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## To the Arab Nation: After “Damn you,” You Are No Longer Worthy of Greetings

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Housseem Ben Lazreg

Ahmed Fouad Negm

To the Arab Nation: *الى الأمة العربية: بعد "الظز" لم يعد يليق بك التحية !*  
After "Damn you," You Are No Longer Worthy of Greetings

To the Arab nation: After "Damn you," you are no longer worthy of greetings

To the Arab nation: How is Palestine; a populace without a homeland, a  
homeland without an identity

How is Lebanon; a nightclub with wooden chairs and a sectarian table

How is Syria; the rapacious knives of barbarism contending for her

How is Iraq; the land of deliciously free death rides?

How is Jordan; no sound or image and the focus is on local issues

How is Egypt; the post-revolution bride, banged by the Islamists

How is Libya; a country turned into military camps and tribal ideas

How is Tunisia; a clown<sup>1</sup> became its president on the pretext of democracy

How is Morocco; a new member in a Gulf Council in the name of monarchy

How is Somalia; only God the most knowledgeable knows about it

How is Sudan; a nation's land and bounty were slashed in half in the name  
of freedom

How is Yemen; its president Saleh is abroad, its wicked are apostate, and  
its people are a forgotten cause

How is Sultanate Oman; a country you honestly hear about only in the  
weather forecast

How is Saudi Arabia; a dates-exporting country burdened with Wahabi<sup>2</sup> ideas

How is United Arab Emirates; a beautiful secret vault where all secret plots  
are woven

How is Kuwait; an Arab state that became part of the United States of America

How is Bahrain; a dying populace absent from fiery speeches

How is Qatar; the godfather of revolutions, the dagger of betrayal, and the  
kitchen of imperialism

To the Arab nation: After "Damn you," you are no longer worthy of greetings

<sup>1</sup> A reference to the previous Tunisian president Moncef Marzouki.

<sup>2</sup> Wahabism is an Islamic ultraconservative doctrine and religious movement founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula in the 18th century.

You are no longer worthy of anything but squawking and braying over your  
rosy dreams

You are no longer worthy of anything but a carpet trampled by western feet

You are no longer worthy of the revolutions' slogans when your Arab  
Spring<sup>3</sup> became a staged play

You are no longer worthy of freedom when all your demonstration chants  
turned to blood

It is no longer appropriate for you to scream in the name of Islam while you  
are originally accused of terrorism

It is no longer appropriate for you, O' nation, whose summits are conspiracies,  
Whose speech is nonsense, and whose decisions are fake

You are no longer worthy of greetings, O' nation, who buried alive its  
dignity and Arabism.

<sup>3</sup> The Arab Spring is a revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests, riots in North Africa and the Middle East that began on 17 December 2010 in Tunisia with the Tunisian Revolution.

## Commentary

Ahmed Fouad Negm (May 22, 1929, December 3, 2013) is an Egyptian poet who is famous for the use of slang/vernacular Arabic in his poems. His words inspired many generations of Egyptians, mainly the working class. His poetry acted as a vehicle for radical social and political change and was shaped by experiences of poverty and prison. Negm's poems became a rallying chant for many protesters during the Egyptian revolution especially his poem "Who Are They, and Who Are We?" Negm's constant clash with the authorities led to his imprisonment for 18 years under Nasser and Sadat. His first collection titled *Pictures from Life and Prison* was published in vernacular Egyptian Arabic and became famous after famous Egyptian writer and journalist Suhair El-Alamawi introduced his book while he was still in prison. An anthology of Negm's poems was published in 2005 by the publisher Dar Miret. In 2007, Negm was appointed a UN "ambassador of the poor." He also won the 2013 Prince Claus Award for "Unwavering Integrity."

In this poem, Negem voices his anger and disenchantment over the outcomes of the Arab Revolutions or the so-called "Arab Spring." He curses and lampoons Arabs for their failures in building and piloting successful democratic movements that would help them regain and reclaim their dignity and unity. He frets about the destiny of the Arab nations and denounces harshly the socio-political conditions in each country separately while employing a language full of puns, obscenities and rhyming slang.

Translating this poem into English posits some challenges, notably on the cultural and political levels. On the lexical level, the famous expression طر is an old Ottoman word that means salt. In the Arabic dialects, it gained a different meaning and became associated with a particularly strong and vulgar way of saying "I don't care." This term was used several times by Libyan colonel Khadafy in his fiery speeches against the USA and Great Britain. I chose to render it as "Damn you" as it expresses feelings of anger and disillusionment over the conditions of Arabs. On the political level, I used footnotes to explain the referents of certain words. For example, the "clown" that is

evoked in the ninth line refers to the post-revolution president of Tunisia Moncef Marzouki, who was known for his verbiage, empty words, broken promises and powerlessness in his relation with the Islamists. In addition to that, Wahabism and the Arab Spring are also glossed in footnotes.

In a region that has been dominated for many decades by authoritarian regimes, poetry has been the most eloquent medium for voicing people's hopes, dreams and frustrations. Poets such as Tamim Al Bargouthi, Hesham Al Gakh and Ahmed Foued Negm assumed other responsibilities and acted as historians, journalists, commentators and even revolutionaries.

Source text:

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