

Dynamics of (Legal) Semiotic Hierarchies Beneath Intertextuality: What Can a Ghost from Late 19th Century Egyptian Literature Unveil About Law?

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What are the conditions for meaning-making in intertextuality? The paper explores what the relational dynamics of (legal) transtextuality can reveal about the semiotic hierarchies that govern them. The interest in these relational dynamics goes beyond the specific relations between texts captured by the hypo-/hyper-text relation. Rather, it embraces the inner conditions of meaning-making in transtextuality across multiple texts. Shifts in the underlying semiotic hierarchies can be tracked within each (legal) field, but the paper turns to literature to explore the potential of intertextuality in exposing the transformative dynamics of various legal fields underneath the shifting semiotic hierarchies. Legal studies have variously investigated these shifting semiotic hierarchies, often resorting to the spectrum imposition/prestige (Sacco 1991); the paper thus looks into the intertextuality of a literary text and what it can contribute to the analysis, beyond the spectrum.

Egypt in the 19th century witnessed major legal transformations (Peters 2020, Fahmy 2018, Hilal 2007). Just as major, however, were the transformations in legal discourse to accommodate a new vocabulary of 'modern' law, often drawing from Islamic law (Parolin 2018). The dynamic relations between alternative legal discourses and their semiotic hierarchies almost imperceptibly transformed over the course of the century, but by the end of the century these hierarchies were nearly entirely redrawn, and Islamic legal discourse had to be characterised or adjectivised as 'Islamic' (Parolin 2015).

The paper thus considers one of the canonical works of late 19th century Egyptian literature, Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī's *What ʿĪsā bin Hišām Told Us* (1898-1901). In it, the author describes with irony the shock and tribulations of the ghost of a mid-19th century personality in his encounter with late 19th century Egypt. Al-Muwayliḥī's is however a brilliant fictional device to stage al-Muwayliḥī's own shock and the shock of late 19th century Egyptians at the transformations of the country in a few decades. His humorous account precisely begins with changes in law and its enforcement agencies. Not only does legal discourse often capture the enormity of these legal transformations, but also how other elements of legal semiotics witness to far-reaching transformations that cause the ghost much tribulation, on top of the shock.

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