews conducted with Arabic-speaking Internet users into the mid-2000s found that participants were still forced to negotiate the centrality of English.

> Of course there are Arabic websites, but we all know that the world of the Internet is the world of English…Sure we go to Arabic sites, but think about it, even to chat, the software is

[65] Wei and Kolko, "Resistance to Globalization: Language and Internet Diffusion Patterns in Uzbekistan", 209.

[66] On Anglophone monolingualism in relation to new technology, see Gerald Goggin and Mark McLelland, "Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms," in *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, ed. Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (London & New York: Routledge, 2009). On estimates of web presence and Internet usage, see Peter Gerrand, "Estimating Linguistic Diversity on the Internet: A Taxonomy to Avoid Pitfalls and Paradoxes," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007). On the question of a linguistically plural Internet, see Joe Lockard, "Babel Machines and Electronic Universalism," in *Race in Cyberspace*, ed. Beth E Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman (London & New York: Routledge, 2000) and Rita Raley, "Machine Translation and Global English," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16, no. 2 (2003).

[67] Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style (Second Edition)*.

[68] Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland, eds., *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009). On the development of alternative, more compatible technologies for Asian character-based languages, see also Heiko Sacher, "Interactions in Chinese: Designing Interfaces for Asian Languages," *Interactions* Sept-Oct (1998).

[69] Kandalaft, "Multilingual Web Design," 26-27. On the Arabic blogosphere in the early twenty-first century, see Bruce Etling et al., *Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture and Dissent* (Berkman Centre Research Publication, 2009).

> in English, so somebody has to be familiar with the basics, how to read instructions or know which button to click on.[70]

Another user noted that English words were often used when chatting, or they would phonetically create Arabic language text with the Latin alphabet.[71] Familiarity with Roman script was therefore necessary for engaging with online space but more broadly, the script formed a structure around which Arabic speakers were forced to adapt.

Ongoing limitations of technology have also affected design outcomes for Arabic typography. Due in large part to the range of technological and political challenges outlined above, Arabic typography has been slow to develop into a mature discipline. Typography has been compared unfavourably with calligraphy and considered more in terms of practicality than aesthetics. The two mediums have often been mapped onto the distinction of art and craft: while calligraphy continues to be venerated as Islamic art's highest achievement, typography has been seen as a mere commercial necessity with little aesthetic refinement or value.[72] In a similar complaint, Arabic typography has been judged as inflexible, restrained by the horizontal line and lacking any beauty of movement: type forms are seen as rigid, functional, and lacking aesthetic beauty. In contrast, the calligraphic text is able to plunge up or down according to the whim or artistic creativity of the artist. In a much used analogy with music, calligraphic letters were considered a dance of ascending verticals and temperate horizontals, choreographed to achieve balance between static individual form and rhythmic movement.[73] This attitude was particularly evident in the early days of type. For instance, when Abdullah Yusuf Ali prepared a bilingual Arabic-English print edition of the Quran in 1934, he commissioned a calligrapher rather than resort to existing type forms. For this text, Arabic letterforms were carefully designed in harmony with their equivalent English text and then transferred to photographic blocks. This elaborate procedure was undertaken, according to Ali's preface to the first edition, because calligraphy occupied an

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[70] Helga Tawil-Souri, "Americanizing Palestine through Internet Development," in *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, ed. Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 37.

[71] Ibid, 38. Note that Arabic internet users often chose to transliterate their text into the Roman alphabet rather than navigate the awkwardness of the script: see Mark Warshauer, Ghada El Said, and Aymen Zohry, "Language Choice Online: Globalization and Identity in Egypt," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication (Online)* 7, no. 4 (2002).

[72] See Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès, "Experimental Arab Type and the Contemporary Arab Identity," in *Visual Narratives from Arabic: Online Master Module on Art and Technology*, ed. Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès and Tarek Atrissi (Beirut: UNESCO, 2008), "Foreward," in *Arabesque: Graphic Design from the Arab World and Persia*, ed. Ben Wittner, Thoma Sascha, and Nicholas Bourquin (Berlin: Gestalten, 2009), Osborn, "Narratives of Arabic Script: Calligraphic Design and Modern Spaces", and E Mulder, "Keyboard Calligraphy," *Saudi Aramco World* July/August (2007).

[73] Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*.

important place in Islamic art and it was his desire that the work should not 'be deficient in this respect'.[74]

Since this time, progress in Arabic type design has been inconsistent and at time incremental, with designers forced to steadily adapt to a range of awkward restrictions placed on Arabic script by new technologies. Even once common web browsers were able to support different world scripts, site developers were limited by the small number of Arabic fonts that were installed on Windows computers. Compared to the wide range of Latin typeface options, site developers were constrained by the choice of Arabic Transparent, Simplified Arabic, Traditional Arabic and Tahoma (Unicode). By the late 1990s, these four fonts were standard but were also considered to be of very poor quality and were not highly legible.[75] As a result of Unicode support for the Arabic language and a range of other innovations, the digital representation of Arabic script finally became easier and many persistent technical problems were resolved. However, Arabic typographers were still required to work around the Roman alphabet standard built into modern systems and applications. For instance, even in 2010, the standard web browser Google Chrome rejected fonts with elements that were fundamental for Arabic rendering, the Windows rendering engine did not allow for kerning between Arabic letters and punctuation marks, and the Apple OSX system only partly supported Arabic OpenType features.[76] As a result, the aesthetic value of typography was low, particularly when compared with calligraphy, and existing technology made it difficult to improve the quality of design.

Media scholar Basile Zimmerman argued that the ASCII code, the 'qwerty' keyboard and Roman alphabet programming information were embedded so solidly inside Western designed interfaces that users have been faced with the choice of either accepting these limitations or designing

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[74] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*, 31. Roman typeface design also had to unmoor itself from a calligraphic tradition that had been the main influence through the sixteenth-century. Western print technologies were originally conceived of as machines for permitting exact and fast replication of an idealised handwriting: typefaces that mimicked handwriting were a way to make the printed word acceptable to public accustomed to script hands. See Blake Fry, "Why Typefaces Proliferate without Copyright Protection," *Journal on Telecommunication and High Technology Law* 8, no. 2 (2010), 449.

[75] See Kandalaft, "Multilingual Web Design," 26-27 and Boutros, *Talking About Arabic*. Even in 2004, prominent designer Tarek Atrissi believed that there were only ten Arabic fonts up to a high standard for use in new media applications: see Tarek Atrissi, "Charting a Course for Arabic Typography," in *The Education of a Typographer*, ed. Steven Heller (New York: Allworth, 2004).

[76] TnType, "BBC Arabic: Nassim Sets News," TnType: Typographic and titsonian ephemera, www.tntypography.com. This difficulty can be understood as a broad reflection of Roman alphabet dominance. On similar barriers for the Greek script, see Jannis Androutsopoulos, "'Greeklish': Transliteration Practice and Discourse in the Context of Computer-Mediated Digraphia," in *Standard Languages and Language Standards: Greek, Past and Present*, ed. Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Michael Silk (UK: Ashgate, 2009), Dimitris Koutsogiannis and Bessie Miksikopoulou, "Greeklish and Greekness: Trends and Discourses of 'Glocalness'," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 9, no. 1 (2003), and Antonios Valassakis, "Greek and the Internet: The Affects of Electronic Mail Exchange on the Greek Language" (University of Toronto, 2001). For continuing issues with Unicode for South Asian scripts, see Andrew Hardie, "From Legacy Encodings to Unicode: The Graphical, Logical Principles in the Scripts of South Asia," *Language Resources and Evaluation* 41 (2007).

another.[77] These restrictions act as cultural elements which circulate through each technology, like soundwaves which travel between people and objects: they can be memorised and recorded, transmitted, multiplied through various kinds of materials, and ultimately shaped and transferred by mediums that host them. Since technology requires years of work to develop and millions of dollars in investment, these cultural elements embodied inside technology are often hard to change.[78] The issue for most users is therefore not one of opting in or out, or choosing a better alternative, but how to negotiate technological limitations and cultural implications of this constraint.

For Arabic speakers, systems of transliteration quickly emerged as one such negotiation. Digital communication with these Roman-alphabet Arabic hybrids became popular, particularly among young people.[79] For instance, since first generation mobiles did not have an Arabic interface, users were forced to use Latin characters. To accommodate the fact that not every Arabic letter has an equivalent Latin letter or phonetic sound, the numbers 0-9 were placed between regular letters to produce a new system of correct pronunciation.[80] This system escalated in popularity and even after the introduction of a functional Arabic interface, hybrid scripts remained in use. A similar approach was formalised under the name 'Arabizi' and was based on points of linguistic, aural and visual similarity between Arabic and English.[81] Vocalisation marks were substituted for Latin vowels, and consonants that did not have an English counterpart were mostly represented by numerals: for example, the Arabic letter *'ayn* (ع) was replaced by the number '3'. In this way,

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[77] Basile Zimmerman, "Redesigning Culture: Chinese Characters in Alphabet-Encoded Networks," *Design & Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010). See Arns and Broeckmann, "Small Media Normality for the East," on whether technology can be "culturally neutral". On the ideological structures of new technology, see both Katharine Sarikakis and Daya K Thussu, eds., *Ideologies of the Internet* (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2006) and Alexander Galloway, "Language Wants to Be Overlooked: On Software and Ideology," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5, no. 3 (2006). Lisa Nakamura examines the work of race in new media in terms of strata, arguing that digital reproduction produces new iterations of race and racialism that have roots in mechanical reproduction: see Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity and Identity on the Internet* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002). On the racial bias embedded within modern technologies, see also Jerry Kang, "Cyber-Race," *Harvard Law Review* 113, no. 5 (2000) and Beth Kolko, Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert Rodman, eds., *Race in Cyberspace* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000). Feminist scholarship has also explored gendered power relations within technology: for instance, see Gillian Youngs, "Gender and Technology: The Internet in Context," in *Ideologies of the Internet*, ed. Katharine Sarikakis and Daya K Thussu (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2006).

[78] Zimmerman, "Redesigning Culture: Chinese Characters in Alphabet-Encoded Networks", 39.

[79] For instance, a Romanised version of Egyptian was widely used in informal email and chat by young professionals: see Warshauer, El Said, and Zohry, "Language Choice Online: Globalization and Identity in Egypt". On the dominance of English and adaptation of non-Western linguistic behaviour, scripts, and language choices to technology and new media environments, see also Lin Pan, "Dissecting Multilingual Beijing: The Space and Scale of Vernacular Globalization," *Visual Communication* 9, no. 1 (2010), David Crystal, *English as a Global Language (2nd Edition)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Quintin Gee, "Review of Script Displays of African Languages by Current Software," *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia* 11, no. 2 (2005).

[80] Halim Choueiry, "Teaching Arabic Type Design in a Global Context," in *Talking About Arabic*, ed. Mourad Boutros (New York: Mark Batty, 1999).

[81] Mohammad Ali Yaghan, "'Arabizi': A Contemporary Style of Arabic Slang," *Design Issues* 24, no. 2 (2008).

combinations of Roman letters were used to draw the actual shape of Arabic word, based on visual – rather than phonetic - similarities.[82]

The use of Romanised Arabic was actually preferred by some, who felt that Arabic letters should only be used for classical Arabic and scholarly texts.[83] Similar to the old injunctions against print, this position reflected a desire to enforce a clear distinction between sacred and secular uses of script. But given the broader value placed on the Arabic script, and the link that many perceived between the Latin alphabet and colonial power, it is unsurprising that discourses of cultural threat also emerged. For instance, Mohammad El Salman, an associate professor of sociolinguistics at the Balqa Applied University, argued that there should be awareness campaigns to familiarise young people with the dangers of transliteration.

> We should rescue Arabic and launch awareness campaigns as the threat has moved from the Internet to mobile phones and even to satellite TV channels.[84]

This issue of transliteration and Western technological dominance sparked debate beyond the Arabic-speaking world. For Arabic and other languages, it was broadly understood as an attack and a contamination – a cultural loss and blow to independence. For instance, the Academy of Athens issued a statement to the press regarding the use of Latin characters for online Greek language communication, and in 2001, forty members signed their names to the claim that the Roman script was a threat to Greek language, culture, and history. Two months of extensive media coverage and debate followed. The issue was framed in terms of a foreign invasion and national danger, with the Greek people called on to 'stand guard' over their language and defend it with vigour.[85] The Academy of Athens equated the use of Latin-alphabet Greek with political domination, finding it 'unholy, but also senseless' to replace the Greek script with Latin in its own birthplace - calling on "all fellow Greeks to respond and ensure that these unholy plans are

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[82] Ibid, 42.

[83] Ibid, 45.

[84] Hady Hamdan, "Text Message Transliteration Threatens Arabic," *Tribune Business News*, 14 September 2012. On the link between romanised Arabic and imperialist, missionary agendas in the Sudan, see Heather Sharkey, "Christians among Muslims: The Church Missionary Society in the Northern Sudan," *Journal of African History* 43 (2002). On the 'conflict of culture' animated by the proposal to have three keys on the keyboard for Arabic letters that don't exist in the Latin alphabet, see Ricardo Mbarkho, "Introduction to Art and New Media in the Arab States, with a Case-Study of Lebanon," in *Visual Narratives from Arabic: Online Master Module on Art and Technology*, ed. Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès and Tarek Atrissi (Beirut: UNESCO, 2008).

[85] Translated in Koutsogiannis and Miksikopoulou, "Greeklish and Greekness: Trends and Discourses of 'Glocalness'". In this context, the President of the Greek republic lashed out against shop owners who used Latin letters on their shop signs, while in the city of Volos, law suits were filed against shop owners who did not use the Greek alphabet: see Moschonas, "Relativism in Language Ideology: Greece's Latest Language Issue".

destroyed, root and branch".[86] Here, the alphabet was closely linked to the preservation of national culture and the authenticity of Greek identity.

> The Greek language has deep historical roots which it has maintained throughout its age old history and development, and it is neither conceivable nor permissible for us to adulterate our pronunciation by the introduction of Latin characters…This language of ours has preserved our culture and history in the multifarious vicissitudes of the nation, and moreover, under harsh Ottoman tyranny.[87]

In this way, the technological dominance of the Latin alphabet was positioned as an invading force able to threaten the continuity and expression of local culture. Beyond Greece, the Kremlin in Russia were reportedly also frustrated by the 'U.S. dominion' over the Internet due to a restriction on the use of Cyrillic for domain names.[88] As a result, Kremlin officials were forced to input the address 'kremlin.ru' in Latin script to access their own site. For other languages, transliteration was primarily an issue of practicality and aesthetics. For instance, the phonetic version of Chinese characters was considered 'ugly' and difficult to read. The nature of Chinese orthography does not lend itself easily to Roman letters since Chinese characters are symbols of meaning and many share similar phonetics: for instance, the phoneme *yi* corresponds to more than three hundred different characters.[89] As a result, many Chinese speakers who were unfamiliar with the Latin script found transliteration confusing and visually uncomfortable.

In this way, a porous connection can be understood to exist between writing technologies and the socio-political, linguistic, and aesthetic context in which they are designed, built and used. The dominance of Roman script at the heart of new digital technologies has emphasised the power disparity between global alphabets, such that its technological architecture was able to spark tensions between nations, foster new linguistic forms, and force both users and designers of Arabic script to negotiate its terms. But this situation is not unique to global media. I argue that technologies of Arabic letter design have been consistently connected to broader political and social agendas. As was demonstrated by the troubled introduction of both print and digital technologies, revolutions in writing technology have provided new ways to visualise and reproduce the Arabic word but, in doing so, they also produced new social conflicts and connections between script, culture and power.

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[86] Translated in Androutsopoulos, "'Greeklish': Transliteration Practice and Discourse in the Context of Computer-Mediated Digraphia," 226.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Clifford J. Levy, "Russians Wary of Cyrillic Web Domains," *The New York Times*, 22 December 2009. Of particular note, the Russian government began to spearhead a global movement in 2009 to allow domain names in languages with non-Latin alphabets. On the politics of domain name registers, see George Pike, "ICAAN Reviews Changes in DNS Policy and Legal Issues," *Information Today* 24, no. 8 (2007).

[89] Basile Zimmerman, "Technology and Culture: Two Paradigms," *Leonardo Music Journal* 15 (2005).

Reflections

Previous chapters explored the implication of Arabic script within orientalist discourses and geo-political events. In this chapter, I turned my focus to the shape of script and argued that its visual quality and technologies of production have also been politicised. I began by exploring the ways in which Arabic calligraphy has been implicated in socio-political structures and used to regulate the visual aspect of Arabic script. As an aesthetic practice, calligraphy has held a powerful influence over Islamic visual culture and as a political practice, calligraphy has been entwined with systems of power, knowledge, religion, and authority. As a result, an examination of calligraphic practice offered insight into the intersection of socio-political power and script – an intersection, I argued, that has been particularly apparent at times of aesthetic innovation and technological change.

Arabic script design has been consistently hindered by technical difficulties, from the early development of print in the sixteenth century to the character encoding schemes of the twentieth century, and more advanced digital and communications media in the twenty-first century. In large part, these technological issues have been reflective of broader political and social constraints. Accordingly, a porous connection can be understood to exist between technologies for producing script and the socio-political context in which they are designed, built and used. Moving from early experiments with the printing press into the space of digital media and contemporary typography, I explored the evolution of Arabic writing practice and letter design. In addition to being visually unappealing, early print technologies challenged highly structured social systems of Islamic knowledge production and transmission, and threatened sites of ingrained power and privilege. The religious weight attached to the script and sacred texts affected which types of Arabic text would be appropriate for machine reproduction: based on a logic of exclusion, technologies of print were restricted to those texts considered unimportant, bureaucratic, and lacking in scholarly value. As a result, print took centuries to take root in the Arabic-speaking world, but by the twentieth century, the ability to print Arabic texts *en masse* became a powerful tool for building social cohesion and fostering political debate. Moving into the twenty-first century, digital innovations in letter design revealed a new set of cultural concerns and power relations. With the rise of mobile technology and global media, the development of Arabic typography was critical to full participation of Arabic speakers in the new media economy. However, the practice was slow to mature due in large part to the Roman alphabet bias built into the heart of new technology. Here, the dominance of Roman script emphasised the power disparity between global alphabets and was able to spark tensions between nations, foster new linguistic forms, and force both users and designers of Arabic script to negotiate its terms. These transitions mark important shifts in the history of Arabic script and, I argue, demonstrate the continued intersection of socio-political, linguistic, aesthetic, and technological components of Arabic letter design.

The visual form of the Arabic script has never stopped evolving in both minor and significant ways, in response to technological demands. The specific qualities of new materials and technologies shaped early lettering styles across a variety of world scripts and languages. In fourth century China, for instance, the ready availability of paper and a more supple brush caused the modification of clerical script to the simpler, regular script, while in fourteenth century Russia, the transition from parchment to paper engendered an evolution from uncial to semi-uncial script. Writing tools have also had a significant effect on the transformation of letterforms. For instance, the *antiqua* form of the Roman script could only have been developed from working with stone and chisel, due to the signature chipping at the end of each notch. In contrast, the German Blackletter *fraktur* and cursive scripts developed in the Middle Ages when the goose quill was introduced to writing, leading to a rapid style characterized by marked thick lines and hairlines.[90] Equally, the technique of square *kufic* appeared in the early Middle Ages on architecture, primarily because both brick and tile work lent themselves to this style: the angular Arabic letters were simplified more than usual in order to permit more or less legible sentences in a structured, defined space.[91] The first Roman typeface designs were partly dictated by the instruments used to produce handwritten script, with letterforms adapting from the difference of the flat-edged brush to the broad nipped pen and finally the quill in the nineteenth century.[92]

For early Arabic calligraphy, the inflexible quality of the *qalam* produced a style led from the wrist. The thick and thin writing in calligraphy developed out of a continual adjustment of the direction of the pen and the hand, a synchronised interplay of movements.[93] This difference is emphasised when comparing Roman and Arabic calligraphic forms: the nib pen used for writing Arabic is cut diagonally to the left at an angle of almost 45 degrees, which makes horizontal lines the thickest, while the Latin calligraphic pen is cut diagonally to the right, which makes vertical strokes the thickest.[94] As the most recent step in this development, Arabic script is adapting its form for digitisation and the requirements of new media applications. Contemporary artists are continuing to push creative, material, and symbolic boundaries by engaging digital technologies and new forms of content. By embracing colour, texture, lighting, three dimensionality and motion, digital typography produces a new visual syntax for expressing words and phrases, ideas and feelings, on

[90] Karl Schlamminger, "The Fine Scratching of the Reed Pen and the Mason's Script: On Calligraphy and Islamic Architecture," in *The Aura of Alif: The Art of Writing in Islam*, ed. Juergen Wasim Frembgen (Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2010).

[91] Schimmel, *Islamic Calligraphy*.

[92] Fry, "Why Typefaces Proliferate without Copyright Protection".

[93] Schlamminger, "The Fine Scratching of the Reed Pen and the Mason's Script: On Calligraphy and Islamic Architecture".

[94] Rana Abou Rjeily, *Cultural Connectives* (NY: Mark Batty Publishers, 2011).

a multiplicity of pages and screens.[95] New textual environments are inspiring new visual forms, meeting aesthetic needs and functional requirements of the global design and communications market.

Arabic calligraphy remains a key source of inspiration and commonly provides a starting point for design, but typography has nonetheless resolved many of its technological challenges and emerged as a legitimate expression of Arabic script. As Lebanese type designer Halim Choueiry instructs his students, knowledge of traditional Arabic calligraphy is essential for developing high quality type designs: designers need not master calligraphy but they should have an acute understanding of calligraphic rules regarding spatial relationships.[96] These mathematical rules, stretching back to Ibn Muqla and Ibn al-Bawwab, are still valuable as a foundation or guide for type designs. For some, traditional styles of calligraphy and epigraphy can even be directly applied to typographic design. For instance, square *kufic* was originally designed for brick architectural inscriptions in Iran at the turn of the eleventh to twelfth century, but its mathematically precise grid basis has been adapted with ease to the requirements of paper and digital screens. Classical calligraphy therefore continues to play a central role in modern design by providing the inspiration and base measurement from which to generate typographic letters. Designers who draw on this heritage build bridges between the two disciplines, creating a link between classical Arabic forms and modern design in a way that keeps the Arabic language alive and evolving.[97]

This sense of transformation, balanced by a respect for heritage, can be seen in a number of recent type projects. For instance in a project from 2007, a team of Dutch and Arab designers collaborated to create an Arabic version of the Roman alphabet *fresco* typeface. Their intention was to create a balance between a hybrid mix of traditional Arabic letterforms while maintaining a resemblance to the Roman *fresco's* visual characteristics.[98] The project began with an analysis of possible Arabic calligraphic styles that could be used as structural models. Deciding to focus on elements of both geometric and Maghrebi *kufic* scripts, the *fresco* Arabic type sought to reinterpret these calligraphic models in a contemporary design style (Figure 16).

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[95] Teal Triggs, "The Newness in the New Typography," in *The Education of a Typographer*, ed. Steven Heller (New York: Allworth Press, 2004).

[96] Choueiry, "Teaching Arabic Type Design in a Global Context".

[97] Brooke Anderson, "Arabic Script Comes of Age with Modern Fonts," *The Daily Star*, 27 September 2013. Note that Anderson attributes the bridge analogy to Lebanese type designer Nadine Chahine. This sense of evolution is also true of calligraphy. Samir Sayegh, a highly respected leader of design at the American University of Beirut, argues that Arabic calligraphy is an art form that should be rooted in tradition but not suffocated by it: while it ought to be revered as a vital part of Arab cultural heritage, it should also should not be weighed down by this legacy, fetishised, or frozen as an artefact of the remote past. See Lysandra Ohrstrom, "Samir Sayegh's Typography Revolution," *The Daily Star*, 14 June 2013.

[98] For more detail on this project, Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès, *Typographic Matchmaking: Building Cultural Bridges with Typeface Design* (Amsterdam: Khatt Books, 2007).

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 16: Sample of *fresco* Arabic. Digital image. Available from: Khatt Foundation, "Fresco Arabic: Western Latin Meets Eastern Kufi," http://www.khtt.net/page/146/en.

On one hand, Maghrebi styles are known for both their inventiveness and leniency, allowing Arabic letters to be varied according to their context and aesthetic needs: for instance, simplified to pure mathematical shapes or decorated in various ways. On the other hand, the geometric *kufic* style is highly structured and has very clear proportions that can be easily adapted to Roman type. The artists therefore combined straight horizontal strokes with rounded shapes, and matched the structured simplicity and curves of Arabic calligraphy to the visual rhythm of the Roman *fresco* typeface. The final design brought together elements of all three styles - the structure of geometric *kufic*, the freedom and fluidity of the Maghrebi styles, and trademark details of the Latin *fresco*.

In a similar project, the *Fedra* Arabic typeface was created by drawing on calligraphic traditions, Latin typography, and the qualities of the handwritten Arabic text.[99] The designers Tarek Atrissi and Peter Bilak began by examining samples of common Arabic handwriting from different parts of the Middle East: these brought to light a wide range of readable, generally accepted forms and different cultural preferences. The next step was to unpack the difference between a simplified *Naskh*-style of Arabic calligraphy and a Latin *serif* typeface. To create the design, Atrissi and Bilak brought calligraphic influences together with the proportions of Latin type: the baseline, ascender and descender were kept identical the Latin counterpart but the character of the curves were adopted from calligraphic forms, beginning fairly flat and turning relatively late (Figure 17).[100]

[99] See *Typographic Matchmaking: Building Cultural Bridges with Typeface Design* and Tarek Atrissi, "Fedra Arabic: The Typographic Matchmaking Experience," http://blog.atrissi.com/fedra-arabic-the-typographic-matchmaking-experience/.

[100] Abi-Farès, *Typographic Matchmaking: Building Cultural Bridges with Typeface Design*.

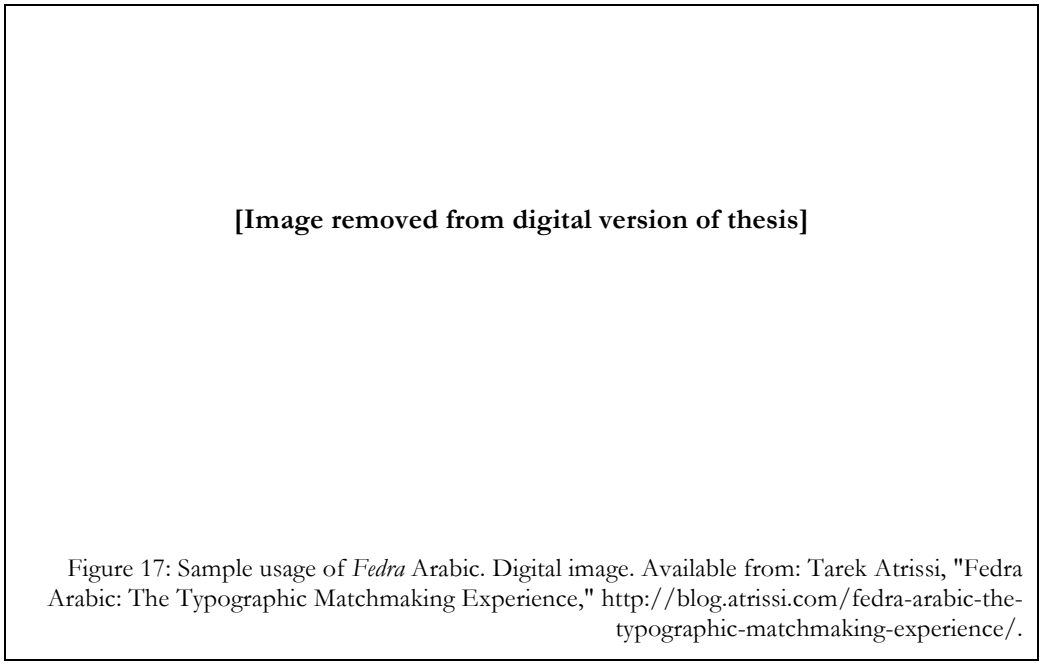

Figure 17: Sample usage of *Fedra* Arabic. Digital image. Available from: Tarek Atrissi, "Fedra Arabic: The Typographic Matchmaking Experience," http://blog.atrissi.com/fedra-arabic-the-typographic-matchmaking-experience/.

As a result, *Fedra* Arabic brought together Arabic calligraphy with the simplicity of Latin letterforms and more traditional forms of printed Arabic book type. With a focus on handwriting in its infinite variability and cultural difference, this design also captured a lingering sense of the physical, writing body. The typeform therefore combined aspects of the corporeality and freedom of handwritten calligraphy with the limitations of mechanical typography – an outcome that directly addresses the challenge faced by early typographical practice.

A key focus of modern type design is therefore on the continual transformation of Arabic script, allowing it to grow, change, and adapt to both the constraints of new technologies and opportunities of global media. Digital technologies offer unique spaces and methods for exploring the shape and experience of the Arabic letter, and innovation is a key driver of these experiments. These contemporary transformations of Arabic letterforms in response to new technologies and markets do not mark a unique moment in the history of letter design: rather, successive styles of script have consistently emerged from changes in the socio-political context and the influence of new technologies.

Typography and identity

Arabic typography mobilises complex, fraught, and often conflicting, notions of modern Arab identity and 'Arabness'. Type works to communicate a message and produce an idea, engaging both the aesthetic potential of the written word and its associated cultural significance. In this final chapter, I explore the way Arabic type designers are employing the cultural element of typography to construct and challenge complex political identities.

I begin by questioning the cross-cultural implications of contemporary Arabic type design. As outlined in the previous chapter, the discipline of Arabic typography is an uneasy hybrid linking Islamic calligraphy with Western typographic traditions and other global forms. I continue this focus on contemporary type design by exploring artists who are attempting to express a unique sense of modern Arab identity while also meeting the demands of global, cross-cultural communication. In particular, I turn to dual-script typography and the narratives that frame the act of placing two alphabets together on a page. Across these design narratives, there is a distinct emphasis on engaging with local heritage and aesthetic traditions to capture a sense of Arab identity or 'Arabness'. In each of these examples, the Arabic alphabet has been used to navigate questions of cultural difference and articulate a view of how Arabic script – and by extension, the Arab and Islamic world - should interact with other global cultures. I argue that these narratives reveal the way in which the Arabic alphabet continues to play a key role in constructing complex, modern identities for global markets.

To place these visual experiments with Arabic in their broader context, I outline the ways in which the concept of 'Arab' identity has been mobilised in recent history. Arguably, any deliberate reference to Arab identity within a project of cultural representation is obliged to deal with the term's history, its close connection to the Arabic language and script, its status as a tool of political and ideological resistance, and its complex relationship to Islam, race and nationalism. Accordingly, in the second half of this chapter I explore the implications and limitations of understanding Arabic type in terms of 'Arabness' or modern 'Arab' identity. Aesthetically, the notion of shaping a modern Arab aesthetic through a rich engagement with both heritage and global influence is not unique to modern typography: rather, these design narratives are the continuation of well established connections between the Arabic script, art practice, and identity politics. Politically, the notion of a unified Arab identity has been fraught by failed discourses of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism. Equally, the internal differences between and within various

Arab countries and cultures must be understood as so significant as to undermine the coherence of any singular concept.

Many designers are therefore challenging broad-based expressions of 'Arab modernity' and 'Arab experience', choosing instead to create letterforms that are sensitive to specific national or community-based identities. Here, there is a growing trend towards exploring localised, particular experiences of identity. I argue that these experiments support the evolution of Arabic script through the responsive integration of letters across multiple forms of complex identity, and in the process, shifts the discourse from homogeneity to multiplicity.

Cross cultural type

When Arabic script appears on billboards, magazines, or news headlines, the visual form of the alphabet is designed to influence and make an impact on the viewer. Typography supports the core meaning of a text through the work of connotation and symbolism, providing a layer of cultural meaning that helps to differentiate one visual impression from another.[1]

The form of the letter often links specifically to the message being communicated. For instance, type can draw on the visual impression of established styles – such as traditional, rustic or corporate - to support a particular brand identity. Equally, the meaning produced around letterforms can mobilise cultural stereotypes and categories, including national, religious, or socio-economic forms of identity.[2] As with the connotations that have formed around alphabets more broadly, the meanings associated with particular styles are shaped by cultural factors and are contingent on a specific horizon of meaning. Typographers rely on the degree to which meaning can consolidate around particular forms, such that a global audience can still recognise and understand these signs. Visual metaphor often helps to produce these effects and supports the work of connotation. For instance, an irregular or asymmetric weight and length tends to suggest rebellion and unconventionality. Equally, designers often employ gendered meanings, using square and bold styles to signify masculinity, and round, delicate and curly styles to indicate the

[1] On the operation of typography, see Jared Ash, "The Letter as Such: Aleksei Kruchenykh as Closet Typographer," in *The Education of a Typographer*, ed. Steven Heller (New York: Allworth Press, 2004), Jeff Bellantoni and Matt Woolman, *Type in Motion – Innovations in Digital Graphics* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), Laura Chessin, "Typography: The Complete Education," in *The Education of a Typographer*, ed. Steven Heller (New York: Allsworth Press, 2004), Hartmut Stöckl, "Typography: Body and Dress of a Text " *Visual Communication* 4, no. 2 (2005), Chuck Byrne, "An Introduction to Typography for Students of Graphic Design," in *The Education of a Typographer*, ed. Steven Heller (New York: Allworth, 2004), Terry Childers and Jeffrey Jass, "All Dressed up with Something to Say: Effects of Typeface Semantic Associations on Brand Perceptions and Consumer Memory," *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2002), Steven Heller, ed. *The Education of a Typographer* (New York: Allworth Press, 2004), Theo Van Leeuwen, "Typographic Meaning," *Visual Communication* 4, no. 2 (2005), and Sabrina Malik, Jonathan Aitken, and Judith Kelly Waaten, "Communicating Emotion with Animated Text," ibid, 8 (2009).

[2] See Morrison, *Politics and Script: Aspects of Authority and Freedom in the Development of Graeco-Latin Script from the Sixth Century BC to the Twentieth Century AD*.

feminine.[3] While a great deal of experimentation has been done with Latin typography to encompass an array of cultural ideologies, emotions, and forms, Arabic typography is still developing this level of maturity.[4]

As explored in the previous chapter, Arabic typography and print technologies were slow to take hold due to a range of technological and cultural factors. Nonetheless, typography began to flourish once digital technologies could more effectively support Arabic script and designers were in a better position to experiment and develop type in new directions. The majority of those who took advantage of this shift gained an education in Western Europe and North America before returning to their home countries to practice or establish firms. Given this background, the dominant trend for contemporary typographers is to shape Arabic letterforms and visual culture from a range of influences, in a way that best represents their needs. To meet both local and global needs, designers are combining, subverting, and rejecting traditions of Islamic calligraphy, European graphic design, and other global forms. The narratives that frame these designs reveal an interest in engaging with multiple sources of influence in order to expand the possibilities for design and reach international markets. In particular, Arabic typography draws heavily on established forms of Roman typography and visual notions of the modern produced through successive waves of aesthetic experimentation in Western Europe and North America. This work is critical to understanding the politics of modern Arabic typography and the ways in which designers speak about their script. To this end, I turn now to the influence of Roman forms on Arabic typography and explore the expressions of identity that emerge from these implicitly cross-cultural designs.

In the early twentieth century, Roman typography aspired to breathe new life into stagnant traditions, reframe typography as a political activity, and explore the possibility of new technologies. For instance, artists under the influence of Dada attempted to free the letter from the constraints of tradition in both layout and form. In contrast, the Constructivist movement sought the promise of the new in geometric forms and the idea of revolution, while Dada and Futurist artists questioned the impact that the visual properties of type might have on the social realm of public language.[5] Across these movements, typography was readily understood as a system of organised meaning that could be reinterpreted or challenged for radical political and aesthetic goals. Moving into the 1930s, modernism aimed to replace lyricism, vagueness and sentimentality with clarity, certainty, and order: when applied to graphic design, letters were

[3] See Jim Davies, "Hot Type," *Design Week (Online)* 5 December (2002).

[4] Anderson, "Arabic Script Comes of Age with Modern Fonts,". For recent outcomes, see Ben Wittner, Thoma Sascha, and Nicholas Bourquin, *Arabesque: Graphic Design from the Arab World and Persia* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2009) and Ben Wittner and Thoma Sascha, *Arabesque 2: Graphic Design from the Arab World and Persia* (Berlin: Gestalten, 2011).

[5] See Ash, "The Letter as Such: Aleksei Kruchenykh as Closet Typographer," 134-41.

"undressed, sloughing off meaningless historical and nationalist allusion and all decorative accretions".[6] While early modernism sought to reject the excess of ornamentation and flourish that had built up around lettering, the sophisticated modernism of the 1930s focussed on precise, logical and unsentimental designs, with geometry playing a key role in creating purity of form.[7]

This sense of the modern came to reflect the values of minimalism and simplicity. Recognisable in its absence of excess and decoration, the modernist approach was taken up by international designers and applied to a range of alphabets. For instance, between 1890 and the beginning of World War Two, German type designers considered ways to strip blackletter of excess and ornamentation. To this end, the structure of letters was reduced to its 'skeletal essence', adapted to established Roman proportions, reconstructed from fundamental geometric units, and subjected to a grid.[8] These stripped back styles produced a vision of modernity that exceeded national or linguistic boundaries - a typographic voice that aspired to be without region or accent, to belong both nowhere and everywhere. Seemingly transparent, type offered up representations of the generic, the symbolic, the superficial, and the stereotypical.[9] A leading advocate of modernist design, Jan Tschichold argued that this style of typography was in line with the spirit of the modern age:

> The so-called Grotesque *(sans serif)* is the only one in spiritual accordance with our time. To proclaim *sans serif* as the typeface of our time is not a question of being fashionable.[10]

By the middle of the twentieth century, this vision of Western modernity was captured by the typeface Helvetica. Grounded in principles of Swiss design, Helvetica reflected a philosophy of positivism and a commitment to the concepts of integrity, clarity, precision, accuracy, and refinement.[11] With its blunt terminals, absence of *serif*, and invariant stroke, Helvetica was celebrated as the typeface without characteristics and the perfect form for an unheroic, economically practical democracy.[12] Its aesthetic was machinic and stark, reminiscent of the forklift and freight car, of smoothly machined curves, heavy industry, and centralised production.

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[6] Nicolete Gray, *A History of Lettering: Creative Experiment and Letter Identity* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), 197.

[7] Alan Bartram, *Bauhaus, Modernism, and the Illustrated Book* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2004), 13.

[8] Paul Shaw, "Lead Soldiers," *Print* 48, no. 4 (1998), 99.

[9] Katie Salen, "Surrogate Multiplicities: Typography in the Age of Invisibility," *Visible Language* 35, no. 2 (2001).

[10] Quoted in White, *Thinking in Type: The Practical Philosophy of Typography*.

[11] Dietmar Winkler, "Helvetica, the Film and the Face in Context," *Visible Language* 44, no. 3 (2010). Note that Islam and the Arab world were not acknowledged in European discourses of modernity while Orientalist paradigms saw an essential incompatibility of Arab and Islamic cultures with modernity. On the production of Arab and Islamic modernities, see Devji (2007) and Bahoora (2010).

[12] Yvonne Schwemer-Scheddin, "Broken Images: Blackletter between Faith and Mysticism," in *Blackletter: Type and National Identity*, ed. Peter Bain and Paul Shaw (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), 67. See also Fry, "Why Typefaces Proliferate without Copyright Protection" and Johanna Drucker, "What Is a Letter?," in *The Education of a Typographer*, ed. Steven Heller (New York: Allworth Press, 2004).

Not limited to the West, designers created international forms of Helvetica and applied the same qualities and meaning to scripts such as Greek, Cyrillic, Hebrew, and Arabic. In this way, Arabic letterforms began to capture a universal sense of the modern – and later, of the post-industrial modern, with its emphasis on automation, flatness, light, and speed. But given the origin of these forms and their universal aspirations, the question of appropriate cultural influence became a critical design issue.

In typographic discourses, typographers have been careful to emphasise their heritage and a distinct 'Arab' quality to their work. The Eurocentric notion that Latin typography should serve as a role model for global design has been placed into question, with designers seeking instead to develop forms that would meet the needs of global communications: typically, this has meant that type forms are inspired by a combination of Western forms and the qualities of local aesthetic traditions, cultures and heritage. For instance, the typographer Mamoun Sakkal argues that westernisation is not in itself a positive development because it implies departing from traditional forms to become more like European models.[13] The goal of Arabic typography should not be to imitate Western aesthetics but rather to find a balance between existing aesthetics and the need to modify script forms to make them internationally viable. Here, images should be produced that appeal to international audiences while also maintaining social and ethical principles drawn from local cultures or Islamic values.[14] For Sakkal, learning from Western typography enables designers to maintain a high standard and develop their own heritage into new directions. As a result, designers are not constrained by Arabic calligraphy or forced to imitate the West: instead, images of Arabic script can reflect an ongoing engagement with both a sophisticated tradition of calligraphy and a range of global forms.

A common thread across these discourses is the notion of using Arabic letters to produce Arab identity and a unique sense of the Arab modern. For instance, designer and critic Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès argues that the Arabic script remains the ultimate embodiment of Arab and Islamic cultural identity, and as such, typography plays a crucial role in promoting a 'contemporary Arab image'.[15] She believes that Arabic letterforms can provide a reflection of

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[13] Mamoun Sakkal, "Modern Arabic Typography: Challenges and Opportunities," http://www.sakkal.com. The designer Nadine Chahine also argues that it is important to preserve the identity of script: designers must not leave behind the 'essence' of script and forget why letters look the way they do since the development of script is "tied to its culture, its history, the tool it is written in, and the medium with which it is transmitted". On this theme, see also Titus Nemeth, "Harmonization of Arabic and Latin Script Possibilities and Obstacles" (University of Reading, 2006) and Wittner, Sascha, and Bourquin, *Arabesque: Graphic Design from the Arab World and Persia*.

[14] David Learman, "Designing in Arabic: Nuances and Holy Influence," in *Talking About Arabic*, ed. Mourad Boutros (New York: Mark Batty, 2009). For an outline of broader debates about globalisation, Islam, and cultural influence, see also Robert Looney, "The Arab World's Uncomfortable Experience with Globalization," *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 2 (2007).

[15] See Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès and Tarek Atrissi, eds., *Visual Narratives from Arabic: Online Master Module on Art and Technology* (Beirut: UNESCO, 2008), and Abi-Farès, "Forward". With similar enthusiasm,

both an individual's artistic vision and the spiritual, social, and economic aspects of the artist's context. The designer Nisreen Sarkis provides a similar view, arguing that the best and only way to preserve old styles in the modern age is to keep local culture a priority:

> The Arabic script is like a treasure in its complexity, and anyone who wants to go into modernizing it needs to know its history beforehand… We need to create a visual culture that's rich and varied…It's about who we are and what we are as a modern Arab generation.[16]

The complexity of this cross-cultural approach can be witnessed in specific design narratives, outlined below, which reflect both the pragmatic requirements of a global design market and the need to articulate cultural, aesthetic, and political difference.

When the designer Mamoun Sakkal was tasked with creating a logo for the magazine *Iqra*, the stated requirements were that the logo should have an 'Islamic character' and should include the word *Iqra* in English.[17] Using both Arabic and Latin script, Sakkal's goal was to create a single image that could represent the idea of the international, intercultural, but distinctively Islamic brand. Far from unusual, this type of bilingual design has become increasingly necessary for a range of Arabic language media, from street signs and government communications to political posters, pamphlets, and books. Fuelled by tourism and commerce, multilingual and multiscript designs have become essential requirements for reaching into local and international markets.[18] In cities like Beirut where the majority of residents speak at least two languages, branding and street signs almost always present Latin letters next to their Arabic counterpart.[19] But these dual-scripts pose a number of challenges: opposing writing directions, one with joined letters, the other with separate characters, different beginnings and endings, and varying text lengths.[20] The goal of dual script typography is to solve as many of these obstacles as possible, without distorting either of

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Sherry Blackenship argues that the work of typography should be approached beyond the terms of legibility and aesthetics since "it is the embodiment of a culture's identity. It is a celebration of humanity". See Blackenship, "Cultural Considerations: Arabic Calligraphy and Latin Typography," 60.

[16] Anderson, "Arabic Script Comes of Age with Modern Fonts".

[17] Mamoun Sakkal, "An Islamic Image: English in Arabic Garb," http://mozie-mozie.blogspot.com.au/2008/07/islamic-image-english-in-arabic-garb-in.html.

[18] Regarding the need for typographic harmony between Arabic and different alphabets, see Rjeily, *Cultural Connectives*, Huda Smitshuijzen Abi-Farès, "Arabic Type: A Challenge for the Second Millennium," http://www.sakkal.com/articles/Arabic_Type_Article/Arabic_Type1.html, Boutros, *Talking About Arabic*, Wittner, Sascha, and Bourquin, *Arabesque: Graphic Design from the Arab World and Persia* and Nemeth, "Harmonization of Arabic and Latin Script Possibilities and Obstacles," University of Reading, 2006. Multiscript typography is not a new requirement: according to Robert Bringhurst, typography was historically fluently multilingual, with typographers in the fifteenth and sixteenth century working across multiple scripts: see Bringhurst, *The Elements of Typographic Style (Second Edition)*.

[19] On the political implications of public bilingual signs, see Annie Slemrod, "Building Public Spaces from Fonts, in Latin and Arabic," *McClatchy - Tribune Business News*, 15 June 2011.

[20] In terms of the technical issues, see Baki, "Bilingual Design Layout Systems: Cases from Beirut", Sakkal (2004), Boutros, *Talking About Arabic*, Abi-Farès, "Arabic Type: A Challenge for the Second Millennium", Wittner, Sascha, and Bourquin, *Arabesque: Graphic Design from the Arab World and Persia*, and Tawadros, "Reading (and Curating) from Right to Left".

the scripts involved. More broadly, graphic designers face the challenge of building a relationship between Arabic and other global scripts, and in so doing, negotiating their technical and symbolic differences.

As seen in the *Iqra* project, this negotiation is critical to a successful design. Sakkal developed the following images to express points of similarity, difference, and intersection between the Arabic and Latin alphabets but also between Islamic and European culture.[21]

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]	**[Image removed from digital version of thesis]**
Figure 18: *Iqra* design version 1. Digital image. Available from: Mamoun Sakkal, "An Islamic Image: English in Arabic Garb," http://mozie-mozie.blogspot.com.au/2008/07/islamic-image-english-in-arabic-garb-in.html.	Figure 19: *Iqra* design version 2. Digital image. Available from: Mamoun Sakkal, "An Islamic Image: English in Arabic Garb," http://mozie-mozie.blogspot.com.au/2008/07/islamic-image-english-in-arabic-garb-in.html.

In the first image, Sakkal repeats the long vertical shape of the Arabic letter *alif* with the Latin letter 'I' (figure 18). Departing from this centre, the Latin characters move to the right while the Arabic to the left. Reading either left or right, both scripts form the sound *Iqra*. While Sakkal believed this image achieved a certain visual harmony, he created the second design to take this equivalence further and establish a more nuanced relationship between the two scripts (figure 19). When describing the design process for the second image, he explained that it was important to draw on a point of shared history. For Sakkal, the story of the second design began about four thousand years ago with the development of the North Semitic alphabet. The Arabic, Hebrew, and Phoenician alphabets are based on the North Semitic alphabet - the earliest-known phonetic alphabet that developed around 1700 B.C.E. in Palestine and Syria. The Phoenicians were credited with subsequently developing the proto-Caananite phonetic script in Sinai, around 1500 B.C.E.[22] As traders, the Phoenicians spread the alphabet across their trade routes and port cities. With the aid of the Romans and the Church of Rome, variations of the script then moved through Europe and into the New World. As a result, it is possible to deploy the idea of Phoenicia as a common point of origin for both the Arabic and Latin script, but also a shared cultural foundation for the Islamic world and the West.

To reflect this sense of commonality, Sakkal added two dots from the Arabic *qaph* (ق) to what he viewed as its distant descendant, the English letter 'q' (figure 19). Both of these letters originated in the Phoenician letter 'Qoph'. This approach had the advantage of blending together the two

[21] Sakkal, "An Islamic Image: English in Arabic Garb".

[22] See Mousa, "The Arabs in the First Communication Revolution: The Development of the Arabic Script". Refer to the introductory chapter of this thesis for further detail on the origins of Arabic script.

scripts so that their separation appeared seamless. Unlike the first image, the relationship is not based on repetition and structural equivalence. Rather, the image recognises a point of commonality between two distinct alphabets and cultures while also rejecting any simple sense of harmony or opposition. In this way, Sakkal emphasises the symbolic aspects of the design in order to construct and reinforce the notion of cross-cultural compatibility between Arabic and Latin, Islam and the West.

This projection of cross-cultural meaning onto the design process is common and can be witnessed across a number of narratives produced around Arabic letter design. As the typographer Nadine Chahine proposes, Arabic and Latin:

> Are supposed to sit on the same page without having any contrast, without having a fight. They can coexist but they don't have to be the same. This is as much a cultural political statement as it is a design statement: that it is OK and possible to have equal dialogue with entities that are very different than us as long as we understand that we are different and it's OK to be different.[23]

When analysing the visual relationship between Arabic and other global scripts, the designer and educator Halim Choueiry argued for a similar approach.[24] Rather than making the two different scripts match, it is better to:

> Make the two different cultures come together at the same time and exist in harmony rather than stripping one of them from its specifications and uniqueness, co-existing together in harmony while keeping the differences and uniqueness of each culture preserved is much more interesting to achieve.[25]

Equating typography with global politics and broader issues of cross-cultural difference, Choueiry argues that following the West is not always the right solution and that the West should follow Arab traditions for a change.

The question of cross-cultural difference is particularly evident in the work that emerged from the experimental *Typographic Matchmaking* workshops, organised by the Khatt Foundation in 2005. Founded by Huda Smitshuijzen Abifares in Amsterdam, the objective of the Foundation is to build cross-cultural creative networks and advance Arabic typography in the Middle East, North

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[23] Quoted in Ohrstrom, "Samir Sayegh's Typography Revolution,". See also Nadine Chahine and Saad Abulhab, "A Reply to "the Mutamathil Type Style"/Response from Saad Abulhab," *Visible Language* 39, no. 2 (2005).

[24] Choueiry, "Teaching Arabic Type Design in a Global Context," 18-25. Tarek Atrissi shares this view, arguing that there is a fine line between being inspired by the West and trying to apply a foreign approach in an inappropriate context: see Atrissi, "Charting a Course for Arabic Typography," 146-50.

[25] Choueiry, "Teaching Arabic Type Design in a Global Context," 24.

Africa and their diasporas.[26] In line with this goal, the Typographic Matchmaking project paired renowned Dutch designers with established or up-and-coming Arab designers. Five teams were asked to collaborate on designing Arabic fonts that would modernise Arabic texts and present both writing systems on an equal footing. Recognising alphabets as emblems of their respective culture, the forum explicitly sought to tackle both cross-cultural and aesthetic issues. Each team developed a different narrative to underpin their work, from the idea of harmony and a 'playful dance' between Latin and Arabic to a line of absolute difference and creative tension.

For instance, the Storyline project team focussed on issues of duality, cultural integration, and an experience of reality that was dubbed 'the dividing line'.[27] This line was understood to separate and connect 'opposites' like Western and Arab cultures, languages, and points of view. In this narrative, the Arabic and Latin alphabets represent two completely different cultures that could only coexist or intertwine finely, but could never replace each other: "the scripts can touch, but they will not be able to merge".[28] The designers believed that while alphabets are primarily used to communicate within a defined culture and community, it is possible for these cultures to connect with each other through the kinds of interactions and activities that occur in multicultural urban agglomerations. Where cultures connect, their geographic, linguistic and demographic differences connect as well. For this reason, different writing systems need to find common ground to coexist but they must not replace one another. Rather than viewing this line of difference as a limitation, the project questioned whether the impossibility of mixing two cultures could serve as a source of artistic energy, creating an area of friction where things either match or clash. Therefore, the concept of friction, confrontation and mirroring of cultures informed the visual aspect of the typeface design itself.

In a more politicised context, Israeli type designer Liron Lavi Turkenich created a hybrid Arabic-Hebrew typeface in an effort to provide a sense of unity between the two alphabets, and more symbolically, between the two communities.[29] The *Aravrit* typeface is an experimental, hybrid set of letters, composed of Arabic in the upper half and Hebrew in the bottom half. Described as 'utopian in nature', the goal was to unite two languages, cultural identities and geographical locations, and in particular, to encourage Israelis to think about difference in their daily lives. The multilingual use of Hebrew, Arabic and English is common in Israel's public space, but Turkenich argues that most of these designs have no visual connection between them. To address this symbolic and technical disconnect, he made it impossible to ignore one half while reading the other: the scripts are literally attached to one another (figure 20).

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[26] Abi-Farès, *Typographic Matchmaking: Building Cultural Bridges with Typeface Design*.

[27] Ibid.

[28] *Typographic Matchmaking in the City: Propositions for a Pluralist Public Space* (Amsterdam: Khatt Books, 2010).

[29] Sarah Dawood, "Can a Typeface Promote Unity? We Look at Two Arabic/Hebrew Fonts," *Design Week (Online)* January 13 (2015).

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 20: image from the *Aravrit* design process demonstrating how a word has been formed from Hebrew and Arabic characters. Digital image. Available from: Designboom, "Aravrit Typeface's 638 Hybrid Letters Unite Hebrew and Arabic," http://www.designboom.com/design/aravrit-typefaces-hybrid-letters-unite-hebrew-arabic-08-28-2014/.

During the design process, Turkenich divided all the letters from the Hebrew and Arabic alphabets in half. Using these components, he modified each half-letter to form legible letters in each script, and then 'harmoniously combined' the two half-letters into a single letterform. In some of these newly created letters, the Hebrew alphabet is more prominent, and in others, the Arabic. Importantly, each alphabet retained enough of its basic features to allow it to be read. When reading therefore, a Hebrew speaker would understand the meaning of the word by scanning the bottom of the letters and an Arabic reader the top, but both would be forced to visually comprehend both scripts as a whole.

While Aravrit is an experimental project that brings Hebrew and Arabic to live 'in the same house', the more practical *Abraham* type makes Hebrew and Arabic 'perfect neighbours'.[30] *Abraham* is a Hebrew-Arabic dual-alphabet font by Daniel Grumer that aims to display both languages in a visually equitable manner. The inspiration and motivation for this work came from local street signs, which display all three official languages of Israel - Hebrew, Arabic and English. Lacking typographic sensitivity or strong sense of connection, their visual language implied that speakers of Hebrew, Arabic and English live together but separately. The main feature of the Abraham typeface is a sense of visual harmony and balance. As Grumer explains:

[30] See Dawood, "Can a Typeface Promote Unity? We Look at Two Arabic/Hebrew Fonts".

> It is a "side-by-side"' collaboration - the basic separation between the languages was perfectly kept. Hebrew letters look exactly like regular Hebrew letters and the same for Arabic. In a symbolic way, it felt much like negotiation. The Arabic letters wanted prominent ascenders, descenders, curves and bowls while the Hebrew letters called for firm structure, boxes and their own rhythm. Finding balance was the key - I was looking for "sweet spots" that enabled both languages to match without losing their identity. I always worked on both languages at the same time, side by side.[31]

As with Sakkal's use of Phoenician letters for inspiration, Grumer's search for visual harmony was framed in terms of shared sense of historical origin. Even though Hebrew and Arabic cultures are very different and in conflict today, the alphabets both came from the same linguistic roots: to take advantage of this commonality, he traced historic resemblances between the alphabets and emphasised their similarities.

In each of these examples, the Arabic alphabet has been used to navigate questions of cultural difference. From Sakkal's reflection on a common Phoenician heritage to the Storyline project's 'dividing line' between East and West, each of these narratives connects the Arabic alphabet with a complex intersection of cultural discourses, economic demands, political goals, and aesthetic choices. As a result, these narratives have a clear political basis and articulate a view of how Arabic script – and by extension, the Arab and Islamic world - should interact with other global cultures. Dual-script typography therefore involves an explicit choice to either emphasise or minimise cross-cultural difference, both visually and in the narratives produced around the work.

Aesthetics and identity

Across these design narratives outlined above, there is a distinct emphasis on capturing political identity in visual form. Aside from the *Aravit* project, this identity is articulated as a sense of Arab identity or 'Arabness'. In a practical sense, much of this emphasis on identity production is driven by corporate and commercial interest. As Tarek Atrissi explains, there has been a boom on the use of Arabic typography for branding since companies are expecting a unique voice and visual impression: but in doing so, they are seeking to reaffirm "their Arab identity on a corporate level".[32] This desire holds for both companies based in the Arab World and established international brands seeking to expand into new markets. For instance, when Atrissi's design company proposed a font for the British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) Arabic speaking audience, they used the frame of Arab identity to describe their aim and process. They wanted to create a style that would appeal to a vast but connected audience:

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[31] Quoted in ibid.

[32] Anon., "Arabic Typeface Catches the Fancy of Designers," *Gulf News*, 24 March 2012.

> To convey in a font both a traditional and modern voice, reflecting both the tradition and values of BBC as well as the modern Arabic spirit it aims to project.[33]

In an effort to survive in the digital age and amidst multiple competing broadcasters, the BBC sought new ways of engaging Arabic-speaking audiences in 2006. According to their public statements, the BBC wanted to define its Arabic service in terms of a 'fresh and objective' approach to the region, using a cross-multimedia platform combining radio and internet.[34] In particular, a strong emphasis was placed on creating a forum for audience participation, discussion, and debate. Since the launch of Al-Jazeera in 1996, the region had witnessed significant growth in satellite television news channels, ranging from popular transnational channels (such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya) to channels originating from outside the Arab World (such as the US-based Al-Hurra and Iran's Al-Alam), and those run by political movements (such as Hezbollah's Al-Manar). For this reason, the BBC wanted their Arabic news channel to stand out in a market of over 500 Arabic language channels and reach 25 million viewers across the Arab world.[35] To meet this goal, the BBC needed to address a number of issues associated with its brand identity. Since its advent in 1938 as the BBC's first overseas foreign language radio service, BBC Arabic has had to confront pervasive regional perceptions that its operations are an instrument of British foreign policy. In addition, there has been a general decline in trust of the BBC amongst Arab audiences, due in large part to the negative reactions generated by their coverage of the Global War on Terror and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As a result, the launch of the BBC's Arabic television channel was viewed by some as an attempt to reassert the presence of the BBC in the Arab news mediascape at a moment of acute geopolitical import.[36]

In this context, good marketing was key. The BBC's 2006 Arabic Typeface design project aimed to commission a typeface that could function as a key component of the channel's new branding strategy. Here, type was positioned as a way to differentiate the channel from others in the region and visualise a 'fresh' approach to the service. The managerial team within the BBC decided not to develop a separate Arabic logo but to stay with the BBC look and feel, allowing font design to become one of the main identifying elements of the channel and on-air branding. To this end, Tarek Atrissi began by exploring the equivalent Arabic letters for the BBC. Using Arabic letters that approximated the English sounds 'bii', 'bii', and 'sii', this initial lettering was based on the

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[33] Tarek Atrissi, "The Written Voice of BBC Arabic: Typographic Branding of the New Channel," *Tarek Atrissi Design* (2008).

[34] Andrew Hill and Atef Alshaer, "BBC Arabic TV: Participation and the Question of Public Diplomacy," *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 3 (2010).

[35] Marie Gillespie, "BBC Arabic, Social Media and Citizen Production: An Experiment in Digital Democracy before the Arab Spring," *Theory Culture Society* 30, no. 4 (2013).

[36] Hill and Alshaer, "BBC Arabic TV: Participation and the Question of Public Diplomacy".

name of the brand (BBC), in an attempt to make this a recognisable element (figure 21).[37] These letters also provided the starting point for the font's specifications, proportions and character, ensuring that the visual idea and form of the 'BBC' would influence the design of the Arabic alphabet.

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 21: BBC Arabic Typeface lettering explorations. Digital image. Available from: Tarek Atrissi, "The Written Voice of BBC Arabic: Typographic Branding of the New Channel," *Tarek Atrissi Design*: http://www.atrissi.com/the-written-voice-of-bbc-arabictypographic-branding-of-the-new-channel/

To capture a sense of the typographic modern, the letters were stripped of excess and ornamentation. Designed for viewing on digital screens, the characters were rigid, clear, and expressive of the simplified style required for global communications. In this way, Atrissi used transliteration from Roman to Arabic, combined with recognisable connotations of the modern, as a starting point for thinking through the mix of influence and designing a recognisable English brand with a 'modern Arabic spirit'.

The BBC design team nonetheless chose a different designer - Titus Nemeth - to provide the main type for their Arabic news site. It is notable that Nemeth's narrative regarding his design is quite similar to that employed of Atrissi, with both designers referring to both Arab and global qualities to confirm the appropriate balance of influence. Nemeth's *Nassim* is a hybrid Arabic-Latin typeface that supports BBC's Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Pashto language channels (Figure 22). Its core goal was to facilitate multilingual text setting and present the two scripts in a way that was balanced and harmonious.[38]

[37] Atrissi, "The Written Voice of BBC Arabic: Typographic Branding of the New Channel".
[38] TnType, "BBC Arabic: Nassim Sets News".

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 22: Sample of Arabic language *Nassim*. Digital image. Available from: TnType, "Bbc Arabic: Nassim Sets News." *TnType: Typographic and titsonian ephemera*, www.tntypography.com.

According to Nemeth, the challenge was to redesign this typeface so that it could correspond with the BBC site without losing the distinct Arabic character. In collaboration with BBC designers and editors, its features were revised and the letters reshaped to accommodate the style and specifications deemed most appropriate for the Arabic language website. Throughout this process there was an attempt to stay true to the qualities of the original design while toning down some 'idiosyncrasies' and retaining an "Arabic look".[39] When the typeface was redesigned for the BBC Persian service, Titus aimed to give *Nassim* – and by extension, the website - a distinctly Iranian look (figure 23).

[Image removed from digital version of thesis]

Figure 23: Sample of Nassim type for BBC Persian. Digital image. Available from: TnType, "Bbc Arabic: Nassim Sets News." *TnType: Typographic and titsonian ephemera*, www.tntypography.com.

Drawing inspiration from classics of Persian typography and trends in Iranian graphic design, his typeface transformed the Arabic letters to capture a traditional Persian style while maintaining coherence with the brand's global visual language and the Arabic language partner site.

Both Atrissi and Nemeth place a distinct emphasis on engaging with local heritage, cultural and aesthetic traditions to capture something 'true' to the Arabic alphabet and so-called modern Arabic spirit. The notion of modern 'Arabness' is therefore actively shaped through visual culture, in engagement with a range of influences, such as Islamic aesthetics, modern Latin alphabet typography, and global market forces. As I explore below, the notion of shaping a modern Arab aesthetic through a rich engagement with both heritage and global influence is not unique to modern typography: rather, these design narratives can be understood as the continuation of strong, well established connections between art practice and identity politics.

[39] Ibid.

Heritage

By the turn of the twentieth century, Western art forms, theories, and techniques had begun to dominate the traditional Islamic arts in areas such as Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt and Tunisia.[40] As a result, many of the connections between modern artists and their own artistic heritage and visual culture were severed. To compound this sense of loss, political domination and greater economic, political and military ties with the West led to a loss of confidence in local practice and heritage. After the wave of independence movements following World War Two, Western colonialism in the Middle East was in decline and artists took advantage of the cultural awakening to investigate their heritage. Gradually, they gained a measure of confidence and began to bridge the gap by choosing local themes and developing new forms of artistic identity. In this period, artists explored their own history and began to take renewed pride in their nation and political independence. The newly rich and powerful Gulf States supported this trend by sponsoring art and architecture that celebrated Arab and Islamic identity. With issues of identity at the forefront of intellectual and artistic debate, artists sought to create a sense of 'authenticity' by introducing elements from what they saw as their local heritage.[41]

Artists developed a language based on traditional elements of Arab art, such as arabesque and calligraphy, but employed contemporary media and modes of interpretation.[42] Notably, the calligraphic arts also turned to socio-political themes. The use of aesthetics as a vehicle of social criticism and political opposition had been rare in the Islamic world, and had not often engaged with the social of political conditions of a nation. An explicitly political approach to Islamic art emerged in Turkey during their War of Independence, but was also apparent in Egypt as a vehicle for nationalist sentiments in the 1920s, and in Syria as its people struggled for independence in the 1940s.[43] This trend gained momentum in the 1950s, after the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, and by the 1960s, social critique was widely apparent in calligraphic works.

In a critical moment for Arabic script, artists began to introduce the alphabet into modern compositions in the late 1940s and early 1950s. For these artists, the Arabic alphabet was both a solution to the problem of authenticity in modern art and a means for reviving cultural tradition. The term *Hurufiyah* was used to broadly encompassed those works of art that dealt with the Arabic language, letters or text. Iraqi artists Jamil Hamoudi (1924-2003) and Madiha Omar (1908-2005), together with the Sudanese artist Ibrahim al-Salahi (1930-), were among the first to achieve

[40] See Wijdan Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1997).
[41] Ali (1994), 73.
[42] Ibid, 74.
[43] See Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity*.

acclaim in this field.[44] As with many contemporary typographers, their work aimed to explore international styles while maintaining a link to Islamic aesthetics, and at its most radical, question the very visual structure for representing of the Arabic alphabet. For instance, Hamoudi's work merged modern European aesthetics (particularly cubism and geometric abstraction) with his Iraqi heritage to create a distinct formal language based on the spirituality of calligraphy. Combining Arabic letters and words with pictorial forms, almost all of his titles were graphically interpreted within the work itself.

In contrast, Omar's experiments with Arabic script focussed on abstraction and a deeper engagement with the qualities of letters, transforming Arabic characters from simple shapes into animated and meaningful figures that embodied certain concepts.[45] The first to use Arabic letters in abstract form in 1945, her style explored the interaction between realism and abstraction. She described her work as an attempt to free the Arabic letter from its bondage: imprisoned within geometric designs, the letter had served to simply fill a space.[46] In contrast to those calligraphers who sought to present the beauty of the complete Arabic word or passage, Umar believed that the letter should be appreciated as beautiful in itself. As she explained, the Arabic script:

> …which is but abstract meanings, symbolic in its essence, should not be viewed as mere geometrical forms and dimensions…Each letter as an abstract image fulfils a specific meaning and through their differences in expression these letters became a source of inspiration: the letter *ya* 'y', has a vigorous personality that expresses many meanings; the letter *ayn*, which has no equivalent in English, is a powerful, vital letter that has two different meanings in Arabic – it is a spring of water as well as the eye through which people see; the letter *lam* 'l' suggests delicate and musical movements.[47]

This experiment would roughly dominate the visual art discussion for four to five decades, first as a nationalist assertion of Arab identity and later as part of an Islamic resurgence. In 1951, Shakir Hasan Al Sa'id and Jawad Salim co-founded the influential *Baghdad Modern Art Group*. This group was the first in the Islamic world to succeed in developing a local style that drew on indigenous sources while taking full advantage of Western art concepts and techniques. Notably, the movement sought 'inspiration from tradition' and took local heritage as the basic point of departure to achieve modern styles, combining local iconography with international artistic

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[44] Sylvia. Naef, "Exhibiting the Work of Artists from 'Islamic' Backgrounds in the West: Current Practices and Future Perspectives," *West Coast Line* 43, no. 4 (2010).

[45] Ali, *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity*.

[46] See Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi, Laura Nader, and Etel Adnan, "Arab Women Artists: Forces of Change," in *Forces of Change*, ed. Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi (1994).

[47] Quoted in Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*, 71.

trends.[48] Moving into the 1960s, the Iranian group *Saqqa-kana* sought to include traditional elements in modern art, such as Persian calligraphy and painting, Achaemenid and Sasanian inscription and epigraphy, and Assyrian bas-reliefs.[49] This movement also turned to cults, rituals, and visual elements of folk and local vernacular culture for inspiration: these roots were linked to modern styles and fused to create a distinctly national artistic expression.

In Turkey, artists like Erol Akyavas (1932-1999) continued to use the Arabic script as a source of inspiration, even though the Latin alphabet had replaced Arabic as the national script. Having studied architecture and art in Europe and America, Akyavas placed Islamic art and the Sufi tradition at the centre of his work, with a scope that took in Cubism to Surrealism, Islamic miniatures to prehistoric wall paintings and calligraphy-based practices. Moving on from the *Baghdad Modern Art Group* in the 1970s, Al Sa'id helped to build *The One Dimension* movement. In their manifesto, participating artists stated that they wanted to use the Arabic letter as the main visual element of their compositions, because in their view, it was a perfect way of combining 'Arabness' and modernity.[50] By the 1980s and 1990s, many artists had become critical of *Hurufiyah* and refused to associate with it, believing that it had became inundated by an aggressively superficial quality. Of particular note, artists felt that the expression of Arab identity had became a matter of merely including an Arabic letter in a painting.[51] With the decline of Arab nationalist discourse, the movement lost its centrality in art production and artists moved on to new questions.

However, it is important to note that this deliberate use of Arabic script to evoke a sense of authentic Arab identity or 'Arabness' has continued into contemporary typographic practice. Across both points in contemporary history, this desire to create a visual impression of 'Arabness' has been driven by a complex politics of identity and aesthetics, closely tied to the socio-economic and geo-political context. To give more depth to this aesthetic lens, I turn now to outline the ways in which the concept of 'Arab' identity has been mobilised in recent political history. Arguably, any deliberate reference to Arab identity within a project of cultural representation is obliged to deal with the term's history, its close connection to the Arabic language and script, its status as a tool of political and ideological resistance, and its complex

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[48] See ibid. On the significance of the Baghdad Modern Art Group, see also Ali, "Modern Arab Art: An Overview," 72-118, and Nathaniel Greenberg, "Political Modernism, Jabra, and the Baghdad Modern Art Group," *Comparative Literature and Culture* 12, no. 2 (2010).

[49] See Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Saqqa-Kana School of Art," http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/saqqa-kana-ii-school-of-art.

[50] Naef, "Exhibiting the Work of Artists from 'Islamic' Backgrounds in the West: Current Practices and Future Perspectives". For Al Sa'id, the goal was to appropriate the Arabic letter as a tool in the search for the meaning of existence. See Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* and Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, "Contemporary Book Art in the Middle East: The Book as Document in Iraq," *Art History* 35, no. 4 (2012).

[51] Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics*.

relationship to Islam, race and nationalism. These concepts have significant bearing on the way in which identity is mobilised within contemporary Arabic typographic practice, in terms of the negotiation of global influence and local heritage as well as the tension between broad regional identities and local difference (explored below).

Unity and diversity

The notion of a specifically 'Arab' identity has a long history. The origins of an 'Arab people' have been linked to the birth of Islam in seventh-century Arabia and to the creation of an Arab-Islamic empire, unified by language, religion and trade.[52] But in terms of a modern political identity, a critical shift occurred from the sixteenth century when the Arab world began to come together politically under Ottoman rule. The idea of uniting all Arabs who shared a common descent (rather than a common religion) gained salience in the late period of Ottoman rule toward the end of the nineteenth century. Here, the emerging Arab identity was considered aligned but distinct from an Islamic or race-based form of identity.

Following the demise of Ottoman power, the notion of a unitary 'Arab people' became a rich source of political identity and took the form of an 'Arab bloc'. By the end of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire had been divided into five distinct entities under Britain and France. The new system of imperial power led to mass protests and the development of nationalist movements for the liberation and independence of former Ottoman provinces. This sentiment was deliberately mobilised by local political leaders as an ideological weapon of resistance against colonialism.[53] However, not every instance of Arab nationalism was a straightforward reaction to Western imperial rule. Articulations of Arab nationalism developed in unique ways in the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, the Nile valley, and the North African coast: each of these areas encountered the West on different terms and at different times.[54] But Arabism was the common name under which these areas were unified and the basis on which an imaginary, regional community was formed. The ideologies of Pan-Arab nationalism that developed in the 1930s were drawn together by a view that stressed commonality and dismissed regional, national, and domestic difference. In a shift from the past, political leaders did not call on this identity to build a national culture or lead the destiny of their nation: rather, they sought to create a shared, regional Arab culture. With Gamel Abdel Nasser's rise to power in Egypt in the 1950s and leadership for the cause of Arab unity, the ideology of pan-Arabism gained momentum and

[52] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*.

[53] See Zabarah, "The Language That Unites and the Language That Divides Us: Why Was Arabic Kept and Serbo-Croatian Abolished?", and Pablo Lafuente, "Art and the Foreigner's Gaze: A Report on Contemporary Arab Representations," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 15 (2007). On the ways in which these discourses have been used to shape, empower or limit self-expression, see Peter Wien, "Relocating Arab Nationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (2011).

[54] Christopher Phillips, "Team Arab: Al-Jazeera and the Flagging of Everyday Arabism During the 2008 Beijing Olympics," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 3 (2012).

produced imaginative, symbolic, or 'lived' ties between those who claimed to belong to an Arab national community.

A key element of Arabism was linguistic unity. As articulated by Sati al-Husri (1880-1967), a Syrian writer and key figure in the development linguistic Arab nationalism:

> Every person who speaks Arabic is an Arab. Every individual associated with an Arabic-speaker or with an Arabic-speaking people is an Arab. If he does not recognize [his Arabness] … we must look for the reasons that have made him take this stand … But under no circumstances should we say: "As long as he does not wish to be an Arab, and as long as he is disdainful of his Arabness, then he is not an Arab." He is an Arab regardless of his own wishes, whether ignorant, indifferent, recalcitrant, or disloyal; he is an Arab, but an Arab without consciousness or feelings, and perhaps even without conscience.[55]

Influenced by German romanticism, nationalist thinkers like al-Husri promoted the idea of a united community in which the Arabic language played a critical role. In line with European models, this approach assumed that race, nationality, language, and territory should correspond.[56] Just as a Frenchman was thought to inhabit a territory known as France and speak a language called French, the 'Arab' was thought to live in a defined Arab region and speak Arabic. Although this model would prove unsupportable in a number of respects (outlined below), it nonetheless gained currency within discourses of Arabism and the Arabic language was increasingly deployed as a unifying symbol of modern political identity. For instance, Michel Aflaq (1910-1989), founder of the Ba'ath Party, considered an individual to be 'Arab' if they spoke the Arabic language and accepted Arab culture in high esteem, regardless of their parents' origin.[57] The priority granted to the Arabic language is also evident across the ideology of pan-Islamism. Although different political actors and goals sat behind both ideologies, pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism were united on the language question.[58] For both, the Arabic language and script were constitutive of their ideology and any change in their status was unthinkable.

However, a series of significant political events would force a shift in this view. Pan-Arabism went into a state of relative decline following the military defeat to Israel in 1967, internal splits among the Arab unionist elites in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, the death of Gamel Nasser in 1970, and his successor's peace treaty with Israel in 1979. In addition, the discovery of oil shifted the balance of power towards conservative oil-producing monarchies, and Arabism began to lose its

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[55] Quoted in Salameh, "Does Anyone Speak Arabic?"

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] See Zabarah, "The Language That Unites and the Language That Divides Us: Why Was Arabic Kept and Serbo-Croatian Abolished?"

practical significance in intra-Arab state politics. A general retreat towards territorial nationalism took place, with Arab states focusing instead on national state projects centred on particular leaders.[59] For instance, Pharaonism asserted itself in Egypt in the 1920s as an elite, secular, urban discourse that competed directly with the political and cultural ideologies of pan-Islamic reformism. But Pharaonist discourse gained in strength in the post-1967 period, following Egypt's defeat in the war.[60] It is important to note that only States were considered legitimate forms of political organisation, in this shift away from regional forms of identity. Groups such as the Utaibah tribe of the Arabian Peninsula, the Islamic *ummah*, the Berber movement in Algeria, or the Saudi royal family, were not treated with the same type of legitimacy or autonomy.[61] Communities and groups therefore began to adopt the attributes of States in their efforts to ban together, put aside disputes, and claim sovereignty. The result was an array of contradictory and complementary set of political identities that took different forms across the Arab world.

In contrast to this move towards fragmentation (with a focus on community-based, local identity), powerful political and military discourses in North America and Western Europe continued to breathe life into the concept of an Arab region populated by an Arabic-speaking, culturally or racially 'Arab' people. The Orientalist paradigm of a monolithic, homogenous, Arab-Muslim culture therefore gained new life in the way regions and their populations are understood within Western political and military discourses.[62] These immensely homogenising discourses helped to produce a sense of external coherence around Arab regions, supported by the dominance of military thinking within policy and scholarship.

As a geographic construct, the region has been referred to by many names, including the Arab World, the Islamic World, the Middle East, the Near East, the Orient, the Levant, and MENA (Middle East and North Africa). The majority of these terms have been unsupported by any clear agreement on where these regions start and end. For instance, there is no universally accepted definition of what the 'Arab World' might be, but it has generally been assumed to contain the twenty-two countries belonging to the Arab League, excluding African areas beyond the Mediterranean coast.[63] This regionalist primordialism has persisted in U.S. foreign policy toward

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[59] Ibid.

[60] See Samah Selim, "The New Pharaonism: Nationalist Thought and the Egyptian Village Novel, 1967-1977," *The Arab Studies Journal* 8/9, no. 2/1 (2000).

[61] See Lisa Anderson, "'Creative Destruction': States, Identities and Legitimacy in the Arab World," *Philosophy Social Criticism* 40, no. 4-5 (2014).

[62] For instance, classic Area Studies commonly treated geographic, physical, economic, cultural, and religious boundaries as being roughly the same. Equally, the tendency to view the 'Arab region' as a single unit of analysis was originally motivated by the military and security requirements of imperial powers. See John Voll, "Reconceptualizing the "Regions" in "Area Studies" " *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 41 (2009) and Fouad Moughrabi, "Moving toward a Knowledge Society in the Arab World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2009).

[63] See Seib, "Hegemonic No More: Western Media, the Rise of Al-Jazeera, and the Influence of Diverse Voices". In one exception to this rule John Voll notes that the British War Office during World War II

the Middle East and also can be witnessed in the labels that were developed during the Global War on Terror. In an attempt to simplify a landscape full of contradictions and diversity, a series of high-level policy initiatives designed to address terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11 spoke of the Greater Middle East and the Broader Middle East.[64] Here, the working definition of the Greater Middle East included the twenty-two nations commonly attributed to the Arab World as well as Turkey, Israel, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Despite this lack of definition within or across the terms, it is clear that dominant political discourses continue to frame this area primarily as a single region, rather than a diverse collection of states with a multiplicity of national and local cultures.

This approach stands in contrast to those political and artistic movements within the Arab World that have moved away from the notion of a unified Arabic-speaking, Islamic Middle East towards an focus on the heterogeneity of local cultures and states. As Lebanese architect and writer Tony Chakar argues, the thought of belonging to a region such as the 'Middle East' surprises him. This is not due to an internationalist refusal to belong to specific region or the desire for the more elegant 'Mediterranean' description, but because it doesn't make sense. For Chakar, this region does not exist.

> We might talk about it as much as you want but it's still not there. […] Do you think I might be able to understand what it means to live under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship or to be "liberated" by the Americans? Or would I be able to understand what it means to be living under the constant threat of being "transferred" from Ramallah to Jordan? Or would I be able to understand what it means to live in a megalopolis of 20 million people like Cairo? How can we connect or find a common ground – and if you want to write about art in the "region", what would be your theoretical ground?[65]

Economic policies and systems vary greatly across the region along with development levels and political systems: for instance, dynastic monarchies coexist with tribal aristocracies, one party systems, and military regimes. Cities range from traditional centres (for instance, Cairo, Tunis, and Baghdad), fringe cities (Sana'a and Algiers) to oil rich Gulf entitles (Dubai).[66] Effects of colonialism also vary within and between states, along with factors such as displacement, nationalism, and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Religion is also unable to provide a common thread for the region. Even aside from the diversity of religions practiced in the region, Islam is

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included the Horn of Africa, but by the 1960s, most accepted the conclusion that Sudan and the countries of the Horn were more properly considered as parts of inter-tropical Africa: see Voll, "Reconceptualizing the 'Regions' in 'Area Studies'".

[64] Dona J. Stewart, "The Greater Middle East and Reform in the Bush Administration's Ideological Imagination," *Geographical Review* 95, no. 3 (2005).

[65] Steven Wright, "Territories of Difference: Excerpts from an Email Exchange between Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz and Walid Sadek," in *Out of Beirut*, ed. Suzanne Cotter (Manchester: Modern Art Oxford, 2006), 60. See also Kholeif, "Arabic Agendas".

[66] Elsheshtawy, "The Middle East City: Moving Beyond the Narrative of Loss".

composed of over a billion adherents who experience their faith in many different ways: some reflect 'confessional' affiliation (for instance, Sunni or Alevi), others class, gender, locality or individual preference. Rather than presenting a unified voice or belief system, Islam reflects many different histories and minorities. It may be possible to refer back to the Arabic language as a source of unification, as pan-Arab and pan-Islam ideologies sought to do. But as outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, the Arabic language is not a single, uniform language with clear ethno-cultural connotations: since Arabic speakers use demotic forms of the language, Arabic is more appropriately considered a 'language family'.[67] As a result, a form of mutual comprehension exists across Arabic speakers but difficulties emerge when crossing significant boundaries. For instance, an Arabic speaker in Beirut would understand another from Aleppo, but the difference between the dialects of Morocco and Iraq can hinder comprehension. To assume a singular cultural or political identity on the grounds of linguistic unity requires simplification of an infinitely complex linguistic situation. More than conceptually meaningless, Palestinian dissident Fawaz Turki argued that unifying notions of the Arabic language enforce imperious, coerced, absolutist 'pan' conceptions of identity and inhibit understanding of the reality of the region's plural identities.[68]

In this way, the internal differences among various countries in the region remain so significant as to nearly fracture any attempt at systemic definition. Despite many religious, cultural, and linguistic similarities, the Arab world remains a patchwork of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and narratives. In Tony Chakar's view, the only coherent response is to reject all collective labels out of hand and advocate a picture of incommensurably discrepant and particular experiences.[69] This approach is reflected in contemporary trends in type design. When typographers evoke the notion of contemporary Arab identity, Arab modernity, or a sense of 'Arabness', they are required to negotiate these complex, fraught, and often contradictory notions of identity. To engage multiple levels of identity, typographers must treat script design as a contradictory site of racial, religious, regional, national and community identity. In particular, there is a growing trend towards expressing these localised, particular experiences within typeface production.

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[67] See Salameh, "Does Anyone Speak Arabic?".

[68] Ibid.

[69] Wright, "Territories of Difference: Excerpts from an Email Exchange between Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz and Walid Sadek," 60. For instance, the Arab Spring has intensified the importance of informal and trans-regional networks, just as the rise of pan-Arab satellite broadcasting and the Internet are connecting the Arabic-speaking world in new ways. On contemporary articulations of shared Arab identity in the global political system, underpinned by a complex system of territorial-spatial-linguistic differentiation, see also Phillips, "Team Arab: Al-Jazeera and the Flagging of Everyday Arabism During the 2008 Beijing Olympics", Mathias Albert and Paul Reuber, "Introduction: The Production of Regions in the Emerging Global Order – Perspectives on 'Strategic Regionalisation'," *Geopolitics* 12, no. 4 (2007), Atiqa Hachimi, "The Maghreb-Mashreq Language Ideology and the Politics of Identity in a Globalized Arab World," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17, no. 3 (2013), Christopher Phillips, "The Arabism Debate and the Arab Uprisings," *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 1 (2014), Anderson, "'Creative Destruction': States, Identities and Legitimacy in the Arab World", Helle Malmvig, "Power, Identity and Securitization in Middle East: Regional Order after the Arab Uprisings," *Mediterranean Politics* 19, no. 1 (2014), and Norten Valbjørn and André Bank, "The New Arab Cold War: Rediscovering the Arab Dimension of Middle East Regional Politics," *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012).

In terms of both aesthetics and politics, this focus on local identity and diversity has been a key driver in the evolution of letter-forms. Historically, a number of script styles came to reflect regional and cultural differences, such that it is possible to look back on the transformation of script styles in terms of broad national or religious formations as well as particular localities and communities, produced and splintered by political change. For instance, script forms in the European Middle Ages were originally derived from Roman sources but were consequently modified by local and foreign influences.[70] When the Roman Empire fell apart in the fourth and fifth century, migratory tribes gained prominence and the lack of a coherent cultural unity exacerbated the difference between the various script forms. Due to clashes between tribes and the creation of new hybrid cultures, small, isolated political units evolved their own styles of lettering. Here, the development of local scripts in fifth- and sixth-century Europe reflected the continual redistribution of power and waves of invasions that changed the cultural composition of different regions.[71] These differences were so significant that it has been possible to chart the shifting territorial boundaries of political influence and periods of relative cultural stability through the changing nature of letter-forms. By the seventh and eighth century, distinct writing styles based on local Roman scripts continued to evolve in extremely localised ways. For instance, the northern Italian 'book hand' Visigothic script (which developed out of the Northern Italian monasteries) could be differentiated from the cursive Visigothic script (which developed in Spanish soil). This latter cursive form also had two distinct variations: the northern Leonese and southern Mozarabic forms. The former was used primarily in the Christian north while the Mozarabic was used by Christians living in the Muslim south. As a result, the Mozarabic Visigothic developed a distinctly vertical in nature due to contact with Moorish culture and the influence of Arabic script.[72] Over time, the writing had become laterally compressed and took on the decorative charm of Arabic.

In a similar way, Arabic letterforms can be differentiated according to particular regional and cultural influences. According to Atanasiu, every major style of Arabic calligraphy has been the successful aesthetic expression of a particular cultural community.[73] For instance, 'hanging' forms of calligraphy were particularly suitable for the Persian language and while popular in Persia, were rarely used for recording the Arabic language elsewhere. The Persian language differs from Arabic in terms of its proportion of straight and curved letters: the lack of the definite article *'al* accentuate this difference. While the upright *alif* and *lam* of the definite article create a certain type of verticality and rhythm to the Arabic language, Persian hanging scripts contained curvilinear

[70] See Drucker, *The Alphabetic Labyrinth: The Letters in History and Imagination*.

[71] Ibid.

[72] See Karr, *The Art of Lettering: The History, Anatomy, and Aesthetics of the Roman Letter Forms*.

[73] Atanasiu, "The President and the Calligrapher: Arabic Calligraphy and Its Political Use".

elements, extraneous loops, extreme contrasts between compression and expansion, and connected letters. This style became the favoured literary script for writing Persian, particularly poetry, and achieved its classical form under sultan 'Ali Mashhadi (c. 1453-1520 C.E).[74] The main centre of production was the provincial city of Shiraz in south-western Iran. Since escaping the ravages of the Mongol invasions, Shiraz had flourished as the heart of Persian literature, culture, and manuscript production. But local differences nonetheless emerged as calligraphers, patrons, and manuscripts moved between cities. For instance, the *nasta'liq* style, created in the fourteenth century, transformed as it spread. The more angular style of *nasta'liq* that had developed at the Turkomen courts in north western Iran gradually gave way to the more fluid eastern style canonised by Sultan Ali Mushhadi. When *nasta'liq* was taken to the Ottoman capital in the late fifteenth century, it continued to develop there as a minor style. Shirazi calligraphers also took the *naskh* style to both Anatolia and sultanate India. There, the scripts became extremely stylised and visually distinct. For instance, the *bihari* style of hanging script came to the fore in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and was used exclusively in India. Thought to have developed at Jawnpur, a flourishing cultural centre in this period, *bihari* is defined by wide horizontals and wedge shaped curves that open at the left, with thick round bowls for endings and wide spaces between words.[75]

This focus on local difference is an explicit element of contemporary design. For instance, Mamoun Sakkal argues that typography should involve sensitivity to the differences between the diverse groups who use the Arabic script.[76] He believes it is important to make typefaces more responsive to the needs of populations since these products have such a widespread impact on users. For instance, he designed a MS Uighar typeface for the Uighur language. Used by the Muslims who live in the Xinjiang province of north-western China, Uighur is a Turkic language with a modified version of the Arabic script. Sakkal designed this typeface after studying traditional Uighur calligraphy and publications printed using both metal and digital typefaces. Incorporating a subtle calligraphic quality, the typeface is designed for maximum legibility of text, especially in small sizes, so that it can also be used in digital devices. Rather than seeking to capture a sense of overarching identity (such as 'Arabness' or Islam), the Uighur design attends solely to the needs of one community. While this attention to local aesthetics could be seen as a financially driven attempt to engage niche markets, it nonetheless demonstrates an alternative way of speaking about Arabic type design that parallels broader shifts in political identity. That is,

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[74] Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy*. While particularly used for fine copies of Persian literary works and calligraphic specimens, it has been estimated that 75 per cent of everything written in Persia from the mid fifteenth century was captured by this form of script.

[75] See ibid.

[76] See Sakkal, "Modern Arabic Typography: Challenges and Opportunities". On localising techniques for Roman alphabet languages, see Adaem Twardoch, "Pickled Herring and Strawberry Ice Cream: Designing Polish Diacritics," in *Language, Culture, Type: International Type Design in the Age of Unicode*, ed. John Berry (UK: Association Typographique Internationale, 2002).

particular experience and diversity are considered a more meaningful starting point for identity, and thus design, than an overarching regional or 'pan' form of identity.

The desire to engage this localising trend was key to the objectives of the 2005 *Visual Narratives of Arabia* project. This UNESCO-supported Master Class course in Arabic typography and graphic design was held in Beirut with the aim of assisting new creative expressions, and reflecting and preserving the cultural diversity of the region.[77] The objective of the project was to discover and use cultural heritage as a source of inspiration for new typographic designs: to this end, students were tasked with examining the similarities and differences between various Arab countries, and from this, learning to create culturally sensitive designs.[78] To begin this work, students enrolled in a module that asked questions about the ways in which artists should be positioned in their socio-political and cultural environment. This discussion specifically targeted the identity of Arabic speaking countries, in terms of the shared links and differences among them, how to define an 'Arab', and how the media has influenced these questions. In a different module, students were asked to explore their surrounding physical environment to document and reflect on the definition of the 'landmark' that best represents their image of their society and country. The outcome of this thinking was to be expressed in a project that focussed:

> Mainly on the conceptualization of an image that would portray 'the Arab identity' without glossing over the diversity amongst Arab nations, and without leaving behind each individual's unique identity often built on personal experiences, memories and education. Because of Arabic typography's emblematic role in Arab visual culture, the balance between image and Arabic type had to be expressed, but how that balance was to be achieved was left entirely to each student (designer/ visual artist) to work out on their own.[79]

In this way, a distinct trend in Arabic letter design is creating a complex image of what 'Arab' identity and visual culture means today, defined from the bottom up. These designers are challenging broad-based expressions of 'Arab modernity' and 'Arab experience' and choosing instead to create letterforms that are sensitive to national or community-based identities. I argue that these experiments support the continuing evolution of Arabic script – building on the foundation created by post-war artists - through the responsive integration of letters across multiple communities. In the process, these works reflect the shift in discourse away from unity and homogeneity towards diversity.

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[77] Abi-Farès and Atrissi, *Visual Narratives from Arabic: Online Master Module on Art and Technology*.

[78] Ibid, 43.

[79] Quoted in ibid.

Reflections

This chapter has explored the complex, fraught, and often contradictory notions of modern identity evoked by Arabic typography. I focussed on type designers that employ the Arabic script to construct and challenge political identities, engaging with concepts of cross-cultural difference, 'Arabness', and more localised, community-based forms. Some seek to capture something 'true' to the Arabic alphabet and 'modern Arabic spirit' while others reject homogenising forms of identity and focus instead on creating culturally sensitive designs. Regardless of which concepts are evoked, I argue that there is a shared desire to engage local heritage, cultures, and aesthetic traditions through the vehicle of Arabic script. The link between script and identity can therefore be understood to function on multiple levels. As explored previously, identity is tied to the Arabic alphabet as a whole. But identity is also expressed in the interaction between alphabets and through their visual form. The visual style of a typeface carries symbolic meaning that enhances the linguistic message as well as alluding to specific technological, intellectual and political developments. In doing so, typographic expression provides a means to construct individual or collective positions, be they ethnic, geographical, cultural or political.

In the examples provided above, the Arabic alphabet has been used to navigate questions of cultural difference and articulate a view of how the Arabic script – and by extension, the Arab and Islamic world - should be expressed and in what way it should interact with other global cultures. Identity, however defined, provides a starting point for experimentation, a rich source of inspiration, and the goal of successful design. This experimentation can be understood as the way in which alphabets evolve. In terms of both aesthetics and politics, the desire to express local identity has been a key driver in the creation of new styles of script. Historically, alphabets have come to reflect regional and cultural differences, such that it is possible to look back on the transformation of script styles in terms of broad national or religious formations as well as particular localities and communities. I argue that a similar process is underway in contemporary typography. New styles of Arabic are being created in engagement with a range of influences, such as Islamic and community-based aesthetics, Latin alphabet typography, digital technology, and global market forces. These forms are creating a complex image of what 'Arab' identity and Arabic visual culture means today, defined from the bottom up and across a landscape full of contradictions and diversity.

Conclusion

When I started this thesis in early 2010, I was fascinated by the way people reacted to the *idea* of Arabic.

I was learning Arabic at the time. When this came up in conversation, I was surprised by the kind of questions I received. Was I planning to convert to Islam? Would I start wearing a headscarf? More often, I was asked my views about the Arab World, the issue of Palestine, and the role of women in Islam. Sometimes, the response was simply a half-joking quote - 'death to America'. Needless to say, I had not had the same kind of response when learning Western languages. There was something different about Arabic and I wanted to better understand this reaction.

The political context of the time was quite specific. In 2010, terror and violence were still at the forefront of political, media, and academic discussions around the Arab World. The first decade following the World Trade Centre attacks had sparked intense knowledge production, witnessed particularly in the growth of terrorism and security studies. Peace and security studies had moved decisively away from Cold War paradigms to a focus on new forms of warfare, marked by terror, insecurity, and the figure of Islamic threat within and beyond national borders. In part due to long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the decade had also witnessed a corresponding intensity in images for Western audiences of conflict and violence in the Arab World. A number of significant political events took place in the subsequent years. In December 2010, the Arab Spring began and altered the shape of contemporary Arab politics: in Egypt, the uprising led to a short-lived revolution and the eventual return of military rule. In 2013 the whistle-blower Edward Snowdon revealed the extent to which surveillance systems had intensified in North America – a disclosure that sparked international debates over mass surveillance and resulted in the passing of legislation in 2015 to wind back the powers of the U.S. government. While the Global War on Terror officially ended in 2013, the group known in the English-speaking world as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS, ISIL or Daesh) gained prominence in 2014 and gave rise to new fears of Islamic extremism. An offshoot of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the group has been defined by its capture and occupation of swaths of territory as well as war crimes (such as public executions) and a number of transnational terrorist attacks.

Given these shifts in contemporary politics, my research project continued to evolve extremely quickly and it was often difficult to draw boundaries around the scope of the project, and more

practically, to stop updating the material in line with recent events. I therefore took a point in time approach and focussed primarily on events prior to 2013. Where possible, I gestured to events that occurred in later years.

Across multiple time periods and geographies, I opened up the ways in which the Arabic alphabet has been politicised and strategically deployed in cultural debates. As explored in each chapter, I demonstrated that the way the Arabic language and script is 'known' is continually shaped by changes in the political and cultural landscape. While scholarship has begun to open up the field of 'alphabet politics', the political role of Arabic had not yet been explored. My question therefore required that I build a conceptual foundation – a way of understanding the political work of Arabic script – as well as identifying how the script has contributed to certain social and political environments. Together, this conceptual foundation and the specific insights that emerged from its application constitute my contribution to the field.

An historical view was critical. Focussing on the cultural dimensions of Arabic, I investigated how persistent, historical discourses have come to shape the way the Arabic alphabet has been understood and used to effect complex political outcomes. I situated the core of this thesis in the context of contemporary politics – in terror, war, and security – and argued that the ways in which individuals come to know or perceive the alphabet are often racially-coded and can work to reinforce systematic discrimination. Taking a long-view and exploring select moments in history, I demonstrated that the cultural elements of the Arabic script have been consistently used to articulate social threats and exclude unwanted identities. In this role, the Arabic script has been used to draw the line between the civilised West and the barbaric East, to inflame fears about immigration, and bolster orientalist discourses. Perhaps most critical to the current political environment, the script has come to act as a sign of terror.

While outside the scope of this thesis, the rise of ISIS has radically reshaped the contemporary political landscape, creating new geographies of terror and images of threat. These events have cast a new (if familiar) light on the Arabic language and script and point to further directions for research in this field. For instance, in November 2015 the *Guardian* reported on an incident involving Arabic language signs in Sydney, Australia, the weekend after a set of coordinated terrorist attacks by ISIS in Paris.[1] With France already on high alert after a devastating shooting in January the same year, the November attack saw suicide bombings and mass shooting in central Paris. In this context of heightened fear and global media attention, members of the public perceived Arabic language signs in an Optus store as both inappropriate and disrespectful.[2] The

[1] Toynbee, Polly. "Optus Removes Arabic Language Signs in Sydney after Threats against Staff." *The Guardian*, 17 November 2015.

[2] Howden, Saffron. "Optus Removes Arabic Ads from Shopping Centre after Alleged Threat to Staff." *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 November 2015.

signs were part of a multilingual series of advertisements informing customers that staff in the store were able to speak Arabic. However, angry customers drew a direct connection between the appearance of these signs and support for the Paris attacks.[3] Equally, online comments reinforced a conceptual divide between an English-speaking Australia and an indistinct Middle-Eastern space, defined by Islam, Arabic and terror.

For instance, one customer asked why Optus was advertising in a Middle Eastern language and not English: "This is an outrage, this is Australia not Syria". While another customer wrote: "This is Australia not Islam…As I said Australia is Australia not Islam." In response to this last comment, Optus was forced to explain the difference between language, geography, and religion:

> Hi Linda, thanks for your feedback. Australia is a country while Islam is a religion. The language used on the sign was Arabic which is also spoken by a number of non-Muslim countries.[4]

As a result of threats were made against staff, Optus decided to take the signs down. While this incident also brought out waves of support for the company's attempts to educate customers online, and for Arabic-speaking populations in Australia more broadly, it also reveals the way in which existing prejudice continues to find a target in the Arabic alphabet.[5] The image of Arabic was interpreted as a threat, as un-Australian, and by some, as implicit support for terrorism. This connection was introduced in this thesis but it necessarily takes on new form in the context of ISIS, changing community expectations, and evolving forms of political rhetoric. For instance, in early 2016 Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull signalled a change in the rhetoric and policy used by the Australian Government in regards to combating terrorism. Rejecting the familiar rhetoric of fear and refusing to play on community anxiety, he has openly avoided placing blame on the local Muslim community for extremist acts overseas.[6] Going forward, this incident suggests that existing prejudice and fear in Australia may be held in greater tension by an increased awareness that Islam and the Arabic language do not equal terror.

However, a month later the *Guardian* reported on a similar incident involving Arabic script in the United States. The headline read: "Arabic calligraphy assignment forces closure of schools in Virginia county".[7] Schools were closed and weekend athletic events were cancelled after a

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Toynbee, Polly. "Optus Removes Arabic Language Signs in Sydney after Threats against Staff."

[5] On community support for Optus, see Brennan, Ben. "Optus Receives Flood of Support after Threats over Arabic Ads." *Yahoo 7 News,* 17 November 2015

[6] Matthewson, Paula. "Turnbull on Terrorism: It's Not Just the Rhetoric That's Changed." *ABC News*, 18 January 2016.

[7] Anon. "Arabic Calligraphy Assignment Forces Closure of Schools in Virginia County." *The Guardian*, 19 December 2015.

backlash against a teacher's lesson about the Islamic faith. The community were concerned that students at a local high school were asked to complete an assignment that involved practicing calligraphy and writing the *shahada*, the Islamic statement of faith, in Arabic. School officials said the aim of the lesson was to illustrate the complexity of the written Arabic language, not to promote any religious system.[8] However, some parents alleged that their children were being subjected to Muslim indoctrination.[9] As a result, the school was alarmed by the volume and tone of the complaints, including angry emails, phone calls and threats to put the teacher's head on a stake.

> In response, additional police were stationed at county schools Thursday. In a statement, school officials said: "We regret having to take this action, but we are doing so based on the recommendations of law enforcement and the Augusta County school board, out of an abundance of caution."[10]

This event followed several anti-Islam incidents in Virginia. For instance, Fairfax County authorities charged a man with leaving a fake bomb at the Dar al-Hijrah mosque in Falls Church. In this same period, Republican frontrunner Donald Trump called for a temporary ban on Muslim foreigners coming into the United States, and backed a plan to monitor every member of the religion in the country.[11] The incident therefore reflects the continued role of the Arabic language and script as a means for reflecting social tensions and supporting political agendas. But in contrast to an emerging shift in Australian political rhetoric, the unexpected popularity of Donald Trump for Republican nominee (and at the time of writing) suggests that the U.S. will continue to struggle with the place of Islam within its borders. As a product of this tension and area for further research, it is likely that the cultural shape of Arabic script will continue to evolve in line with these debates, but will nonetheless remain firmly embedded within the militarised discourses of the U.S. security state.

As it is important to reinforce, the construction of threat is only one aspect of Arabic politics. This thesis also examined the ways in which the script has been used as a powerful tool of art and revolution, particularly in events such as the Arab Spring. To this end, I explored the way in which aesthetic forms of Arabic script have been taken up to challenge totalitarian regimes, define community identities, and produce resistant, urban space. Here, I focussed on disciplines such as Arabic calligraphy, digital typography, graphic design, and graffiti. These practices have created a space whereby the Arabic alphabet can be viewed through the frame of active, creative

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[8] Anon. "Arabic Calligraphy Assignment Forces Closure of Schools in Virginia County".

[9] Balingit, Moriah, and Emma Brown. "Schoolwork About Islam Triggers Backlash in Virginia County." *The Washington Post*, 18 December 2015.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Dizard, Wilson. "Arabic Calligraphy Fracas Closes Virginia School District" *Al Jazeera*, 18 December 2015.

expression rather than simply threat, extremism, or the potential for violence. In addition, an aesthetics lens demonstrated the continued transformation of Arabic script. Artistic practice has allowed the script to grow, change, and adapt to both the constraints of new technologies and opportunities of global media. Digital technologies continue to offer unique spaces and methods for exploring the shape and experience of the Arabic letter. But as argued in this thesis, recent transformations of Arabic letterforms do not mark a unique moment in the history of letter design: rather, successive styles of script have consistently emerged from changes in the socio-political context and the influence of new technologies.

For instance, Arabic typography is currently embracing the possibility of activating urban space in Western geographies. In a project called Typographic Matchmaking in the City, fifteen Arab and European designers were tasked with designing multilingual typography for contemporary multicultural cities, both inside and outside the Arab World.[12] Each team explored the historic and contemporary role of typography in the urban landscape, with a focus on identifying new ways to integrate text, space, and architecture. Could a building's façade be turned into a kind of public space? How should text in the built environment look, and what should it say to reflect the coexistence of culturally diverse citizens? Using both Arabic and Latin scripts, the aim was to create culturally sensitive designs that would invite interaction by the public. The challenge was to push the practice of typography beyond the confines of flat surfaces into other ways of experiencing textual information: for instance, through monumental typographic gestures and sculptural forms that give tactility to language, transforming words into tangible objects. Overall, the project sought to 'give the street back to the people' by designing type and public typographic interventions that would be thoughtful, provocative and culturally sensitive.[13] Projects of this nature set new directions for Arabic aesthetics but also set the stage for new uses of script. While this thesis has focussed on the relationship between script and space in the Arab World, the Typographic Matchmaking in the City project opens up the possibility of Arabic script as a defining, creative element in Western public space. As a new direction for research, urban forms of typography have the potential to reshape public interaction and enhance cross-cultural dialogue, while at the same time continuing to transform the aesthetics of Arabic script.

This thesis has explored a few, select moments in the history of Arabic script but there are many other stories that are beyond the scope of its work. The Arabic script, like orientalism, has been pressed into new shapes according to the demands of a particular moment. Each instance is internally complex and unstable while remaining bound together by a coherent set of common features. My thesis has explored these contradictions and threads of continuity across each

[12] Abi-Farès, Huda Smitshuijzen, ed. *Typographic Matchmaking in the City: Propositions for a Pluralist Public Space.* Amsterdam: Khatt Books, 2010.

[13] Ibid.

instance - moments that are incomplete but that provide insight into the political, cultural, and aesthetic uses of Arabic script. As a result, any conclusion is necessarily – and appropriately - incomplete: the diversity of experience, perspectives, and political structures within and beyond the Arab World lends itself to countless stories and frames of meaning. Although certain frames of meaning persist, the specific cultural shape of Arabic remains contingent and in flux, defined by the conjunction of historical discourses and the sensitivities of a particular geo-political context. This diversity should be accepted as a limitation to the findings of any one project but also valued in terms of the rich and complex research it could inspire.

With this in mind, a key contribution of this thesis is the conceptual framework I proposed to understand the work of Arabic script. Across this thesis, I opened up each area of inquiry in terms of two central, interrelated questions: 'how has the Arabic script been politicised? And how has it been used for political ends?' While scholarship had attended to aspects of these questions in certain contexts, no overarching framework had previously been established to understand the political or cultural work of Arabic script, and no global analysis had previously been undertaken. My question therefore required that I build a conceptual foundation to identify how the Arabic script has accrued cultural meaning and come to reflect as well as influence political environments. Focussing on the idea and visual form of script, I developed a foundation that can be used by others to investigate the many ways in which the Arabic alphabet can be politicised and strategically deployed in cultural debates. To this end, I argued that the ways in which individuals come to 'know' the alphabet are often racially coded and can work to reinforce systematic discrimination. Here, I demonstrated that the Arabic script has been consistently used to articulate social threats and exclude unwanted identities. To balance this view, I also opened up the ways in which the script has been used as a powerful tool of art and revolution. I argued that these practices have created a space whereby the Arabic alphabet can be viewed through the frame of active, creative expression rather than simply threat, extremism, or the potential for violence. This framework contributes insight into how Arabic script works as a political artefact as well as key aspects of its operation and 'cultural shape' in contemporary history.

In this way, I locate my conclusions across two levels: the underlying conceptual framework as well as the detail of a situation. A focus on Arabic script therefore allows for a new lens on a familiar situation and discourse. As a result, this thesis sheds new light on an important cultural artefact - the Arabic script – as well as historical events and the macro-level discourses and practices that have shaped ways of thinking and seeing for decades, and continue to inform our world.

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