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[Episode 16 - Mosab Al-Nomaire](#) (April 2015)

Transcript by Christabel Smith

Host: David Turner – **DT**

Guest: Mosab Al-Nomaire – **MA**

Conversation:

DT: Hello, my name is David Turner and this is another episode of Lunar Poetry Shorts. Again, I'm in Istanbul, up at Mau Mau artists' residency centre and right now, tonight, I'm joined by Mosab Al-Nomaire. As an introduction, as normal, we'll start with a poem.

[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time]

DT: Thank you, Mosab, that was very nice. My first question is usually, very loosely, why poetry? What is it about poetry that keeps drawing you back to that method of working, as opposed to other forms of writing or art?

MA: First thing, I didn't wake up one day and say: 'I'm going to be a writer or a poet'. I don't know, it happened suddenly, or let's say, by mistake. I didn't plan for this and in general, I don't like to say I am a poet. The writing is my way to say something, to say what I feel, what I see, what I listen to.

DT: And poetry is the best way to get that across?

MA: Writing in general.

DT: How often do you read poetry in public?

MA: Actually, I read only one time at Spoken Word [Istanbul], but I used to read to close friends. As official reading to people, it's the first time for spoken word. This reflects how I don't see my writing as a serious project.

DT: How did you end up at Spoken Word Istanbul last time?

MA: By mistake. I was just going there to have a beer and they said: 'Is there anybody who wants to share with us?' I said I would share. I was a little bit drunk and it was great.

DT: The perfect introduction to poetry, to be a little bit drunk. Had you seen spoken-word events before?

MA: Actually, that one was the first I went to. In general, I was a nobody before I came here. I came in September [2014] so I am fresh here. That was the first time I go to spoken word and back in Dubai of working.

DT: We'll have a second poem.

MA: Can I read in Arabic?

DT: Of course, please do.

MA: Because I think my friends can understand and I want them to understand.

[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time]

DT: Thank you. I have no idea what you said, but that choked me up a little bit. That was really nice. You write your poetry in Arabic and when you're reading to people in English, whether it's spoken word or to friends, are you translating to English in the moment?

MA: Yeah. The first time in Spoken Word, I was doing this, but I have some poems translated by my friend. I can translate from English to Arabic, it's easy for me, translated from Arabic to English, it's a little bit hard to find the correct word.

DT: I was speaking to some other writers today and they were saying they had the same problem with Turkish, to find the right descriptive terms in English. When you read Arabic poems in English live to people, is it the same translation you use or just the feeling in the moment?

MA: No, I'm using translated text by [Google] translation because I am planning to do something in my English stuff, with my English poems.

DT: Is there a big difference in the way you look at your work in Arabic and English?

MA: Yeah, it's different things, different text in the Arabic one and the English one, because it loses the music and the rhythm.

DT: You were very rhythmical when you were reading in Arabic. I've heard you read a few times in English and there's definitely a greater rhythm to the Arabic.

MA: There are rules to make the poem musical in Arabic. It's there in the Persian and English.

DT: All formal poetry in English really has some sort of rhythmical structure anyway. Definitely, the Persian and Syrian language...

MA: You mean Arabic?

DT: Sorry, yes.

MA: Actually, there is a Syrian language. It's not language, it's an accent. I write in two ways.

DT: I think that's where the confusion lies. I was talking to a couple of other people today about Arabic in general, but obviously across different regions, you have different versions of that mother language.

MA: There is one Arabic language, the official language in all the Arabic countries, and there are national accents, the Egyptian, the Syrian. I write in both of them, the Syrian, the spoken language in the street and the official Arabic I just read for you.

DT: That takes us onto the next question, about your influences growing up. What's the storytelling tradition like in the part of Syria you're from?

MA: I understand, but I don't know what is meant exactly by influence.

DT: Is it how your writing style was formed? Is it why your style of writing in Arabic is perhaps more musical?

MA: Of course, because I am able to write in Arabic more than in English. I'm not that fluent in English.

DT: Could you tell us a bit about Syrian poetry culture? Is there a written culture in Arabic? Does it differ from the storytelling which might exist in the Syrian accent?

MA: It's so long, the question, I will answer something else!

DT: That's fine.

MA: Let's talk about the language itself. The Arabic language. I feel so close to the Arabic language. I love the language so much. The words. The words in any language have an effect on the people, on you, and you take and give feelings, affecting the words. That's how I look to the writing and the language itself.

DT: I think you pretty much did answer the question I was trying to ask myself, how the language affected you. That was quite a beautiful answer anyway, after me stumbling. I have to say, it's very late and I've been doing podcasts all day and now my mouth has stopped working. We'll have a poem or a couple of poems to finish with.

MA: I will read short poems and number each one.

[We are unable to reproduce this reading at this time]

DT: Thank you, Mosab, very nice. How would you like your poetry or your writing to develop? Would you like to see more in English text?

MA: Actually, I'm not looking for developing or trying to motivate myself. I'm not in this mood, not now. If I write something, this is the thing I write and I don't wish it could be better than this, because I always work on it to not let it have any chance to be better.

DT: Have any other writers influenced the way you write?

MA: Of course, every time I read for anyone, there are certain people, if you read for them, their writing will affect your writing. I'm trying to avoid that, by decreasing what I read. Not reading too much and not feeling inspired by some. I just feel the soul of writing and get it good enough.

DT: Then move on?

MA: Yeah.

DT: OK, that's fair enough. Is there any writer, artist or musician you would recommend to people listening?

MA: It's difficult. Deep things don't come from advice from somebody, it comes accidentally. In general, everybody would want to look for something. He will find his way, he will not wait for advice or recommendation.

DT: The question's not based around you teaching people where to go, it's about sharing an interest, it's nice to share contacts.

MA: The problem is that most of my reading is in the old Arabic language, so I don't know if they can get that, even if they get that translated to English.

DT: It's not that easy a question, it's too broad. Maybe I shouldn't ask that again.

MA: Maybe I can say there is a certain poet I feel it's OK to always listen, read. Most of them have bad... They are standing inside against what I have seen in Syria. I don't feel it's a matter for me. A nice poem is a nice poem for me. As an example, Saadi Youssef, I like, and there are Syrian poets like Hassan Basma, a Syrian poet in France. I have a Moroccan friend, whose name is Mohammed Miroud. I am going to read something from him in Spoken Word next to my poems.

DT: Thank you for coming over and talking to me. I'm stuck in a polarity, I represent a group of people listening, but I am the only one talking. I don't know if I am I, us or we. Maybe I'm 'all'. I'm definitely not, I'm just me. Thank you, Mosab. We're going to try and record more of Mosab's stuff and put it out so you can check it out. You don't have a blog?

MA: I just have my Facebook page and something published in Arabic only. I'm trying to publish something in English soon.

DT: I'm sure there are some people in Britain that speak and read Arabic, so we will put the title of the book in the description of the video and if anyone wants to check it out, they can. Thank you, Mosab, and thank you again, Mau Mau, the centre of my Istanbul world at the moment. I love them very much.

End of transcript.