LITERATURE OF ENEMIES OF THE US
Written and Compiled by Dick Bennett, February 21, 2013.

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BOOK FORUM
LITERATURE OF US “ENEMIES.”
(See OMNI’s web site for notes on the anthologies:   http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/)

WHO IS BEING BOMBED, DISPLACED, KILLED?
WHO ARE THEY, WHAT ARE THEY LIKE?  HOW DIVERSE ARE THEY?  HOW TRUE THE LABELS OF WAR?
WHEN: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2013, 7 p.m.

WHERE: OMNI CENTER FOR PEACE, JUSTICE, AND ECOLOGY,
3274 Lee Ave., parallel east of N. College, north of Atlanta Baking Co. and just south of Liquor World.

Dick Bennett, Coordinator

THE PANEL:
Jacob George: Alex Strick Van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn, eds. *Poetry of the Taliban*. Columbia UP, 2012. Jacob has also composed and will sing a song based upon one of the poems.

Kaveh Bassiri: *Forbidden: Poems from Iran and Its Exiles*. Edited by Sholeh Wolpé, who also translated many of the poems.

Taymour Elkerim. Reading a poem by a Syrian author.


Let us cheer the authors, the editors, and the translators.

Bios of Panelists:

 Jacob George: Veteran soldier of US occupation of Afghanistan; founder of the anti-war bicycling organization, A Ride Till the End (ARTTE); musician, song-writer.  
 a.ride.till.the.end@gmail.com

 Kaveh Bassiri: Iranian-American poet and translator, also teaches Persian literature and film courses at University of Arkansas.  
 kbassiri@email.uark.edu

 Taamour Elkerim. Former political prisoner and now refugee from Syria.

 Dick Bennett: Emeritus professor of English, UA; co-founder of OMNI; compiler of *Peace Movement Directory, Control of Information in the US, and Control of Media in the US*.  
 jbennet@uark.edu
Dick’s Letter to the Editor
Terrah Baker, Editor
Fayetteville Free Weekly

During the Vietnam War I was a professor in UAF’s English Department. Even as the years of the war mounted (two years, eight years, ten years!) the university failed to respond to the killing and devastation—a million people subjected to bombs, napalm, and agent orange, their villages burned and leaders assassinated, and more millions displaced in a dubiously legal war. Of course a university cannot shift its curriculum to meet emergencies, but such a long war could have provided at least one course on Vietnamese history, politics, or literature.

Now the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq have caused twelve years and ten years of more killing. But this time the university is better prepared. With Arts and Sciences named for J. William Fulbright, the Middle Eastern Studies with a variety of courses and a film series, a translation program, other international activities, and high-level emphasis upon internationalism and diversity, UAF is better positioned to help its students examine their nation’s wars and the idea of an “enemy nation” in real time. Its course offerings include Iranian literature several semesters, South Asian history and sociology, Vietnam history and culture, and Syrian literature this semester.

In this thoughtful context, OMNI has organized a Book Forum on the Literature of US “Enemies.” Please come and join the conversation: Friday, February 22, 7 p.m., at OMNI. The panelists—Jacob George, Kaveh Bassiri, and Dick Bennett—will discuss anthologies of Poetry of the Taliban, Literature of the “Axis of Evil,” and Poems from Iran and Its Exiles. Join us to celebrate the rich literature of these countries and the distinctiveness of the individuals who inhabit them.

References:

US WAR AGAINST VIETNAM


History

US WAR AGAINST AFGHANISTAN

US WAR AGAINST THE “AXIS OF EVIL”
Wolpe, Sholeh, ed. *Forbidden: Poems from Iran and Its Exiles*

Related anthologies:
Reza Aslan, ed. *Tablet and Pen.* Middle Eastern literature.

FINAL AGENDA
Intro.: Dick Bennett
Taliban Poetry and Jacob’s Song: Jacob George
Iranian Literature: Kaveh Bassiri
Syrian Literature, A Reading: Taymour Elkerim
Axis of Evil Literature: Dick
Audience

DICK’S NOTES ON THE THREE ANTHOLOGIES

POETRY OF THE TALIBAN

From the *Oxford Dictionary*

Pronunciation: /ˈtalɪbən/

(also *Taleban*)

Definition of *Taliban*

- a fundamentalist Muslim movement whose militia took control of much of Afghanistan from early 1995, and in 1996 took Kabul and set up an Islamic state. The Taliban were overthrown by US-led forces and Afghan groups in 2001 following the events
of September 11.

from Persian ṭālibān, plural of ṭālib 'student, seeker of knowledge', from Arabic (so named because the movement reputedly began amongst Afghani students exiled in Pakistan)

Derivatives: Talibanization (also Talibanisation) noun, Talibanize (also Talibanise) verb.

(The editors explain various synonyms denoting those fighting for or affiliated with “the Taliban.” “Mujahed” is a person who does jihad.” A similar term is “Ghazi.” Other words are “trench friend,” “brother,” “Afghan.” —Dick)

THE TRANSLATORS

Although Rahmany is only 30 in 2013, while Stanikzai must be around 40, Both are experienced. Rahmany taught English a few years, and Stanikzai has translated many kinds of writings between English, Pashto, and Dari.

THE EDITORS

Alex Strick van Linschoten and Felix Kuehn.

They have worked together on many projects. In 2006 they founded AfghanWire, an online research and media-monitoring group to give voice to local Afghan media. In 2010 they co-edited My Life with the Taliban. In 2012 they published An Enemy We Created, a history of the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda relationship.

In 2012 at Kings College London Linschoten was working on a book and Ph.D. on the identity of the Afghan Taliban movement 1978-2001. He speaks Arabic, Pashtu, and German.

THE POEMS


The book includes a useful Glossary, Notes, and Bibliography.

THE “PREFACE” BY FAISAL DEVJI.
Devji has taught at the several of the best universities in the UK and US, and is the author of *Landscapes of the Jihad* (2005), *The Terrorist in Search of Humanity* (2009), and *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (2012).

The future of Afghanistan and Taliban poetry: “Now that coalition forces are preparing to withdraw from Afghanistan without achieving any of their goals...a new society will have to be built from the kind of consciousness that is on display in this and other poems that may be said to constitute the literature of the Taliban.” (11).

Taliban poetry: Although the Taliban (plural of Talib) “are invariably defined in terms of tribal regulation and religious law. . . .surely it is the human element” of their “prolific culture of versification, that goes some way towards accounting for the Taliban’s self-consciousness, to say nothing about their resilience and appeal. For this body of verse is part of a greater world of poetic production in which Afghans belonging to every shade of political opinion participate.” (11-12) The Taliban are represented in the West and in “much of the Muslim world, too, for their strict conservatism,” but their poetry is “replete” with the “feelings of humanity.” “Drawing upon the long tradition of Persian or Urdu verse as much as Afghan legend and recent history, it is an aesthetic form that includes unrequited love, powerful women. . , and descriptions of natural beauty among its themes.” (12). Additional topics discussed by Devji: Afghan attempts to humanize the many wars, their links to aesthetic traditions, the ancient Pashtun culture, the heroes and heroines of Afghan history from the medieval period to the present, its Pashtun Afghan content (“a resolutely Pashtun land for the Taliban poet” 21), the enemy (see my notes below), the ambiguity and multi-layered complexity of the verse, their historical consciousness, and more. Devji’s essay provides a highly positive appreciation of the content and verse of the poems. (See my notes on themes, following.) Anyone reading his essay will no longer be able to accept the US government’s war-mongering and lazy or subservient media’s mindless “Taliban” label.

**LINSCHOTEN’S AND KUEHN’S “INTRODUCTION” 29-48.**

Everything Devji argues and illustrates is confirmed by the editors’ excellent commentary. But first, what is “Taliban poetry”? It’s the poems and songs published on the Taliban’s website, which the editors monitored, and the additional poems and songs collected by the editors online, orally, or on cassettes. Of these, the editors have selected 235 poems “to showcase some of the diversity of thematic and stylistic content as well as offering three dozen older examples from the 1980s and 1990s,” all part of a ancient, broader tradition of Pashtun and Farsicultural heritage and poetry. Here are other key arguments.

In Section one:
We cannot understand “the Taliban” and see through the hostile US/NATO stereotypes without the poetry.

The Taliban possess a vision, which is partly expressed by the poetry. (See my note on “hope” below.)

Poetry is “part of the lifeblood of social intercourse” in Pashtun/Afghan culture. The poetic culture derives from the Qur’an, which is written in rhymed prose and is recited in schools. “Every Thursday evening, poets around the country meet in groups” to recite their works and discuss.

Section 2 on Music is a close analysis of the important role of music, the music selected for censorship, the differences among officials, some more censorious than others, the subterfuges by artists found in all authoritarian countries, the continuation of the censorship after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Section 3: Taliban authors, singers, audience, business of the arts, poetic traditions. Section 4 on themes (43-) discusses “Taliban” references, the international enemies, prisons (Guantanamo), the six topics into which the poems are grouped. The final page (48) makes several significant general statements very much worth reading. Poetry of the Taliban offers the first collection of Taliban voices not purely political or religious. “This is not politics, but identity.” “The perspective. . .allows the reader to appreciate those who comprise the Taliban as human beings. . . .as individuals. . . .As such they prompt us to rethink our assumptions about a movement that has perplexed outsiders for decades.”

DICK’S COMPLEMENTARY NOTES ON TALIBAN POETRY THEMES in Sections 5 and 6 about the wars.

Many of these poems are worthy works of art that enrich their political statements, but his is thematic not stylistic commentary.

Patriotic victory over all invaders and occupiers

Section 5, “The Trench,” in particular collects poems of war and resistance violence and Afghan heroism. One poem gives a snapshot of 200 years of resistance to foreign occupation, “Islam’s Heroes” by Hanif. “This is the soil of Islam; it has well-trained heroes;/ This is why they would have beaten the enemy on any ground/. . . .The English are a great example of those who have been pushed out. . . .[Afghans] brought shame to the name of Communism. . . ./they have beaten a power like Bush.”

Like Hanif, Turab writes in “Warning” about the occupiers who wrongfully intruded into Afghanistan and who must be expelled: “I cannot escape from the trench. . . .I am a Muslim who has been granted Afghan zeal. . . .The cruelties of
Bush and Gordon Brown, I cannot tolerate this for Afghans. . .I cannot allow you to remain in my country.”

In “Home of Heroes” by **Abedzai** the invaders expelled go back to the Christian Crusaders, the British, to the Soviets, even to their own war lords, and now US/NATO. “The unbelievers have always been defeated on your soil.”

Victory over the USA is as fiercely desired as was victory over the British and Soviets. “**Good News**” by **Abedzai** describes “days of hope” over the collapse of the White House and the “infidels coalition,” “days of uprising” “towards freedom.” And **Ahmadi** in “White House” perceives the White House as “the centre of cruelty and barbarism”: “The murderers of the oppressed tribes live inside; May you turn red with their blood, White House.”

Additional war poems briefly noted:

“A Mujahed’s Wish From [to?] His Mother” p. 138
A resistance poem. The writer/persona is going to war against the foreign invader and occupier, and he sends his “last will” to his father and mother. In addition to personal courage and honor and pride in his “homeland,” the poet also asserts his faith in Allah and his family: family, country, God.

“Goodby” 138
Similar. Telling his mother he must go fight against the “English” who have “occupied my home” and played with “our dignity and chastity.” The editors explain that English” is shorthand for all the foreign invaders—Soviet, US and NATO.

“I Am an Afghan Mujahed” 138
Also about going to battle, and revealing his basic values, who he is, “I am” repeated, an identity poem:

1) Foremost he is an Afghan Mujahed, repeated several times, ready to martyr himself for his homeland. He identifies with the history of Afghan resistance to invaders.
2) He has “my religion,” faith, “holy Qur’an,” Shari’a “my light.”
3) He seeks “free life,” freedom from foreign occupation, and justice and stability.
4) He and all Afghans hate war, but they will fight against invaders, “Oh cruel colonizer!” I am an Afghan mujahed!

“Hero” 139
Another identity poem, with “I am” assertions throughout.

“I am Afghan.”

“History attests that I am a hero.”

Yet merciful.

But not to the cruel

And he will not “accept enslavement.”

Personal within national historical pride pervades this and preceding poems.

Note: “Freedom” is a major value to these poets—freedom from conquest and occupation by foreigners. Ironically, US leaders partly rationalized the illegal, ill-prepared, ignorant, immoral invasion by claiming to be benefactors—bringing freedom to the Afghans! Read more below.

GRIEF OVER THE DESECRATION AND DESTRUCTION OF THEIR HOMELAND

The 6th and final topical groupings of the poems is “The Human Cost.”

Abdul Basir Watanyar in “I live in flames” laments the invasion and destruction of Afghanistan and refers to his “country” and “homeland” frequently. “When I see the country’s wounds/I start screaming.” Why did this happen? “The enemy came and became our boss today/My country was destroyed.” The country and its people are diminished, constricted, damaged, uprooted, burned, leaving Watanyar “in mourning for my country.”

FREEDOM

Maybe the most unexpected and striking theme by its unintended irony is that of freedom. In the name of “freedom” the US invades, occupies, bombs, shoots, displaces and in general creates immense calamity and grief in Afghanistan. In the name of “freedom,” in defense of their homeland, the Taliban poets resist the US!
“This Country Will Be Freed” (author not given) is a key expression of Afghan resistance to foreign domination. The first stanza declares why freedom is certain: because the mujahed/ghazis (Islamic warriors) are fighting for their freedom; because every home is a “fortress,” together providing an army; because the enemy invaders are guilty of turning Afghanistan, the very earth, “into the Day of Judgement”; and because Afghans dream of a “flood” of justice by which the cruel and criminal will be punished and the oppressed freed and happy. The final two stanzas evoke the great liberation poets from Blake to Ginzberg, except the freedom is “for the nation”: “Everyone will break their chains and every captive’s hand will be freed;/In order to gain independence for the nation.” The freedom for which they fight and kill, and die, is for their country and their place in their homeland. “My dear homeland is burning,” writes Shin Gul Aajiz in “Homeland,” “Its soil and deserts are destroyed,” its people are leaving, and he appeals to “my creator” to protect the homeland from the plotters “against our freedom.” (But see Devji 14 on the “thoroughly individual sense of freedom” in some poems.)

Dick Bennett 2-19-13

LITERATURE FROM THE “AXIS OF EVIL”: Writing from Iran, Iraq, North Korea, and other Enemy Nations (Syria, Libya, Sudan, Cuba).

EDITORS’ NOTE (xiii-xxi)

They begin by pointing out the importance of translation to international understanding and the paucity of translation in both the US and in the Arab world, compared to Western Europe. They also reveal one cause of translation deficiency in the US in the past was US restrictions on publishing “enemy” literature, particularly that of embargoed nations, through licensing by the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control. The US was made further ignorant of its designated “enemies” by denying its leaders public access to realities of its ostensible opponents. (xiv-xv). Do the leaders of the most powerful militarized country in the world fear a free trade in ideas and literature, making us appear a mirror image of the “enemies,” as was the case with Soviet Union: SU/US?
They follow by skewering US use of “axis of evil” rhetoric. Its harms cut deep and wide. “The ‘Axis of Evil’ is an abstraction that obliterates both the very real differences between the included countries, which are not even remotely in alliance with each other, and the distinctiveness of the individuals who live in them. The devastation wrought by the ‘axis of evil’ rhetoric and thinking behind it, from Abu Ghraib to the deaths and maiming of so many thousands of people, military and civilian, and the deaths and maiming yet to come from cancer and other illnesses related to depleted uranium from American ‘smart’ weaponry—this is now glaringly clear.”

Against these harms they ask “Is the ‘enemy’ a particular leader, or a more pervasive ideology? A system of government, a people, a social group?” They hope their book “might simply celebrate diverse works of literature and through them, provide fresh perspectives on the notion of the ‘enemy nation.’” (xvi). Through the literature of nations threatened by the US or attacked and occupied, US leaders and public might become able to make a life-giving “war on ignorance” instead of the global, seemingly permanent, lethal “war on terrorism.”

Underlying this belief is the assurance that understanding of others is the preeminent purpose and achievement of literature. (xvii). Literature enables us to see the real individuals living in the nation and its ideologies, to participate in lives around the globe. Our leaders and mainstream media give us abstractions of good and bad nations, when we must experience real people, unique individuals, like people living in the towns and an the farms of our own nation in all their diversity, if we are to decide whether to invade and bomb. The editors recognize too the importance of international education in general—classes on the cultures of other nations, world literature translated and written in English, study abroad, exchange programs, multiculturalism. Thus we will widen our “circles of reference. . . against ignorance and fear of the ‘enemy.’”

Finally, they acknowledge the difficulty of selecting literature from seven nations, particularly from those nations prolific with writers, such as Iran. Their partial solution was to place “the equivalent of a companion volume” in the Words Without Borders web site,
THE ANTHOLOGY

The literature is arranged in this order: Iran, Iraq, North Korea, Syria, Libya, Sudan, Cuba. Each national section and each individual selection is preceded by an introduction, many of them well worth reading. Of the three Axis of Evil countries I will begin with Iraq, because it has been invaded by the US twice, embargoed and bombed for a decade, occupied for another decade, and the killing and chaos continue as our troops withdraw, while Iran and North Korea (NK since 1956) have only been threatened and sanctioned. I have also discussed Syria. My inquiry explores the diversity the editors emphasized.

IRAQ

The Introduction by Najem Wali describes the plight of writers living in a dictatorship destroyed by wars (one with Iran, two with US). Some of the writers went along with Saddam, some went into exile, and some grew silent.

All of the five Iraqi writers represented in the anthology are exiles. Here are three of them.


Sherko Fatah, writing in German, depicts life under war in his prize-winning novel, At the Borderline. The excerpt recounts two experiences of a smuggler at the border—crossing a minefield and dealing with border guards. Fatah lives in Germany.

The excerpt from Scattered Crumbs, a novel by Huhsin Al-Ramli, set in an Iraqi village during the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran in the 1980s, presents the men of a family creatively—zani, insanely—trying to evade military service. The author lives in Spain. The novel was written in Arabic.

IRAN

From the Persian Empire to Nuclear Conflict
The author of the introduction to the Iran literature, Zara Houshmand, helpfully distinguishes between Iran and the rest of the Middle East; for example, it was once the center of the largest empire in world history, known for its toleration and the first bill of rights, and the origin of the Zoroastrian religion. It is a center of Shiite Islam, to which 90 percent of Iranians adhere, and a century of strong central government. Yet “there is substantial diversity.” In 1954, the elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq, who was strengthening democracy and nationalizing the mainly British oil industry, was overthrown in a CIA-led coup and the oil divided between Iran and Western oil companies. Mohhamad Reza Shah’s cultural modernization and political repression led to the Islamic revolution of 1979 and Ayatollah Khomeini’s radical theocracy. His early regime was distinguished by eight years of war against US supported invasion by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, with a million dead. It was also marked and for the US when the US Embassy staff were held hostage for 444 days.

Nation of Poets
Hafez, Rumi, Sa’adi, Kayyam from the eleventh to the fourteenth century—these creative icons, and many others, enlighten Iranian culture. “Their poetry is very much alive today, recited and loved by Iranians at all levels of society” and extending into “Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.” Through the poetry particularly has spread the Sufi tradition of Islamic mysticism and nonviolence. To represent the literature of Iran, Houshmand has chosen “three very different voices”: a poem by Ahmad Shamlou, “a monumental and revered presence”; Houshang Moradi-Kermani, the “most translated modern Iranian author” with numerous international awards; and Tirdad Zolghadr, who writes about connections between Teheran and Europe.

The selection from A Little Less Conversation, Zolghadr creates an astonishingly international, witty, cynical character named Golmohamad whose mind is a dozen cultures simultaneously in a similar Teheran. A politically striking passage is a favorable comparison of Khomeini’s regime to that of the more systematically brutal Shah. But after reading about North Koreans who had lived in Japan, we know quality of dictatorships is a matter of comparison.
And some Syrians don’t support the revolution, while detesting Assad, because they fear those revolutionaries to the right of the Muslim Brotherhood will be worse.

**THE FORBIDDEN: POEMS FROM IRAN AND ITS EXILES** Edited by Sholeh Wolpe. Our Forum gives special attention to Iran with this second collection. An Iranian instructor at UA who is using the book as a text in a class will report on it, so I need say little more beyond praise for the editor’s keen introductory essay on literature and politics, and the exceptional quality of the poems, which is to praise also the translators. Wolpe distinguishes well between the empathy of literature and “religious and ideological fanaticism.” And I hope she is right for the entire world that in Iran literature is like rain. I can praise the poems despite my ignorance of the original language because the editor understands translation as “a recreation, a re-rendering of what cannot be literally duplicated.” Hence when I say I admire these poems, I mean poems co-created by author and translator. Comparison of original with translation is a different, scholarly enterprise.

**NORTH KOREA**

The four authors are given almost the same number of pages as for the Iraqi writers. None of them are in exile. All were published by official magazines or state-run publishing companies and following official guidelines particularly regarding respectful treatment of the Great Leader. Biographical information was not available for some of the writers. So I was surprised by this judgment by the author of the NK introduction: “Nevertheless, what we witness on these pages is the persistent power of the written word, of the willingness to deliver, despite all obstacles, the stories of lives in North Korea as they relate to events we know only from the news. . . .”

The judgment is true. One story—by Kang Kwi-mi—tells a story about a displaced, poor Korean family living in Japan following WWII. Both sons learn to play the trumpet, and the second boy is particularly talented. Their parents are proud of them. But their father decides to return to Korea, because discrimination
against Koreans was severe in Japan. Life was much better in North Korea (where their home was located), and a musical career was assured for both boys—until the US “spy ship, the Pueblo,” was captured and the US threatened dire consequences. Then the second son joined his classmates in joining the Army. When his Army enlistment ended, he became a worker at a rock quarry, because the country needed building stone. The decisions, his choices, and their repercussions in the family are told in painful detail. And another—the political—context exerted its powerful influence: both decisions were made with the US enemy and the beloved leader Kim Jong Il in mind.

The story is literature or merely a political pamphlet written for advancement and to avoid punishment? Either way, it should be a wake-up call to the US. For the question—Are the leaders and the people of North Korea paranoid?—is also not the full story. There’s an old saying: You’re not paranoid if someone is trying to kill you. The North Koreans fear the US, with some good reasons, and their fear combined with the repressions of dictatorship have created national solidarity. (US global depradations—some fifty invasions and interventions since 1945—drive some people to lunacy, as when Vladimir Zhirinovsky, “a nationalist leader noted for his vehement statements, blamed the Americans” for the recent meteor: “It’s not the meteors falling. It’s the test of a new weapon by the Americans.” ADG, Feb. 16, 2013, 6A.) The US supported S. Korean dictatorships hostile to the North. The US devastated the North during the Korean War, and some US officials discussed using nuclear bombs. (Yes, NK invaded SK, but read closely the events leading up to that moment. See my newsletters on North Korea.) Out of this brew came NK’s development of its own nuclear weapons, a decision reinforced by the US invasions of Iraq, which lacked the weapons.

This wretched history continues today. Watch the newspapers. On Feb. 15, 2016, the ADG copied an editorial from the Chicago Tribune reporting “Another Nuclear Tantrum” by NK; that is, a nuclear test. The fear-mongering CT/ADG speculated “ominously” that the test was perhaps to develop “a warhead small enough to fit atop a long-range missile and threaten the United States and its allies.” The old US/SU mirror image saber rattling. And then the editorial lectures the new leader Kim Jong Un to “ratchet down the bluster and threats and try harder to feed his starving people,” when it is the US who has not only threatened but used the Bomb, and when NK would feed their people better if they did not feel the need to defend themselves by building the bomb as have all the other nuclear powers, and sustaining their enormous army. Then the CT/ADG urges China to “slow food and oil deliveries!” Threat after threat after threat, and NK’s reaction? They have the Pueblo and the Bomb—and the people love the Leader.
Threat after threat. On Feb. 16, in the ADG the AP reported “House: Get Tough on North Korea.” The House of Representatives called on Obama to “take a tougher stance against Pyongyang” because of its nuclear test. The vote was 412-2 for “additional sanctions.” And the bipartisan resolution also urged China to “pressure the North to curtail its nuclear and missile programs.”

SYRIA

Hanadi Al-Samman’s introduction explains the close connections, as in other Arab countries, between literature and politics. Ottoman empire’s “harsh censorship” forced many writers into exile mainly to the US and Egypt. But under France’s occupation of Syria 1918-1946, writing was freer. The 1948 war and establishment of Israel witnessed the rise of politically committed, social realist literature, which was strengthened by the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and Arab defeat and further loss of territory. The Ba’athist Party took power in 1963 and created a police state with martial law and strict censorship, including destruction of writings considered subversive to national security and imprisonment of their authors. Many writers went into exile. Those who stayed, as is perhaps universally true for writers under dictatorship, resorted to techniques of indirection in style and genres that questioned and criticized without alerting the police. Some of these methods Mohja Kahf has named “the poetics of Syrian silence.” The US is not now invading or occupying Syria, but in the 1990s the US had called Syria a “rogue” state and placed it on the State Department’s blacklist along with Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan for allegedly sponsoring terrorism. Al-Samman offers a keen comment on writers living between the two negations of Syrian repression and US/Western threatening and support of Israel, ‘lives between two exiles.” Perhaps this concept offers a framework for interpreting all of the literature written under repression, including that of NK.

The editors of the anthology selected one novel to excerpt, by Salim Barakat, and a story by Hanna Mina. The story “On the Sacks” (1976) tells about his Syrian-Arab boyhood in Turkey with his mother and sisters, his friends working as what we call child labor, the tyrannical boss of the business, and more—a familiar turn to the past in a dictatorship.

For world writers and their translators
Dick Bennett 2-21-13
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Dick Bennett
My blog:
War Department/Peace Department
http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/
Newsletters
http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

Index:
http://www.omnicenter.org/omni-newsletter-general-index/
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