

The World Humanities Report

Case Study: *Rehla*

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Rehla is a magazine that was begun in Lebanon in 2008. It is independently run and is published online and in print; both versions are open-access and free. It is “a monthly cultural magazine that provides our audience with critical stories, essays and research at the intersection of philosophy, politics, arts, culture and psychology.”¹

Without telling readers what to think, *Rehla* poses ideas about how to make sense of events, phenomena, and productions. It pushes toward a more critical reading of events by addressing the following questions: What happened? What are the possible reasons behind an event? What were the sociopolitical circumstances around it? What are its consequences on our lives?

The magazine includes several sections offering critical analyses of global, radical movements, and their effects. One of the sections, “Kalimat-l-sir” (Password), offers critical writing in response to a specific topic shared by the editor in chief every month. *Rehla* offers the space to discuss texts in their political and social contexts, such as in “Fī tahshīm ra’s ’aflatun” (Marginalizing Plato). This article discusses the journey of life and how bitter it is to live in a politically dominating world that lasts for only a few decades.

The platform encourages imaginative thinking as a mode of critical thinking. In the section “Jagal bizantī” (Cool Byzantine Lad), writers conduct imaginary interviews with deceased philosophers and psychologists. The purpose of these interviews, according to the editor in chief, Haramoun Hamieh, is to discuss theories that the interview subject proposed in the past and relate them to current circumstances. One imaginary interview—a conversation with writer Saadallah Wannous on dialogue—was written by Hamieh.² The piece imagines a conversation with the playwright on the possibility of a new play, titled *An Evening’s Entertainment for the Arab Spring*, based on Wannous’s previous play about the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War.

¹ See <https://www.rehlamag.com/about>.

² Saadallah Wannous was a Syrian playwright who focused on social criticism and the decline of Arab politics. For more information see Judith Miller, “Saadallah Wannous, 56, Arab Playwright,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1997, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/17/arts/saadallah-wannous-56-arab-playwright.html>.

The interviewer asks Wannous how he creates a dialogue, how he envisions revolutions, and how he creates the notion of hope in his plays.³

In the magazine's third section, "Report and Destiny," writers target socio-economic structures such as dictatorship, capitalism, and imperialism to help readers question such structures and hopefully move beyond them. For example, one piece asks about the real purpose of long working hours in a capitalist economy.

In addition, *Rehla* offers analysis of literature and film. It encourages its writers to analyze a wide variety of media and art forms. The writers tend to consider these artworks beyond the limits of the words or scenes by finding meaning in the text and relating it to the intentions of the authors. They often try to explain the work in light of sociopolitical structures and personal biographies. In an article on Ernest Hemingway, Rim bin Khalifa considers the novelist not only as a writer but also as a journalist and army soldier to explore the larger social context for his writing.⁴ *Rehla* writers are critical in their interpretations of people and events because works of art would not exist without artists' experiences and historical context. Bin Khalifa, for example, explores how Hemingway's writings were shaped by the Cuban Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, and his stay in prison.

Rehla advocates for considering avant-garde and radical movement artistic works from around the world as moments, rather than taking them in as a whole and situating them in global political contexts. For example, Hassan Shami analyzes the 1998 movie *Sombre*, directed by Philippe Grandrieux, and discusses themes of revolution, love, and psychology (mental illnesses).⁵ The notion of "revolution" is important to *Rehla*. It believes that the publication has an "emancipatory function: to liberate man and to allow him to live up to his full potential in a truly free and just society."⁶

³ Haramoun Hamieh, "Sa'dala Wanūs yakshuf li Riḥla Mashrū'ihī 'ladhī lan yubsira-l-nūr: ḥaflat sumur min 'ajl-l-rabī'-l-'arabī" [Saadallah Wannous reveals to *Rehla* his project that will not be seen: An evening's entertainment for the Arab Spring], *Rehla*, 18, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.rehlamag.com/story/saadallah-wannous-arab-spring-interview>.

⁴ Rim Bin Khalifa, "Hemingway: Al-kitāba laḥẓat sudq" [Hemingway: Writing is a moment of honesty], *Rehla*, 13, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.rehlamag.com/story/hemingway-writing-truth>.

⁵ Hassan Shami, "Al-mujtama' ntaha fi 'atmat grandrīu: hādha-l-'ālam lam ya'ud yuḥibuna" [Society ended up in Grandrieux's darkness: The world does not love us anymore], *Rehla*, 13, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.rehlamag.com/story/philippe-grandrieux-sombre>.

⁶ "About," *Rehla*, <https://www.rehlamag.com/about>.

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