

THE WORLD, IN WORDS

CHARLOTTE SQUARE GARDENS
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NEWS RELEASE



Friday 26 August
FOR IMMEDIATE USE

BOOK FESTIVAL AUTHORS CALL FOR TONY BLAIR TO BE TRIED FOR IRAQ

Today to audience applause at the 2011 Edinburgh International Book Festival, author Ahdaf Soueif from Egypt called for the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair to be tried for his role in the Iraq war. Her fellow participant in the event, Libyan novelist Hisham Matar agreed, but said “We must be careful when we address justice symbolically as so many people are responsible.”

The authors were participating in an event chaired by BBC Correspondent and Book Festival Guest Selector Allan Little, on the theme of Revolution in the 21st Century: North Africa. Matar and Soueif discussed dictatorship and democracy, the Arab Spring uprisings, and their personal experiences, in a conversation that ranged across Libya, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia and Egypt.

Matar compared novelists to dictators, saying “Dictators are involved in narrative, just as novelists are. Novelists are interested in narrative that mirrors life, but dictators write novels that are very bad novels, novels that are intolerant of any change, they are very single minded. They enter into the most private aspects of our lives, they try to affect even the way people love each other. This is certainly the case in Libya.”

Commenting on the ongoing Libyan uprising Matar remarked: “The uprising was a holy moment, there was something sacred about this event. To see it persist and gain momentum is astonishing. The people rose because their hearts were empty not their bellies.”

Matar went on to question to what extent democratic values are the source of democracy and called for everyone to concentrate on liberty and justice. He added that democracy meant accepting everybody and agreed that the Muslim brotherhood is likely to form an influential part of the Government in Egypt but stressed he believed the group are open to other political dialogues. Soueif added: ‘But democracy is not enough, we have to have it but it doesn’t automatically deliver the kind of society that we want.’

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Matar went on to say that the western view of the conflicts in the middle east are not reflected in the countries themselves, adding, “Suddenly we are able to speak about things in the middle east that really affect us, we are looking at the things that matter.”

Soueif discussed Palestine, and the hope that as a result of the Arab Spring events, the understanding of the situation in Palestine was becoming a world issue, like South Africa, and there was therefore hope for a resolution some time in the future.

The Revolution in the 21st Century strand continues over the weekend when Allan Little speaks to Kamila Shamsie & Declan Walsh on Saturday 27 August at 2.30pm on Pakistan and Robert Bickers, Wang Hui and Chan Koonchung on Sunday 28 August at 2.30pm on China. The Edinburgh International Book Festival continues until Monday 29 August, further information can be found at www.edbookfest.co.uk.

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