



3,159 Tweets

Ahmed Mansoor

The Last Human Rights Defender in the UAE

Editorial

Ahmed Mansoor Al Shehhi (أحمد منصور الشحي) is a poet. A family man. A social media activist. And since May 2018, a prisoner of conscience in the United Arab Emirates.

Mansoor is currently serving a 10 year prison sentence for his online activities – specifically, for ‘promoting false and shaded information’ and ‘serving agendas aimed at spreading hatred and sectarianism’. We are republishing the 3,159 most recent posts from his Twitter feed, @Ahmed_Mansoor, in parallel with a machine translation into English, to give the reader an opportunity to assess the credibility of the accusations. @Ahmed_Mansoor has 16.8K followers, and has been silent since his arrest.

The tweets are accompanied by a selection of Mansoor’s poetry in Arabic from his 2007 collection ‘Beyond the Failure’, together with new English translations.

Broader context is provided by the transcript of an interview with Mansoor, conducted and filmed by Manu Luksch in May 2016, and first published in the journal ‘Surveillance & Society’. Images and photographic documentation are from the international campaign to #FreeAhmed.



London, UK.

Beyond the Failure

In 2007, Ahmed Mansoor published a collection of his poetry in Arabic entitled 'Beyond the Failure'. Some of these poems have been translated into English and arab included here.

Time does not gore my wounds anymore
For I have no wound and there is no such thing as time
And no consolation

لا زمن يندش جراحي الآن،
فلا جرح لي ولا زمن هناك،
ولا عزاء.

They've gone
And I am left alone
Poking about in the ashtray
Trying to find a pulse*

رحلوا،
وعندما بقيت وحدي،
غرللت رماد المنفضة،
افتش عن نبضهم.

What are all those stars for?
And the night
And the clouds
And the sky erected like a tent in the desert

In a place like this
Everything is
Luxury*

ثم لما كل هذه النجوم،
و الليل
والغيوم

السماء المنصوبة مثل خيمة في العراء!

في مكان كهذا،
كل شيء،
ترف.

Like a celestial body we burned bright
And went out like a jellyfish

Just for you
All these waves hidden like a wreath or a bomb
Just for you
A blend of the spirit and annihilation
Just for you
The entire
Cemetery*

كجرم سماوي توهجتا،
و انطفأنا كقنديل بحر.

لك وحدك،
كل هذا الموج المخبأ كإكليل أو كقنبلة!
لك وحدك،
مزيح الروح والعدم
لك وحدك،
كل هذه
المقبرة.

Heart
A deep bow to you
You, the heart that died twice
and never grew jaded

Another bow
to what approaches with its dagger

From the horizon
انحناءة عالية لك؛
أيها القلب الذي مات مرتين،
ولم يضر.
انحناءة ثانية،
للقادم بخنجره،
من الافق.

Happening
He didn't finish the whole glass
If he had and had left the table
the sky outside would have rained
How would he have crossed the street
when he had forgotten his umbrella
لم يشرب الكأس كاملة،
فلو فعل، وغادر الطاولة،
لامرت السماء في الخارج.
فكيف سيعبر الجادة،
و قد نسي مظله!

The flower of the door
This morning I greeted the flower at the door by lifting my hat
She surprised me
leaning softly,
when my lover passed by
in the evening
وردة الباب التي رفعت لها قبعتي مداعبا هذا الصباح،
فاجأتني،
بانتأاج عذبة،
عندما مرقت حبيتي،
في المساء.

Longing
The love we buried together
we've lost its location
so we dug the whole desert
when we felt the first prick
of nostalgia
الحب الذي دفناه سوياً،
أضعنا علا منه،
فحفرتنا صحراء بأكملها،
عند أول وخزة،
للحنين.

Love
I fell in love with you
without any regret directed at you or the grave
I fell in love with you
but I
I forgot the shoes in the dream
and the keys
in the coffin
احببتك،
دون ندم يدلتي عليك أو قبر،
أحببتك،
إلا أنني،
نسيت الحذاء في الحلم،
وفي العسلى.

Another Love
When will you come?
My insides froze on the barrow
and the coat melted in the wind
I blew the whistle
I nodded with my heart one million times
and one million times the galaxy fell
متي ستأتي؟
أحشائي، هاد قد تجمدت علي الريبة،
و المعصط ذاب في الريح.

أطلقت الصافرة ،
وأومات بقلمي مليون مرة ،
و مليون مرة، أنسدل السديم هو الآخر.

How did you not see me
As if I were hiding behind a mountain
And how did I see you then
Passing in a distance of two leagues
Curving the moon with a gaze
And pulling the stars
To the field
كيف لم ترين،
كما لو أنني مخبأ خلف جبل ،
وكيف رأيتك إذاء ،
تمرين على بعد فرسخين ،
تعقفين القمر بنظرة
وتجرين النجوم ،
إلى الحقل؟!

But you
Did not come

All that is
A hair from your braid
Fell into the dream
And I found it

Finally
لكلك،
لم تأتين.
كل ما في الأمر،
شعرة من ظفيريته،
سقطت في الحلم،
وعثرت عليها،
أخيراً!

Final Choice
I have no other means now
but a tight-flipped silence in the square and through corridors
Since I have tried everything
screams, chants, signboards
obstructing roads
and lying on the ground in front of the queues
Cutting through the procession with eggs, tomatoes, and
blazing tires
Hurling burning bottles and stones

Stripped naked in front of the public
Carving statements in the flesh
Walking masked in front of cameras
Dressed in shackles
Tied and chained to garden fences
Swallowing rusty razor blades and splintered glass
Hacking off fingers with a machete
and hanging myself from the lampposts
Dousing the body with kerosene
and setting it aflame

I have tried all this, but you didn't even turn to look
This time, I swear
I won't utter a word, or move
I will stay the way I am
until you turn to look
or until I am petrified

ليس لي من وسيلة الآن،
سوى الصمت المطبق عند الساحة العامة،
أو عند الممرات.
فقد جريت كل شيء؛
الصراخ والهتافات والانفادات.
إعتراض الطريق والاستلقاء أرضاً أمام الطوابير.
رشق المواكب بالبيض والظماطم وأشعال لإطارات.
وقذف الزجاجات الحارقة والحجارة.

التعري أمام الملا،
ونحت عبارات على الجسد.
ليس الأفتعة والمشي أمام الكاميرات.
التسريل بالأغلال.
وربط السلاسل بأسوار الحدائق.
إبتلاع أمواس صدئة وبراءة زجاج.
جر الأصابع بساطور.
وشق نقصي بعواميد الإنارة.
رش الكيروسين علي الجسد،
وإضرام النار فيه.

جريت كل ذلك و لم تلتفت،
هذه المرة، قسما، ان أنطلق أو أتحرك.
حيتي تلفت،
أو احتطأ!



The UK-UAE Relationship

The UK-UAE relationship is deep, and there should be opportunities to raise concerns through commercial channels as well as government diplomacy. Emirati investment and sponsorship is omnipresent in the UK across sports, culture, and infrastructure – London boasts the Emirates Stadium and the Emirates Air Line cable car across the Thames, and Great Ormond Street Children’s Hospital has received a £60m donation. Manchester is another hub of UAE investment, most visibly in the purchase of Manchester City Football Club by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, deputy prime minister of Abu Dhabi.

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch had already petitioned the City Council of Manchester and the Football Club in 2016 over human rights abuses in the UAE. But although Manchester takes pride in its history of progressive politics, neither the Council nor the Football Club responded to the petition. Was the disappearance of UAE activists just too far away from the football terraces to be of concern?

Sheikh Mansour describes his purchase of the Club as part of a ‘strategy to hold a wide portfolio of business investments’. Another of his billion-pound projects in Manchester is a joint venture with the Council to redevelop the impoverished East of the city. This development of former public land has been negotiated so that there is no requirement to build ‘affordable housing’. Instead, it will become another luxury district. How is this even permitted?

It turns out that the British government is complicit in such dealing at the highest levels. The UAE enjoys privileged access to Britain’s political elite and prime land, thanks to an arrangement brokered in 2013 (codename: Project Falcon) by Tony Blair, who controversially was on the Emirates’ payroll while also acting as ‘peace envoy’ of the Quartet on the Middle East. The UAE has also been putting pressure on the UK to ‘reign in’ the BBC, whose coverage of the region irritates the Sheikhdom. Then there are the lucrative defence contracts. The UK-UAE relationship is so ‘special’ that, as UK ambassador to the UAE, Dominic Jermy even referred to London as the ‘Eighth Emirate’.

The UAE is the fantasy frontier where hi-tech dreams of smart cities and a frictionless economy are being realised. Its glass towers appear to have risen out of the sand almost overnight – fully formed, weightless, pointing to the future. But its also a hereditary Sheikhdom, lacking democracy, free speech, and an independent judiciary. Citizens of the UAE have none of the freedoms that Western beneficiaries of its wealth would expect for themselves in their own countries.

It has become clear that the terms of the UK-UAE relationship are such that neither the UK government nor commercial partners will raise the issue of UAE human rights abuses. It is just not worth the possible loss of investment. Once the Million Dollar Dissident, Ahmed Mansoor has become the Billion Dollar Dissident – that’s how much an untrobbled relationship with the UAE is worth to the UK.

Timeline

2011
The UAE Five
The Arab Spring. As telecommunications engineer and blogger, Ahmed Mansoor facilitates an online discussion forum together with other activists, later known as the UAE Five. After signing a petition in favour of an elected parliament, Mansoor is arrested and convicted for ‘insults to the nation’s leadership’. International pressure leads to his release, but he loses his passport and right to employment.

2015
The Nobel Prize for Human Rights’
Mansoor is awarded the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders. The jury statement reads: ‘Mr Mansoor is one of the few voices within the United Arab Emirates who provides a credible independent assessment of human rights developments. He regularly raises concerns on arbitrary detention, torture, international standards for fair trials, non-independence of the judiciary and domestic laws that violate international law. He has faced repeated intimidation and harassment, including imprisonment in 2011 after being convicted of “insulting officials” and sentenced to three years in prison, although he was released after eight months. Since being jailed in 2011, he has been denied a passport and banned from travelling.’

2016
The Million Dollar Dissident
Mansoor’s iPhone is targeted by expensive ‘lawful-intercept’ spyware developed by the Israel-based NSO Group. (Mansoor had been the target of several prior electronic attacks). A report by The Citizen Lab, University of Toronto questions the lack of accountability and regulation of sales of spyware developed in democracies to countries with records of serious human rights violations.

2017, March 20
The Last Emirati Human Rights Activist
Mansoor is once again detained on the orders of The Public Prosecution for Cybercrimes, on charges of ‘promoting false and shaded information through the Internet and serving agendas aimed at spreading hatred and sectarianism on social media’ (Emirates News Agency). He is taken from his home in Ajman to the Central Prison in Abu Dhabi.

2018, May
10 Years for a Tweet
The court sentences Ahmed Mansoor to 10 years in prison and a fine of 1 million Emirati Dirham, and orders him be placed under surveillance for three years after his release. An appeal is turned down on December 31st.

Above: Nantes, France. Below: Emirates Air Line, London, UK.


^[1] * Translated by Tony Caldenbak

