

Nietzsche in Arabic: An interview with translator Ali Mosbah

It is the first time that a publishing house intends to translate Nietzsche's entire works from German into Arabic. The specific cultural circumstances of our times, marked by a conflict between the Arab and the Western world, makes this act of translation not only a literary, but a cultural event as well.

How will the Arab world respond to the work of a philosopher and poet, who recalled "Zarathustra" for the sake of *deconstructing* the view of morality, that was introduced, once, by Zoroaster, thousands of years ago?

The video version of this interview will be part of a lecture-performance which Susanne Granzer, an actress from Vienna, and Arno Böhler, a philosopher at the University Vienna, will perform on stage in June 2007 at KosmosTheater in Vienna. The performance will question the "hits" one receives by getting in touch with and being touched by Nietzsche's texts.

(For more see: <http://www.univie.ac.at/performanz/pos2/>)

In 2001, Cologne publishing house *Kamel Verlag* began to have Nietzsche's works translated into Arabic. On 28 October 2006, Arno Böhler & Susanne Granzer (GRENZ-film Vienna) conducted an interview in Berlin with Ali Mosbah, the translator of Nietzsche's works, in order to gain insight into the process of the editing project.

Arno Böhler: Thanks ever so much for agreeing to participate in an interview with us for the Nietzsche Circle. In 2002, Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* was translated into Arabic for the first time by you. Since 2003, you've also been working on a translation of *Zarathustra*. That means that the text is being translated into Arabic from German for the first time, rather than from French. How did you end up with such a seemingly monstrous translation task?

Ali Mosbah: I come from Tunisia, I speak Arabic and I studied in France. Therefore, I first came across Nietzsche's texts in French and Arabic translations. Roughly 15 years ago, my proficiency in German became such that I was able to read Nietzsche in German and I began to realize that the translations I had been reading before were problematic. Up until then, there had been only one work of Nietzsche's available in Arabic, and the translation was simply bad. I would even go so far as to say it was a catastrophe: it was not made from the German but from the French. Hence I gave birth to the dream of translating Nietzsche into Arabic myself one day. But the idea was simply too crazy, too utopian, to become a reality.

In the year 2000, a little book by Peter Sloterdijk on Nietzsche's fifth gospel arrived on the scene.¹ After I'd read it I immediately felt like translating it, which is what I did. Somehow, Sloterdijk's text did away with my fear of getting closer to my dream of translating Nietzsche into Arabic. This is not to say that today I am free of fear when translating Nietzsche. Truly not! Each translation of Nietzsche is an adventure, an experiment, a risk.

I was already in contact with Khalid Al-Maaly, the publisher of *Kamel Verlag*, back then. It was him who had started publishing German and French literature in Arabic in Cologne some 20 years ago. When I told him I was translating Sloterdijk's Nietzsche text it made him very happy.

Eventually he asked me explicitly whether I wasn't up for translating a text by Nietzsche himself from the German into Arabic. That was when I realized it was about time to make my old dream come true. Hence, I set to translating *Ecce Homo* in 2002.

Even though it was merely the translation of *one* text that was at stake, we both silently knew we wouldn't stop at the translation of that *one* piece of writing. Implicitly, we realized from the beginning we wanted to translate Nietzsche's *entire oeuvre*, even though

¹ Peter Sloterdijk, *Über die Verbesserung der guten Nachricht. Nietzsches fünftes Evangelium*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000.

we were frightened by the sheer scope of the project. For that reason, we merely bound ourselves to translating one book after the other and publishing them one at a time at *Kamel Verlag*.

We do not yet know how we will realize that enterprise. But who knows such things at all? For now, I am thus concentrating on the book I am currently translating, *Also sprach Zarathustra*.

Susanne Granzer: Your translation of *Also sprach Zarathustra* is due to be finished shortly?

Ali Mosbah: Yes, that is correct. I have been working on that translation for 4 years by now. When I had finished working on *Ecce Homo* at the end of 2002, the beauty of Nietzsche's "Nachtlied" seduced me to start immediately with the translation of *Zarathustra* into Arabic. If all goes well I will finish the translation before the end of 2006. Hopefully *properly* finish!—(laughs). *Properly* finished means holding a printable manuscript in hand.

Susanne Granzer: What is it that the act of continuous trans-ferring from the German into the Arabic language actually does to you as a person—and to your life here in Berlin?

Ali Mosbah: It is a daily commute between two shores. A toing and froing. On some days, everything is closed off to me, because I cannot find an approach to Nietzsche's texts, or because the one word I need for the transferral into Arabic denies itself to me. It is then that I sit around in my flat, powerless and helpless, wanting to run around—for which the flat unfortunately is too small—or I venture outside to go for a long walk supposed to aid me in working off the frustration developed over an entire day spent on getting stuck on a single sentence. Then, one must retain patience. Tomorrow's another day. Such experiences are really frustrating and painful.

But of course there are those days—particularly now that I am translating Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*—on which I am rewarded. On which I am happy, truly overjoyed. Receiving rich rewards in the intoxicating beauty of his language...

Susanne Granzer: ...because that language is beginning to speak?

Ali Mosbah: Yes. A word, or a sentence, is beginning to speak. In such moments, a lot of energy is released. One is given back much, one is happy, feels good, because something has happened during the act of trans-lating.

Arno Böhler: Do you remember concrete incidents of encountering great difficulty in finding the harmonious Arabic word?

Ali Mosbah: Many! Unfortunately, *very* many! (smiles). The term “Übermensch,” “Overman,” for example, has been getting to me in a big way for a long time now. Firstly, the problem lies in the fact that the Arabic language does not allow for joining together words such as “Über,” “Over,” and “Mensch,” “man.” The possibility given to German of joining several words to make one sometimes drives me crazy when I am translating as that possibility neither exists nor works in the Arabic language.

An example: Nietzsche’s concept of the “Übermensch,” the Overman, is represented in French as “Surhomme.” In Arab Nietzsche editions, we then encounter, inspired by that French translation, the phrase “higher man,” “l’homme supérieurs,” for the word “Übermensch.” But such a translation is not really permissible to me, as Nietzsche, in his texts, explicitly differentiates between the “höheren Menschen” and what he calls the “Übermenschen.” Seen from the perspective of the masses, the “höheren Menschen” are something higher, rarer and nobler than the mediocre form of the “Massenmenschen” well adjusted to the respective ruling circumstances—the perniciousness of whom he often compares to that of the ground flea—, but the “höheren Menschen” are not what Nietzsche is seeking when he is looking for the “Übermensch.” The latter is not a higher *man*, but a being, a new life-form, which transcends kind and kin of man as we know

him. *La condition humaine*, as the French put it, man as a species, is precisely what is supposed to be transcended in the coming of the “Übermensch.” “Man”—to Nietzsche, in his historically visible shape a thoroughly resentful being—is something to be transcended. Hence, in Arabic, I cannot simply translate the term “Übermensch” as “higher man,” nor can I form a composite like it is done in German. For that reason, I have been on the phone and sending many e-mails in the last few months in order to collect suggestions for translation.

Susanne Granzer: And how do you translate the German word “Gott,” “God,” into Arabic?

Ali Mosbah: As “*Allah*.” Of course, it depends on the respective passage and on the context. Whenever “*the God*” is referred to, he is called “*al-Rabb*” or ‘*al-Ilah*’ in Arabic. When it is simply “God,” in Arabic we say “*Allah*.” “*Allah*” is not only the name for the Muslim God, He is the God of all. As the Muslims see themselves as the further development of a continuing tradition of the monotheistic revealed religions—that is to say, as a form of the continuing revelation of God begun in Judaism and Christianity and, finally, continued in Islam, in terms of salvific history—, the word “*Allah*” refers to the God of all three monotheistic religions. Many here in the West believe that “*Allah*” refers to the God of Islam. But as the sole God, “*Allah*” is everybody’s God as opposed to just that of Islam. In the Arabic translation of the Bible, as well, or rather, in that of both the New and the Old Testaments, God is “*Allah*.” I work with the Arabic translation of the Bible frequently as Nietzsche’s writings contain numerous references and allusions to the Bible. Often, even more often, I translate God as “*Allah*,” sometimes as “Rabb.” Nietzsche’s saying “God is dead,” e. g., may be translated as “*Inna’ allaha qad Mat.*”

Arno Böhler: What was the reaction to the sentence “God is dead” in the Arab world?

Ali Mosbah: Of course, it is a problem to religious Muslims as it is felt to be an atheist statement. Roughly two years ago, e.g., I was invited to Southern Morocco to give a talk. After my talk, someone raised their hand and said: “When I saw you outside half an hour

ago, I thought you were a good person. And now I see you have translated not one but two of Nietzsche's books even though you know very well that Nietzsche despised men in general and the weak in particular," etc. etc. All the clichés regarding Nietzsche were put forth. The sentence "God is dead," too.

I retorted that Nietzsche was born into and brought up with Christianity. That he even was the son of a Christian priest and that the sentence "God is dead" had been a decisive topic within the Christian belief system. Jesus Christ had been crucified. Hence, I insisted that one has to understand Nietzsche's statement "God is dead" from within—and in the context of—Christianity.

When I think back to my own youth, however, when I read Nietzsche for the first time at age eighteen, stumbling across the sentence "God is dead," I remember well that it was precisely *that* sentence which was received enthusiastically by me, by us, by an entire generation of young people in the Arab world. To us, it was a magic sentence back then, a kind of liberation of the "ghosts" of our ancestors. The sentence to us was "dynamite" back then, a powerful phrase, exactly what *we* needed back then.

Arno Böhler: Does not the translation and publication of a work containing the sentence "God is dead" pose a threat to the translator and publisher of such works?

Ali Mosbah: I do not believe that I will be killed, that I will be the victim of a fundamentalist attack, merely for having translated Nietzsche into Arabic. No, I do not believe that. When I still worked in Tunisia as a teacher and journalist, I spoke my mind, as well, without immediately getting assassinated. Of course I had problems! As did everybody else who didn't just simply conform. For example, it is not easy to be an atheist in an Arab country with an Islamic tradition. No, that really is not easy... But nor is it easy in Germany to remove oneself from the reigning system or to even oppose it. Still, it isn't as if "our heads are two inches away from the blade." (laughs again)

Arno Böhler: Still, I would like to ask you once again: why the translation of Nietzsche into Arabic? Why him of all people, and why now? Are there not good (global) reasons for this, after all?

Ali Mosbah: The usefulness of translating Nietzsche into Arabic surely has to do with our current historical situation. On the one hand, with our global situation, on the other, with the generation of '68. By that, I mean that we, the generation of '68 and those coming after us, felt the eighties to be some kind of transition period. We were all involved in the left-wing scene. The "left" was the answer to our questions. And to us, Marx had the answers to the questions of the 20th century. But in the eighties, those Marxist convictions started to crumble. Suddenly, somehow a great ideological emptiness developed. On top of that, a renewed interest in Nietzsche was awakened in us by thinkers such as Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida. All these authors are, by the way, French thinkers currently being read in the Arab world very closely. Thus, Nietzsche slowly filled the gap as soon as we had to admit to ourselves that Marxism could no longer answer our questions—the political ones as well as the existential and philosophical ones. Marx no longer sufficed.

Many started to look for answers elsewhere back then. Some turned to the Sufis, the Islamic mystics. I, too, rediscovered them at that time. And along with them, Nietzsche's texts, as well, became relevant once more to me, to us. Not as a new ideology to simply replace Marxism, but as an adventure of a new kind of existence and thought required from us by Nietzsche's texts. Thus, he began to unleash and to enliven our heads once more with a hammer's blow in the eighties. A new sense of aesthetics, a new commitment to a cognizance of life *in the service* of the invention of new, singular forms of life; all that to us now seemed the most noble and pressing task. Now, it was no longer about ideology, nor about the demanding and realization of certain (political) aims, but rather, about the invention of new ways of living. It was that promise which made Nietzsche's texts so attractive to us in our post-Marxist Nietzsche phase. To philosophize with a hammer was what we needed back then, and we need it today more than ever.

I would like it to be known at this point that I am no Nietzschean. I like Nietzsche. I find his philosophy one of the deepest that exists; who could totally elude the aesthetics of his language? He is a great stylist. It is as though he is restoring new life to the German language in his writings, in a manner not known before. Although his texts are pervaded by images, metaphors and tropes, his language is the opposite of a “flowery language.” It is acutely precise and accurate. It simply hits the mark. It is that unerring precision of his language which makes his writings so fascinating to me, making me feel at home in his texts. His language *is* oriental. He *writes* in an oriental manner. I would say, Nietzsche *is* an Oriental. The best Germans were Orientals. Goethe. Hölderlin, too. And with them, I *am*, I *feel* at home.

And today I am deeply convinced that Nietzsche holds the most important answers to the questions posed by the 21st century at the ready for us.

Arno Böhler: In Europe, the situation was quite similar. After WWII, Nietzsche was rediscovered in France. *Nietzsche aus Frankreich*, Nietzsche from France, is the title of a famous compilation published in 1986 by Werner Hamacher at Suhrkamp Verlag. And nor was the collection of essays *Looking After Nietzsche*, published in 1990 by Laurence A. Rickels in New York, a “German initiative.” The fact that the decisive critical edition of Nietzsche’s works was initiated and realized by two Italians, Giorgio Colli andazzino Montinari, fits well into that picture. “Nietzsche from the Arab world,” how would you characterize that particular “Nietzsche”—according to Derrida, we know that there has to be *more than one* Nietzsche—how would you characterize the Arab Nietzsche image? Who are its readers?

Ali Mosbah: Nietzsche is very popular in the Arab world and also very well known in some circles—this refers to the intellectuals, of course, not to the masses.

As far as I have an overview of Nietzsche’s reception in the Arab world, I can tell that it is not so much the artists who have discovered Nietzsche for themselves, but rather the world of academia, the universities. Philosophers, sociologists, maybe also men and

women of letters. To artists, it is rather the multi-faceted image provided by Nietzsche's "Zarathustra" *as a literary figure* which is interesting. In Arabic, Zarathustra is "*Zaradescht*." The sound of the word alone is very beautiful. Zaradescht mediates the image—the portrait of a man—, who is a jester, a sage and a revolutionary all at the same time. The tropic character of his language has of course also made many art critics and literary critics take notice. The Nietzschean text simply lends itself exceedingly well to any kind of art criticism or literary criticism.

Then, there are of course great numbers of young students at Arab universities who are left wing and read Nietzsche. This goes to show that today we are dealing with an "Arab left" which is organized and orientated ideologically very differently from the way we were back then.

Marx demanded the liberation of the masses. A mass-scale liberation of men aided by the category of "mass." In the Eastern block, in the Soviet Union, in China, in Cuba, that demand has proven to be both a fatal error and a particularly bad kind of dictatorship/totalitarianism.

Conversely, Nietzsche constantly argued in favour of the individual's self-reliance. He appeals to the individual's creative powers. That is why I have said that I believe that the 21st century will be the century of Nietzsche. Today, in times of postmodern globalization, we are fighting, above all, to maintain our identities *as individuals*. Against an administrated life, in favour of the possibility of individual ways of life. And Nietzsche has much to say about all that! Whilst the subjugation and exploitation of the proletariat, that is, the liberation of the masses, was the main topic in the 19th and 20th centuries, in my view, it is the subjugation of *individual ways of life* which is the main issue nowadays.

Arno Böhrer: What kind of position does the individual have within Arab culture?

Ali Mosbah: You know, the question of the individual's standing, and of that of individuality within the Arab world is an incredibly difficult one. In answering it, one encounters a great deal of hypocrisy. For example, it is claimed time and again—in some sort of blanket generalization—that Europe, once capitalism has been overcome, will be the realm of the individual. In comparison, all other countries would be places of a collective consciousness. Mass cultures of a more or less homogenous collective, etc.

I vehemently contest that myth. In contrast to Europe, it is, rather, the Arab world which is the world of the individual par excellence. When I say Arab world, I am also referring to the Berber region in North Africa and to the Tuareg. Those are people with very pronounced personalities and an enormous sense of individuality. We must not forget that the Bedouins used to be sons of the desert, desert people. Desert people have never accepted any authority *above themselves*—at least until Islam arrived, which they accepted in the end. Hence, individuality was suppressed more and more in the Arab world, as well, by means of religious systems and moral systems. Sadly, today it is merely practised auricularly if at all: subterraneously, repressedly, suppressedly.

In altruism and in the religious and moralistic forms of self-denial, Nietzsche has criticized that “uncanny” history of turning one's own individuality into a taboo in his texts. Religion, morality—as forms of altruistic selflessness—are always also forms of the individual's self-denial to him. Therefore, they become accomplices of a dangerous political conformity all too quickly.

What we need in the Arab world today, however, is a new version of the kind of non-conformity that was run-of-the-mill in pre-Islamic times. A general shift in thought, a revaluation of all values, as well as of Western values and ways of thinking.

But even Islam could not completely prevent the free growth of great personalities. Indeed, it has produced great individualists itself time and again. Poets, for example—poets are always individualists! And it may surprise many when I refer to the Sufi as an example; the mystic direction Islam can take. The Sufi have always been

individualists *within* the Islamic world. To me, the mystics in general are *the* individualists par excellence. And that is why I encounter so many parallels to Nietzsche in them.

When I first turned to the Sufi out of my disappointment with real existing Marxism, their writings resounded in a new and different tone in my ears. I—as well as many other intellectuals—we could no longer overhear the claim to individuality resounding in their writings. I mean the independence of thought and the *individual* “striving” to gain cognizance *by oneself*. When I had rediscovered Nietzsche, I immediately recognized in him the voice of the Sufi; that is to say, in Zarathustra’s voice. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra used terms and described experiences nearly identical to those of the Islamic mystics—that one only ever gains a vivid cognizance of life not only by learning dogmatic systems by heart and by reading books, but above all by one’s own alertness concerning one’s own life—and the development of independent ways of life. For example, of an individual lifestyle. They taught exactly that which I had encountered in Nietzsche’s Zarathustra—cognizance as expression of a lifestyle; as expression of a way of life; as an expression of taste! All this did not sound new to my ears, but familiar.

By the way, the Arab word for “taste” is “*Dhawq*” and means as much as the capturing of that which is individual. In an astonishing analogy to Nietzsche, mystics such as Halladsch, for example, spoke out against abstract terms, generalizing ideas and, above all, the idea of a closed system as represented and disseminated by Islam’s men of letters in their texts. Or take Rumi, a great mystic poet from Turkey who came from Anatolia and who claimed similar things. Or Ibn-Arabi, a great mystic from Andalusia. Even back then, from within Islam, they all wanted nothing to do with a pure and literal exegesis of Islam. People even made up jokes back then which poked fun at conventional interpretations of Islam by jurists and men of letters.

Arno Böhrer: Was it the geopolitical situation at the time which tipped the scales for you, in favor of getting to work on translating Nietzsche just then?

Ali Mosbah: To be honest, when I made the decision to translate Nietzsche into Arabic, I wasn't interested in the geopolitical situation or whether there was a desire to read Nietzsche in the Arab world, let alone whether there was an historical need for Nietzsche. I merely egotistically thought of my own pleasure in translating. Nothing more; but nothing less, either.

Subconsciously, however, from the start, the global situation we all have been in since, above all, the 9/11 attacks must have been a decisive criterium to actually get started on this mammoth project.

Arno Böhler: Are the texts critical of religion comparable to those by Nietzsche in the Arab world?

Ali Mosbah: No. There is no systematic and radical critique of religion such as Nietzsche's. No. It is true that there were harsh critics of religion in the 8th and 9th centuries, but their criticism was primarily directed against certain forms of practicing religion, not as much against God himself. There were recognized atheists, too, who were widely read. But not as much because Islam was more tolerant back then, but rather because it was animated by the curiosity, euphoria and joy that gripped the Arab world of letters back then with regard to Greek philosophy to also engage with atheist philosophies.

Back then, however, the situation was wholly different from and incomparable to ours today. Nietzsche was only possible, and perhaps also only necessary, at the end of the 19th century. Earlier than that, he would not have been possible in Europe, nor in any other place. Only the scientific, philosophical, religious and cultural developments of modern times have made a body of work like his possible.

I have mentioned the name of a harsh critic of conventional systems of thought earlier. It is Sufi Halladsch, whom I like to refer to as an "Arab Zarathustra" in a Nietzschean sense. Halladsch not only liked to preach in the market place, like Sokrates; he also

danced his texts and recited his prayers dancing in the streets of Baghdad. In the end, he was murdered and nailed to the cross as a heretic. His life, at least as has been testified to, obviously had been an all-out provocation to the men of letters at the time.

The difference to Nietzsche, however, lies primarily in the fact that he was a believer. His form of prayer was opposed to religion rather than to God himself. But that is of little importance to me. What is more important is that his life was a sort of “Untimely Meditation” of his time and the form of religiosity practised in it. And that is a form of religious critique I am encountering once more in Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*.

In the 10th century, there also existed a great poet from Syria. He was referred to as the poets’ philosopher and the philosophers’ poet. He did not hide his doubt concerning faith and all religions and finally even composed a sort of *Divina Comedia* in which he poked fun at heaven and hell. That work was once even read to us and commented on in school. It is still printed and sold today—perhaps not in Saudi Arabia, but in other Arab countries.

Arno Böhler: A good Arab friend of mine who lives in France and Morocco has been telling me time and again of the fact that he lives in two irreconcilable worlds when he zaps back and forth between the news coverages of, respectively, CNN and Al Jazeera. Is it the same for you?

Ali Mosbah: I consciously refuse to watch either CNN or Al Jazeera. And I know why! They are the two sides of one coin. The two sides of a big propaganda battle. And those I do not wish to see at all!

Arno Böhler: Do you still dream a little, with Nietzsche, that art has the power to change societies? Second question: Nietzsche’s texts also lend themselves to very reactionary readings. Do you presently see the danger of such a reactionary harnessing of Nietzsche’s texts in the Arab region?

Ali Mosbah: I believe that when I translate or read Nietzsche I have been reacting as a poet first and foremost. Poetry is always also an act of salvation to me. But not a mass salvation, not a salvation for society as a whole, but a sort of “salvation of the soul.” Reading Nietzsche, re-thinking him, translating him, is *my kind* of “soul salvation” in the midst of the pressures of daily life whose power is becoming ever more monstrous. For I believe that we are not approaching a progression towards and an increase in freedom, but rather, that we are heading towards a global retrogression of freedom; more freedom, is, I believe, simply a lie. It has to do with globalization and the new media which rule our lives more and more. There is no outside to technology anymore.

Therein, I see a new and terrible form of monotheism coming towards us, which takes me back to Nietzsche and his veneration of the ancient gods. Nietzsche loved the ancient world; he despised Christianity as a monotheistic religion, as monotheism spelt catastrophe to humanity according to him. Subjugated to the power of *a single, almighty* God by the monotheistic religions, man lost much of his autonomy, intimate protection and individual power. Now, there is no one by his side to protect him from God himself and his wrath. Now, no *other* god can protect us from the one, almighty God.

Today, in America’s pretension to playing the world’s global power, we are experiencing a renaissance of monotheistic structures in the political sphere. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which I would refer to as the second God in this context, all other powers have become somewhat powerless faced with the global power USA. In this context, the ancient patterns of the moral duality of good and evil are resurfacing. The battle of the good against the evil, etc. Since WWI—and later, during and after WWII—the global power USA is playing the role of the good in the world. It believes it is God’s hand in the world; even its wars are being carried out from above, as it were. All decisive battles of the USA have been and are conducted with the aid of the air force. The gods seem to shirk war on the ground; perhaps they feel the ground, our earth, is too low, too dirty, to be touched.

That is exactly why Nietzsche's philosophy, with its demand to revalue and to overthrow monotheism, is precisely what is needed now. His "post-modern" demand to break both idealistic and real power monopolies is exceedingly timely, that is, it is still untimely! And exactly at this point, Nietzsche intersects with the pretension of art. For art only exists in the plural, in the arts, in the artists.² The pretension of art is always singularly plural. It is directed at you, at me and, respectively, singularly at us.

In that sense, I do not believe that in 20 or 30 years' time, I will have caused a great change in the Arab world by means of my translations, either. But I will be able to move individuals. And who knows, somewhere the small hope, the secret hope, remains that this singular thing of being touched and moved by Nietzsche's texts affects something in the plural...

Arno Böhler: Does Nietzsche play a role for anti-Semitic tendencies in the Arab region?

Ali Mosbah: Thank God Nietzsche is not read by everybody. After all, he has given his *Zarathustra* the subtitle, "A book for All and None." His texts require a particular carefulness in reading them in order not to be entirely misunderstood regarding their intentions. In the Arab world, we have been well prepared by the philosophical work of Foucault, Deleuze and Derrida during the last 25 years for reading Nietzsche in a new light and for liberating him from standard clichés and phrases. "God is dead." Sentences like that are said quickly, but it takes a long time to evaluate them in their historical dimension, to really *think* them. The same clichés have been spread with regard to Marx. "Religion is opium for the people."

Thus, the question before me is approximately as follows: How can one read Nietzsche as a liberator, rather than a reactionary? As a revolutionary, rather than a reactionary? Of course, Nietzsche could also be read as a reactionary, in the way that all great texts can be harnessed—the Koran, too. That possibility exists, always and *for every* text. Texts can

² Zur *Pluralität der Künste* siehe: Jean-Luc Nancy, *singular plural sein*, Diaphanes Verlag, Berlin: 2004. Sowie Jean-Luc Nancy, *Die Musen*, Verlag Jutta Legueil, Stuttgart: 1999.

be bent and turned around. To Nietzsche himself, making ideologies of his texts was a completely alien concept. He did not want them used as maxims, *vade-mecums* or manuals of political interventions. Reality was not supposed to be described, changed or improved with their help; they were, rather, supposed to serve truth and only truth, in the sense of the “intellectual fidelity” he saw his works bound to. As is generally known, his sister took care of the political ideologizing of his works for him. As well as others who took him in ideologically. Indeed, even Thomas Mann made him responsible for National Socialism and fascist ideas in a famous talk “Nietzsche’s Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung” [“Nietzsche’s Philosophy in Light of Contemporary Events”].³ I find that despicable. Very, very despicable and very, very superficial and platitudinous.—That such a great intellectual managed to get Nietzsche that wrong, that simply hurt me.

As far as the Arab world is concerned, the Arab world is very sensitive at the moment, of course. We are experiencing exactly the situation criticized by Nietzsche so vehemently: a situation dictated by the spirit of *ressentiment*: rage, powerlessness, frustration, *ressentiment*, an inclination towards destruction. The feeling of *ressentiment* is beginning to dominate the globe.

Every nation, *every* person who feels abased, neglected or excluded systematically develops that sense of *ressentiment*. It was the same in 1918 in Germany. The National Socialists capitalised on Germany’s abasement after WWI, harnessing and using the reigning *ressentiment* for their political purposes. Even back then it was a mistake of the Allies not to use their victory constructively, but turn it against the Germans in a negative way in order to abase and humiliate them. No one back then reckoned on Germany recuperating that fast, developing the horror of National Socialism out of the humiliation of WWI.

³ Available in the collection, *Nietzsche: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1973), Robert C. Solomon, ed., or in the following volume of Mann’s Library of Congress addresses, *Thomas Mann’s Addresses Delivered at the Library of Congress*, (England: Peter Lang, 2003), Don Heinrich Tolzmann, ed.

Today, too, this politics of humiliation is a mistake again. The arrogance displayed by George W. Bush, Tony Blair and others day by day is simply destructive. It is detrimental to global unity. Thank God those names are not representative of that which constitutes opinion in the West. Maybe the fact that George W. Bush has come to power just now is an unfortunate coincidence. But chance occurrences are realities, too, and do something. They, too, produce effects. In this case, the chance outcome of the American presidential elections influences our entire global situation. And the longer this politics of Western arrogance regarding the Arabic-Islamic world is continued, the more reasons the Arabic-Islamic world will find to continuously feel abused and attacked. Each mistake made by a Western politician destroys ten, fifteen or even twenty years of work put in by our generation during which we fought the case for freedom, democracy, etc. in the Arab world. Some of us have paid that battle with our deaths, with long stretches in prison or the loss of our professions. Fifteen, twenty years of cultural battles in the sphere of philosophy, culture, art—and then, there is an attack on Baghdad in which, for example, the museum of Baghdad is destroyed, one of the greatest places of cultural interest in the world—and, with one fell swoop, the work of an entire generation which wanted to develop Arab culture further, towards freedom, is ruined. Thus, the danger of reactionary developments in the Arab world absolutely exists. However, I do not believe that this danger stems from the works of Nietzsche; whoever thinks as a fundamentalist does not need Nietzsche for the foundation of his or her ideologies. Those people have entirely different writers to base themselves on who deliver the right kind of fodder for their fundamentalism.

Susanne Granzer: Nietzsche's relationship to women is questionable, as are his utterances regarding issues of gender. In the Arab region, the position of woman is precarious, as well.

Ali Mosbah: A delicate issue, but a good question. Of course there are many, many ideas in Nietzsche's texts, among them statements on the topic of "woman," or that of "democracy," of which I get the feeling, "my God, how am I to translate those lines? This simply goes too far!"

As regards women: by now, I have come to believe that I see through his position quite well. Nietzsche is actually a gentle, a very gentle man, a gentle man through and through. He loved women. He loved and revered Cosima Wagner. To him, she was a mixture of highest intelligence and brilliance. He loved and valued Lou Salomé, as well. He also worked on her texts. But somewhere, there always came a point at which his relationships to women broke down. At some point he was overcome by feelings of *ressentiment* towards them himself. In a sort of self-protective mechanism, he then tried to differentiate himself from them rhetorically and often made abject remarks about them. But more out of weakness than out of any true conviction. In such moments he would say sentences such as, say, “when you go to women, do not forget your whip.”⁴ But in a different place, one may also encounter a sentence such as the following: “It is women who know me best.” Perhaps, there is disguised in this sentence Nietzsche’s wish to be understood better by women.

As always in the Arab world one can also throw oneself onto those Nietzsche passages regarding women and attempt to harness them for one’s own purposes; like the idea of democracy lends itself to misuse, so does the topic of “woman.” Important work remains to be done in this respect, in particular. Nietzsche’s interpretation of the relationship of the sexes must be written one day. In doing this, Nietzsche’s human, all-too-human side will have to be discussed as well. Nietzsche was a human being with great weaknesses. He experienced moments of despair in which he slept alone in his room in the cold, crying in the most heartbreaking manner. Above all, out of loneliness... Just to face life afresh the next day. That is typical of him.

⁴ Nietzsche himself does not actually pronounce this sentence as is too often proclaimed; to equate the pronouncement with Nietzsche would be like equating Edmund’s declarations with Shakespeare. The statement is made by the old woman to Zarathustra in the chapter “On Old and Young Little Women” in the first part of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. “Give me,” Zarathustra asks, “old woman, your little truth!” and she responds: “You are going to women? Then don’t forget the whip!” In TSZ as in other works of Nietzsche’s, both life and truth are characterized as feminine, thus when speaking of woman or women he may be speaking of life or truth, not necessarily of women themselves.

It is thus I wish to answer your question. Perhaps, it is no answer, but it is how I happen to view Nietzsche's relationship to women.

Susanne Granzer: Would you like to add something regarding the actual position of women in the Arab region?

Ali Mosbah: I do not know all Arab countries. I can only speak of those countries I truly know: for example, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon; Syria, less already. I would say that the situation of women in our Arab world is a topic the state of which one cannot be really satisfied with, let alone proud of. Although there has been progress regarding the improvement of the position of women within Arab society during the last twenty, thirty, forty years. For example, it is not true at all that all Arab women are simply at home, looking after the family; and, by far, not all women are wearing veils: whoever veils herself in the countries named above truly does so for ideological reasons, much like we may see veiled women here in Berlin, Vienna or Paris.

The fact that hardly any women may be found in the cafés of Arab cities even today is a reality that has to be changed; and polygamy is, or was, really a terrible form of the subjugation of women. In Tunisia, it was abolished in 1957. By now, also in Morocco and Lebanon. But there surely is much to be fought for still in this respect. A fight fought today in the Arab world above all by the women themselves in countless clubs.

That fight for women's equality began already in the 1920s in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and in Lebanon, and it carries on today. One has not been waiting for George W. Bush to lead that battle in the Arab world. It is women who are the greatest losers in Iraq today. Thus, we have to realize that the fight for women's equality has its own rhythm, its own internal rules, and that it has been going on for over eighty years in the Arab world (perhaps I ought to add at this point that women in 20th century France fought into the 1920s for the acknowledgement of their right to vote?). I am convinced that the process of women's liberation in the Arab region can only be supported and instigated from within; any intervention from outside will only disturb, falsify, derail and block that

process. And exactly that is, sadly, the case today. The metaphysical idea of a development dictated from outside, from above is reappearing here. A thoroughly anti-Nietzschean conception of power, I would say.

I have mentioned earlier that I was invited to a reading in Southern Morocco, in the city of Tan-Tan, the former Sahara, at which I spoke about my Nietzsche translation. It was organized by a women's association. At the bus stop, I was received by four women in desert saris. Four desert princesses, not two as in Nietzsche's texts! The women's activities surprised me. Not only were they in a women's association, but in a whole lot of other organizations, too. One of them was in an environmental organization, for example. She collected donations, say, from Spain, for old women to buy them goats whose milk they could sell in order to maintain themselves. Another pulled her weight for the education of young girls. I visited the place of education myself. And at the end, they invited me to a talk given by a doctor about "Aids and STDs." Except for myself and the doctor, it was attended exclusively by women. The self-assured manner of those women flabbergasted me. They asked their questions without any taboos, up to and including the tiniest details. That surprised me, for by now I am carrying a little European around with me myself—after all, I have been living in Europe for 27 years now—who only perceives women in the Arab region as suppressed creatures.

Arno Böhrer: The publishing houses in the Arab world mostly work via Lebanon. Is the current crisis there a problem with regard to the realisation of the Nietzsche translation?

Ali Mosbah: Lebanon is the Phoenix. Beirut is the Phoenix. That city, that country won't be tamed. Simply everything is possible there, anything you want to do you can do. During the first Lebanese war in 1982, the country was bombed—and the publishers printed and published their books in the basements. Of course the bombs have destroyed much; but people immediately made something out of the ruins. And that will be the case after this war. It has destroyed some things, but shortly everything will rise again from the ashes. There will be no enduring problems for the publishers. No. I have great trust in those Phoenicians, in that art of the Phoenix which they are masters of.

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Susanne Granzer, University Professor for Performing Arts at the University Of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna (Max Reinhardt Seminar). As an actress 15 years on stage at State Theatres in Vienna, Basel, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt am Main and Berlin. Parallel she studied philosophy at the Goethe University in Frankfurt and earned her Ph.D. at the University of Vienna in 1995. Scientific research on “acting” in: India (Kalakshetra) and South Korea (Hankuk University), at Juilliard School and Herbert Berghof Studio, New York. Publications (selection): *Experiences Of Absence*, Freiburg/München 2007 (in print), ABC. *Breaks Of Childhood*, Hildesheim/Zürich, 2005. Member of the Advisory Board: Nietzsche Circle as well as GlobArt, Connecting Worlds of Arts and Sciences (Lower Austria). Read more: → <http://personal.mdw.ac.at/granzer>

Arno Böhler, philosopher and filmmaker, teaches philosophy at the University of Vienna at the Department of Philosophy. Research Visiting Professor at New York University (2000-2001) and Princeton University (2002). Head of the FWF-Research-Project: “On The Material And Temporal Aspects of Performative Speech Acts. Philosophy On Stage”. 2005-2007. Books (German): *Singularity*, Passagen Press, Vienna 2005; *On The Way to Friendship*, Passagen Press, Vienna 2000; *Memory of The Future*, Passagen Press, 1996. Member of the Advisory Board: Nietzsche Circle as well as GlobArt, Connecting Worlds of Arts and Sciences (Lower Austria). Read more: → <http://homepage.univie.ac.at/arno.boehler>

In 1997 Susanne Granzer & Arno Boehler founded the Viennese art factory *GRENZ-film*. Realization of *Philosophy in Pictures* – 4 DVD-books, *Philosophie im Bild*, Passagen Press, Vienna 2005 and *Philosophy On Stage*, Lecture-Performances in Europa and the USA.

Title of DVD-books (German-English): *The Call* (with Avital Ronell); *Das Fremde* (engl. title: *Strangeness*, with Elisabeth von Samsonow); *In.Time* (with Robin Kelley); *Archivare des Sterbens* (engl. title: *Archives of Death*, with Hans-Dieter Bahr). Various Lecture-Performances – “Philosophy On Stage” – in Europe and the USA.