



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR  
SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

## EXILE 2.0

An analysis of Afrah Nasser's blog authorship

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Examinator:	Tetz Rooke
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## Abstract

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**Aim:** To analyse how blogging in the Arabic blogosphere conditions political authorship in exile and how new digital media technologies create novel forms of presence at a distance. This purpose is fulfilled by an in-depth analysis of the works by Yemeni blogger Afrah Nasser.

**Theory:** This thesis relies on media theory in relation to the blog as a medium and the sociological concept of “connected migrant” to understand the literary genre of exile literature in the context of the blogosphere.

**Method:** The corpus under investigation in this thesis consists of two blogs created by Nasser, the first located on *afrahnasser.blogspot.com* and the second blog is *al-Dīmūqrāṭiyya kalima murra* (Democracy is a bitter word). The analysis is based on selected posts from both of Nasser’s blogs, which were published during the time of the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 to the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2015.

**Results:** Being uprooted, a central theme in 20<sup>th</sup> century writing, is no longer the same experience as digital technologies make global communication possible on a much larger scale and available to more people. The spatial disruption inherent in migration is today accompanied by instant ICT-mediated communication with the homeland. In Nasser’s authorship this is abundantly present, as she often returns to the immediate conversations with her friends and family in Yemen, often taking place on a daily basis, as grounds for her exile writing. This, however, does not erase some of the conventional characteristics of exile literature, for example expressing a longing for returning to the homeland and frustration with the predicaments of exile. The main difference between 20<sup>th</sup> century exile authorship and Nasser’s blog authorship is a higher degree of presence and connectivity afforded by the blog as a medium

## **Abbreviations**

CMC – Computer mediated communication

CMD – Computer mediated discourse

ICT – Information and communications technology

MENA – Middle East and North Africa

MSA – Modern Standard Arabic

YCA – Yemeni colloquial Arabic

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# 1. Introduction

Yemen is one of the least connected countries in the world. According to Global Voices Online the Internet penetration in Yemen reached around 15 per cent of the population in 2013 (Al-Saqaf 2013). However, the number has increased rapidly since the beginning of the uprisings in 2011, when only about 1.8 per cent were online (Radsch 2012: 18). One person in this small segment of connected people was Afrah Nasser, a tech-savvy journalist and blogger working in the capital of Yemen, Sana'a. Through blogs and social media, Nasser, together with other young women and men, began to connect with online groups of Arab youth and started to cover the situation in Yemen, writing both in Arabic and English. Cited in an article by Courtney C. Radsch (2012: 31), Nasser claimed that “[b]logging was not very popular before the revolution but now thousands of people are creating them, creating Facebook accounts, because they are platforms for knowing what's happening, and they don't trust the news”. Today, Nasser lives in exile in Sweden due to the political instability in Yemen and because of threats received through social media, making it dangerous to return to Sana'a.

However, by using the Internet in general, and her two blogs in particular, she has remained connected to her country of origin as an activist blogger in exile. Even though Nasser is not physically present in Yemen, the way she utilizes online forms of communication makes it possible for her to write about the day to day political events in her homeland, almost as if she were physically there.

## 1.1 Aim and research question

This thesis wants to understand how emerging Internet- and communication technologies (ICT) offer new forms for political exile authorship. More precisely, the purpose of this study is to explore exile blogging in the twenty-first century and how it is expressed through online discourse, as information technologies transform the possibilities of staying connected on a distance. In other words, the aim of this thesis consists of seeking an answer to the following research question: *How does the blog in the Arabic blogosphere condition political authorship in exile?*

With ‘political authorship’ I hereby mean a broad commitment to engaging in a current political situation. But, exactly what forms of expressions that should be considered political or not must remain a somewhat open-ended question for this analysis to be able to

include the subtle details present in online discourse. Unlike el-Nawawy and Khamis (2013: 10), I do not think it is necessary to distinguish between ‘activist blogs’ and ‘public sphere blogs’. Such distinctions may even prove to be misleading, because the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have shown that activism may be a form of participation in the public sphere (for example by occupying a central square in the capital), and vice-versa, the public sphere blogs seem to play an important role in co-ordinating protests and rallies in the streets. The distinction presented by el-Nawawy and Khamis originates in Lynch (2007) who besides ‘activist’ and ‘public sphere’ bloggers also introduces the notion of ‘bridge-bloggers’, meaning authors that write in English with the purpose of addressing Western audiences. As I will show, Nasser would, in this terminology, occupy all three positions described by Lynch. However, something that is a central topic to this thesis, the blog as a medium blurs these lines even further. As noted by Anishchenkova (2014: 174–175), blogs are both fluid and flexible in the way they express political identities. Even narratives that on a superficial level seem to deal strictly with personal experiences, may in doing so also engage critically in political issues, simply because they ‘make public’ a narrative that has previously been considered a purely private matter. Thus, with ‘political authorship’, I wish to designate a broad spectrum of writing about and engaging with political issues relevant to the author and her readers.

With ‘Arabic blogosphere’ I mean, along the lines of Etling et al. (2009), the vast network of blogs primarily based around the different countries in the MENA. In this network, consisting of more than 35,000 blogs, it was revealed that thousands of them were mixing English, Arabic and French (2009: 3). This would also apply to Nasser, who mainly blogs in English but also in Arabic. Moreover, in relation to political authorship, it is imperative to stress that vital parts of the Arabic blogosphere are written by authors in exile. As the medium of the blog is not restricted by any particular geographical boundaries, except when there is online censorship, bloggers have new opportunities to maintain the same audiences, as well as finding new ones, even if they are forced to leave their home countries.

The research question, how political authorship in exile is conditioned by the blog as a medium in the Arabic blogosphere, will be answered through an analysis of a selection of Nasser’s blog posts, from the 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011, as her first post in Arabic was published to the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015, as this thesis was completed. Naturally, focusing on a single authorship has its limitations in terms of representativity. However, it also has the advantages

of close readings of the texts and in-depth studies of the textual and hypertextual strategies employed by the author in a historically speaking new medium.

## 1.2 Background

Yemen is a censored media landscape, which is a topic of specific concern for Nasser. The 2014 Press Freedom Index, by Reporters Without Borders, showed that Yemen ranked close to the bottom, 168<sup>th</sup> of a total of 180 countries. According to this report, armed, non-state groups related to al-Qaeda were among those who constituted the deadliest threat to journalists in the Arabian Peninsula.

While being a journalist in Sana'a at the *Yemen Observer*, an English language Yemeni newspaper, Nasser turned to blogging in 2010 as a reaction to her experience that she could not write on topics regarding politics.<sup>1</sup> Further down the road, as the 2011 uprisings gained momentum, Nasser's own blog began to attract more and more attention, especially after being mentioned in an article at *CNN.com* (Davies 2011) and being featured by many international media outlets. In May 2011 Nasser left for Stockholm to participate in the Swedish Institute's Young Leaders Visitors Programme and she expected to return to Yemen after its completion. But during her stay in Sweden, the situation in Yemen turned more violent every day and she received threats through social media and telephone, and consequently chose to seek political asylum in Sweden.

Nasser currently lives in Gothenburg and is a graduate student in communication at the University of Gothenburg. In addition to her blogs, she works as a freelance journalist for various media outlets, including *The National*, *al-Arabi* magazine and Yemen's *al-Thawra* newspaper. Along with Hana al-Khamri she has taken the initiative to the Yemeni Salon, a meeting place for those interested in the complex political situation in the Arab world. In October 2014 Nasser was awarded the Dawit Isaak Prize for freedom of speech by the Swedish Publicists' Association. The statement made in connection to the award described Nasser as one of the "world's most important voices from the Middle East" (Publicistklubben 2014). In spring 2015, the magazine *Arabian Business* named her the 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The statement that Nasser could not write about politics is mentioned in various articles, see for example <http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/diktaturen-forsokte-tysta-henne> (accessed 2015-05-01) and <http://www.tedxgotborg.com/portfolio/afrah-nasser-the-human-rights-blogger> (accessed 2015-05-01). However, exactly what kind of topics related to politics is not specified.

most influential Arab under 40 (Arabian Business 2015).

## 2. Concepts and theory

Before analysing Nasser's blog authorship, it is necessary to present concepts and theories, which can help understanding how political exile authorships have been transformed by the blog as a medium. I will begin by discussing the medium-specific properties of the blog, and in what ways it creates new possibilities as well as boundaries for online discourse. Then I will attempt to understand blogs in relation to the notion of connected migrants. Finally, I will discuss aspects of the use of Arabic language in the context of blogging, with special regards to how linguistic variations can be utilized to tailor specific discourses that may be received by different audiences.

### 2.1 The blog

The blog as a medium differs from traditional analogue media, and this difference will serve as a backdrop for the analysis performed in this thesis. First, a blog is an immediate form of publishing. The moment the author chooses is the moment of publication; his or her writing potentially reaches a global audience, unless the Internet is censored. Second, it is a tool for self-publishing and there is no gatekeeper or editor present in a personal blog. The author herself makes every decision on what to publish and what not to publish. A third property of the blog as a medium consists of the absence of an upper limit on how much content can be published. The continuous updating of the blog results in a more fluid form of expression compared to a printed book or article because this way, it is always a work in progress (Pepe 2014: 221). The look of the blog – which is a result of the author's taste, knowledge, and preferences offered by the blog platform – may also transform several times during the lifetime of a blog.

Consequently, the author can combine text with video clips, images and hyperlinks to other websites, and thus integrate the blog with multiple intertextual references. This way, the narrative may expand into an almost infinite cyberspace, to “create open-ended fluidity, and situate intertextuality as an essential quality of cybertext” (Anishchenkova 2014, 188). Or, the narrative may also expand inwards, meaning that the author can collect and republish narratives from other sources, for example by re-posting Facebook-updates and newspaper articles, publishing screenshots from Twitter, and so on. Following Jill Walker, Teresa Pepe (2014: 218) uses the term “distributed narratives” to understand this disruption of

the conventional linear narrative. Moreover, many blogs also have a search function or a calendar, two features that further contribute to the non-linear character of the medium.

This combination of different elements may, Pepe (2014: 225) argues, result in a more active form of readership: “The multimodality of blogs also requires the reader to make an effort to interpret the text: he or she has to make sense of different semiotic resources. The meaning of the text stems from the combination of audio, video and visual elements.” Furthermore, this active form of readership is further expanded by the reader being able to comment directly in the blog, or share and comment on the content in other social media. This immediate dialogue contributes to a kind of presence between the reader and the author, which “demonstrates some elements of a storytelling discourse where the invisible audience of the virtual space replaces traditional life audience” (Anishchenkova 2014: 191). The interactivity between the reader and the author, which emerges from such presence, may affect what the author blogs about in future posts, but the reader's imprint in the form of comments is also a part of the narrative. In Pepe's (2014: 225) terminology, this complex relationship renders a “distributed authorship”.

According to Pepe (2014: 218), postmodern theories conceive of such distributed narratives as a reflection of the fragmented (postmodern) self. Likewise, Valerie Anishchenkova (2014: 174) argues that the blog medium “is particularly convenient for articulating fragmented subjectivities”. However, as convincingly explained by Diminescu (2008), there is an opposite movement present especially in migrant identities, as a consequence of digital narratives and computer mediated communication (CMC). As I will discuss later in this thesis, there is continuity in interactive communication, as opposed to postmodern theories and their emphasis on fragmentation. Here I will explore whether “presence at a distance” yields any significance for the exile authorship and how this creates continuity rather than disruption in maintaining an identity over time.

## 2.2 The connected migrant

An interesting concept for understanding political exile authorship is that of the “connected migrant”, as proposed by sociologist Dana Diminescu (2008) in “The connected migrant: an epistemological manifesto”. In this article Diminescu argues that new forms of ICT have changed the experience of being a migrant, by allowing them to stay connected to their homelands and uphold their personal relationships in new ways. Consequently, it is relevant

to talk about a new figure – the *connected migrant* – in lieu of the concept of the *uprooted migrant*, which suggests a permanent break with the homeland. Although transnational activities have been around in all forms of migration, Diminescu differentiates these activities as much more visible in present times. The concept of the connected migrant thus aims at describing a faster and more intense type of connectedness, enabled by the use of ICT that allow “today’s immigrants [to] develop networks, activities, life ‘styles’ and ideologies that form a link between their home country and the host country and which re-introduces them to mobility” (Diminescu 2008: 567). This means that the experience of migration changes as migrants can uphold contact with their home countries, relatives and friends, even on a daily or hourly basis. Diminescu (2008: 572) explains that “[t]he idea of ‘presence’ has thus become less physical, less ‘topological’ and more active and affective, just as the idea of absence is implicitly altered by these practices of communication and co-presence”.

This thesis will analyse Nasser’s authorship from this dynamic perspective, in which writing is enacted in a direct online environment that is framed by a different type of presence. Exile bloggers can be informed directly by their friends and families, but also by an online public sphere consisting of other bloggers and social media commentators. Both political and private events are increasingly taking place in online environments enabling Nasser to relate directly to them in an “active and affective way”, which in turn influences her authorship. This presence has also been examined by Kissau and Hunger (2010: 247) who propose that “[d]iaspora and transnational communities form *brigdes* between host and home countries. In analysing these bridges, the Internet can be used as a device, as these connections mainly consist of communicative relationships sustained, to a large degree, with the help of ICT”.

In similar respects, social anthropologist Hylland Eriksen has showed that using the Internet has helped to strengthen national identity among migrants. The wide opportunities to interact by sharing ideas and news regarding the home country has resulted in that “the Internet is fast becoming a major medium for the consolidation, strengthening and definition of collective identities, especially in the absence of a firm territorial and institutional base” (2007: 8).

Nevertheless, in this case study it is important to take into consideration the special circumstances inherent in what it means to be a *dissident in exile*, for example a curtailed freedom of movement. A similar critique of the assumed connectedness among

migrants has been raised by sociologist Roger Waldinger (2013: 765), highlighting that being a connected migrant is dependent on several socio-economic and political factors and because “[o]nly migrants equipped with the material resources and the legal entitlements needed to move back and forth across borders at will enjoy the full array of cross-border connections.” Moreover, Waldinger mentions the “digital divide” between rich and poor countries, which also has implications for the ability of migrants to maintain relationships between their host- and home countries.

Diminescu’s account is mainly sociological, so for my purpose of analysing one specific aspect of migration – the political authorship that emerges and further unfolds during such circumstances – I need to consider briefly the relation to a much more established field of analysis. While migration as a phenomenon, and ‘the migrant’ as an actor, fits well in sociological theory, literary theory has conceived of their expressions more in terms of exile authorship and literature. Even though the notion of exile has been sometimes associated with romanticised literary descriptions of the homeland (Mardorossian 2002, Said 2000), I still consider exile literature to be an interesting point of departure for creating a contrast to its digital counterpart: what could be called “Exile 2.0”, which is equipped with ICTs and all the new forms of expression they provide.

While Diminescu argues that there has been a paradigm shift between the uprooted and the connected migrant, the author and scholar Edward Said wants, on the other hand, to declare the whole notion of exile authorship obsolete in his essay “Reflections on exile” (2000). He argues that “[o]n the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible: at most the literature about exile objectifies an anguish and a predicament most people rarely experience first hand” (Said 2000: 174). In other words, Said wants to get rid of the romanticism inherent in much of the exile literature because it hides and even make the suffering of migration appear as banal. While I agree with these formulations of the problem, I think it is even more urgent to explore whether this is still valid in a new medium, one which allows for more voices to be heard, at least potentially.

Traditionally, the meaning of exile has been portrayed as a condition of permanent loss and a sense of not belonging. In this context Said’s understanding of exile stands in stark contrast to the concept of the connected migrant because “exile, unlike nationalism, is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being. Exiles are cut off from their roots, their land, their past.” (Said 2000: 177). The connected migrant challenges the extent to

which Said's description of exile remains meaningful in an age of digital communications, where the homeland is no longer completely and forever left behind, but rather, social relations can be maintained and the presence of exile struggles can be mediated online.

However, for this discussion to be valid, it is necessary to consider blogs as literature.<sup>2</sup> As Pepe (2014: 177) notices, the fluid form in blogs makes it necessary to speak of it as a specific literary genre. There are also examples of how Arabic blogs have found their way into printed literature. For example, in 2008 the Egyptian publishing house *Dār al-Šurūq* published several Egyptian blogs in book format. I agree here with Pepe's suggestion that blogs can be viewed as a form of literature. Studies that have focused specifically on the content of Arabic exile blogs are difficult to find, in comparison to research on authorship in exile and in diaspora which is abundant in the field of comparative literature. However, it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a summary of this field since exile literature in its general form is not the subject matter of this thesis. Instead, I am interested in the forms of authorship that take place in social media, especially blogs, and in what ways ICTs enable and transform such diasporic discourses.

## 2.3 Language in the Arabic blogosphere

Central to understanding contemporary Arabic forms of expression is the notion of diglossia, as originally coined by Ferguson (Bassiouney 2009: 10-11; Pepe 2014: 233–234). Diglossia means that language consists of one low- and one high variety. In Arabic this means that in one end of a continuum consists of the spoken, colloquial Arabic, which is the mother tongue of the speaker and is used in less formal milieus. At the other end resides the classical Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) as it appears in the Qur'an. In reality, recent researchers, such as Elsaïd Badawi has shown that there is no sharp boundary between the low variety and the high variety, but rather that it is a question of a continuum, and that the one who speaks adapts a variety of words by sociolinguistic factors, such as subject, situation and the target audience. While a mixture of these varieties are not unique to blogs, they do challenge the boundaries between

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<sup>2</sup> In an article published by the Swedish online magazine *Feministiskt Perspektiv*, Nasser (2014) stated that she regarded blogs as a literary genre, arguing that “[f]eminist blogs is the latest branch of the Arab feminist literature that has long challenged the patriarchal dominance in the Arab world.” [“Feministiska bloggare är den senaste grenen av den arabiska feministiska litteraturen som länge utmanat den patriarkala dominansen i arabvärlden.”]

the private and public sphere, and both Pepe (2014: 237) and Ramsay (2012: 84) stress that Arabic CMC needs to be further researched.

In the present analysis, I will make use of the term Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is based on Classical Arabic. Furthermore, I will apply a similar strategy as Ramsay (2012: 50) below, to make a broad distinction between MSA, Yemeni colloquial Arabic (YCA) and a mixed variety:

While acknowledging that there exist at least ‘three different varieties of Arabic in each Arab country’, as expressed by Reem Bassiouney, we will in this article distinguish broadly between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Egyptian dialect/Egyptian Colloquial Arabic (ECA) as distinct code levels. In addition, we will speak of mixed variety without further distinguishing between the mixed varieties as specified by Bassiouney.

In the vein of Arabic sociolinguist Reem Bassiouney (2009: 29-31), I will also regard switching between colloquial varieties, MSA, and other languages, as instances of code-switching (CS). Building on Bassiouney’s findings revealing that the choice of code depends on the audience the speaker aims to address, Ramsay (2012: 83) confirmed that this applied to the five Egyptian blogs she analysed. This also corresponds to Pepe’s (2014: 228) example of how the Egyptian blogger Mona Seif used CS from MSA to ECA to filter her audience when she wrote about sexual harassment in Egypt, but switched to English when she blogged about the protests in the Tahrir Square to communicate with international media.

In addition to the use of YCA, this thesis will also consider CMC and blogs to further complicate the relation between spoken and written language (Ramsay 2012: 50). Anishchenkova (2014: 174) argues that “[c]yberwriting as a medium – with possibilities for endless textual manipulation, alternation, and deletion – is as much related to oral folktradition or storytelling as it is to written self-referential accounts”. Pepe (2014: 244) also provides examples of expressions “aimed at reproducing oral discourse” in Arabic blogs. These include extended vowels and childish expressions, conjunctions typical for speech (“yā rabb”, “allaaaah”) and an unconventional, erratic use of punctuation.

Ultimately the blog author has a variety of linguistic codes to choose from, since personal blogs are self-published. What will be explored in the analysis is how this form of dialogue is constructed in computer mediated discourse (CMD), especially when combined with a distributed narrative as a way of generating a sense of both proximity and familiarity,

for example when re-posting texts written in a casual spoken form rather than as formal writing (see Anishchenkova 2014: 192).

### 3. Method and materials

The corpus under investigation in this thesis consists of two blogs created by Nasser. *Afrahnasser.blogspot.com* is Nasser's first blog, dating back to the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2010, and it was from its inauguration exclusively written in English. However, as the wave of protests unfolded in Tunisia, Egypt and, later on, in Yemen, Nasser began blogging also in Arabic. Over the years, the blog has undergone several changes. In 2012 the comment functionality was removed and in 2013 the blog returned to being English language only.

In December 2013, Nasser created her second blog *al-Dīmūqrāṭiyya kalima murra* (Democracy is a bitter word), which is connected to her first blog by a link in the menu bar. Here all entries are written in Arabic, and over the 17 months that the blog has existed, a total of 14 posts have been published. There are no comments from readers on the blog, despite the presence of such functionality. Instead the readers have commented on Nasser's personal Facebook page, where she reposts the blog content. In the first post, '*An al-mudawwana* (About the blog, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013), she describes the blog title and the purpose, as "inspired by one of the quotes of the late Yemeni journalist Abd al-Ḥalīb Sālim Muqbil (1961-1995), and this sentence was, 'democracy is a bitter word'". In the description she also mentions that the header is designed by Abdulrahman Jaber, who according to his Twitter profile<sup>3</sup> is another Yemeni citizen in exile who currently lives in Istanbul.

The analysis is based on selected posts from both of Nasser's blogs, which were published during the time of the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2011 to the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2015. The first date is selected because it coincides with the beginning of the uprisings in Tunisia, which is a decisive moment in Nasser's writing as a blogger, leading up to her exile. The second date is chosen because it designates the last post on *al-Dīmūqrāṭiyya kalima murra* at the time of writing (May 2015).

I have read through all blog posts between the selected dates in chronological order. To create an overview, I marked the posts according to the following categories: date, original language, author, main content (theme) and multimediality. From this overview, I have selected a number of blog posts for close reading in the analysis. A list of all the selected blog entries, their title, date and URL are included in the bibliography.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://twitter.com/arjaber>, (Accessed 2015-04-20).

To understand how political writing is related to, and in some cases leads to, a condition of exile, I will depart in Nasser's writing during the wave of protests that swept across the MENA in the end of 2010 and throughout 2011. As she is forced into exile, the blog undergoes many changes, not only in terms of the topics of her writing, but also, as I will show, Nasser's use of the blog as a medium is developed in new directions. To make such contrasts clearer, the analysis is structured around this moment of disruption between writing about uprisings and exile, even though I deviate at times from a chronological presentation, in favour instead of the categories of analysis as specified below.

To structure the analysis of Nasser's writing I defined three general categories of analysis that are of special interest to the aim of this thesis. The first category concerns the (multi-)medial strategies employed by Nasser in her blogging, consisting of inter- and hypertextual elements that, in turn, make possible both a distributed narrative (by linking other text) and a distributed authorship (by readers' comments and inserting other author's works). Moreover, the mediality also allows for a variable degree of interactivity. The second category entails the time and space dimensions of blogging, in relation to connectedness and presence at a distance. Here I analyse how the use of ICTs make a "connected migrant" possible. Third, the category of expressivity analyses linguistic and textual strategies, concerning diglossia, oral and written forms of expression and CS.

### 3.1 Notes on translation and transcription

The translations in the thesis are my own, unless otherwise stated. I have avoided to mark spelling errors in the original quoted text. The quotations in Arabic are written in the Arabic alphabet and given English translations. According to the guidelines by Isaksson (2010), all Arabic names and titles appear as pausal transcriptions and have been italicised, e.g. *al-Dīmūqrāṭiyya kalima murra*. But in those cases where the names have an established spelling in English, I have followed such conventions, e.g. Afrah Nasser.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 The uprisings

In 2011 Nasser's blog took a turn towards political activism as the uprisings known as "the Arab Spring" gained momentum. In a post entitled *I wish I were a Tunisian* (15<sup>th</sup> January 2011) Nasser commented the Tunisian people's uprising against Ben Ali, which had culminated on the 14<sup>th</sup> of January, and expressed solidarity with the Tunisian people. She compared the dictator Ben Ali with the Yemeni president and listed the reasons why she believed that Yemen would not be able to repeat what the Tunisians had done – this way articulating how she wished she "were a Tunisian", so that she could take part in the revolution. Also, because Yemen's national radio station did not mention the revolution, Nasser expressed that the post she had written had probably stepped across the boundaries of Yemeni freedom of speech. The post ended with the sentence: "Most importantly, it's VERY LIKELY that I disappear after posting this article." With this post, and those that would follow, Nasser changed the discourse of her writing, moving away from the previous style of 'journalistic objectivity' towards an engaged form of activist blogging. This can be interpreted as the beginning of a new direction in her digital narrative.

Two weeks later, the protests had spread to Egypt and Yemen, taking place both in the streets across the MENA region and on digital platforms, which affected the way Nasser authored her blog, in terms of stylistic, linguistic and thematic choices. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, in the midst of the Tahrir Square protests in Egypt, she published her very first blog post in Arabic, *Al-faḥr kull al-faḥr li-ša'b miṣr al-'aẓīm* (All credit to the great Egyptian people), addressed directly to the Egyptian people. The tribute to the Egyptian people was combined with an illustration depicting a screaming man, and a text in Arabic and English saying: *Tawrat al-ḡaḍab mustamirra Revolution Anger* (The continuous Revolution of Anger). By writing the text in MSA (except for the dialectal word *lammā*, 'when'), Nasser here turned to all connected Arabs who sought news about the ongoing protests. Although the text conveyed frustration and admiration, it still retained the certain formal and journalistic style of her previous

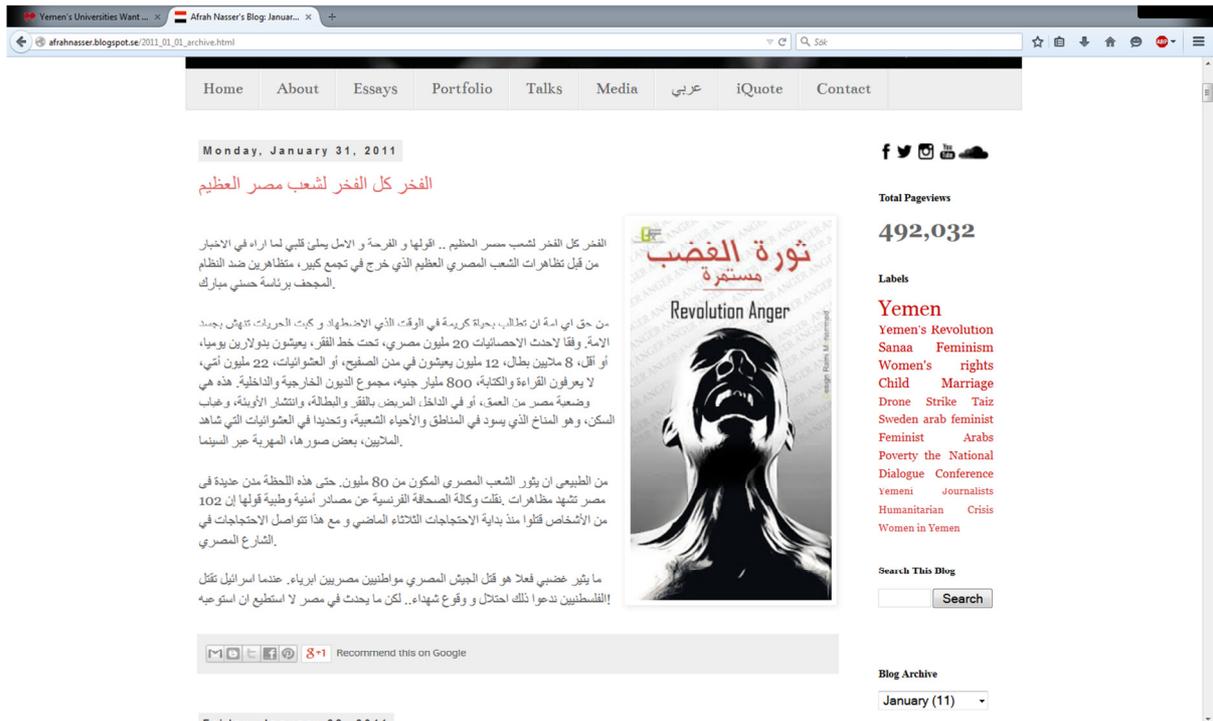


Figure 1 Nasser's first blog post in Arabic, *Al-fahr kull al-fahr li-ša'b miṣr al-'aẓīm* (The outmost pride to the great Egyptian people), screenshot 2015-05-25.

English writing, for example by referring to statistics and sources.

A few days earlier, Nasser had written in English about Tawakkol Karman, the Yemeni activist who received the Nobel Peace Prize later the same year, and how she took to the streets with “a pure sense of nationalism /.../ to send a message that Yemen is not satisfied with its government anymore and it needs an immediate change!” (*Yemen is waking up!*, 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011). Nasser's call to the Egyptian people in the midst of the protests, as mentioned above, contained a similar understanding the notion of nationalism in relation to the people. In her vocabulary, ‘Yemen’ and ‘Egypt’ denote ‘the people’, as opposed to the ‘government’ of these countries, which contributes to a revolutionary tone to her writing during this period of time.

During the following month Nasser reported in English about the protests in the country, directly from the demonstrations in al-Tahrir Square in Sana’a, and about her dreams of a new Yemen. In connection to Mubarak’s resignation she argued that, “Yemenis’ imagination got really unleashed and they do now want to have the same Tunisian and Egyptian experiences.” (*In Love I Trust*, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2011)

Nasser’s previous suspicion that her new open blogging and the reporting on the

protests in Yemen would have consequences proved to be right, when she received the first threatening message on Facebook 13<sup>th</sup> March 2011. Nasser posted the threat along a translation one day after it had been sent to her, with the title of her blog post written in both MSA and English: *A threatening message I received on my Facebook – risāla tahdīd talaqqaituhā ‘alā al-fīsbūk*. The post consists of an inserted screenshot, depicting the message. Nasser’s reply to the sender, Hamed (his last name is removed), stated ironically: “Thank you for your nice message, respected reader”. Hamed had written that Nasser was “educated” in his message, making the point that she belonged to a rare elite in Yemen. The message also gave the impression that the person behind it knew her by describing her family situation.

Nasser’s short and polite answer, written in a formal style stands in stark contrast to the threatening and affective message penned by Hamed, whose writing consists of a mixture of MSA, YCA, oral expression and repeated punctuation. Before ending the message, Hamed repeats the word *aṣḥī aṣḥī* aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa (wake up, waaaaaaaaaake up), as if he is screaming to get through with his message. This is an example of the informal style of spoken language, which is common for social media status updates, and how it may be inserted into the blog. Also, it is an instance of the boundary between public and private spaces becoming blurred, by taking something from a private chat and making it public to anyone on the Internet.

In May 2011 Nasser left for Stockholm to participate in the Swedish Institute’s Young Leaders Visitors Programme and she expected to return to Yemen after its completion. During this trip, she published another threat directed towards her in the entry *Journalists Under Attack in Yemen* (30<sup>th</sup> May 2011). The sender called himself “Ali Yemen” on Facebook, a pseudonym for someone who is loyal to the government and the president Saleh. Although the message contained several words in YCA, the style of this brief, threatening message, was more conservative than the previous one. This is illustrated in the final line written by Ali Yemen, which is a tribute to the president Saleh, where the author chose to use MSA:

My warm greetings to you. I know that you are outside the country. I wish you be back very soon so I could teach you an unforgettable lesson as a response for all the disrespectful words you said against the dear Mr. President Ali Abdullah Saleh, may Allah bless him!" (Nasser's translation.)

تحياتي الحارة اليكي وانا علا علم انك خارج البلاد راتمنى انا ترجعي باسرع ما يمكن لكي لغتك درس لن  
تنسيه ردا علا كل كلمات الجارحة لفخامة سيادة الرئيس علي عبد الله صالح حفظه الله

This can be interpreted along the lines of Ramsay, who argues that “MSA is the language of officialdom, Islam and unity and connects the Muslims with a glorious past” (Ramsay 2012: 63), as a way of expressing loyalty and respect to the president. Consequently, the same way as the blog and social media makes it possible to write about topics that challenge the public discourse, it is also an effective way for the regime’s supporters to monitor and harass dissidents.

In an interview for Reuters, Nasser talked about her decision to seek political asylum in Sweden, which then became the theme for two blog entries, *Reflections about the Interview with Reuters* (15<sup>th</sup> June 2011) and *Ta ‘qībā ‘alā muqābalatī ma ‘a rūytirz* (17<sup>th</sup> June 2011). In these posts, Nasser responded to a number of reactions she had received regarding the interview. With this strategy of publishing the same message in two languages, Nasser made sure to reach out to as many readers as possible. However, the entry in MSA deviates slightly from the English one, for example in the fifth paragraph where Nasser defends her decision to stay in Sweden, describing the situation of journalists in Yemen in greater detail, in comparison to the English text.

## 4.2 Feminism in colloquial Arabic

Despite her physical absence from Yemen, Nasser has employed a number of strategies for staying connected to the Yemeni domestic politics, and to report on current events on her blog. Besides a steady stream of mainstream news, covering topics such as the presidential elections, The National Dialogue Conference and US drone strikes, Nasser has also reported on human rights, women’s rights, child marriages and press freedom.

One central commitment in Nasser’s blogging concerns sexual harassment in Yemen. Also, the posts that cover this topic are among the few ones in which Nasser has switched to YCA in her writing, a phenomenon similar to the above mentioned case with Egyptian blogger Mona Seif who switched to ECA when discussing this issue. The first post bears the title *Anā ka-bint yamaniyya miš mustaḥiya innī agūlu innī ‘ānaytu min al-taḥarruṣ*

*wa-lā ziltu u'ānī* (I'm as a Yemeni girl not ashamed to say I suffered from sexual harassment and I'm still suffering, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2012), and was re-posted by Safe Streets (a campaign raising awareness about sexual violence against women in Yemen) on their Facebook page. Interestingly, it was also reworked into a book chapter and published by Safe Streets the same year, but then it was translated into MSA. As the title of the post suggests, the topic of sexual harassment is sensitive in a Yemeni context, and is to be described from the perspective of personal experiences. Here, YCA functions as a way of telling a story from a first-person angle, with childhood memories and personal encounters with sexual harassment on public transportations in Yemen.

Nasser's next post on the topic, published later the same year, was also written in YCA, but in an angry and frustrated tone, clearly conveyed by the title *Law ḥadd gālī marra t̄ānī innu 'eeb natakalām 'an al-taḥarruṣ bagallah ṭab'an #@%&...* (If somebody says to me again that it's shameful to talk about harassment then I will say to him of course #@%& ..., 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012). Nasser wrote the post as a response to comments she had received after having discussed sexual harassment on Facebook. It includes many linguistic elements aiming to reproduce oral discourse, such as *riḡāāāāāāl* (meeeeeen), *wāāāāāāqi'* (reaaaality) and typical features of computer mediated discourse, such as “:\” and “&%@#”. The post shows how the distributed narrative allows the content on Facebook and the blog to merge, and how Nasser responds to a conversation in another platform.

Another instance of integrating Facebook comments in her narrative is revealed in the post *Fatāh yamaniyya taksiru ḥāḡiz al-ṣamt wa-tataḥaddatu 'an al-taḥarruṣ al-ḡinsī* (Yemeni girl breaking the silence and talks about sexual harassment, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2012). After the previous post on sexual harassment, Nasser was contacted by a Yemeni girl on Facebook. Their private messages were reposted on the blog by Nasser to follow up on the previous posts. The text switches codes from MSA to YCA, with Nasser writing in MSA, maintaining a formal style as she introduces the confessions of the anonymous Facebook friend. However, by preserving the informal style of the chat messages in YCA, a contrast to the “authentic” personal testimony is maintained.

### 4.3 Distributed authorship

As seen above, the potential to integrate various narratives into the fabric of the blog allows Nasser to connect to and comment on events taking place in Yemen as well as it enables her

to convey her emotions in a wide spectrum. In the following section I will focus on the importance of the functionality of creating multimedial content and a distributed narrative.

Nasser's blog often contains other forms of expression than texts, such as videos or pictures, which have been authored by other people. This form of distributed authorship and narrative is illustrated by the fact that the vast majority of Nasser's content in MSA originates from other sources, mostly from news articles that Nasser has chosen to feature on her blog. Hence, in this respect, Nasser's blog authorship also involves an editorship. For example, of the eleven blog posts during the period of 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> June 2011, Nasser was the original author of only one single post. The other authors were: reporter at the Reuters News Agency Noah Browning, The International Federation for Human Rights, the Yemeni activist Bushra al-Maqtari, Ahmad al-Zarqa, two texts by Tawakkol Karman, one unknown author, Atiaf al-Wazir who is the author of the blog *Woman from Yemen*, photographs by Reem Jarhum, and finally a text by Fares Anam. Five of these blog entries were written in MSA, the rest in English.

The use of other people's Facebook status updates is another important strategy employed by Nasser for creating a distributed authorship leading to her being able to report on what is happening in Yemen. For example, the entry *Limādā narfiḍu 'askarat ḡāmi'at san'ā'*... (Why do we reject the militarization of the University of Sana'a..., 10<sup>th</sup> October 2012) contains a verbatim copy of an update posted by Shibab Masri, a Yemeni student. It concerns the militarization of the University of Sana'a and its campuses, which has been a contentious issue since the protests in early 2011 and a subject that Nasser herself has written about previously on her blog. She has also publicly supported the campaign "Ana Nazel", which aims at counteracting the military's presence on campus (*Activists Continue Campaigning against Militarizing Universities' Campuses in Sanaa*, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012). By inserting Masri's Facebook update into her own blog post Nasser inserts a personal experience of his encounter with the military into her own narrative, almost as if she had interviewed him. This brings a sense of presence into Nasser's blog, and this way, the subject of militarization of the university can be addressed with a first-hand account by re-using a narrative by someone else, who was actually there. The post also features another text written by Samia al-Aghbari, a woman who is not further introduced. It is a call for action and announces that there will be a protest against the militarization of the same university, specifying the time and place:

Be with them tomorrow Wednesday to participate in their rejection of the militarization of their university. The location of the rally is in front of the Faculty of Commerce, East Gate, at the University of Sana'a, ten o'clock in the morning.

كونوا معهم غدا الاربعاء للمشاركة في رفضهم عسكرة جامعتهم

نقطه التجمع امام كلية التجارة البوابة الشرقية لجامعة صنعاء الساعة العاشرة صباحا

Here the distributed narrative is mobilized to encourage people to participate in a protest. Also here, the blog creates a form of presence where Nasser is able to communicate with people who may have the opportunity to participate in events that will take place in Sana'a very soon in time. But, writing in MSA on her worldwide blog platform also works to inform a wider, Arabic speaking, readership on the unfolding of the revolution in Yemen.

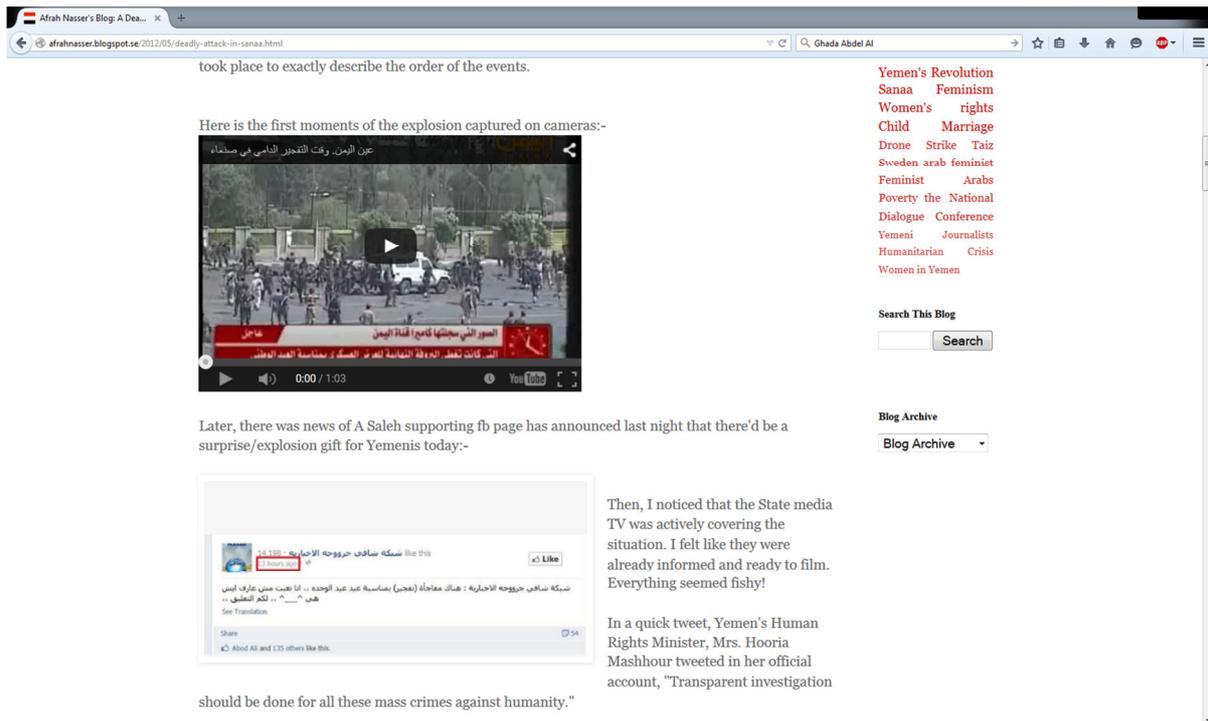


Figure 2. A deadly attack in Sanaa, screenshot 2015-05-25

Another entry, *A deadly attack in Sanaa* (22<sup>nd</sup> May 2012), is an example of distributed narrative in relation to news and citizen journalism. The main topic of the post is a suicide attack by al-Qaeda in the capital Sana'a. To show that there was something “fishy” about the attack, Nasser published a screenshot from a Facebook support page for the former President

Saleh, which warned people about the terrorist attack before it had actually happened. Nasser also inserted a statement made on Twitter from Yemen's Human Rights Minister, Hooria Mashhour, as well as photographs and Youtube-videos, both depicting the explosion and a televised speech by the President Hadi (see Figure 2). With this intertextual information, which is linked from other sources in social media, Nasser manages to create and comment on recent events almost as if she were in Sana'a. The few markers of that she is not on site, are revealed only by her concern for the family's safety in the capital. However, because she can reach them on the phone, she is also able to report back on Yemenis' reactions to the incident, which she then adds to the story in the blog post. The narrative is also expanded by a link back to one of her previous post about the American journalist Jeremy Schahill, and his criticism of the US drone strikes, which is a way of providing self-authored context to the news events.

Through the different sources, Nasser creates a critical view of the "official story" and which resembles the genre of citizen journalism. Thanks to social media, language skills and knowledge of the national domestic policy, she is able to engage in this form of journalism from Sweden.

#### 4.4 Exile 2.0

As I'm being told that I'm labeled now as an "immigrant" in Sweden (But I'm a blogger in exile), I walk on streets and see Swedes walking normally and peacefully. I get confused. I feel I want to scream out loud, "HELLO! my people are being killed in my country, will you care please?!!" (*My Heart Aches Deeply for Yemen*, 17<sup>th</sup> October 2011)

In the quote above, Nasser identified as a "blogger in exile", rather than an "immigrant", during her first months in Sweden. She described in the same post that while she was living in Sweden and studying "about being an 'immigrant'", her mind was instead occupied by thoughts of Yemen. Even though Nasser was blogging and tweeting to inform the surrounding world, she expressed feelings of weakness and helplessness when facing the Yemenis' situation – especially when they turned to her and ask for help to flee the country. The medium of the blog allows her to continue moving further away from the journalistic style of writing she had before the uprisings, instead using a more casual discourse as she describes the frustration of forced exile. The post continues:

Messages and emails from people I know and I don't know are pouring into my inboxes asking me to help them immigrate. They write to me that they can't take it anymore. I get shocked and paralyzed as I'm reading those messages. What shall I reply!! I can't help it but get depressed because of the bleak current situation and pain people from Yemen have to endure.

The quote highlights a recurring theme in Nasser's exile blogging. Her feelings about living in exile are deeply intertwined with her direct communication with her homeland, and she narrates this experience with direct references to emails, tweets and video clips. This way, exile is expressed as an ever ongoing dialogue with events that take place in the very moment as they happen, rather than in the form of memories of past events. People Nasser knows, her family and people she does not yet know appear in her writing, in a direct form of online discourse.

But even when she recounts memories in her blog, they are narrated by hypermedia. For example, in the entry *Childhood; the Palm of Innocence* (11<sup>th</sup> March 2012) Nasser remembers her childhood as her happiest time in life, and she writes: "Then, (thanks to Youtube) I was able to have a glimpse of that. I youtubed couple clips of very old cartoons that I used to watch during the 90s with my younger sister." Similarly, in the entry *Nostalgia* (13<sup>th</sup> January 2013) Nasser mediates her feelings with a song, *Wahrān Wahrān* (Oran Oran) by the Algerian singer Cheb Khaled. It is sung in Algerian dialect, but by adding a description of the song, Nasser explains that it is about "nostalgia and people living in exile". It is worth noticing here that the genre of Raï music, to which the singer Khaled belongs, has been regarded as subversive in Algeria and the city of Oran from which it originated. Hence, many musicians (including Khaled), have been forced to move to France and other European countries. The lyrics centres around the concept of *ḡurba*, meaning exile intertwined with feelings of alienation and homesickness. Here, embedding a song about exile, in itself regarded as subversive, helps Nasser to express identification with other Arabs living in exile, missing their home countries. The post as a whole is also an interesting case of Nasser introducing Arabic lyrics to an English-speaking audience as a way of describing how badly she misses Yemen.

Arabs in diaspora is also the subject of the song *Fī al-ḡalīd* (In the ice), in the entry with the same title published on *al-Dīmūqrāṭiyya kalima murra*, the 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015. The song is a collaboration of a Lebanese and a Jordanian rap duo, El Rass and Munma, and Nasser writes, in MSA, that the song "embodies the image of the reality of the fact that a lot

of Arab refugees and migrants in European countries.” The starting point of the entry is Nasser’s memories from her childhood of relatives immigrating to the USA. She continues to reflect on why so many Yemenis see migration as a path to a better life. She then asks herself how she ended up in the diaspora, in the ice. Again, she returns to the image of her inbox overflowing with messages, “like a waterfall”, from Yemenis who want to immigrate. They ask if she is happy in Sweden, giving rise to mixed feelings. She does not know if she should describe Sweden as heaven or hell. But she does not stop at her own feelings but she uses the song’s theme to talk about other refugees she has met. The title of the song is also used as a musical leitmotif in her text, which gives it a poetic nuance. She tells about a Kurdish woman Ūrās, who was raped on the way to Sweden, and an Iranian film director, Nasrīn, who paid 15,000 dollars to be smuggled to Sweden and then ended up in a Swedish prison. In this way the stories of the immigrants is a continuation of the song by El Rass and Mumna, who raps about scattered Arabs – from Lampedusa and the refugee camp Zaatari, to the northern European cities Rostock, Copenhagen and Stockholm.

Lending a voice to a collective experience of migration is a theme that Nasser touches on a little further down in the same post, when she writes about her feeling guilty because she is considered useful by the host country, which makes her privileged in comparison to other refugees:

Your weapon is to transform this usefulness to serve the vulnerable and those who do not have a voice against this racist, class system.

سلاحك هو أن تُحوّل تلك الفائدة لخدمة الضعفاء ومن ليس لهم صوت في وجه هذا النظام العنصري  
الطبقي.

This ambition is tangible in several other posts, especially in the post *Fī al-makān al-ḥaṭa’ wa al-tawqīt al-ḥaṭa’*: *riḥlat muwāṭin yamanī min al-yaman ilā al-qāhira fī wasaṭ al-ḥarb* (In the wrong place at the wrong time: A journey of a Yemeni citizen from Yemen to Cairo in the middle of the war, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2015) published on *al-Dīmūqrāṭiyya kalima murra*. The post, written in MSA, consists of a long autobiographical account written by Fahd Aqlan, who published a text on Facebook and Nasser then chose to republish it on her blog. Aqlan, introduces himself in the text as a Yemeni who moved to Egypt eight years ago. In March 2015, he travelled to Yemen to attend his brother’s wedding in Taiz. During the visit, the situation worsened and he tried to get out of the country, but the air traffic was down because

of bomb attacks. As the title suggests, Aqlan's journey back to Cairo is a very long and arduous trip in the middle of the war. This way, it marks a very recent testimony of the escalating situation in Yemen in spring 2015 and have to date been shared 348 times on Facebook. In the context of Nasser's blog it becomes part of a larger story about what it means to be a Yemeni and in exile.

In spring 2015, as the civil war in Yemen culminated in air strikes by Saudi Arabia, Nasser felt compelled to provide an answer to the question: How to apply for asylum in Sweden? The title of the post is *Naṣā'ih 'amma 'an al-luġū' fī al-suwīd* (General tips for asylum in Sweden, 19<sup>th</sup> April 2015) and the entry begins with an explanation:

Salvation today is immigration, which is mandatory and not an option, because our Arab region is in the centre of an immense historical change, in the centre of a volcano that will affect everyone around it.

الخلاص اليوم هو الهجرة، وهو أمر إلزامي وليس إختياري، فمنظقتنا العربية في وسط تغيير تاريخي  
جسيم، في وسط بركان سيطل كل من حوله.

The post begins with a description of the consequences of war. She also believes that it is necessary to escape the war in the future to build a new Yemen. From the more poetic introduction, she goes on to respond to questions of practical information on asylum and the housing situation in Sweden. Among other things, she links to an article with further information about the asylum application published on *al-Kompis*, an Arabic online newspaper in Sweden. Finally, she writes that the reader is welcome to submit additional questions in the comments field. The post is also republished on her Facebook page, where she today has close to 6000 followers.

#### 4.5 Exile Poetry

Lastly, I will address two poems about exile that Nasser published in 2012 on *afrahnasserblogspot.com*. Since Nasser has only published two poems over four years, it is an uncommon form of expression for her blog as a whole. Rather, they should be seen as examples of the mixture of languages and genres typical of the blog medium. The first poem, *I am a refugee in Sweden* (3<sup>rd</sup> January 2012) was written in English, while the other poem

*Suriqa qalbī*. (My heart was stolen<sup>4</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2012) was penned in a mixed variety of YCA and MSA.<sup>5</sup>

In the first poem Nasser elaborates her feelings of estrangement in exile, by describing scenes from her life as a refugee in Sweden; going to “state’s offices alone”, encountering other refugees who also carry immense suffering, receiving suspicious glances in public places. Between the four verses of the poem, the phrase “I am a refugee in Sweden” is repeated. Furthermore, the rhetorical device of anaphora is applied in verses one, two and four, which makes it very coherent. The also expresses gratitude for her Swedish friends who support her, inviting the reader to understand her situation by giving glimpses of her life as a stranger in Sweden.

The other poem is both similar and very different. The theme consists of a more abstract longing after Yemen, rather than the everyday life in Sweden, and can be interpreted as a love poem to Yemen. Yet, Nasser uses the same style of repetition, by introducing every line with the words *suriqa qalbī*, then ending each line with two dots. The poem consists only of a verse, and below there is an attached photograph, showing two hands holding up two parts of the same heart. The fear that she will never find the other “half of her heart” in a future return to Yemen, invokes a theme resembling Said’s description of exile, namely the possibility of having forever lost a key attachment to the homeland, and indeed, this could be interpreted as an expression of rootlessness. Although it is an example of literary writing in a blog, the colloquial language adds a tone of intimacy, as if the reader gets access to her innermost feelings, as expressed in her mother tongue.

The two poems bring on the one hand a style of literariness to the political blog, while also communicating emotions related to exile. On the other hand, they are addressed to

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<sup>4</sup> The title could also be interpreted as meaning “He/It stole my heart”. However, I base my translation into the passive form of “My heart was stolen” on the other phrase present in the poem “انه مش حرامي” (it has no thief), which would not make sense if “he/it” stole the heart.

<sup>5</sup> Notably, the occurrence of poetry in a political blog is present in another Yemeni blog, called “Notes by Noon”, which is written under the pseudonym “Noon”. In these poems, in both English and MSA, the author begins each line with an anaphora, i.e. a repetition of a phrase, in the same manner as Nasser. See for example <http://notesbynoon.blogspot.se/2011/08/i-dream-of-yemen.html> (accessed 2015-05-23) and [http://notesbynoon.blogspot.se/2011/09/blog-post\\_14.html](http://notesbynoon.blogspot.se/2011/09/blog-post_14.html) (accessed 2015-05-23). But based on just these two blogs, it is too early to say whether this would be a typical phenomenon in Yemeni blogs.

very different readers (English and Arabic speaking), even if they are written on the same theme, portraying a personal split between the two countries Yemen and Sweden.

## 5. Discussion

“I’m a foreigner at my own country simply because I’m a journalist!”

The quote above are the first words written by Nasser on her blog, in the entry *To blog or not to blog? that’s the question!* (28<sup>th</sup> January 2010). Here she presents her modest expectations on the blog as a medium, when describing the purpose of the blog as an archive to some of her journalistic work and maybe as a place where she is able to “think loudly”. However, being a woman who works as a journalist and writes in English in Yemen is, Nasser argues, an “unusual” combination. This way, as quoted above, the first steps of her blog authorship expresses a form of estrangement with regards to her predicament. Feeling like an “expatriate” in your own country as a blogger, is interestingly also noted by literature theorist and writer Sahar el-Mougy in a description of Egyptian bloggers (Pepe 2014: 272).

It is, however, upon leaving Yemen that Nasser begins to continually return to her experience of exile through the blog as a medium, using its multimedial and intertextual functions which, I will argue, create new conditions for exile literature. These conditions can be related to the notion of uprootedness in Said’s essay “Reflections on Exile”, as previously discussed. But, unlike the Said’s examples of exile authors, Nasser’s social and working life is deeply intertwined with mobile technologies and the Internet.

The continuity in Nasser’s writing is preserved by making use of the multimedia features of the blog medium. Nasser utilizes the web archives both as a memory practice and a discursive practice in her blog – either to share memories with the reader, or to connect to recent events in Yemen. Moreover, by embedding songs and movies in the posts, Nasser expresses identification with the predicaments of both Yemenis and other Arabs living in exile. This can be compared with Pepe’s (2014: 225) observation of hypermediality in Egyptian blogs, where videos from Youtube are very popular, and one of the bloggers examined always included a song “as a means to reproduce the writer’s mood during the post’s composition, and to put the readers in the same atmosphere”. Through Nasser’s ‘curating’ of content created by other authors, these narratives are threaded as a string of pearls, rather than scattered in cyberspace. This relates to Kissau and Hunger’s (2010: 247) observation that “[d]iaspora and transnational communities form *brigdes* between host and home countries”.

Regarding whether exile literature is still meaningful as a description of a literary genre, Said (2010: 174) argues that exile literature cannot convey the scale of suffering in modern mass migration. However, the blog medium easily allows the autonomy of the author to be challenged by a polyphony of voices. This is seen in the republishing of the Yemeni-Egyptian Fahd Aqlan, who was a previously unknown author until he posted his story of fleeing from Yemen on Facebook.

Anishchenkova (2014: 199) stresses the importance of collective identity in Arab autobiographical accounts, be it in online discourse, film, photography, or novels. For example, Egyptian blogger Ghada Abdel Al writes, according to Anishchenkova, in a way that claims to speak in the name of an entire group of Egyptian women in her blog. There is a similar ambition in Nasser's blog authorship, which claims to speak for a group who are often invisible in the public sphere, such as migrants and refugees. This representative aspect is also clearly present in the way Nasser's blogs are influenced by an online discourses stemming from other Arabic blogs or discussions taking place on Facebook.

But even though the blog is potentially a medium that increases freedom of expression, Anischenkova (2014: 193) points out that reality often looks different: “[Egyptian blogger] Abdel Aal sees the Internet as ‘restrictive’ and looks at the book publication of her blog as something that would set it free”. Indeed feeling monitored or to receiving threatening and misogynist comments could lead to a form of self-censorship. Blogging may lead to terrible consequences under repressive conditions, as in the case of Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to flogging for his critical writing online. However, also the opposite could be said to be at work in the public character of blogs. For example, by publishing threatening messages in a public sphere context, Nasser used her blog to resist those who tried to silence her by gaining attention from an international audience. The blog allowed her to immediately make the threats public, using screenshots to increase the authenticity, something that consequently also made her a public person.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis has examined how political authorship in exile is being transformed, and thus conditioned, by ICT-enabled blogging in the context of the Arabic blogosphere. This question was investigated through an analysis of Nasser's blog authorship, resulting in a number of qualitative conclusions.

The main research finding consists of uncovering a form of presence in Nasser's exile writing and authorship, which is drawing its temporal immediacy from an extensive use of the distributed forms of narrative afforded by the blog medium. This presence makes possible a wide range of writing styles, ranging from journalism to poetry. But it also invites reposting multimedial content created by other users on site in Yemen, to further stress the immediacy of writing. This observation is similar to Diminescu's (2008: 572) discussion about a social space of 'presences', replacing the strong emphasis of absence in the migrant's experience.

A second conclusion consists of finding a two-fold distributedness in Nasser's online discourse. On the one hand, the use of hypertext and inserted multimedial content makes the narrative fundamentally distributed in character. Each blog post consists of a small network of other texts. However, the frequent reposting of other author's texts, created originally by both other social media users and traditional media outlets, makes it necessary also to speak of a distributed authorship of the blog as 'a whole'. In such instances the role of being an author and an editor is blurred, even though the origin of each text is clearly specified.

The ability of code-switching and translating also allows Nasser to speak to several different readers, even in the same text. Posts about her life in Sweden are mainly written in English. In these entries she also sets aside a journalistic style to express her feelings of fear, frustration, depression, nostalgia and longing for the homeland. Moreover, the casual language related to oral discourse of Facebook posts and other social media are inserted into posts with a more formal language, and there is a frequent switching between MSA and YCA.

I have found that the blog as a medium, to a certain extent, challenges the conditions for exile literature. Being uprooted, a central theme in 20<sup>th</sup> century writing, is no longer the same experience as digital technologies make global communication possible on a

much larger scale, available to more people every day. The spatial disruption inherent in migration is today accompanied by instant ICT-mediated communication with the homeland. In Nasser's authorship this is abundantly present, as she often returns to the immediate conversations with her friends and family in Yemen, often taking place on a daily basis, as grounds for her exile writing. Nasser expresses a longing for returning to the homeland and frustration with her predicament in Sweden. However, the poems and the poetic style sometimes employed by Nasser, especially when it comes to their thematic structure of sorrow and pain, resembles more common themes in conventional exile literature. But what is different is the ability to rely on active social relations in projecting images of Yemen into her narrative, rather than relying solely on memories or distant reports in traditional mass media, which limited the 20<sup>th</sup> century authors in their forms of expression.

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