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Bilal Hamamra
An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine.

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Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* and Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey*: Language, Gender Politics, and the Emergence of Authorial Identities

By Bilal Hamamra[1]

Abstract

This article engages with the critical lenses of new historicism and presentism, using Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* and the discourse of Palestinian female martyrs as contemporary intertexts to scrutinize women's silence, speech, and authorial identity in Mary Sidney's early modern English work *The Tragedy of Antony*. I contend this text enabled Sidney to construct a narrative of mourning for her brother Philip Sidney, just as Tuqan uses her writing to mourn her brother Ibrahim Tuqan. It is argued here that Sidney's and Tuqan's creation of their authorial identities emanated from their close relationships with their brothers. I argue that Sidney's memorialization of Philip Sidney by persuading Queen Elizabeth to support Protestant military intervention in the Netherlands bears a striking similarity to Tuqan's memorialization of her brother. Tuqan continued Ibrahim's work of nationalist poetry in her critique of the Israeli occupation that reinforces traditions that stifle women. I propose that women's writing and Palestinian female martyrs' acts of suicide bombing both signal women's erasure of their bodies.

Keywords: Silence, Gender, Sacrifice, Mourning, Martyrdom, Authorial Identity, Mary Sidney, Fadwa Tuqan, Early modern English literature, Palestinian literature

Introduction: Speech, Writing, and Sacrifice

Historicist and materialist feminist criticisms have reiterated the conventional link between women's speech or writing and lasciviousness, an equation that was shored up in early modern gender ideology (Newman, 1991; Callaghan, 1989). Tuvil (1616) remarks that writing is detrimental to women's sexual purity and reputation: "[t]he pen must be forbidden them as the tree of good and evil […]. It is a pander to a virgin chastity" (p. 87). Margaret Cavendish, a highly productive English intellectual who contributed to various fields such as philosophy, poetry, science, and playwriting, was addressed as an "illustrious whore," and many critics drew an analogy between the "Poetess" and a "Punk," which means a prostitute (Pearson, 1988, pp. 9-10). This condemnation and association of women's writing with lewdness in early modern England has implications for present-day Palestinian society. For example, the journalist Maysa Abu Ghannim got divorced and was branded as a "whore" because she writes about topics considered taboo in Palestinian society, such as sexual violence, enforced marriage, the unfairness of the Palestinian laws and legal system, and the marginalization and oppression of women. Her family threatened to disown her if she did not stop writing (Abu Ghannim, personal communication, 2013). Abu Ghannim's writing is subversive when it is read against the backdrop of silencing that has traditionally thwarted Palestinian women's self-expression. The prohibition and stigmatization of early modern English women's literary

[1] Bilal Hamamra has a PhD in Early Modern Drama from the University of Lancaster, UK and is currently an associate professor of English literature in the Department of English Language and Literature, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine. His research interests are in Early Modern Drama, Shakespeare, Palestinian literature, women's writings, and gender studies. His articles on language, gender politics, martyrdom and diaspora have appeared in *Early Modern Literary Studies, Critical Survey, ANQ, Journal for Cultural Research, Journal of Gender Studies, Journal of Contemporary Asia, Anglia, Middle East Critique, Journal of Modern Jewish Studies, Educational Philosophy and Theory, Arab Studies Quarterly, Social Identities, International Studies in Sociology of Education, Interventions, Psychodynamic Practice* and *Changing English*, among others.

activity spurred Virginia Woolf to claim that there were no women who wrote in an age when "every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet" (1977, p. 41). In the same vein, Margaret Ferguson (1996) argues that "the idea of the 'woman writer' is a veritable paradox or oxymoron, one eliciting attitudes of outrage and /or scorn. As writing is a 'masculine' activity and also in opposition to 'silence,' then the phrase 'woman writer' will be seen as a contradiction in terms" (p. 145). In cultures antagonistic to women's expression, I argue that women use their bodies to construct their agency as writers and speakers while evading the subject positions of phallic speaker or lascivious woman. The death of the body, the means of writing and speaking, is inextricably linked to women authors and heroines, as well as to Palestinian martyrs' construction of authorial identity and heroic immortality.

Sidney's translation of Robert Garnier's French work *Marc Antoine* (1578) into English, with the title *The Tragedy of Antony* (1595) interrogates the conventional patriarchal construction of masculine and feminine roles and the entanglement of gender and politics. Krontiris suggests that Sidney "chose to translate the work of an author who might be called 'feminine' in his approach" and that Garnier "uses strategies which could be employed also by women writers" (1992, p. 77). In their depiction of Cleopatra, Garnier and Sidney use the enfranchising discourses of domesticity, privacy, motherhood, sexual purity, marriage, and death to deconstruct the conventional association of women's speech with sexuality. While Cleopatra's loyalty to Antony will lead the Egyptians to a life of bondage, Sidney endorses Cleopatra's political choice of suicide to impede Caesar's aim of humiliating her. While Sidney dissociates Cleopatra's speech from lasciviousness, Cleopatra's suicide carries a veiled political message to Queen Elizabeth (Hannay, 1991; Kewes, 2011). Sidney's translation of Garnier exhorts Elizabeth to fulfill her obligations as monarch by supporting the Protestant cause in the Netherlands. Garnier accommodated this goal, for he was "a magistrate who used his drama to criticize the state" and whose "dramas were at the forefront of the contemporary movement in Continental historical tragedy, the avant-garde of the theatre" (Hannay, 1991, p. 126, 119). Since she was unable to join the military like her brother Philip, Sidney honors his memory by using words to impel the queen to assist Protestant military intervention in the Netherlands.

I employ a presentist tactic by using Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* (1990), and the publicity surrounding Palestinian female martyrs as intertexts to read Sidney's *Tragedy of Antony* (1595). As Grady and Hawkes (2007) point out, by "deliberately employing crucial aspects of the present as a trigger for its investigations, [presentism's] centre of gravity will accordingly be 'now,' rather than 'then'" (p. 4). Smith (2012) argues that "Presentism […] goes too far in denying continuities between past and present" (p. 41). However, I use the trigger of the masculine construction of gender in contemporary Palestine and the publicity surrounding Palestinian female martyrs to scrutinize this representation in Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony.* This comparison reveals trans-historical and trans-cultural continuities between this early modern English text and contemporary Palestine.

While Tuqan and Sidney differ in their methods–autobiography and translation–they raise similar issues concerning the conditions of women's speech and the relationships between gender, silence, and authorial identities. Because women's bodies and voices are subject to scrutiny and circumscription, women use writing, a form of silent speech, to express their thoughts. By writing it is possible for women authors to enter the symbolic order and displace phallic power while reiterating their silencing process on the page. Ihde (1976) notes that "[w]riting creates the possibility of a word without voice" (p. 154). Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony*, Cleopatra's sacrifice, Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey*, and the public discourse surrounding Palestinian female martyrs suggest that writing and martyrdom are the means through which women figures create their legitimate authorial identities. In both Sidney's fictional world and contemporary Palestine, women's writing and sacrifice open up subjective

spaces that deconstruct the conventional construction of gender difference through the binary opposites of speech and silence.

I analyze Sidney's text alongside that of Tuqan. Tuqan uses the feminine discourses of domesticity, sexual purity, and death in her autobiography to legitimize her voice and construct her authorial identity. I argue that both Tuqan and Sidney's literary relationships with their brothers demonstrate the threshold of their journey towards constructing independent literary voices. Death as a prerequisite for Palestinian women's political participation takes on a chilling relevance with Sidney's representation of Cleopatra's suicide. Both the phenomenon of Palestinian female suicide bombers and Sidney's translation open up a space for a virtuous woman's intervention without conflating sexuality with politics. I argue that Garnier's *Marc Antoine* enables Sidney to mourn her brother Philip Sidney, just as Tuqan mourns Ibrahim Tuqan. Sidney's and Tuqan's mourning for their brothers has a political dimension. Sidney honors Philip Sidney's memory by encouraging Queen Elizabeth to support Protestant military intervention in the Netherlands. Tuqan continues Ibrahim Tuqan's literary journey by penning nationalist poems and articulating her critique of the Israeli occupation and Palestinian traditions which curb women's aspirations to freedom. I argue that Cleopatra's suicide to prevent her public humiliation and to be reunited in death with Antony prefigures but also contrasts with Palestinian female martyrs who sacrifice themselves for Palestine rather than for personal desires as Cleopatra did.

Teaching Sidney's *Antony* in Palestine

As a university professor of Renaissance Drama, I have been teaching Sidney's *Antony* for a student body in contemporary Palestine. Introducing Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* as a feminist text that assaults traditional Palestinian discrimination against women as a part of Literary Criticism Course and introducing Sidney's *Antony* into the Drama syllabus was a challenge to the male-dominated scholarly tradition, for female dramas are not part of the academic curriculum (Nabil Alawi, 2021, Personal Communication). An examination of women-authored texts across periods contributes to a critical examination of women's agency as speakers and writers. I was attempting to integrate women-authored texts into a male-dominated tradition that continues to control the canon and the critical perspective in contemporary Palestine. I will outline the Palestinian context with reference to critical readings and anecdotes from my own experience growing up within traditional, non-metropolitan Palestinian culture.

Tuqan (1917-2003) is an eminent Palestinian poet who was born in Nablus to a wealthy family. Despite the harsh circumstances in which she lived and the overwhelming obstacles that she faced, Tuqan was able to transcend her physical and mental confinement to become a pioneering Arab poet. Her collections include *My Brother Ibrahim* (1946), *Alone With The Days* (1952), *Give Us Love* (1960), and *Before The Closed Door* (1960). Her autobiography, *A Mountainous Journey* (1990), is a criticism of masculine domination over women in the 1920s and 1930s, describing the domestic sphere of women in Nablus as a prison. Tuqan tells the reader how she is unable to defend herself against the injustice she suffers from male and female family members in her home. Tuqan says that "The right to express her feelings or views was prohibited" (p. 36) and that "[n]ever once did I have the courage to raise my voice in protest" (p. 79). She tells the reader that her paternal aunt used to berate her whenever she broke her silence and tried to write poetry (p. 32). While Tuqan's family tried to curtail her utterances and confine her in the domestic sphere, she created *A Mountainous Journey* to criticize her family and traditional Palestinian society.

While Palestinian women have been treated as objects, the written genre of autobiography gives Tuqan an opportunity to express herself as a self-defining subject. In voicing her grievances and defiance of oppressively patriarchal discourse by publishing her

story, Tuqan blurs the boundaries between public and private and between the political and the personal. Ostle (1998) argues that "[t]he autobiography […] [is] an instrument of strategy through which a position of relative powerlessness or marginality is transformed into something which is able to challenge or to occupy the centre" (p. 22). Writing can be described as a process of self-negation, or self-abstraction because the woman's body and her voice are not physically present in the written text. Elizabeth Bronfen argues that

> the representation of a woman killing herself in order to produce an autobiographical text can serve as a trope for the relation of the writing process to death in general. She proposes that writing is a kind of disembodiment or absence of the writing subject, based on the notion that the image or symbol functions as the negation of the thing, be it the speaker, the addressee or the object of speech (1992, p. 142).

Writing, therefore, constructs the author's authorial identity and cancels out the author's corporeal existence. Tuqan's autobiography ends with her assertion that "I shall write, I shall write a lot" (p. 191). Tuqan's textualization of herself erases her life outside autobiography and poems. The "I" on which autobiography and subjectivity depend is transformed into words, text, and the signature of authorial identity. This construction of writing as a process of self-negation that enables Tuqan to enter the public realm resonates with the discourse of Palestinian female political activists whose political participation demands their silencing through acts of martyrdom (Hamamra, 2018).

Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey*, a narrative of defiance and criticism of Palestinian patriarchal society, offers a useful intertext for reading women's speech, silence, and sacrifice in Sidney's *Antony*. The immortality of the author that autobiography promises has immediate relevance to Sidney's use of the trope of death as a strategy of self-assertion and rhetorical control. This is stressed by the movement of the author/heroine from the physical realm of the body into the textual or spiritual realm. Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* is an appropriate intertext to read Sidney's *Antony* because Tuqan is a woman writing in a traditional society that equates women's writing with sexual looseness.

Mourning

Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* repudiates the assumption that translation impedes the female translator's critical voice. Translation was considered an acceptable field for women because it was not viewed as creative. Trill (1996) suggests that "one of the reasons that translation has been perceived to be an appropriate form of writing for women is precisely because it is deemed to preclude an expression of their own opinions" (p. 147). Translations were deemed appropriate for women "since all translations are reputed femalls" (De Montaigne, 1603, sig. A2r). However, as Trill (1996) has argued, "[t]ranslation […] is not simply a passive reflection of a previous text, but a form of writing which, by establishing it within a new context, makes a claim about the status of the translated text" (p. 143). In the light of Trill's argument, translation can be seen as a creative means of establishing authorial identity. Far from being a form through which women writers were obliged to internalize and reproduce the ideas and voices of the male-authored texts they translate, translation actually opens up a subjective space for subversive intervention, as will be shown in my discussions of Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony*. Krontiris (1992) suggests that Sidney spoke "from behind curtains" of the male-authored texts she translated (p. 65). Krontiris (1992) also notes that "[to] translate literally is to seek protection in the idea of conveying the author's meaning exactly" (p. 68). Sidney's *Antony* is a close translation, whose subversion is affected through her choice of Garnier's text, into which she weaves her subversive meaning.

Sidney and Tuqan's entries into writing and construction of authorial identities emerge from their brothers' voices. Sidney was engaged in preparing and publishing the first authorized version of Philip Sidney's romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia* (1593). Sidney also published Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* in 1595 and the complete sonnet sequence of *Astrophil and Stella* in 1598. Likewise, Tuqan's authorial voice emerges from her brother Ibrahim Tuqan's voice. Tuqan tells readers that "[d]uring the period between 1933 and the beginning of 1937, I occasionally tried to clothe myself in Ibrahim's poetical robes and to imitate him by writing patriotic verse" (1990, p. 71). Because Ibrahim Tuqan was Tuqan's teacher of poetry, many believed that he was the one who wrote her poems. The fact that he was an eminent poet and "the voice of the Palestinian people" made her susceptible to such denunciations (1990, p. 71). However, in constructing her literary voice, she usurps her brother's fame as a poet by surpassing him (Jayyusi, 1990). In a similar situation, Sidney articulated her subject position as a female author first by ventriloquism and then by developing her own literary personae. While she overstepped the bounds of feminine silence in producing "To the Angell Spirit" (1590) and "The Doleful Lay of Clorinda" (1595), these original literary texts belong to the genre of elegy, which "provided non-threatening outlets for their author's learning and poetic skills" (Lamb, 1985, p. 120). Elegy augments the writer's relationship with her male relatives–dead brothers in the case of both Tuqan and Sidney. As Jayyusi notes, "[w]hat we all remember about Fadwa the moment her name is mentioned is her elegiac voice" (1990, p. x). Apart from the fact that Ibrahim Tuqan was Tuqan's teacher of poetry, he left her no literary legacy. In contrast, Philip Sidney left a literary legacy for Sidney to publish and edit. In addition to completing and publishing Philip Sidney's literary work, Sidney translated texts such as Philippe Du Plessis Mornay's *Excellent discours de la vie et la mort* (1577) and Robert Garnier's *Marc Antoine* (1578). Because Sidney locates her voice as a writer in a familial context, Kim Walker claims that Sidney has been effaced as a writer (Walker, 1996). However, I agree with Paulina Kewes, who argues that *The Tragedy of Antony* is a direct intervention into European, Protestant politics and that it is directed towards Queen Elizabeth (2011).

In Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* and Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey*, mourning is a form of self-expression because it suggests that women retain their shadow roles. Mary Ellen Lamb observes that Sidney "creates her authorship as a form of mourning" (1990, p. 116). Cleopatra's mourning for Antony and in extension Sidney's mourning for her brother Philip Sidney resonates with Tuqan's mourning and memorializing of her brother Ibrahim Tuqan. Garnier and Sidney suggest that mourning is a narrative through which Cleopatra expresses her love, authority, and self-memorialization. Cleopatra expresses her grief through the feminine expressions of crying, wailing, "tearing off [her] hanging hair' and '[o]utrag[ing] [her] face" (Sidney, 1996, 5.195-96). As a woman of sentiment, Cleopatra boldly expresses her love to Antony through emotionally moving rhetoric of tears and laments. While Cleopatra's mourning for Antony is located in the domestic sphere, it is a speech act with public effect. Sidney uses the play to mourn and memorialize Philip Sidney (Findlay, 2006), thus reminding the queen of his death and, verbally, continuing his mission to influence Elizabeth toward a Protestant cause. Similarly, Tuqan expresses her "grief," "estrangement," and "inner exile" (1990, p. 105) provoked by the loss of her brother Ibraham.

Deconstructing the Link between Speech and Sexuality

From a masculine perspective, Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* seems to support the conventional association between women's speech and lust. Antony, like his Shakespearean analogue (Sidney, 1996, 4.14.24), claims that Cleopatra, whose "words" (1.100) and "wiles" (1.11-16) have tempted him into a "wanton love" (1.120), is "disloyal" (1.141) to him. He describes her as a "cruel traitress, woman most unkind" (1.17), accentuating her political and sexual treachery. Antony's claim that "too wise a head she wears, / Too much inflamed with

greatness, evermore / Gaping for our great empire's government" (3.20-22) implies Cleopatra's sexual openness as well as her political ambition. Antony arouses the traditional views of Cleopatra's speech and sexuality (3.20-22) that Shakespeare's Cleopatra exemplifies (Sidney, 1996, 1.1.13, 2.2.233-35, 2.7.26).

Sidney engages with two opposing discourses on women's voice and sexuality. While Antony associates Cleopatra's speech with licentiousness, other characters contradict him, emphasizing her political dexterity. Diomede says that Cleopatra expresses herself in several languages (2.483-88) and is gifted with "a sweet voice all Asia understood" (2.463). This verbal description makes Cleopatra an alter ego of Elizabeth. She is virtuous, for she avoids using her speech to "make a conquest of the conquerer" (2.501). Her "enchanting skills" are physical and spiritual, for she has a "celestial spirit" and is possessed of "grace" (2.483-85). While Garnier's Cleopatra's "amoureux charmes" (1975, 1.736) suggest the association between Cleopatra's speech and her sexual and political transgression, Sidney's translation notably mutes the link between speech and sexuality.

Sidney's deconstruction of the association between woman's speech and sexuality in the figure of Cleopatra has present relevance with contemporary Palestinian silencing of sexual debates. For example, in her study of sexuality and politics and "the attitudes of Palestinian women in Israel toward their sexuality," Shalabi (2010) notes that "Sexuality is considered a taboo subject" (p. 166). Tuqan maintains a "veil" over her "private affairs" (1990, p. 12) and avoids writing about sex and sexuality in her autobiography and poetry, for sexuality is a taboo subject in contemporary Palestine. As Jayyusi notes, "The bold bravado and loud audacity of some later women writers in Arab speaking countries about sexuality and love could never be shared by her" (1990, p. xii). Abudi (2011) notes that Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* "exclude[s] references to sex and sexuality" (p. 92). Many Palestinian scholars of English may recognize that female authors dissociate themselves and their heroines from sexual looseness and avoid sexuality in their writing to legitimize their speech and writing in cultures antagonistic to women's self-expression. During my teaching at An-Najah University, I have always been advised by staff members not to allude to sexuality in classes, for sexual debates subvert Palestinian traditions that silence such taboos (Hamamra, 2021).

In the course of Cleopatra's decision to die by suicide, Eras and Diomede encourage her to use her sexual power to protect Egypt and her subjects (Sidney, 1996, 2.181-88, 193, 287-97, 458-64). From a presentist Palestinian perspective, this equation between Cleopatra's political intervention and sexual transgression espoused by Diomede and Eras challenges conventional ideas of modesty in contemporary Palestine. Palestinian women's religious and national struggle against Israel demands their deaths and absenting their bodies from the public sphere of politics (Hamamra, 2018). Moreover, Cleopatra's and Palestinian women's sacrifice suggests that the body is a medium of communication that must shatter in order to impart its message and receive response and recognition. Clarke (2001) points out that "*Antony* suggests that female political power is always mediated, either by sexuality, whereby it becomes transgressive, or by death, whereby it becomes a sign which enacts its own erasure" (p. 96). Cleopatra's decision to die by suicide may provide many Palestinians with a model of virtuous women's action. Cleopatra evades the troubling positions of a phallic, lascivious woman by stressing her loyalty to Antony and killing herself (Sidney, 1996, 2.297-302). Clarke (2001) notes that "Cleopatra's death can, like Iphigenia's, be viewed as a kind of substitute marriage" and it is "a kind of inverted martyrdom which expiates her past life, and absents her troublesome and tempting body" (p. 89). While *Antony* reveals Cleopatra's resistance to the conflation of sexuality with politics, Cleopatra's personal suicide is a foil to Palestinian female martyrs who sacrifice themselves for a nationalist cause with a metaphorical marriage to Palestine (Hamamra, 2018). Cleopatra kills herself to be reunited with Antony and to avoid

Caesar's potential humiliation of her rather than to ally herself with Egypt, while Palestinian women ally themselves with Palestine in their acts of martyrdom.

Domestic Discourse

Sidney and Tuqan use the discourses of domesticity which enable them to justify their writings and cleanse themselves from the blemish of sexuality. In confining Cleopatra's speech primarily within the domestic realm of the palace, Sidney further mitigates condemnation of the character. Belsey (1985) argues that when women speak, they "threaten the system of differences which gives meaning to patriarchy" (p. 191). However, in Garnier's text, Cleopatra's speech is dramatized in the confines of the domestic sphere within earshot of other women, Charmian and Eras. This domestic containment of Cleopatra's speech resonates with Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* which is a domestic and intimate text, despite being projected into the public arena by the act of publication. Tuqan's telling of the reader that "Dealing with people in the public world was not in my nature" (1990, p. 124) suggests that her "journey de-emphasises the political in favour of the personal" (Malti-Douglas, 1990, p. 7).

The familial relations between Cleopatra and Antony and the accusations unleashed against Cleopatra offer my students a point of comparison to Tuqan's domestic autobiography which charts her struggle against the discrimination and circumscription of her voice in the domestic sphere. While Cleopatra is unable to respond to Antony and Caesar's accusations, her rhetorical questions (2.152-54, 156, 164-66), addressed to the audience, enable her to claim autonomy by imagining herself being examined and scrutinizing herself under surveillance. In an echo of Eve's fate, Cleopatra would rather be "fall[en]" into the earth if she deceived Antony (2.158-59). While Caesar says that the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra is based on "lewd delights" (4.37), Cleopatra dissociates herself from lewdness, refusing to live on as Antony's widow (2.297-310). Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* does not include any conversations between Antony and Cleopatra and communication between them is mediated through male messengers (Findlay, 2006). The first time that Cleopatra addresses Antony is when he is a corpse that neither hears nor speaks (3.159, 5.157). She gives burial rites to Antony (5.183) and entombs her own body along with his (5.175), separating her body and speech from the public sphere. That Cleopatra's "overtly sexual lines are delivered only over Antony's dead body" and express her "desire for death" (5.173-77, 200-08) contradicts stereotypical representations of Cleopatra (Sidney, 1996; Lamb, 1990, pp. 131-32). Whereas Cleopatra confines her speech in the domestic sphere to defend herself against the accusations of political and sexual transgression, Tuqan is unable to speak publicly against women's oppression but she deploys writing, a silent form of speech, to criticize patriarchal oppression in Nablus in 1930s. Cleopatra's private speech and Tuqan's writing are legitimate discourses that enable Cleopatra and Tuqan to subvert the masculine construction of gender roles through the binary opposites of speech and silence.

Men's Words and Action

Sidney's translation of Garnier challenges the conflation of women's speech with wantonness by divorcing Cleopatra from Antony's fall, which is attributed to his own susceptibility to women, rather than to Cleopatra's seductive speech (Sidney, 1996, 1.165-80). Instead of associating performance with power and self-fashioning, Sidney shows that Antony, in his mournful tone and self-pity (1.51,62), is feminized. His first soliloquy dramatizes his conflicting impulses from different subject positions (1.1-148). While he aspires to die like a warrior on the battlefield, Sidney suggests that there is a disparity between his words and his actions (3.225-32).

The rift between Antony's words and actions is similar to Tuqan's representation of the rift between her father's words and actions in spite of historical and ideological differences.

Tuqan tells the reader, “My constant dream was to break off all association with whatever represented authority in the family: Father, male cousins, paternal aunt. I avoided them all and thus learned to loathe whatever represented despotic domination and unjust authority in all social institutions” (1990, p. 81). Tuqan tells the reader that her father and uncle “represented, in the most flagrant manner possible, the rigidity of the Arab male and his absolute inability to maintain a personality that was healthy and whole” (1990, p. 78). Tuqan says that her father and uncle send their boy children to acquire Western education and prevent girls from this privilege even though these male figures are motivated to oppose Western ideas and education from religious and political discourses (1990, p. 36). Many Palestinian girls are still deprived of a university education because it would enhance their individualities, thus contradicting the Palestinian traditions that oppress and silence women. By contrast, boys from the same rural areas are exposed to Western culture and education.

Cleopatra creates a tragic narrative that celebrates her and Antony, making Antony’s idealized masculinity rest on the incorporation rather than the elimination of femininity. In an inversion of Renaissance conventions, Antony asserts his subjectivity by retreating into Cleopatra’s domestic sphere as Acheson observes (2001). Paradoxically, Antony’s determination that he must die bespeaks his self-assertion (3.369-76). His death is counter to Caesar’s plot of humiliating him (3.373-77). His dying speech enables him to construct his narrative of love and to mourn his own death. Dircetus delivers the news of Antony’s “hard mishap” (4.202) that temporarily stifles his voice (4.206) to Caesar, the Chorus and Agrippa. Dircetus’s reproduction of Antony’s speech (4.195-97, 242-61) underlines that Antony’s speech outlives his silencing, in that his voice is carried through the voices of others. Students of English at An-Najah University find parallels between Cleopatra’s construction of Antony’s tragic narrative and the literary memorialization of brothers created by Sidney and Tuqan in their own editing and writing.

Garnier’s representation of Cleopatra as a mother enables Sidney to dissociate Cleopatra’s speech from lewdness and to deliver a political message to Elizabeth. Even though Antony is married to Octavia, Cleopatra speaks with the authority of a mother and a wife to Antony so as to legitimize her speech. Antony regrets his disrespect for “Octavia and her tender babes” (Sidney, 1996, 1.122). I agree with Krontiris, who observes that Sidney’s sympathetic reference to Octavia “enables a woman like Mary Herbert[2] to publish the play without running the risk of appearing to endorse the abandonment of wives in favour of romantic lovers” (1992, p. 71). Cleopatra prioritizes romantic love above political power and even motherhood (2.317-20). Sidney dramatizes Cleopatra’s parting from her children in very moving terms (2.73-74, 78-79) which demonstrate the suffering Cleopatra is willing to endure for Antony. Although Cleopatra’s children only speak four words (5.77, 82), their eloquent silence arouses Cleopatra’s distressing conflict until they exit with Euphron (5.83). Unlike Sidney’s Cleopatra, Daniel’s Cleopatra emphasizes her “lascivious Court” (1.159) and refers to her children as “the wretched pledges of a wanton bed” (1.84). Sidney’s Cleopatra is not a worthless mother, but a tragic figure of fated love; Antony’s love is “[m]ore deare then Scepter, children, freedom, light” (Sidney, 1996, 2.174) to Cleopatra. While Cleopatra’s constant love deconstructs the association between her speech and sexuality, in Sidney’s translation, Garnier’s words enable Sidney to exhort Elizabeth to fulfill her role as a mother of England rather than satisfy personal desires. Perhaps, Sidney is reminding Elizabeth of Philip Sidney’s death, which can be attributed to Elizabeth’s failure to act and attempt to free the Protestant Netherlands from Catholic Spain. Thus, Sidney’s description of Cleopatra as a mother emphasizes her sexual purity while conveying a political message to Elizabeth.

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[2] Mary Sidney’s married name.

Women's Writings and Politics

From a presentist context, Sidney's political interventions and Cleopatra's rhetorical skills can be compared to Tuqan's engagement with politics and political leaders. Tuqan puts her pen in the service of Palestine and writes nationalist poetry to stimulate Palestinian resistance against occupation. Tuqan tells the reader that "With the winds of change and revolt, poetry felt its ivory tower to march along with the Arab masses, expressing their aspirations for freedom from repression and exploitation" (1990, p. 117). Tuqan receives admiration and praise by Arab leaders and Israeli ones. Jayyusi says that Tuqan "had in the late sixties a long meeting with President Jamal Abd al-Nasser, which extended for one hour and forty minutes (a dream of every Arab intellectual at the time)" (1990, p. ix). The President of Palestine, Yassir Arafat, expressed his admiration and affection for Tuqan on many nationalist occasions (Jayyusi, 1990). Even an imminent Israeli figure, Moshe Dayan, sought to meet and talk to her more than once: "And it was Dayan who said about her that one of her poems is enough to create ten fighters for the Palestine resistance" (Jayyusi, 1990, p. ix).

From a political presentist perspective on territory and occupation like that of Cleopatra's Egypt, I contend that Sidney's urging of Cleopatra to save Egypt illuminates my analysis of Palestinian female martyrs' critique of Arab leaders due to their failure to save and defend Palestine. However, Sidney problematizes gender in association with the political sphere because Cleopatra's involvement with politics demands her use of her sexuality. Cleopatra's choice of personal suicide to escape being labelled a lascivious or a phallic woman, and to avoid potential humiliation from Caesar, can be seen as a contrast to Palestinian women's martyrs. This Renaissance text has contemporary implications with some contemporary Palestinian women who redeem their honor (supposedly disgraced by sexuality) through their acts of suicide bombing.

In comparison to Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* that urges Queen Elizabeth I to fulfill her duty of defending the Protestant cause, contemporary Palestinian female political activists convey a political message to Palestinian male figures of authority and Arab leaders. Palestinian female martyrs assert virtues of bravery, courage, and willingness to sacrifice while male figures are associated with the traits of weakness, empty talk, and inability to defend Palestine (Hamamra, 2018). As the female suicide bomber Ayat al-Akhras said, "I say to Arab leaders, stop sleeping. Stop failing to fulfil your duty. Shame on the Arab armies who are sitting and watching the girls of Palestine fighting while they are asleep" (Hasso, 2005, p. 29). While Palestinian female martyrs challenge gender roles, Ayat al-Akhras's words are a wake-up call to Arab leaders to occupy the masculine gendered realm of war. While Cleopatra resists the conflation between politics and sexuality in her decision to die by suicide, she, unlike Palestinian female suicide bombers, prioritizes personal interests and loyalty to Antony over the integrity of Egypt.

Suicide and Authorial Identity

Sidney's dissociation of Cleopatra's speech from sexuality and her criticism of Elizabeth as a monarch are illuminated by Sidney's representation of Cleopatra as a prince. Sidney characterizes Cleopatra as "princely" to dissociate her speech from licentiousness (3.19) and (like Elizabeth) to strengthen her authoritative discourse. Catty claims that "[t]he characterisation of Cleopatra as 'princely' is a feature specific to Sidney's translation [and it is not Garnier's]' (1999, p. 147). This depiction of Cleopatra as prince "is likely to elevate Cleopatra, rather than denigrate Elizabeth" (Catty, 1999, p. 147). However, the Egyptians realize that Cleopatra's decision (Sidney, 1996, 3.422-35) will subjugate them to Caesar, expressing their worry that Dircetus asserts that "greater misery / In sacked towns can hardly ever be" (Sidney, 1996, 4.320-21). Kewes proposes that Egypt's loss of its statehood to Rome is "the fulfilment of the nightmare scenario which haunted forward Protestants" in that "[i]n

the event of the queen's sudden death without a clearly designated Protestant heir, England, they feared, would succumb to conquest by Roman Catholic Spain, and […] would degenerate into a mere province of the Iberian empire" (2011, pp. 245-46). Sidney exhorts Elizabeth to fulfil her obligations as a monarch by listening to the voices of the Protestants and defending their cause against Catholic Spain. However, while Cleopatra's decision to commit suicide can be seen as a failure to act in a legal, authoritative way as a prince, Sidney admired Cleopatra's decision to avoid public shame and retain her dignity (Krontiris, 1992; Clarke, 2001; Kewes, 2011). Lamb proposes that Cleopatra is the key protagonist of the art of dying, which elucidates the "heroics of constancy as these concerned women" (1990, pp. 129-32). Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* seems to have inspired Shakespeare's representations of Cleopatra's heroism (Wilders, 1995). Raber proposes that "it is Caesar who determines the direction Cleopatra's last moments must take" (2001, p. 86). However, while Cleopatra's suicide emerges from her fidelity to Antony, it prevents Caesar's aim to:

> wholly get
> Into our lands her treasure and herself
> […]
> That by her presence beautified may be
> The glorious triumph Rome prepares for me (4.362-63, 366-67).

While Caesar perceives Cleopatra as a "treasure" to possess and represent, Cleopatra defies his potentially controlling discourse.

Cleopatra's suicide out of loyalty to Antony complicates the Palestinian nationalist and religious discourses that are perceived by many Palestinians as the motives for Palestinian women's acts of martyrdom. I think that Palestinian readers steeped in the discourse of nationalism and religion would interpret Cleopatra's suicide-–out of loyalty to Antony and subversion to Caesar's plan to humiliate her—alongside the Israeli and the Western interpretation of Palestinian women's acts of suicide bombing. Many Palestinians perceive Palestinian women's acts of suicide bombing as acts of martyrdom because the perpetrators of these actions are motivated by religious and nationalist discourses. However, Israeli and Western feminist critics such as Barbara Victor and Anat Berko suggest that Palestinian women commit suicide bombing to redeem themselves and escape the humiliation they brought against themselves and their families due to their loss of sexual reputation (Victor, 2003; Berko, 2007). While Charmion says that man's fate is governed by God (Sidney, 1996, 2.273-76), Cleopatra opposes God's word by dying for her love. Thus, Cleopatra's personal suicide provides students of English at An-Najah University a ground to interpret her suicide alongside some Palestinian women who commit suicide bombing in an attempt to redeem their honor, as Western and Israeli media would suggest.

Sidney's translation of Cleopatra's dying speech suggests that a woman's authorial voice emerges from the shadow of her brother's voice. Female authors immortalize themselves through the process of writing and creating authorial identities. As Williams (2000) has pointed out, Sidney has adopted "the present tense of Garnier's directly phrased last lines "mon ame vomissant," to a more lyrical and indirect future subjunctive, "forth my soul may flow"' (p. 32): "That in this office weak my limbs may grow,/ Fainting on you, and forth my soul may flow" (5.207-08). These lines highlight Cleopatra's loyalty to Antony, representing her death as an act of love. In this conjunction between love and death, the above-mentioned lines suggest Sidney's aspiration to mortality and immortality as well. The fact that female authorial identity emanates from the weak limbs of the body, the means of writing, suggests that Sidney uses her body to write so as to create her authorial identity and immortalize herself, as does Tuqan who writes her autobiography "to create something more permanent than the self" (p. 188).

Furthermore, the fact that a woman's soul "may flow" from death suggests that Sidney constructs her independent literary authority after Philip Sidney's death in a similar manner to that in which Tuqan's literary independence emerges after Ibrahim Tuqan's death. As Findlay (2003) argues, "The power of female creativity grows out of the weak limbs, so that woman's soul can flow forth from death, as Philip Sidney's death had been the catalyst for Mary's independent literary creativity" (p. 506). Likewise, Tuqan's independent authorial identity emerges after the death of her brother. As Malti-Douglas says, "It is, in fact, the death of a male that permits the establishment of the birth of a female" (1990, p. 4). Tuqan's authorial identity is challenged when some people attribute her early work to her brother Ibrahim Tuqan. She tells the reader, "With the exception of Sitt Fakhriyyeh, that privileged female community of teachers was bent on hurting me and facing me with negative feelings which were reflected in the hostile arrogance with which they treated me" (1990, p. 95). She also notes that "Their sharp tongues would repeat: 'Her brother Ibrahim writes the poetry for her and puts her name at the end of it'" (1990, p. 95). In her evolution from victimization to self-assertion, Tuqan had to overcome cultural hardships engrained in patriarchal expectations about herself as a woman and a poet. As Jayyusi says, Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey*

> delineates, poignantly, the struggle of a gifted woman born into a very conservative society where women were kept in tragic isolation away from the male world of success, eminence and intellectual endeavour, but who succeeds in forging her way to fame despite unbelievable difficulties (1990, p. viii).

Tuqan achieves her creative self-assertion after the death of Ibrahim Tuqan. As Jayyusi remarks, "[b]y 1960 she had become a renowned poet, standing completely on her own, and despite her brother Ibrahim's lasting fame in Palestine and outside, her standing as a poet was quickly superseding his" (Jayyusi, 1990, p. x). While Ibrahim Tuqan taught Tuqan to write elegies, her autobiography signifies a break with the male poetic tradition to which he introduced her.

Cleopatra's control over narrative is illuminated in Sidney's dramatization of Cleopatra's dying speech. The present tense of the verb "flow" underlines Cleopatra's agency in the moment of death, which, dramatically, is extended to an off-stage future. Cleopatra appears on the stage, expressing her desire for suicide. Unlike Antony's death, Cleopatra's is not described. While in other acts, the characters' speeches are followed by the Chorus' voices, as Williams has noticed, the final act "significantly […] is the only act which does not conclude with a chorus" (2000, p. 32). The appearance of Antony's dead body in the final act signifies an inversion of gender roles (Sidney 1996, 5.144-52); in Breitenberg's words, Antony "takes the feminine position of interpreted object rather than the masculine position of interpreting subject" (1996, p. 161). Antony is playing the role of the dead corpse who can hear without affecting the course of action. Apart from the fact that Antony's silence prompts Cleopatra's desire for death, Sidney presents him as a silent spectacle that Cleopatra interprets. In inverting gender roles of speaker and listener, Sidney writes against the patriarchal construction of attitudes towards women.

Conclusion

Within a New Historicist context, Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* is a political message to Queen Elizabeth I, mother of England, to free the Protestant Netherlands from Catholic Spain. From a feminist standpoint, Sidney's *Antony* subverts the stereotypical association between female speech and lewdness in the figure of Cleopatra. Sidney uses the discourses of domesticity, marriage, motherhood, and death to justify and legitimize her writing and her heroine's public voice.

Following presentism, I demonstrated that both Tuqan's and Sidney's literary voices emerged from the shadows of their brothers' voices. I have argued that Tuqan's political interventions through the medium of writing bear similarities to Cleopatra's rhetorical skills. Teaching Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* contributes to debates about female self-sacrifice in contemporary Palestine and the cause for which it is enacted. In both the fictional world of *Antony* and contemporary Palestine, sacrifice enables women to assume a public voice which evades the speaking positions of a lascivious and a phallic woman. Yet this sacrifice ultimately silences women's voices and confines them to the spiritual and textual realms. Cleopatra's personal suicide implicates Palestinian discourses of religion and nationalism that prompt Palestinian women political activists to carry out suicide bombing. I argued that many Palestinians read Cleopatra's suicide alongside Palestinian women who carry out suicide bombing to redeem their tainted honor, as Western and Israeli critics suggest.

For Western critics as well as Palestinian readers and critics, this cross-cultural dialogue between contemporary Palestinian society and Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* may contribute to the developing interest in cross-cultural narratives and gender studies. Furthermore, my presentist approach may appeal to feminists and postcolonial feminists who strive to bring women to public attention and think that studying historical texts and deconstructing gender stereotypes can help to effect social and cultural change in the present. Teaching Mary Sidney's *The Tragedy of Antony* which represents an exemplary instance of how female authors from the past utilized their literary aptitude to challenge patriarchal conventions and assert their political agency has offered Palestinian women students new perspectives on how they can employ their own voices and literary talents to instigate social and political transformation within their own cultural milieu. Indeed, my teaching of these female-authored texts have challenged the curriculum at An-Najah University which has been dominated by Shakespeare's plays and by traditional interpretations interested in consolidating established traditions of gender roles via the binary opposites of speech and silence.

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