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Editorial

Frank DARWICHE

This issue of *Hawliyat* may well be described with one heading: *challenge*. Indeed, all of the articles collected herein express past, present or future challenges for thinking, dwelling, and effective change. The variety is in the themes, periods, and disciplines under consideration. The reader is thus invited to consider freethinking in the Abbasid era, a nineteenth century attempt to rebuild the Egyptian state, the questioning of power relations through art, the current Lebanese media crisis, Islam and peace-seeking and the building of reconciliation through a precise espousal of mourning. This variety is there to show the wealth of present and past possibilities open to facing the challenges to thinking and action at all social, political, intellectual, and artistic levels. Our hope is for the reader to realize that all such challenges may be dealt with in a plethora of ways and that the avenues leading to freedom and autonomy may be difficult but never entirely blocked by ideologies.

Aziz Al-Azmeh's stimulating article takes a meta-view of freethinking in its manifestation as cognitive, ethical, and political critiques of religion throughout history. It then focuses on the Abbasid era to identify the way such critiques developed in their constant internal and external connections. The wealth of textual and discursive debates involved therein comes to the fore as, at times, surprisingly rich material for further investigation and research.

Mohamad Rihan examines the comprehensive reformative program of Abdallah Al-Nadim, who sought to reconfigure Egypt's politics, economy, society, and education. The aim was to catch up with, then surpass Europe. Rihan shows, more subtly, that Al-Nadim did not seek a mere imitation of European ways and norms. Rather, his project involved an adaptation with an Egyptian face, preserving the particularities of Egyptian history, society, and identity, while taking in what could push Egypt forward and make it a worthy rival to be reckoned with on all levels.

Ryan Davidson brings the reader into book history, as he considers the links between William Blake and Walt Whitman. The critical frame that is book history is coupled then with a view of 19th century American literature as post-colonial in nature. This critical lens is used to read into the publication history of Blake's work and Whitman's encounter with Blake's poetry. Davidson then generalizes his observations to discuss the larger question of literary influence.

Zena Meskaoui tackles the work of Lebanese artist Pascal Hachem to evince the connection the artist makes, implicitly and explicitly, between force of law and ordinary life. She relies on the theoretical apparatus provided by specific writings of Derrida and Asef Bayat. This allows her, first to bring out the said connection and, second, to show how the artist has managed, in many of his works, to put into question the generally accepted notions of violence, force, and law, while grounding them in his personal experience.

Sharif Abdunnur and Krystle Houiess gear this issue of *Hawliyāt* toward more immediate concerns, as they tackle the thorny question of the media crisis in Lebanon. They retrace the history of media in Lebanon, in order to bring out the reasons—internal and external, 'positive' and often 'negative'—behind their variety and success as unique in the region. Their etiology then points to the current problems inherent to media's deterioration in the last decade, up to a point where their very existence seems threatened. New competition, lack of funding, sectarian divisions, lack and difficulty of reform, and other issues are brought to the fore, as well as a solution taking its momentum from digital technology as increasingly espoused by Arab youths. Government is called upon to take heed of such evolution.

Pamela Chrabieh takes us again into current issues, as she presents and interprets the results of her research, involving 160 University of Dubai students of various religions and ethnicities. She focuses on the perception, by each student, of Islam and its relation to establishing peace. However, this is not done through mere questionnaires. Indeed, the interest of Chrabieh's research is in her analysis of artworks, evaluations, intercultural and inter-religious exchange, and confrontation of different concepts within her classroom environment. Neither is her

research limited to observation and mere analysis, for it also seeks to create configurations, intellectual and otherwise, for the establishment and fostering of a “culture of peace”, which espouses and goes beyond each individual’s culture(s).

My own article is well-fitted to follow Chrabieh’s, since peace is also at its core. It is specifically geared toward an establishment of peace within Lebanon. It takes civil war and its end as its point of departure, and seeks in the Lebanese’s language a way to say that peace and to especially dwell in it. That language is called upon to be the expression of mourning the past and the present. Heidegger’s notion of ground-attunement is then used to determine the full operation, rhythm, and oscillation of mourning as possessing the two poles of joy and sorrow, and thus the promise of both in their recurrent reconciliation. The people’s espousal of mourning as essential to peace and preservation is thus made explicit and clear in its urgency.