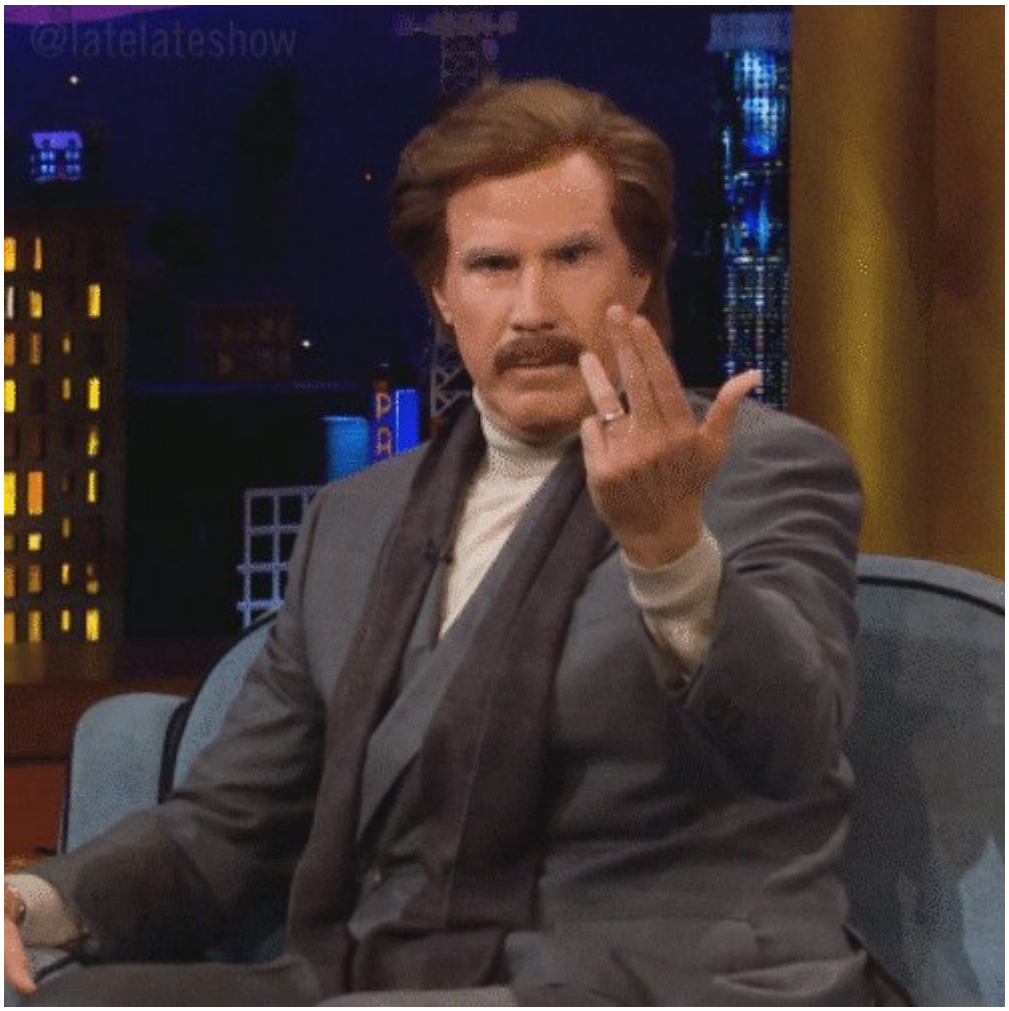
Twitter Thread by Tweeting Historians



Tweeting Historians
@Tweetistorian

1/25 Today, I will continue looking at the lives of Palestinian poets in the context of the intellectual battle over modernizing Arabic poetry after 1948. A marginalized and maligned figure in Arab intellectual history in the Cold War is Tawfiq Sayigh (1923-71) ~AA.



2/25 I am tagging Tawfiq's nephew @SayighYezid, a brilliant political economist and political scientist of the modern and contemporary Middle East. He is the son of Palestinian economist Yusuf Sayigh and Rosemary Sayigh, the British anthropologist ~AA.

3/25 Though elsewhere in my work I closely study Jabra I. Jabra (1920-94) -- Sayigh's lifetime colleague and confidant -- I will cover Jabra, here, in relation to Sayigh for the purposes of brevity and since Jabra has received a fair amount of attention in the historiography ~AA.

4/25 The prose-poem was a form that Sayigh masterfully used to express his feelings of misery and pain. Sayigh led a tortured life that took him from one exile to another until his lonely death in Berkeley in 1971. Mounah Khouri, Arabic professor @NESUCB laid him to rest ~AA.

5/25 During the Nakba, the Sayigh family fled from Tiberias and settled in Ras Beirut, where Sayigh received them and cared for them from his income as a librarian at Beirut's American Cultural Center and as an anonymous editor of the women's magazine "■awt al-Mar'ah" ~AA.



6/25 Two years after the Nakba, Sayigh suffered a serious upset with the death of his mother in 1950. The torments Sayigh experienced from the Nakba to the death of his mother affected him immensely and inspired the poetic imagery he employed ~AA.

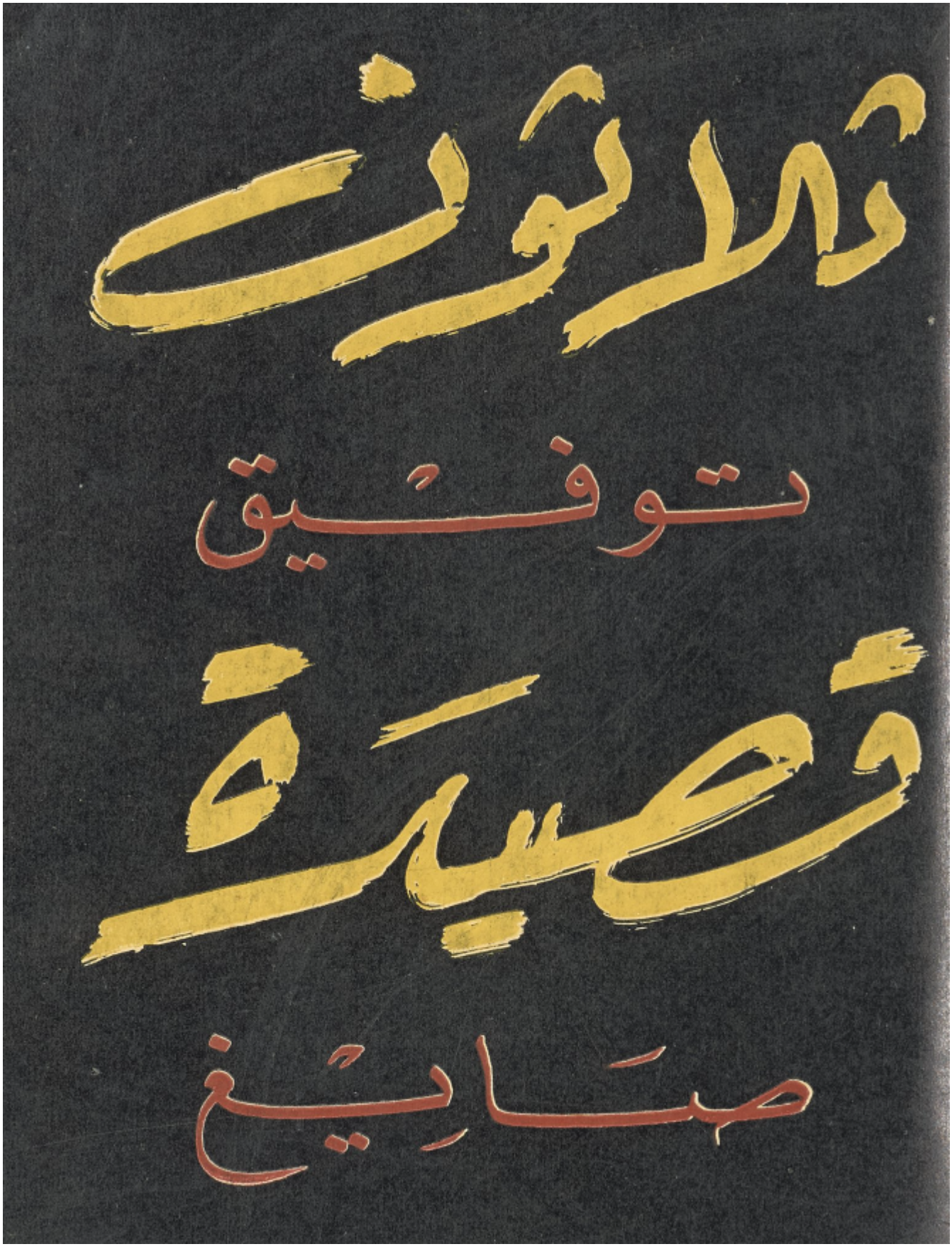
7/25 In 1951, Sayigh began his "pilgrimage" to @Harvard. He enrolled in courses in US and English @HistLit and literary criticism. Yet, Harvard's stuffiness failed to tame Sayigh's spirit and instead he chose to wander Boston's streets and to frequent the city's dive-bars ~AA.

8/25 In fall 1952, Sayigh would meet Jabra who came to @Harvard funded by the same fellowship that Sayigh received earlier. At Harvard, Jabra and Sayigh worked with Archibald MacLeish: the modernist poet, professor, and @librarycongress librarian ~AA.

9/25 Jabra and Sayigh shared the trauma of removal and indignity of exile. Sayigh never left his house without a book in hand to hide his passport and present it whenever he was approached by a police officer for a proof of his identity: that of a stateless Palestinian ~AA.

10/25 Such piercing experiences inspired Jabra and Sayigh to create, to experiment, and to seek solace in poetry. Yet, they were unable to tell of the expanse of their tragedy through traditional modes of the poetic; theirs was too unwieldy to be stifled by rhyme or meter ~AA.

11/25 In 1954, Sayigh, published his first collection of prose-poetry under the title: "Thalathun Qa■idah (30 Odes, TQ)." Ibn Man■ur (d. 1311) defined the qa■idah –the classic Arabic ode– as that form of poetry “celebrated by its author and revised with fine articulation” ~AA.

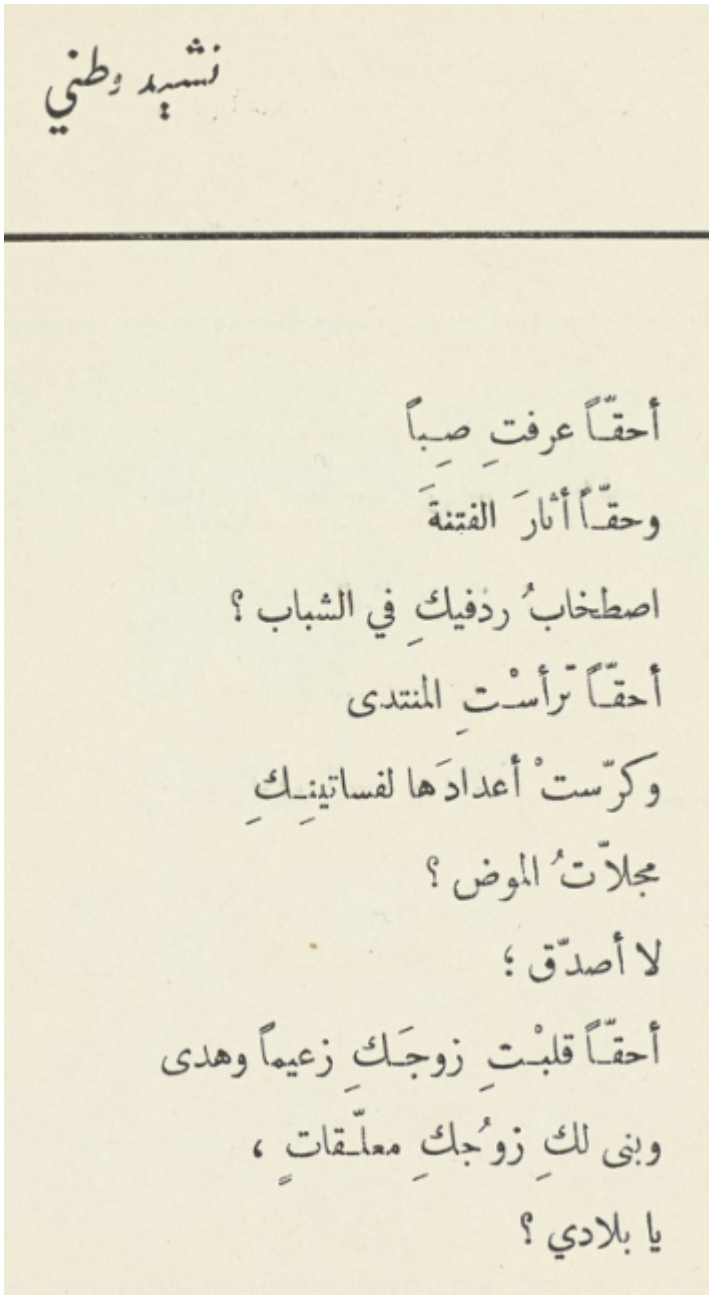


12/25 This definition did not elude Sayigh. He sought to unsettle established notions of Arabic poetry with his deftly composed odes. Sayigh wrote much of TQ at Harvard where he trained and developed friendships with American poet @adrienne_rich29 and novelist Henry Miller ~AA.



13/25 Not unlike Malhas in NT, Sayigh wrote lucidly in a language that was “contemporary.” Jabra even went so far to say that Sayigh in TQ “smelt Arabic language, its new and old, its beautiful and monstrous ... and poured it out into molds of his creation" ~AA.

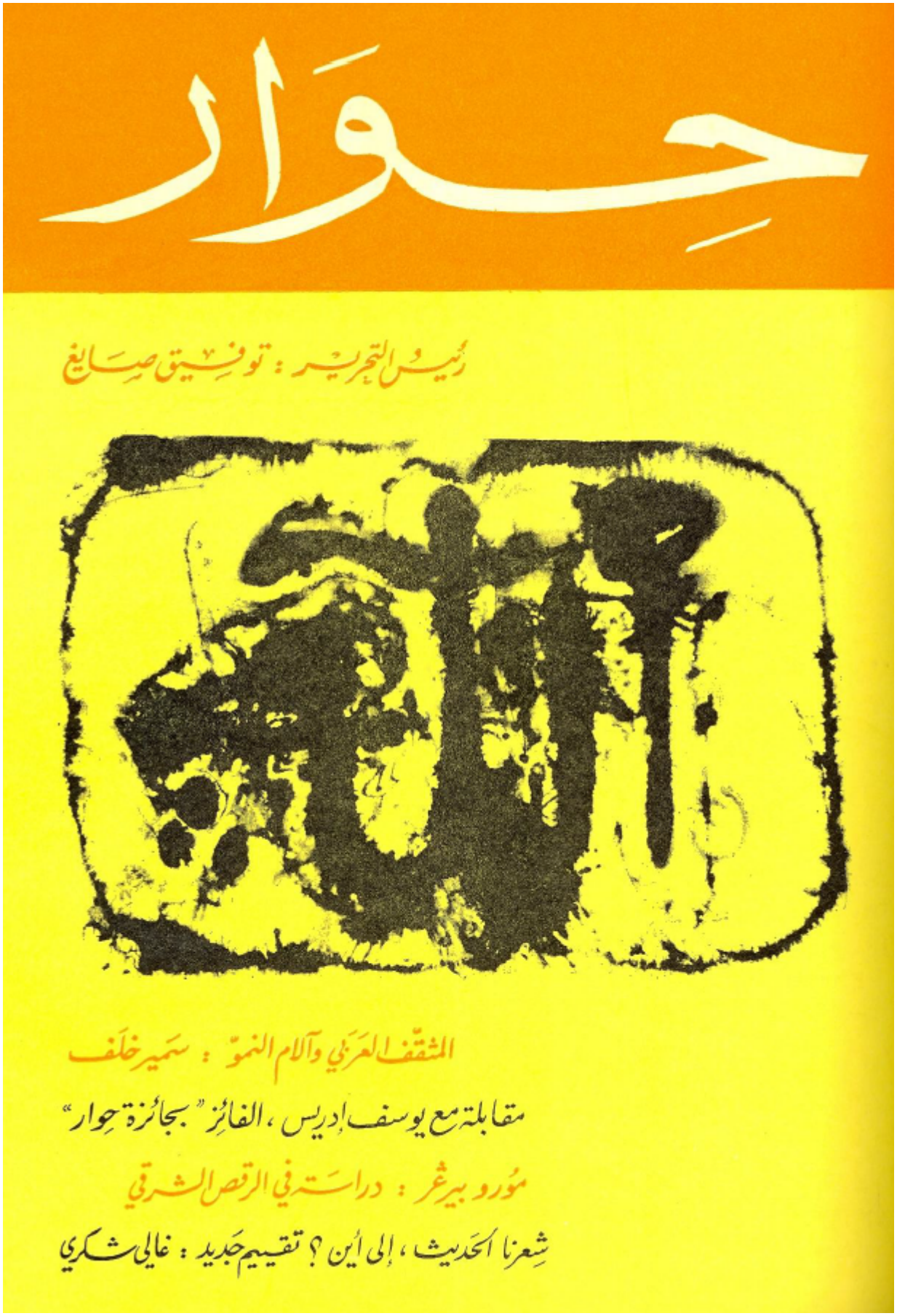
14/25 In an ode from TQ, ironically titled: National Anthem (nashid wa■ani), Sayigh was explicit in describing his country & his relation toward it. Sayigh detailed an abusive love with a country that boasts of its past while it “neuters its sons” & “ravishes its daughters” ~AA.



نشيد وطني

أحقّاً عرفتِ صِباً
وحقّاً أثارَ الفتنةَ
اصطخابُ ردفيكِ في الشباب ؟
أحقّاً ترأسْتِ المنتدى
وكرّستْ أعدادَها لفساتينِكِ
مجلاّتُ الموض ؟
لا أصدّق ؛
أحقّاً قلبْتِ زوجَكِ زعيماً وهدى
وبنى لكِ زوُجكِ معلّقاتٍ ،
يا بلادي ؟

15/25 Yet Sayigh's poetic modernist project was best articulated in the magazine he edited "Hiwar (Dialogue)" over 1962-67. Iraqi critic ■adham Badr went farther. She argued that the praxis of Arab modernism in all fields did not really come full circle until Sayigh & Hiwar ~AA.



16/25 @zeinamaasri also underlined Hiwar's “aesthetic legacy” and how the magazine "reserved an important space for modern art in the Arab world," and where art was employed not ornamentally but as a "meaningful and aesthetically autonomous contribution to the journal" ~AA.



17/25 Unfortunately, this rediscovery of Sayigh and of his modernist yield remains haunted by a global, literary scandal, which incriminated him and the publication he edited ~AA.

18/25 In mid-1966, @nytimes revealed that @CIA, as part of its cultural warfare against communism, funneled funds to the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). In conjunction with Hiwar in Lebanon, the Paris-based CCF operated journals in India, Brazil, Uganda, and Europe ~AA.



pg. A11

Cairo Bars Arab Journal, Charging CIA Link

By Patrick Seale
London Observer

Congress for Cultural Free- be traced to the detailed ex- the Cairo daily, Al-Ahram, the Egyptian scene is that it please the authorities is to go Hiwar is uncertain. The C

19/25 News of the CCF-CIA links were picked-up by Arab papers, which hastily denounced Sayigh and even condemned him as a servant to Israel and to colonialism and as a "Zionist sympathizer" ~AA.



20/25 Indeed, in a region that has been long-consumed by conspiratorial thought and where regimes and regime-loyalists cloak authoritarian failure with claims of anti-imperialism, Sayigh would perpetually be guilty-by-association ~AA.

21/25 And, despite severing publicly his ties to the CCF in early 1967, the scandal has proven bigger than him and it has, thus far, precluded a serious engagement with his literary corpus and intellectual activities through Hiwar ~AA.

22/25 Given access to his private papers, I can assert that Sayigh was deliberately kept in the dark about the CCF and its dubious funders. Despite that, Elizabeth Holt in her studies on the topic pushed the cultural Cold War envelope too far ~AA.

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"Bread or Freedom": The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and the Arabic Literary Journal *Ḥiwār* (1962-67)

Elizabeth M. Holt
Bard College

23/25 Holt obsessed over the scandal without taking into account Sayigh's position and drew a picture of a pawn lacking agency. In essence, Holt regurgitated the half-century-old accusations against Sayigh, in that he was but a cog in the machine of US cultural imperialism ~AA.

24/25 All this to say that the story of Arabic poetic modernism cannot be told in full without considering the scattered efforts of exiled Palestinian poets like Malhas and Sayigh. But what links prose-poetry to the fact of exile in our case? ~AA.

25/25 Edward Said offered a tentative answer. For him to be an exile – a poet no less – is to be in a "jealous state," seeing estrangement in all matters and "clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will." Tomorrow unto literary criticism. Until then! ~AA.

