

## Remapping Poetic Spaces: A Comparative Reading in Some Selected Poems by Allen Ginsberg and Ahmed Fouad Nigm

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الملخص باللغة العربية:

تقدم الدراسة الحالية قراءة نقدية جغرافية لقصائد منتقاة من ديوان "قصائد مختارة: 1947-1997" (2013) للشاعر الأمريكي ألن جنسبرج (1926-1997) والأعمال الشعرية الكاملة (2005) للشاعر المصري والكاتب المسرحي العامي أحمد فؤاد نجم (1929-2013) في ضوء نظرية النقد الجغرافي التي أرساها الناقد الفرنسي برتراند ويستفال (1926) وطور ملامحها روبرت تالي (1969) أستاذ اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها الأمريكي بجامعة تكساس. والقصائد المختارة هي: "مناجاة الشمس الراحلة" و "أمريكا" و "زيارة الي سويماركت في كاليفورنيا" لجنسبرج و "رسالة رقم 1 من معتقل طره" و "مصر ياما يا بهيه" و "بابلو نيرودا" لنجم. وقد ساعدت القراءة النقدية التحليلية المقارنة لهذه القصائد الباحث على استنباط ثلاث نتائج جوهرية تتعلق بالبعد الجمالي للنقد الجغرافي في شعر جنسبرج ونجم؛ أولاً: النقد الجغرافي ما هو الا فلسفة جمالية تسعى إلي إزالة الفوارق الواهية بين الادب والتاريخ والجغرافيا من خلال توفير أدوات نقدية تساعد الفنان علي نقد الحاضر السياسي من خلال تخيل أماكن ليس لها وجود على الخريطة البشرية؛ ثانياً، لتحقيق هذا الهدف تبني جنسبرج ونجم رؤية شعرية مختلفة حيث اعتمد الأول علي خلق فضاءات شعرية متحررة من بطش الدولة البوليسية أما نجم فقد خلق عوالم ارتحل اليها خيالة الثأر من قلب المعتقل؛ وأخيراً وليس آخراً، تؤكد الدراسة المتفحصه لأعمال جنسبرج ونجم الشعرية أنه علي الرغم من كلا الشعارين ينتميان الي سياق ثقافي مختلف جذريا الا أنهما ولفا فن الشعر لخلق فضاءات جغرافية جديدة تقاوم الإحباط السياسي والظلم الاجتماعي لتزرع بذور الامل.

الكلمات الدالة: ألن جنسبرج، أحمد فؤاد نجم، النقد الجغرافي، برتراند ويستفال، روبرت تالي

## Abstract

This paper presents a comparative geocritical reading of some selected poems by American essayist and poet Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997), and Egyptian vernacular poet and dramatist Ahmed Fouad Nigm (1929–2013). It aims at examining Ginsberg’s and Nigm’s poetry in terms of geocriticism demonstrated particularly in Westphal and Tally’s speculative thoughts on the relationship between literature and geography. The collections from which the poems are selected are Ginsberg’s *Selected Poems, 1947–1997* (2013), and Nigm’s *Al-Amaal al-Shariyah al-Kamlah* (2005 [some of which are translated into English by Mona Anis in 2013]). The poems selected for the study are: Ginsberg’s “Ode to the Setting Sun,” “America,” and “A Supermarket in California,” and Nigm’s “Message Number 1 from Tura Prison,” “Mother Egypt,” and “Pablo Neruda.” The analysis of these poems motivates one to sum up three essential points regarding the achievement of both poets. First, geocriticism is a critical interdisciplinary framework via which Ginsberg and Nigm represent real places in terms of imaginary ones with a view to producing geocritical maps of the historical present. Second, to accomplish this objective, both poets adopt a different poetic strategy via which they show an exceptional talent to make their poetics political. Finally, the close reading of the selected poems

indicates that Ginsberg and Nigm may be geocritical poets who utilized their poetics to create spaces that resist any sociopolitical depression, injustice and discrepancy.

**Keywords:** Ginsberg, Nigm, geocriticism, Westphal, Tally

### **Introduction**

Inspired by Lawrence Buell's statement that there was no "an is" "without a where" (2001, 55), this paper presents a comparative geocritical reading of some selected poems by American essayist and poet Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997), and Egyptian vernacular poet and dramatist Ahmed Fouad Nigm (1929–2013). The collections from which the poems are selected are Ginsberg's *Selected Poems, 1947–1997* (2013), and Nigm's *Al-Amaal al-Shariyah al-Kamlah* (2005 [some of which are translated into English by Mona Anis in 2013]). The poems selected for the study are: Ginsberg's "Ode to the Setting Sun," "America," and "A Supermarket in California," and Nigm's "Message Number 1 from Tura Prison," "Mother Egypt," and "Pablo Neruda." The study aims, first and foremost, to show that Ginsberg and Nigm tend to create poetic spaces that bridge the widening gaps among literature, geography and politics, by bringing into prominence the notion that poetry is but a mapping machine. In this context, Ginsberg and Nigm, to quote Robert Tally's words, may expose the unjust social conditions that befall human society via "a complex skein of imaginary relations" (2015, x), not geographical techniques. To disclose these relations, the selected poems are

technically analyzed, in the light of geocriticism developed by Bertrand Westphal (1962), French philosopher of comparative literature at Limoges university, and Tally (1969), American Professor Emeritus of English literature at Texas State University.

Despite the fact that geocriticism was not in the mainstream of literary criticism at the time of Ginsberg and Nigm, the present paper seeks to argue that the two poets manipulate the speculative assumptions of this school, particularly the thoughts propagated by both Westphal and Tally. True it is rather difficult to set up an analogy between Ginsberg and Nigm in terms of cultural, educational or social backgrounds, but a close reading of their legacy may reflect that they are identical in creating poetic spaces simulating the real ones in terms of creative imagination. Such a skillful talent paved the way for both of them to launch a sharp criticism against the social injustices that befall Americans and Egyptians. In the process, both Ginsberg and Nigm produce spatial relationships, that not only clarify the fundamental reasons behind the rise of social and political corruption, but also stimulate the readers to rebel against the makers of their exploitation.

Ginsberg and Nigm formulate, each, their own unique poetic vision. Inasmuch as the former focuses on an exploration of native American roots, he is called the 'poet of the city'. Nigm's poetic strategy, however, does not go that deep into the infrastructure of the Egyptian heritage, but rather concentrates on Egypt as a unified

land, known throughout his poetic corpus as *Bahiya* (the fine, beautiful country). While Ginsberg engenders a poetic space free of the dominance of the police-state, Nigm manages to create a sensible poetic space that springs essentially from the womb of the police-state. Depending on the creative aspect of Ginsberg's and Nigm's poetic vision, one can contend that both poets are not just artists, but mapmakers who deploy their poetics in the service of the sociopolitical threats befalling humanity in general and the homeland in particular. In so doing, both poets prove that poetry does not merely reflect an emotional crisis, but rather provides a political discourse via which the downtrodden everywhere can change their own predetermined destinies.

### **Rationale and Scope of the Study**

Geocriticism, as this paper argues, is but an explanatory set of critical acts. It endows readers and critics alike with productive initiatives to consider the role played by "space, place and geographical practices" (Kashikar 2019, 13) in deciphering the meaning of literature. That is why geocriticism depends basically on the concept of space, the "physical existing environment" (Kashikar 2019, 14), via which geocritics attempt to supply readers with a new portrait of existence, an aesthetic *mélange* of real and imaginary places. Writers, from here, adopt a variety of approaches in their endeavor to depict space. While some portray places as they actually are, others offer an imaginary landscape of the real in order to decry

the political elite. It is for this reason specifically that the present paper adopts a comparative approach, through which Ginsberg's "Ode to the Setting Sun," "America," and "A Supermarket in California," and Nigm's "Message Number 1 from Tura Prison," "Mother Egypt," and "Pablo Neruda" are analyzed, in the light of geocriticism, namely Westphal's and Tally's critical standards.

Although Ginsberg's and Nigm's poetic contributions are the outcome of two completely different cultural milieus, the analysis of their selected poems reflects the fact that both poets tend to engineer geocritical spaces. This brings into prominence the ethical responsibility of the artist as a political thinker, who employs an exceptional talent to recapture the lived experience through imaginary landscapes. Considered thus in terms of such a critical maneuver, a re-reading of Ginsberg's and Nigm's legacy is expected to result in an interesting argument. That is to say, while the poet can be a mapmaker who creates social and political spaces, the critic can become a map-reader whose main task will be to identify such spaces in relation to the historical presence of the poet. Bearing this in mind, the paper addresses several research questions: 1) What is geocriticism? 2) What are the salient features of Westphal's and Tally's geocritical theory? 3) What is the geopoetic strategy adopted by Ginsberg and Nigm? 4) How far are Westphal's and Tally's geocritical views translated in the selected poems? 5) What are the poetic similarities and dissimilarities between Ginsberg and Nigm?

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## Geocriticism: Theory and Practice

In its simplest form, geocriticism, is but a set of critical practices, whose very aim is to establish an aesthetic strategy by which critics can unfold “the dynamic relations” (Tally 2015, viii) that stand between fictional and real places. Such an effort requires the geocritics to foster “interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary methods and practices” (vii) that may establish “productive connections” (vii) among literature, geography, politics and social sciences. Geocriticism, thus, calls upon its critics to efface the fake disjunctions between real and imaginary areas. The removal of any given limits helps the critics to set up a zone of “dialogical understanding” (Prieto 2011, 21) of the places in question. It is not a topographical description of geographical data, but, rather, a metaphysical vivid approach that exceeds the subjective vision of any author, not to say mapmaker. To fully appreciate this metaphysical dimension, one should contemplate the “ideological presuppositions of authors” (21) with a view to pinning down the sociopolitical “significance” of landscapes under study.

For this reason, one should supposedly be equipped with an aesthetic methodology to explain how Ginsberg and Nigm yield poetic strategies that bridge the gaps among literature, geography and history. It is a far-fetched objective that can only be achieved through scrutinizing the places in question “as the focal point for a variety of critical practices” (Kashikar 2019, 14), so that “a pluralistic

image” of such landscapes can be created. A complete understanding of any specific territory does not necessarily depend on the reader’s actual experience, is certainly determined by his/her geographical knowledge vis-à-vis ideological agenda. A good analysis of these constituents reflects how geocriticism sublimates the critic’s aesthetic consciousness by trying to draw an analogy between “the real and fictional spaces” (14) invented by the artist. The geocritics are, therefore, required to search for “an infinite variety” of geographical and historical data so that they can explore the reason behind the birth of the imaginary places. Taking this into consideration, one should hinge heavily on a “variety of texts”, to use Kashikar’s words (2019, 15), by way of underscoring the significance of “the real-and-imagined” (15) places produced by Ginsberg and Nigm. That is why the selected poems of both poets are not only examined as literary pieces but are also analyzed as geo-maps that portray the sociopolitical setbacks threatening any nation.

### **Ginsberg’s Geopoetic Strategy**

Ginsberg and Nigm never spell out precisely what poetic strategy they adopt to imply their meanings. However, a close reading of their poetic achievement may prove that they may be professional geocritics. This is justified by their tendency to create in their poems imaginary spaces to which they guide their readers to the very cause behind the wide spreading socio-political corruption. One of the leading figures of the ‘Beat Poets’, Ginsberg is called the



“poet of the city” (Seddeek 2013, 3), who employs its space to set up a poetic vision reflecting the dreadful “scenes of urban decay and poverty” brought by America’s capitalist agenda (Diggory 2022, 766). When asked about the importance of composing retrospective poetry, Ginsberg answers that he is so interested in “the localism and appreciation of native roots” (30, 1975) to provide a “tragic view” (30) of capitalist America. The more the artists endeavor to explore socio-political problems, the more they should distance themselves from the firm grip of the “police-state” (30). The poet should in this context give free rein to his readers’ awareness to interact with the fictional form of existence created.

The importance of Ginsberg’s creation of poetic spaces addressing political themes renders him as an active participant in any socio-economic “struggles” (Katz 2015, 211). When again asked whether or not he is concerned with politics, Ginsberg replies that he is so much preoccupied with the idea of “meditation,” as it enables him to unfold the aesthetic middle ground between literature and politics. To this effect, he says: “I’m interested in meditation, in exploring inner-space, in a certain political movement” (1975, 32). His words suggest that he devotes his own poetry to the criticism of the makers of American policy, who simply fail to defend any liberal ideals. His words also suggest that the poet should manipulate historical and geographical data since truth is not a fixed entity, but rather “an absolute” icon, in terms of which the artists can represent

the real sociopolitical dilemmas via an imaginary landscape (Ginsberg 1998, 175).

### **Nigm's Geopoetic Strategy**

Just as Ginsberg has gained a prominent position on the map of American literature, Nigm is crowned the leading figure of the modern Arabic vernacular poetry. One reason for receiving such a prestigious place is, most likely, his cooperation with Sheikh Imam Eissa (1918–1995), a blind author, composer and singer of popular Egyptian songs. The Nigm–Imam duet composed impressive political lyrics that obtained widespread popularity for their simple ‘Cairene dialect’ and “mock–heroic style” (Abdel–Malek 2013, 8, 10). Besides instilling social and political motifs in his poems, Nigm sometimes pays a particular attention to such universal themes as the “opposition to colonialism and neo–colonialism, and commitment to socialist struggles” (Halim 2013, 50). Opposite to Ginsberg’s main concern about localism and native American roots, Nigm is preoccupied with creating a wide variety of poetic spaces that revolve around Egypt, Chile, Palestine and Tehran. This paved the way for him to transcend the boundaries of localism to outreach the arena of internationalism, where Arab and non–Arab critics celebrate his literary achievement.

Still opposite to Ginsberg, Nigm is not the poet of the city, but rather, one of the ‘marginalized’ citizens. His duty as a universal poet insinuates him to delineate poetic landscapes that employ

geographical techniques to present the famished conditions of Egypt during the reign of President Nasser and that of President Sadat after him. This is why he depicts Egypt as a fictional landscape weighed down with social injustice and oppression. Such a practice convinces Nigm's readers to relate him to Ginsberg in that both of them adopt geocriticism as a poetic strategy to produce an artistic portrait of Egypt as an eternal spirit challenging poverty, dictatorship and any military defeat. Nigm uses this portrait as a starting point for spurring the Egyptians on to achieve social change by revolting against the makers of their oppression.

But Ginsberg's poetic strategy springs from a burning desire to free himself from the power of the police-like state, whereas Nigm's strategy flows primarily from the heart of the very same state. Nigm's attitude can be traced back to the time when he was jailed for 18 years. It was then that the bitterness of political harassment formulated the sources of his poetic inspiration. Spurred by such a horrible experience, Nigm became convinced that poetry and politics were "interlocked in a symbiotic relationship" (Abdel-Malek 2013, 90). To disclose this relationship, he was inclined to adopt a poetic vision that would enable him to represent Egypt as a promising strong child, born to resist all aspects of injustice and downfall. He utilized thus his talent to draw a cognitive map of Egypt not as a traditional topographical place, but as an absolute power that withstood humiliation and frustration.

But Ginsberg contended that the artist was but an active participant in any activist struggles, whereas Nigm viewed the poet as a revolutionary leader, who ought to remind his ‘marginalized’ fellow-citizens that the “revolution against the oppressors and dictatorship is a must” (2018, para. 6 [trans. mine.]). This is why Nigm developed a poetic vision that did not depend on Ginsberg’s meditation, but rather hinged tightly on the confrontation of the root cause behind the rise of despair and depression. The job of the artist, from this point of view, is to delve deeply into realities, not just to contemplate them. Accordingly, Nigm’s poetic vision is not the result of any philosophical meditation, but the outcome of a firm belief that “the artist is born to assail any wrong phenomenon” (Nigm 2020 [trans. mine]).

### **Westphal and Geocriticism**

In order to grasp how Ginsberg and Nigm engineer poetic spaces illuminating the ‘real’ in terms of the ‘imaginary’, it is important to closely review the geocritical assumptions propagated by both Westphal and Tally. Westphal defines geocriticism as a ‘critical discourse’ that aims to “unleash spatial perception and representation” of the geography of the real (2015, xiii). However, an investigation of such a geography does not yield “a referent,” simply because a referent flows primarily from “a multiplicity of heterogeneous points of view” (122) that revolve around a specific place. This maneuver enables the critics to achieve “a multifocal

dynamic” discourse (122), which certainly denotes that “multifocalization” is the inherent characteristic of geocriticism. Writers can, therefore, represent their ‘multifocalized’ perspective through three basic methods: “endogenous, exogenous, or allogeneous” (128), each of which ranging from intimate models to strange arena. The endogenous perspective depends greatly on a traditional vision of space that strongly opposes any exotic representation of reality because it privileges “an autochthonic vision” of existence (128). The exogenous viewpoint stems mainly from the perspective of a traveler who overemphasizes an exotic understanding of place. The allogeneous estimation lies in a middle ground between the above-mentioned two forms. It refers to metaphors generated by artists who reside in a place, but still treated by the native people as non-natives. To explore the aesthetic dimensions of such voices, geocritics ought to be equipped with “a geocentered and multifocalized” framework (119) with a view to evincing how the topography of the imaginary explores the real.

Bearing in mind Westphal’s insistence on the geocentered and multifocalized practice, it can be inferred that geocritics make literary discourse an authentic account by drawing an analogy between the real and the imagined worlds, not to mention geographical knowledge. However, geocritics do their best to explain the significant differences and similarities between real and fictional places. By so doing, not only can they reveal the author’s hidden

socio-political agenda of, but they can also explain the rationale behind the distortion of geographical data. For this goal to be accomplished, a strong emphasis should be laid on a “complex chronology” (Westphal 2015, 113) and a multiplicity of points of view concerning the spaces in question. The diversity of views maintains an aesthetic relationship among literary discourse, geography and politics, simply because geocriticism renders a comprehensive portrait of real locations through fictional ones. Geocritics, therefore, ought to pick up an artistic methodology that helps them to carry the fictional spaces over to new horizons, where the fake limits separating the real from the imaginary are eliminated. Such is the geocritical innovative approach that supplies one with necessary tools to look closely into Ginsberg and Nigm’s corpus.

### **Tally and Geocriticism**

Motivated by Westphal’s statement that “the geography of the real” (Westphal 2015, 170) and that of the imaginary need to be explored, Tally advances a new form of geocriticism which he christened “literary cartography” (Tally 2013, 3). It is a critical concept that examines the different “spatial representations” (144) invented by authors to map specific sociopolitical spaces. Westphal lays heavy emphasis on geocriticism as a geocentered approach, whereas Tally insists that geocriticism is a form of “literary cartography” (11) that generates skillful critical acts. Not only do these methods help the readers “understand and think their own

social spaces” (6), but they also enable them to depict what is real through what is fictional.

A simple consideration of the interrelated real/fictional spaces may attest that literary cartography is the best aesthetic medium used by critics and writers alike. This springs essentially from the notion that literary cartography provides artists with a realistic vision to map their “social space” (Tally 2011, 1). The geocritics thereupon should pay a particular attention to the “spatial practices” (1). Taking this into account, one can assume that literature is a form of “mapping or a cartographic activity” (2013, 45). One can also propose that the literary text is no longer a text, but rather a “literary map” (79). Just as the writer is expected to be a “mapmaker” (45) who creates literary spaces, the geocritics is, by necessity, regarded as “a map-reader” (79), whose very objective is to explore the significance of each geographical sign. In this context, both Ginsberg and Nigm can be argued to be literary cartographers who utilize their poetics to bring out a critique of the historical present in terms of imaginary landscapes.

## **Discussion**

### **Ginsberg and Nigm: A Geocritical Reading**

Westphal’s definition of space as “an entity with a thousand faces” (2015, 120), along with Tally’s conception of the artist as a mapmaker, can be best translated in Ginsberg’s “Ode to the Setting Sun,” “America,” and “A Supermarket in California,” as well as in

Nigm's "Message Number 1 from Tura Prison," "Mother Egypt," and "Pablo Neruda". A six-stanza poem, "Ode to the Setting Sun" seems to be an echo of Westphal's statement that the perception of place and its representation "do not involve the same thing" (2011, 1). Inspired by this criterion, Ginsberg uses a train ride to provide a pluralistic image of the real New York through the fictional Jersey marshes. He aims to bring to light the notion that the fatal American politics during the 'cold war' left the American people no options but to live in an eternal state of darkness. To hammer home this *leitmotif*, the poet instils in his poem a dreary consciousness of "temporality and death" (Breslin 1984, 84). That is why the poem deals with drawing a paradoxical map of the city as a spatial entity with two faces. The first refers to New York as "a corrupt," not to say a dying impure "physical being," while the second goes deep into the heart of the same place to depict it as "an incorruptible spirit" (85).

Poetically dramatizing, thus, the impurity of the physical aspect of New York, Ginsberg tends to adopt what Westphal christened "the exogenous point of view" (2015, 128). It is a geocritical technique via which the poet acts the role of a traveler who hinges greatly on his own imagination in the hope of creating "a multifocal dynamic" (122) representation of New York. To achieve his objective, Ginsberg describes the eastern border of the city as an area of "smoke and iron" (2013, 154). His description engenders a portrait of the Jersey marshes as if they were "the archer" that are not only



lined in “a broken crown,” but also found half naked “in a rusty gown” (154). The more the train runs, the more the poet changes the geographical features of New York by creating an imaginary place, in which existence becomes a hell devoid of any aspects of peace and purity except darkness and “fire” that destroy the marshes. To bestow a sense of reality upon this fictional landscape, Ginsberg portrays the city from the perspective of a fairy land.

In that land, the shining chariot of Apollo, god of light and sun in Greek mythology, participates effectively in turning the Jersey marshes into a mortal “meadow.” The dreadfulness of this mythic country, not to say America, can be traced back to the failure of Phaethon, son of the sun-god, Helios, who eggs on his father to drive the chariot responsible for bearing the sun across the sky. But, since Phaethon has no previous experience in leading the sun-chariot, he, to quote Luke and Monica Roman’s words, loses “control of the horses” (2010, 204) that pull the vehicle. The more the chariot moves upwards, the stronger the sun rises, burning the surface of the earth. Phaethon’s serious deficiency motivates Zeus, the god of thunder, to kill him with a thunderbolt. Whereas Greek mythology relates that Phaethon is “crashed into the river Eridanos” (402), Ginsberg’s poem tells that he is vanished in the somber land of “chiaroscuro”/ New York:

Apollo’s shining chariot shadow  
Shudders in the mortal bourn;

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Amber shores upon the meadow

Where Phaëthon falls forlorn

Fade in somber chiaroscuro. (Ginsberg 2013, 154)

By making Phaëthon disappear in somber ‘chiaroscuro’, Ginsberg brings into prominence what Westphal calls an “integral space” (2015, 196). He also fixes a close rapport between the fictionalized Jersey marshes and the real New York. Therefore, he adopts “a bardic stance” (Breslin 1984, 93), blaming the Americans for their negligence of the massive consequences of Phaëthon’s absence, that transposes human existence into a “funeral of raining cloud” (Ginsberg 2013, 154). In such a cloud, the “cold Heavens” (154) were burnt strongly, to the degree that the setting sun reflects nothing but a “blind gaze” stemming from the horrors of the cold war, not to say from the “dying crowd” (154). That crowd waits for the resurrection of Phaëthon, owing to a strong belief that it can provide some sort of social justice. Unfortunately, in case Phaëthon is resurrected, he will produce “bloody light” that flows from his “shroud” (154). It is for this reason that Ginsberg praises the darkness which invades the city, as it encourages the supporters of the American dream of rebelling against the makers of their own eternal night/oppression. Equipped with such a political desire, Ginsberg describes America as the “empire of the lark” (154), that ought to be optimistic about its promising future, putting on splendid “raiment”

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of freedom amid the darkness that surrounds the American dream of egalitarian society.

In the last two stanzas, the dominion of the night is developed into what Reynold calls a terrifying “scenario of horror” (2011, 98). Despite the break of dawn, the Americans are forced to live under the earth in “a sightless cave” (Ginsberg 2013, 155). This cave is conceived to be a visual image of blindness which denotes that the absence of sight transforms New York into a horrible cavern that can be likened to the Platonic cave. In it, the Americans, to borrow Plato’s words, are whipped into the painful experience of sightlessness, simply because they keep shackling within the body of the cave. Isolated within the cave, they cannot understand the reasons behind the total darkness that befalls and surrounds them. Not only can they see the shadows reflected through the cave’s entrance, but they can also “stare directly” at nothing but an illusion (Plato 2016, para. 2). If they do not resist such a humiliation, they “must die” (Ginsberg 2013, 155), mainly because their existence becomes something like a “grave.” That is why Ginsberg ends the poem with gloomy lines, which imply that temporality and death are the common fate of all the Americans. The more the train approaches New York, the more the poet feels that he is moving towards nothingness. It is an overwhelming dysphoria which befalls the train and human existence, mainly because it prevents the colors of “the

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rainbow” from appearing. This total darkness brings on destruction that “rolls upward out of” New York:

My bones are carried on the train  
Westward where the sun has gone;  
Night has darkened in the rain,  
And the rainbow day is done;  
Cities age upon the plain  
And smoke rolls upward out of stone. (2013, 155)

It is noteworthy that Ginsberg does not use geographical techniques as a point of reference. Rather, he hinges greatly on “a haze of symbolism” (Diggory 2022, 766) as well as on many classical elements. Not only do these devices challenge the geographical mapping of the city, but they also bring into prominence what Tally called “a cognitive mapping” (2013, 6). It is a geocritical model that explains why Ginsberg employs the fictionalized Jersey marshes to cast criticism at the real American cold-war dualities, inherent in “America’s liberal ideals and its less-than-liberal realities” (Katz 2015, 46).

Unlike Ginsberg’s “Ode to the Setting Sun” that makes use of the exogenous point of view of a traveler, Nigm’s “Message Number 1 from Tura Prison,” wields the endogenous perspective of an objective observer. Inspired by the aesthetic power of this perspective, Nigm plays the role of a geographer who hinges greatly

on his experience, as a real political prisoner, to provide a geocritical vision of Egypt's sociopolitical conditions as a solid space. In it, he represents a portrait of the imaginary Egypt in terms of the real Torah prison complex. By thus blending the real with the imaginary, Nigm brings to light the 18-January uprisings, the 1977-Bread Riots, that broke out when the president of Egypt, Muhammad Anwar al-Sadat (1918-1981), decided to reduce food subsidies. This can be justified by the poem's footnote, where Nigm asserts that the Sadat regime was accustomed to "arresting the Egyptian national figures with the beginning of each year in order to protect his authority" (2005, 11 [trans. is mine]).

A three-stanza poem, "Message Number 1 from Tura Prison" is written in the form of a letter, not to say an ode addressed to a woman called Azza, the poet's beloved. The poet, to cite Westphal, employs Azza as a "spatial referent" (2015, 113), via which he explores the impact of the real upheavals of the 1977-Bread Riots. He aims to produce a "sensuous geography" (120) of Egypt, as an eternal power that flourishes with the outbreak of the January uprising. The poem, thus, revolves around celebrating the birth of the great "harbinger" of January (Nigm 2013, 28). This celebration results in a tide of optimism where the poet personifies the "breeze" of the prison. He gives the breeze an order to lean on the trees and send the poet's very friendly greetings to "the blossoms" that adorn the gardens of Egypt. These blossoms are but a direct metaphor for

brave demonstrators who took to the streets of Egypt to protest against the government's pursuit to cut food subsidies. Side by side with changing the topography of the prison, that momentous event transformed Egypt into a revolutionary grove, flourishing with the arrival of the 18-January demonstrations. As soon as January arrives, bright light glowed in "the prison cells" to the extent that the political detainees felt neither "fear" nor "darkness." The absence of such a tormenting feeling transposed Tura prison to a land of promising future, where the "doves" can rest peacefully. However, the poet seems to be bent on reminding the reader of the passivity of the situation, in that the portrait contains no objective details. Rather, it is a dreamy vision that stems mainly from three sources of artistic inspiration: "the silence of the prison," "my heartbeats," and "the coffin":

With every harbinger  
 Of January's arrival  
 Light enters the prison cells,  
 Driving away fear  
 And darkness. (Nigm 2013, 28)

Nigm's description of the real Tura prison as a landscape of "harbinger," "light," "blossoms," "doves," "silence" and "coffin" becomes something like a mosaic of geopoetic images. These images, to quote Tally, help Nigm highlight the "dynamic relations" (2015,

vii) between the fictional Tura prison and the real Egypt. Here, the poet had to yields a “hybrid” (vii) zone of interrogation between the positive omens and the gloomy silence of the prison. This spatial relation urges the poet to challenge the authorities, by entrusting Azza with delivering his deep love and respect to the native Egyptians, who were about to rebel against the makers of their oppression. As he was jailed, Nigm had no interactive ties with the physical realities outside the prison, as if he were imprisoned within Ginsberg’s sightless cave: All that he perceived was a metaphysical hint of the January protests. To shatter this cave, Nigm provided Azza with a chance to assume the part of a political envoy to mediate between the real and fictional spaces. He, thus, expects her to send him a “look” (Nigm 2013, 28) via which he can sense —if not see— the pulse of the great events befalling Egypt. He also beseeches her to blame “the learned” people and all the Egyptians for not foreseeing the fateful “resurrection” of Egypt. He compares this resurrection, the 1977–Food Riots, to the day of judgment, the critical doomsday when the Egyptian people bravely rebelled against “hunger,” “humiliation” and “injustice” imposed upon them by their despotic rulers (30):

Ask every tower and every minaret,  
 Ask every friend,  
 And every child,  
 If any of them had seen

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The signs of resurrection  
Before the good tidings  
Of 18 January. (2013, 28)

Egypt's resurrection is a geocritical stance of the real Egypt, as an undefeated power that may die, but is revived sooner rather than later. It is clear by now out that Nigm employs his poetics to establish a geopoetic space that blows up the facile distinctions between the real Egypt and the imaginary prison. To emphasize this meaning, he concludes the poem by imploring Azza to inform the "dark-skinned boys" and girls of his affectionate greetings for their historical role in reliving Egypt (2013, 30). However, Nigm excludes the cultured elite from his greetings, simply because they never ever believe in the rebirth of Egypt from the womb of "ignorance" and "darkness" (30). Rather, he blames them for not admitting "the instincts of the people" that can spontaneously overcome corruption and social injustice. The dogged determination of the downtrodden to improve their miserable realities asserts the greatness of Egypt as an egalitarian society, where the Egyptians can build up their own "humble nest" (30). That can compete the power of "the palaces" (30), which stands for the presidential power. Such is the "great Egypt," the land of resurrection that insists on destroying the shackles of social injustice whatever the consequences may be.



A six-stanza poem, Ginsberg's "America" utilizes the first-person narrative technique, that contributes to the establishment of a picture of America as a landscape of disappointment and a frustrating socio-political institution. It is not an objective portrait. Rather, it is indeed a subjective vision, which, to cite Westphal, affirms that geography and literature are but the logical consequence of "spiritual hermeneutics" not "immediate observation" (2015, 2). This geocritical maneuver serves as a useful starting point for Ginsberg to provide a hermeneutic map of the imaginary America, in terms of the real political tumult evoked by both the cold war and the capitalist agenda. He, thus, describes America from a "totally exogenous point of view" to establish an "endogenous" (120) multifocalized approach of the bleak lived present of the fictional country during the 1950s. Not only does the manipulation of these crucial events represent America as the root cause behind the downfall of humanity, but it also endows the readers with "a mythologization and prophecy of the fatal American politics" (Brown 1994, 40). According to this vision, the USA is represented neither as a utopia nor as a dystopia. Instead, it is depicted as "a vortex of signs", that leads to the heart of "local peculiarities" (40) and cosmic political issues, viz. the nuclear warfare and the negative American policies in Asia.

Under such circumstances, "America" seeks to establish "a parasitic relationship" with the poet (Katz 2015, 88), who is

overwhelmed, as a consequence, by an angry tone of voice that pervades every aspect of the poem's overall structure. To express this pent-up wrath, Ginsberg personifies America by likening it to a person with whom he can engage in a direct dialogue. The outcome stresses the poet's attitude in that it confirms his dissatisfaction with the personified country, because of its destructive policies which cause him poverty and ill-mental conditions. Frustrated at such a gloomy materialistic atmosphere, he pleads to America to let him alone and "fuck" herself with her "atom bomb" (Ginsberg 2013, 31). In spite of his realization that the conversation with the personified nation will inevitably reach a deadlock, the poet is bent on opening up an endless dialogue with this country, in the hope of reinvigorating the American dream that is almost dead. His dialogue is transformed into a nostalgic lament over America as if it were a deceased and hence lost love. To keep an American ethos alive in the socio-political values, the poet indulges in a series of interrogative speech acts, via which he addresses the personified nation to regain its "angelic" principles as befitting a promised land (31). For this to be achieved, America ought to denounce its destructive politics, which turn human existence into a "grave" "full of tears" (31). The only solution to wipe out this bleak situation is to change its ideology in order to "be worthy" of its "million Trotskyites" (31), the American communists:

America when will you be angelic?

When will you take off your clothes?

When will you look at yourself through the grave?

When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?

America why are your libraries full of tears? (2013, 31)

The more personified America fails to give affirmative answers to the poet's interrogative questions, the more the latter acts as a spokesperson for the American communists. To maintain such a representative capacity, the poet produces positive declarative lines, imbued with a satirical attitude towards the American government. This enable him to dare ask America to stop interfering in other nations' internal affairs, lest its relationship with them should be damaged or else: "America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world" (2013, 31). The poet further warns the personified country against trying to defy his Marxist beliefs, since he will never "give up" his "obsession" with defending the workers' rights. Although the poet shows a dogged determination to settle this argument, he uses an ironical tone to highlight the "sinister" aspect of America as a police-state. To mock the false democracy of the USA, he mentions the fate of William Burroughs, an American visual artist of the Beat Generation (1914-1997), whom the American authority forced into exile in Tangiers. Unless America stops such illegal practices, "the plum blossoms" (31) that stand for justice will certainly vanish. The 'plum blossoms' here become a figurative

substitute for the absence of social justice, the inevitable consequence of America's destructive policies.

Although America appears like a dreary wasteland devoid of any blossoms, Ginsberg is determined not to relinquish feeling "sentimental about the Wobblies" (2013, 31). When one turns the pages of the modern history of America, one is expected to find out that the Wobblies is a 'mass of labor unions' formed by the workers to castigate "the abuses of capitalism" (Alexander et al, 2017, ii). It is true that America criminalizes communism, but the poet puts it overtly that he keeps "reading Marx" whose writings are the best way to achieve social justice (2013, 32). Remarkably, grief weighs heavily on Ginsberg owing to the firing desire of the personified nation to divide its society into communists and non-communists. To criticize this discriminating attitude, he cites his own uncle, Mr. Max, as an example of a communist Jew, who experienced painful hardships upon immigrating to America. Such American racist practices make the poet admit his suffering from a schizophrenia, a mental state via which he replaces his addressee. This turns into a dramatic shift, within the poetic texture, in the indexical relationships between the participants of the imaginary dialogue. The first-person speaker I/ Ginsberg is transformed into the second-person addressee you/America:

I'm addressing you. . . .

It occurs to me that I am America.

---

I am talking to myself again. (2013, 32)

By replacing the personified America, Ginsberg unleashes the aesthetic power of the stream-of-consciousness technique. This helps him become an omniscient narrator who fully comprehends the dirty games of politics. His deep understanding of such games is best demonstrated in his saying “Asia is rising against me” (2013, 32). This line, to borrow Westphal’s terms, is but an “explicit toponymic” referent (2015, 129). It accentuates the hot political events, arising from Asia, since the index “me” is a sign for America, not the poet. To make these events unique, Ginsberg marvelously yields an artistic *mélange* of the personal and public experience. He describes in detail a meeting held by the American communist party that he had attended when he was seven years old.

Not only did the free speeches about the workers’ rights, made by the leaders of the party, make him proud of being a natural-born communist, but they also motivated him to make a comparison between America’s capitalist restrictive atmosphere and the freedom speech of the communist party. To sustain this comparison, Ginsberg resorts to the literary device of allusion, where he hints at three prominent American Marxist thinkers deemed by the American authority as Russian spies. Those were “Scott Nearing” (1883–1983), a radical Marxist political activist, “Mother Bloor” (1862–1951), one of the greatest female figures of the American communist

party, and “Israel Amter” (1881–1954), a Marxist politician and founder of the American communist party.

To remind the American government of the necessity of reviewing its hostile ideology regarding communism, Ginsberg closes the poem by re-addressing the personified country over again. He accuses the authority of implanting in the citizen’s mind the seeds of an unjustified horror of Russia and China: “America it's them bad Russians . . . Them Russians and them Chinamen” (2013, 33). Thus directly referring to the Russians and Chinamen, the poet, to use Westphal’s words, creates a “macrocosmic” space (2015, 4), that acts as “a gap– filler”, not to say a “factual background” (31), carrying the issue backwards to the time of the cold war. The poet also manages to refute the false American tactics, built on the claim that China and Russia are but makers of a ‘mad’ ‘power’ that seeks to “eat” up “Americans “alive” (2013, 33).

Historically speaking, the American phobia about the Russians and Chinamen can be traced back to the strategic alliance held between the two nations, a cooperation agreement that had empowered the Russian front during the cold war. To remove such a fake phobia, the poet contends that the communists and socialists are far from being criminals who seek to spoil a filthy American dream that has “no good” agenda. In case America keeps maintaining an antagonistic stance against its communists, “nearsighted and psychopathic” disorders may prevail all over the states. The turmoil

will then become a direct consequence of the blind patriotism, upheld by the capitalist ideology, to make any communist the Snowball of the USA:

America is this correct?

I'd better get right down to the job.

It's true I don't want to join the Army or turn lathes in precision parts factories, I'm nearsighted and psychopathic anyway.

America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel. (2013, 34)

Just as Ginsberg's "America" provides an endogenous map of the USA, Nigm's "Mother Egypt" offers an exogenous cartographic portrait of Egypt through endogenous perspective. A five-stanza poem written at al-Qalah Prison in 1969, "Mother Egypt" employ the third-person narrator. This technique paves the way for the poet to yield a poetic space of Egypt as the promised land of optimism, that would have never considered the massive consequences of the June-1967 defeat. Nigm, therefore, voluntarily accepts to play the role of an objective observer with a view to engineering a hermeneutic map of the imaginary Egypt. He does so while still bearing in mind the real 1967 war, that unexpectedly resulted in the total defeat of not only Egypt, but Syria and Jordan as well. Here, the poet advances a poetic *leitmotif* of resistance in order that the bitterness of that crisis can be effaced and that life can be breathed into the symbolically dead spirit of the Egyptians. Inspired thus by

this schema, the poet deliberately alters the geographical features of Egypt, attempting to unfold the real conditions of the nation through an imaginary Bahiyah. This achievement proves beyond doubt that Nigm is not the poet of a specific single moment, but one of a “collective memory” (Orabi 2023 Para. 1 [trans. mine]). He is a poet who holds that genuine poetry is but the child of “the sociopolitical conditions that shape the artist’s consciousness” (Para. 1 [trans. mine]).

In spite of drawing an exogenous map of Egypt from the indigenous perspective, Nigm, strangely enough, denies that he is the author of “Mother Egypt.” He claims that the poem was written by a “little sparrow,” that produced rhymed verses resonant with geopolitical significances about an unknown “dark land.” Not only is this land decorated by a dreamy full “moon,” but it is also surrounded with a charming river, broad seas, boats and a sandy shore. The inhabitants of this imaginary landscape are the faithful comrades of the poet, who had endured tremendous hardships since the dawn of history. The poet asks the ‘sparrow’ to give friendly greetings to those revolutionary people who are resolved to crowd in “a huge gathering” to express their rejection of all the frustrations and discomfitures afflicting them. These topographical features cannot be charted on a map, but can best be reflected through the deep eyes of “a beautiful young woman” called Bahiyah. Thus, the



poet calls upon the readers to consider that Bahiyah is the ulterior reason behind the composition of these lines:

Little sparrow chirping rhymed words full of meaning

About a dark land, a moon,

A river, a boat and a shore,

And fellow travellers on a hard journey . . .

Reflected in the eyes of a beautiful young woman. (2013, 8)

Unlike Ginsberg's space which is macrocosmic, Nigm's, to quote Westphal, is "microcosmic" (2015, 4) in that Nigm employs the fictional persona of Bahiyah to encompass the actual socio-political conditions of Egypt during the 1960s. But Nigm's ultimate intention of creating of this imaginary, fictional character is, most likely, to achieve a metaphorical device, in the hope of formulating a concrete space to dramatize the depressive conditions of Egypt in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat.

An extended metaphor as it really is, Bahiyah becomes a milestone description of the featured space in "Mother Egypt." Nigm masterfully forms strong aesthetic analogies between that young woman and Egypt simply to bring out spatial relationships reflecting the massive consequences of the Six-day War. Like Ginsberg, he lays strong emphasis on the poetic device of personification, via which he directly addresses Bahiyah, *Ummah Bahiyah* [Mother Egypt] as if she were Egypt itself. According to Egyptian folkloric tradition, the name Bahiyah refers to a famished,

peasant young woman, whose love was not fulfilled. Nigm lifts her name and character from the folk tale, “Yasin wa Bahiyah” [Yassin and Bahiyya]. Although she was ‘Yasin’s illicit’ beloved, the Egyptians received her as ‘a national’ heroine who stood against the British occupation (El-Shamy 2018, 29). Opposite to the narrative, Nigm focuses on the heroic aspect of Bahiyah’s character that urges the Egyptians not to surrender to the 1967 setback. That is why he introduces Egypt/Bahiyah as a young beautiful lady, wearing a head scarf and dressed in “a long robe [*gallabiyah*]” (2013, 8). This elegant appearance bestows a sense of eternity upon Egypt/Bahiyah, hence making her challenge the law of time by being so youthful throughout the ages:

Time’s grown old, and you’re still young,  
It’s now departing, and you’re still coming,  
Coming after a hundred and one nights,  
Treading on hardship. (2013, 8)

The contrast between old/young and departing/coming enables the poet to set up a potent metaphor, or rather a hyperbole, in which he postulates that Egypt’s will can withstand the natural flow of time. As time passes, Egypt will still have an infinite spirit that can be animated upon overcoming any hurdles encountered. The road to salvation is a risky one. However, the poet is all confident that no matter how depressing the calamities brought on by the 1967 defeat are, Egypt will certainly continue to survive. This hope of survival

transforms the personified country into a landscape of hopeful dawn. In it, the sun soars high in the sky amid the “dark” disasters, blazing an expected omen for Egypt as a gorgeous woman.

Since the Six-day War obsessed the subconscious of the Egyptians, Nigm develops a geocritical stance of the geography of Egypt. He alters its topographical structures to reflect upon the after-effects of that defeat. This major alteration proves that poetry is but a form of mapping in which Nigm plays the role of a mapmaker. He possesses an aesthetic license to distort geographical data so as to maintain the flow of his poetic vision. His nonrealistic descriptions of Egypt as “islands of the night” (2013, 8) is but a cartographic activity, where he implies that these islands are protected by “the sea” that can sweep away the depression caused by the 1967 setback (8). The power of the sea urges the poet to be optimistic that the dawn of glorious victory will prevail in Egypt, through the rays of the sun protecting the looming shore. While Ginsberg relies on interrogative speech acts, Nigm resorts to imperative locutions: “come, give us a hand, / help us” (8). Within two imperative lines, the poet reminds the Egyptians that resisting the spirit of defeat is a must. He also utilizes the imperative points to call upon the people to cooperate closely with each other whatever “rough” the consequences may be.

The image of the above-mentioned rough sea paves the way for Nigm to terminate his poem with a magnificent and majestic personification. Rather than addressing the personified

Egypt/Bahiyah, he speaks directly to Egypt as if it were a ship. Utilizing this essential simile, the poet describes Egypt as a fully-fledged administration that leads the country safely, like a ship's wise crew, through a rough, raging sea of political troubles:

Mother Egypt, you're like a ship;  
 Your peasants are your sailors; . . .  
 The helmsman is a worker  
 And the oarsman, an Arab knight,  
 And the one up on the mast can see all that has passed  
 And all that is to come. (2013, 10)

The entity or rather the edifice of the ship/Egypt, namely the state, is based on four basic human pillars: farmers, workers, soldiers and intelligence men.

Even the simple reader of Nigm's poetry can easily trace, through the simile used, the balance that the poet strikes between Egypt and the ship. The 'peasants' are the keen 'sailors' who can control the sailing process. The 'worker' is the skillful ship 'helmsman' who can lead the journey. The soldier/Arab knight is the brave 'oarsman' who can defend Egypt/the ship. The 'intelligence man' is the 'mast' man who can interpret what goes by and what is to come. Technically speaking, thus, Nigm employs a rich—though simple and traditional—metaphor of Egypt's demography, comparing the Egyptians to a crew of professional, harmonized

members, who work together to help frustrated Egypt overcome the bitterness of the 1967 defeat.

To herald Egypt's triumph, Nigm resorts once more to the Egyptian folklore, adopting a proverb which says that if two attempts fail, the next will certainly not: "Two knots, and a third for luck" (10). Only when a person looks back to modern history, he/she can grasp the full significance of this folkloric proverb. The 'two knots' will become the 1948 Arab-Israeli clash and the 1967 Egypt-Israeli War, while the 'third for luck' will become the October-1973 victory achieved by Egypt over Israel, followed by the restoration of the Sinai Peninsula. Although Nigm wrote this poem, "Mother Egypt" in 1969, he was so optimistic that he predicted the sweeping triumph achieved by Egypt over Israel in what was known as the 'Ramadan War' (1973). To inspire an atmosphere of victory, the poet calls upon the sparrow to come back again. He asks it to kiss the land of Egypt and salute the Egyptians, for transforming their defeat into a total triumph. The more the sparrow sings, the more rapidly grow the seeds of prosperity and happiness in the land of Egypt, to prove that this country is a piece of glory, not just a sweet geographical, phenomenon.

Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California" is an unrhymed three-stanza poem written in the voice of the first person, the speaker. Using the poetic device of apostrophe, he addresses the great American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892) and Garcia Lorca (1898-

1936), the prominent leftist Spanish poet. Breathing life back into these two eminent figures, Ginsberg creates a poetic vision about the real capitalist America in terms of a Californian fictional supermarket. It is not just an empty frame, but a geopoetic landscape that provides a methodological foundation for setting up what Westphal called “spatiotemporal or geohistorical” (2015, 20) relationships between the real America and the imaginary supermarket. To foster these relationships, the poet leans heavily on the “allogeneous point of view” (2015, 128), a geocritical tactic that enables him to transform California’s supermarket into “a purely liminal space” (129). It is but a third space, in terms of which the poet expresses his disappointment at an industrialized America that sustained the victory of “consumer culture over naturalness” (Montaha 2019, 4).

“A Supermarket in California” revolves around an imaginary meeting in which Ginsberg coincidentally runs into Whitman while loitering in the city’s “side streets”, in an area surrounded by some “trees” and a “full moon” (2013, 23). Obviously, the natural elements, represented by the green trees and the bright moon, stand for the purity of the American dream, spoilt by the image of the dirty and dark ‘side streets’, easily recognizable on Berkeley’s map. Through the geographical description provided, Ginsberg, according to Westphal, creates a multifocalized perspective, not to say a “third space” (2015, 129). Relying on this, he suggests that the charm of the trees and the moon is interrupted by an accidental

feeling of “headache” and “hungry fatigue” (Ginsberg 2013, 23). The ‘headache’ is a physical symptom that requires medication, but the ‘hungry fatigue’ is a psychological anxiety that entails peace of mind.

Lacking a purely spiritual atmosphere of innocence, Ginsberg decides to go into the supermarket to purchase, metaphorically, “images of tranquility” (2013, 23), not catchy goods. When the poet does not find what he looks for, he dreams of Whitman’s “enumerations” that are conceived to be a synecdoche for poetic achievement. Whitman used to make lists of items that celebrate the magical power of nature. To warn the Americans against the menacing consequences of ‘consumer culture’, Ginsberg assumes the role of an anthropologist. By examining the behavior of the shoppers in the supermarket, he notices a place stuffed with a wide selection of merchandise that reflects no spiritual energy, namely “peaches,” “avocados,” “tomatoes,” “watermelons” and above all “penumbras” (23). He combines the penumbras with other grocery items only to mock the Penumbra Law, a group of rights issued by the American government to sustain the ethos of the USA’s dream. Holding onto this *leitmotif*, the poet declares that “whole families” are “shopping at night”, which refers to the ‘darkness’ brought on by capitalist agenda. This bleak climate stems mainly from Ginsberg’s dissatisfaction with capitalism, which, as far as he can see,

dehumanizes the citizens by turning them into remotely-controlled machines.

It admits little doubt that Ginsberg is frustrated at the Americans who unconsciously, if not intentionally, become capitalized consumers. However, his accidental meeting with Whitman makes him optimistic, especially since he points, when in the supermarket, to “the meats in the refrigerator” (2013, 23). To bestow a sense of reality upon the apostrophized Whitman, Ginsberg makes him address the grocery officers through a multiplicity of interrogative speech locutions:

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier. (2013, 23)

The term ‘angel’ should not denote Whitman’s homosexuality, as it is an allusion to the concept of the ‘angel of history’, invented by Walter Benjamin (1892–1940), the German Marxist philosopher. Benjamin warned that the ‘angel’ who protected human civilization from any catastrophe was destroyed by a storm blown by the paradise of modernity. According to José García’s concept, the angel’s tragic death may predict the death knell of the American dream of equality



and prosperity, simply because “what we call progress [capitalism] is this storm” that dehumanizes existence (2011, 206). In order to bring that ‘angel’ to life again, the Americans have to stick closely to Whitman’s poetic vision, since it is resonant with “solitary” “imagination” (Ginsberg 2013, 23). By unleashing their own imagination, the consumers will taste different goods and buy their needs without “passing the cashier” (23). This brings back to mind Ginsberg’s disregard of “the money mindedness of the capitalist” USA (Montaha 2019, 4).

By the conclusion of “Supermarket in California,” Ginsberg looks as if sadness has taken over him. This deep feeling stems mainly from the realization that the imaginary encounter with Whitman is destined to come to an inevitable end. That is why he writes the last stanza in the form of interrogative text. In the concluding lines, the poet addresses Whitman directly by producing a multiplicity of inquisitive interrogations:

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight? . . .

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? . . .

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America...?

What America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and... the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe? (2013, 24)

These deliberate interrogative lines are but speech acts intended to obtain information from the apostrophized Whitman. When the

addressee/ Whitman returns no answers to the questions directed at him, the poet gains a sense of linguistic superiority via which he reveals the hidden reasons behind the downfall of America. That collapse can be attributed to capitalism, which fostered the growth of consumer culture and transformed the USA into a deserted “lost” country, not to say a wasteland with neither a glorious past nor a promising present. To make his readers appreciate the significance of the concluding interrogative illocutions, Ginsberg mentions two different figures of Greek mythology: Charon and Lethe. While the former, to cite Roman’s terms, is a ferryman responsible for transferring the dead “across the river Styx” (2010, 116), the latter is a mythic river that brings “oblivion” on anyone tasting its water (184). That is to say, the absence of Charon/communism does not only remove the ethics of American dream, but also forces the Americans to spend their life on the black waters of the capitalist USA/Lethe.

Unlike Ginsberg’s “A Supermarket in California,” Nigm’s “Pablo Neruda” is a five-stanza poem that employs the third-person’s point of view. This technique explains Nigm’s tendency to use allusion as a poetic device to point directly to prominent figures derived from local and universal history. These allusions become, in the light of Westphal’s remarks, “temporal metaphors” (2015, 6), through which Nigm seeks to spatialize the real conditions of Egypt during the early 1970s, when the Egyptians thought of avenging

themselves on Israel after the fifth-of-June, 1967 defeat. Inspired by his position, Nigm, as an omniscient narrator, employs a deep sense of historical knowledge to yield an exogenous map of Egypt upon Sadat's rising to power in 1970. His map combines local and universal histories with a view to producing "a stratigraphic vision" (137) that harps on the 1967 crushing defeat. At the time, the Egyptian people, as the legendary Egyptian journalist and political analyst, Mohamad Hassanein Heikal observes, were frustrated at Sadat's adopted policy of "no war, no peace" (1983, 45). What added fuel to the fire was Sadat's expulsion of the Russian military experts from Egypt in (1972). Not only did this dramatic action weigh down on the Egyptians, but it also provoked them to blame Sadat for repeatedly declaring that the current year will be "the year of decision" (46).

An initial glance at "Pablo Neruda," will tell that it is about a catastrophe. In it, Nigm directly addresses an unknown administration that controls an unknown territory. Grief and bitterness weighed down on him because of that regime, which surrendered submissively to an untitled humiliating defeat. Baffled by this reaction, the poet is compelled to write imperative lines: "Shoulder your gun" and "consign your promises" (2013, 18). These are two central imperative speech acts in which he urges the personified government to forget anything except carrying guns against its enemy. But when these locutions do not accomplish any perlocutionary effect on the personified nation, the poet indulges in

a series, of what Searle calls “assertive declarations” (1999, 20), that condemn the addressee for not considering the depression brought on by the military setback: “they massacred the roses” and “there can be no peace” (2013, 18). These two lines are but declarative pointers to the threats of transformation that may be caused by the atmosphere of failure prevailing in an afflicted country. Egypt, in this respect, may be transformed into a dreary wasteland devoid of “roses,” “greenery” and “peace” (18). As long as this imaginary land is surrounded by “the ogres,” there will be no stability no “prosperity” either. By making a clear analogy between the fictional country and the wasteland, Nigm sets up a multifocalized views on a specific referential space that unfolds the depression afflicting Egypt prior to the outbreak of the 1973 war. Within the poetic context, the ‘ogres’ become a substitute for the Israelis, whereas the roses are a metonymy for the Egyptian soldiers who were martyred during the six-day war.

Though intending to draw the attention of the people of the imaginary landscape to the necessity of confronting the ‘ogres’, Nigm believes that the memories of defeat cause unforgettable wounds, that are “still fresh” (2013, 18). He holds that history is the record of setbacks and heroic actions perpetuated by revolutionary figures, who can remove any political stigma. To elaborate on this view, he engineers what Westphal terms a wide variety of “spatiotemporal or geohistorical” (2015, 28) allusions that refer to universal and local histories. Nigm alludes to four international characters: a) “Imam

Hussein” (2013, 18), ibn Ali (626–680), grandson of prophet Mohamad; b) “Spartacus” (103–17 BC), leader of the slaves’ revolt against the Roman Empire; c) Salvador “Allende” (1908–1973), a Marxist politician who rose to power in Chile; and d) “Ernesto Guevara” (1928–1967), the icon of Cuban revolution.

To establish temporal and spatial relationships between these historical allusions and the socio-political conditions of the Egypt, the poet refers to five persons belonging to local history: 1) Sayed “Qotb” (1906–1966), an Egyptian thinker who was hanged for belonging to Muslim Brotherhood; 2) Mustafa “Khamis” and Muhammad “Baqari,” two textile activist labors who were hanged by Nasser’s regime in 1952; 3) “Shafie” El-Sheikh (1942–1971), a Sudanese communist politician who was executed for being the chief of workers’ federation; 4) “Adham” al-Sharqawi (1898–1921), an Egyptian national hero who resisted the British occupation; and 5) “Abdel-Rehim,” an Egyptian soldier martyred in the 1967 war:

Abdel-Rehim,  
 A peasant from our country  
 Who was burnt before Doomsday  
 In the hell of betrayed Sinai,  
 Constantly betrayed. (2013, 18)

In these lines, the poet elucidates on how Abdel-Rehim met his death. This soldier was killed in the 1967 war, which the poet

likens to doomsday. It is a telling metaphor that portends the danger facing the Egyptians. Unless they move quickly to regain Sinai, they will be fated to spend eternity in the inferno of defeat (not to say Ginsberg's 'Lethe'). The aesthetic value of this metaphor denotes that Nigm produces a plethora of historical details to bring into prominence a cognitive mapping of the real Egypt. He provides the Egyptian people with shock tactics, inspired by Hussein, Spartacus, and Guevara, in the hope of forcing them change the-real-and-imagined landscape.

Meditating the idea of cognitive mapping, Nigm devotes the rest of the poem to praise the achievement of Pablo Neruda (1904–1973), a Nobel laureate Chilean poet-politician. Nigm introduces a powerful metaphor to make an analogy between the above-mentioned figures and “a garnet necklace” (2013, 18), beaded with a stunning diamond that stands for Neruda. Although the sky of Santiago, the capital of Chile, is enlightened by Neruda's historical epics, the crying of the owl surrounds the city as a bad omen of the death of Neruda, who had been injected with a poisonous substance. Nigm employs this tragic assassination to reflect upon Egypt during the 1970s, rather than upon Chile. By doing so, he aims to attract attention to the importance of Neruda's revolutionary poetics. For all Egyptians, Neruda's way is the only possible means, via which they can carry “guns” and heal their “wounds” (20). This will surely

give birth to “the sun” of victory that can in its turn wipe out the fatal consequences of the 1967 plague:

The sun rises in the morning,  
 Bidding good morning  
 To all those  
 Carrying guns and wounds in one hand  
 And flutes in the other. (2013, 20)

The more one reads through “Pablo Neruda,” the more one realizes how bitterly Nigm laments the absence of Neruda, through whose legendary character Nigm endeavours to set up an imaginary space of the real Egypt. The disappearance of Neruda causes a state of total darkness, simply because the sun of resistance is due to vanish. The falling of the sun is an indication of Sadat’s hesitation over launching war against Israel for the restoration of Sinai. Nevertheless, the poet is bent on implanting the seeds of optimism in the Egyptians, not the Chileans. That is why the last stanza is written in the form of what John Austin calls the performative “verdictives” (2020, 150), that the poet employs to address Egypt directly for the first time. He apostrophizes Egypt as if it were a human being who can not only listen to him, but also share with him the feeling of despair and frustration: “Oh earth [Ya Ardina]” (2013, 20).

This apostrophe is developed into a vivid metaphor in terms of which the poet speaks to Egypt as if it were the affectionate mother of all Egyptians: “Mother of boys / Mother of girls” (20). He aims to

remind her that the law of time can help them cross safely over the widening gaps of the past mistakes: “Hardships, / Wars, / Peoples’ ordeals, / dogs, / Agony” (22). However, the poet warns the Egyptian of the firm belief in the artificial power of time. For, it seeks to make them ignore the ethics of justice, simply because justice is the keystone of their plan to remove the destructive pains of defeat. If Egypt gives an ear to the poet’s faithful instructions, its land will be a glorious stage for resistance from the time of “Imam Hussein,” through “Spartacus and Guevara” (22), until the regaining of Sinia.

### **Conclusion**

Having thus examined Ginsberg’s “Ode to the Setting Sun,” “America,” and “A Supermarket in California,” and Nigm’s “Message Number 1 from Tura Prison,” “Mother Egypt,” and “Pablo Neruda” in the light of geocriticism, five essential conclusions can be made. Firstly, geocriticism, as coined, introduced and developed by Westphal and Tally, is a critical interdisciplinary approach that seeks to show how artists represent real places in terms of imaginary ones. It provides a set of underlying assumptions that change the critics’ spatial perception of space as a truthful depiction of geographical data. Place becomes a dynamic icon in terms of which the critics can interrogate a literary text to yield pluralistic paradoxical maps of the socio-political realities. This skillful maneuver denotes that Ginsberg and Nigm are but professional



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literary cartographers who show a geocritical talent to make their poetics political.

Secondly, Ginsberg and Nigm are the spokespersons for two significantly different cultural milieus. They both intend to incorporate in their poetic achievements Westphal and Tally's thoughts of geocriticism. Each of them adopts a different poetic strategy in terms of which he depicts the real in terms of the imaginary. Ginsberg is too preoccupied with the idea of meditation as he unfolds the inner-space between the real and fictional spaces. He implies that the artists should distance themselves from the place of the police-state, by engendering an aesthetic free zone of existence. Not only did Ginsberg depict the collapse of America as a nation-state, but he also delineated a multiplicity of fictional spaces that criticize America's capitalist agenda. Ginsberg's poetic vision is devoid of the dominance of the police-state and Nigm's flows essentially from the womb of the police-state. Thus, Nigm intends to create active spatial relationships between a fictional landscape and the real Egypt that felt frustrated at the 1967 defeat. He draws a cognitive map of Egypt as a dynamic entity that can challenge moments of despair and misfortune, not as a traditional geographical location. Ginsberg, on the other hand, depends on meditation to reveal the inner space between the real and imaginary.

Thirdly, in "Ode to the Setting Sun," Ginsberg employs the trick of a train ride to warn America that its fatal politics brought on

an eternal state of darkness during the cold war. He yields a geocritical stance of the eastern border of the city in terms of the exogenous perspective and composes a multifocal representation inherent in many classical elements and symbols. He develops a poetic voice that springs essentially from what Westphal called a “smooth/heterogeneous” space. Nigm’s “Message Number 1 from Tura Prison,” makes use of the endogenous perspective of an objective observer. While Ginsberg’s poem is eminent for its classical elements, Nigm’s is resonant with many geopoetic image, i.e. “light,” “fear,” “darkness,” “blossoms,” “doves,” “silence,” and “resurrection.”

Fourthly, in “America,” Ginsberg depends on the exogenous perspective to set up an endogenous critique of the capitalist USA during the cold war and presents real political events in terms of the imaginary America. He hinges on rich allusions to geographical places and histories: as “Trotskyites,” “Burroughs,” “Asia,” “Russia”, “China,” “Nearing,” “Bloor,” “Amter” and “Wobblies.” Ginsberg produces a vortex of geohistorical signs that are but spatial icons established to prove that the USA is a collective landscape, whose fatal fate is interlinked with its citizens. He engineers a macrocosmic space in which America is depicted as a total fictional landscape created by a geopoetic imagination to transcend geographical data. In similar ways, “Mother Egypt” yields an exogenous map of Egypt in terms of the fictional Bahiyah. It is

devoid of any historical allusions and is resonant with extended metaphors, which help Nigm create a microcosmic space of the histories of Egypt especially after the 1967 defeat. His fictional world is but a cartographic activity via which the metaphorical representation of Egypt in terms of Bahiyah and ship becomes a geocritical maneuver. In it, he reworks the geographical data of Egypt to reflect upon the depression of the 1967 debacle.

Finally, in “A Supermarket in California,” Ginsberg creates the apostrophized Whitman to fix up an allogeneous poetic space of the capitalist America and uses a wide variety of symbols, allusions, and classical elements. He transforms California’s ‘Supermarket’ into an aesthetic zone, where the fictional Whitman interacts with the real America to compose a liminal space that helps to set up a metonymic relationship between the real America and imaginary market. The poet resurrects Whitman to warn the American government of supporting consumer culture, otherwise the American people will be fated to exist in the dark waters of the Lethe. Similarly, “Pablo Neruda” creates a poetic space replete with apostrophes, metaphors, and allusions. Just as these literary devices help Ginsberg criticize the real capitalist America, they also help Nigm criticize Sadat’s hesitation over waging war on Israel. Unlike Ginsberg’s first-person perspective, Nigm adopts the third-person narrator technique that provides him with an ecstasy to create an aesthetic *mélange* of local and universal histories. The real Egypt is spatialized within the

structure of the poem as a wasteland void of roses, greenery, peace, prosperity, and justice. While Ginsberg engineers an allogeneous view of the capitalist America, Nigm yields an exogenous perspective of the real Egypt. He seeks to warn the Egyptians of giving up the spirit of resistance. Otherwise, they will be fated to dwell on the Lethe of agony and darkness. In short, Ginsberg and Nigm are geocritical poets who dedicated their poetics to transform the aesthetics of poetry into a geohistorical revolt against any sociopolitical depression, inconsistency, injustice, and discrepancy.

### **Endnote**

Translations from Arabic are all mine.

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