

Ghada Abdel Aal

**@ the Intersection**

Back home in Egypt, we have two famous sayings. The first one is: "If you are afraid you better not speak, and if you decide to speak you better stop being afraid." The second one is: "Some burdens are material for crying, but some other burdens can only be laughed at." My late mother, God bless her soul, also had a saying of her own, as she was always telling me: "If you ever get hurt, scream, 'Ouch!'"

At first, I thought that trying to explain why I write the way I do would be as simple as trying to explain why I write in the first place. I can find a simple answer for each question. The answer to the second question is: "Because I have something to say." The answer to the first is: "Because I like it." And yet, when I think about it more deeply, I realize that the three sayings I just mentioned may be the real reasons for the way I write.

When I started to write my first book, I didn't really start it as a book, but as a blog. I started blogging because I had something to say and I was hurt. Writing was my attempt to scream, "Ouch." I was one of fifteen million Egyptian women between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five pressured into getting married by our society, and being blamed when we failed to do so. I felt very pressured and I couldn't find anyone to talk to about it, so I started blogging. Blogging has been a way out for my generation, even though we only started blogging in 2003. It was some kind of a breakthrough for us, because ever since we began doing it we've been able to write about things that hurt us without fear of being seen as pathetic or weak. It gave us the ability to share our political views in a freer space.

The importance of blogging in Egypt and other Arab countries can be understood if you imagine countries which are heavily populated by youths who are not really allowed to speak out. There are social restrictions, religious restrictions and political restrictions that prevent us from talking about our thoughts and feelings. All of that came to an end when we discovered blogging, and when, a few years later, we discovered that we could use this space not only to share thoughts and opinions, but to show our creativity as well.

I am one author of a new generation of authors emerging from spaces at the intersection of the novel and the blog, poetry and hip-hop, native language and English, and who can write about personal experiences in a complex cultural landscape. We deal with questions of sexuality, religious extremism, and youth culture, and most of the time, we use satire to expose the hypocrisy of social mores and the prevailing economic forces. We employ a familiar and often casual language, free of artifice and traditional complexities. Our works have introduced many innovations into the literary text, including stream of consciousness and fragmented narratives, the didactic genre of the interview, and the preponderance of English words and such e-writing acronyms as "lol" and "@." We address a reading public eager to explore issues relevant to its daily life.

I started blogging in 2006, and ever since then I haven't really stopped. When I'm writing a weekly column, or when I was writing the screenplay for the television series based on my first

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book, and even now, as I am writing my second book, I don't feel that I'm writing. I'm just blogging.

So this is the way I write, and my writing has been described to be at the forefront of a new literary genre in the Middle East. Produced at the intersection of the virtual and the material, the blog and the novel, I'm proud to say that my writings belong to this kind of literature that is no longer in the service of governments and political ideals. It reflects instead the aspirations of a new generation seeking to define itself and engage others across cultural, political, and linguistic spaces. Urban experiences, foreign settings, and colloquial languages and dialects that are used to represent a reality often masked by political discourse, cultural censorship, and miscommunication.