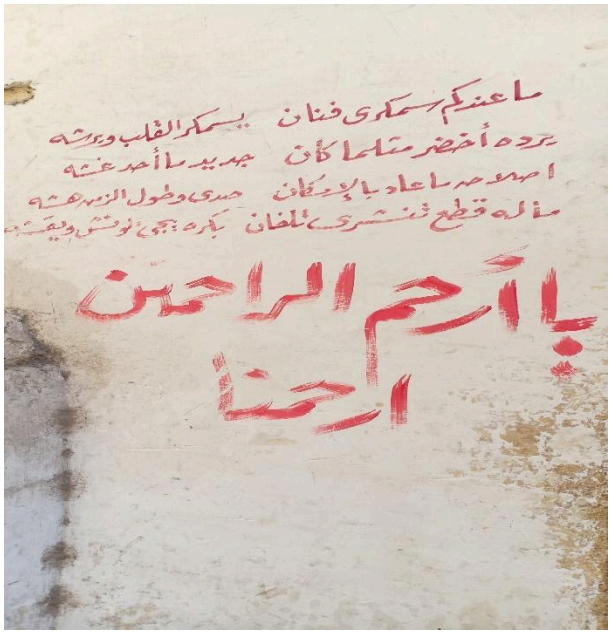
An Exercise in "Translating Life-Worlds"

I found this poem painted on a semi-hidden wall, just a few meters from Mimi's workshop, where I discovered on the very first day on my way from his workshop to the semi-public stool. Once seeing it, I stood a moment to digest what was written. I loosely remember an older man, in his fifties, sitting on the chair opposite to the wall. I will later come to find out that he works in the ice factory, just a few streets behind the workshop. His stares were invasive and pensive. I decided to sleep on it and not take the picture right away. I alerted my friend, who was accompanying me at the time, of it when he finished talking with Mimi, and he went to see it, so I went along. There was no longer anyone there, and I took the chance and got my cell quickly, taking just one good clear picture. A few visits later on, I dared to ask Mimi about the poem painted on the wall, he laughed it off, saying he remembers someone who used to come sit on el ahwa wrote it a few years ago, but he no longer remember their name.



ما عندكم سمكري فنان يسمكر القلب و يرشه

يرده أخضر مثلما كان جديد ما أحد غشه

اصلاحه ما عاد بالإمكان صدى و طول الزمن هشه

ما له قطع تنشري تلفان بكره ييجي الونش و يقشه

يا أرحم الراحمين

ارحمنا

Would you know of a brilliant polisher, who could polish the heart and sprinkle it?

Turning it innocent as it was, fresh, no one screwed with it.

It can no longer be fixed, rusted, weakened by the long time.

And no spare parts to be bought, it is broken. Soon the crane will come for it and smash it.

O! Most Merciful,

Have mercy on us.

In texts like these, where the meaning is both specific and elusive, employing a language rooted in both technical specificities and street connotations, the translator needs to decide capturing that spirit, and in that sense commit to such approach. As for the tone of this poem, it is a classic example of a torturing heart, a lover, who is melodramatically, and totally crushed. the question here is how to translate the labor-affect relationship present in this poem from Arabic into English? How to translate a very specific understanding of the relationship of the "Samkary", including what this expression holds as a social category, a class position related to the nature of the labor, and their relationship to their profession; with the matter and thus time and affect, into English?

In that context, it is worth pointing out that this section's title is inspired by Dipesh Chakrabarty "Translating Life-Worlds into Labor and History" (2000),

where he attempts to historicize the various labor expressions employed by people on the ground, by positioning them into their respective spatiotemporal localities, pointing out that these different expressions do not automatically equate the modernist western notion of "labor", but rather should be looked at as expressions of a certain life-world, without simply assuming their ability to be translated into the mainstream social sciences categories.

Coming back to the translation, I find myself nearly horrified by the closeness yet unfamiliarity of both texts' tone; something is off in English, and I cannot quite put my hand on it. It is indeed my intimate and multi-layered relationship to each and both languages which experiences this situation as some sort of "scandal", which Chakrabarty claims is a beginning allowing opening up the universalist categories of homogenous time. Thus, this can be considered a serious theoretical attempt at blasting open our understanding of the transability of what is known as "life-worlds"; going one step further to our immediate understanding of the concept, in an attempt to find inspiration in association, in reworking the sensibility of the context and the connotation of the expression in multiple geographies, and as such, multiple temporalities. In that context, Chakrabarty states that "A proposition of radical untranslatability therefore comes as a problem to the universal categories that sustain the historian's enterprise",

(Chakrabarty 2000, 76). In that sense, this untranslatability only exists because of the nature of the universal, which works as a mediator between variables.

Building on the idea of "Translating Life-Worlds", there is something to be said about the kind of words and expressions used by Mimi to describe not only his labor, but his life as well. In that effect, Mimi possesses his proper lexicon, a vocabulary that is not usually used nowadays, which many times might sound a little odd or outdated. This might simply be seen in light of both his age and the nature of his interactions in the street but points out as well to a certain understanding and engagement with the social, deeply embedded in Boulak, as a specific neighborhood which holds a particular history related to motorcycle workshops.

To give a concrete example of Mimi's lexicon, it is worth pointing out to the following: Mimi would generally call a pharmacy an "Aghzghana", which is an outdated Turkish expression, rather than using the more commonly employed "Saydaleya". Another example is the use of the word "Khamara" to describe the many bars which used to be located in Boulak, rather than just employing the word "bar", which became widely used nowadays. A third example is his use of the word "Khawta" to say that there is too much noise around the workshop, instead of using "Dawsha", the more commonly used. In that respect, it is worth looking further at

Mimi's conception of work, relying on his description to his relationship to his labor as being one of "gheya".

Before giving the full analysis of "gheya", it is worth noting that what is taking place here is a process of translating life-worlds, in the sense that the connotation of the concept is not merely a linguistic debate, but at its core, leans to its social use, and as such, to a certain view of the world (and in this context a view of work) and how people, as subjects, might interact with it. In that sense, "gheya" for Mimi could be considered as one of his life values, in the sense that it is a particular viewing of life and of his relationship to work, a certain "conception of the desirable" as theorized by Clyde Kluckhohn, as "ideas if not necessarily about the meaning of life, then at least about what one could justifiably want from it", (Graber 2001, 3). To put further the analysis, gheya here is also a "value orientation", in the sense that it forms part of Mimi's understanding of the world and one's place in it, which explains the fact that he did not want to force his children to get into the workshop work, "because if they do not have their hearts in it, they will simply fail", as he explained.