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Chronicles of Disappearance:
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By

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Committee in charge:
Professor Margaret Larkin, Chair
Professor Chana Kronfeld
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Abstract

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This dissertation identifies investigation as an ironic narrative practice through which Arab authors from a range of national contexts interrogate certain forms of political language, contest the premises of historiography, and reconsider the figure of the author during periods of historical upheaval. Most critical accounts of twentieth-century Arabic narrative identify the late 1960s as a crucial turning point for modernist experimentation, pointing particularly to how the defeat of the Arab Forces in the 1967 June War generated a self-questioning "new sensibility" in Arabic fiction. Yet few have articulated how these intellectual, spiritual, and political transformations manifested themselves on the more concrete level of literary form. I argue that the investigative plot allows the authors I consider to distance themselves from the political and literary languages they depict as rife with "pulverized," "meaningless," "worn out," or "featureless" words. Faced with the task of distilling meaning from losses both physical and metaphysical, occasioned by the traumas of war, exile, colonialism, and state violence, these authors use investigation to piece together new narrative forms from the debris of poetry, the tradition's privileged mode of historical reckoning.

In the first two chapters, I bring together two novels with remarkable formal and structural similarities, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *al-Baḥth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* (*In Search of Walid Masoud*; 1978) and Elias Khoury's *al-Wujūh al-bayḍāʾ* (*White Masks*; 1981). From these two works, I shape a general typology: the novel of investigation begins with the mysterious disappearance or death of its protagonist and proceeds as a search for causes and answers conducted by a metafictional frame narrator. In the second two chapters, I observe how the investigative model manifests both in Egypt, with Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd's *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān* (It's happening now in Egypt; 1977) and in Morocco, with Driss Chraïbi's Francophone detective novel *Une enquête au pays* (1981), at approximately the same historical moment. In all of these novels, I argue, the absent protagonist represents a figure for political resistance that seemed to have disappeared in the disillusionment occasioned by the 1967 defeat—the peasant, the freedom fighter, the exilic intellectual, the Berber, etc.—while the self-questioning frame narrator stands in for the author himself, attempting to wrest meaning from the scattered, chaotic events of recent history.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Note on Transliteration

For transliterations from Arabic, I have followed the *ALA-LC Romanization Table* for Arabic, with a few modifications. Where there are commonly known English equivalents for proper names, I omit full diacritics (e.g. I use Naguib Mahfouz for Najīb Maḥfūẓ, Elias Khoury for Ilyās Khūrī, Beirut for Bayrūt, Maghreb for Maghrib). I render the *nisbah* ending as "-iyy" rather than "-īy." I render inseparable prepositions and conjunctions preceding the definite article with hyphens to indicate elision, rather than retaining the "a" (e.g. *bi-l-tamām wa-l-kamāl*). To avoid confusion, I retain full diacritics and italics on some technical terms in Arabic even where there are accepted English spellings (e.g. I write *fidāʾī, fidāʾiyyīn* rather than fedayee, fedayeen; *fallāḥ, fallāḥīn* rather than fellah, fellahin). In citations where it is of typographical relevance, I retain the original Arabic script. All translations from Arabic are mine unless otherwise noted.

So now it's back to the same old vortex!
<div align="right">—Dr. Jawād[1]</div>

[1] Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud*, trans. Roger Allen and Adnan Haydar (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 279.

Introduction:

From Resistance to Disappearance in the Novel of Investigation

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the figures that had once anchored modern Arabic literature in political and social resistance seemed to be disappearing.

Take the freedom fighter, or *fidāʾī*. In his 1968 collection of short stories, *ʿAn al-rijāl wa-l-banādiq* (Of men and guns), Ghassan Kanafani told tales of young Palestinian boys borrowing old-fashioned rifles from their uncles and leaving home to join the *fidāʾiyyīn*.[1] This new generation of fighters fearlessly defended their people and their land through steadfastness and skill. "You can hardly ask a fighter why he's fighting, can you?" one of Kanafani's characters asks in *Banādiq*. "It would be like asking a man why he is a man."[2] In the 1969 collection *Umm Saʿad*, meanwhile, Kanafani painted a complementary portrait of resistance: that of the steadfast Palestinian mother, who in sending her son off to fight manages to say more than any author of novels could ever say.[3] In the story "*al-Rajul wa-l-maṭar wa-l-waḥl*" (Men, rain, and mud) the protagonist Umm Saʿad at first feels defeated by torrential rain, which mires her sewer-less refugee camp in mud, and which the camp's residents must continually shovel just to keep their makeshift homes intact. Yet by the end of the story, after Umm Saʿd hears that her fidāʾī son has "gifted her a car" (meaning he's carried out a successful attack against occupying Israeli forces), the rain transforms from a menacing force into little more than "water displaced by a steadfast ship, carving its path like fate."[4] Kanafani's portraits of brave, young Palestinian fidāʾiyyīn and their steadfast, immovable mothers shaped the Arab imaginary of Palestinian revolution from the 1960s until the writer's tragic death in 1972.[5]

Yet in the novels of the Lebanese author Elias Khoury, we find fidāʾī characters in various states of incapacity and liminality, immobilized both physically and psychologically by the trauma of war. The 1981 novel *al-Wujūh al-bayḍāʾ* (*White Masks*), for example, features a

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[1] See Ghassan Kanafani, "al-Ṣaghīr yastaʿīr martīnat khālihi wa yusharriq ilā Ṣafad" [The little boy borrows his uncle's rifle and heads east to Ṣafad) in *ʿAn al-rijāl wa-l-banādiq* [Of men and guns], 4th printing (Beirut: Muʾassassat al-abḥāth al-ʿArabiyyah, 1987). For an English translation of this and many other stories, see Kanafani, *Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*, trans. Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 47-57.

[2] Kanafani, "Dr. Qassim Talks to Eva About Mansur Who Has Arrived in Safad," in *Palestine's Children*, 70.

[3] The stories in the collection are narrated by an acquaintance of Umm Saʿad's—a character who, it turns out, is a writer much like Kanafani himself. In one story, Umm Saʿad says to this unnamed narrator:

> What can I say to you, nephew? […] I want to live until I see it. I don't want to die here, in the mud and food waste… Do you understand, nephew? You know how to write things. I never went to school in my life, but we feel the same way. My God, what am I saying? Last night I thought about it, and I found the right words, but in the morning I had forgotten them… Well! You write your opinion. I don't know how to write, but I sent my boy over there… With that, I said what you say, isn't that so?

See Kanafani, "al-Maṭar wa-l-rajul wa-l-waḥl" (Rain, men, and mud) in *al-Āthār al-kāmilah* (Beirut: Dār al-ṭalīʿah li-l-ṭibāʿah wa-l-nashr, 1972), 1:271.

[4] Ibid., 273.

[5] Kanafani was killed on July 8, 1972, when his booby-trapped car exploded outside the home he shared with his wife, Ānnī, and his two children, Fāyiz and Laylā. His niece Lamīs was also in the car with him, but survived. See Karen E. Riley, "Ghassan Kanafani: A Biographical Essay" in *Palestine's Children*, 1-12.

fighter character who once imagined going to war as "carrying the sky between [his] two hands, just as [he'd] read about in books" (presumably, Kanafani novels).[6] Yet once on the field of battle, his visceral encounters with the rotting corpses of fallen soldiers scar him, and he is unable to return either to the battlefield or to civilian life. Instead, he remains in the party offices of his militia, where he awaits nothing and everything all at once.[7] Khoury's 1998 novel *Bāb al-shams* (*Gate of the Sun*), meanwhile, is also narrated by a disillusioned fidāʾī doctor named Khalīl, who finds himself similarly stuck in the Shatila refugee camp outside Beirut: "I'm stuck in this hospital and unable to leave," he continually says to his comatose patient Abū Sālim, an older Palestinian man who's been felled by a stroke.[8] And where Kanafani gives us Umm Saʿad, a woman heroically plowing her way out of the muddy morass of a refugee existence, in *Bāb al-Shams* Khoury gives us Umm Ḥasan, a woman so wrapped up in a sentimental simulacrum of "Palestine" she cannot see its decrepitude. Like many of the residents in the Shātīlā camp, Umm Ḥasan endlessly watches videos of the homeland, telling the same stories of loss over and over again until she and everyone around her have run out of tears.[9] If Khalīl is both physically and psychologically "stuck" in the hospital, and Umm Ḥasan is doomed to repeat the same stories and videos in an endless feedback loop, it is also because these characters are in thrall to a Kanafanian image of resistance that, at the time of Khoury's narration, had already disappeared.

In Egyptian fiction too, the figure of the peasant, or *fallāḥ*, once so associated with popular, anti-authoritarian resistance seemed, by the late 1970s, to have disappeared almost entirely. Two decades earlier, following the 1952 Free Officers Revolt that brought President Gamal Abdel Nasser to power, Egyptian authors had reimagined the *fallāḥīn* as a vital source of revolutionary energy. In so doing, they had reconfigured the Romantic rhetoric that once painted the *fallāḥ* as a symbol of earthly simplicity and national purity.[10] In ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī's 1954 historical novel *al-Arḍ* (The land), for example, a group of simple but determined peasants organize several successful revolts against the arms of local and national government attempting to limit their access to water and land.[11] When the village mayor, or

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[6] Elias Khoury, *al-Wujūh al-bayḍāʾ*, 3rd printing (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2003), 202.

[7] For a full analysis of this character and his autobiographical resonances with Khoury himself, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[8] Elias Khoury, *Bāb al-shams* (Beirut: Dār al-ādāb, 2010), 49. For an English translation, see Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun*, trans. Humphrey Davies (New York: Picador, 2006), 46.

[9] "The Shātīlā camp has turned into Camp Video," the narrator writes. "The videocassettes circulate among the houses, and people sit around their television sets, they remember and tell stories. They tell stories about what they see, and out of the glimpses of the villages they build villages. Don't they ever get sick of repeating the same stories? Umm Ḥasan never slept, and, until her death, she would tell stories, until all the tears had drained from her eyes." *Bāb*, 111; *Gate*, 103.

[10] Developed, for example, in Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's 1913 novel *Zaynab*, and, somewhat differently, in Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's ʿ*Awdat al-Rūḥ* (*Return of the Spirit*). See Haykal, *Zaynab* (Cairo: Maktabat al-nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1963) and al-Ḥakīm, *Return of the Spirit*, trans. William Maynard Hutchins (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 2012).

[11] The novel is set in a small village in Upper Egypt during the 1930s, after Ismaʿīl Ṣidqī's rise to power as prime minister. Shortly after his election, Ṣidqī proceeded to dissolve the democratic parliament and revoke the 1923 Constitution instituted by the much-revered Wafd party, led by the charismatic Saad Zaghloul. Robin Ostle notes how, within a short time, Ṣidqī had also formed his own, "ironically named People's Party" (*Ḥizb al-shaʿb*) and set up new electoral laws that effectively disenfranchised many Egyptians. See Robin Ostle, preface to *Egyptian Earth*, trans. Desmond Stewart (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), viii. For more on the Wafd, the monarchy of King Fuʾād I, the role of the British, and the turbulence of the 1930s in Egypt, see James Whidden, *Monarchy and*

ʿumdah, imprisons a large group of men without charge, their wives and daughters confront him by hurling baskets of dung and manure at him until they draw his bodyguards to their side.[12] The imprisoned men, meanwhile, when conscripted to shout popular chants of support for Ṣidqī and the unpopular People's Party (*Ḥizb al-shaʿb*) during a sham welcome parade, subvert the occasion to sing songs in support of the Wafd, Saad Zaghloul, and Egyptian independence instead.[13] And when the government sends national guards to build a road that would destroy the villagers' fields, a group of fallāḥīn band together to toss the construction materials and the guards themselves into the local canal.[14] Al-Sharqāwī's novel, in short, is a tale of popular resistance and fallāḥī steadfastness that incorporates the colloquial Arabic of popular songs, chants, and epics.

Yet by the late 1970s, with the decline of Arab nationalism and the institution of Anwar al-Sadat's *Infitāḥ*, or "opening up" to trade with the West, the figure of the clever, resistant fallāḥ also began to disappear from Egyptian village fiction. He would be replaced with disillusioned native sons, paper-pushing bureaucrats, and—in the village novels of Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd in particular—corrupt government officials.[15] Where al-Sharqāwī's omniscient narration and colloquial dialogue pay tribute to the community-minded humor and fortitude of the fallāḥīn, al-Qaʿīd works by collage and caricature, populating his works with unnamed government officials and citations from various "official" documents, all of which combine to crush, and even kill, his peasant characters.[16] Nearly all of al-Qaʿīd's novels are structured as investigations, beginning with the death or disappearance of one peasant and proceeding in the official voices of police investigation, local government, and military rule. The peasants themselves rarely speak, and on the rare occasions when they do, their voices are often lost among a sea of official paperwork. Each of the chapters in *al-Ḥarb fī barr Miṣr* (*War in the Land of Egypt*), for example, is narrated by a different unnamed official, including "the ʿumdah," "the broker" (*al-mutaʿahhid*), "the night-watchman" (*al-khafīr*), "the officer" (*al-ḍābiṭ*), and "the public investigator" (*al-muḥaqqiq*).[17] The only character who has a given name is the disappeared fallāḥ himself, and even he bears the generic name of "Maṣrī," or "Egyptian man." He himself never speaks,

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Modernity in Egypt: Politics, Islam, and Neo-Colonialism Between the Wars (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[12] ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī, *al-Arḍ* (Cairo: Dār al-kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1968), 227-29.

[13] Ibid., 243-49.

[14] Ibid., 291-94.

[15] For the fallāḥ as a disillusioned native son, see especially the later novels of Bahāʾ Ṭahir, particularly *Sharq al-nakhīl* (East of the Palms) (Cairo: Dār al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabī, 1985).

[16] For an overview of al-Qaʿīd's literary production, see Paul Starkey, "From the City of the Dead to Liberation Square: The Novels of Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24, no. 1 (1993): 62-74. For in-depth readings of al-Qaʿīd's 1977 novel *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān* (It's Happening Now in Egypt), see Christopher Stone, "Tawfiq al-Hakim, Yusuf al-Qaʿid, and the 'Mature' Arabic Novel," in *Transforming Loss into Beauty: Essays on Arabic Literature and Culture in Honor of Magda al-Nowaihi*, ed. Marlé Hammond and Dana Sajdi (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 295-319. See also Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

[17] Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd, *al-Ḥarb fī barr Miṣr* (Cairo: Dār al-Qāhirah, 1985). For an English translation, see Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd, *War in the Land of Egypt*, trans. Olive and Lorne Kenney and Christopher Tingley (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2004). The novel was originally written in 1975, but due to government censorship in Egypt, al-Qaʿīd was unable to bring it out until 1978, and only then with a publishing house in Beirut. See Starkey, "City of the Dead," 67.

however, and the absence of his voice from literalizes how, in their very structure, al-Qaʿīd's novels literalize the disappearance of the fallāḥ as a figure of resistance.

This dissertation is concerned with these figures of resistance and the effects that their real-life disappearances from Arab public life had on the structure of novelistic prose. I argue that the plot-level disappearances and form-level investigations that give these later novels their experimental narrative structures literalize a crisis of signification in literature from the Arab world during the late twentieth century. This crisis of signification is the result of two seemingly contradictory impulses. On the one hand, authors in this period felt a general disillusionment with revolution as a mode of literary figuration and emplotment, since it seemed to have yielded such scanty real-life political and social results. On the other hand, they remained committed to improving the lives of society's most downtrodden and least spoken-for communities, even if it meant seeking out new figures, voices, languages, and tropes through which to do so. In the four chapters that follow, I examine how several authors from the decade 1975-1985 work within this crisis of signification to transform the novel from a mode of anticolonial action and national imagining into one of searching, investigating, and questing (all encapsulated in the Arabic term *baḥth*).[18]

The Arabic and Francophone Maghrebi novels I bring together under the rubric of "investigation" are united in four respects. First, as I mentioned above, they all mobilize a plot-level disappearance to comment upon a generalized loss of faith in the figures and plotlines of revolutionary transformation that had saturated literary writing in the Arab world in earlier decades. Second, in the process of investigating the deaths and disappearances of their main characters, these novels all put a series of false, corrupted, and manipulative discourses on display, including the deadening official prose of bureaucracy (al-Qaʿīd), the supposed truth-telling power of journalism and documentary film (Khoury), and the aloofness of intellectual fields such as history, sociology, psychology, and even literature itself (Jabra). While satirizing these discourses—and this is the third aspect that unites these novels—the authors I discuss below all wonder whether the novel too has served as an instrument of state oppression and falsification, rather than a popular way to negotiate liberation. The language of the author, after all, is not so dissimilar from the language of the state: the Arabic author uses the same formal register (*fuṣḥā*) as the policemen and intellectuals whose words he mocks, while the Francophone Maghrebi author continues to use the French associated with a colonial past and a neocolonial present. Consequently—and here I am coming to the fourth aspect that brings these novels together—the authors I examine below all face an anxiety of complicity. They use the novel to interrogate notions of cultural authority and historical authoritativeness associated with authorship in the Arab context. Working from within a space of disillusionment, unstable forms, and suspect languages, they use metafictional frame narrators to comment upon the paradoxes of authorship itself, as a process precariously perched between representation and exploitation, self and other. The thematic content of these novels thus intertwines with their form: they both *are* investigations and *are about* investigation.

In four chapters, I move from Palestine, Iraq, and Lebanon to Egypt and Morocco, and from the metropolitan Arab intelligentsia to the backwater Berber (Amazigh) underground. The project is thus transnational in scope, bringing together novels previously only considered within

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[18] On the fruitful multiple resonances of the Arabic *baḥth*, see Rebecca Carol Johnson, "The Politics of Reading: Revolution and Recognition in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *In Search of Walid Masoud*" in *Recognition: The Poetics of Narrative: Interdisciplinary Studies on Anagnorisis*, ed. Philip F. Kennedy and Marilyn Lawrence (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 178-92.

particular, localized national or metropolitan contexts. In reading Arabic and Francophone Maghrebi texts together, I make an implicit case for linking minor literatures "laterally," through East-East transnational comparisons based on form that do not route these literatures through the "major" languages of colonial and neocolonial power.[19] More specifically, I illustrate how the formal trope of investigation transforms and translates across contexts to articulate responses to different historical traumas. In the wake of catastrophic events and projects, including the *Nakbah* in Palestine, the Lebanese Civil War, al-Sadat's Infitāḥ in Egypt, and the "copification" (*flicaille*) of civil society in post-Protectorate Morocco,[20] the authors that I bring together here do not presume to know, but stage the process of discovering their own unknowing. The novel of investigation thus decouples the figure of the author from authority and authoritativeness, and it embraces an aesthetic of searching for, rather than confidently speaking in, new literary languages. It therefore stands in stark contrast to authors of a slightly earlier historical moment, such as Kanafani and al-Sharqāwī, who had much less anxiety about the complicity of the author in state operations of control, and who imagined literary representation itself as a form of "resistance" (*muqāwamah*).[21]

Integral to these polyphonic searches for absent, disappeared, or dead protagonists, then—as I mentioned above—are their parodic stylizations of political, intellectual, and literary discourses once considered capable of social transformation on a mass scale, but now found to be overdetermined or, as al-Qaʿīd puts it, "ground up and chewed-on so much that the words have lost their features."[22] These include the discourses surrounding the figure of the exilic Palestinian intellectual (Jabra), the martyr or *shahīd* (Khoury), the Egyptian fallāḥ (al-Qaʿīd), and the indigenous "Berber" or Amazigh (Driss Chraïbi). Wearing these languages as masks, the authors I consider lay out the many registers of speech and writing that are no longer of use to them. Yet the novels are not all parody, stylization, and rejection. On the contrary, to forcefully discard these and other dead discourses, each author crafts what I call a "limit language"—a prose monologue that presses against the conventions of punctuation, sound, and sense in Arabic and French. In some cases, sentences run on and bleed into one another, defying the reader's efforts

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[19] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih make the case for this kind of comparative work in *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005), 1-23. In many ways, they are responding to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's foundational (but problematic, and now copiously reconsidered) contention that "a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language." Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.

[20] I borrow "copification" (*flicaille*) from Driss Chraïbi's *Une enquête au pays* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981), 212 (hereafter; *Enquête*), examined in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

[21] One of Kanafani's major contributions to the "literature of resistance" was his edited volume *Adab al-muqāwamah fī Filasṭīn al-muḥtallah, 1948-1966* [The Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine, 1948-1966] (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1966), a collection of poetry, prose, and drama from the occupied Palestinian territories in the years before the June War. The notion of a "literature of resistance" (*adab al-muqāwamah*) spread outside Palestine, however, and penetrated particularly into the Egyptian literary scene. For some of its key primary texts, see ʿAbbās Khiḍr, *Adab al-muqāwamah* (Cairo: Dār al-kātib al-ʿArabī,1968) and Ghālī Shukrī, *Adab al-muqāwamah* (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif, 1970). For a consideration of Arabic resistance literature from a transnational perspective, see Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

[22] Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān* [It's happening now in Egypt] (Cairo: Maṭbaʿah Dār Usāmah li-l-ṭabʿ wa-l-nashr, 1977), 173. The term "parodic stylization" is Bakhtin's; see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 292.

to separate and compartmentalize thoughts into orderly formations;[23] in others, words possess the speaker as in a trance, unearthing matrilineally transmitted oral tales that modern education and other state languages have suppressed.[24] In every instance, the passages in question lie at the limits between poetry and prose, between formal and colloquial languages, and between high and low literary cultures. In their very form, they negotiate the author's liminal position between self and community.

To be clear, I am not making the case for a new genre of novel (the novel of investigation) so much as I am arguing that these novels, in mobilizing the tropes of searching, questing, and indeterminacy, exemplify what Jonathan Culler has called "non-genre literature." Focusing in particular on the *nouveau roman*, Culler characterizes this literature as one that operates at the limits of understanding. "The essence of literature," he affirms, "is not representation, not a communicative transparency, but an opacity, a resistance to recuperation which exercises sensibility and intelligence."[25] Such texts "avoid established relations between *écriture*—production of a surface—and *lecture*—production of sense—and hence, for the reader, [are] essentially *about* the ways in which he attempts to create order."[26] Non-genre literature, in Culler's formulation, dramatizes the exercise of the mind in the act of creating meaning, and in so doing it destabilizes the notion that meaning accrues in the text itself, rather than in the reader's sense-making operations.

By Culler's own admission, most of the *nouveaux romans* he discusses in this short essay are more concerned with linguistic play than the politics of literary form.[27] I would like to argue, however, that when posed in the context of violent events in the Arab world during the 1970s and 80s, the question of how the reading mind creates meaning from experience becomes a profoundly political one. Consider the contexts under examination here: the *Nakbah* of 1948 displaced more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians and scattered an entire community across the globe. Hundreds of thousands were settled in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria that are still densely populated today, nearly seven decades later, while others were driven into exile outside the Arab world. Still others remained in or returned to the homeland and now live either as second-class citizens within Israel or as heavily policed populations in the West Bank and Gaza.[28] The reverberations of Palestinian loss were felt once again in the defeats of 1967 (in the June War, commonly referred to as the *Naksah* or "setback"), 1970 (Black September), and 1973 (the October War), as Israel consolidated its hold on the occupied territories.[29] In the Lebanese Civil War, meanwhile, violence blurred the lines between civilian

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[23] This is the case with Walīd Masʿūd's monologue in Jabra's novel. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[24] As in Inspecteur Ali's monologue from the end of Chraïbi's novel. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

[25] Jonathan Culler, "Towards a Theory of Non-Genre Literature," in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, ed. Michael McKeon (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 53.

[26] Ibid., 54.

[27] At one point, Culler refers to his own essay as a series of "apolitical reflections." Culler, "Non-Genre Literature," 52.

[28] For the foundational introduction to the question or issue (*qaḍiyyah*) of Palestine, see Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992). For more in-depth histories of the *Nakbah*, see Walid Khalidi *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992) and Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld, 2006).

[29] On the *Nakbah* as an ongoing reality, rather than a past event, see Elias Khoury, "Rethinking the *Nakba*," *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2012): 250–66.

and military life as it came to saturate and structure the city of Beirut itself.[30] At the same time, in Egypt the promises of Arab nationalism were definitively laid to rest as the al-Sadat government realigned the country away from Arab Socialism and toward American-modeled free market capitalism.[31] In the attendant widening of the already cavernous wealth gap in Egyptian civil society, the burden of the change fell squarely on society's poorest—the farmworkers and peasants who populate the countryside—even as the state hypocritically extolled the authenticity and simplicity of "village morals."[32] In Morocco, meanwhile, during what are known as the "Years of Lead" (*sanawāt al-raṣāṣ*, *les années de plomb*), the post-protectorate government of Hassan II suppressed dissent and "disappeared" thousands, such that it seemed to be adapting, rather than abandoning, the police practices of French colonial rule.[33] It was, in short, an era of disillusionment across the Arab world, as the promises of pan-Arabism, Arab socialism, Palestinian liberation, and post-colonial democracy were gradually revealed as deceptive fictions.

While each of these contexts is marked by its own conjuncture of social, economic, and historical circumstances, still they are united both in the sheer scale of the violence they enacted on landscapes, cities, bodies, and minds, and in the way they seemed to defy representation in conventional narrative forms. To distill meaning, significance, or guidance from such catastrophic events thus became an ethically and politically fraught process for Arab and Francophone authors working in this period, in a manner quite distinct from the French experimentalists Culler discusses in his essay. Narrative representations of history seemed both imperative and impossible for these writers: imperative because there was a deeply felt need to mourn the losses occasioned by these events and projects, yet impossible because to do so required using the very same mechanisms that corrupt governments and armies were using to deceive their citizens and conceal the atrocities they were committing. Narrative-crafting, the very definition of the author's profession, had been revealed as a process of suppression, omission, and obfuscation, just as much as it was one of remembrance, preservation, and transmission. Just as the possibility of remembrance was shot through with forgetting,[34] the

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[30] For more on how war divided and fractured the city in ways both physical and psychological, see Ghenwa Hayek, "A City Divided: Beirut in the (1975-1990) Civil War" in *Beirut, Imagining the City: Space and Place in Lebanese Literature* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

[31] The Egyptian critic Ghālī Shukrī has referred to this period as the "counter-revolution" in Egypt. See Ghālī Shukrī, *Egypt: Portrait of a President, 1971-1981: The Counter-Revolution in Egypt, Sadat's Road to Jerusalem* (London: Zed Press, 1981).

[32] Even as the al-Sadat regime loosened the reigns of censorship on literary publication, it created a series of new morality laws, including the "Egyptian family laws" (*qānūn al-ʿāʾilah al-Miṣriyyah*) and "village morality laws" (*qanūn akhlāq al-qaryah*). As Magda al-Nowaihi points out, "on the one hand, the government was moving away from an accountability for the welfare of its citizens by privatizing the economy and espousing policies of global market economy and 'opening up' to the West. At the same time, it expected from those citizens private and 'traditional' norms of behavior in the public discursive arena." Magda al-Nowaihi, "Reenvisioning National Community in Salwa Bakr's *Golden Chariot*," in *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels*, ed. Lisa Suhair Majaj et al. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2002), 69.

[33] For more on human rights violations during the Years of Lead and their aftermath, see Susan Slymovics, *The Performance of Human Rights in Morocco* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

[34] On the notion of memory and forgetting as mutually implicated processes, I continue to be inspired by Daniel Heller-Roazen's *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* (New York: Zone Books, 2005).

process of narrative formation also seemed predicated on exclusion.[35] The novel of investigation as I consider it here is thus much more than a new genre (or even, "non-genre") of Arabic novel. In staging the vagaries of the reading mind in the act of creating meaning, these novels ask about the complicity of narrative in the effectuation of historical and psychological loss.[36]

It is also my contention, however, that these novels of investigation are what I (borrowing the term from Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman) call "chronicles of disappearance."[37] They are *chronicles* because they do not abide by the standards of narrativity that require causality, sequence, and closure. As Hayden White has it, the chronicle, unlike the narrative history or the annal,

> usually is marked by a failure to achieve narrative *closure*. It does not so much conclude as simply terminate. It starts out to tell a story but breaks off *in medias res*, in the chronicler's own present; it leaves things unresolved or, rather, leaves them unresolved in a storylike way. While annals represent historical reality *as if* real events did not display the form of a story, the chronicle represents it *as if* real events appeared to human consciousness in the form of *unfinished* stories.[38]

According to White, the "official wisdom" of historiography rejects the chronicle as unworthy of the name history, because "however objective a historian might be in his reporting of events, however judicious in his assessment of evidence, however punctilious in his dating of *res gestae*, his account remains something less than a proper history when he has failed to give to reality the form of a story."[39] The novels under examination here, then, are chronicles more than histories because they not only "fail to give reality the form of a story," but indeed *refuse* to do so. I argue that these refusals of narrativity and closure call attention to the truths that are scattered when social, political, and moral significance are distilled from experiences of violence. If the period of anticolonial committed literature was an era of stories designed to begin in oppression, pass through revolutionary struggle, and end with liberation—in David Scott's words, a period of Romantic emplotment[40]—then the period following the 1960s in the Arab world is the era of the chronicle, of the unfinished story.

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[35] As Gerard Genette has it, unlike discourse, "narrative is a particular mode, marked and defined by a certain number of exclusions and restrictive conditions." Gerard Genette, "Boundaries of Narrative," trans. Ann Levonas, *New Literary History* 8, no. 1 (1976): 11.

[36] For two recent works on the various significations of loss in postcolonial Arabic literature, see Nouri Gana, *Signifying Loss: Toward a Poetics of Narrative Mourning* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2011) and Jeffrey Sacks, *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, Al-Shidyaq to Darwish* (New York: Fordham UP, 2015).

[37] Elia Suleiman et al., *Chronicle of A Disappearance*, directed by Elia Suleiman (1996: New York, NY: Fox Lorber Home Video, 1999), DVD. I discuss the film at greater length below.

[38] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1: 9 (emphases in the original).

[39] Ibid., 9-10.

[40] Scott reads C.L.R. James' account of the Haitian revolution in *The Black Jacobins* as an example of epic Romantic narration. He does so, in his words, to "raise some questions about the continued efficacy of a mode of emplotment shaped by the mythos of Romance, and to cast some doubt on the continued usefulness of a discursive strategy in which political change is thought in terms of vindicationist narrative of liberation or a concept of revolution." David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University press, 2004), 64-65. Scott's postcolonial interrogation of revolution as a fruitful concept for political imagination is very much in line with the

These novels are also chronicles *of disappearance*, however, in that each of them mobilizes disappearance as a form of political commentary. In Jabra's novel, the disappearance of the titular Palestinian character and the consequent proliferation of explanations about him limn the overdetermined status of the exilic Palestinian intellectual in the post-1967 period.[41] In Khoury's *Wujūh*, the unexplained murder of Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir compels the reader to reflect on the literally *untold* deaths of the Lebanese Civil War. As a seemingly infinite number of death-stories emerge from the first, the reader must confront the work of mourning s/he (and by extension, the community as a whole) may never be able to perform. In al-Qaʿīd's *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān* (It's Happening Now in Egypt, 1974), meanwhile, the author-narrator does not allow the protagonist's death to function narratively as a disappearance. For him, to transform a violent death into a narrative device is to betray reality (and community) by transforming a real situation into a suspense-inducing game. His goal is quite the opposite: to confront his readers with the injustice and corruption that the state masks in bureaucratic procedure. In Driss Chraïbi's *Une Enquête au pays* (*Flutes of Death*, 1981), finally, disappearance functions as a *ligne de fuite* from the knowledge-power apparatus of a violent, post-colonial State. The Aït Yafelman's vanishing at the end of the novel tenuously promises the preservation of an autochthonous, modernity-resistant, earth- and body-bound identity in Morocco, even as Inspector Ali's transformation into "un vrai chef" reveals the author's pessimism about his own position as a Francophone Moroccan author.

My thinking about the form of these novels also owes a great deal to the Elia Suleiman's film *Sijjil Ikhtifāʾ* (*Chronicle of a Disappearance*).[42] Like Suleiman's film, the novels I bring together here are all marked by what Edward Said calls "the artificial and imposed arrangements of interrupted or confined space" and "the dislocations and unsynchronized rhythms of disturbed time."[43] The narrative of Suleiman's film knows neither chronological nor spatial progress: it jumps from one vignette to the next without closure or transition, and the camera remains stationary in nearly every shot of the film, making no progress forward in space. In a similar manner, the novels of investigation that I read in this dissertation are circular more than they are teleological. They are parodies of narratives and archives of story-fragments, all orbiting around a central, ineluctable loss. Moreover, they stage the work of authorship as potentially complicit in processes of state control. Where chapter-divisions and chronological markers might once have marked development and even revolutionary progress, in these novels as in Suleiman's film (see figures 1 to 3), such markers seem to have lost their meaning. And just as Suleiman often depicts characters in multiple frames (the frame of the camera, of course, but also that of a window, of one or more doors in a home or shop, etc., as in figures 4 to 6), so too the authors in

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disillusionment of the authors I consider in this dissertation, each of whom saw different anticolonial revolutions and uprisings ultimately compromised.

[41] In particular, the character Ibrāhīm al-Ḥājj Nawfal's monologue, often cited as an example of Jabra's reverence for the productivity of the Palestinian exile, is framed so many times over within the novel's diegesis that it rings hollow. See my analysis of this passage in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[42] Born in Nazareth in 1960, Suleiman lived in New York from 1981 to 1994 before returning to Jerusalem, where he was entrusted with a grant from the European Commission to establish a program in Film and Media Studies at Birzeit University. It was the first institution of its kind in the Palestinian interior. He now lives and teaches in Paris. See "The Other Face of Silence: Nathalie Handal Interviews Elia Suleiman" *Guernica / A Magazine of Art & Politics*, May 1, 2011. https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/suleiman_5_1_11/

[43] Edward Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), 20.

Figure 1: Repeated intertitle from Elia Suleiman *Chronicle of a Disappearance*[44]
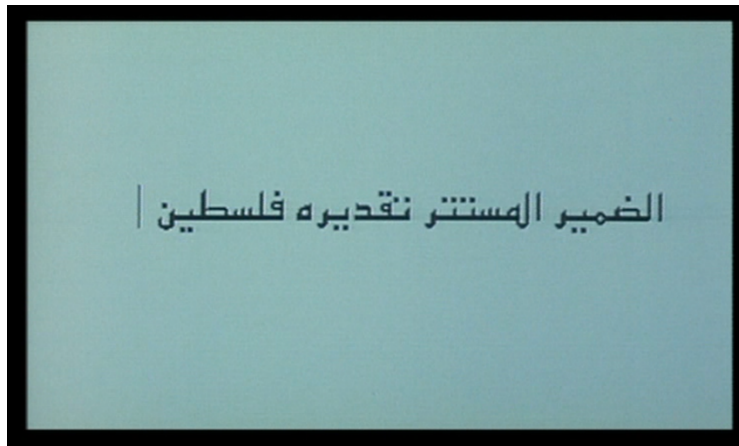
Figure 2: Intertitle: "An implied pronoun whose value is of Palestine."
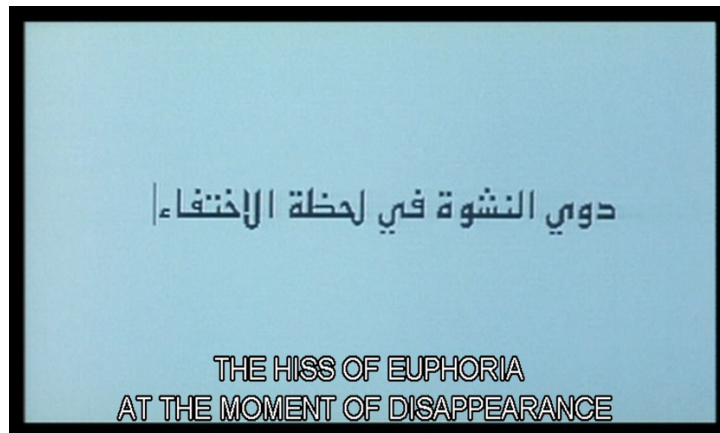
Figure 3: Intertitle: "The hiss of euphoria at the moment of disappearance"

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[44] Figures 1-6 from Suleiman et al., *Chronicle of a Disappearance*.

Figure 4: Multiple frames (Elia's mother reads the newspaper)

Figure 5: Through the doorframe (Elia waits for the real estate agent)

Figure 6: Three windows (an arm wrestling competition)

this project are concerned with the ethics and aesthetics of framing; they call the reader's attention to the frames they are creating as much as to what is contained within them.

Chronicles of Disappearance thus contributes to a growing literature on the fate of literary production in the Arab world following the 1967 June War and the ensuing appearance of what have been variously called "postmodern" or "new sensibility" tendencies in late-twentieth century fiction.[45] Many scholars and authors have characterized the period following the defeat as one of "searching," both in literature and in social theory. In his sweeping sociological study of the Arab world during the twentieth century, for example, Halim Barakat describes the independence and post-independence periods as "distinguished by a *search* for the meanings and causes of the failure of the Arabs to confront the challenges facing them."[46] Elias Khoury too frames his critical study of the Arabic novel after the defeat as a "search" for something new, titling the work *Tajribat al-baḥth ʿan ufuq* (The experience of searching for a horizon).[47] Reflecting on the defeat's impact specifically on the form of the Arabic novel, meanwhile, Roger Allen affirms that "one of the primary features of the period immediately following the 1967 June War was a *search* into the past for both explanation and confirmation."[48] He notes that while authors such as Jabra, al-Qaʿīd, and the Moroccan Mohammed Berrada experimented with metafiction in order to "conduct research" into fiction itself,[49] others such as Emile Habibi, Gamal al-Ghitani, and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf drew on the pre-modern cultural heritage (*tūrāth*) in their quest for new forms of expression, including both elite and popular forms.[50] And where Allen emphasizes the "searches" and "researches" that characterize Arabic fiction in the wake of a disillusionment with realism, Pierre Cachia notes how "a dissatisfaction with Science and Reason as the ultimate keys to reality" transformed the later novels of Naguib Mahfouz into works marked by "questing."[51]

The late Egyptian critic and experimental author Idwār al-Kharrāṭ also characterizes post-1960s fiction as marked by "searching," "investigating," and "questing." In *al-Ḥassāsiyyah al-*

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[45] On the "postmodern" in Arabic literature, see *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature: Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata*, ed.Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: Brill, 2000) and *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Andreas Pflitsch, and Barbara Winckler (London: Saqi, 2010). On the "new sensibility" and other modes of experimentalism in Arabic fiction since the 1960s, see in particular Idwār al-Kharrāṭ, *al-Ḥassāsiyyah al-jadīdah: maqālāt fi-l-ẓāhirah al-qiṣaṣiyyah* [The new sensibility: essays on the narrative phenomenon] (Beirut: Dār al-ādāb, 1993); Fabio Caiani, *Contemporary Arabic Fiction: Innovation from Rama to Yalu* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); and Elisabeth Kendall, *Literature, Journalism, and the Avant-Garde: Intersection in Egypt* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006). Al-Kharrāṭ borrows the term "new sensibility" from Susan Sontag. See Muḥsin al-Musawi, *Infirāṭ al-ʿiqd al-muqaddas: munʿaṭafāt al-riwāyah al-ʿarabiyyah baʿda Maḥfūẓ* [Breaking the sacred bond: Turns in the Arabic novel after Mahfouz] (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿāmmah li-l-kitāb, 1999), 107-108.

[46] Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 256 (emphasis added).

[47] Elias Khoury, *Tajribat al-baḥth ʿan ufuq: muqaddimah li-dirāsāt al-riwāyah al-ʿarabiyyah baʿda al-hazīmah* [The experience of searching for a horizon: An introduction to the study of the Arabic novel after the defeat] (Beirut: Munaẓẓamat al-Taḥrīr al-Filasṭīniyyah, Markaz al-Abḥāth, 1974).

[48] Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1995), 122 (emphasis added).

[49] Ibid., 121.

[50] Ibid., 122-23.

[51] Pierre Cachia, *An Overview of Modern Arabic Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990), 24.

jadīdah (The new sensibility), al-Kharrāṭ outlines the features of what he calls an "old" or "traditional" sensibility (*al-ḥassāssiyyah al-qadīmah, al-taqlīdiyyah*) in Arabic literature, and contrasts these with more recent, experimental trends of the "new sensibility," starting in the 1960s and continuing into subsequent decades. In texts governed by the old sensibility, al-Kharrāṭ writes, "the writer wants to 'transmit' 'reality' to his reader—to reflect it, and to deal with its most pressing issues, on the presumption that there is, indeed, a fixed, evident, external 'reality' that exists out there, full of injustice and hardship, and that it is possible to describe, transmit, and delimit this reality, which is already well-known and established."[52] Specific narrative techniques that al-Kharrāṭ associates with the old sensibility are sequential narration (*al-sard al-muṭṭarid*), mimesis (*al-muḥākāh*), and a plot that gradually unfolds and is eventually resolved. More importantly however, the traditional story, according to al-Kharrāṭ, "adopts an outlook that is both knowing and cunning, because it doesn't immediately say everything that it knows."[53] That is, conventional narratives are built on the author's judicious withholding and disclosing of information; they are "full of learning and suspense, equal parts disclosure and surprise," built in order to take the reader through a process of verification and circumspection (*tathbīt wa-taḥdīd*) that ultimately brings the satisfaction of closure.[54]

In the new sensibility, by contrast, the author is not an all-knowing figure who judiciously divulges information to draw the reader's interest, create suspense, and offer resolution. Rather, like the reader, the new sensibility author is also "searching" for new forms through which to parse a shattered reality:

> The harsh shattering [*taḥṭīm*] of "reality" following the catastrophe of 1967 has meant that now modernist currents have taken the place of the old, realist aims that our age has almost entirely effaced […] Creative writing, for one reason or another, has become disruption, not continuation; the *search* for new forms, rather than the imitation of old ones; a mode that poses questions, as opposed to providing answers; a mission into the unknown, not a way to satisfy the self with knowledge.[55]

The new sensibility, then, rejects fixity to embrace fluidity and a reflection on the self. But what are the specific techniques and forms of such a sensibility? And what, precisely, makes it "new"? How does the new sensibility manifest on the concrete levels of structure, language, and form? In the introduction to *Ḥassāssiyyah*, Kharrāṭ offers a preliminary typology of new trends in narratives of the post-67 period, including trends toward objectification and estrangement (*tayyār al-tashyīʾ, al-taghrīb*), a privileging of interiority over exteriority (*al-tayyār al-dākhilī*), a revival of traditional, historical, or popular Arabic culture (*tayyār istīḥāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī al-taqlīdī, al-tārīkhī, aw-al-shaʿbī*), a magical realist tendency (*al-tayyār ʿal-wāqiʿī al-siḥrī*), and a trend he calls the "new realism" (*al-tayyār al-wāqiʿī al-jadīd*).[56] Yet the analysis stops short at these categorizations, and only a few new sensibility writers are treated at length in the subsequent

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[52] al-Kharrāṭ, *Ḥassāsiyyah*, 8.

[53] Ibid., 9.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 11 (emphasis added).

[56] Ibid., 15-20. For an excellent and thorough overview of the avant-garde and "new literature" (*al-adab al-jadīd*) in Egypt, see Kendall.

chapters of the book. While there seems to be critical consensus in al-Kharrāṭ's wake that the 1960s and 1970s marked a rupture with older approaches to the novel in the Arab world, the question remains as to the politics of form and representation embedded in each of these new trends and, indeed, in the novels themselves.[57]

Given the variety of discourses that characterize the 1960s-1980s as a period of "searching," "researching," and "questing," it seems only appropriate to devote a full-length study to investigation as a distinct and recognizable literary form in literature from the Arab world. This dissertation brings nuance, specificity, and texture to al-Kharrāṭ's larger claim, focusing on the paradigm of investigation as a crucial mode through which authors of this period questioned both the premises of historiography and the position of the author with respect to society. Far from rejecting any of these writers' and critics' contentions about the literature of defeat, then, *Chronicles of Disappearance* observes that the "research" certain authors conduct into the novel via metafiction, and the "searches" others undertake through the pre-modern literary archive are united under the rubric of investigation.[58] That these novels respond to very different historical traumas yet bear such strong formal similarities (and were produced within ten years of each other) attests to the power of the search as both a thematic and formal topos in the wake of reality's (and realism's) "shattering" (*taḥṭīm*).[59] The project, in other words, dubs the decade under examination the era of investigation.

An Outline, and a Disciplinary Gesture

The project begins with Palestine and the catastrophe of the Nakbah, which Elias Khoury has described as a "continuous process" rather than a discrete historical event,[60] and which Abdallah Laraoui has referred to as "the Arab problem *par excellence*"[61] In Chapter 1, I explore Jabra's own grappling with the *Nakbah* as articulated in *Walīd Masʿūd*, focusing in particular on the way the novel frames the many discourses surrounding the figure of the exilic Palestinian intellectual. By the late 1970s, the many representations of Palestinian exile had proliferated to such an extent that the lived experience of exile seemed to disappear under their weight. Jabra figures this situation by giving descriptions of Walīd only in the voices of other intellectuals: sociologists, architects, historians, artists, and cultural critics are its many narrators. These voices are then cast into the echo-chamber of Dr. Jawād's frame narrative (the "study" he is writing about Walīd), and they are thereby called into question. I argue that through the form of the novel itself, Jabra criticizes the almost mythical power with which Arab cultural discourse had imbued the Palestinian exile—a figure, it should be noted, after which Jabra had modeled

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[57] Caiani has begun this more in-depth work of reading the politics of form. Rather than organizing his book by period, region, or thematic content, he divides it along formal lines, with each chapter dedicated to a different technique (e.g., fragmentation, polyphony, intertextuality, metafiction). His work thus takes seriously the contentions that this dissertation shares: that literary form itself is political, that technique is transnational, and that works from across the Arab world can be considered together under the rubric of form. See Caiani, *Contemporary Arabic Fiction*.

[58] All of these terms—research, investigation, search, etc.—come together in the Arabic *baḥth* as in the French *enquête*.

[59] Kharrāṭ, *Ḥassāssiyyah*, 11.

[60] Khoury, "Rethinking the *Nakba*," 258-265.

[61] Abdallah Laroui, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectual* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 171.

himself earlier in his career. I then turn the focus away from these framed characterizations and onto the experimental language of Walīd's tape-recorded monologue, arguing that it represents Jabra's attempt to move beyond the worn-out discourses of exile and embrace the limit-language of childhood. Through a close comparison of this monologue with passages from Jabra's later autobiography *al-Biʾr al-ūlā* (*The First Well*), I ultimately show how Jabra recasts authorship as an exploration of uncharted memory, in the hopes that his work might contribute to reconstructing (if only partially, and if only in fiction) the Palestine he and so many others lost in the Nakbah.

If Jabra's novel criticizes the rhetoric of exile by plumbing the depths of the author's memory for an alternative language in which to give voice to loss, Khoury's *Wujūh*, the subject of my second chapter, rejects the monopoly on "truth" claimed by documentary forms such as film and journalism to experiment with alternative truths communally negotiated through collective narration. Through a close analysis of Khoury's frame narrative, I show that the formal parallels between *Walīd Masʿūd* and *Wujūh* are unmistakable (and Khoury was an avid reader of Jabra's work).[62] Nevertheless, I also remain attentive to the extremely significant stylistic and thematic differences between these two works. Where Jabra's characters are all intellectuals and speak the eloquent literary Arabic of well-educated professionals, Khoury's narrators run the gamut from bootblacks, maids, and garbage collectors to militiamen, doctors, and journalists, all of whom speak a wide variety of Arabic registers, including colloquial Lebanese. I show how Khoury transposes the Jabra-esque structure of investigation into the socially striated world of Beirut at war, and I argue that Khoury, like Jabra, is searching for languages in which to grapple with the trauma of war outside the rigid dogmatism of revolutionary rhetoric. The difference is that Khoury's limit language is not that of childhood, but that of testimony—specifically, the oneiric monologues of Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir (the novel's murdered protagonist) before his death. In giving voice to others without imposing any external, organizing logic upon them, Khoury's unnamed frame narrator, I argue, ultimately models a new form of authorship based on "bearing witness" or *istishhād*. He thereby challenges the dominance of another meaning associated with this word—"martyrdom"—in wartime Lebanese discourse.

In my third chapter, I turn from the Levant and the continuing reverberations of the Nakbah to Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd's dystopian vision of Egyptian civil society in *Yaḥduth*. Like *Walīd* and *Wujūh*, *Yaḥduth* cycles through and parodies a series of dead discourses in the search for a new mode of authorship. Yet unlike Jabra or Khoury, al-Qaʿīd targets the bloated, bureaucratic apparatus of the Egyptian state and the triumphalist rhetoric of free-market trade. Al-Qaʿīd illustrates how bureaucratic language transforms violence and murder into ordinary, everyday occurrences by numbing its speakers' and readers' capacity for shock. I argue that against the deadening languages of the state, al-Qaʿīd uses metafiction to craft an aesthetics of confrontation. He enters his text as an author-character to copiously comment on the primary documents collected in the case file of a disappeared migrant worker, exposing these documents' many fabrications. Yet no matter how much he intervenes in the narrative, al-Qaʿīd cannot fully dispel his suspicion that the author is not so unlike the police officers and bureaucrats he so vehemently denounces. Like these officials, the author relies on standard, literary Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) to tell his tale, and like them, he is interested in transmitting a certain truth through narrative. Al-

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[62] See his reviews of Jabra's novels *Ṣurākh fī layl ṭawīl* (*Scream in a Long Night*) and *Ṣayyādūn fī shāriʿ ḍayyiq* (*Hunters in a Narrow Street*). Khoury, "*Ṣurākh fī layl ṭawīl*" and "*Ṣayyādūn fī shāriʿ ḍayyiq*," in *al-Dhākirah al-mafqūdah* [The Lost Memory] (Beirut: Dār al-ādāb, 1982), 108-112 and 113-119.

Qaʿīd finds himself caught between his commitment to his countrymen and his desire to break out of the rigid dogma of socialist realism. His answer to this dilemma is not an experimental, dreamlike language (as in Jabra's and Khoury's texts), but rather a "new realism"—one in which the author overtly stages the disappointment of his own Leftist hopes and expectations.

The fourth and final chapter moves even further west to the Maghreb, turning to Driss Chraïbi's comic take on the detective novel, *Enquête*. I show how Chraïbi, like al-Qaʿīd, parodies the administrative French of the state, with its mania for identifying, classifying, and controlling, yet simultaneously probes his own complicity in this discourse as an author of novels in French. Chraïbi holds up the rural world of the Imazighen (Berbers) as a space immune to the discipline of the modern police state. But even more than this, he seeks to uncover a space, psychic realm, and identity beyond both the French language associated with administration and the Arabic language associated with an earlier generation of conquerors. He rejects the intellectual formation he received at the hands of a French colonial administration and seeks to re-suture the ties to land, mother, body, and orality that colonial education has severed. Yet because his "search" for Amazigh alterity is conducted *in French*, it—like all of the other searches in this dissertation—fails before it can even begin. By prying into the minds of his Amazigh characters through free indirect discourse, Chraïbi's narrator undermines his own claim that the Imazighen remain resistant to state practices of knowledge-power. I argue that Chraïbi uses the detective plot to navigate this paradox, and I focus in particular on the limit-language that surfaces in the novel's second-to-last chapter. An alternative creation-myth transmitted to Ali by his mother, the story remains buried within his psyche until a moment of crisis. When unearthed, it offers the reader a glimpse into an alternative way of being, a space beyond the scope of the state or the novel—even if that reality ultimately disappears as soon as Ali regains control of himself. In the end, Chraïbi's fictional Imazighen disappear both from the surveillance mechanisms of the state (Inspector Ali, who becomes Chief Ali) and from the prying eyes of the novel's omniscient narrator. In Chraïbi's text, I conclude, disappearance is not the beginning but the end of the story, and it promises the continuance of communal, non-colonial, non-Enlightenment life outside the realm not only of a French-speaking state, but of the novel as well.

The project thus traces the anxiety of authorship through a series of iterations, all constellated around the fear that the author has become either irrelevant to the populace to whom and on whose behalf he would speak, or worse, that his use of eloquent, literary language makes him complicit in the operations of a violent state. Khoury's and Jabra's experimentations with Arabic syntax, sound, and sense ultimately give way to Qaʿīd's and Chraïbi's gestures beyond language, into worlds that remain unknowable even to the literary text. I conclude the project with a vignette from Khoury's text that resituates the archive at the center of literary creation, replacing the Romantic notion of originality or authenticity with the deconstructionist (or, as Abdelfattah Kilito might point out, Arabic-poetic) notion that all writing is rewriting.[63] In the wake of tragedy and loss on a catastrophic scale, the novel must become an archive or chronicle through which the reader searches, rather than a narrative meant to absorb, engross, and ultimately cleanse the reader through cathartic resolution.

By investigating investigation, as it were, in recent fiction from the Arab world, my hope is that this project will contribute to ongoing conversations about how Arabic literary and

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[63] See Abdelfattah Kilito, "Verses and Reverses" in *The Author and His Doubles: Essays on Classical Arabic Culture*, trans. Michael Cooperson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 9-16.

cultural studies might live inside Comparative Literature. As scholars and teachers of Arabic literature, especially when we work in fields such as Comparative and/or World Literature, we tend to present Arabic literary texts to our students as repositories of information on the ever-topical Middle East, as a complement (if not yet a counterpoint) to historical, political, and sociological discourses on the region and its peoples. Yet when we remain attentive to the form of speculative novels such as the ones I bring together in this project (and many others that lie outside its scope), it becomes apparent that these texts tend to defy our best impulses to consult them as sources of information. Many of the texts from this period are *about* the difficulty of reconstructing truth through scientific, academic, and intellectual means, including reading, research, medical examination, etymology, and historiography. Against the hard and social sciences, religion fares no better: authors from al-Qaʿīd and Khoury to Chraïbi, Mahfouz, al-Ghitani, Sonallah Ibrahim, and many others parody the languages and practices of religious authority as much as they do those of the academic world. In taking note of the speculative turn in recent Arabic fiction, then, I would like to suggest that our task as researchers and teachers of Arabic literature is to become more like the authors and frame narrators examined in this dissertation: to practice a form of critical *listening* in our investigations, to relinquish control over our materials, and to dispel the notion of a total knowledge gained through reading, comparing, and writing. Given the imperial, colonial, and neocolonial histories in whose image our departments and institutions have been created and in which they continue to be shaped— histories based around dividing, ordering, and classifying in order to encompass, control, and subject—such relinquishing might have a salutary effect both on our work and our pedagogy. It would take its cue from the objects of our study, which purposefully resist our best attempts to instrumentalize them.

Chapter 1:

"All the Words Have Been Pulverized:"
Anxieties of Authorship in Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's In Search of Walīd Masʿūd

> The disasters we've suffered can't be dealt with in verbal form. All the words have been pulverized.
> —Walīd Masʿūd[1]

  At one point in Palestinian author Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *al-Baḥth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd* (*In Search of Walid Masoud*, 1978), the character Ibrāhīm al-Ḥājj Nawfal, an art critic and good friend of Walīd's, remembers a dinner party he hosted for several friends a few months after Walīd's unexplained disappearance. Among the attendees are Sawsan ʿAbd al-Hādī, a modernist painter who has just completed an oil portrait of Walīd, which she intends to gift to Ibrāhīm; Maryam al-Ṣaffār, a doctoral student of history and one of Walīd's many lovers; the architect ʿĀmir ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd and his British wife Ann; and the sociologist Dr. Jawād Ḥusnī, who is also the novel's frame narrator, accompanied by his wife Hālah. It is a gathering of intellectuals from the Baghdad intelligentsia, including both the producers of culture (Sawsan the painter, ʿĀmir the architect) and its theoreticians (Maryam the academic; Ibrāhīm the cultural critic). Inevitably, the conversation circles back to Walīd as the characters collectively try to explain his mysterious disappearance. Maryam and Sawsan believe that he is still alive somewhere, though they're not sure where. Ibrāhīm, meanwhile, advances his theory that Walīd was kidnapped, drugged, smuggled across several borders, and eventually killed by his captors when he resisted capture. Ibrāhīm even implies that two of the group's good friends, the art critic Kāẓim Ismāʿīl and the psychoanalyst Ṭāriq Raʾūf, may have been the kidnappers.

  Only once these debates have died down, however, does Maryam make one of the central remarks in the novel—one whose implications resonate, in one form or another, throughout all of the chronicles of disappearance under consideration in this dissertation. Maryam mentions an idea she had been discussing with some of her professors earlier that day:

> The idea's built on what seems, on the surface, to be a logical progression: Man is a product of his culture. And since the source of culture today is Western books, or else the university with its curricula whose real source is also the West, therefore the intellectual must also be a Western product—that is, his thinking, at its root, has no ties to his social class or his land, etc.[2]

Dr. Jawād, ever the discerning scholar—or as Ibrāhīm describes him, "the great professor who clung to reason and avoided all perils"[3]—is quick to ask Maryam: "And what if his cultural education's been a traditional Arab religious one?" Ibrāhīm, however, has anticipated this question, and already has an answer for both Maryam and Jawād: "No doubt people will say that he, too, is a reactionary product, the product of a backwards-looking thought system that

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[1] Jabra, *Search*, 274; and Jabra, *al-Baḥth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd*, 4th printing (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1990), 357. Hereafter, I will refer to the novel in-text as "*Walīd Masʿūd*" and to the character as "Walīd Masʿūd." I give references to both the Arabic and the English editions as "*Baḥth*" and "*Search*" respectively.

[2] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 355; *Search*, 272 (translation modified).

[3] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 347; *Search*, 265.

idealizes the past and looks down on both social class and land."[4] The endpoint of this kind of thinking, Maryam concludes, is the following: "Culture implies the severance (*taqṭīʿ*) of man's ties to his class and his country. In other words, it's a kind of betrayal (*khiyānah*)."[5]

Maryam's remark shakes at the very foundations on which all of these intellectuals have built their identities as producers and theorists of culture. Whether Western or Arabo-Islamic, education is, at its most fundamental level, an estrangement both from one's community (*ṭabaqah*, "class") and from one's land (*arḍ*)—so the theory goes. It is a "severance," a "cutting" (*taqṭīʿ*) of ties to familial and territorial origins that can never be re-sutured. To be educated is to betray not only one's family, but also one's *land*, the most primal sources of one's identity. Yet rather than despair at, rage against, or resignedly accept Maryam's backhanded allegations of treachery, Ibrāhīm welcomes them with almost Bacchic merriment. When Maryam describes his books as "a treacherous plague," he joyfully replies: "Let's burn the lot of them then!... Let's drink a toast to the great blaze to come, when people with no culture will be the only patriots!"[6] The other attendees laugh with him, raise their glasses, and drink to the end of the intellectual's era and the rising sun of populism. After decades of making his living by the written word, by the end of the dinner party Ibrāhīm has sworn off writing altogether. "I'm not going to write anymore after today," he informs his guests. "I'll record anything I want to say on cassettes, and anyone with the necessary patience and tolerance is welcome to listen."[7] Although he publicly shrugs off Maryam's comment, it seems to have struck at the core of his identity as an intellectual. What if education, acculturation, art, and cultural critique are nothing more than a form of betrayal? What if the life of the intellectual is little more than a continual process of severance, isolation, and exile?

Maryam's comment strikes at the heart not only of Ibrāhīm's carefully crafted identity, but also at that of Jabra himself. A Palestinian of extremely humble origins,[8] Jabra—an author, poet, translator, critic, and painter—emerged during the 1950s and 1960s as one of the Arab world's most recognized and prolific thinkers. Jabra contributed to the burgeoning Arab modernist movement not only through his novels, but also through his criticism on British and American Romantic and Modernist poetry,[9] his firm stance on innovation and free verse in

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[4] *Baḥth*, 355; *Search*, 272 (translation modified).

[5] Ibid. (translation modified).

[6] *Baḥth*, 355; *Search*, 273.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Jabra chronicles his childhood in the first volume of his autobiography, *al-Biʾr al-ūlā: fuṣūl min sīrah dhātiyyah* [The first well: Chapters from an autobiography] (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 2009). For an English translation, see Jabra, *The First Well: A Bethlehem Boyhood*, trans. Issa J. Boullata (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995).

[9] See note 60 (below) for references to some of Jabra's key essays on British and American Romanticism. For his essays on British and American Modernism, see especially "al-Shiʿr al-Amrīkī al-ḥadīth" [Modern American Poetry], *al-Ādāb* 3, no. 1 (1955): 110-115, and "al-Riwāyah wa-l-insāniyyah" [Humanism and the Novel], in *al-Ḥurriyyah wa-l-ṭūfān* [Freedom and the Flood] (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 1979): 41-54. See also the critical introductions he wrote for his translations of poems from the English, including Dylan Thomas' "Fī sanʿatī aw fannī al-zaʿūl" ["In My Craft, or Sullen Art"], in *al-Adīb* 27, no. 5 (1955): 13; Edith Sitwell's "Saranādah" ["Serenade"] and "Ughniyyat al-shāriʿ" ["Street Songs"], in *Shiʿr* 3 (1957): 69-72; and Ezra Pound's "Min Sakstas ilā Sinthiyā" ["From Sextus to Cynthia"], in *al-Adīb* 27, no. 6 (1955): 19.

Arabic poetry,[10] his paintings and essays on fine art,[11] and his translations of foundational works such as Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury,* Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, and Whitman's *Song of Myself*, to name only a few.[12] Born to a poor Syriac Orthodox family, raised and educated in the fields and olive groves outside Bethlehem and Jerusalem, Jabra would subsequently graduate from the Arab College in Jerusalem in 1937 and earn a scholarship to study English literature at Cambridge University.[13] After graduating from Cambridge with a B.A. in 1943 and an M.A. in 1948 (both degrees in English literature), he went on to teach at the Rāshidiyyah secondary school in Jerusalem, and at the College of Arts and Sciences, Teachers' Training College, and Queen ʿĀliyah College in Baghdad. Through no small feat of self-cultivation and transformation, in other words, over the course of his life Jabra transformed himself from a barefoot schoolboy living in poverty outside Bethlehem into one of the Arab world's most preeminent scholars, critics, and literary innovators. He was, in this sense, the consummate Palestinian exile, having transformed political abjectness into intellectual and cultural productivity. He had quite literally built the early part of his career on the kind of "severing" from land and class that Maryam describes.

Yet *Walīd Masʿūd* reveals a much more speculative, self-questioning side to Jabra's intellectualism. No longer the critic holding forth about "Humanism and the Novel," the revolutionary potential of Romantic verse, and the importance of embracing a completely unmeasured form of free verse in Arabic, Jabra seems, in *Walīd Masʿūd*, to be looking back over his accomplishments and questioning his commitment to a largely British-inspired project of literary modernism. The novel finds him dramatizing the intellectual's anxiety of irrelevance, staging his alienation from the exiled Palestinian community in whose name he would speak. Most importantly, however, the novel finds him revisiting the portrait of the exilic Palestinian intellectual that had so inspired him earlier in his career, searching through the many languages—literary, political, and sociological alike—that had combined to create this idealized but ultimately fictional figure. Where once the Palestinian exile had seemed to be a liberated

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[10] Jabra, "al-Shiʿr wa-l-naqd al-jāhil" [Free verse and ignorant criticism], *Adab* 2, no. 1 (1963): 74-82. Republished as "al-Shiʿr al-ḥurr wa-l-naqd al-khāṭiʾ" [Free verse and false criticism] in *al-Riḥlah al-thāminah: Dirāsāt naqdiyyah* (Sidon: al-Maktabah al-ʿaṣrīyah, 1967).

[11] Collected in *al-Fann wa-l-fannān: Kitābāt fi-l-naqd al-tashkīlī* [Art and the artist: Writings in art criticism] (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 2000), and *al-Fann al-muʿāṣir fī al-ʿIrāq* [Contemporary Art in Iraq] (Baghdad: Wizārat al-thaqāfah wa-i-ʿlām, 1970). Jabra also wrote a great deal about the Iraqi painter and sculptor Jawād Salīm in particular. See especially *Jawād Salīm wa nuṣb al-ḥurriyyah: Dirāsah fī āthārihi wa ārāʾih* [Jawād Salīm and the Statue of Liberty: A study of his work and his views] (Baghdad: Wizārat al-iʿlām, mudīriyyat al-thaqāfah al-ʿāmmah, 1974).

[12] See William Faulkner, *al-Ṣakhab wa-l-ʿunf* [*The Sound and the Fury*], trans. Jabra (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 1983); William Shakespeare, *Hāmlit*, trans. Jabra (Beirut: Dār majallat Shiʿr, 1960); and Walt Whitman, "'Ughniyyat Nafsī' li-l-shāʿir Wālt Wītmān" ["Song of Myself," by the poet Walt Whitman], trans. Jabra, in *al-Adīb* 23, no. 5 (May 1953): 3-9. Regarding *Waiting for Godot,* according to Muḥammad ʿAṣfūr's comprehensive annotated bibliography of Jabra's works (on which Jabra himself gave copious feedback), the translation was directed by Sāmī al-Ḥamīd and performed at the Baghdad Theater in 1972. See Muḥammad ʿAṣfūr, *Narjis wa-l-marāyā: Dirāsah li-kitābāt Jabrā Ibrāhīm Jabrā al-Ibdāʿiyyah* [Narcissus and the mirrors: A study of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's creative writings] (Beirut: al-Muʾassassah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 2009), 271-94. See also the Winter 1967 volume of *Shiʿr*, where Jabra's translation of *Godot* into Iraqi Arabic is mentioned on page 188.

[13] For more biographical information about Jabra, see Issa J. Boullata, "Living with the Tigress and the Muses. An Essay on Jabra Ibrāhīm Jabra," *World Literature Today* 75, no. 2 (2001): 214–23, and Jabra, *Biʾr*.

figure unbound by national borders, political commitments, or artistic conventions, now—in the wake of so many defeats in Palestine—this figure seemed to be little more than a fantasy. Yet the desire—indeed, the imperative—to give voice to the experience of Palestinian dispossession still pressed upon Jabra, even as he expressed a dissatisfaction with its predominant intellectual discourses. This imperative makes *Walīd Masʿūd* equal parts parodic stylization and poetic experimentation: it simultaneously exhausts the discourses surrounding the Palestinian exile in order to discard them, and conducts a deeply personal search for new languages in which to represent the lived experience of exile.

In this chapter, I focus on the twinned characters of Walīd Masʿūd and Dr. Jawād Ḥusnī to argue that the novel *Walīd Masʿūd* is marked by an anxiety of form, memory, and self. On the one hand, the portrait of Walīd that emerges on the novel's pages is that of a Palestinian exile unconstrained by borders, ideologies, or conventions, capable of combining political activism, spiritual contemplation, and cultural production to foment a revolution that is more than a mere changing of the political guard. On the other hand, this portrait is crucially embedded within the novel's frame narrative, which depicts the dogged sociologist Dr. Jawād hard at work on a "research project" (*baḥth*) about Walīd that aims to explain his disappearance.[14] The novel, therefore, chronicles not only the life of Walīd Masʿūd, but also the struggles of its sociologist frame narrator, who wants to encompass the life of his Palestinian friend in words but is disenchanted with the intellectual words at his disposal. Each of these two characters longs for a language that he recognizes to be inaccessible—Walīd for one that would encapsulate the plenitude of his memories of a lost Palestine, and Jawād for the well-measured verbal distillation promised by poetry. I explore how these characters' anxieties of form pull the novel apart, "pulverizing" its words through the tactics of framing, citation, and stylization. I argue that between the empty triumphalism of the discourses surrounding the Palestinian exile and the deceptively tidy verbal economy of the poem, *Walīd Masʿūd* ultimately offers up Walīd's tape-recorded monologue as a productive limit-language—one that mobilizes childhood memory to reassemble a new form from the scattered debris of both poetry and narrative. What the "search" for Walīd Masʿūd ultimately uncovers, I conclude, is its author's liminal position between hopefulness and disillusionment, land and education, poetic "composition" (*naẓm*) and the "scattering" (*nathr*) of prose.

The chapter will proceed in four sections. After a short summary of the novel and an introduction to its metafictional dimension, I turn to the prologue of *Walīd Masʿūd* to argue that it is none other than a *nasīb* in prose—that is, a meditation on memory, loss, and literary form that intertextually references the "amatory prelude" of the traditional pre-Islamic ode or *qaṣīdah*. But whereas the traditional *nasīb* introduces a poem in which words are carefully arranged into metrically undulating, monorhymed lines, the prologue to *Walīd Masʿūd* introduces a novel in which nearly all of the narrators lament their inability to arrange words in a way that reflects their memories of and experiences with Walīd Masʿūd. The prologue's plea for intelligibility and clarity, therefore, is ironic in light of what the rest of the novel bears out. In the third section, I consider the portrait of Walīd as an "ideal uprooted Palestinian" that emerges both from the other characters' descriptions from him and from the pages of Walīd's unfinished autobiography. I argue that Jabra dismantles this heroic, legendary portrait by framing it, questioning its validity and illustrating the extent to which it had eclipsed the actual, lived experience of exile. The

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[14] Johnson has insightfully highlighted this metafictional dimension to *Walīd Masʿūd*. See Johnson, "The Politics of Reading." I discuss her argument with relation to my own at greater length below.

fourth and final section offers a new reading of Walīd's tape-recorded monologue as limit-language, one that aspires toward a new form of literary creation even as the rest of the novel is concerned with worn-out, "pulverized" words.

Of Vortexes and Labyrinths: Jabra's Metafiction

Let me begin with a brief summary of the novel and a review of its metafictional dimensions, by way of several other previous critical readings. *Walīd Masʿūd* is a polyphonic text in which a number of characters, each narrating a different chapter or series of chapters, attempt to explain the mysterious disappearance of their friend and colleague, a Palestinian writer and activist named Walīd Masʿūd. Some suggest he may have been kidnapped or killed; others believe he is still alive and fighting with the Palestinian Resistance in Lebanon. As in Jabra's earlier novel *al-Safīnah* (*The Ship*), the action of *Walīd Masʿūd* centers on a signifying absence that motivates much of the novel's psychological drama. In *al-Safīnah*, that absence is the land, which bears heavily upon the characters' relationships with each other even as they attempt to escape it by drifting at sea.[15] In *Walīd Masʿūd*, the absent figure is Walīd himself: all that remains of him when the novel begins are his car and an audiocassette tape on which he has recorded his own voice delivering a stream-of-consciousness monologue. Following the discovery of these remains, the tape is entrusted to the novel's first narrator, the sociologist Dr. Jawād Ḥusnī, and subsequently played for all of Walīd's friends at a garden party hosted by the architect ʿĀmir ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd. On the tape, the guests hear Walīd's voice meandering from topic to topic, interweaving childhood memories and spiritual ruminations with readings of *Hamlet*, remarks on love, and words addressed to a mysterious lover named Shahd (later revealed as Wiṣāl Raʾūf, the younger sister of the psychoanalyst Ṭāriq Raʾūf) in one long, continuous sentence.

Many critics have suggested that listening to the audiocassette tape is what motivates the novel's other narrators to share their memories of Walīd and reflections on his life.[16] Yet *Walīd Masʿūd* includes many other chapters not narrated by Walīd's friends in Baghdad, including one in the voice of ʿĪsā Nāṣir, a Palestinian carpenter now living in Amman who knew Walīd as a child in Bethlehem, and Marwān Walīd, Walīd's *fidāʾī* son who ultimately dies in a raid on the occupied Palestinian village of Umm al-ʿAyn.[17] The presence of these two chapters suggests that what we have in *Walīd Masʿūd* are perhaps not the private meditations of the characters who originally listened to Walīd's audiocassette tape at the garden party, but rather a selection from the various primary sources compiled by Walīd's friend Jawād Ḥusnī. Indeed, as Rebecca Carol Johnson has argued,[18] the word "*baḥth*" from the novel's title suggests that the novel *Walīd*

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[15] Jabra, *al-Safīnah* [The Ship] (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1990). For an English translation, see Jabra, *The Ship*, trans. Roger Allen and Adnan Haydar (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1985). On the significance of the land in this novel, see Allen's introduction to *The Ship*, 8-10; and Allen, "The Novels of Jabra and the Art of Translation," in *Jusūr* 7–8 (1996): 98.

[16] For several variations on this reading, see Boullata, "Living with the Tigress," 219, Stefan G. Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 54, and Mattiyahu Peled, "Sexuality in Jabra's Novel, *The Search for Walīd Masʿūd*," in *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Roger Allen, Hilary Kilpatrick, and Ed de Moor (London: Saqi, 1995), 143.

[17] See Chapters 3 and 10, respectively (*Baḥth*, 87-110 and 295-303; *Search*, 65-82 and 224-29).

[18] Johnson, "The Politics of Reading."

Masʿūd is perhaps not a novel at all, but rather the unfinished "research project" that Jawād declares he intends to write in the novel's first and last chapters.[19] The novel's title—*al-Baḥth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd*—would then be translated not only as the "search *for*" Walīd, but the "research project *about*" him. (The Arabic *baḥth* can mean both "search, quest" and "study, investigation, research project.") This would suggest that there is a metafictional dimension to Jabra's novel that, in critical readings of the novel, often goes largely unnoticed. Jawād is not only a character in the novel *Walīd Masʿūd*; he is also an author writing a book, and his book is the very text we are reading.[20]

   Building off of Johnson's insight, it becomes apparent that each chapter of *Walīd Masʿūd* could be read as a selection from the various primary documents that Jawād collects over the course of his "research"—what he refers to as a "sea of papers" that fill his office with "their particular brand of silent roar."[21] Indeed, the novel cites from numerous forms of documentation, including love poems,[22] letters,[23] journal entries,[24] and short stories based on real events.[25]

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[19] In the novel's first chapter, Jawād describes how he "sat down to transcribe [Walīd's] tape […] That way I'd be able to read it and study it in every detail. I'd add it to Walīd's other papers and books in case it coud help me with the study (*dirāsah*) I'd decided to write about him." Jabra, *Baḥth*, 21; *Search*, 8-9. Again, in the novel's final chapter, he declares that here, at the end of the novel, he has finally "collected all my papers and organized my thoughts. Now I'll begin my study in earnest." *Baḥth*, 378; *Search*, 288 (translation modified).

[20] This metafictional approach to *Walīd Masʿūd* challenges earlier critical approaches that mobilized the mirror as a figure for Jabra's polyphonic approach to the novel. Meyer, for example, notes that "in their *reflections* on Walid, the other characters are merely *reflecting* on aspects of themselves," and thus "Walid simply serves as a *mirror* in which these characters see themselves." Meyer, *Experimental Arabic Novel*, 52 and 54 (emphases added). Likewise, Boullata claims that, "in the process of their attempt to unravel the garbled utterances of the tape recording, [Walīd's] friends—*as though looking in a mirror*—reveal more of themselves than of him." Boullata, "Living with the Tigress," 219. Samīr Fawzī Ḥājj, meanwhile, turns the mirror into a complete interpretive framework in his book, *Marāyā: Jabra Ibrāhīm Jabra wa-l-fann al-riwāʾī* [Mirrors: Jabra Ibrāhīm Jabra and the Art of Narrative] (Beirut: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabiyyah li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr, 2005). Ḥājj discusses what he calls Jabra's "mirror-style" (*uslūb al-marāyā*) and "reflective characters" (*al-shakhṣiyyāt al-ʿākisa*) and he asserts that "Walid's character becomes a mirror that reflects the characters who speak about him." Ḥājj, *Marāyā*, 112. These critics' shared reliance on the language of mirrors and reflection is not coincidental. In a passage from the novel, Dr. Jawād uses the mirror as a figure for the narrative conundrum in which he finds himself: "Who was it that [Walīd's friends] were actually talking about? Were they in fact the mirror, with Walid serving as the face surveying them from its depths? Or was he the mirror, and their faces the ones rising up, while they, perhaps, weren't even aware of it?" Jabra, *Baḥth*, 363; *Search*, 276. The passage seems to offer the reader a readymade critical framework for interpreting Jabra's fictional text. If we think of Walīd's friends and colleagues as a mirror, then *Walīd Masʿūd* becomes a polyphonic portrait of the exilic Palestinian intellectual, revealing this figure's many contributions to the overall modernist project in the Arab world. If we think of Walīd as the mirror, by contrast, then *Walīd Masʿūd* becomes a portrait of the Iraqi intelligentsia in the aftermath of the Naksah. As I argue below, however, the metafictional structure of *Walīd Masʿūd* invites a more complex reading of this novel as one that questions and destabilizes the mimetic premise on which these critical accounts are based.

[21] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 364; *Search*, 277.

[22] See the poems Wiṣāl Raʾūf exchanges with Walīd. Jabra, *Baḥth*, 268-271; *Search,* 202-204.

[23] See Walīd's letter to Wiṣāl, which the psychoanalyst Ṭāriq Raʾūf mistakenly believes was written to Maryam, and which somehow winds up in the hands of Jinān al-Thāmir, another of Walīd's many lovers. Jabra, *Baḥth*, 143-144; *Search*, 105-107).

[24] See the entries Ṭāriq Raʾūf reproduces from Maryam's dream journals. Jabra, *Baḥth*, 149-152; *Search,* 110-113.

[25] See Dr. Jawād's short story about a heated encounter between Walīd and his friend, the literary critic Kāẓim Ismaʿīl. Jabra, *Baḥth*, 47-64; *Search*, 31-46.

Likewise, we are told that after Walīd's disappearance, all Jawād has left of his Palestinian friend is an "accumulation of his papers, stuffed into huge envelopes," which he plans to use as primary sources for his study.[26] We are also told that Wiṣāl Raʾūf gives Jawād "several bundles of folded papers and a large collection of small blue pages all the same size" before leaving Baghdad to join the *fidāʾiyyīn* in Beirut, continuing her own search for Walīd, whom she believes is still alive.[27] The approach to *Walīd Masʿūd* as Jawād's study, finally, would also explain why it includes testimonies from two characters who were *not* at ʿĀmir ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's party: ʿĪṣā Nāṣir and Marwān Walīd. Indeed, part of the strength of this new reading of *Walīd Masʿūd* is that it can account for these two otherwise anomalous chapters.

Johnson ultimately argues that Jabra's novel "explores the limits of the power of intellectual production" in the wake of the 1967 defeat by staging the multiple ways that reading (the intellectual's primary epistemological tool) fails as a mode of accessing truth.[28] In particular, Johnson points out that all of the characters in the novel are themselves readers who, like the actual reader of the novel, seek to find out the truth about Walīd by reading a series of documents about him. And yet "the attempts to read Walīd in his books and conversations… do not yield the desired results, and their failures reflect back on the novel as a whole, parodying the reader's efforts even as she reads."[29] Drawing on the theoretical language of deconstruction, Johnson concludes that "reading, for Walīd, and for the novel as a whole, is a process that itself signifies."[30] That is, by presenting characters who fail to attain the truth by reading a variety of materials in numerous ways, *Walīd Masʿūd* reveals that, as Paul de Man puts it, "the interpretation of the sign is not… a meaning but another sign; it is a reading, not a decodage."[31] For the characters in *Walīd Masʿūd*, "text… is not just an epistemological product, but a self-generating process… [and] the knowledge that reading reveals is therefore always mediated and inherently unstable, as is its relationship to the world outside the text."[32] In Johnson's account, Jabra thematizes the processes of reading and interpretation themselves in order to illustrate how, in the post-1967 moment at which he was writing, the occupation of the politically committed intellectual had been thrown into doubt, and the exilic Palestinian, the epitome of such an intellectual figure, existed "only as a rapidly expanding text."[33]

Johnson's analysis provides an important perspective on *Walīd Masʿūd*, one that highlights the intricate intertwining of form and content in the novel. Building outward from this reading, I aim below to consider the many genres that Jabra intertextually incorporates into *Walīd Masʿūd*. These include poetry (in Dr. Jawād's prologue), and the limit-language of Walīd's tape-recorded monologue. I show that through narrative framing, Jabra calls into question the at times Christ-like, at times mythical or heroic portraits of the exilic Palestinian intellectual that had come to dominate Arab intellectual discourse at the time of his writing. And

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[26] See Jabra, *Baḥth*, 17; *Search*, 6.

[27] See Jabra, *Baḥth*, 377-78; *Search*, 288.

[28] Johnson, "Politics of Reading," 179.

[29] Ibid. 184.

[30] Ibid. 188.

[31] Paul de Man, "Semiology and Rhetoric," *Diacritics* 2 (1973), 29 (cited in Johnson, 192).

[32] Johnson, "Politics," 188.

[33] Ibid.

through the inclusion of a metafictional frame narrator who seems to wish he were writing a poem rather than a sociological "study" (*baḥth*), Jabra reflects on the simultaneous desirability and inaccessibility of poetry—a medium that promises to crystallize experience into neatly measured lines, yet through that very promise threatens to misrepresent the dire political realities of exilic experience. My aim in this chapter is to highlight both these elements in Jabra's text, and to argue that Walīd and Jawād may dismiss *certain* languages and words as ineffective, misleading, or "pulverized," but even so, they continue the search for an alternative form, something between or beyond the dead intellectual discourses of exile and the broken fragments of poetry. In so doing, I aim to subsequently refocus critical discussions of *Walīd Masʿūd* on the limit-language of the tape-monologue itself by closely reading this enigmatic block of text. How is this monologue built, if not chronologically or narratively?[34] What temporal, affective, or figural conceits link the many thoughts and memories conveyed therein? And how do these memories link up with Jabra's own memories of his early childhood, as recounted in *al-Biʾr al-ūlā*?

In my attempt to answer these questions, I argue, finally, that within the world of *Walīd Masʿūd*, which is pulled apart by the formal anxieties of both its absent protagonist and its frame narrator, Walīd's tape-recorded monologue represents an attempt to return to the knowledge of the child, which has not yet been rerouted by intellect or education, nor has it been hardened into any fixed form, genre, or set of conventions. In its lyric exploration of memory's mechanics, the monologue represents the author's attempt to create what Theodor Adorno has called "a subjectivity that turns into objectivity," a deeply personal reflection that, in its very withdrawal from the world, limns that world's most abject conditions.[35] The subjective-objective dialectic that Adorno attributes to lyric poetry in general, however, is perhaps nowhere as structurally present as in Palestinian writing, where, as Edward Said has pointed out, to engage in personal acts of remembrance is itself a political act, and to record and transmit one's memories in written or spoken form is akin to engage in an insurrectionary activity that defies the prohibition on self-narration imposed by Zionist historiography.[36]

The monologue, in short, is Jabra's way of recreating in words what was lost in actuality. "Words, words, words," Walīd says at one point in the novel. "At the end of everything, words are all that remain. If no words remain, then nothing remains."[37] For Walīd as for Jabra, both Palestinian exiles for whom "home" seemed to exist only in words, words really are "all that remains" of anything in the wake of absence and loss. Even though they may be flawed epistemological tools, as Johnson convincingly argues, still for the Palestinian exile words seem to *constitute* reality, defying an ineluctable loss by transforming absence into presence and

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[34] In asking this question, I am troubling Meyer's contention that, "in al-Baḥth ʿan Walīd Masʿūd, there are no connections" or associations to link the various sections of the monologue together. Rather, in Meyer's estimation, "Walid's 'tape' consists of an interiorized stream-of-consciousness narrative that simply goes from one thought or memory to another." Meyer, *Experimental Arabic Novel*, 51. As I hope to show in my new reading of the monologue, the different sections of the monologue are linked by associations of image (such as a mustache), color (olive-green, radiant white), and figure (where a figure used to describe something literal quickly transforms into something literal requiring a different figure to describe it, etc.).

[35] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 1:43.

[36] Edward Said, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 3 (1984): 27–48.

[37] *Baḥth*, 267 (my translation).

thereby constantly recreating reality anew, through iteration and reiteration. "When words of love are no longer to be heard on lovers' lips, doesn't the love itself disappear as well?" Walīd asks Wiṣāl in the same passage.[38] We might also say that when the homeland ceases to be heard on the lips of exiles, it too threatens to disappear. In the Palestinian context, therefore, it would seem that memory itself is an insurrectionary act, one that aims to steel history and identity against the many forces that seek to wipe them out entirely. This is why Jabra makes memory the focus both of his protagonist's tape-recorded monologue and of his frame narrator's *nasīb*-like prologue: to grapple with memory's chaotic, tumultuous form by refusing the all-too-neat crystallization of poetry (*naẓm*) and embracing the scattering (*nathr*) of prose.

Like Tent Pegs Scattered in the Desert of the Soul: Jabra's Nasīb in Prose

The novel's prologue and its tape-recorded monologue thus offer two different approaches to memory in *Walīd Masʿūd*: where the former longs for the condensation and concision of poetry, the latter embraces a more chaotic prose form as one that more closely reflects the operations of memory. In this section, I address Dr. Jawād's prologue in particular. I will return to the tape-recorded monologue below. Already from the first lines of the novel, memory is a problem for its frame narrator, Dr. Jawād. He begins by remembering a wish that Walīd himself once expressed: "I wish there were an elixir for memory, something that could bring events back in the order they happened, one by one, giving them form in expressions that would cascade out onto the page."[39] Of course, the memories and experiences that the narrators of *Walīd Masʿūd* will soon share don't "bring events back in the order they happened," nor do the words "cascade out onto the page." Indeed, almost every narrator (including Dr. Jawād) eventually decries the insufficiency of the words at his or her disposal.[40] Walīd's phrase thus reflects back on the form of the novel as a whole: it both expresses a desire—for clarity, order, and form—and tacitly acknowledges the impossibility of that desire's fulfillment.

On closer observation, however, the elixir wished for by Walīd and recalled by Jawād seems to have *two* magic qualities, not one. Not only would it "bring events back in the order they happened," thus offering a kind of mnemonic magic; it would also "give form" to these events (*yujassiduhā*), making them corporeal (literally "giving them body," or *jasad*, in Arabic) by translating them into words. The elixir invoked by Walīd and remembered by Dr. Jawād starts out as a tool for enhancing the imperfect, human mechanism of memory, yet by the end of the sentence it has transformed into a tool for literary creation, a catalyst of *poeisis*. This slippage continues throughout the remainder of the prologue, as Dr. Jawād's terms for talking about memory transform into the terms of literary form in Arabic—specifically the difference between poetry (*naẓm*) and prose (*nathr*):

> However much we resist it, we are the playthings of our memories. […] How can we take
> hold of these inverted dreams, these dreams that simultaneously harden and dispel the

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[38] *Baḥth*, 268; *Search*, 201.

[39] *Search* 1; *Baḥth* 11.

[40] At one point, Maryam implores: "When will I write everything in the clear, detailed, precise way I should be writing it?" Jabra, *Baḥth*, 237; *Search*, 179.

past, these images at times scattered like clouds over the expanses of the mind, at others pressed like precious diamonds within the folds of our souls?[41]

Dr. Jawād figures memory as something dialectically distributed between scattering and condensing, dispersal and distillation, nebulousness and clarity. Memory both hardens and releases the past, setting loose clouds of evaporated material even as it works to harden others into permanent, stable possessions. Yet the Arabic terms at play here also resonate in the sphere of *literary form*. Stuck between these contrasting mechanisms of memory, Dr. Jawād is essentially also caught between *poetry* and *prose*—between the "hardening" or "fixing" (*naẓm*) of the past into "precious diamonds pressed within the folds of our souls" and the "scattering" (*nathr*) of the past into "clouds over the expanses of the mind." This allusion to the formal differences between prose and poetry quickly becomes explicit, as Dr. Jawād borrows the language of Arabic prosody to describe his representational impasse:

> So come now, patience, perseverance, words, help me to shed some light on [these memories], to force them into intelligible lines. Intelligible lines? Every line is a year, a month, or at least a day. How can a line like that be intelligible, when each word in it is bound to a separate cord (*awtār*) reaching back into the vast deserts of the soul, so filled with the pegs (*awtād*) of tents pitched and struck down by the hundreds?[42]

Where at first our narrator spoke in the abstract about the nature of memory (which is always dialectically implicated with forgetting), here these same opposing forces are also attributed to *words*, as Dr. Jawād lands us squarely within the world of Arabic poetics. According to the prosodic system credited to the eighth-century lexicographer al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, the combinations of long and short vowels that form the metrical feet of poetic a line in Arabic are named for different elements in tent-construction. A line of metered poetry, according to this system, comprises a certain number of "pegs" (*awtād*) and "cords" (*awtār*) and is referred to as a *bayt*, that is, a "tent."[43] Dr. Jawād's figures for memory directly reference the terms of Arabic prosody, just as his prologue's thematic content references the thematic concerns of the *nasīb*— memory, loss, and an invocation to words.[44]

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[41] … *hādhihi al-aḥlām allatī tujammid al-māḍī wa tuṭliquhu maʿan, hādhihi al-ṣuwar al-mutanāthirah aḥyānan ka-l-ghuyūm fawqa suhūb al-dhihn, al-maḍghūṭah aḥyānan ka-l-māsāt al-thamīnah bayna talāfīf al-nafs*). *Search* 1; *Baḥth* 11 (translation modified).

[42] *Baḥth* 11-12; *Search* 1-2 (translation modified).

[43] A "cord" (*sabab* or *watar*) is a two-letter foot consisting of either a "movent letter followed by a quiescent letter" (*sabab khafīf*) or "two movent letters" (*sabab thaqīl*). Examples of such cord-feet include the *lun* at the end of many feet, or the *muta* in *mutafāʿilun* (in the *al-kāmil* meter). A "peg," meanwhile, is a three-letter foot consisting of either "two movent letters followed by a quiescent letter" (*watad maqrūn*), or "one movent, then one quiescent, then one movent letter" (*watad mafrūq*). Examples of each of these would be the *faʿū* of *faʿūlun* (in the *ṭawīl* meter) and the *fāʿi* of *fāʿilātun* (in the *al-madīd* meter). For a full explanation of Arabic prosody (*ʿilm al-ʿarūḍ*) in English and Arabic, see William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2004), 350-90. On al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī's life, work, and status within the world of Arabic prosody, lexicography, grammar, see Rafael Talmon, *Arabic Grammar in its Formative Age: Kitāb al-ʿAyn & its Attribution to Khalīl b. Aḥmad* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

[44] I am thinking in particular here of the *muʿallaqah* attributed to Labīd ibn Rabīʿah, in which the speaker stops to address mute, immortal stones, but is not surprised when they do not reply to his invocation. For a more literal translation of this ode, with copious annotation, see Alan Jones, ed. *Early Arabic Poetry* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press,

With its interest in the magical conjuring powers of language, its lament over the insufficiency of memory, and its nostalgic longing for that which can never be retrieved, the prelude to *Walīd Masʿūd* invokes the "amatory prelude," or *nasīb*, of the pre-Islamic ode (*qaṣīdah*). Dr. Jawād explicitly summons forth the language of Arabic prosody to lament the shortcomings of memory as a literary mechanism, and his prelude-like *nasīb* in prose thus inaugurates a journey not only through space, but also through self. In his work on the *qaṣīdah* form, Jaroslav Stetkevych has described how the ode as a whole aims to "*crystallize* meaning in a very limited number of structurally determined themes."[45] In imposing a set of formal limitations and thematic expectations, in other words, the *qaṣīdah* traditionally "fulfilled a need for a comprehensive synthesis of an entire culture's view on world, life, and historical experience."[46] Like the classical poets, then, Dr. Jawād also wants to "crystallize meaning" into fixed patterns of long and short vowels, tidy verbal units that will not only explain Walīd's disappearance, but also—by extension—prevent this Palestinian's story from disappearing, even if his body has already gone.

Yet where once the well-wrought lines (*usṭur*) of poetry could distill time and experience into rhymed, metered speech—speech that could be transmitted both synchronically and diachronically, both laterally within the experiencing community and forward in time to future generations—now narrative strives to pick up the pieces of poetry, to reconnect the cords of words to the pegs of memory. Through the character of Walīd Masʿūd, the paradigmatic Palestinian exile, Jabra figures the exile's predicament as also a poetic predicament. Exile is not only a crisis of the body—the body uprooted from home, in perpetual movement, never settled or attached to a single place. It is also a crisis of *form*, an inability to connect, to recall and arrange memories into well-ordered words, thereby weaving oneself into the weft and warp of collective history. As such, finally, it is also a crisis of the soul or self (*nafs*), which in Dr. Jawād's image becomes like a desert (*fayfāʾ*) where illegible fragments of experience are scattered. Prose becomes the best medium for recording this crisis, since it too is a "scattered" form (*manthur*), broken almost by definition.

Clearly, then, Jawād's friendship with Walīd, combined with what he's learned from his research, has exceeded the bounds of his training as a sociologist. The methodological and rhetorical constraints of the sociological "study" are no longer adequate to his purpose. What he wishes to say about Walīd now transcends the bounds of social scientific rhetoric and methodology. "What am I supposed to write?" he exclaims to Ibrāhīm. "Don't you know that the sociological point of view rots the imagination at the root? For ten years they train you to view man as a societal phenomenon, and then there you are at the end of it all, totally incapable of looking at him as a discrete, unique person, whose strength of character lies in his mind, in the cells of his brain."[47] Dr. Jawād longs to abandon the academic genres with which he is most

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2011), 453-93. For a more poetic translation into English, see Michael Sells, trans. *Desert Tracings: Six Classical Arabian Odes* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 32-44. For an in-depth analysis of this ode, see Suzanne Stetkevych, "Voicing the Mute Immortals: *The Muʿallaqah of Labīd* and the Rite of Passage," in *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3-54.

[45] Jaroslav Stetkevych, *The Zephyrs of Najd: The Poetics of Nostalgia in the Classical Arabic Nasīb* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 82; *Search,* 61 (translation modified).

familiar and embrace the crystallization of poetry. Yet even poetry fails him as a medium, its neatly arranged cords and pegs becoming dislodged in his mind.

Working on his book-length study of Walīd thus becomes more than an intellectual or investigative pursuit for Dr. Jawād. It is an almost religious passion, one that requires monastic solitude and, every so often, rewards him with moments of ecstasy and rapture:

> I'm trying to take all the elements back to square one, to compare part with part, to establish where the gaps are, to look for the lost pieces to fill them, to unravel the intermeshed folds with their obvious, yet scanty evidence, and finally to penetrate to that distant, well-fortified region deep within where motives are incessantly at work like bees in their hive. All these goals have remained my secret addiction and, at the same time, my true pleasure. The sad thing is that I haven't been able to tell anyone else about it; when I enter my office alone, I shut the door and exclude my family, my friends, and people in general. The universe is united in a small room, as densely packed as *a forest*, surging in waves like *the sea* [*yatawaḥḥad al-kawn fī ghurfah ṣaghīrah, muktaẓẓah iktiẓāẓ al-ghābah, māʾijah mawja al-baḥr*]. I'm at one here too; I ignite, I'm fired, I circle in rotating heavens like a piece of the sun that's broken off. I feel my way through an unknown universe at once horrifying and wonderful. Yet, the only way I can express any of all this is through a feeble phrase here and an even more feeble phrase there.
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> In the end, though, I'm going to have to put some of all this down in words, however feeble it turns out to be. When were words bits of chaff, of flame, of rapture, like those that would come to me during the trances that thrust me around and dashed me in pieces just so as to reassemble me, then smashed me in pieces once more, so as to reassemble me once more, and so on ad infinitum?[48]

Dr. Jawād finds a kind of mystical unity and oneness in his study that he cannot find outside it, yet he is unable to translate this solitary, visionary, unifying experience into any coherent verbal form. In his attempts to do so, the unreal, textual world of his research project comes to replace the real world outside his office, with books stacked up into tall piles taking the place of trees in a "densely packed forest" and papers heaped on every surface taking the place of ocean waves, "surging… like the sea." The textual representations of Walīd, in other words, have eclipsed his reality.

Yet Dr. Jawād's meditations on the "feebleness" of words in comparison to memory also dramatize the anxiety of authorship that saturates *Walīd Masʿūd* itself. Just as the textual game of reading brings pleasure, so too it brings frustration and shattering for Dr. Jawād, until he is caught up in an endless cycle of smashing and reassembling. Words hold out the promise of narrative unity, linearity, and objectivity, but can just as easily be transformed into the fabricators of delusion and deception, pittances to the overwhelming nature of experience. Dr. Jawād set out to write a "study" of Walīd, in the hopes that this scholarly work might benefit a larger readership, preserving the story of at least one Palestinian's life against the ongoing effacement begun with the Nakbah and continued by its settler colonial aftermath. Yet here our frame narrator worries that any narrative he might distill from the sources he's collected could never do justice to the fullness of Walīd's life. Here and in other key moments from the novel's frame narrative, it is Dr. Jawād and not Walīd who stands in for Jabra himself, modeling a new

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[48] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 364-65; *Search*, 277.

form of authorship not predicated on total knowledge. In Dr. Jawād's anxiety over the impossibility of deciphering, rearranging, and composing into narrative form the entirety of a life, we can read Jabra's own anxiety that any narrative he might assemble will never do justice to the lived experience and totality of Palestinian dispossession, loss, and exile. Rather than assume that the novel can serve as a comprehensive or authoritative mode of historical reckoning, Jabra dramatizes his anxiety over its partiality and indeterminacy.

Jabra expresses a similar authorial anxiety in the introduction to *The First Well*, reflecting on what he calls "the writer's eternal problem—reconciling the fluidity of experience with the formalism of language."[49] He affirms that the writer, when describing phenomena such as self and environment, which are constantly changing in time, must strive "to capture them in a net of words lest they should be lost entirely."[50] Even if the words only amount to very little in comparison with experience, in other words, it is still worth weaving them into a "net," in order to prevent one's memories from disappearing altogether. This conflict between experience and language, the simultaneous imperative and impossibility of capturing the exile's life in words, resonates with Jawād's conclusion to *Walīd Masʿūd*, in which he resolves to finally "begin his study in earnest" (the novel we are reading):

> I wonder if I'll ever reach a definite conclusion about Walīd. Can there ever be a definite conclusion about any event in life, let alone a man's life as a whole? I ought to sift through all the facts and data, eliminate the false trails and fabrications and delusions, then try to reach a conclusion that will entail the least degree of contradiction possible. *But my sense of responsibility as a seeker/researcher (bāḥith) won't let me do that.* […] Are events always material, palpable, and rationalizable? Don't some people have a power that can't be explained by these events, because it's a series of streams that can't be bound by analysis, action, or place? The connecting parts don't always fit together exactly, and contradictions may show up in the tiniest elements. But who ever said that the different parts of life are all fitted together logically and harmoniously? Wherever life's a continuous struggle, a continuous challenge, continuous love—all of which requires the creation of conflicting relationships—then the product of its parts taken together is much greater than the mere whole.[51]

To be a product of one's parts, in Jawād's final estimation, is not necessarily to be less than whole. Indeed, in this passage the separate pieces of a life—the abandoned pegs of memory and cords of words, to borrow language from the novel's prologue—amount to "*much more* than their mere sum" (*akthar min mujarrad majmūʿihā bi-kathīr*) when taken together but not assembled into something unified. Facing the anxiety that the words at his disposal are "feeble" (*ʿājiz*) tools when compared to memory and experience, Jawād offers up indeterminacy and plurality, a refusal of coherence or closure. He reveals the very notions of unity, wholeness, and authoritativeness as fictions, and he holds out the promise that there may be some immaterial, impalpable, non-rationalizable element to the events of a life. The novel ends with questions as opposed to answers, open-endedness as opposed to finality.

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[49] Jabra, *Biʾr*, 12; *First Well*, xviii.

[50] Jabra, *Biʾr*, 10; *First Well*, xvi.

[51] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 378-79; *Search*, 288-89 (translation modified)

In a sense, then, Dr. Jawād seems to have crossed the semantic threshold that separates the intellectual from the spiritual in the many resonances of the Arabic *bāḥith*. He has transformed from a "researcher" or "investigator" treating his friend as an object of study, into a "seeker" or "quester" content not to offer his readers the satisfaction or finality of authoritative, total knowledge. Indeed, Dr. Jawād *refuses* such total knowledge as a fiction that would actually betray his "responsibility" as a seeker. Reading, researching, and education, therefore, are not a process of severance or betrayal for Dr. Jawād, as Maryam suggested in her comment at the dinner party. Rather, in Jabra's rendering of authorship, the intellectual is inextricably bound up with the spiritual, with both meanings constellating around the single term *baḥth*. It is as though the author himself were trying to bring harmony to his own life, to temper his intellectual's anxiety of irrelevance with his seeker's sense of openness and wonder.

Framed Intellectuals: Jabra's Critique of Exile

Keeping Dr. Jawād's frame narrative in mind, it quickly becomes apparent that the heroic, idealized portrait of Walīd Masʿūd that the reader receives from the pages of *Walīd Masʿūd* is mediated by the voices of a series of other characters. Each has been shaped by his or her formation in a particular intellectual field, whether history (Maryam), sociology (Jawād), psychoanalysis (Ṭāriq Raʾūf), the fine arts (Sawsan), architecture (ʿĀmir), or cultural criticism (Ibrāhīm). Accordingly, each character who speaks about Walīd adds another brushstroke or tone to the portrait that emerges of him—or to use the musical terms that Jabra loved so well, another musical line to the orchestral arrangement of voices in the novel.[52] There are so many voices, in fact, that by the end of the novel the exile himself has disappeared not only into the desert, but also into a vortex of textual representations. "In the end," as Johnson writes, "Walid exists for us and for his friends only as a rapidly expanding text."[53] Yet contained within this "text" are numerous voices and reigsters, each of which contributes to shaping the reader's impression of Walīd in a unique way. In this section, I examine the many voices that combine in *Walīd Masʿūd* to create the figure of the exilic Palestinian intellectual—a figure that, through metafictional framing, Jabra reveals as a fiction, equally as imaginary as the unity, clarity, and authoritativeness Dr. Jawād had hoped to attain through intellectual research alone. Jabra thus seems not to be extolling this figure, but parodying the way the Arab intelligentsia heroized the figure of the exile while simultaneously retreating into the more comfortable, insular world of the intellectual.

In a brief article on Jabra and the Iraqi writer ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Munīf, M.M. Badawi describes the titular character from *Walīd Masʿūd* as "the ideal uprooted Palestinian, free from the shackles of narrow ideologies, committed to freedom and liberal values, who puts his gifts, fortune, and indeed his life at the service of his homeland."[54] And indeed, at first blush, *Walīd Masʿūd* does seem to portray its absent protagonist as precisely such an exile. Maryam al-Ṣaffār,

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[52] On Jabra's passion for music, see especially his letters to Roger Allen, in which he discusses the importance of Henry Purcell's pieces for harpsichord, as well as Monteverdi's "Magnificat for Six Voices" to the orchestral, polyvocal composition of *Walīd Masʿūd*. Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, "My Dear Roger, Letters from Jabra I. Jabra to Roger Allen 1980-1994." Jusoor/Jusūr 9 (1997): 360–393.

[53] Johnson, "Politics of Reading," 188.

[54] M.M. Badawi, "Two Novelists from Iraq: Jabrā and Munīf." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23 (1992): 143-44.

for example, sees Walīd as an exceptional figure who managed to combine community-minded political activism with individual self-reflection in a harmonious and productive identity:

> The important thing is that Walid was something else, something unique, different from other people and a contrast to anyone else. There are ideologues and populists who want to start an uproar and have the ability to do it; they like the whole world to know about it because they feel that's their right. But Walid wasn't like that. […] There's also the man who does things, the activist [*al-rajul al-fāʿil*, « *al-aktīfīst* »], prepared to throw bombs, write secret posters, set booby traps for the enemy, all this without worrying whether the world knows about it. Walid had a lot of that type of thing about him; he wouldn't say anything about it or make it a pretext for his existence on earth. It was just a spontaneous part of his being […] And alongside this anxious, self-questioning doer, there's the contemplative ascetic who, deep down, wanted to keep away from crowds and was bound up in his thoughts and dreams. Were these two levels in his life in conflict with each other? Who can know? The tragedy for us is that we know so little about his life.[55]

In Maryam's portrait, Walīd combines the noblest, most self-sacrificing aspects of the "activist" (Jabra includes the English term in quotation marks alongside the Arabic "*al-rajul al-fāʿil*") with the most respected characteristics of the religious ascetic. He takes risks and makes sacrifices for the Palestinian resistance movement without posturing or seeking praise; he "wraps himself" in dreams and aspirations without losing sight of the real world. He is simultaneously contemplative and active, a dreamer as well as a doer. As Maryam paints him, Walīd seems to combine all the stereotypes associated with the ideal uprooted Palestinian: academically productive, politically active, self-sacrificing in the extreme, having transformed his loss into an impetus for productivity.

Ibrāhīm al-Ḥajj Nawfal's characterization of Walīd also contributes to the formation of the ideal uprooted Palestinian as a simulacrum, an imaginary figure capable of balancing revolutionary political activity with transformative intellectual work. But Ibrāhīm takes the image even further, painting Walīd as a Christ-like redeemer of the Arab world as a whole:

> Walīd was the kind of Palestinian who rejected, pioneered, built, and united (if my people can ever be united). He was a scholar, engineer, technocrat, modernizer, vehement goader of the Arab conscience. Walid, as I knew him, refused to occupy any role without mastering it. And his most important role was to foster the new spirit based on knowledge (*al-ʿilm*), freedom, love, and a rebellion against looking back—all this as a means of achieving the complete Arab revolution. To him, revolution wasn't merely a class-based change in governmental system, or a matter of replacing Right with Left or vice versa. To him, revolution meant placing the Arabs within the ambit of the big, wide world, affirming his capacity for steadfastness on the one hand, and his ability to contribute on the other. […] I know that he is one of those exiles who'll use that vantage point to shake the Arab world into reexamining everything its ever thought or created, and who'll fill the world with the word *Arab* […] Wherever you find outstanding achievements in science, finance, ideas, literature, or innovation, you'll find the exiled Palestinian: you'll see him doing things, urging, theorizing, and achieving everything that's different.

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[55] *Baḥth*, 349; *Search*, 267

Wherever there's anything worthwhile involving self-sacrifice, you'll find the Palestinian.[56]

Taken together with Maryam's portrait, Ibrāhīm's characterization further supports the predominant reading of Walīd as an ideal uprooted Palestinian. Like Maryam, Ibrāhīm grants Walīd an almost mythical ability to combine intellectual labor with social productivity. (Indeed, elsewhere in the text, Ibrāhīm compares Walīd with the legendary questers Gilgamesh and Alexander the Great.)[57] These Iraqi intellectuals make Walīd out to be not only an "engineer," "technocrat," and "modernizer," indicating his physical, tangible contributions to Arab society; he is also a "scholar" and "vehement goader of the Arab conscience," indicating the philosophical and spiritual impact he has also had on the region. In Ibrāhīm's triumphalist, heroic portrait, not only does Walīd achieve things in the spheres of "science" and "finance," but he is capable of fostering a new spirit "based on knowledge, freedom," and "love," inspiring a "revolt" that would span the entire Arab world and encompass more than mere political change. Walīd—in Ibrāhīm's estimation—transforms revolution from a political into a spiritual phenomenon, one that would lift the Arab countries out of the so-called Third World and inaugurate them as players in a global, world culture. On first reading, the monologue seems like an homage not only to Walīd, but to all Palestinians of the diaspora who have managed to turn their material losses into social productivity and their metaphysical alienation into a "vantage point" (*mawqiʿ*) from which to change the world.

Even Walīd himself contributes to his own figuration as an "ideal uprooted Palestinian" through the memories he recounts in his unfinished autobiography. We learn that even as a young child growing up in Bethlehem, he inhabited the position of the productive, visionary exile, a position overtly symbolized by his penchant for perching in fruit trees: "Watching the people pass to and fro below me, from a tree that looked out over the road and into the valley beyond, I wanted to change the world according to my will. Perched there between the branches, eating green almonds, I wanted the world to change."[58] Already as a child, the change Walīd wishes to see in the world is not limited by any particular political ideology: "It wasn't the way politicians bring about change, but that of rebels not yet familiar with theories and revolutionary planning; and the kind of change such rebels aspire to has no connection at all with mere change in governmental systems and class conflict."[59] Instead, his vision of change has been shaped both by his innocent, childhood imagination (long revered by the British Romantic poets, from whom Jabra drew much inspiration)[60] and by Christian parables of asceticism and boundless love:

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[56] *Baḥth*, 322-3; *Search,* 244 (translation modified).

[57] *Baḥth,* 308; *Search*, 231-32.

[58] *Baḥth*, 177; *Search*, 130.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Throughout his career, but particularly during the late 1940s and 50s, Jabra was deeply engaged with the work of the British Romantic poets, especially Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Blake. See in particular the essays "Bayrūn wa-l-shayṭāniyyah" [Byron and satanism], *al-Adīb* 21, no. 4 (1952): 33-40; "Maʿa Kīts ʿalā al-rābiyah" [With Keats on the hill], *al-Adīb* 23, no. 3 (1953): 45-46; and "Amthāl al-jaḥīm fī Wīlyīm Blāyik" [Tales from hell in William Blake], *al-Adīb* 23, no. 4 (1953): 3-5. See also Jabra's "Jūn Kīts wa-l-jamāl wa-l-mawt" [John Keats, beauty, and death], *al-Adīb* 16, no. 10 (1949): 14-16. In his bibliography, ʿAṣfūr notes that this last essay "is subtitled 'from the book *The Romantic Revolution*, in press.' Jabrā never published this book, and it looks as if it was a *project* for a book, more than a book 'in press.'" ʿAṣfūr, *Narjis*, 273.

It was as though I had to be rid of everything, of every relationship, and float like an unknown bird in unknown heavens; and, within the setting of my isolation from everything, I would actually, paradoxically, be in touch with my love of everything […] Christ spent many years in the wilderness, and then came back to talk to man about love, and when he came back, they crucified him. The rebel, then, has to be crucified as well, and his victory will be in his crucifixion.[61]

If we are to believe what Walīd has written in his autobiography, it seems that he was a "rebel" (*mutamarrid*) long before he ever became an exile. His account of his own life makes it seem as if he has always occupied a position of critical distance from the world, as if he has always been a boy in a tree, looking upon his native city of Bethlehem from a distance, intensely aware of its imperfections, and dead-set on transforming them by means of love.

This penchant for perching in fruit trees, snacking on green almonds (unripe fruit, seeds of transformation), and thereby gaining a critical, youthful vantage point on the world is abundantly echoed in *The First Well*,[62] where Jabra describes his activities as a young boy living in Jerusalem:

There were two large almond trees on the edge of the alley leading down to our home. We shared their fruit with the neighbors when it was still green. More importantly, I climbed them and felt in the middle of that vast space that I was on top of the world. My imagination wandered in the direction of the distant horizons supporting the heavens, and I wished I could reach them, climb to their summits, open an aperture in the sky, and enter from it to where I would see God and the angels.[63]

Indeed, amidst the turbulence of his impoverished childhood, the only constant refuge Jabra seems to find is in the various fruit trees he encounters along the way. "Whenever I got tired, the big mulberry tree on the edge of the plot was my secure refuge," he writes later on. "Among its branches and leaves, I could raise my voice to read."[64] Similarly, after a frightening experience in which the family pigs he was tending to nearly escaped from the courtyard, Jabra also retreats to branches of a tree: "I went to the mulberry tree, climbed it, and sat among its branches. And I let my mind roam freely again in the vastnesses of the world."[65] In both *The First Well* and *Walīd Masʿūd*, then, trees are a space of refuge and contemplation, a place of distance from and perspective on the world.

With their impassioned desire to transform exile from an abject political and physical reality into a revolutionary, spiritual vantage-point, Ibrāhīm, Maryam, and even Walīd himself paint a portrait of Walīd that closely resembles Edward Said's theoretical and critical model of

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[61] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 178; *Search*, 131.

[62] Note that the title of Walīd Masʿūd's autobiography is the same as that of Jabrā's. At the dinner party he hosts, Ibrāhīm affirms that of all Walīd's many books, "I prefer *The Well*, where he talks about his youth. He does it in such a way that I don't really know whether it's autobiographical or an attempt at writing a novel." Jabra, *Baḥth*, 347; *Search*, 266.

[63] Jabra, *First Well*, 78.

[64] Ibid., 121.

[65] Ibid., 124.

the exile, particularly as elaborated in his short essay "Reflections on Exile." Said navigates the minefield of exilic subjectivity in this text, advocating for something in between the modernist's depoliticized fetishization of exile, the dejected exile's sulky refusal of all connections and commitments, and the kind of defensive nationalism that engenders what he calls "less attractive forms of self-assertion."[66] "Provided that the exile refuses to sit on the sidelines nursing a wound," Said writes, "there are things to be learned: he or she must cultivate a *scrupulous* (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity."[67] Viewed in this light, exile as a mode of subjectivity can become "not a privilege, but… an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life."[68] Like Jabra in his early essays on painting and free verse poetry,[69] Said emphasizes the voice of the visionary individual over and against the voices of "mass institutions."

Said does not give any specific details about the meaning of "scrupulous" here, nor does he give specific examples of "mass institutions" or how exile might offer an alternative to them,[70] but he does illustrate his point further by referring to the work of two exemplary literary figures. Theodor Adorno is the first of these; Said cites from his *Minima Moralia* to show that part of the exilic intellectual's moral responsibility is to highlight "the discrepancies between various concepts and ideas and what they actually produce."[71] Said focuses in particular on the concept of "home" in this late text of Adorno's, affirming with the German critic that "it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home"[72]—that is, the exilic critic must not take the concept of home for granted, but remain attentive to the kinds of "homelessness" (such as exile) that the very concept of home engenders. The second figure to whose work Said refers is Hugh of St. Victor, the twelfth-century Saxony monk famously cited by Erich Auerbach.[73] "The man who finds his homeland sweet," St. Victor writes, "is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land."[74] If historians do not embrace an attitude modeled after Hugh of St. Victor's, Said warns, they "will remain committed more to the exclusions and reactions of prejudice than to the freedom that accompanies knowledge."[75]

With these lines, Said urges scholars not necessarily to renounce their attachments to "homes"—whether those take the shape of borders, territories, nations, or intellectual and

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[66] Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 184.

[67] Ibid. (emphasis added)

[68] Ibid.

[69] See in particular "al-Suriyāliyyah wa-l-ittijāhāt al-ḥadīthah fī al-rasm" [Surrealism and Other Modernist Movements in Painting], in *al-Adīb* (Beirut: October, 1951), 14-19.

[70] For an excellent clarification of terms from this and other essays of Said's, see Abdul JanMohamed, "Worldliness-Without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Towards a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual," in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, ed. Michael Sprinker (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1992), 96- 120.

[71] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 185.

[72] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 39. Cited in Said, 147.

[73] See Erich Auerbach, "The Philology of World Literature," trans. Jane O. Newman, in *Time, History, and Literature: Selected Essays of Erich Auerbach* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 253-266.

[74] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* vol. 3; cited in Said, 185.

[75] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 185 (emphasis added).

political affiliations—but rather to "work through" these attachments on the path to "knowledge," which he equates with "freedom."[76] Through reference to Adorno and Hugh of St. Victor, Said's portrait of the "scrupulous" exile—and by extension, Badawi's portrait of the "ideal uprooted Palestinian"—begins to come into focus. Though exile is indeed a material condition that occasions a great deal of suffering, it can also be transformed into a position from which to analyze and deconstruct abstract notions such as "home," "nation," "border," and "identity" themselves. From a position of detachment and skepticism, Said argues, the exilic critic can reveal these notions as social constructs created by the dominant culture as a means of sustaining itself. Thus, the exile intimately understands how "borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity."[77] Said's exilic critic, in other words, is one who escapes the traps of both filiation (the "culture to which they are bound" by "birth, nationality, profession") and affiliation (the bonds acquired "by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances, voluntary effort and willed deliberation").[78] This theory of exile, like Said's theory of secular critical consciousness, is ultimately a hopeful—even utopian—notion.

Returning to the text of *Walīd Masʿūd*, however, we would do well to remember that, although Maryam, Ibrāhīm, and even Walīd himself may make it seem as though Walīd embodied all the characteristics of a "scrupulous," Saidian exile, the novel's metafictional dimension casts these portraits into doubt. Walīd, after all, is framed and reframed throughout the novel in "voices that restate other voices" until he ultimately disappears into a vortex of text.[79] The description of Walīd that Maryam gives at the dinner party, for example, is mediated on at least two levels. First, it is not spoken directly by Maryam to the reader, but rather remembered by Ibrāhīm during the night on which he is drinking copious amounts of *arak* and recording his voice on tape. Second, if we believe that *Walīd Masʿūd* is in fact Dr. Jawād's "research project," then Ibrāhīm's tape has been further mediated by the frame narrator himself. It is a *transcription* provided for the reader by Dr. Jawād, yet another primary source he has collected for his "study" (*baḥth*). Jabra, in other words, is not giving a full-throated defense of the Palestinian exile in the two passages from the novel cited above. Rather, he is parodically stylizing the almost worshipful discourses that coalesced to create the Palestinian exile as a mythical or saintly redeemer of the Arab world.[80] What we are told about Walīd by Ibrāhīm and Maryam is "really threefold," as Vladimir Nabokov reminds us: "shaped by the teller, reshaped by the listener," and "concealed from both by the dead man of the tale."[81] The issue is not

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[76] It is notable that in his effort to illustrate the contours of a "scrupulous," exilic subjectivity, Said should cite such diametrically opposed figures as Adorno and Hugo of St. Victor. For while Adorno criticizes the notion of home for reasons based on material experience (the destruction of European cities and systematization of atrocity he witnessed in the Second World War), St. Hugo advocates the renunciation of attachments as a way of drawing closer to the divine. In other words, while Adorno cultivates his scrupulous exilic subjectivity by means of philosophical immanence, Hugo of St. Victor arrives at his by means of transcendence.

[77] Said, "Reflections on Exile," 185.

[78] Said, "Introduction: Secular Criticism" in *The World, the Text, the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 20.

[79] Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 225-6.

[80] For "parodic stylization" as a feature of the novel's heteroglossia, see Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 312.

[81] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 50.

whether Walīd was or was not an ideal uprooted Palestinian exile, an intellectual innovator and spiritual revolutionary come to save the Arab world from perdition. It is, rather, that Jabra satirizes the discourses that would construct him as such a figure by framing them in *Walīd Mas'ūd*.

Indeed, there are many indications elsewhere in the novel that Ibrāhīm should not necessarily be trusted as a truth-teller, since he has a tendency to exaggerate and embellish, particularly when it comes to Walīd. At one point in the novel, Dr. Jawād remembers something Kāẓim Ismaʿīl once said to him about Ibrāhīm: "I saw [Ibrāhīm] coming away from Walīd's house yesterday, and he looked as though he'd been on a pilgrimage to a saint's shrine, or met some legendary hero."[82] Later, Dr. Jawād also comments on the extent to which Ibrāhīm's office has changed over the years, as the onetime aspiring revolutionary gradually became an isolated, reclusive intellectual:

> Over this long period, the room's been transformed into a very elegant office with steel and leather furniture, oil paintings on the walls, and bronze and wood statues that he buys in large numbers from Baghdad artists. The paltry wooden window's been widened and now has an aluminum frame, not to mention the metal blind that covers it. And no, he doesn't open it now to stare into the distant sky. "The sky's inside me," he said […] "I'm in a cozy womb here; so what if it's phony?"[83]

With each passing year, Ibrāhīm continues to sacrifice his ideals of political and social transformation (once symbolized by his penchant for gazing off into the "distant sky") for the creature comforts of an office sealed off from the outside world through aluminum blinds. He chooses an aestheticized, idealized, "womb"-like reality over an actual one. Rather than confront the real contradictions and struggles that may have structured Walīd's life, he chooses to remember him as a legendary, saint-like character.

With the novel's metafictional frame still in mind, Maryam's chapter too offers us reason to doubt the trustworthiness of her description. When she speaks, she remembers how, after sleeping with Walīd for the first time, she ran barefoot from his bedroom into the garden, circling the trunks of trees, cutting her feet on the sharp stones, and eventually grabbing a heavy rock and lugging it inside the house to present to Walīd. "My pagan body, unsheathed before the wildness of the star-studded night, pierced all things, and all things in turn pierced it. What was this passion? Annihilation? Or being, an utterly violent being?"[84] In this moment of pagan connection with the body (*jasadī al-wathanī*), and of mystical annihilation in nature (*talāshin*), Maryam connects with the primal element of stone and experiences a loss of the self in nature. In Jabra's earlier novel *The Ship*, the Palestinian character Waḍīʿ ʿAssāf stresses the centrality of "rock" to his conception of his Palestinian identity. For Waḍīʿ as a child, "Palestine was a rock on which civilizations had been built because it was so solid and had such deep roots connected to the center of the earth."[85] Furthermore, "rocks… symbolized Jerusalem," not only because the city's "contours were those of rocks," but also because it is the site of the Dome of the Rock. "So let us

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[82] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 68-269; *Search*, 49.

[83] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 81; *Search*, 60 (translation modified).

[84] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 227; *Search*, 170 (translation modified).

[85] Jabra, *Safīnah*, 56-57; *Ship*, 52-53.

now praise the virtues of rock!" he concludes.[86] Given the central role of rock for this Palestinian character in *The Ship*, it seems significant that Maryam's connection with this element is forged through Walīd, another Palestinian character exiled from Jerusalem, city of the Dome of the Rock. She forms an embodied bond not only with Walīd, but with Palestine itself in this scene.

But years later, at the time of the novel's narration, Maryam struggles to assign her experience with the rock any definitive meaning, to recapture the connection between body, spirit, and world in words. "What did that rock mean in those moments? […] Why does it remain, always, in front of me, like a beautiful, enticing riddle, a symbol fraught with all the things I cannot put into words, no matter how hard I try, year after year?"[87] Ultimately, like Ibrāhīm, she abandons any attempt to capture the reality of her experience with Walīd in writing. Instead, she decides to retreat into the more objective world of history, where the past is definitively past and does not unexpectedly bubble to the surface of the present:

> I should just finish writing my lectures on Dāwūd Bāshā, the famous Ottoman provincial governor. Writing about him is much easier, and more useful, too. After all, he isn't connected to me, and his memory doesn't bother me on summer nights. I never dug out a rock from his garden, nor could he interfere in any aspect of my life. What I write about him, the university will help me publish, but I don't think it would help me publish anything I might write about my own life, or about Walīd.[88]

The world of mystical experience, where what is sensed overwhelms and defies rational judgment and categorization, and where the power relations between sensing subject and sensed object are destabilized, is a dangerous and uncertain world for Maryam. Like Ibrāhīm, she chooses to isolate herself from the world to which Walīd has exposed her, though unlike Ibrāhīm she effects this isolation not in space, but in *time*—she shuts herself off from the world of the present and isolates herself with dusty Ottoman archival documents, the dry historical details of the past.

Indeed, when we eschew a purely thematic approach to *Walīd Masʿūd*, it becomes possible to see just how many figures in this work call attention to its own status as a textual *mise-en-abyme*. Again, as Johnson points out, the text is a work written by a real author (Jabra) about a fictional author (Dr. Jawād) who is attempting to write the story of yet *another* writer, Walīd Masʿūd.[89] But this observation expands beyond the many valences of *baḥth* to include images of self-referentiality peppered throughout the narrative. The figure of the mirror is one of the ways Jabra calls his readers' attention to his textual *mise-en-abyme*, as when Dr. Jawād asks if Walīd's friends were "the mirror, with Walīd serving as the face surveying them from its depths," or whether "[Walīd] was the mirror, and [his friends'] faces the ones rising up, while they, perhaps weren't even aware of it?"[90] Later on, Jawād also describes the process of wading through his copious papers, books, and notebooks as akin to "traveling inside mirrors, both

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 228; *Search*, 171 (translation modified).

[88] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 238-39; *Search*, 179.

[89] Johnson, "Politics of Reading," 182-184.

[90] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 363; *Search*, 276.

exciting and full of traps."[91] Another important figure of self-reflexivity is that of the "vortex" (*dawāmah*): "So now it's back to the same old vortex!" Dr. Jawād says to Maryam in the last chapter, referring to his inevitable return to his office and its sea of papers, each page adding another swirl to the mystery.[92] Finally, the figure of the "labyrinth" (*matāhah*) also makes an appearance in the chapter narrated by Wiṣāl. She describes ʿĀmir's garden as "the modernized minotaur's labyrinth in miniature."[93] In these moments, the novel hints at its own fictionality, urging the reader not to take any of its characters' portraits of exile as unmediated truths.

Through framing, then, Jabra casts into doubt two of the genres most closely associated with Palestinian "resistance literature:" the autobiography and the prison-memoir. The novel's fourth and sixth chapters are excerpts from Walīd's unfinished autobiography, while its eighth is an excerpt from the memoirs he kept while detained in an Israeli prison. As Angelika Neuwirth affirms, in Palestinian literature, autobiography has long served as a way to reclaim self, memory, identity, and community, despite the frequent disappointment of political hopes.[94] In many Palestinian autobiographies, "writers do not give an account of their lives primarily for personal reasons, but employ their memory of events to appeal to the conscience of the Western world and gain recognition for their cause."[95] In a more general vein, Robin Ostle also attests that "autobiography may spring from a sense of powerlessness on the part of the subject," and that "the autobiography thus becomes an instrument of strategy through which a position of relative powerlessness or marginality is transformed into something which is able to challenge or to occupy the center."[96] Regarding the prison-memoir genre, meanwhile, Barbara Harlow has argued that after 1967, "resistance literature" (*adab al-muqāwamah*) was gradually replaced by "prison literature" (*adab al-sujūn*), a genre that, in her reading, "proposes a collective cultural strategy for retaking the state's prison apparatus and countering its machinery of repression with an emancipatory dynamic of resistance."[97] And indeed, the excerpt from Walīd's prison memoir vehemently cries out against the kind of torture once practiced by colonial oppressors, yet now also adopted by authoritarian Arab regimes in turn:

> I saw countries I consider my own, for which I'd been prepared to go through the tortures of hell, themselves applying these selfsame tortures on anyone who fell into the hands of those with influence. From the Arab Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean, I heard cries, I heard weeping and the sound of sticks and plastic hoses, secret police filling capitals and casbahs, mountains and valleys, men in neat civilian suits walking to and fro like a thousand shuttles in a thousand looms, taking away to the centers of darkness people by the tens and hundreds, losing them in labyrinths of cellars and dungeons.[98]

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[91] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 364; *Search*, 277.

[92] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 366; *Search*, 279.

[93] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 256; *Search*, 191.

[94] Angelika Neuwirth, introduction to *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives* (London: Saqi, 2010), 48.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Robin Ostle, introduction to *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, and Stefan Wild (London: Saqi, 1998), 22.

[97] Barbara Harlow, "Readings of National Identity in the Palestinian Novel" in *The Arabic Novel Since 1950: Critical Essays, Interviews, and Bibliography*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (Cambridge, MA: Dar Mahjar, 1992), 103-4.

[98] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 249; *Search*, 188 (translation modified).

This final paragraph of the chapter reads simultaneously as a cry of rebellion and resignation, indignation and inadequacy. Having survived torture himself, Walīd speaks out against it, shaming the Arab regimes using against their own people the very same methods that their enemies have used and continue to use. Yet like the first pages of Walīd's autobiography, the work remains unfinished—both in the sense that this prison-narrative never went any further than Dr. Jawād's study, and in the sense that the torture continues even after Walīd's disappearance. The prison-memoir is fraught, in other words, with the anxiety that words, however eloquently or poetically arranged, can effect no concrete change on a self-perpetuating cycle of torture wherein the victims quickly become victimizers.

In *Walīd Masʿūd*, in short, the excerpts from Walīd's autobiography and memoirs of his time in prison amount to little more than unfinished, unpublished scraps of paper, piled high in Dr. Jawād's office. Like the other characters' testimonies, they are mediated by Dr. Jawād's frame narrative, and thereby become suspect as truthful accounts or sources. More importantly, however, these are notebooks, pages, and words seen by no one, inspiring no change. Indeed, the many, multiply embedded accounts of Walīd as the ideal uprooted Palestinian are not so much upheld as *exhausted* over the course of the novel. The forms once associated with Palestinian self-assertion and resistance are thus revealed as little more than worn-out discourses, "pulverized words" in *Walīd Masʿūd*. These are the languages and registers against whose borders and limits Jabra presses in the novel, and they stand in counterpoint to Walīd's tape-recorded monologue, which excavates childhood memory in a lyric attempt to recreate Palestine in new registers. As I illustrate in the next section, the monologue represents Jabra's own attempt to find something in between the insular intellectuals' idealization of Palestinian exile and the sociologist-author's impossible longing for poetry.

Horizons, Dawns, Apertures in the Sky: Walīd's Tape-Monologue as Limit-Language

For the frame narrator of *Walīd Masʿūd*, then, poetry is no longer available as a mode for giving form to exile in words, as its crystallized, distilled form belies the "scattering" (*nathr*) of self and soul that the exile experiences. Poetry is like memory in *Walīd Masʿūd*: even as it hardens some experiences into fixed, transmissible lines, it disperses countless others into the realm of the unspoken and forgotten. Yet neither is narrative completely adequate to Dr. Jawād's purpose, for despite his furious devotion to his "study" of Walīd Masʿūd, by the end of the novel he still cannot assemble a coherent explanation for the Palestinian's disappearance. Walīd's fellow intellectuals extol him as both a visionary and a revolutionary, a committed activist and a spiritual scholar. And Walīd too portrays himself this way in the pages from his autobiography, as he recalls perching in trees, cultivating a perspective of critical distance from which to view the world with an eye to transforming it. But the multiple levels of mediation through which the reader receives all of these testimonies also casts them into doubt, as though Jabra were criticizing the tendency to romanticize the Palestinian exile as a figure for freedom and unboundedness. What words remain, then, when all the words that constellate around exile have been pulverized?

Walīd's tape-recorded monologue may offer at least one answer to this question. Composed of a single, meandering sentence that pours out over nearly nine full pages, the monologue weaves together images and other sensory impressions through association and metaphor. It is peppered with literary references to both the Arabic and the English traditions,

from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Spring and Fall" to the fables of *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, the legend of Gilgamesh, and Palestinian folk poetry. Metaphors and similes pile up so quickly that they funnel into one another, as figurative language quickly becomes literal, only to be described by yet another figure, and so on nearly endlessly. The only break occurs at the monologue's midpoint, when Walīd pauses to flip the cassette tape over and continue recording. For its style, centrality to the plot, and attempt to render near-madness in textual form, the monologue has drawn comparisons to Faulkner and to Joyce.[99] Others have called the monologue the "nucleus" of the novel as a whole,[100] or referred to it as an example of Bakhtinian *anacrisis*—that is, "the provocation of the word by the word."[101] In my reading, however, the monologue serves as more than just a "hollow core" motivating the other characters' accounts.[102] Its content and form press at the limits of the reader's understanding, and it thereby aims to limn the process of sense-making itself.[103] Jabra returns to *childhood*, I argue, as a space of indeterminacy, and to his own childhood as a source of both mystery and inspiration. He focuses specifically on the language and perception of the child, which in this depiction have not yet been rerouted by education or hardened into literary conventions. If Dr. Jawād's formal anxiety is an analogue for Jabra's own attitude toward authorship in the wake of loss and defeat, then this monologue offers the possibility of a return to a way of speaking beyond or outside the intellectual theorizing of sociology, the false objectivity of historiography, and the insular self-importance of cultural criticism.

In his preface to *The First Well*, Jabra writes that the memories of early childhood are insistent and formative precisely because they resist complete recapturing, because childhood is "not quite a single story, but many contradictory stories that are usually difficult to connect to one another."[104] It thus seems significant that the childhood memories Walīd recounts on the first side of the cassette tape are not given in any particular narrative form, but rather linked together through impressions and images, with one color, shape, sound, or smell forming a connection between otherwise disconnected moments in time. Note, for example, the way the memory of a priest's mustache triggers the remembrance of a much later conversation between Walīd and one of his lovers:

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[99] See Tawfiq Yousef, "The Reception of William Faulkner in the Arab World," *American Studies International* 33, no. 2 (1995): 41-48.

[100] Meyer, *Experimental Arabic Novel*, 50; Johnson, "Politics of Reading," 179.

[101] For this reading of Walīd's monologue, see Peled, "Sexuality in Jabra's novel," 143. For the quotation about the nature of *anacrisis*, see Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 111.

[102] For this reading, see Meyer, *Experimental Arabic Novel*, 54.

[103] al-Mūsawī has focused on the style and syntax of the monologue, arguing that the "studied nature of [its] language" reveals an author seeking to achieve "the effectiveness of ritual, enchantment and magic" in text. Al-Mūsawī thus reads the monologue as Jabra's plea for aesthetic autonomy in a degraded, mundane world, and he places the text alongside Alfred Lord Tennyson's Lady of Shalott and palace of art, as well as Oscar Wilde's "escape into a private world of aesthetic poignancy." Muḥsin al-Mūsawī, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel: Debating Ambivalence* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 156. This focus on the particular attitude Jabra assumes toward the aesthetic has greatly informed my own analysis. What this brief treatment does not offer, however, is a full reading of the monologue, or of the many references to childhood memories contained therein. My aim in this section is to offer precisely such a reading, focusing on specific parallels between the images, themes, and scenes that saturate the monologue and *The First Well*.

[104] *Bi'r* 11 (my translation).

... and the priest in his billowing white beard spread out on his shiny cassock takes out his dentures immerses them in a cup of water and washes them for everyone to see his mouth disappears under his big mustache I don't want a mustache I told her I'm going to keep on shaving if you grow a mustache she told me a black line over your upper lip as if drawn there in charcoal you'll look like movie stars especially the handsome bad guys who win the money and the women but I love you with or without a mustache…[105]

The image remembered from childhood triggers a more recent memory with a jolt of sensory association rather than the gradual, carefully structured or punctuated connection of narrativization. Moreover, in the earlier image, the priest, who for the child existed only in the spiritual realm, at a remove from the lowly, bodily sphere, is shown in the joltingly corporeal action of removing his dentures. He's been revealed as a frail old man, his body disintegrating like any other human being's. Perhaps this is the image that established the older Walīd's distaste for mustaches—his resolution to "keep on shaving"—despite his lover's flirtatious appeal. As Walīd affirms toward the end of the tape, he is "trying to define the question" (*fa-li-ujarrib an uḥaddid al-suʾāl*),[106] trying to recapture the past in an attempt to explain his present. Yet the present keeps involuntarily inserting itself into the past, cropping up through imagistic association rather than flowing neatly in chronological order.

At other moments in the monologue, the figurative quickly becomes literal and vice versa, as words are revealed to be unstable and shifting, not subject to complete control by their speaker. When describing the body of a woman named Rayyā, for example, Walīd says:

… thanks be to the one God for her voice her hands her tiny fingers weaving the fabric of the nights and printing kisses and revealing a navel like a cheek's dimple in a belly as smooth as one of the hills on the distant horizon where we see nothing but black birds floating and disappearing is heaven there behind the sky where sky meets horizon and if I were to reach that purple horizon above the blue mountains I would open a gap in the sky and through it I would enter heaven oh you poor stupid boy how long will you dream of passing through to other worlds when all you have is this cruel stubborn world you must fight it and not fear it…[107]

No sooner has Walīd compared the woman's tangible, literal belly to a figurative hill than that figurative hill becomes a literal hill in his childhood memory: the hills of Jerusalem as seen from a distance. The memory of these hills in turn summons forth the childhood fantasy of heaven not as a place to which one passes after death, but as simply another dimension accessed through the horizon, the place where land meets sky. Like the child, who has been told that heaven is located in the sky and so believes that it can be accessed from the horizon, so too Walīd in this moment misunderstands and so blurs the line between figurative and literal language. Yet no sooner has Walīd returned to the innocence of childhood than his fantasy of entering the sky is interrupted by the voice of an admonishing adult, enjoining him to improve this world rather than fantasizing about passing into another. Finally, the passage almost directly foreshadows yet another from

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[105] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 26; *Search*, 13.

[106] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 34; *Search*, 21.

[107] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 27; *Search*, 14 (translation modified)

The First Well, in which Jabra describes perching in an almond tree, eating unripe almonds, and allowing his imagination to "wander in the direction of the distant horizons supporting the heavens." In that moment, he describes "wishing [he] could reach" these heavens, "open an aperture in the sky, and enter from it to where I would see God and the angels."[108] Walīd's associative language, mined from the trove of Jabra's own childhood memories, offers up an answer to Dr. Jawād's formal anxiety and Walīd's endless mediation as text. It is as though Jabra were staging a dialogue between split elements of himself—the non-rationalizing, imaginative, visionary child (Walīd), and the disillusioned, skeptical researcher (Dr. Jawād).

Through associations of color, moreover, Walīd's monologue also manages to link the *land* of Palestine with its *schools*, as though the two were inextricably intertwined. The very first lines of the monologue, for example, offer a catalogue of what was contained in Walīd's "olive-colored" knapsack, yet quickly spills over into a memory of running through actual olive trees with his young friends:

> green bookbag olive color full of books copybooks lead pencils and colored pencils school days it's strapped around the neck and bulges under the arm on the waist full of childhood secrets the exploits of heroes strange names Hercules Ulysses Achilles Petrocles Priam how does the first hemistich go darkness has run away many thanks be to the one and only God as is most justly due I took the bag emptied it on the windowsill and we went Suleiman and Abd and I jumping down the terraces of the valley to the olive trees olive harvest going on we picked a few stray olives resting between thorns and slopes and earth or the few left clinging to the high branches shaking nervously the feet secured from long practice and the whole world is full of olive trees…[109]

With its seamless flow from an olive-green book bag to the actual olives of the Palestinian landscape, the passage unites land and class with education, thereby implicitly denying Maryam's characterization of education as a "severance from land and class." The passage also resonates with several moments from *The First Well* in which the classroom and the natural world overlap. When exposed to classical Arabic poetry for the first time at school, for example, Jabra remembers memorizing the poems and "declaim[ing] them aloud, as though I were addressing the olive trees and the vines, whenever I climbed up a tree or stood on a terrace wall on the edge of a valley."[110] Later in *The First Well*, Jabra also describes climbing a mulberry tree near his house with his school books: "Among its branches and leaves, I could raise my voice to read."[111] Education, in short, does not estrange the young Jabra from the landscapes and natural elements on which he was raised; it does not effect the "severing" (*inqiṭāʾ*) from community and land that Maryam described at Ibrāhīm's dinner party. In fact, education brings him *closer* to the landscapes in which he was raised by imbuing them with his voice.

Only when the young Walīd is asked to record his thoughts *in writing* does he encounter a disconnect between self and landscape, thought and expression. Where the oral recitation of

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[108] Jabra, *Biʾr*, 99; *Well*, 78.

[109] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 26; *Search*, 12.

[110] Jabra, *Biʾr*, 131; *Well*, 109.

[111] Jabra, *Biʾr*, 142-43; *Well*, 121.

43

poetry brings Jabra closer to his homeland in *The First Well*, the compulsory distillation of his own thoughts into written words constrains him:

> in school when my fingers could hardly hold on to the pen and write and the lines would come crooked not as I wanted them and the pen would not register all the words that flowed from my brain and lips I could almost see them scattering on the desk and falling all around me and I would gather them up again with frozen fingers[112]

The image of "scattered" words that the writer must gather up and rearrange into something like an order echoes the very first image of *Walīd Masʿūd*, in which Dr. Jawād struggles, like a poet, to resurrect the "tents" of experience by connecting the "pegs" of memory to the "cords" of words. Yet he disjuncture between imaginative intention and verbal expression also plagues the *spoken* words of the monologue as well, as though speech too were inadequate for capturing Walīd's full intention. At several points, he interrupts himself with phrases like "this isn't what I wanted to say"[113] and "no this isn't what I wanted to say,"[114] or with meaningless exclamations such as "*hā*" and "*uf*."[115] These interjections reach a climax at the end of the monologue, when Walīd affirms, "no no no this is not what I wanted to say even if I wanted to say some of it so when will I say what I want to say everything I've said is marginal commentary [*al-ḥawāshī*] but the original text is lost…"[116] These three images—of Dr. Jawād trying to arrange his words into intelligible lines; of a young boy gathering up the words scattered all over his desk with cold fingers; of a commentary for which the original text has been lost—all stage the anxiety of form with which Jabra and many other authors were grappling in the post-1967 moment. As the fixed forms associated with resistance literature came to seem increasingly rigid and constricting, authorship too was revealed as a fraught process of selection and arrangement—a commentary on the now irrecoverable original text of experience.

Perhaps it is in an attempt to negotiate what has been lost with what remains, then, that Walīd continually returns to images of betweenness and liminality in the monologue. Dawn in particular—another favorite image of the British Romantic poets—becomes one of Walīd's figural touchstones. Though it begins as the second term in a simile describing the brightness of a young woman's eyes, the figure of dawn quickly becomes literal, as the images and words gradually escape the speaker's control:

> Sāhirah has no idea about original sin her virginity is in full flower like one of those maddening Baghdad roses her big eyes flash with searing thoughts like the onrush of fire during nights of a drought that sometimes seems never-ending and does it end for example at four in the morning when the first tentative chirp is heard from a shy bird in the garden to be repeated again and again encouraging the nightingale to vary his song slightly as one bird after another joins him until they form a complete orchestra from their trees which begin to wake up with the first rays of dawn how often I've seen those

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[112] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 27-28; *Search*, 14.

[113] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 30; *Search*, 17.

[114] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 31; *Search*, 18.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 34; *Search*, 20 (translation modified).

rays changing from brown to gold to blue and then violet as though the world would dissolve its cares in spaces of brilliant colors which presage the rising of the bleeding yellow disc but this isn't quite what I wanted to say…[117]

Thinking of the brightness in Sāhirah's eyes launches Walīd into a memory from his youth in Palestine—fire on a night of drought—which in turn launches him into a meditation on the many-colored markers of dawn. Like the horizon he so frequently mentions (and that crops up with similar frequency in *The First Well*), the dawn is a liminal space—no longer night, yet not quite morning, no longer pitch-black, yet not quite light.

But the horizon and dawn that form the figural and imagistic *content* of the monologueare also both figures for its *form*, for the kind of language Jabra has cultivated in this experimental, enigmatic block of text. There is no punctuation to mark the end of one thought and the beginning of the next; there is no chronological timeline progressing gradually and tidily from event to event and from past to present; nor are there clear markers to distinguish one voice from another. The admonishing voices of teachers merge with the voices of female love-interests, just as citations from Palestinian folk-songs blend with those from *Hamlet* and Gerard Manley Hopkins. The orchestra of birds at dawn stands in for the orchestra of voices in the monologue, just as the colors morphing and blurring into one another—"rays changing from brown to gold to blue and then violet"—concretely and affectively figure the bleeding of one sentence into the next. The monologue pushes the Arabic language beyond the conventions of genre and significance into the associative world of the senses.

In Walīd's monologue, then, Jabra crafts a new narrative form that attempts to negotiate his Romantic's devotion to childhood, innocence, and love with his skepticism about the literary forms and discourses available to Arab authors in the post-1967 moment. Elsewhere, Jabra's English translator and friend Roger Allen has described Jabra's dual education in English and Arabic literatures as a form of "bicultural mastery" or a "mastery of intercultural space,"[118] citing as evidence Jabra's skillful Arabic translations of notoriously difficult English works and his ability to write novels in English equally as well as in Arabic (such as his novel *Hunters in a Narrow Street*, from 1960). Yet in light of the ambivalence, self-reflection, and doubt that saturate *Walīd Masʿūd*, particularly in Dr. Jawād's frame narrative and Walīd's monologue, we might re-evaluate Jabra's bi- or inter-culturality as a position of tentatively maintained liminality rather than "mastery"—a horizon that is no longer earth but not yet sky, words that are no longer poetry but not quite narrative.

Conclusion: Between the Horizon and the Dawn

In line with other recent approaches to *Walīd Masʿūd* then, I have tried to examine the novel not as a realistic reflection of the Arab intelligentsia at a particular moment in time, but as a work about the many problems that attend literary representation in the Arab world after 1967: the anxiety that words can never map onto experience or lay out a life in its entirety, the fear that reading is an imperfect epistemological process that never yields definitive truths, and the worry that education and acculturation are little better than forms of deracination from land, family, and community. Yet as I hope to have shown in this chapter, Jabra's novel of investigation is not

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[117] *Baḥth*, 30; *Search*, 17 (translation modified).

[118] Roger Allen, "The Novels of Jabra and the Art of Translation." *Jusūr* 7–8 (1996): 91-101.

only looking for its disappeared protagonist and attempting to reassemble his life in words; it is also looking for a language outside the limits of rationalization, narrativization, and sense-making that educated, intellectual, writerly sensibilities are accustomed to imposing on the world. On the one hand, as Dr. Jawād's metafictional frame narrative makes clear, the text is looking for a form of authorship that does not presume total control of or domination over its narrative materials. It is searching for a different kind of unity to be found more readily in juxtaposition, partiality, and open-endedness than in tidy narrative arrangement and development. On the other hand, as Walīd's tape-recorded monologue illustrates, the text is also looking for a new language not bound by the constraints of genre, convention, causation, or chronology. Like the novel as a whole, this language works by association and juxtaposition, allowing the words themselves to overwhelm the author's best efforts to discipline them into coherent forms. As readers, we are asked to consider the forgetting that attends every remembrance, the exclusions that attend any narrativization, and we are asked to consider what experiences, voices, and memories are lost in these twinned processes.

In *Walīd Masʿūd*, then, exile from Palestine is no longer simply a geographical, material, or political reality. Nor is it a metaphor for the boundless freedom of the cultural revolutionary. Exile expands and multiplies to encompass numerous forms of estrangement, including education (an exile from the imagination into a "cold" reality), aging (an exile from childhood innocence into the accumulation of worries and cares), and verbal expression (the incomplete translation of experience into "feeble" words). Maryam's suggestion—that education is little better than "severance" of ties to land and community—stands out from the polyphonic narration of *Walīd Masʿūd* precisely because it limns the author's encroaching fear that the education he had so cherished, and for which his family sacrificed so much, had become its own kind of alienation. Like Khoury, al-Qaʿīd, and Chraïbi, Jabra chronicles the disappearance of a figure— the exilic Palestinian intellectual—that had once so inspired him, and after which he had modeled his entire life and career. "Walīd has mourned himself before anyone else could mourn him," Ibrāhīm melancholically states after hearing Walīd's tape.[119] We might say the same of Jabra himself in *Walīd Masʿūd*. Yet still, like other authors working in the wake of catastrophic loss, he remains committed to assembling a new language from the debris of the ones that remain to him, a language that might resurrect that first bond between the voice reciting poetry and the land resonating with that voice.

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[119] *Baḥth*, 34; *Search*, 21 (translation modified).

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Chapter 2:

This is not a story:
From Authorship to Witnessing in Elias Khoury's White Masks

> The writer is only a medium. He is a medium between the direct experience of life and the imaginary, between memory and the future, between written and spoken language, between the possibilities of language itself.
>
> —Elias Khoury[1]

Published only three years after *Walīd Maṣ ʿūd*, Lebanese author Elias Khoury's 1981 novel *al-Wujūh al-baydāʾ* (*White Masks*) has a great deal in common with Jabra's novel, particularly on a structural level. Both novels are bookended by metafictional prologues and epilogues in which a frame narrator states his original intention to investigate a particular mystery and apologizes for his failure to solve it. In *Walīd Mas ʿūd*, it is Walīd's unexplained disappearance that prompts the frame narrator to collect and analyze the sources that form the novel's polyphonic chapters. In *Wujūh*, meanwhile, the discovery of Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir's corpse in a pile of garbage near the statue of Ḥabīb Abū Shahlā in Beirut's UNESCO Square prompts the novel's unnamed frame narrator to "follow the news of this corpse."[2] Unlike the frame narrator of *Walīd Mas ʿūd*, however, the frame narrator in Khoury's novel had no personal connection with Khalīl before his death. He was not a friend, relative, or colleague of Khalīl's; indeed, he had never met the man at all. He only hears about Khalīl's death after reading a short article about it in the newspaper. Unlike Dr. Jawād, the frame narrator of *Wujūh* was not a close friend of its murdered protagonist. He is simply a bored travel agent's clerk who, "owing to 'prevailing circumstances'" (*al-ẓurūf al-rāhinah*),[3] was "unable to find a job to match his ambitions—as a journalist, for instance" following his graduation from the Lebanese University in 1974, one year before the outbreak of the Civil War.[4] With nothing better to do, the frame narrator of *Wujūh* resolves to follow the story of a murder he stumbled upon in the newspaper simply "because I was interested in the life of Ḥabīb Abū Shahlā on the one hand, and motivated by curiosity on the other."[5]

Yet like Dr. Jawād, Khoury's frame narrator is soon engrossed in and almost obsessed by his search, as "the case began to get more complex, and my interest in it intensified."[6] He begins consulting more and more sources, compiling more and more information in his quest for answers: "Through personal contacts that I established and daily perusal of the local papers, I was able to collect a vast amount of information about the murder, which happened on the

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[1] Elias Khoury, "Conversations with Ilyās Khūrī," interview by Sonja Mejcher, in *Geschichten über geschichten: Errinerung im Romanwerk von Ilyās Khūrī* [Stories Overlying Stories: Memory in the Novels of Elias Khoury] (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2001), 141.

[2] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 10.

[3] "*Al-ẓurūf al-rāhinah*," a journalistic euphemism for widespread sectarian violence and crumbling infrastructure.

[4] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 11.

[5] Ibid., 10-11.

[6] Ibid.

morning of 13 April 1980, according to the medical reports."[7] The date is no accident: Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir was killed on the five-year anniversary of the Ain al-Rummaneh Incident (*Ḥādith ʿAyn al-Rummānah*), widely marked as the official beginning of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). On this date in 1975, a car of unidentified gunmen passing through the Christian suburb of Ain al-Rummaneh opened fire on a church gathering attended by several prominent Christian Phalangist partisans and killed four men. Hours later, the Phalangists retaliated by opening machine-gun fire on a bus carrying Palestinians to the refugee camp at Tall al-Zaʿtar, killing twenty-one people. As Fawwaz Traboulsi writes, "A war that was to last fifteen years had just begun."[8] Ain al-Rummaneh would come to symbolize not only the beginning, but also the brutal nature of the war: the continual exchange of bodies in a vicious cycle of attack and revenge.

That Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir was killed on the five-year anniversary of the war's beginning lends his murder a particular historical significance: his body is made to bear the weight of the war's many unmourned and unburied dead. The attempt to assemble his story from a series of memory-fragments thus becomes an occasion for bearing witness to the war's violence—an occasion that, at the time of the novel's writing, had yet to be accorded to the residents of Beirut. Each of the novel's many narrators occupies a different station in Lebanon's economically, religiously, and socially stratified society, and each has suffered the trauma of war in a different way. As in *Walīd Masʿūd*, in *Wujūh* the frame narrator soon realizes that no singular explanation for Khalīl's murder can be extracted from the many accounts he has consulted. The testimonies, stories, letters, reports, and other primary documents tend to meander and branch off, as stories generate other stories in intricate, labyrinthine arrangements. Before the novel can even begin, then, the frame narrator—like Dr. Jawād—announces his failure, and his inability to assemble a coherent narrative becomes the justification for the novel's polyphonic structure:

> To tell the truth, I find myself completely baffled. Nothing can definitively confirm any of the hypotheses, and nothing can definitively refute them either. For this reason, I've chosen to let the documents speak for themselves (*faḍḍaltu an atruk al-kalām li-l-wathāʾiq*) and not interfere in the issue myself. Maybe the documents and information that I've collected can form an entryway into understanding Mr. Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir's situation, and the many similar situations whose motivations we find we cannot understand, nor can we understand why they've become so widespread.[9]

Unable to sift through and organize all of the information he's gathered, Khoury's frame narrator offers up "the documents themselves," which include first-hand testimonies from the victim's wife, daughter, and neighbor, as well as from people less closely connected to him, such as the caretaker of a building in his neighborhood, a neighborhood militiaman, and one of the garbage men who discovered his body. There are also excerpts from newspaper articles and court documents, as well as a copy of the coroner's report. The frame narrator relinquishes control over these documents, "letting them speak for themselves" rather than coercing them into a predetermined narrative structure.

In this sense, the frame narrator of *Wujūh* models a new form of authorship similar to that performed by Dr. Jawād in Jabrā's *Walīd Masʿūd*. In both works, the embedded author-narrator

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 183.

[9] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 14.

does not judiciously withhold and disclose information in order to draw the reader's interest, create suspense, and ultimately offer a cathartic resolution. Indeed, Khoury's frame narrator explicitly leaves behind this conventional model of authorship in his "Provisional Epilogue" (*Khātimah muʾaqqatah*):

> The author of this story feels lost and doesn't know, he doesn't know anything. Normally, the author knows all the details of the story, especially its ending, and he presents them slowly and gradually, and the reader draws his own conclusions. But in this story, the author doesn't know, nor does he know how to present things slowly and gradually, in order to convince and amuse the reader.[10]

The hope, instead, is that an alternative form of truth will emerge by letting the documents "speak for themselves," as though the voices of everyday Lebanese could speak through the narrator in the chapters of the text. The author-narrator does not organize, arrange, discipline, and disclose in *Wujūh*; he merely provides the premise for listening.

In what follows, I argue that Khoury's novel models an act of communal witnessing by recording stories of loss and trauma that might otherwise have been eclipsed in the historical narrativization of the Lebanese Civil War.[11] I show how the novel articulates a new, communally negotiated relationship to truth by abandoning the hypotactic organization of narrative for the paratactic association of testimony—"bits and pieces," as Shoshana Felman writes, "of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance… events in excess of our frames of reference."[12] The narrator of Khoury's text is an "involuntary witness":[13] his curiosity about one man's violent death leads him to collect and transcribe a seemingly endless series of other traumatic experiences. Each witness consulted in the investigation of Khalīl's murder offers a testimony that, far from explaining or solving the murder, only generates more mysteries to be solved, more deaths to be mourned. Where the narrator of *Wujūh* perceives narrative *failure*, then, is precisely where the novel's act of witnessing succeeds. That is, by failing to arrange the narratives of death, loss, and violence that he collects into what we might call a conventional story (*qiṣṣah*), yet including them in his text nevertheless, the narrator of *Wujūh* crafts an ethical relationship to the experiences of others. He renounces the position of the "author," the *muʾallif*—literally, the "arranger" or "composer" of knowledge—in the same way that he renounces the premise of the "*qiṣṣah*," of the story that encourages its readers to follow the traces of a tale to a logical, cathartic, and often instructive

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[10] Ibid. 300.

[11] Anne Whitehead points out how the concerns of what she calls "trauma fiction" overlap with those of postcolonial fiction in that both are concerned with how "memory counters or resists the ways in which history elides difference and forgets the heterogeneous." Trauma fiction too, she claims, is "concerned with the recovery of memory and the acknowledgement of the denied, the repressed, and the forgotten." See Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004), 82-83.

[12] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

[13] Ibid., 4.

conclusion.[14] He allows the stories to follow their own logic and craft their own language, transforming the solitary, exilic act of authorship into a communal practice.

While my reading of *Wujūh* is informed by many of the now canonical texts in the field of trauma theory, it also does not approach the novel as merely another example of "trauma fiction" abiding by a fixed set of narrative conventions.[15] Rather, by elaborating the structural and stylistic specificities of *Wujūh*, exploring the rhetorical features of its limit-language, and comparing its implicit recasting of authorship with the explicit poetics Khoury articulates in his criticism, I show how Khoury, like Jabra, criticizes the textual and visual forms that claim a monopoly over truth, including the newspaper and the documentary film. Pushing beyond the bounds of these forms, as well as the conventions of authorship as "composition" (*taʾlīf*), the author searches not only for meaning in catastrophic events, but also for a new language in which meaning and truth might be articulated in the wake of war. To borrow Khoury's own language, in *Wujūh* "the author disappears within a world that cannot be controlled, melting into this world as the words alone flourish, as the victims flourish when their faces and language are revealed in a never-ending series of secrets."[16]

The chapter will proceed in three sections. In the first, I focus on the character Fahd Badr al-Dīn, a freedom fighter who, after suffering near-fatal wounds to his eyes, finds himself suspended in limbo between military and civilian life. When a group of film students ask him to star in a documentary film about the Palestinian cause, Fahd's discomfort with the process highlights the disjuncture between those who have experienced death first-hand and those who have only experienced it through the visual media of film and video. I argue that as a refracted, semi-autobiographical stand-in for Khoury himself, Fahd's spatial and spiritual liminality articulates Khoury's ambivalent stance toward the Leftist, pro-Palestinian Lebanese National Movement following the Dāmūr Massacre of January 20, 1976. I further argue that Fahd's rejection of documentary film offers the novel's first critique of truth-telling media, in contradistinction to fiction and storytelling. Fahd's Civil War story crucially depends on associations of *smell* rather than sight (specifically the haunting smell and touch of a corpse), and thus it reclaims storytelling as a form that engages all five senses, as opposed to film, which aestheticizes death by erasing its gruesome, corporeal reality.

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[14] *Qiṣṣah* derives from a root that connotes not only cutting, trimming, and splicing (*qaṣṣa, yaquṣṣu*), but also a notion of *sequentiality*. According to Ibn Manẓūr *Lisān al-ʿArab*, "it is said: *qaṣaṣtu al-shayʾ* if you followed its traces sequentially, one after the other." (*Wa-yuqāl: qaṣaṣtu al-shayʾ idhā tatabbaʿta athrahu shayʾ baʿda shayʾ*.) This insistence on the "traces" or "tracks" to be followed sequentially, "one after the other" (*shayʾ baʿda shayʿ*) is inherent in the definition of *qiṣṣah*, and persists even in modern Arabic. Later on in the *Lisān*, we also have the following: "And it is said: 'the storyteller tells stories' because he links together one event after another and utters his words in an orderly fashion." (*Wa-qīla al-qāṣṣ yaquṣṣu al-qiṣaṣ li-ittibāʿihi khabar baʿda khabar wa sawqihi al-kalām sawqan*). Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, s.v. Available at: http://www.ejtaal.net/

[15] I hope to maintain a historicized relationship to the body of theoretical literature known as "trauma theory" by acknowledging how it is situated in a particular time (the 1990's) and place (New Haven and Yale University). I would like to ask how Arabic literary texts such as Khoury's (and specifically the limit-languages contained therein) challenge the premises of this theory—how bearing witness to the Lebanese Civil War *in Arabic* differs from bearing witness to the Holocaust in English, German, or French; how the Arabic language, in the hands of the authors under examination in this project, transforms language syntactically, grammatically, and sonically to respond to different traumatic events.

[16] Elias Khoury, "Mawt al-muʾallif" [The death of the author], in *al-Dhākirah al-mafqūdah* (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1990), 75. In the original context, Khoury is describing the effacement of the frame narrator in the *Thousand and One Nights*.

As in *Walīd Masʿūd*, however, Fahd's autobiographical status in the novel is complemented by the figure of the frame narrator, and it is to this figure that I devote the second section of the chapter. Like Fahd, the author-narrator of *Wujūh* is caught in a liminal place between the necessity of bearing witness and the impossibility of doing so through conventional narrative forms. Although he outwardly expresses a preference for journalistic truth over narrative fiction, in the end the nature of the stories he collects overwhelms his desire to tell a "true" story, and he is forced to admit—much like the speaker of the "Foreword" to the *Thousand and One Nights*—that there may be some value to storytelling, particularly when performed as a communal, polyvocal act.

In counterpoint with both Fahd and the frame narrator of *Wujūh*, Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir— casualty of the war's five-year anniversary—offers a language that borders on the nonsensical, yet in which a kind of truth is said to inhere. It is to Khalīl, as remembered by the character Fāṭimah Fakhrū, that I devote the third and final section of the chapter. Fāṭimah is a poor, Kurdish domestic worker from the Lebanese countryside, and she was the last to speak with Khalīl before the discovery of his body. Reflecting on her tenuous connection with the victim, Fāṭimah remembers a series of conversations in which Khalīl narrated the experiences of his life through broken images of whiteness and refracted light. In these passages, Khoury experiments with the limits of Arabic grammar, syntax, sound, and sense much as Jabrā does in Walīd's monologues. I argue that through her conversations with Khalīl, Fāṭimah becomes an involuntary witness to his testimony. His broken language does what she has thus far been unable to do: give verbal, vocal form to what she calls her life of "calamities" (*maṣāʾib*). The kind of knowledge Fāṭimah gleans from Khalīl stands in stark contrast to the "intelligence" her military interrogators seek from her, just as it contrasts with the journalistic premises on which the frame narrator insists, and the visual manipulations of truth and emotion performed by the twinned genres of documentary film and martyr-poster. In Fāṭimah's mind, Khalīl "speaks nonsense, but he's right, maybe he's right" (*innahu yahdhī, lakinna al-ḥaqq maʿhu, rubbamā al-ḥaqq maʿhu*).[17]

I conclude that in the dissonance between the truth claimed by the other media in the novel and the truth Fāṭimah hears in Khalīl's words, we can glimpse the distance between history and testimony. Khoury models a form of authorship that transforms the author from an "arranger" of experience into "a medium between the direct experience of life and the imaginary, between memory and the future, between written and spoken language, between the possibilities of language itself."[18] He implicitly proposes that testimony, memory, and storytelling can bring the exilic, intellectual author closer to the community he aims to represent.

From the Documentary to the Olfactory: Fahd Badr al-Dīn

Fahd Badr al-Dīn represents the first incarnation of a figure that will recur throughout Khoury's novelistic oeuvre: the disillusioned freedom fighter (*fidāʾī*) trapped in limbo between his passionate commitment to the Palestinian cause and his rejection of the brutal tactics deployed in the name of that cause.[19] In his liminality between these two positions, Fahd greatly resembles Khoury himself. Born into a Greek Orthodox family in 1948 and raised in the Beirut

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[17] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 123.

[18] Khoury, "Conversations," 141.

[19] I am thinking particularly of Khalīl, the narrator of Khoury's 1998 novel *Bāb al-Shams*. See my brief discussion of this figure in the introduction to this dissertation.

neighborhood of Ashrafiyyah, Khoury was only nineteen years old when he left to enlist with Fatah and the Palestinian Liberation Organization in Jordan in 1967.[20] Three years later, he left the ranks of the fidāʾiyyīn following the events of Black September, when Jordanian Armed Forces, fearing a threat to the Hashemite monarchy, drove the increasingly powerful PLO out of Jordan, forcing it to relocate its base of operations to Beirut and killing thousands in the process. After returning to Beirut, Khoury left for Paris to complete a dissertation on the 1860 Lebanese conflict. From 1975 to 1979, he worked alongside the Palestinian poet Maḥmūd Darwīsh as an editor with the journal *Shuʾūn Filasṭīniyyah* (Palestinian Affairs), which publishes articles on Palestinian politics, culture, economics, and activism. In the weeks after the Ain al-Rummaneh incident, Khoury, like Fahd, suffered a serious eye injury that left him temporarily blinded, traces of which remain with the writer to this day.

Formed as he was in the crucible of Palestinian solidarity, the "question" of Palestine (*al-qaḍiyyah*) has remained a central problem in Khoury's work, from relatively early novels such as *Wujūh* through more recent contributions such as *Mamlakat al-ghurabāʾ* (*Kingdom of Strangers*) and *Bāb al-Shams* (*Gate of the Sun*). Yet in his literary texts much more than in his journalistic and critical pieces, Khoury articulates his criticism of the violent methods employed by the PLO and their leftist Lebanese allies throughout the Lebanese Civil War. "Criticism was very difficult," he says in an interview with Sonja Mejcher, "because in our consciousness the Palestinian revolution was sacred. You could not criticize it. Nevertheless we did… Writing was very important because it gave me the chance to rethink and to understand what was going on."[21] His work with *Shuʾūn Filasṭīniyyah*, together with his novels, began to articulate a counterpoint to his earlier, more youthful devotion to the cause. In the same interview, he describes a turning point in his views on the relationship between political ideology and literature, one that began during his years at *Shuʾūn*: "I discovered… that there must be something wrong in our optimistic ideological approach. When you write literature you cannot insert the ideology of historical optimism which was in fashion, Mao Tse Tung, etc. Ideology cannot work in literature and it cannot really work in life either because *it covers reality and it covers atrocities and I cannot be a part of that*."[22] Literature, for Khoury, is an imaginary, creative space that needn't abide by the teleologies of revolutionary discourse. In literature, it was possible to shed light on atrocities that had previously been masked with talk of liberation, justice, and noble martyrdom, and to do so without compromising one's continued commitment to the Palestinians themselves.

The most concrete turning point in Khoury's attitude toward the Civil War and the PLO's role in it, however, came in the aftermath of the Dāmūr massacre of 1976, in which PLO and Joint Forces fighters violently attacked the Christian coastal town of Dāmūr, killing over five hundred civilians. Dāmūr represents the culmination of a series of events that began in January of that year, when Christian Phalangist forces overran the predominantly Muslim district of Karantīnā in a bid to consolidate territory in East Beirut, killing approximately one thousand of the district's Muslim inhabitants and displacing the rest. Over the course of two years, the Phalangists carried out a series of similar massacres and depopulation campaigns in the neighborhoods and refugee camps of Maslakh, Nabaʿah, and Tall al-Zaʿtar, areas mainly populated by Palestinian Muslims, Kurds, Armenians, and other minority groups. Tall al-Zaʿtar in particular has become a painful memory for many Lebanese Leftists and Palestine supporters:

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[20] For a more extended biography of Khoury, see his interview with Mejcher, "Conversations," 125-53.

[21] Khoury, "Conversations," 134.

[22] Ibid., 134-35 (emphasis added).

Yāsir ʿArafāt ordered the inhabitants of the camp not to surrender, "knowing full well that they would be defeated," in an attempt to create more martyrs and "capture the attention of the world."[23] In retaliation for these brutal massacres, in which many thousands of Palestinians were killed (often through extremely gruesome tactics),[24] PLO fighters together with the leftist Joint Forces laid siege to Dāmūr. Many of the village's residents (both soldiers and civilians) evacuated by sea, but many remained when the siege began. After executing twenty Phalangist soldiers, fighters summarily executed hundreds of civilians, including women and children, then looted and destroyed their homes. In the chaos that inevitably followed, the fighters also desecrated a centuries-old Christian cemetery. "They lay there for days," Robert Fisk writes of the aftermath, "the long dead, skeletons and withered cadavers still dressed in the nineteenth-century Sunday best in which they had been buried before mandate Palestine even existed."[25] In a cruel twist of irony, the PLO subsequently resettled many survivors of the Tall al-Zaʿtar massacre in Dāmūr.[26]

In light of these events structured around violence and retaliation, Khoury radically altered his perspective on the war. No longer the idealistic nineteen-year-old he had been in Jordan, he writes:

> [M]y attitude toward the civil war became critical, especially after the fidāʾiyyīn occupied the Christian town of al-Dāmūr south of Beirut and behaved with the logic of revenge. I was astonished that the progressive Palestinian camp believed in al-Dāmūr. It was the crucial moment for me to discover that our ideology did not protect us from behaving in a savage, fascist way. What is the meaning of all our discourse and all our ideology if we kill children, women, and men because they are Christians or Muslims or whatever?[27]

Dāmūr brought the falseness of the war's discourses and ideologies to the fore for Khoury. It revealed that every side was as culpable as the other, as all groups' actions were governed by the brutal logic of revenge. No matter how forcefully or eloquently they spoke of freedom, revolution, and transformation, the torture, violence, and killing at Karantīnā, Tall al-Zaʿtar, Maslakh, and Dāmūr revealed their language as little more than a mask covering over atrocity.

The reality of violence beneath the rhetoric of revolution and liberation is precisely what occupies the character Fahd Badr al-Dīn as well, in the chapter of *Wujūh* that he narrates. Like Khoury, Fahd begins his career as a fidāʾī with the Joint Forces of the LNM at a young age, before he has even finished his degree in Arabic literature at the Lebanese University. For Fahd,

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[23] See Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Nation Books, 2002), 85-86 and 102, as well as Asʿad Abu Khalil, *Historical Dictionary of Lebanon* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1998), and Trablousi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 187-205.

[24] The Phalangist leader Etienne Saqr (whose nom de guerre was Abū al-Arz, "Father of the Cedars") commanded a group that, in Fisk's words, "specialized in cruelty, whose men tied Palestinian prisoners to the backs of taxis and then dragged them twelve miles up the motorway to Jounieh. Their carcasses would then be flung into a dried-up riverbed. 'If you feel compassion for the Palestinian women and children,' Abu Arz proclaimed, 'remember they are communists and will bear new communists.'" Fisk, *Pity the Nation*, 85-86.

[25] Ibid., 100

[26] See Ibid.*,* 99-100, and Traboulsi, *History of Modern Lebanon*, 192-93.

[27] Khoury, "Conversations," 133.

enlisting as a fighter was more than simply commitment to a political cause. During the early days of his service with the Joint Forces, he describes a feeling of invincibility and limitlessness, an ability to "hold up the sky:"

> Up there on the distant mountain. The mountain was full of snow, and we would walk on top of it, our feet sinking and drowning in the snow, and we would sprint or try to sprint. Our laughter filled the sky, we would raise up our hands and stretch out the clouds. Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ, who later died up there, his body lost in the snow, said to me that he felt he was holding the sky in his two hands. And we were all holding the sky.[28]

It is a memory of youthful exuberance and brotherhood in arms, of transcendence and boudless possibility. Yet nearly every story Fahd tells about these early days with the fidāʾiyyīn is tied to a fighter who lost his life, each memory colored by a loss. Despite the rhetoric of martyrdom and sacrifice he was fed as a fighter, he has seen how the deaths of his brothers in arms had little effect on the outcome of the war, and he begins to doubt the utility and glory of death in the name of a cause.

Fahd also describes all of the personal sacrifices he's made to fully devote himself to the cause: "My mother is waiting for me," he says, "and I left university, I left her, I told her that I was studying at university, but I'm not studying anything. I'm fighting, just fighting. I want to reach the sky and carry it between my two hands, just as I've read about in books, I want to storm into the sky [*urīd an aqtaḥim al-samāʾ*]."[29] For Fahd in these early years, there is a distinct link between revolutionary fighting and "the sky," with all its attendant connotations of transcendence, heavenliness, and freedom. Fahd naively believes he can "storm into" the sky, as though it were a building he could take by force. Even as he's recovering from wounds to his eyes that nearly blinded him completely, Fahd insists that he is not a "retired fighter," as his fellow convalescents insist. "No, I am not retired, I will go back and carry the sky, just as we used to chant when we filled the streets with our roaring demonstrations, crying out that we would plow the earth and cultivate it anew, that we were the 'newness' we had been awaiting for a thousand years."[30]

If "rushing off into the sky" is Fahd's preferred figure for the headiness of revolutionary conviction, it is in no small part because he was immersed in an atmosphere that glorified death as the ultimate revolutionary sacrifice. The actual encounters he has with death he has on the battlefield, however, gradually unravel this romanticized vision. In the first of two formative encounters, Fahd is on a mission near Sannīn mountain, with a group of freedom fighters much older than him. Suddenly, a bomb explodes, and after making a small stand, nearly all of the fighters are killed. Only one besides Fahd—Samīḥ—remains alive, and he is badly wounded. Fahd carries the man halfway up the mountain, attempting to bring him back to the base camp. But the distance is far and the man is heavy. After a while, Fahd can no longer bear the burden. He hopes that when he arrives at the base camp alone, he can bring a team back to get Samīḥ. The reaction he gets from his commander, however, disappoints him: the commander refuses to go back for Samīḥ. "But I promised him," Fahd insists, to which the answer is a curt: "Simple" (*Basīṭah*). "What do you mean, 'simple?'" Fahd asks. "He's a martyr," the commander replies.

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[28] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 197.

[29] Ibid., 202.

[30] Ibid., 209.

"We'll count him as a martyr."[31] The commander hands out martyrdom as if it were a way to instantly manufacture significance, but Fahd has seen the real circumstances that surrounded this supposed "martyrdom." Samīḥ did not "rush off into the sky." His body was torn apart in an explosion, and he was dragged through the snow, helpless and on the edge of death, eventually becoming delirious and hallucinating. Eventually, Samīḥ begs Fahd to leave him behind and save himself. We are far from the fantasy of transcendence here.[32]

Following this event, Fahd has a second, even more gruesome and traumatizing encounter with death in battle. After spotting a young boy carrying a rifle during another mission in the mountains, Fahd takes him prisoner, leads him back to his troop's base camp and interrogates him. While the boy admits that he was part of a group of Christian militiamen, Fahd still promises to spare his life, since he seems to pose no particular threat. Upon presenting the boy to his commander Comrade ʿUmar, however, Fahd loses control of the situation: ʿUmar shoots the boy and orders his men to throw the corpse somewhere far away from the camp. When Fahd asks why ʿUmar killed an innocent young child, ʿUmar calls upon the rhetoric of war and revenge:

> —Do you think that if they'd taken *you* prisoner, you'd still be alive?
> —OK, but…
> —Do you think that if it he had arrested *you*, he'd have left you alive?
> —OK, but…
> —Have you forgotten what they did to Saʿīd? They took him prisoner when he was wounded near Nāṣirah Tower in Ashrafiyyah, and they dragged him, they skinned him alive with a Land Rover, dragging him through the streets while everyone watched. Have you forgotten?[33]
> —OK, but…
> —Have you forgotten how they threw the children off the Beirut River bridge? Have you forgotten?
> —OK, but…
> —But, but, but… shut your mouth, they must be killed [*yajib qatluhum*].
> —But we…!
> —But we, but they… you philosophize a lot. Shut up and get out of my sight.
> —But comrade ʿUmar, I promised him and he was young, his beard hadn't even started coming in yet. He doesn't have anything to do with the skinning or the bridge.
> —Shut up, he said. No one has nothing to do with it. Everyone has something to do with it. He knew, and he stayed silent, so he is a murderer just like them. This is a war… They kill us, and we kill them. What does that even mean, "nothing to do with it." He knew

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[31] Ibid., 235.

[32] The tragedy of Samīḥ's death also parallels a tragedy Khoury himself suffered on Sannīn Mountain while fighting with the students' battalion within Fatah: "On Ṣannīn one of my closest friends Muḥammad Shbarū died. I dedicated my novel *al-Jabal al-Ṣaghīr* (*The Little Mountain*) to his memory. In my novel I gave him the name Ṭalāl. And Ṭalāl became the name of my son, who was born a few months after his death." Khoury, "Conversations," 132. Ṭalāl is also the name of Fahd's closest friend and comrade in arms in *Wujūh*, whose grave he frequently visits and with whom he converses even after death. Khoury, *Wujūh*, 243-245.

[33] The scene ʿUmar describes here calls to mind the real-life massacres undertaken at Tall al-Zaʿtar in 1976 and led by Etienne Saqr (a.k.a. Abū al-Arz, "Father of the Cedars"), the founder of the far-right Christian party "The Guardians of the Cedars" (*Ḥurrās al-Arz*). See note 24, above.

and he stayed quiet, so he is a murderer just like them. This is a war, we're not playing, and they're not playing. They kill us, and we kill them.[34]

In this moment, Fahd sees all too clearly the way narratives of vengeance are used to justify the continued killing of the war. Death no longer seems like the means to a revolutionary end; it has been *naturalized* as a cyclical way of life. In a subtle gesture, ʿUmar expunges his own individual guilt by adopting the passive voice—*yajib qatluhum*, "they must be killed"—as though these were murders without perpetrators, as though murder were a moral obligation, or even a natural occurrence from which there was no escape. No one, not even a young boy, is exempt from the logic of war; everyone is on a side; no one has "nothing to do with it."

In contrast with Comrade ʿUmar, however, Fahd develops a very different attitude toward death as a result of this incident. Several days after the boy was shot, he encounters his corpse lying discarded in a field, bloated with decomposition and swarming with maggots:

I was crawling, hearing the shots, shooting and crawling, then I collided with that thing, at first I couldn't discern what it was, my arm was on top of something hard like an inflated tire, then the worms started crawling over my hand and my arm. I drew back quickly, and the worms were on my hand, I left my gun on the ground, I knelt down and took it off, and they were on my waist and the lower part of my chest, on belt in which we put our cartridges, *and there was that smell, the very same smell*, and I stayed in my place, I couldn't do anything else, I was supposed to advance, but I didn't. I thought about going back and returning to my tent, but I stayed in my place. And in the early morning, in the soft light blended with shadow, I saw him. It was the same young boy, inflated, the beginnings of decomposition clear on his face and especially his lips.[35]

Where ʿUmar has a cold, almost completely abstract relationship with death, which he treats like a kind of currency to be exchanged between enemies,[36] Fahd quite literally collides with the cruel reality of death in war, where bodies are not buried but left to decompose on the field of battle. When Fahd physically encounters the destruction wrought on the bodies of innocents in the name of the cause, it completely eclipses the abstract rhetoric of revolution that once inspired him to fight, as well as the fantasy of "holding up the sky." The longer he fights and the more deaths he witnesses, the further Fahd feels from making these abstract concepts into realities. The "smell" he mentions is the very same smell he will later encounter on Khalīl Jābir; indeed, it is the smell of Khalīl that ultimately triggers Fahd's memory of this battle scene.

In a salient stroke of irony, then, it is only upon nearly losing his sight in battle that Fahd understands the reality of death, and understands it not by *seeing*, but by *smelling*.[37] Unlike many

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[34] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 235.

[35] Ibid. 236 (emphasis added)

[36] The idea of exchanging bodies instead of words resonates with a statement Khoury made in one of his wartime articles for the Lebanese daily *al-Safīr*: "Writing is no longer a means of exchange. Exchange is now enacted with bodies, and corpses have become a way of proclaiming a position, through shelling, kidnapping, or execution. As for writing in all its various forms, it has become merely another name for this kind of proclamation." Khoury, "al-Kitābah wa-l-mawt" [Writing and Death] *Zaman al-iḥtilāl* [The Time of Occupation] (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-abḥāth al-ʿArabiyyah, 1985), 253.

[37] On the complex relationships among sight, knowledge, and trauma, Geoffrey Hartman writes: "Literary knowledge finds [the] real, identifies with it, and can even bring it back… Yet as in the Orpheus myth, there is a

of his fellow fighters, Fahd is unable to draw the causal link between violence and the realization of his ideals. "They don't know the meaning of the word death," he complains of the new recruits he meets in the party offices upon being transferred there for office work. "Death is disgusting. They talk about death as though it were something beautiful, but it's disgusting. I tell them that death is disgusting, but they don't believe me."[38] In contrast with this new group of fighters, Fahd finds himself caught between two irreconcilable positions: on the one hand, he can no longer muster the kind of dedication to fighting that he once had and that he sees reflected back to him in this brash new group of young fighters. On the other hand, as an adult, he has never led any life outside the realm of the fidāʾiyyīn. He left home, family, and university study to enlist; he no longer knows how to live as a civilian. When a documentary filmmaker asks him about his profession, he responds: "Fidāʾī." "I know, I know," the director persists, "but before that, what was your profession?" "Nothing," Fahd responds with a mix of pride and sadness.[39] Throughout the many interwoven analepses and prolepses of the chapter, Fahd constantly returns to his liminal status in the party offices of the Joint Forces. "Here I sit," he repeats, signaling a return to the time of narration. "I'm here… and I won't go anywhere else. I can't. Maybe they can, but as for me, I just can't."[40] The war has immobilized him both spiritually and physically, and this immobility literalizes Khoury's own ambivalent position toward the PLO after Dāmūr.

Just as Fahd is trapped within the party offices, awaiting orders that will never come, so too the *form* of the chapter he narrates mirrors the circular, repetitive nature of traumatic memory. He begins the chapter by responding to the frame narrator's questions about Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir, summarizing his first and only encounter with Khalīl, which occurred when some of his fellow fighters brought the older man in for questioning. Remembering the scene of interrogation, Fahd offers a few scanty details, but it is the memory of Khalīl's *smell* that triggers a break in the narrative, jolting both Fahd and the reader into the past. "That smell," he recalls several times. "The most disturbing thing about [Khalīl] was his smell. "His smell was just like *that* smell…" Suddenly, in the very next line, we are transported to a battle scene "over there, in the distant mountain,"[41] as Fahd proceeds to describe the explosion that nearly blinded him.

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limit to recovery, or a limit to the effort at visualization. Every time we are tempted to say 'I see' when 'I understand' is meant, we do not see, or else do not understand." Geoffrey Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," in *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (1995): 540.

[38] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 210.

[39] Ibid., 213.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., 196. Fahd is not the only one to mention the disturbing smell that emanated from Khalīl during the last several months of his life. Nuhā Jābir, Khalīl's wife, also dwells on Khalīl's smell at great length in the chapter she narrates, describing how it permeated their bedroom and how impossible it was to get rid of it, no matter how much cleaning she did. "I don't know why, but I don't dare enter the room," she says at the end of the chapter she narrates. "It smells of blood… I threw out everything after his death. I washed the room with soap and water, and whitewashed the walls. But the smell is still there, and I'm scared." Khoury, *Wujūh*, 49. Khalīl's daughter Nadā Najjār also notices the smell and blames her mother for not being thorough enough in her cleaning: "The smell of the room was unbearable. My mother says she cleaned it every day, but where did the smell come from then? Maybe it was the smell of the cat… but even a cat can't give off such a strong smell…" Khoury, *Wujūh*, 289-90. Smell also plays a large role in many of Khoury's other writings, both his novels and his articles (particularly those written for *al-Safīr* during the nineteen-eighties). See in particular, "Madīnat al-rāʾiḥah" [City of smells] in *Zaman al-iḥtilāl* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-abḥāth al-ʿArabiyyah, 1985) and the passages on the smell of the comatose fidāʾī Abū Sālim in *Bāb al-Shams*.

Again later in the chapter, Fahd returns to the day when his comrades brought Khalīl in for questioning. "I left the room, but the smell followed me. It was just like *that* smell, the smell of the corpse. I put my hand over my nose, then I washed my face with cold water and blew my nose, but the smell didn't go away."[42] Yet again, this olfactory memory launches Fahd's narration into the past, as he immediately returns to the scene with the young boy. Each time the narrator asks him to return to the subject of Khalīl, in other words, Fahd is overwhelmed by the memory of Khalīl's *smell* and cannot help but return to his visceral experiences of death in battle. Thinking of Khalīl only causes him to reflect further on the relationship between the maggots and the smell: "I still feel them even now, worms on my hand, as though it were stuck in a rubber pillow full of worms, and they writhe and squirm, then crawl up and up, they crawl up to my neck and keep crawling, one of them crawls into my nose, and then there's that smell."[43]

Indeed, the smell of Khalīl reminds Fahd of all the casualties of war who have not received a proper burial, including Khalīl himself, as though the man reeked of his own unmourned, unjust death even before his brutal murder:

> I swear, Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir was a poor man, it's shameful how men die these days, they threw him away as though he were garbage, as though he were trash, is that any way to treat a man? To throw him away? I don't want to meddle in the issue, but the smell, my own smell has started to resemble his, as though my body were carrying the very same smell [*kaʾanna jasadī yaḥmil al-rāʾiḥah nafsahā*]. I go into the bathroom and bathe, soap and shampoo, I get out, but the smell is still there. How can I get rid of this stink of worms?[44]

Fahd outwardly affirms that he "doesn't want to meddle in the issue," yet his testimony in this moment illustrates how he is already inextricably involved in Khalīl's death, psychologically if not investigatively. He now "carries" the smell of Khalīl—which is also the smell of worms, of the young boy's bloated corpse, and by extension, of all the war's un-mourned, unburied dead— in his very *body*, as though encumbered with a burden for which he did not ask. (The verb *yaḥmil*, "to carry," heightens this sense.) Like the frame narrator of *Wujūh*, Fahd is an involuntary witness: he may not want to "meddle" (*yatadākhil*) in the investigation of Khalīl's death, but the trauma of war has left him with a testimony that he cannot contain or control. This uncontrollability is manifested formally in the chapter, as it flashes forward and back in time, its chronology hinged on associations of smell.

The experience of death as smell rather than sight is also at the root of the dissonance between Fahd and Samar, the young documentary film student at the American University in Beirut who asks Fahd to feature in a Leftist propaganda film. Initially, Fahd agrees to appear in the film, but when the director hands him a script and asks him to read it in front of the camera, Fahd quickly discovers that it is a canned monologue reiterating only the most tired tropes of revolutionary rhetoric. Even more significantly, it exploits Fahd's wounded eyes as evidence of the enemy's barbarity:

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[42] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 230.

[43] Ibid., 237.

[44] Ibid., 242

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My name is Muḥammad al-Sayyid, and I am a fighter with the Joint Forces of the Palestinian Revolution and the Lebanese National Movement. We are fighting for the independence and unity of an Arab Lebanon, for the liberation of Palestine, and against the forces of Imperialism, Zionism, Fascism, and Conservatism. Stop. Look at the crimes the Fascists have committed. Stop. We don't love war; we fight for the sake of peace. Stop. The Fascists are committing heinous crimes, and we are defending women and children. Stop. Many of my friends have been martyred. I carried them in my arms as they breathed their last, still repeating chants of freedom. Stop. I've been wounded, my eye was wounded, can't you see my eye? Stop.[45]

As the director points out after Fahd has finished reading, the film will be cut after each "stop" and spliced with documentary footage from the Tall al-Zaʿatar massacre and the shelling in West Beirut. Through the repeated inclusion of the word "stop" in the text of the chapter, however, Khoury underscores the constructed-ness (and indeed, the *fictionality*) of this monologue, which is intended as truthful, "first-hand testimony" but which couldn't be more fabricated. The narrative has been "arranged" or "composed" (*muʾallaf*) to advance a particular political side, just as Fahd—with his cultured, educated background—has been chosen as its representative, someone whose language and bearing will be palatable to Western audiences, and whose wounds will inspire empathy and pity for the cause. The form of the documentary film, in other words, selectively represents some events to the exclusion of others in order to promulgate a particular political message, first distorting the truth, then asserting its identity with truth through its explicit claims to the documentary category. "We're not asking you to act," Samar reassures Fahd. "We're asking for the truth."[46]

Indeed, although Samar first refers to the documentary film as a "tool" for swaying public opinion in favor of the leftists' cause, in her hands it quickly transforms into a "weapon": "You fighters all hate culture and intellectuals. But the media is extremely important, and cinema is an important tool [*adāh*] of the media, perhaps *the* most important tool." She asks Fahd to imagine "thousands of spectators in Europe and America watching a cultured intellectual with a glass eye talking about the justness of the cause, about women, children, and martyrs, with images of Tall al-Zaʿatar." She insists that such a film would have an important impact, then concludes: "You don't understand the importance of the media as a weapon [*silāḥ*] in battle."[47] From "tool" to "weapon" in the span of only a few lines, documentary film in Samar's hands becomes a dangerous medium, almost equally as violent—in its aestheticization of violence—as the Kalashnikovs used by the fighters themselves.

Samar is only interested in "truth" insofar as it advances the political cause. "The truth must serve the revolution" is her frequent refrain.[48] When Fahd protests that the truth is "more complicated" than Samar makes it out to be, Samar dismisses his complaint and spirals off into her own filmic imaginary, fantasizing about the images of death that could be exploited in her campaign to sway international opinion. In this moment, the disconnect between Fahd's visceral,

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[45] Ibid., 212

[46] Ibid., 215

[47] Ibid., 216.

[48] Ibid., 223.

lived experience of death and Samar's aesthetic, imagined, and ultimately exploitative relationship to death becomes almost comically apparent:

> "Imagine," [she said.] "We could film death in a totally new way. We'd film a corpse, for example—a corpse thrown into the street somewhere in the old marketplace downtown, with weeds having grown all around it and a high embankment beside it. The camera circles silently and pauses on the corpse, then pauses at a single, innocent flower that's sprouted amongst the weeds. Wouldn't that be an amazing scene?"
> "Amazing, sure… but the *smell*. The smell of the corpse would be awful."
> She smiled.
> "You're right," I said. "You're right, the camera doesn't transmit smells. It only transmits images."
> "You see? Even death can look beautiful."[49]

The fighter and the filmmaker have such different associations with death, it is almost as though they were communicating in different media—hence the humorous misunderstanding. Where Samar speaks the abstract language of photographic and imagistic representation (i.e. information), Fahd speaks the language of experience (i.e. storytelling), complete with the two senses that are absent from filmic and narrative representation: touch and smell. He refuses to romanticize death the way Samar and the new generation of fighters do, because he knows that death has a physical, corporeal dimension, one that continues to haunt him in the exact form of the "corpse" that Samar would transform into something "beautiful." Like the brash young fighters, Samar also objectifies death, turning it into a spectacle, uprooting it from the violence to which it bears witness and transforming it into a weapon.

Samar is not interested in the ambiguities and dream-like impressions of the "story"—the centrality of smell, the flashes backward and forward in time that structure the chapter Fahd narrates (and that similarly structure his post-war consciousness). She has no concern for the infinitely layered nature of storytelling, nor is she concerned with the intricacies of conveying experience to her viewers of her films. Rather, she exploits the story by transforming it into information, mobilizing a selective version of the truth and then laying false claim to the authority of documentary objectivity. Fahd however, claims no such monopoly over the truth, nor does he exercise any form of power in its name. It is as though in *failing* to provide an answer to the question of who killed Khalīl, Fahd is ironically able to articulate a different truth about the war: the importance of the literary text as a form of testimony, one that speaks in counterpoint to the supposed objectivity of documentary film.

Suspended between his continued belief in the cause and his unwillingness to perpetuate the endless cycle of killing and revenge, Fahd's tone oscillates between the self-righteousness of revolutionary commitment and the self-questioning of intellectual introspection. "I fought just like everyone else," he affirms, "and I stayed. Others left, but I stayed. I sleep in the office and I carry out all the jobs, even the thought of women has left my mind after my experience with Samar and with film."[50] Yet this claim to authenticity begins to ring hollow, almost despairing, in the very next line: "I stay. Anyway how could I leave? Where would I go?"[51] The world of

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[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 243.

[51] Ibid.

Beirut at war has no place for a disillusioned *fidāʾī*, so scarred by his recurring memories of death that he cannot resume life either as an idealistic fighter or as a civilian. The party offices become the limbo between "rushing off into the sky" and remaining in a world of perpetual war, between expecting nothing and expecting everything:

> I'm here in the office, I stay without budging, I remain here and I wait […] I'm waiting for my mother, I'm waiting to get married, I'm waiting to die, I'm waiting for the revolution, I'm waiting, I'm waiting for nothing, I'm here and I'm waiting for nothing, expecting nothing.
> They're all like this, actually, but they lie and claim they are brave. I am brave, but I'm not waiting, brave because I know and don't expect anything. […]
> I'm the one who waits without expecting anything.
> I'm the one who waits and expects everything.[52]

Through Fahd, and through the disjointed narrative structure of this chapter, Khoury gives shape and form to a position (that of questioning the validity of the PLO's methods) that would have been incommunicable in purely political terms. The novel thus serves as a prism through which to refract the self, and the imaginary space of its narrative—its unreality—ironically becomes the only space in which it is possible to articulate a kind of truth. War has polarized public discourse, solidifying voices into rigid for-or-against camps, obliterating the border zones of nuance. The literary text, by contrast, pries into the grey zones between conviction and questioning, between the transcendence of the sky and the earthly reality of cast-off, rotting corpses. In Khoury's hands, the Lebanese Civil War novel investigates these otherwise unspeakable liminal spaces, recording the voices that refuse to aestheticize death or be exploited, finding new forms in which these voices can speak their testimony as a story.

This is Not a Story: Recasting Authorship in the Frame Narrative of Wujūh

Like Fahd, the frame narrator of *Wujūh* also struggles to negotiate two opposing forces within himself. On the one hand, he openly admits that he prefers truth over fiction and journalistic information over imaginative narration. He himself is an aspiring journalist, and he is driven by a sincere desire to solve the mystery of Khalīl Jābir's murder, even though he never knew the victim while he was alive. On the other hand, the narrator recognizes, as early as the novel's prologue, that the stories of death, loss, uprooting, and madness that he collects over the course of his investigation cannot be arranged into anything like a verifiable report. In asking various witnesses to reflect on Khalīl's life, the narrator unwittingly opens the floodgates of testimony, offering his interlocutors the occasion to grapple verbally and psychologically with their experiences of war—an occasion that had not been offered them in official public discourse. Like Fahd, then, the narrator is caught between two notions of truth: that of information and objectivity, to which journalism lays claim, and that of communal storytelling, which seems to belong to a past era yet resurfaces nevertheless in his work. His dilemma is the one confronted by all of the authors in this dissertation—that of the writer caught between his

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[52] "*Anā huwwa alladhī yantaẓir la shayʾ. Anā huwwa alladhī yantaẓir kull shayʾ*," Ibid., 245.

desire to speak *to* and *on behalf of* a community, and his anxiety that his education and intellectual formation have made him irrelevant to that very community.

In this sense, the frame narrator represents another refracted version of Khoury himself. In his criticism, Khoury also grapples with the problem of the author's relationship to the community. One possible answer to this problem, Khoury proposes, is to "efface the author," effecting his "disappearance" or "death" within the narrative. In the essay "The Death of the Author" (*Mawt al-muʾallif*), published in *al-Safīr* in 1980 (only one year before *Wujūh*), Khoury expresses admiration for the narrative structure of the *Thousand and One Nights* and argues that such a structure might be worth revisiting as a way to approach the catastrophic history of the Lebanese Civil War:

> Today, we must return to the *Nights* because we are currently witnessing the death of the author and of the prophet-poet. Who is capable—or dares to claim he is capable—of expressing or capturing this accumulated pile [of events]? Who can find any subject, thought, or framework for his writing, when subjects are amassed in piles on the streets of our cities, and writing is incapable of giving them any form; when the author is caught between living in the past—where the dream (or illusion) of writing was to be a messenger and missionary—and living through this astonishing accumulation, which kills off the fullness and tragedy of lived history?[53]

Khoury's imagery of "accumulations" of subjects (*rukām*; *tarākum*; *takaddus*) scattered in the city streets evokes the experience of life in Beirut during the war, when buildings were frequently reduced to piles of rubble, when the bodies of the dead seemed to amass without end, and when there was a sense that the horror of these deathly accumulations could not be adequately expressed in words of any form, narrative, poetic or otherwise ("…writing is incapable of giving them any form"). Given the conditions of violence in which they were writing, Khoury asks, how could any author presume the theological position of "messenger" or "missionary," conveying "truth" to his or her readers through narrative? How could any author (*muʾallif*) presume to sift through the senseless accumulations of experience and "compose" or "arrange" (*taʾlīf*) them into any kind of form?

As a way out of this impasse, Khoury proposes the model of the *Nights*, in which "the author is absent and erased,"[54] since "within the story of Shahrayar and Shahrazad are thousands of stories that cannot be regulated by the first."[55] The frame narrative of the *Nights* allows for multiple forms of embedding and framing, as each new story told generates characters who have their own stories to tell, and within those stories there may be yet new character-storytellers, and so on *ad infinitum*. This expanding network of stories eludes authorial control by definition, for there is no telling what one's characters will do or say once they themselves become storytellers. In the *Thousand and One Nights*, therefore:

> the process by which writing erases its author is completed […]. In this sense, the author is the first absentee and the first victim: he is only present in order to disappear within a world that cannot be controlled. He melts into this world, and the words alone flourish;

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[53] Khoury, "Mawt al-muʾallif," 73.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid., 75.

the victims [*al-ḍaḥāyā*] flourish when their faces and language are revealed in a never-ending series of secrets.[56]

Here, Khoury explicitly outlines the model of authorship that will structure all of his subsequent works, from *Wujūh* through *Riḥlat Ghāndī al-ṣaghīr* (*The Journey of Little Gandhi*, 1989) and *Bāb al-Shams*, all of which are structured as archives of overlapping testimonies and stories collected by a self-effacing frame narrator. For Khoury, an author's goal should not be to transmit meaning or significance to his readers, conveying a message that will inevitably be lost in the "accumulations" of history. He should instead grant pride of place not only to the words themselves, but to the victims who speak these words, allowing their "faces" to be seen and their "language" to be heard by "melting into" his text. Khoury's poetics of prose is thus fundamentally premised on *disappearance*—not only the disappearance of the protagonist but also, more crucially, that of the author. In returning to the *Nights*, Khoury returns to a mode in which the author weaves himself into the very weft and warp of his narrative, hoping that voices other than his own might be heard in him and through him. As Khoury says elsewhere, "the writer is only a medium."[57]

Where "The Death of the Author" explicitly articulates Khoury's poetics of novelistic prose, *Wujūh* implicitly effects the death of the author through its incorporation of an unnamed frame narrator. From the very beginning of the prologue, it is clear that our frame narrator wants to lend his work the kind of objective authority normally granted only to journalistic writing, not to works of fiction. "This is not a story [*qiṣṣah*]" he affirms in the very first line of the novel, "and it will not be of particular interest to readers, as people these days are concerned with more important things than reading or listening to stories, and rightly so. But this story actually happened."[58] This assertion, together with the later one that his story is "not worth more than the effort required to read it,"[59] neatly encapsulates the frame narrator's dilemma: he wants to lend his account the weight, authority, and urgency of truth, yet the testimonial nature of the stories he's collected requires a different, more story-like form. "Now I'm writing the story, which is not a story," he affirms again later in the Prologue, [60] "and I know that it will not be of interest to anyone […] Every one of us has his own story, and that's quite enough. We don't need to hear

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[56] Ibid. (emphasis added)

[57] Khoury, "Conversations," 141.

[58] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 9.

[59] Ibid., 14 and 337.

[60] This rhetorical move—to assert that something simultaneously is and isn't what it seems to be—reappears constantly in Khoury's fiction. It is particularly present in *Bāb al-Shams*, which takes place in the Palestinian refugee camp of Shatila, outside Beirut. "Everything here isn't itself but only resembles itself," Khalīl points out to Abū Sālim in that book. "We say *house* but we don't live in houses, we live in places that resemble houses. We say *Beirut* but we aren't really in Beirut, we're in a semblance of Beirut." Khoury, *Bāb al-Shams*, 116. Khoury frequently highlights the moments when things, situations, and people do not correspond to their names, when signifiers have become loosed from their referents. The refugee camp is perhaps the place where the users of a language feel this referential loosening most acutely. When the refugee uses the word "house" or "home" (*bayt*), s/he is not referring to a *real* house, but only to the tent or makeshift shack where s/he resides—a residence originally intended to be temporary that has become cruelly permanent. In this sense language itself constantly reiterates the cruelty of a refugee-camp existence and serves as a constant reminder of the alienation that the refugee feels. S/he cannot exist without language, and yet language provides daily reminders of his or her distance from home.

the stories of others."[61] The narrator recognizes that he is living in a time and place when fiction has been totally discredited, its truth-telling capacity eclipsed by the more documentary forms of film and journalistic reportage. We are very far, in other words, from the moral and pedagogical power attributed to the fantastical tales and imaginative worlds of popular Arabic storytelling traditions such as the *Thousand and One Nights*.

As an illustrative counterpoint to the narrator's affirmation that we "don't need to hear the stories of others," we might cite the Foreword to the Muḥsin Mahdī edition of the *Nights*, which reaffirms the edificatory power of fantastical tales:

> I should like to inform the honorable gentlemen and noble readers that the purpose of writing this agreeable and entertaining book is for the benefit of those who peruse it, for in it there are many edifying stories [*siyar kathīrat al-adab*] and excellent lessons [*maʿānī fāyiqah*] for the people of distinction, and from them people can learn the art of discourse, as well as what happened to kings from the beginnings of time. […] [This book] also comprises splendid biographies [*siyar*] from which the listener can gain an intuitive knowledge of human character, such that no one can trick or deceive him, and it can also bring him delight, diverting him whenever he is burdened with the cares of life and the ills of this world.[62]

Like the frame narrator of *Wujūh*, the speaker of this prologue is unidentifiable, not associated with any of the characters we encounter within the *Nights* themselves, including Shahrazād herself. It is the voice of an editor, presenting an archive or collection of tales much as the narrator of *Wujūh* does. Yet unlike Khoury's frame narrator, the speaker of this "Foreword" reaffirms multiple times the potential of stories to "benefit" and "edify" (*nafʿ*) those who listen to them (*al-sāmiʿ*),[63] not only with information about civilizations past, but also with lessons in "intuition about human character" (*firāsah*), such that he may never become the victim of a trap or trick (*ḥīlah*). According to the *Nights'* editor-narrator, in other words, *fiction* is equally, if not more beneficial to the listener than true stories. Tales instruct their listeners in various practical and intellectual skills, including the intellectual arts of history (*siyar al-mulūk*) and discourse (*ʿilm al-kalām*), and the more practical skills of recognizing and resisting deception (*al-firāsah*).

In this way, the prologue to *Wujūh* outwardly contradicts the foreword to the *Nights*, dismissing the value of fantastical, fictional stories in a world saturated with information. Yet in light of the vertiginous form of the stories he's collected, the frame narrator who speaks in this prologue cannot help but present these tales as an archive or collage; there is no other form available to him. His explicit valuation of information over storytelling thus offers a parody of the conventional author's obsessive desire to control and dominate his narrative materials,

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[61] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 11.

[62] Husain Haddawy, trans. *The Arabian Nights*, trans. Husain Haddawy (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 2 (translation modified). The literature on the *Nights* is extremely vast. For an introduction to the work's transmission, translation, and circulation history, see Haddawy's introduction to *The Arabian Nights*, ix-xxx, and Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (New York: Tauris Parke, 2004).

[63] A remarkable oversight in Haddawy's translation is his transformation of the Arabic "listener" (*sāmiʿ*) into the English "reader" in the following line: "This book […] abounds also with splendid biographies that teach the *reader* to detect deception." Haddawy, *Arabian Nights*, 2. The Arabic in the Mahdī is: "*wa yataḍammanu ayḍan siyar jalīlah yataʿallamu sāmiʿuhā al-firāsah minhā ḥatā lā yadkhulu ʿalayhi ḥīlah*." Muḥsin Mahdī, ed. *Kitāb Alf Laylah wa Laylah* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 56.

forcing them to correspond with a fabricated order rather than allowing them to follow their own sensuous, associative logic. Both the prologue and epilogue dramatize the narrator's compulsive, repetitive, yet fruitless efforts to wrest the "truth" from the information he's collected. He enumerates a number of possible motives for the murder (money, women, mistaken identity, suicide), only to dismiss each one for a variety of reasons.[64] Yet the more he reads, the more distant the truth begins to seem, and the greater the physical toll on his body becomes. "But I've searched [*baḥathtu*]," he affirms. "I've spent long months seeking, searching, and reading in order to know. I've smoked thousands of cigarettes sitting behind my desk, my back almost breaking, all this in order to know… but to no avail."[65] In the end he decides to simply let the documents "speak for themselves."[66] The writing of others' stories, in other words, gradually effaces the author of *Wujūh*—not only the work's frame narrator but also, by extension, its author (Khoury himself). The author is no longer an "arranger" of information; s/he merely serves as a conduit, a "medium," through whom the voices of others speak.

The narrator's obsessive and ultimately parodic quest to discover the "meaning" or "significance" of Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir's death reaches its climax in two moments from the novel's "Provisional Epilogue." In the first of these, he incorporates a trio of stories about even more brutal, gruesome, and meaningless deaths, which he (perhaps sarcastically) claims will "give our narrative some significance (*ma'nā*)" and "draw us closer to the happy endings we've come to expect."[67] "If I had wanted significance," he affirms near the start of the epilogue, "I would have started differently.

> […] I would have told you the story of the Palestinian man who committed suicide in the airport bathroom, or the story of my friend Dr. ʿAjjāj Sulaymān and his countless love affairs, or the story of our neighbor Umm Muḥammad and the way her husband died. Let me try telling these stories, in the hopes that they will give our narrative some meaning and draw us closer to the happy endings we've come to expect when we use the expression, "the sweet musk of an ending…" (*misk al-khitām*), the kind of endings that save us—and this is the most important thing—from the debilitating pessimism we all feel.[68]

The idea that any of these additional stories could appease readers' "pessimism" or provide the "sweet musk" of a happy ending is ridiculous to the point of being comical. Nearly all of the stories deal with deaths both accidental and inconsequential, people who die not in the name of a cause, not to shed light on and transform a particular reality, but just because they were caught in the dire, deathly circumstances of war. The narrator is not making an honest attempt to alleviate his readers' pessimism; he's showing them that they must confront the "meaningless" (*lā ma'nā lahā*), brutal stories that structure the reality of war.

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[64] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 12-13.

[65] Ibid., 303.

[66] Ibid., 13.

[67] Ibid., 304

[68] Ibid. The phrase "*misk al-khitām*" is most likely a reference to Qurʾān 83: 22-26: "The pious are in bliss… They drink from a pure wine, sealed, whose seal is musk," itself referring to Muḥammad, who is called the "seal of the prophets" (*khitām al-anbiyāʾ*) (Alan Jones translation).

In the first story, for example—which incorporates a great deal of Levantine Arabic—Umm Muḥammad tells (in the first person) how her husband worked as a longshoreman before the war, but was forced to abandon his job when the port became a battle zone. Upon returning to work after the war, he dies while attempting to unload a refrigerator from a truck when the appliance falls on his back and crushes him to death. "He wasn't hit by a bullet or a shell," Umm Muḥammad says. "No one abducted him, so that we could say he died as a servant of God, no, he just dropped dead."[69] To give his death some kind of significance, she tries to register him as a martyr (*shahīd*) with the militiamen who run the neighborhood, but the men reject her plea because her husband was not a fighter. "But he *is* a *shahīd*," she protests. "Say that he died in the line of duty, for his country, for the port, for whatever the devil you like, but please consider him a *shahīd* of *something*!"[70] Yet another victim who was simply caught in the crossfire of the war, Umm Muḥammad's husband has left her with eleven children and multiple low-paying jobs, and she struggles simply to keep her family fed. What "meaning" does this story bestow on *Wujūh* as a whole? If anything, it calls attention to those casualties of war who *weren't* considered martyrs, yet whose stories clamor for room in the grand narrative of the war. Umm Muḥammad's tale of her husband's death limns the even more difficult struggle of the survivor, the ones who must continue living and raising children after the dead—martyr and non-martyr alike—have gone.

The story of the Palestinian man, Muʿīn ʿAbbās, who hangs himself in the bathroom of the airport in Damascus is equally dark, and it is equally as difficult to think that this story of meaningless death could give the narrator's account of Khalīl's murder any additional significance. After being arrested in Egypt, deported to Syria, and forced to leave all his possessions behind, Muʿīn takes refuge in a mosque in the Yarmouk refugee camp outside Damascus.[71] When he shares the story of his deportation with the camp's residents, Muʿīn attracts the sympathy of his countrymen, and they scrape together enough money and forged documents to send him to Sweden. But upon arriving at the airport, Muʿīn discovers that all his documents and money have been stolen. Seeing no other way out, he hangs himself in the airport bathroom. Like dozens of other death-stories recounted in *Wujūh*, the tale of Muʿīn's tragic, desperate suicide can hardly give the book any more meaning; exiled from both his home country of Palestine and his adoptive home of Egypt, forced to abandon his Egyptian lover and all his possessions, driven to sleep on the floor of a mosque in a camp where he knows no one, robbed just at the moment where it seemed the kindness of his countrymen might finally save him—Muʿīn ʿAbbas' story, like Umm Muḥammad's, can only serves to *increase* the readers' "debilitating pessimism" toward life and the historical conditions they are currently facing, not offer the "sweet musk of an ending," as the narrator promises.

Not only the content of Muʿīn ʿAbbās' story, but also the way the narrator presents it point to his insistent preference for information over stories.[72] He contrasts Muʿīn's story with

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[69] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 330.

[70] Ibid., 331.

[71] The Yarmouk camp, located about five miles outside the center of Damascus, was established in 1957 and is home to over one hundred fifty thousand Palestinian refugees, many second-, third-, and fourth-generation. More recently, Yarmouk residents have borne and continue to bear much of the famine, bombing, and destruction of the Syrian conflict that began in 2011.

[72] The distinction between information and the story is also one extensively discussed by Walter Benjamin. See Benjamin, "The Storyteller," and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, 83-109 (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 88-89 and 158-59.

the overtly fictional ones told in the novels of Ghassan Kanafani, asserting that unlike *Rijāl fi-l-shams* (*Men in the Sun*), Muʿīn ʿAbbas' tale is "a very ordinary, straightforward story that doesn't brook any narrative fantasies [*fāntazāyā kitābiyyah*]. No flashbacks, free associations, or linguistic cadences are possible here."[73] And unlike Kanafani's characters, who are "heroes and symbols," according to the narrator, Muʿīn is "neither hero nor symbol. He's just a guy who killed himself in the bathroom of an airport."[74] To the narrator, the lack of "fantasy" is supposed to lend Muʿīn's story the credibility of truth, making it more worthwhile for his imagined readers. Where Kanafani is recognizable as a writer of fictions, the narrator wants to mark himself as a teller of true stories. As a Palestinian who *didn't* sacrifice his life for the liberation of his country, Muʿīn is all the more "significant" to Khoury, for it is precisely these non-glorified, non-military deaths—the ones that aren't deemed a form of martyrdom—that get overlooked in the writing of history and must be recuperated in literature. In the quest to grant the Palestinian struggle and its fighters' sacrifices "significance," the everyday, banal manifestations of a dire, practically unlivable Palestinian existence such as Muʿīn's get overlooked and forgotten. Yet the narrator's idea that either Muʿīn's or Umm Muḥammad's story could somehow alleviate his readers' pessimism seems utterly remote.

With these two supplementary stories having failed to give his narrative any added significance, the narrator makes a second attempt to distill some "meaning" or "moral guidance" (*maʿnā*) from his tale, this time by trying to condense its teachings into a proverb (*mathal* or *ḥikmah* in Arabic). The result, however, is only a frantic recitation of short proverbial phrases that have little or nothing to do with Khalīl's story:

> I'm a realistic man, and realistic men search and see [*yabḥath wa yarā*], and I've searched and seen, but I can't see anything. What you see is what I see: this Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir was killed. We must find a reason for his death.
>
> That is what we learned. For every cause, there is an effect, for every result, a cause, for every birth, a death.
>
> So we have learned and learned.
>
> What goes up must come down.
>
> He who digs a pit for his brother will fall into it himself.
>
> Contentment is an inexhaustible treasure.
>
> The best of speech is short and clear.
>
> Kiss the hand you cannot break, and pray that it be broken.
>
> Whoever marries our mother becomes our stepfather.
>
> When regimes change, watch your back.
>
> Moderation in all things is the best policy.
>
> Whether or not it flies, it's a goat!
>
> At a time when people are greatly concerned about other people, the cat is worried about giving birth.
>
> The funeral is elaborate, but the corpse is a dog.
>
> Your tongue is your horse: if you take care of it, it will take care of you.
>
> The defining features of Man are his heart and his tongue.
>
> When a secret becomes known to two, it becomes known to all.

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[73] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 305.

[74] Ibid.

If speech is silver, then silence is golden.
He who sets out on the path will eventually arrive.
Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et
cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et c… e… t… e… r… a…[75]

Here, the narrator essentially gives the reader pure expression (*lafẓ*) without the necessary
support of an idea or meaning (*maʿnā*). Many of these aphorisms rhyme in Arabic (*khayr al-
kalām mā qalla wa dalla*; *al-nās bi-l-nās wa-l-qiṭṭah bi-l-nafās*; *lisānak ḥuṣānak, in ṣuntahu
ṣānak*, etc.), and several are meta-aphoristic, having to do with the qualities of good speech itself
(*khayr al-kalām mā qalla wa dalla*; *lisānak ḥuṣānak, in ṣuntahu ṣānak*; *al-insan bi-aṣgharayhi
qalbuhu wa lisānuhu*; *idhā kāna al-kalām min fiḍḍah, fa-l-sukūt min dhahab*). Some proverbs
also invoke specific stories from the Lebanese folk archive, such as the saying, "Whether or not
it flies, it's a goat!" (*ʿUnzah wa law ṭārat*). This saying recalls the tale of the shepherd who was
so stubborn he insisted to a friend that the animal figure he saw in the distance was a goat, not a
goose, even after it flew away into the sky. The moral import of an entire tale, in other words, is
condensed into a few short words. Other sayings in the narrator's list are aphorisms drawn from
Biblical teachings, such as the familiar "If speech is silver, silence is golden," attributed to King
Solomon in the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions. Still others are drawn from classical
Greek philosophy and poetry, such as the famous "Moderation in all things is the best policy"
(*khayr al-umūr al-wasaṭ*).

      Yet no matter how many traditions he consults, no matter how many bodies of
knowledge he draws on, our narrator cannot make sense of Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir's murder. By the
end of this passage, his attempt to distill knowledge into a concise proverb backfires as his words
quite literally come apart at the seams. With each repetition of "et cetera" (*ilā ākhirihi*), the
words disintegrate further, ultimately breaking apart into single letters separated by a series of
ellipses.[76] The failure of the proverb in this context yields its own kind of message: war has
shattered not only the buildings and bodies of Beirut, but also the forms and modes through
which the peoples of the Middle East have traditionally made sense of experience. The war has
wrought not only physical, but also formal destruction. Here, what proverbs teach us is that
proverbs can teach us nothing.

      Khoury's narrator simultaneously longs for the proverb and recognizes it as an
impossibility. This melancholic interaction with the tradition recalls Walter Benjamin's claim
that the proverb is the fruit of the storyteller's attempts to "fashion the raw material of
experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way."[77] But even more than
this, the proverb is "an ideogram of a story," for Benjamin, "a ruin which stands on the site of an
old story and in which a moral twines about a happening like ivy around a wall."[78] Benjamin's

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[75] Ibid., 334-35. In this translation, I have relied heavily on Anis Freyha's excellent and informative *Dictionary of
Modern Lebanese Proverbs* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1974).

[76] This is as true in the Arabic script as in my English translation above:

وإلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى آخره، إلى
آ...خ...ر...ه...

Khoury, *Wujūh*, 335.

[77] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 108.

[78] Ibid.

formulation figures the proverb as *already* a belated or antiquated form—the story is gone, yet the proverb remains, as an inscrutable "ruin." His lament for the proverb in the essay "The Storyteller" is thus linked to his lament for storytelling amidst the rise of the novel. As for Khoury's lament, articulated not in criticism but in fiction, it emerges from a similar place of belatedness, articulating meaninglessness through repetition and disjuncture.

However, the aphoristic and proverbial archive from which Khoury draws in this passage is, I would argue, even more esteemed than the European traditions on which Benjamin is commenting. Derived partly from Hellenistic letters and partly from the "wisdom literature" of ancient Near Eastern cultures, the proverb is one of Arabic's oldest and most revered modes of cultural and intellectual transmission.[79] The Qurʾān itself often assumes an aphoristic tone, just as it emphasizes the importance of proverbs derived from illustrative parables. This can be seen, for example, in a frequently repeated verse, "We have propounded for men, in this Qurʾān, every kind of Parable" (*wa-la-qad ḍarabnā li-l-nās fī hādhā al-qurʾān min kull mathal*).[80] The *ḥadīth* too—the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad—assume the form of aphorisms meant to guide rightful behavior. Their condensed form facilitates both the mnemonic practice of the transmitters and the activation of these pearls of wisdom through the repeated practice of the believers. Also central to the aphoristic tradition in Arabic are the sayings of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad.[81] By the end of the tenth century, as Lutz Berger notes, aphorisms derived from religious traditions like these had combined with those attributed to great men of eras past to become "the stock-in-trade of ethically oriented *adab*-literature (books of 'good conduct and manners')."[82] Knowledge of aphoristic literature was an "indispensable skill," according to Berger, for any poet, statesman, or other court official who hoped to better his fortunes with his patron through the wise execution of rhetorical skill.

It is only in the modern era that the aphorism begins to fall away from formal literary culture in the Arabic tradition within which Khoury is working. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth, literature takes on the more political dimensions of commitment, denouncing colonial and imperial regimes in the attempt to form new national citizens and new transnational senses of identity. The rise of the novel in the Arab world meant the decline of other forms associated with guidance, instruction, and historical experience, the proverb or *ḥikmah* chief among them. What Khoury's frame narrator performs for the reader in the above passage is not only a search for answers, but a search for the *forms* in which such answers have traditionally been articulated. As the words of his proverbs gradually fall to pieces—perhaps we could say they are reduced to "piles" or "accumulations" of letters (*rukām, tarākum*)—the Lebanese Civil War is reflected as a historical occurrence from which no tidy message or instruction can be distilled. The stories in *Wujūh* are only available, to our frame narrator and to us as readers, in fragments and bits, on the tongues of various narrators. Like a contemporary author himself, the frame narrator must piece together a new mode for reckoning

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[79] For an overview of this history, see Lutz Berger, "Aphorism," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*, ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, et al. Consulted online 16 June 2016.

[80] Qurʾān 17:89, 18:54, 30:58, 39:27 (Alan Jones translation).

[81] For an introduction to and translation of many of these deeply revered sayings, see ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib et al., *A Treasury of Virtues: Sayings, Sermons and Teachings of ʿAlī Al-Qāḍī Al-Quḍāʾi: With the One Hundred Proverbs Attributed to Al-Jāḥiẓ*, trans. Tahera Qutbuddin, Library of Arabic Literature (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

[82] Berger, "Aphorism."

with history from the ruins of pre-modern modes of transmission. In this, he refracts an element of Khoury's own identity: the writer facing community and catastrophe, searching for a form.

The narrator's failure thus reflects Khoury's own answer to the problem or anxiety of authorship in the postcolonial Arab world. The "usefulness" of *Wujūh* lies not in its ability to distill significance and moral edification into the tidy verbal unit of a proverb, but in its *refusal* to instrumentalize significance, its openness to the voices of others. At a time when documentary film, journalism, and photography have replaced fantastical tales as the privileged forms of historical reckoning, Khoury hopes that the storytelling practiced by *Wujūh's* frame narrator (and its author) might reclaim truth as something communally negotiated, rather than imposed from above. In erasing the author, he hopes to make the voices of a community emerge.

Fāṭimah and Khalīl, Testimony and Torture

Thus far, we have seen how the disillusioned fighter Fahd Badr al-Dīn and the failed investigative journalist narrator in *Wujūh* refract different elements of Khoury's liminal political and authorial position. Each of these figures also offers an implicit critique of what I have referred to as truth-telling media: the documentary film and the newspaper. Having seen Khoury's implicit critique of these media, however, the question remains as to what medium, what language, will offer the author and his community a way to grapple with the trauma of war. The loss of Palestine, and its aftermath in the Lebanese Civil War, have laid waste to the delicate mechanics of reference, torn the tenuous cords that conventionally weave remembered experiences into chronological narratives. Revolutionary rhetoric, moreover, has perverted the language of liberation and change by using it to paper over atrocity. In response to this situation, a new language becomes necessary. In the monologues that Khalīl speaks to the character Fāṭimah Fakhrū, Khoury attempts to assemble such a language, crafting a form of Arabic speech that, like Walīd Masʿūd's monologue, operates at the limits of sense and syntax, governed instead by the fragmentary logic of testimony.

It is important to remember, however, that Khalīl does not speak these monologues directly within the narrative of *Wujūh*. Rather, they are doubly mediated within the text, first remembered by Fāṭimah, and second transcribed by the frame narrator in the course of his investigation. Just as Khalīl's corpse carries the weight and stench of all the unburied, unmourned bodies that have accumulated over the course of the war, so his testimony, his language, must carry the losses that have remained unspoken. Fāṭimah and, to a lesser extent, the narrator, thus occupy the paradoxical position of the witness to traumatic testimony. "Since the testimony cannot be simply relayed, repeated or reported by another without thereby losing its function as a testimony," Shoshana Felman writes, "the burden of the witness […] is a radically unique, noninterchangeable and solitary burden."[83] Yet even within this solitude, the very nature of testimony paradoxically also asks the its witness to transmit it to a wider audience or community. "The *appointment* to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak *for* other and *to* others."[84] Like the other characters and authors examined in this dissertation, then, Fāṭimah too occupies a liminal space between solitude and community—the solitary burden that Khalīl's testimony has imposed on her, and the imperative to communicate this testimony to others, to bring light an otherwise

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[83] Felman, *Testimony*, 3.

[84] Ibid.

occluded violence. Fāṭimah and Khalīl meet as two survivors, and his language articulates a series of losses for which Fāṭimah previously had no words. With his death, Fāṭimah must carry the burden of this language alone, and even though she "falls silent" at the end of her chapter,[85] Khalīl's words live on in the narrator's account—the novel *al-Wujūh al-Bayḍāʾ* itself. The burden of Khalīl's testimony passes from Fāṭimah to the frame narrator, and from the frame narrator ultimately to the reader herself.

A poor Kurdish migrant from Southern Lebanon, "calamity" (*maṣībah*) is Fāṭimah's constant refrain. "What's this, another calamity?" she says, in colloquial Arabic, in the chapter's first line. "From the day we were born, it's been nothing but calamities."[86] And later: "Calamities, as if calamities were following me everywhere…"[87] Indeed, from the details we can gather about her life, it does seem to have been little more than a never-ending series of misfortunes. Her mother died when she was very young, and when she turned twelve, her father brought her to Beirut, uprooting her from a village she only ever refers to as "there" (*hunāk*).[88] She begins work as a housemaid for a wealthy family in the Christian neighborhood of Ashrafiyyah and uses forgetting to paper over her grief for her family. When Maḥmūd Fakhrū, the building caretaker, approaches her wealthy patron Mitrī al-Ḥalū about arranging a marriage, Fāṭimah has barely reached the age of sixteen. "Listen, my girl," Mitrī says to her, "you are an orphan and this is for the best. You're not a little girl anymore, you're sixteen now, a young woman."[89] And so Fāṭimah moves from the calamity of uprooting to that of an unwanted marriage. Soon she has five children, whom her husband beats almost as much as he beats her. One of these children, their eldest son ʿAlī, Maḥmūd beats so fiercely in the head that the boy suffers disabling neural damage. He begins acting strangely: he fondles his brothers and sisters, beats the neighborhood children, eats pepper compulsively. Eventually, Maḥmūd leaves the boy unaccompanied on the roof of their building, and ʿAlī falls to his death.

Yet ʿAlī's death is not the final calamity Fāṭimah will suffer. "What is this calamity?" she repeats again later in the chapter. "It's Maḥmūd who brought this upon us."[90] When the war begins in earnest, Maḥmūd is kidnapped by a group of young men, who only release him after the intercession of Mitrī's son Fādī, who is apparently well-respected among the Christian Phalangist militias. The war initiates a series of new dislocations for Fāṭimah, first to the Christian neighborhood of al-Qanṭarī, where Fādī appoints Maḥmūd to watch over a building he owns, then to a new house in the district of Mūṣayṭbah, where Fāṭimah oversees yet another building while Maḥmūd stays behind in Qanṭarī. Eventually, Maḥmūd marries another woman— Bahiyyah—whom he meets in Qanṭarī, adding yet another calamity to Fāṭimah's life. When Maḥmūd eventually divorces Bahiyyah, her sons come after him, accusing him of having stolen six gold bracelets and a series of other valuables from Bahiyyah. Eventually, the sons brutally

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[85] The narrator describes how, after her experience with the interrogators, she "rarely ever speaks," and when her employer Sitt Ilhām asks her why, she simply shrugs. Khoury, *Wujūh*, 152.

[86] "*Shū hā al-maṣībah? Maṣībah jadīdah, min yawm mā khuliqnā, wa-maṣāʾib.*" Ibid., 90.

[87] *Al-maṣāʾib, wa-l-maṣāʾib tatbaʿunī.* Ibid., 91.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 94.

[90] Ibid., 105.

murder Maḥmūd in front of his and Fāṭimah's children in Mūṣayṭbah, "filling him with bullets and blood," as Fāṭimah describes it.[91]

Only after all of these calamities, all of these violent uprootings and losses, does Fāṭimah meet Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir. Though she doesn't know it, Khalīl has also had to grieve for his son Aḥmad, a professional boxer who enlisted with a militia against his parents' will. The boy is killed in battle, and the militias proclaim him a martyr, showering Khalīl and his wife Nūḥā with posters that herald the boy as a hero who sacrificed his life for the cause. But the images eventually drive Khalīl into madness. At first, he becomes obsessed with the posters commemorating Aḥmad's death and continually reproduces them to hang on the city walls. Several years later, he takes the opposite tack and begins obsessively erasing his son's face from all of the posters and newspaper articles where it had appeared after his death. Finally, Khalīl starts painting over the faces in *all* photographs with white-out, first those of his family, then those in the newspaper, then those in the martyr posters on the walls of Beirut. He becomes a wanderer, forever tearing down posters, barely ever returning home, eating, or bathing, obsessed with whiteness and erasure. It is at this point in his life that he encounters Fāṭimah. They are two survivors, struggling to articulate the catastrophes that have befallen them in words. By the end of the chapter, Fāṭimah has woven Khalīl's experience into the calamitous tapestry of her own life: "Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir, this man whose name is Khalīl Jābir, he's a new calamity. What's all this calamity. My calamities with men. All the men I've known are a calamity, and the last of them was Khalīl."[92]

Before his death, however, Khalīl was not a calamity, but more of a curiosity for Fāṭimah. She sees him wrapped in his worn, grey overcoat, wearing a pith helmet and carrying a bucket of quicklime. She sees him variously tearing down posters and painting over the walls, or else sleeping on the sidewalk, wrapped in his coat. She offers him tea and some bits of food, which he accepts without disclosing very much about himself. Indeed, whenever Fāṭimah attempts to engage him in conventional conversation, Khalīl jumps directly into his form of associative storytelling, defying the unspoken rules of discourse and exchange. When Fāṭimah asks what his name is during their first encounter, for example, Khalīl tells her instead about his mother, al-Ḥājjah Ṣubḥiyyah, who died on the hajj in Mecca. "She went on the hajj and didn't come back."[93] Eventually, he had to bring the butcher to slaughter the lamb he had intended as a celebration of the Eid and of his mother's return. His son Aḥmad stood next to him, as the violence done to the lamb literalized the loss of his mother: "Abū Khālid leans over, inflates the body of the lamb, and begins to skin it, and Aḥmad and I, and little Aḥmad is crying, and Ḥajjah Ṣubḥiyyah didn't come back."[94]

In their next encounter, Khalīl's language becomes even more associative, sensuous, and abstract when Fāṭimah asks him why he is tearing posters down from the city walls. The monologue is a fantastical retelling of his son's death, and perhaps for this very reason, it invites Fāṭimah to form closer ties with Khalīl, articulating as it does the unbelievable reality of a parent forced to grieve his or her child:

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[91] Ibid., 142-43.

[92] Ibid., 144.

[93] Ibid., 106-107.

[94] Ibid., 107.

The white sheets, he told her that the bed had to be painted white, and we'll put a white sheet on it, then we'll cover ourselves with the white sheet and sleep. We'll pull the sheet up to our eyes and all we'll see is the light that has scattered into white dots that spread to every place. And he said that he would buy a white sheet and sleep in it alone, and Aḥmad would sleep by his side. Aḥmad is small, he runs behind me, and I am behind him, I carry him up high he flies and flies, Aḥmad is a bird flying, a bird flying up high, there, higher than there, a man came, two men came, three men came, a thousand men came, a million men came, the man came and raised his gun and aimed it up high and fired. The fire flies and Aḥmad flies, the fire flies around him, he flees from it, he turns and turns, then collides with it, the fire swallows him and he becomes the fire. The feathers burn, the bird burns, I burn and the white sheet.

I am white, I want a white sheet to sleep in, and on top of the white sheet a white blanket, and the lightbulb in the middle of the room, I look through the white blanket and see the light scattering, the light is white spots. My teeth are white, and the walls, the walls are white.

He leans against the curb and talks endlessly, and I listen to him, and the war has ended, and he is alone, and I am alone.[95]

The monologue blends reported speech with first-person narration in Arabic. The "he" whose speech is being described quickly becomes a "we," only for the "he" to return shortly thereafter. Soon, however, the "he" and "we" are replaced by an "I," a first-person voice that describes in breathless terms the death of Aḥmad, who in this version of the tale is figured as a burning bird, assassinated either by one or a million men. The first paragraph cuts off in the middle of a sentence: "the bird burns, I burn, and the white sheet" (*al-ʿuṣfūr yaḥtariq, ana aḥtariq wa-l-sharshaf al-abyaḍ*). Khalīl processes the experience of losing his son by expressing a desire to engulf everything around him in whiteness. His obsession with the "white sheet" also presages his own death: in a later chapter, when the forensic pathologist inspects Khalīl's corpse amidst the garbage piles, he "turns the corpse over onto its stomach and inspects the back. He stands up again, steps back, squats down once more, turns the corpse over one more time, and finally covers it with the *white sheet* [*al-sharshaf al-abyaḍ*]."[96] Although it is abstract and fantastical, Khalīl's language speaks to Fāṭimah, and the two form a paradoxical bond over their shared loneliness as survivors ("…the war is over, and he is alone, and I am alone…"). Given the unbelievable series of catastrophes Fāṭimah has had to suffer, the scene Khalīl describes does not seem so fantastical to Fāṭimah. Her unreal experience has made his unreal narration believable.

The processing that Khalīl and Fāṭimah undertake together is not decided upon in advance, nor does it take any recognizable narrative (or for that matter, poetic) form. Khalīl's dreamlike, broken language speaks to Faṭimah in an unconventional, unexpected way, obliquely echoing her own life of calamity. Fāṭimah continues to engage Khalīl each time she sees him, asking him questions to which he responds only indirectly. The next time she meets him, she asks again why he is whitewashing the walls. In lieu of an answer, Khalīl takes an eraser from the pocket of his coat and shows it to Fāṭimah. He tells her that "they" are going to give him a much bigger eraser, and when Fāṭimah asks who "they" are, Khalīl's language spins off yet again:

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[95] Ibid., 121.

[96] Ibid., 189-90.

You don't know, none of you knows, a huge eraser, but it doesn't only erase what's written on the walls, it erases everything, I put it against the wall like this and the wall disappears, it doesn't crumble, there is no noise, no voices, no dust, no rubble, no stones. I put it against the wall and the wall disappears on its own, it disappears like this as you can see, it disappears as you can see. We go out, we are a thousand men and a thousand women, we go out, a thousand men and a thousand women going out, and every one is carrying a giant eraser and we erase, we erase the wall and the houses and the faces. There is nothing left, everything is disappearing, you disappear and I disappear and the city disappears and the pictures disappear, everything disappears and becomes white, white like the whiteness of eggwhite, white like the whites of your eyes, white like white. Everything is being erased, everything falling just like this, as though it weren't falling […] And now I'm carrying the eraser, look, you're not seeing clearly, your eyes don't see clearly, but I see, I see everything. […] [The soldiers] don't know, and you don't know. No one knows the truth, and I don't know the truth. We'll be a thousand men and a thousand women, can you imagine our numbers, and we'll erase, and we'll die. Everything dies, it's as though we're dying, as though everything were dying, as though everything.[97]

Khalīl makes a series of claims regarding truth and knowledge in this passage. He insists that only he "knows," and that neither Fāṭimah nor anyone else can truly "know." Although he begins with the question of "knowledge" (*anti lā taʿrifīna… kullukum lā taʿrifūna*), he then progresses to "sight" (*kama tarīn… unẓurī, anti lā taraīn bi-wuḍūḥ, ʿaynāki lā tariyān bi-wuḍūḥ, ammā anā fa-arā, arā kull shayʾ*), and finally ends with "truth" (*la aḥad yaʿraf al-ḥaqīqah, wa anā lā aʿraf al-ḥaqīqah*), recalling Fāṭimah's earlier assertion that "maybe Khalīl is right"—literally, maybe the "truth is with him" (*rubbamā al-ḥāqq maʿahu*). Khalīl's language claims a kind of truth that is inaccessible in other discourses, one which relies on repetition, sound, and rhythm. Something in this monologue speaks to Fāṭimah Fakhrū, located not in Khalīl's ability to capture reality by mirroring it, but in his very *refusal* to do so, in his ability to *erase* his language almost as soon as he has uttered it. "White like the whiteness of eggwhite, white like the whites of your eyes, white like white" (*Abyaḍ mithl bayāḍ al-bayḍāh, mithl bayāḍ al-ʿuyūn, mithl al-abyaḍ*); "Everything is dying, as though we were dying, as though everything were dying, as though everything" (*Kull shayʾ yamūt, kaʾannanā namūt, kaʾanna kull shayʾ yamūt, kaʾanna kull shayʾ*).[98] The sentences cut off before they can end, incompletely repeating similar phrases. In contrast with the way newspapers, martyr-posters, and documentary films lay claim to truth, Khalīl speaks a language that contains its own effacement, whose assertions and descriptions trail off into senselessness ("white like white;" "as if everything"), but never claim authority or singularity. "What the testimony does not offer," to return to Shoshana Felman's words, "is… a *completed statement*, a totalizable account of those events. In the testimony, language is in process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion, as the constatation of a verdict or the self-transparency of knowledge."[99] For Fāṭimah as for other parents forced to grieve their children in *Wujūh*, Khalīl's defiance of make sense offers a palliative to the martyr-posters and missives that hasten to

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[97] Ibid., 139.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Felman, *Testimony*, 5 (emphasis added).

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exploit an unthinkable occurrence by assigning it a singular meaning. What Khalīl offers Fāṭimah, in other words, is an alternative language in which to mourn not only her son, but her city, family, and self as she once knew them.

Khalīl's monologues, as Fāṭimah remembers them, stands in stark contrast with the account of them she gives to the militiamen who detain, interrogate, and beat her in connection with Khalīl's murder. In a monologue peppered with colloquial expressions, Fāṭimah tells the interrogators "everything she knows" about Khalīl Aḥmad Jābir, but what she says contains clues and insights not into who the killer might be, but into what Khalīl represented for her. There is thus a marked disconnect between the kind of "testimony" the interrogators seek (intelligence, clues, possible motives, etc.) and the kind of "testimony" Fāṭimah offers (reproductions of Khalil's impressionistic monologues), as Khoury again shores up the opposing meanings embedded within a single word (*shahādah*):

> "I swear to God, I don't know anything. Yes, I saw him, I saw him several times and spoke to him, and he told me, he told me that he would erase the walls, and I believed him, by God I believed him. I don't know why, but I believed him. What have I done wrong? I didn't kill him, you can't be serious [*hal yumkin yaʿnī*], yes, yes, he told me all those things and more. […] I thought of Maḥmūd […] I remembered Maḥmūd and said, this man is like him, and I pitied him. No, no, he didn't speak very much, yes he would say, but I didn't believe him, the truth is I didn't believe the tale [*ḥikāyah*] about the thousand men and the thousand women, those are just stories [*qiṣaṣ*] and not to be believed. But I said maybe, everything is possible these days, who would have believed that what has happened would have happened, but it happened just the same, no one believes, and things happen, and he died. […] No, no, he didn't have anything to do with it, he didn't tell me about anyone, the thousand men, no I don't know I don't know. He said a thousand men and a thousand women, but I don't know anything else, I swear I don't know anything else. […]
> "I don't know anything, sir [*yā sayyidnā*].
> "Of course you're right, sir."
> And our sir gave her a condescending look. He stood up and struck her. She cried and wailed.[100]

The passage outwardly criticizes the petty power of the interrogators, who insist that Fāṭimah ingratiate herself to them but beat her anyway, regardless of what she says. They seize on her repeated mention of the "thousand men and thousand women"—little more than a figure of speech for Khalīl—thinking this might be a potential clue, perhaps evidence that Khalīl was organizing an insurgent militia. Moreover, in this passage Fāṭimah both reiterates and refutes the frame narrator's belief that fictional tales (*qiṣaṣ, ḥikāyāt*) aren't worth anyone's attention in a context of war. Although she begins with the conventional knowledge that stories are "not to be believed" (*lā tuṣaddaq*), she soon concedes that, in light of "everything that has happened," perhaps stories *are* worthy of our attention. From the loss of her family and the uprooting from her home village, to her forced marriage and the deaths of her eldest son and husband, Fāṭimah has had to accept a series of unbelievable, unthinkable realities as a result of the war. They are

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[100] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 145-46.

calamities more likely to appear in a fantastical tale than in real life, yet "they happened just the same." Who is to say, in light of these calamities, that Khalīl was not speaking a kind of truth?

The three passages thus stage the many possible meanings that inhere in the notion of "testimony," and the violence that can result when these meanings are confused. In their quest for information, the interrogators miss the experiential quality of Khalīl's language. What Fāṭimah "knows" from Khalīl cannot be quantified or decoded the way clues are followed in a police file; she is a "witness" not in the legal, but in the psychological sense, as she has been silently asked to listen to Khalīl's testimony and bear it forward (in time) and outward (to other listeners).

Conclusion: From Martyr to Witness

For Fāṭimah as for the many other narrators in *Wujūh*, Khalīl ultimately does serve as a "martyr," or *shahīd*, then, but in a different sense than the one used by the militias and fighters on posters and gravestones, in newspapers and propaganda films. Khalīl is not only a "martyr," the sense so frequently abused by every side in the Lebanese Civil War, but also a "witness" to the smaller, more personal but no less catastrophic deaths resulting from the war. His death allows a multiplicity of otherwise suppressed, silenced or effaced voices to emerge on the page. While he was alive, he gave voice to deaths that seemed unspeakable, including that of his son Aḥmad and, by proxy, that of Fāṭimah's son ʿAlī. And now that Khalīl has been found dead, the frame narrator's investigative process inadvertently gives the novel's other narrators the opportunity to verbally, narratively grapple with the traumas they have experienced. Meditating on Khalīl Jābir's death allows the living to recognize themselves as survivors. This is precisely what the interrogators, with their purely legal, military understanding of testimony, cannot grasp, and what the reader, in turn, is asked to witness.

If for Jabra the return to the language of childhood offered a partial solution to the dilemma of the author severed from roots, community, and land, for Khoury the language of testimony is a way out of this same impasse. At the heart of both authors' work is the loss of Palestine, a catastrophe that shattered not only community, identity, and history, but also the possibilities available to Arabic literary writing itself. For Jabra, the loss of Palestine is synonymous with the loss of childhood, and this loss represents the beginning of his attempts to transform himself into a productive, exilic intellectual, fomenting a revolution both spiritual and political. Yet in *Walīd Masʿūd*, we find him simultaneously framing (and thereby mocking) this sense of self and plumbing the depths of his childhood memories in search of a new unity between land, language, and self. Khoury, meanwhile, grapples with what he has elsewhere called the "continuous Nakbah,"[101] the way the experiences of uprooted Palestinian refugees in Lebanon intertwined with those of poor, disenfranchised Lebanese throughout the Lebanese Civil War. Reclaiming the literary text as a contrapuntal space distinct from other, supposedly objective media, he attempts to carve out a middle ground in which support for the Palestinian people need not necessarily be identical to support for the PLO, LNM, or any other political group. He attends to the liminal spaces between commitment and doubt, truth and fiction, survivor and witness.

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[101] In this much later article, Khoury calls the Nakbah "a continuous tragedy, a catastrophe without borders in space or limits in time." Elias Khoury, "Rethinking the *Nakba*," 262.

Faced with a crisis of language and authorship, both Khoury and Jabra refract themselves and their voices through the novel as if through a prism, crafting polyphonic texts more like archives than the detective novels their frame narrators set out to write. Through the self-reflexivity and doubt of these frame narrators, they offer a commentary on authorship itself in a context of catastrophe, repainting the author not as an all-knowing cultural authority, but as a self-questioning investigator in search of new languages, much like the community of whom and to whom he wishes to speak. In this way, like the other novels of investigation under consideration here, *Wujūh* and *Walīd Masʿūd* affirm the continued importance of a textual reckoning with history, even as they confront a crisis of signification brought on by the Nakbah. Through the limit-languages of childhood and testimony, they press at the boundaries of sense in Arabic, transforming the novel not into a narrative rendering, but an archival collecting of experience. Like other authors in the Arab world who mobilize investigation as a reflection on education and estrangement, they negotiate the distance between author and community by framing a series of used-up, worn-out, pulverized languages, crafting experimental "limit-languages," and allowing themselves to disappear into the voices of others.

Chapter 3:

The Words Have Lost Their Features:
Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd's It's Happening Now in Egypt *and the Aesthetics of Confronation*

"True seriousness is the destruction of all false seriousness."
--Mikhail Bakhtin[1]

With the 1977 novel *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān* (It's Happening Now in Egypt), by Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd,[2] we move away from the limit-languages of Khoury's *Wujūh* and Jabra's *Walīd*, and into what I am calling al-Qaʿīd's "aesthetics of confrontation." Set on the eve of President Richard Nixon's historic and controversial visit to the Middle East, al-Qaʿīd's text paints a polyvocal portrait of life in the Egyptian village of al-Ḍahriyyah, the author's natal home in the Nile Delta province of al-Buḥayrah. Like *Walīd* and *Wujūh*, *Yaḥduth* explores the author's ethically fraught relationships with both his audience (the readers of his text) and the objects of his representation (the characters within that text). In the case of *Yaḥduth*, however, these characters are not educated intellectuals from among the Baghdad intelligentsia, nor are they the everyday citizens of Beirut coping with the violence of the Civil War. Rather, al-Qaʿīd's characters include, on the one hand, the peasants (*fallāḥīn*) and migrant workers (*ʿummāl al-tarāḥīl*)[3] who populate the Egyptian countryside (and who speak in colloquial, often epigrammatic Arabic), and on the other, the wealthy landowners, policemen, and salaried public officials who exploit and mistreat the peasants for their own profit (and who speak the "eloquent literary Arabic" of the professional class).[4] Also among the characters in this novel is a native son-cum-narrator also named Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd, who was born in al-Ḍahriyyah but educated in Cairo, and who returns to his village to investigate the disappearance of a poor farmworker named al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis.[5]

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[1] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 312.

[2] The author's full name is Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd. The family name is sometimes given as "al-Quʿayd," (specifically in the Library of Congress), but the author himself usually signs as Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd. See Stone, "'Mature' Arabic Novel," 315.

[3] For more on these informal, precariously employed migrant workers, see James Toth, *Rural labor movements in Egypt and their impact on the state, 1961-1992* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1999). For a literary depiction on their lives and struggles, see Yusuf Idris, *al-Ḥarām* [The Sinners] (Cairo: Maktabat Gharīb, 1977).

[4] See the chapter narrated by the town doctor, comically titled, "*Bi-l-ʿarabī al-faṣīḥ amlā al-ṭabīb taqrīrahu*" [The Doctor dictates his report in eloquent literary Arabic], al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 29. I analyze the specificities of the Doctor's language at greater length below.

[5] For more on the figure of the native son-cum-narrator in the Egyptian village novel, see Samah Selim's *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880-1985* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2004). Selim refers to this figure as "the divided self" (87) and describes him as a (usually first-person, usually male) narrator who sets out to narrate the village in which he was born, yet realizes he has been completely alienated from it, often because of his physical relocation to Cairo for schooling, and the intellectual and spiritual acculturation that attends such schooling. Also key to this process of alienation is the narrator's exposure to a variety of cosmopolitan media (novels, films, plays, and magazines) that stand in stark contrast to the aesthetic forms that characterize village life (oral epics, proverbs and sayings, popular drama). Selim traces the presence and evolution of this trope (departure, return, alienation) through a series of Egyptian novels, from the early romanticism of Haykal's *Zaynab* (1913) through the fragmentary narration of ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's *Ayyām al-insān al-sabʿah* [The Seven Days of Man] (1969).

Al-Qaʿīd's metafiction is thus much more explicit than either Jabra's or Khoury's: the frame narrator of his novel is not a self-questioning sociologist composing a "study" or an aspiring journalist conducting an investigation, but an author-character writing a novel, who shares his name with the biographical author himself. Moreover, al-Qaʿīd's frame narrator does more than merely acknowledge the presence of a reader outside his text; he openly confronts the reader in the novel's opening lines:

> As soon as your eyes fall on the first words of this line, and until they reach the final words at the bottom of the last page, a relationship will have been established between us, one that revolves around a novel that we are creating together about what is happening in Egypt now. I don't know how fast you read, but I am certain that in the time it takes you to read this novel, a great deal will happen in the other Egypt, the Egypt of the countryside and the *fallāḥīn*—so much, in fact, that it would require many volumes to be recorded in writing, and millions of mouths and tongues to be told.[6]

From the very beginning then, al-Qaʿīd acknowledges the reader's role as a co-creator of meaning in his novel,[7] dismissing the idea that the author must always be the ultimate authority on the significance of his novel. Yet even as the first sentence of this prologue invites the reader into a "relationship" with the author-narrator, its second sentence assumes certain things about her social positionality: the narrator refers to the "Egypt of the countryside and the *fallāḥīn*" as "the *other* Egypt," implying that he anticipates a reader with metropolitan as opposed to rural origins. The author-narrator then confronts the reader with the necessary partiality of the text she's about to read: in the time it takes to read *one* story about "the other Egypt," so many others will transpire that it would take many volumes to record them in writing and "millions of mouths and tongues" to tell them aloud.

In his concern for partiality and completeness, al-Qaʿīd's author narrator does resemble the frame narrators of the other novels of investigation we've seen thus far: he feels overwhelmed and defeated by the task he has set himself, which is, as the novel's title suggests, to record the entirety of "what's happening now in Egypt." Yet his dialogue with the reader is not an apology for failing to solve the mystery he is about to present (as in Khoury's and Jabra's novels of investigation) so much as it is a reminder about the even harsher realities continually transpiring outside of the text. The author-narrator does not allow the reader to approach reading his novel as a pleasurable escape or diversion from reality. He is not interested in creating an intriguing prologue that will draw the reader's interest, which is why he titles this prologue "Instead of a Stimulating Introduction" (*Badalan min al-muqaddimah al-muthīrah*). It is also why, in the title to the novel's second chapter, he promises to "surrender his most important weapons to the reader" (*al-Muʾallif yusallimu li-l-qāriʾ ahamm asliḥatihi*), renouncing the conventional tools through which authors create suspense to sustain their readers' interest:

> The novel's introduction was normal. Now it is time for the most important methods used by novel-traders in our time, and there are many such methods. To secure the reader's

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[6] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 9.

[7] I borrow this phrase from Bran Nicol: "But postmodern writing challenges us because it requires its reader to be an active co-creator of meaning rather than a passive consumer." Bran Nicol, *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), xiv.

interest in my novel and ensure that he runs along breathlessly behind the words, I should rely on these tools, safeguarding one shocking surprise in a hidden corner until just before the end. But for a number of reasons, I'm announcing my renunciation of all the weapons used by novel-writers, traditional and modernist both.[8]

The author-narrator, in other words, renounces the "cunning" outlook on authorship that al-Kharrāṭ associates with the old or traditional sensibility in novel-writing.[9] He will not withhold the details of the novel's main event—al-Dubbaysh's disappearance—in order to create an intriguing novel. The narrator insists, therefore, that al-Dubbaysh did not escape from prison and mysteriously disappear, nor is it true that he "never existed in the first place," as his fabricated police file would have it. Rather, he died in police custody after a great deal of abuse:

> Normally, the conventions of the profession would dictate that I should conceal the fact of the farmworker's death. It would be much more interesting if I told you about his mysterious nighttime disappearance and we followed the adventures of the Officer's search (*baḥth*) for him everywhere, only to discover in the end that he had died. The reader would ask, "How did this happen?" And in order to respond, we'd begin a series of new chapters guaranteed to be read. But I've disclosed my secret and exposed my plan. Still, I don't want you to forget about the farmworker's death. In fact, I'll remind you of it every step of the way throughout this novel.[10]

The author-narrator is, in short, more interested in confronting the reader with the violent realities *outside* the text than allowing her to escape *within* the text. While we are reading this fictional tale of state violence, corruption, and death, similar events will transpire that, if we weren't so absorbed in the intellectual task of reading, we might have perhaps had a hand in preventing. In al-Qaʿīd's mind, to transform al-Dubbaysh's death into a disappearance, and to use this disappearance as the premise for an intriguing mystery novel "guaranteed to be read," would be to exploit the farmworker after his death in a manner not so distinct from way he was exploited by greedy landowners in life. It would be, as the author-narrator writes in the novel's last chapter, "to transform the corpses of the destitute into cars and bottles of whiskey"[11]—to turn a profit from the suffering of the poor by transforming their stories into village fiction.

The version of rural life that al-Qaʿīd's author-narrator presents is thus not the Romantic, pastoral, nationalist one readers might encounter in earlier Egyptian village novels, such as Muḥammad Ḥusayn Haykal's *Zaynab* (1913) or Tawfīq al-Ḥakim's *Return of the Spirit* (*ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ*, 1933), nor does it take the same heroic, revolutionary stance as village novels of the era following the Officers Revolt in 1952, such as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sharqāwī's *The Land* (*al-Arḍ*, 1954) or Fatḥī Ghānim's *The Mountain* (*al-Jabal*, 1956). Rather, al-Qaʿīd's take on village life is exaggerated and absurd, mocking and deeply satirical. It parodies the languages of the self-interested landowners, bureaucrats, and local officials in the village's upper echelons, yet it is equally as critical of its impoverished peasant characters. The fallāḥīn, al-Qaʿīd points out,

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[8] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 15.

[9] al-Kharrāṭ, *Ḥassāsiyyah*, 9. See my analysis in the Introduction to this dissertation.

[10] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 16.

[11] Ibid., 170.

participate in their own victimization because their passion for eloquent, playful speech renders them incapable of seeing beyond such speech to the manipulation at its core.[12]

Most importantly for my purposes in this chapter, however, al-Qaʿīd also does not propose that the literary author's use of written language is any less exploitative than that of the police, the greedy landowners, or any of the other bureaucratic professionals whose languages he mocks in *Yaḥduth*. By inserting himself into the novel's diegesis as an author-narrator, he explores the author's complicity in the intricately intertwined operations of writing and power. Like the Town Doctor, the Village Chairman, and the Respected Officer who sweep al-Dubbaysh's death under the rug of bureaucratic documentation, novelists too—and particularly those who write about the Egyptian countryside—conceal and withhold truths from their readers in order to ensure interest in and consumption of their novels. They exploit the written word to transform the suffering of the impoverished *fallāḥīn* into profit and personal gain. As Samah Selim has amply demonstrated, the Egyptian countryside and the *fallāḥīn* have been at the center of the Egyptian national imaginary throughout the twentieth century.[13] Journalists, authors, and sociologists have alternately romanticized the *fallāḥīn* as the purest source of an idyllic, earth-bound Egyptian identity and lambasted them as backward-minded, teeming masses hindering the necessary process of modernization. al-Qaʿīd's metafiction intervenes in the contested semantic territory of the Egyptian village to explore the delicate terrain between representation and exploitation—between the committed author's fervent desire to decry the injustice of a corrupt bureaucratic system, and his reliance on the written word, the very same tool on which that system's existence depends.

Yet for all its ruthless satire and bitter irony about class inequality in Egypt, its scathing criticism of Sadat-era subservience to American capitalist models, and its metafictional rejection of literary language itself, *Yaḥduth* does not reject the novel form altogether. On the contrary, as I argue in this chapter, prose fiction is essential to al-Qaʿīd's overall project as an author, and to *Yaḥduth* in particular, because it enables precisely the kind of critical distancing from eloquent language, with its power to manipulate and sway, that he seeks. In its persistent satire of the many linguistic strata that saturate village life—including that of "village fiction," which had hardened into a genre by the time of al-Qaʿīd's writing—*Yaḥduth* elaborates an implicit poetics similar to Mikhail Bakhtin's explicit poetics of the novel in "Discourse in the Novel." That is, through heteroglossia, and particularly through the polyvocal narration enabled by the trope of the police investigation, Qaʿīd brackets the eloquent languages of state and citizen alike, laying out instead "a critical, qualified relationship" to language, as well as, to paraphrase Bakhtin, his own incomplete commitment to any given language.[14] The "search" (*baḥth*) undertaken by the author-narrator in *Yaḥduth* thus becomes a search not only for the missing protagonist al-

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[12] Here I am breaking with Stone's argument that, "in the world of *Yahduth*, poor equals good and rich equals bad," and that "the poor, in this work as in [al-Qaʿīd's] others, are almost without exception heroic, even if he adjusts the conventional definition of that word." Stone, "Mature Arabic Novel," 310-11. I will argue below that Al-Qaʿīd satirizes the language of his poor characters just as much as he does that of the rich.

[13] See Selim, *Rural Imaginary*.

[14] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 285. It should be noted that al-Qaʿīd's poetics of the novel differs from Bakhtin's in one important way: where Bakhtin tends to idealize the subversive power of the narrative forms proper to the "folk" (the "low," the "unofficial," the "carnivalesque," etc.), al-Qaʿīd brings even these forms under his critical lens, employing the very specific colloquial Egyptian of the Nile Delta in order to mock—not laud—its political power. I address this important distinction between Bakhtin's explicit and al-Qaʿīd's implicit poetics of the novel at greater length below.

Dubbaysh ʿArāyis, but for a new literary language characterized by two prominent features. First, this new language rejects all the "readymade" plotlines, character types, and political slogans characteristic of ideological socialist realism in the Egyptian novel—all words that, in Qaʿīd's estimation, have "lost their features, like piasters worn down from use."[15] Second, this new language refuses to accept state-inflicted violence or death as "ordinary" or "everyday" (*ʿādiyy*) occurrences, and instead attempts to shock an inured reading public into outrage, replacing the rhetoric of the *ʿādiyy* with an aesthetics of confrontation and creating scenes that deliberately stage the disconnect between authorial expectation and *fallāḥī* existence, representational assumption and lived reality.

Perhaps it is these features of al-Qaʿīd's work that led al-Kharrāṭ to characterize it as exemplary of a "new realist" trend (*tiyyār wāqiʿī jadīd*) in sixties-generation fiction.[16] That is, although it continues to use devices and forms associated with the conventional realism of the old or traditional sensibility, al-Qaʿīd's prose nevertheless "stands in opposition to traditional power" and "interrogates prevailing value systems" through its ironic stylization of "documentary language, political allegory, and the language of political publications."[17] Where al-Kharrāṭ only gestures toward the "new realistic" aspiration in al-Qaʿīd's fiction in *Ḥassāsiyyah*, I aim to elaborate the specific features of al-Qaʿīd's poetics of the novel through a sustained reading of heteroglossia and what I have called the "aesthetics of confrontation" in *Yaḥduth*.

Surrounded by what he perceived "worn-out words," and "readymade molds" for novel writing (particularly the socialist realism associated with an "increasingly ossified" and dogmatic literary Left establishment in Egypt),[18] al-Qaʿīd's enframing of multiple linguistic registers hilariously mimics the abstruse, empty vocabulary of bureaucratic jargon, yet simultaneously expresses outrage about the kinds of political and epistemological power such language can wield. He dramatizes the disappointment of his own hopes as a Leftist author, the clash between expectation and experience that occurs when the village-born, city-educated author returns to his natal home, searching for anger and organized political resistance, yet encountering only hunger, abject poverty, and a resigned acceptance of such poverty as immutable and God-given, rather than historical and subject to change through collective human action. The result is a novel that variously adopts, satirizes, and ultimately rejects a series of literary, political, and popular discourses. "Rejection" and "refusal" (*al-rafḍ*) are the guiding principles of *Yaḥduth*,[19] and as al-

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[15] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 173. On the distinction between "committed realism" and "ideological socialist realism," see Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 140-43.

[16] al-Kharrāṭ, *Ḥassāsiyyah*, 19-20.

[17] Ibid. al-Kharrāṭ himself acknowledges that he is not completely satisfied with the term "the new realism," which he thinks misrepresents the true characteristics and intentions of the authors he associates with this trend.

[18] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 172-73; Selim, 140.

[19] In an interview with Ṣāliḥ ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm, al-Qaʿīd clarifies the great extent to which *Yaḥduth* is concerned with "rejection" and "refusal" (*al-rafḍ*):

> [In] the novel *It's Happening Now in Egypt*, my concern for [civil] society took on a distinctly political dimension. I completely rejected all forms of dependency on America. I rejected the alliance with the Israeli enemy. I completely rejected the Egyptian rich and aligned myself with the Egyptian poor, in accordance with my belief that all great wealth conceals an even greater crime. […] It was a violent, restricted, but very clear period, one in which we stood firmly against all of Al-Sadat's attempts to compromise the achievements of the July Revolution […] We refused to let the achievements of the October War be sold for the peaceful settlement that al-Sadat created; we refused to be detached from Arab

Qaʿīd passes from the triumphalist rhetoric of economic liberalism and *infitāḥ* through that of the hypocritical Left literary establishment, all the way to the superstitious forms proper to the *fallāḥīn* and the exploitative practices of the author of village novels, each language he adopts is rejected in turn, in an attempt to create rupture and indignation where previously there were only continuance, "ordinariness," (*al-ʿādiyy*) and acceptance. Al-Qaʿīd's insistent practice of discursive rejection is a forceful discarding of dead discourses in an attempt to clear space for new forms of realism not bound to the dogmatic strictures of social-realist plot construction but still crucially invested in transforming the dire reality of the *fallāḥīn*. Like Khoury and Jabra, al-Qaʿīd is caught between his devotion to his natal home and his disillusionment with the literary forms conventionally used to represent that home.

Heteroglossic Humor: Satire Beyond Festive Laughter in Yaḥduth

Before examining the various official and non-official linguistic strata that Al-Qaʿīd puts on display in *Yaḥduth*, let me first offer a brief summary of this complexly constructed novel. Set in a number of villages and towns in al-Buḥayrah, the events recounted in *Yaḥduth* take place in June 1974, on the eve of President Nixon's visit to Egypt and tour of the countryside. A package containing large quantities of food aid from the U.S. arrives in al-Ḍahriyyah, and the head of the village council (*raʾīs majlis al-qariyah*, hereafter "the Chairman")[20] is instructed not only to distribute the aid, but also to ensure that each recipient understands his or her portion as "a personal gift from the great American people, sent by President Richard Nixon, International Man of Peace."[21] But the Chairman soon finds himself unsure of how to most equitably distribute the food. He consults his friend, the town Doctor (*ṭabīb al-wiḥdah*), who suggests that the aid should be given only to the pregnant women in al-Ḍahriyyah—not necessarily because this seems fairest, but because he (the Doctor) is the individual most qualified to determine who is pregnant and who is not, a fact that will put him in control of the food and allow him to distribute it only to his best-paying clients, regardless of their natal status. In exchange, he hopes they will lend him money to build a private clinic for himself, even though, as a footnote from the author-narrator informs us, his contract as a public servant strictly forbids such an enterprise.[22] The Chairman, meanwhile, sees himself in a dream catapulted into the prestigious position of governor of Alexandria, thanks to the overwhelming success of the welcoming celebration he is about to organize for Nixon; he then consults a gypsy fortune-teller, who confirms that his dream

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nationalism; we refused the alliance with Israel and America […]; we refused the economic open-door policy and what happened to Egypt as a result of this policy; we refused the extreme haughtiness that befell the luxury class, as bequeathed to them by Sadat's economic regime. I expressed all of this in the novel *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān.*

Ṣāliḥ Sulaymān ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm. *Sūsiyūlūjiyyā al-riwāyah al-siyāsiyyah: Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd namūdhajan* [The sociology of the political novel: The model of Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd] (Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿāmmah li-l-kitāb, 1998), 194-95.

[20] In *Yaḥduth* as in almost all of al-Qaʿīd's other novels, government officials are not given names, but only referred to by their titles (the Doctor, the Chairman, the Officer, etc.).

[21] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 23.

[22] Ibid., 31.

will soon be realized. Blinded by a combination of ambition and superstition, he agrees to the distribution plan proposed by the Doctor.[23]

When the farmworker al-Dubbaysh hears about the arrival of the food aid, he comes up with a plan to trick the authorities and secure food for his impoverished family, even though his wife is not pregnant. He straps some old bits of rag and hay to his wife's belly, covers her in a long robe, takes her in to the Doctor's office, and collects a generous portion of the aid. However, word of the trick soon reaches the Doctor, and together with a battalion of police officers, he storms al-Dubbaysh's house to take back the food. In retaliation, al-Dubbaysh confronts the Doctor in his office, screaming at him and eventually knocking him unconscious. He's arrested shortly thereafter, and suffers a severe beating at the hands of his cellmates. We're told that, "by the time the roosters were crowing at dawn, [al-Dubbaysh] had died in the hospital."[24] The "Respected Officer" (*ḥaḍrat al-ḍābiṭ*, hereafter the "Officer"), from the regional capital al-Tawfīqiyyah, ensures that the poor farmworker is buried in an unmarked grave, in an undisclosed location, and the Doctor, Chairman, and Officer then meet to decide how to handle the case. Either they can assert that al-Dubbaysh was an enemy of the state fomenting a protest of Nixon's visit and thereby aiming to threaten national security (a plan they refer to as "D.E.," or "Dubbaysh existed"), or they can attempt to prove that al-Dubbaysh never existed at all, and thus wipe away all traces of their own blunder in his arrest and subsequent death (a plan they refer to as "D.N.," for "Dubbaysh Never Existed").[25] In the end, they decide to follow the latter plan, which only works because the farmworker was so poor he lacked even the most basic documentation to prove his existence: no marriage license, no identification card, no birth certificates either for himself, his wife, or his children. However, when a mysterious visitor arrives in al-Ḍahriyyah from al-Tawfīqiyyah (it turns out he was a nurse at the hospital where al-Dubbaysh died), it seems for a moment as if plan "D.N." will be foiled: the visitor informs al-Ghilbān ʿAbd Allāh, a friend and fellow worker of al-Dubbaysh's, that there has been a conspiracy to cover up al-Dubbaysh's death. al-Ghilbān subsequently informs al-Dubbaysh's wife, Ṣudfah, then gathers a group of farmworkers who attempt to obtain justice for their friend. Yet the farmworkers' efforts are foiled by the baroque procedures of regional bureaucracy. Because they cannot produce any *written* documentation definitively attesting al-Dubbaysh's existence, their efforts to avenge him, find his grave, and obtain state compensation for his family ultimately prove fruitless.

Although this is a reasonably comprehensive plot summary of *Yaḥduth*, its tidiness belies the complex narrative construction of the novel. The events described above are not revealed to the reader in the neat, chronological manner in which I have narrated them here, but disclosed gradually through citations from the various primary documents collected in al-Dubbaysh's case file, which—as in *Walīd Masʿūd* and *Wujūh*—form the chapters of the novel itself. Furthermore, through footnotes, asides, and parenthetical remarks, the author-narrator directly alerts the reader to the elisions, omissions, and fabrications in the accounts given by the novel's other narrators.

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[23] The Doctor is quickly revealed as a master of manipulative language, for he knows how to play on the Chairman's very particular weaknesses: "Since seizing upon people's aspirations is the most effective way of controlling them," he writes in the report he submits to al-Dubbaysh's police file (the novel's fifth chapter), "I reminded [the Chairman] of the gypsy's prophecy and the dream he'd had, both of which confirmed that his life will change completely after Nixon's parade. He agreed to the plan immediately." al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 29.

[24] Ibid., 15

[25] In Arabic, *dāl mīm, Dubbaysh mawjūd*, and *dāl ghayn, Dubbaysh ghayr mawjūd*. al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 123.

And there are many other narrators. Book One includes two primary documents from the "report" or "inquest" (*taḥqīq*) regarding al-Dubbaysh: the Chairman's account of what happened following the arrival of the American food aid (comically titled, "The Chairman of the Village Council Writes Down his Impressions, Striving for Utter Accuracy"),[26] and the Doctor's account of al-Dubbaysh's crime and subsequent attack on him the day the food aid was to be distributed (also comically titled, "The Doctor Dictates His Report in Eloquent Arabic").[27] Book Two, meanwhile, includes a series of "eyewitness" testimonies from villagers who knew al-Dubbaysh to varying degrees: the Town Crier (*al-munādī*),[28] Ṣudfah, al-Ghilbān, the Landowner on whose property al-Dubbaysh was working the day he attacked the Doctor, the Nurse who was assisting the Doctor on the day of the aid distribution, and the official Courier for the Village Council, who was the last person in al-Ḍahriyyah to see al-Dubbaysh before he went to jail. Each of these characters tells a different version of the tale, revealing not only a different facet of al-Dubbaysh's story, but also a distinct linguistic stratum (to borrow a Bakhtinian term) proper to a specific group of people within the village context.

Among the figures Mikhail Bakhtin uses to describe the poetics of style in the novel, the figure of language as a "mask" in particular stands out. In poetry, Bakhtin argues, no distance or dissociation between the poet and his language is possible. "The language of the poet is *his* language; he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, [and] he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, 'without quotation marks')."[29] In the novel, by contrast, the author deploys words and expressions in ironic, framed, and "refracted" senses, using representational tactics inherited from the folk genres of street songs, sayings, anecdotes, and others, in which "a lively play with the 'languages' of poets, scholars, monks, knights and others" implicitly affirmed that "all 'languages' were masks and [that] no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face."[30] Bakhtin argues that "language—like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives—is never unitary," and that the novelist, much more than the poet, remains attentive to this multiplicity, the various "tastes" and associations carried by particular words in particular contexts.[31] In Bakhtin's poetics of prose, the novelist becomes a kind of conductor, "orchestrating" these languages, "staging their encounters and collisions in his work," uniting "parodic stylizations of generic languages."[32] This orchestration crucially relies on the play of the author's distance from or proximity to the languages he cites:

> The language of the prose writer deploys itself according to degrees of greater or lesser *proximity* to the author and to his ultimate semantic instantiation: certain aspects of

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[26] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 23.

[27] Ibid., 29.

[28] The presence of a Town Crier in the novel, like that of the Public Scribe (see my analysis of this figure below), further illustrates al-Qaʿīd's interest in the divide between the primarily oral linguistic universe of the peasants and the written language wielded both by the professional, landed, official class and by the city-educated novelist.

[29] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 285.

[30] Ibid., 273. Bakhtin's theory of the medieval carnivalesque and its relationship to artistic prose is more fully elaborated in *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

[31] Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 288.

[32] Ibid., 292.

language directly and unmediatedly express (as in poetry) the semantic and expressive intentions of the author, others refract these intentions; the writer of prose does not meld completely with any of these words, but rather accents each of them in a particular way—humorously, ironically, parodically and so forth; yet another group may stand even further from the author's ultimate semantic instantiation, still more thoroughly refracting his intentions; and there are, finally, those words that are completely denied any authorial intentions: the author does not express himself in them… rather, he *exhibits them* as a unique speech-thing, they function for him as something completely reified…Thus a prose writer can *distance himself* from the language of his own work… He can make use of language without wholly giving himself up to it.[33]

The ironic citation of particular, real-life linguistic strata in the novel then—what Bakhtin terms the "parodic stylization of incorporated languages"—not only "refract[s] the author's intentions," but allows for an "unmasking" of those linguistic strata, whether they be the languages of particular social groups (in al-Qaʿīd's case, the rich landowner, the corrupt police officer, the public scribe turned venture capitalist, etc.) or those of official institutions (the Arab Socialist Union, the Association for the Protection of Migrant Workers, the edifice of socialist realist literature, etc.).[34] Through ironic citation and parodic stylization, these incorporated languages are "destroyed as something false, hypocritical, greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality."[35] Paradoxically then, through its stylization of incorporated languages, the novel engages in a mode of mockery that "verges on a rejection of any straightforward and unmediated seriousness" in order to attest that "true seriousness is the destruction of all false seriousness."[36] Here the link between Bakhtin's earlier work on Rabelais and these later essays collected in *The Dialogic Imagination* becomes clear: the novel, like the folksy plays of the medieval carnival, suspends language in a space of ironic distance, relativizing the supposedly given, immutable status of power by mocking the language or languages that sustain it. In the novel as in such plays, laughter becomes the key to unlearning a fear of and submission to power.[37] The difference is that where the carnivalesque play allows for only a "*temporary* liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order,"[38] the novel's desacralization of power aims toward a more lasting transformation—or at least, so authors like al-Qaʿīd hope.

Through his parodic stylization of the numerous linguistic strata that saturate life in the Egypt at the time of Nixon's visit, al-Qaʿīd elaborates an implicit poetics of novelistic prose in *Yaḥduth* that resembles Bakhtin's explicit theorizations in "Discourse and the Novel." The trope of investigation itself enables this parodic stylization, transforming the novel into a space where multiple individuals speak and give different, often contradictory accounts of a singular event, each account crucially mediated by the social position and language of the speaker. As in Jabrā's *Walīd Masʿūd*, the characters in *Yaḥduth* who offer up their perspectives on al-Dubbaysh's arrest

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[33] Ibid., 299 (emphasis added).

[34] Ibid., 312

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Elliott Colla offers a similar understanding of laughter and political power in "The Poetry of Revolt," *Jadaliyya*, last modified January 31, 2011 http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/506/the-poetry-of-revolt

[38] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 10 (emphasis added).

and disappearance tend to reveal more about themselves, simply by speaking, than they do about al-Dubbaysh or his supposed crime. The trope of investigation becomes the window onto a complex social world—in this case the Egyptian village during the 1970s—which is shot through with a variety of languages that mark their speakers' class, profession, and relationship to others within that social world.

Book II, in which the Officer interrogates his "eyewitnesses," offers a particularly rich and comic display of village heteroglossia. In the chapter titled "A Feudal Lord of the 1975 Variety Wonders, Why do the Poor Covet What the Rich Have?" for example,[39] al-Qaʿīd gives readers a glimpse of the greedy, dehumanizing, and hypocritical language proper to the uppermost classes of village society. In the very first words of his testimony, the landowner affirms that on the day al-Dubbaysh disappeared, he had "twenty-three and a half" laborers working his lands. When the Officer expresses confusion over this statement, the landowner explains very matter-of-factly: "Well, there were twenty men, two old men, and five children. Old men and children are paid half-wages. So the total was twenty-three and a half."[40] To the landowner, migrant laborers (*al-anfār*) are not human beings with individual, discrete stories but numbers to be tallied and exchanged according to the wages they earn. He evaluates humanity on a sliding scale of wealth, and holds himself at the top of this scale. In a moment of arch hypocrisy, he assumes that his wealth grants him the authority to diagnose the problems of the poor:

بعد اذن حضرة الكاتب، ليه طلب واحد، ان الكلام اللى حا أقوله لا بد ينكتب ولازم يوصل للمسئولين الكبار فوق خالص. لأنه يهمنا كلنا. لمصلحة الحكومة وأولاد الذوات. الحكاية تتلخص في كلمة واحدة: الطمع. مع ان المال زائل ويجب على الفقراء أنهم يتحلوا بالصبر والقناعة والعمل الصالح. علشان يضمنوا الآخرة بكل ما فيها. هل الموت بيفرق بين من يملك كل شيء ومن لا يملك أي شيء؟ اللى مايملكش بيكون أخف يوم القيامة.

> If you don't mind, Mr. Scribe, I have one request: that what I'm about to say be written down and reach the highest authorities, the ones at the very top, because it concerns all of us, for the good of our government and everyone in the upper classes [*awlād al-dhawāt*]. The whole story can be summed up in one word: greed. The poor are greedy! He who has nothing always looks at what others have as though he had some kind of right to it, even though money is fleeting and the poor should be satisfied with patience, contentment, and good deeds [*al-ṣabr wa-l-qināʿah wa-l-ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ*], so that they can pass into the next world with everything that's in it. […] Does death distinguish between those who have everything and those who have nothing? Those who have nothing will be that much lighter on the Day of Judgment.[41]

The first half of this account reaffirms the political power of the written word in Egyptian bureaucracy: those who control the written word are none other than the rich landowning class—*awlād al-zawāt*, or "men of means." And given his power to decide what goes on record and what does not, this man, who earlier described old men and children as "half- humans," is so blinded by his own power he hypocritically claims that all the problems of the poor can all be traced back to their greed. He summons forth the rhetoric of religious morality, including the key

[39] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 65.

[40] Ibid., 66.

[41] Ibid., 68-69.

Qur'anic bywords *ṣabr* ("patience, forbearance") and *al-ʿamal al-ṣāliḥ* ("good deeds"), as well as *al-qināʿah*, "contentment," as used, for example, in the popular expression *al-qināʿah kanz*, "contentment (with one's lot) is an inexhaustible treasure."[42] The landowner preaches a particular kind of doomsday docility, which advises that money is only a worldly burden, a "fleeting" possession (*al-māl zāʾil*) that will only weigh one down on Judgment Day, in the passage to the next world. Yet even as he preaches this doctrine, this "Feudal Lord of the 1975 variety" himself jealously guards his own money, carefully doling out only the most meager wages to those who work his land. The landowner decries the futility of money on Judgment Day, its status as deadweight in the hereafter, yet continues to wholeheartedly weigh himself down with it in this life. The irony here, of course, is that the landowner, even as he attributes all of society's ills to the greed of the poor, is the real danger to a harmonious Egyptian society, perpetuating and even worsening the immense gap between rich and poor by jealously guarding his money while hypocritically chastising the poor for their greed.

It is also worth noting that in the original Arabic, the landowner freely mixes colloquial Egyptian Arabic with the more formal, literary register of *fuṣḥā*. *Allī ḥa-ʾūluh*, "what I will say;" *lāzim yūṣal*, "it must reach;" *al-kibār fūʾ khāliṣ*, "the ones at the very top;" and the final sentence, *allī mayamlaksh biykūn akhaff yūm al-qiyāmah*, "those who have nothing will be that much lighter on the Day of Judgment"—these are all colloquial expressions that normally would not be recorded as such in a literary text, but translated into the formal register for inclusion in the novel.[43] In al-Qaʿīd's satire of the landowner's speech, therefore, colloquial Arabic—the language of the people—is not necessarily a subversive or subaltern discourse that, simply by virtue of being "unofficial," can challenge or disrupt the formal Arabic of state discourse and literary writing alike.[44] Al-Qaʿīd reveals the hypocrisy in the "feudal lord's" outlook by

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[42] See Martin Hinds and El-Said Badawi, *A Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban 1986), 719.

[43] This is not to say that literary works in colloquial Arabic have not existed from the pre-modern period to the present, but rather that until the twentieth century, these colloquial works were generally excluded from the realm of "literature" or *adab*. On the history of colloquial Arabic literature, see Pierre. Cachia, "The Use of the Colloquial in Modern Arabic Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87, no. 1 (1967): 12–22. On the use of colloquial Arabic in modern Arabic literature, see Marilyn Booth, "Poetry in the Vernacular," in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, ed. M. M. Badawi (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 463-82; Noha Radwan, *Egyptian Colloquial Poetry in the Modern Arabic Canon: New Readings of Shiʿr al-ʿAmmiyya* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Zaki N. Abdel-Malek, "The Influence of Diglossia on the Novels of Yūsuf al-Sibāʿī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3 (1972): 132–41

[44] This is one of Selim's major arguments in *Rural Imaginary*. Selim specifically chooses works of village fiction that contrast the hegemonic languages proper to the state (often a modern standard *fuṣḥā*) with the unruly, subversive rural languages proper to the fallāḥīn (generally colloquial Arabic), and places great stress on the "empowering" and "challenging" aspects of this "subaltern discourse." In the courtroom scenes from *ʿAdhrāʾ Dinshaway* (*The Maiden of Dinshaway*, 1906), for example, Selim asserts that "it is not only the political and moral legitimacy of colonialism itself that stands trial [here], but also the discursive structures of power that normalize and support this legitimacy" (101). Similarly, she argues that in *Yawmiyyāt Nāʾib fī al-aryāf* (*Maze of Justice*, 1937), author Tawfīq al-Ḥakim's "inscription of 'realistic' peasant voices" creates "a discursive challenge to the canonical languages of authority" (92), suggesting "the possibility of a popular, folksy critique of all hegemonic discourse, including that of bourgeois narrative fiction" (123). And finally, she affirms that in al-Sharqāwī's *al-Arḍ*, perhaps the most famous work of Egyptian village fiction, the characters' passion for "chatting, punning, and counter-punning" (173) represents "a contrapuntal subaltern dialogue that both exemplifies peasant culture and challenges […] the discursive authority of institutional power in a rural context" (174). As I argue below, al-Qaʿīd's portrayal of the rural, folksy, colloquial language proper to the fallāḥīn breaks with Selim's model, suggesting that this author

exaggerating his language, putting it on display as an object of ridicule, and—so he hopes—
creating anger and indignation in the minds of his otherwise complacent reader.

Beyond the testimonies and versions of al-Dubbaysh's story given by the witnesses in
Book II of *Yaḥduth*, al-Qaʿīd also parodies the language used by the unnamed but central
triumvirate of corrupt officials—the Doctor, Officer, and Chairman— who abuse their social
status and control of the "official" written word to reap personal profit at the expense of the
fallāḥīn. Much like the greedy, hypocritical landowner, the Doctor frequently refers to the
farmworkers for whom he is supposed to care as "half-humans" hardly worth his time. When the
Officer asks him to give testimony for the inquest on al-Dubbaysh, the Doctor protests that he
had nothing to do with the case and was merely an innocent victim. "I am utterly above being
party to any of the doings of the half-human, half-animal beings who live in these villages!"
(*ashbāh al-ādamiyyīn wa-anṣāf al-ḥayawānāt*).[45] In another moment, when the Doctor regains
consciousness from al-Dubbaysh's blows, a second, sympathetic doctor assigned to a
neighboring village offers comfort through commiseration: "We study, learn, and receive our
degrees, then we are thrown into this miserable situation, the best and brightest of our country's
youth squandered, left to be beaten up by semi-humans (*ashbāh al-nās*) who overstep all the
natural divisions between human beings."[46] In these moments, Al-Qaʿīd's irony cuts deep:
whereas medicine is nominally a practice devoted to maintaining and supporting healthy human
life, the city-educated Doctors appointed to al-Ḍahriyyah measure humanness only in terms of
class, naturalizing the divisions between rich and poor, with educated professionals occupying
the most human spot, while the *fallāḥīn* are only "semi-human" (*ashbāh al-ādamiyyīn; ashbāh
al-nās*). Moreover, both Doctors speak in a high register of formal Arabic here: the phrases "I am
utterly above the doings of the half-animal, half-human beings," *ana arfaʿ min al-dukhūl ṭarafan
wasaṭ ashbāh al-ādamiyyīn wa anṣāf al-ḥayawānāt*, and "we squander the best and brightest of
our youth," *nubaddid zahrat shabābanā al-adhā*, resound with the eloquent grammatical
structures and rhetorical flourishes of the educated class. Once again, al-Qaʿīd amplifies the
contradiction between the Doctors' high, formal register of Arabic and its dismissive,
dehumanizing content by framing it in a primary source, a report "dictated in eloquent literary
Arabic" by the Doctor himself.

Equally subject to al-Qaʿīd's heteroglossic critique in *Yaḥduth* are the written genres
proper to the offices of local government, particularly the police. By sharing what "really
happened" to al-Dubbaysh, in a chapter titled "al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis: A Scene No One Saw," and
then juxtaposing these actual events with the "official version" that goes on record in al-
Dubbaysh's police file, al-Qaʿīd mocks the stylistic tactics that the Officer, Doctor, and
Chairman use to create a "truth" that not only serves their economic and personal interests, but
also ultimately erases al-Dubbaysh's very existence. In the chapter titled "Reports and
Documents With Some Information About al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis' Life,"[47] from the novel's
Interlude section, the omniscient narrator relates that the Officer, after opening al-Dubbaysh's
unnamed, unnumbered case file, went looking for an assistant or researcher to undertake some

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has less faith in the subversive power even of non-hegemonic, non-state languages than many of the more canonical
authors of village fiction.

[45] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 20.

[46] Ibid., 38.

[47] Ibid., 109.

"inquiries" or "investigations" (*taḥariyyāt*) into the whole affair. Of course, there are no researchers in the governorate's police headquarters, and owing to considerations of time (due to Nixon's impending visit), the Officer can't afford to follow protocol and request an assistant from the regional headquarters. He needs to find someone who can "furnish him with the information he requires" quickly and without asking any questions (implying this "information" will be fabricated).[48] Soon, he finds a young soldier recently deployed to al-Ḍahriyyah who comes from a decently rich family, has a passable education, and enough ambition to agree to a corrupt deal. The Officer promises to secure the Soldier a promotion if he prepares the required documents in a timely fashion. The Soldier promises that he is the "most qualified person to do the job," not because he has any training in police investigation, but because he has relatives among several of al-Ḍahriyyah's richest families.[49] This boosts the Officer's confidence in the young Soldier: "As long as our information comes from these great people," al-Qaʿīd writes with bitter irony, "it will be completely trustworthy, for rich people are incapable of lying."[50]

Tellingly, the Soldier prepares the report in a single day, giving the Officer the option to file one of two official reports: either there was never a person with the name "al-Dubbaysh," or al-Dubbaysh was a dangerous criminal and mastermind of a plot to bring down the government. Al-Qaʿīd's omniscient narrator then includes the full text of these reports and documents within the text of the novel itself, yet in light of the absurd story that frames them, they appear both comic and tragic: comic, because the documents and sources the young soldier supposedly consults to prove al-Dubbaysh's non-existence run the gamut from official registries to popular rumor. Yet also tragic, because the report reveals the extent to which abject poverty made al-Dubbaysh and his family outsiders in their own community, unable to participate in the doings of everyday life, and thereby unable to prove that they ever existed at all. In this sense, al-Qaʿīd's satire of bureaucratic style also criticizes and destabilizes the easy equation of writing and truth, the power of the written word to determine "official" existence.

The Soldier's report begins by citing the fact that there is no written record of al-Dubbaysh in either the official birth or death registries in al-Ḍahriyyah. It then reiterates the now familiar logic and language of the conspiracy against the state: "The story of al-Dubbaysh is a clever trick designed to distract the government and regional leaders from their national duty during these delicate times through which our dear country is passing," i.e. on the eve of Nixon's visit.[51] Here again, al-Qaʿīd amplifies the young soldier's patriotic rhetoric to limn its hypocrisy: the soldier claims that the story of al-Dubbaysh was fabricated as a distraction from more important national issues, yet he is the one using nationalist rhetoric—"*al-wājib al-waṭanī*" (patriotic duty), "*al-waṭan al-ghālī*" (our dear country)—to distract the reader's attention from the injustice al-Dubbaysh and hundreds of other fallāḥīn like him have suffered at the hands of the very state apparatus he extols.

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., 110. The Officer's statement parallels an earlier footnote from the author-narrator himself to the Doctor's report: "Our era has revived in al-Ḍahriyyah the conviction that men of means (*awlād al-dhawāt*) never lie, and that the evils of our world only occupy the lowest classes (*al-suflah*). The Doctor is certainly a man of means, and yet half of what he says is a lie." al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 31.

[51] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 111.

Next, the report casts doubt on the idea that Ṣudfah was really al-Dubbaysh's wife: "Ṣudfah is certainly a wife, but whose wife was she?"[52] There is no official marriage contract, none of the "commemorative wedding photos that good families (*al-usar al-karīmah*) take to document their happy memories for posterity," and no one remembers any trappings of a wedding party: musicians, parades through the neighborhood, or the henna party for the women in the bride's family (*laylat al-ḥannah*), nor do they remember "the people who claim to be [al-Dubbaysh's] children" coming into the world.[53] These questions lead the Soldier to ask if al-Dubbaysh had any presence at all in village life over the past twenty years. No one remembers him voting, taking his children to school, strolling through the marketplace, participating in the *mawlid* festivals (popular carnivals celebrating local saints), or walking with his children on holidays, all wearing new clothes. And who remembers ever seeing an important member of the community (*kibār al-balad*) visiting his home? Did he ever receive any official mail or telegrams? Where is his tailor? his butcher? his grocer? Where is the barber/doctor (*ḥallāq*) who visited his house to shave him, cut his children's hair, and give the family their shots? Dubbaysh's name is not on the deeds to the land where his house stands, nor is it registered with any of the numerous (and lengthily named) farmworkers' organizations, from the Cooperative Agricultural Organization to the list of Agricultural Holdings cards, and from the Office for the Protection of Migrant Workers to the Migrant Workers' Employment Office. The irony here is that all of these markers of everyday, middle-class existence—marriage licenses, wedding photos, identification cards, sending children to school, buying new clothes for the Eid, paying the barber, tailor, butcher, grocer, even registering births and deaths—all of these require money that al-Dubbaysh and Ṣudfah never had. It's highly unlikely that their family had *no* part in any of these village activities, yet the authorities that the young soldier is consulting (*al-usar al-karīmah*, "good families;" *awlād al-nās*, "upstanding people") certainly wouldn't remember seeing a lowly, tired, worn-down worker like al-Dubbaysh; he is a non-person, made invisible and even semi-human by his lack of money. In the dystopian village world of *Yaḥduth*, the amount of money one possesses determines the level of one's humanity—indeed, one's very existence.

The report's language reaches the height of its absurdity, however, with the following passage, which uses erudition almost as a weapon, an eraser capable of definitively proving al-Dubbaysh's non-existence:

> This all leads us to a fundamental question: did al-Dubbaysh exist at all? Let's take a closer look at his name: "al-Dubbaysh," from *dabsh*, limestone. *Dabsh* was a material used in the construction of Mamluk houses. Since we know from history that the Mamluks were completely eradicated from Egypt following the massacre at the Citadel,[54] this means that *dabsh* too was completely eradicated from our lives, as were all names derived from this word.[55]

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., 111-12.

[54] The Soldier is referring to Muḥammad ʿAlī Bāshā's infamous slaughter of the remaining Mamluks at the Citadel in 1811.

[55] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 112-113.

In his quest to prove that al-Dubbaysh never existed (thus securing a promotion for himself), the young soldier marshals the truth-bolstering language of two academic fields, etymology and history. It's not enough to point to the absence of "respectable" (i.e. rich) witnesses who can testify to knowing al-Dubbaysh, nor does it suffice to highlight the absence of official documents in his name. The Soldier must also wield education and erudition toward this end—or at least, the linguistic trappings of such erudition. Indeed, this is quite literally what distinguishes someone like the Soldier from someone like al-Dubbaysh: whereas the Soldier can speak in an eloquent, literary Arabic, referencing common history lessons and bringing forth etymological proofs, al-Dubbaysh's very name implies that his speech is crude and coarse. The Egyptian colloquial word *dabsh*, which literally means "rough-cut limestone," can also be used metaphorically, with *kalām dabsh* meaning "crude and insensitive talk," and *dabbāsh* meaning "one who talks crudely and insensitively."[56] The colloquial expression riffs on a long tradition of comparing words to stones. Whereas, in classical Arabic poetics, the words arranged in a line of poetry are often compared to delicately faceted, glittering gems arranged in a necklace, in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, the words spoken by a *dabbāsh* are akin to limestone, which is knobby, gravelly, and pale. Like the rich landowner, the Doctor, and others cited in *Yaḥduth*, the Soldier, by employing eloquent, educated, *written* language, also wields power, specifically the power to officially establish existence and non-existence. In a remark attached to this first report, he reaffirms that "anyone who comes forth to prove that the myth and fable of al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis is actually true must have with him supporting documents, pictures, or audio recordings to prove his claim" and "cannot rely on rumors, claims… [or] oral testimony."[57] The report ultimately underscores not only the tyranny of writing under bureaucracy—in al-Qaʿīd's dystopian world, as Christopher Stone succinctly puts it, "Descartes' famous sentence can be rephrased: I am written, therefore I am"[58]—but also the susceptibility of such writing (and therefore, of existence itself) to manipulation in the hands of those who control it.

With its demonstrated reliance on written documentation such as birth and death records, marriage certificates, leases, and union membership cards, and its emphasis on officially recognized practices of truth-finding such as etymology, history, and religious learning, the Soldier's report stylizes and parodies the written language of the police inquest, in the same way that the landowner's testimony stylized and parodied the spoken language of the rich. Al-Qaʿīd does not speak in his own voice here, but wears the language of the inquest as a mask to reveal truth as a tenuously constructed, contingent entity vulnerable to destabilization through mockery. Truth is not a given, preexisting reality to be "sought out" and documented in a report (again, the Arabic for report, *taḥqīq*, literally implying "truth-establishment") in *Yaḥduth*. It is rather a delicate balancing act and must be vigorously maintained through the use of sanctioned vocabularies and bywords, each with its own specialized significance. The task of the novel, as both Bakhtin and al-Qaʿīd affirm, is to reveal the contingency of these discourses and procedures, and to gesture toward other truths, other realities, and—especially where al-Qaʿīd—is concerned, the many tragic stories that go untold in "the *other* Egypt, the Egypt of the countryside and the teeming fallāḥīn."[59] It is to refocus the reader's attention onto the everyday,

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[56] Hinds and Badawi, *Egyptian Arabic*, 277.

[57] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 113.

[58] Stone, "'Mature' Arabic Novel," 307.

[59] Ibid. 9.

"ordinary" (*ʿādiyy*) stories that official discourses either ignore or, in the case of al-Dubbaysh, actively efface.

Equally subject to stylization and satirization in *Yaḥduth* are the languages of paper-pushing bureaucrats who, in al-Qaʿīd's schema, shirk their moral duty toward their countrymen by citing charters and bylaws, hiding behind stacks of paperwork in order to avoid jeopardizing their comfortable, government-salaried positions. Such faceless bureaucrats are common to a great deal of sixties-generation fiction in Egypt: as Sabry Hafez writes, during this era in Egyptian history, "everywhere one encountered not living, but official beings concealing their individual personalities beneath a carapace of conformity, people who acted out social roles and repeated, automatically, slogans that were often contrary to their real hidden opinions."[60] Everyone, in other words—not just the *fallāḥīn*—disappears in this linguistic environment. In Book Three of *Yaḥduth*, the reader encounters a series of such "official beings" as the group of migrant workers headed by al-Ghilbān journeys through the convoluted chambers of regional Egyptian bureaucracy seeking some kind of justice for (or at least acknowledgement of) al-Dubbaysh's death. As the group travels from one office to the next, a seemingly never-ending series of officials gently but decisively drive them away, citing the "considerable legal difficulty"[61]—or simply "difficulty"[62]—in al-Dubbaysh's case, particularly the official uncertainty over whether he fled from prison, died in prison, was an enemy of the state, or never existed at all.

The author-narrator knowingly casts the reader into this nightmarish world of nameless bureaucrats, affirming in the second chapter of Book Three that, "because the majority of characters you've met in this novel have been nameless, we'll finish out the few remaining pages in the same vein."[63] To the Doctor, Officer, Chairman, and Feudal Lord of the 1975 Variety, the narrator will add another series of nameless officials for whom reality and truth are inextricable from official documentation, starting with the President of the Organization for the Protection of Migrant Workers (OPMW. The President's language embodies yet another form of hypocrisy: he is the president of the "Office for the Protection of Migrant Workers and Day Laborers' Rights", yet he does everything in his power to *avoid* protecting migrant workers or defending day laborers' rights. At first, he drives the small group of farmworkers out of his office by "gesturing to the papers, notebooks, and files piled up in front of him on the desk" and citing the massive amounts of work he has to complete.[64] Then, when he finally addresses al-Dubbaysh's case, he assures the group that he pored over the files trying to find some trace of the murdered farmworker, to no avail. "The Association and the Office each have charters compelling them to operate according to a particular system," he tells the farmworkers:

> We are living in an era characterized by the utmost respect for rules, statutes, bylaws, constitutions, and written systems, and no two honest Egyptians would disagree about that. The first clause of the OPMW's charter states that it was founded to care for, protect, and defend the rights of migrant workers and farmworkers. The second clause

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[60] Sabry Hafez, "The Egyptian Novel in the Sixties." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 7 (1976): 68.

[61] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 145.

[62] Ibid., 149.

[63] Ibid., 143.

[64] Ibid., 144.

defines precisely what constitutes a migrant worker or farmworker, for whose protection and service this organization was founded: he must be an active member in the association who has paid his dues and defrayed the costs of his subscription, and membership in the association is also contingent on active membership in the Arab Socialist Union. I can only defend those who are registered with me and those who get their work exclusively through my office. al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis is, first of all, not a member of the ASU—(and here the Secretary assured them that he had spent the previous two nights reviewing folders and files but hadn't found a single word pointing to al-Dubbaysh's membership, even through association)—nor is he a member of the OPMW, and he does not work in the fields through the Farmworkers' Protection office. The Secretary then reminded them of his previous attempts to get al-Dubbaysh to join the OPMW, and al-Dubbaysh's refusal—indeed, his mockery—of all government agencies or political organizations.[65]

The bureaucrat cites bylaws and charters like sacred scripture, exhibiting an attitude of almost religious devotion to the bureaucratic written word. Because he didn't pay his dues, and because his name isn't *written* anywhere in the secretary's mountains of files, Dubbaysh doesn't count as a farmworker. When a worker from among al-Ghilbān's band protests that "al-Dubbaysh should qualify as a 'migrant worker' not because he was a member of the organization, but because he worked every day in fields owned by others, slung his axe over his shoulder every morning, and carried his dry lunch in a knotted napkin, heading to work in fields owned by others," this only angers the Secretary, who responds that "these are legal matters about which the worker knows nothing."[66] To the bureaucrat, the everyday actions, the actual labor of the workers whom he is paid to protect counts for nothing. In a moment of arch irony, he uses the dry language of OPMW's bylaws to do the *opposite* of "care for" or "protect" the rights of migrant laborers and farmworkers; he writes them off at precisely the moment he is most needed, hiding behind a "carapace of conformity" to rules, statutes, and bylaws.

In the third-to-last chapter of *Yaḥduth*, titled "When al-Dubbaysh Was Turned Into an Investment Project" (*ʿIndamā taḥawalla al-Dubbaysh ilā mashrūʿ istithmārī*) al-Qāʿīd once again moves the reader from one linguistic stratum into another—in this instance, out of the paper-bound logic of bureaucratic doublespeak and into the triumphalist rhetoric of free-market capitalism, the heart of the Sadat regime's Infitāḥ policy. The group of farmworkers led by al-Ghilbān consults a Public Scribe or *ʿarḍḥāljī* to help them in their quest for justice,[67] but as the reader quickly learns, this *ʿārḍḥāljī* is quite unlike the image one might conjure of a local public scribe. In fact, he "travels to America every summer, and thus has a more realistic viewpoint on things."[68] He is frequently also referred to as "the educated young man" (*al-shābb al-mutaʿallam*), yet his education seems to have been primarily in the principles of free-market capitalism. Rather than lodge the farmworkers' complaint against the government in writing, in accordance with the traditional dictates of his work, he suggests that they file a lawsuit against

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[65] Ibid., 145.

[66] Ibid., 145.

[67] The rather unusual word "*ʿarḍḥāljī*" originates in Arabic (*ʿarḍ* = to present, *ḥāl* = a condition or state), migrates into Turkish and Persian, and then returns to colloquial Egyptian in rural areas via Turkish. Hinds and Badawi, *Egyptian Arabic*, 572.

[68] al-Qāʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 160.

President Nixon himself. The Scribe aims to profit not only off of the American president through extortion ("he's the one who caused this whole thing from 'how d'you do' to 'see ya later'"),[69] but also off of the international attention the case will draw once it goes to trial: "Throughout the case there'll be international interest in Ṣudfah and her children. The press, radio, television—maybe they'll even make a movie about her! All this with the money that's coming to her."[70]

When al-Ghilbān protests that he, his group, and al-Dubbaysh's family combined couldn't come up with the money for such a lawsuit, the Public Scribe suggests that they bring in a rich financial backer for the project, who in exchange for his investment will receive three quarters of the total profits. Essentially, the Scribe suggests they form a start-up company and seek venture capital to finance it. al-Ghilbān further protests that Ṣudfah will never agree to such an idea, because her primary goal is to find out what exactly happened to her husband. At this the American-educated Scribe laughs:

> al-Dubbaysh died, or was killed, or escaped. None of that matters now. The important thing is that he's gone, and being sad about it is no use. Ṣudfah is now in a difficult position, but she should think about how she can turn it to her profit. Crying for al-Dubbaysh won't get her any more to eat. But finding an investor for this project and following through with it will guarantee a happy future for the family. We're living in an era when money is lord and master, and people only pray to ensure their bread is round. With money, you can even buy the emotions that stir people's hearts. With a hundred pounds, Ṣudfah could have a hundred men at her beck and call, the least of them perfectly capable of helping her forget al-Dubbaysh.[71]

As the Scribe characterizes it, the new era inaugurated by the Infitāḥ involves such a complete mediation of experience by capital that even emotional labor, even "the emotions that stir people's hearts," can be bought and sold (*bi-l-māl nashtarī ḥatā al-ʿāwāṭif fī al-ṣudūr*). He encourages the farmworkers to manipulate the legal mechanisms of the state to seek not justice but *profit* from al-Dubbaysh's tragic story; not punishment for those who first occasioned, then covered up the farmworker's death (as well as the location of his unmarked grave), but only other men who can help Ṣudfah "forget" her husband, just as their profits from this investment project are designed to help the villagers forget the injustice suffered by their comrade.

The Public Scribe's *language* is also designed to contribute to this mass forgetting. Soon, he even has a name for the start-up company he's proposed: "The General Egyptian Foundation in Memory of the Martyr al-Dubbaysh & Co."[72] This lengthy name parodies the pomposity of official organizations, the names of which are littered throughout the rest of the novel. Furthermore, it enacts yet another form of concealment, masking the violent circumstances of al-Dubbaysh's death in the rhetoric of "memory" and "martyrdom." Operating under the sign of a hypocritical name, then, the company will also undertake a series of projects to cover up, rather

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[69] "*…min ṭaʾṭaʾ li-salām ʿalaykū.*" al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 159.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 160.

[72] Ibid.

than ameliorate, village poverty—projects that will be familiar to specialists in developing economies under the evocative euphemism of "revitalization:"

> With ten thousand pounds, you could turn al-Ḍahriyyah into a touristic village. […] We'll profit off the age of the free market and open-door policy by finding an American investor to take over 49% of the project's capital. Then there are thousands of things we could do. al-Ḍahriyyah is a treasure. We could build a cannery, bring crews to look for oil in the ground, or to draw mineral water from the earth. We could start a carpet factory in collaboration with Iran and sell the merchandise in Europe. We could build huts or chalets along the banks of the Nile, so tourists could spend their vacations near the mighty river.[73]

Although in theory the Public Scribe could be a crucial link between the hallowed institutions of government and the humble populace whom it is supposed to represent, and thereby serve as a source for positive change in the Egyptian countryside, in the dystopian reality of *Yaḥduth*, as in many other works of Egyptian village fiction,[74] the ʿ*arḍḥāljī* uses his mastery of the bureaucratic written word to wrest personal profit from community loss. The very presence of such a figure in *Yaḥduth* illustrates al-Qaʿīd's enduring interest in the inextricability of writing and power. In this particular instance, the ʿ*arḍḥāljī* is well schooled (*shāb mutaʿallam*) in the very specific language of American-style free market capitalism. Al-Qaʿīd's parody of venture capitalist language in this chapter astutely mocks its easygoing tone of infinite hope and limitless possibility, particularly the way its fantasies of wealth accumulation obscure the actual labor that makes such wealth possible. As al-Qaʿīd himself has said elsewhere, "Every great wealth conceals an even greater crime."[75]

By ironically inhabiting the voice of the ʿ*arḍḥāljī* and donning the vocabulary of venture capital as a mask, al-Qaʿīd's author-narrator satirizes the official language of the Infitāḥ, which touted the benefits of American-style multinational capitalism in an attempt to distract Egyptian citizens from the everyday injustices going on all around them (especially in the countryside). The rhetoric of the Infitāḥ attempted to replace popular memories of lives lost and violence suffered at the hands of American-made tanks, bombs, and guns in the 1973 October War against Israel,[76] with fantasies about the modern conveniences and luxuries the country will enjoy once it "opens up" to all things American. Even before introducing readers to the ʿ*arḍḥāljī* and relating

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[73] Ibid.

[74] See, for example, al-Sharqāwī's *al-Arḍ*, where numerous letters are written to the government by different Scribe figures, all to no avail, and Idrīs' *al-Ḥarām*, in which the social aspirations of Masīḥah Afandī, a former laborer, are realized precisely through writing: "After all, it was through the chief clerk's words and bookkeeping that Masīḥah was to move from one class to another, and make the transition from being a young man fated to farm and work with a hoe to being a gentleman—an effendi—sitting at a desk and wielding that small, magical object: the pen." Idris, *The Sinners*, trans. Kristin Peterson-Ishaq (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 33. A counter-example can be found in Fatḥī Ghānim's *al-Jabal* [The Mountain, 1956], where the penniless, Upper Egyptian villager Ḥusayn ʿAlī's complaint letter to the government in Cairo serves as the impetus for the entire novel, creating the circumstances in which patently false bureaucratic language can fall away and clear space for first-person storytelling in the peasant's own voice. See Ghānim, *al-Jabal* (Cairo: Dār al-Hilāl, 1965).

[75] ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm, *Sūsiyūlujiyyā*, 194.

[76] The U.S. provided a great deal of weaponry to the Israeli army in the war, while Egypt's forces were backed by the Soviet Union.

his encounter with the farmworkers, al-Qaʿīd's author-narrator reflects on the materialistic rhetoric of American cooperation disseminated in conjunction with Nixon's visit. In an early paragraph from this same chapter (the novel's third-to-last), he writes:

> Witnesses sold [al-Dubbaysh's life] as cheap as dirt in exchange for promises that would never be kept. The American dream come from across the Atlantic, paradise passing right through their village riding a well-greased locomotive: the American President. […] He is the one man in our world capable of solving all the problems of the Middle East. Egypt will not know war for another century—maybe they'll even get rid of their army! Cairo will become a city of canned beef, Alexandria hills of fine white flour. Port Said will be filled with mountains of televisions, cars, tape recorders, refrigerators, washing machines, and water heaters.[77]

The implication in this passage, and throughout the novel as a whole, is that al-Dubbaysh's life could have been saved, or at least acknowledged, if only the officials and villagers had not been so preoccupied with the preparations for Nixon's visit and all it was meant to signify: for the officials, ambitions of promotion; for the villagers, material commodities to improve their living conditions, and an end to the seemingly ceaseless wars that have structured the last half-century of their history. Nixon's visit is thus construed not only as the dawn of a new era of "lasting peace" (*al-salām al-dāʾim*), but also of "economic advancement" (*al-taqaddum al-iqtiṣādī*), as though the two were inextricably linked. Indeed, these are the very terms Nixon deployed in the first speech he delivered upon arriving at the Presidential Palace in Cairo on June 13, 1974:

> The goal of our meeting today is twofold. First, we want to achieve economic advancement in all areas, for the good of your people and all the populations in this region. And second, we want to achieve a true, just, and lasting peace. We cannot achieve advancement without achieving peace, and without advancement and hope, there can be no peace.[78]

In Nixon's speech, economic reform wears the rhetorical guise of "peace," and both peace and hope seem to be contingent on the kind of economic "advancement" associated with al-Sadat's open-door policy. The passage from the beginning of the Public Scribe's chapter thus takes up precisely the same rhetoric as the state-operated press, only in a tone of mockery: "The American president… He is the one man in our world capable of solving all the problems of the Middle East." Both al-Sadat's speeches and the newspapers that reproduced them contributed to this association between Nixon and "peace," and the promise of this association drew massive crowds of supporters, both on the pages of the newspaper (where various government agencies and private corporations paid for advertisements in support of Nixon and al-Sadat, as in figures 1 and 2) and in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria (figures 3 and 4). One enterprising television shop even offered a discounted rate on "American-made" R.C.A. televisions "in honor of President Nixon's visit to Cairo" (figure 5).

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[77] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 155.

[78] From the front-page article "Istiqbāl shaʿbī wa rasmī kabīr li-Nīksūn fī al-Qāhirāh" [Large popular and official welcome for Nixon in Cairo], *al-Ahrām*, June 13 1974 (see figure 4).

Figure 1: Full-page statement of support for Nixon by the "people of Alexandria," signed by the city's mayor, ʿAbd al-Tawwāb Aḥmad Hudayb, and the chair of the Arab Socialist Union, ʿĪsā Shahīn (*al-Ahrām*, June 13, 1974)

WORLD WELFARE

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COLLABORATION FOR THE SAKE OF WORLD WELFARE.

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OF CO-OPERATION BETWEEN PEOPLES IN THE INTEREST OF WORLD PEACE

WE HOPE TO REALIZE ALL OUR OBJECTIVES AND REACH LASTING PEACE IN THE

REGION OF THE MIDDLE EAST

PRESIDENT
MOHAMED ANWAR EL SADAT

THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND RECONSTRUCTION IN THE ARAB REPUBLIC

OF EGYPT, TAKES A GREAT PLEASURE, AFTER THE COURSE OF HISTORY HAS BEEN

CHANGED, AND THE ARAB PEOPLES REGAINED THEIR SELF-CONFIDENCE

FOLLOWING THE DECISIVE AND HISTORIC DECISION TAKEN BY THE DEVOUT

PRESIDENT
MOHAMED ANWAR EL SADAT

, ON THE GREAT DAY OF OCTOBER 6, AND THROUGH WHICH BOTH EGYPT

AND SYRIA AND THE REST OF THE ARAB PEOPLES RE-ASSURED THEIR RIGHT IN

LIBERTY AND PEACE FOR THE SAKE OF REGAINING THEIR TERRITORIES, AND RE-

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE LEGITIMATE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE,

TO WELCOME EGYPT'S DISTINGUISHED GUEST:

PRESIDENT
RICHARD M. NIXON

AND HONOR, IN HIS PERSON, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, ASSURING THAT

VICTORIOUS EGYPT WILL CONTINUE TO BEFRIEND ALL THOSE WHO SEEK

HER FRIENDSHIP, GREATLY APPRECIATES THE U.S. CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE,

REASSURES THE WHOLE WORLD THAT SUEZ CANAL WILL ALWAYS SERVE

WORLD PEACE, AND WELCOMES MUTUAL CO-OPERATION, UNDERSTANDING

AND RESPECT FOR THE INTEREST OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.

رفاهية العالم

إن اهتمامنا الأول هو الرفاهية العالمية وأن المثل الذي
ضرب في علية تطهير قناة السويس بين السلطات المصرية
وبين الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية يعطى البرهان على مدى ما يمكننا أن نشيده
من صداقة خالصة وتعاون مخلص لمصلحة الرفاهية العالمية .
إننا فتحنا عهداً جديداً في العلاقات العالمية وضربنا مثلا على تعاون
الشعوب من أجل مصلحة السلام ، ونأمل أن تتحقق جميع أهدافنا
وأن نحقق سلاما دائماً للمنطقة

الرئيس محمد أنور السادات

ويسعد وزارة الإسكان والتعمير بجمهورية مصر العربية

بعد أن تغير وجه التاريخ واستردت الشعوب العربية
والجيوش العربية ثقتها بنفسها بعد القرار المصري والتاريخي الذي اتخذه

الرئيس المؤمن

محمد أنور السادات

يوم ٦ أكتوبر العظيم ، وأكدت به مصر وسوريا وكافة الشعوب العربية
حقها في الحرية والسلام من أجل استرداد الأرض واستعادة حقوق الشعب الفلسطيني

أن تحيي ضيف مصر

الرئيس ريتشارد نيكسون

وتحيي في شخصه الشعب الأمريكي وتؤكد أن مصر الظافرة تصادق
من يصادقها وتتقابل بالتقدير الدور الأمريكي البناء وتؤكد أن القناة
في خدمة السلام . وترحب بالتعاون والتناهم والاحترام المتبادل
من أجل الحق والسلام .

Figure 2: Full-page statement of support for Nixon and al-Sadat from the
Cairo Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction (*al-Ahrām*, June 13, 1974)

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Figure 3: al-Sadat and Nixon greet crowds in Alexandria, with welcome banner by Arab Socialist Union (National Archives Catalog)[79]

Figure 4: "Large popular and official welcome for Nixon in Cairo" *al-Ahram*, June 13, 1974

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[79] Photograph No. 7268211: "President Richard Nixon with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Waving from a Motorcade Driving through Alexandria, Egypt," June 12, 1974; Nixon White House Photographs, 1/20/1969-8/9/1974, https://catalog.archives.gov/id/7268211

Figure 5: Advertisement for a sale on American R.C.A. televisions (*al-Ahrām*, June 13, 1974)

In the various official languages of the state, in other words (from political speeches to press releases), the promise of peace was made contingent on consumption and conformity to American economic models, as munificently bestowed upon the Egyptian people by Nixon in cooperation with al-Sadat. By contrast, in al-Qaʿīd's studied satire of capitalist triumphalism, his Public Scribe's detailed method for transforming violent death into exponential profit, there is a combination of despair and outrage at the idea that al-Dubbaysh's life could be sold so cheaply, in exchange for washing machines, toaster ovens, and blenders sold under the guise of "lasting peace." The final image of this chapter perfectly encapsulates both the villagers' susceptibility to such delusions and the possibility of resisting them: as the educated young Public Scribe enumerates the many ways to profit from al-Dubbaysh's death, al-Ghilbān quietly withdraws from the scene, "leaving [the farmworkers] to build the palaces of their hopes and dreams from the blood of al-Dubbaysh, whose location was still not known by anyone in al-Ḍahriyyah."[80] Arriving at home, he asks himself in colloquial Arabic: "What's happened to this country?" (*al-balad garā l'hā īh*?).[81] al-Ghilbān is not the courageous hero who will lead the farmworkers in an uprising against their capitalistic masters (as so often appeared in socialist-realist novels of the post-1952 era), but the victim of a Kafkaesque world of paper-pushing bureaucrats and Public Scribe-capitalists. What he offers is only a gesture of indignation, yet the everyday colloquial language in which it is expressed stands out in even greater relief against the Public Scribe's (and by extension, the two presidents') overweening, dehumanizing language of profit.

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[80] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 161.

[81] Ibid.

Given al-Qaʿīd's attitude toward the rigid, classist, dehumanizing languages of al-Ḍahriyyah's moneyed classes, the human-erasing languages of police reports, charters and bureaucratic bylaws, and the triumphalist language of *infitāḥī* capitalism, one might expect him to uphold the languages and aesthetic forms proper to the fallāḥīn as modes of subversive, subaltern, "non-official" language, as many other authors and critics have.[82] However, al-Qaʿīd is consistently as critical of peasant speech as he is of the other, more official linguistic strata he parodically stylizes in *Yaḥduth*. Indeed, the most important difference between Bakhtin's explicit and al-Qaʿīd's implicit poetics of novelistic discourse is their contrasting attitudes toward folk language and the genres proper to the popular, unofficial strata of society. Where Bakhtin tends to idealize and romanticize the subversive power of the folk genres inherited from the carnivalesque,[83] al-Qaʿīd portrays the everyday language of poor peasants as equally complicit in creating and maintaining the social conditions of their impoverishment as the languages of the rich and politically powerful.

The narrator of *Yaḥduth* consistently characterizes peasant speech as meandering and incoherent, bogged down with an overabundance of fatalistic proverbs and suspicious beliefs. When Ṣudfah gives her testimony to the Officer and Police Secretary, for example, we are told that the Officer was forced to "gather up the fragments of her scattered words and re-dictate them to the recording secretary," so incomprehensible were they to the village outsider.[84] Similarly, when al-Ghilbān and his group of farmworkers take their case to the secretary of the Arab Socialist Union and Public Scribe, we are told that their words "poured from their mouths, thick, overlapping, so charged with the smoke and spit exiting their mouths that the country Scribe couldn't understand a word of it."[85] More importantly, however, the *fallāḥīn* in *Yaḥduth* are easily manipulated because they consistently fail to see the conditions around them as the product of decisions and actions undertaken by human beings; instead, they assign everything to "fate" (*al-qadr*), viewing all the joy and suffering in their lives as integral parts of their "lot" (*al-naṣīb*), two words that frequently recur in the novel.[86]

Thus, as the author-narrator writes in a lengthy footnote to the Chairman's report in the second chapter of Book I, the *fallāḥīn* do not protest Nixon's visit in light of the U.S.'s enemy status in the October War only a year earlier and its president's recent indictment in the Watergate scandal. Rather, they welcome the recently shamed American president to their village with open arms, viewing him not only as "the only man who can solve the problems of

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[82] This is one of the major points Samah Selim makes in *Rural Imaginary*. See note 45, above.

[83] In his prologue to the 1984 edition of Bakhtin's *Rabelais*, Michael Holquist affirms: "Bakhtin's image of the folk is also open to the charge of idealization." Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, xix.

[84] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 56.

[85] Ibid., 156.

[86] See especially the first chapter of Book Three, titled "To Anyone Who Cares: al-Dubbaysh was Murdered," where the villagers are shown "slapping one palm against another" (a gesture of resignation) and mechanically reciting "variations on the idea that what happened to al-Dubbaysh was simply his lot (*naṣīb*)." Eventually, the matter is "officially closed" when a man who received a religious education categorically proclaims that al-Dubbaysh's death was "his destiny and his fate… the will of God on High" (*innahu al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadr... mashīʾat illāhi fī ʿulāh*). al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 141.

the Middle East,"[87] but as a kind of mystical healer bestowing peace through the magical power of the free market. The narrator calls this effect the "American dream factory" (*maṣnaʿ al-aḥlām al-amrīkiyyah*) and affirms that it was highly active during the weeks preceding Nixon's visit:

> In its own way, al-Ḍahriyyah tried to take its share of the new life, the post-Nixon life. […] There were many stories saying things that had never been said before. […] At night those expecting stories about the miracles performed by Shaykh ʿAbd Rabbuh Kafīf instead heard that the American steamships contained eyes for the blind. The village headman is afflicted with baldness all over his head. In America, they have a kind of oil, and all you have to do is smear it on your head to sprout a full head of hair the next day. Sitt Naffūsah is sterile; she's tried everything but has never been able to conceive. The visitor smiled and said: "In the steamships there are cures to make her conceive seven boys and three girls like full moons, to make the crippled man walk and the consumptive man talk!" (*sabʿah min al-dhukūr wa-thalāth banāt ka-l-budūr, wa-tuḥarrik al-kull: al-kasīḥ wa al-maṣdūr*).[88]

The rhyming, rhythmic form of this final promise (*dhukūr, budūr, maṣdūr*) plays on the *fallāḥī* penchant for clever, poetic, playful speech—especially rhymed speech.[89] The *fallāḥīn*, with their love of rhyming wordplay, are taken in by the factory-made American dreams precisely because they are presented to them in their own witty language with its flair for the musical and fantastical. The stories of an elderly shaykh's "miracle cures," for example, are replaced with stories of the even greater miracles that can be worked with American medicines, soon to arrive on steamships thanks to the new open-door policy. *Fallāḥī* language is yet another form of linguistic manipulation, one that uses a particular kind of eloquence—in this case, rhyme and other conventions in orally recited tall tales—to deceive and delude the *fallāḥīn*, using their own forms of self-expression and subversion against them.

Al-Dubbaysh's wife Ṣudfah is perhaps the crowning example of the way fatalism and superstition, reinforced through popular forms of speech and narrative such as the tall tale and the folk proverb, keep the *fallāḥīn* docile, subservient, and unresistant in *Yaḥduth*. Like other peasants in the novel, Ṣudfah understands her impoverishment as a manifestation of God's inscrutable will rather than the product of human-wrought injustice. When she describes the events of the day her husband was arrested to the Officer, she retroactively reads each moment as a bad omen:

> Some days are born grim and hideous. From the first glint of sunlight, the day seemed like an unwanted guest. […] Days like this bring you bad tidings from their very first moments. When I tried to bring a little water to wipe the rheum from the children's eyes, the jar spilled all over the floor. ʿArāyis[90] shattered a teacup, and the largest shard was no

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[87] Ibid., 155.

[88] Ibid., 27.

[89] As Idrīs writes in *The Sinners*, the *fallāḥīn* are "clever with words" and "natural-born talkers, famous for their skill, […] experts at telling stories and highlighting details… For the [*fallāḥīn*], conversation was a hobby, practically their only one, and there were people of genius among them, people who, when they went to a meeting, naturally took a front seat, having the glibbest tongues around." Idrīs, *The Sinners*, 48-49.

[90] The name of al-Dubbaysh's eldest son, who is around four or five years old.

bigger than a piaster. I went up onto the roof to relieve myself, and I saw a black bird whirling through the sky. I despaired at the sight of it.[91]

In Ṣudfah's world, the occurrences of everyday life are not random and coincidental (ironically, given that her name in Arabic means "chance" or "coincidence"), but signs of the invisible workings of fate. According to this Sufi-influenced worldview, the material, apparent world is little different from a book of signs transmitting the divine, eternal signified. This is precisely the kind of outlook that al-Qaʿīd's author-narrator chastises throughout *Yaḥduth*; he aims to show that al-Dubbaysh's death was not "written on the veiled slates of fate," as the village imam asserts,[92] but the product of a series of malicious machinations by a cohort of corrupt, negligent, self-interested officials, who should be held responsible for their actions.

Ṣudfah's worldview is plagued not only by overabundant superstition, but also by her overreliance on proverbs (*amthāl*) that—contrary to the longstanding tradition of *amthāl* as *ḥikmah* or inherited, common-sense knowledge gleaned through the ages—only mire her in further incomprehension. In the following dialogue, the author-narrator expects Ṣudfah to explain what happened to her family in terms of class conflict, and is disappointed (though perhaps not surprised) to find that she resorts to colloquial Egyptian proverbs instead:

> "The rich folks got aid with no strings attached (*min ghīr ḥibil*)," [she said].
>   "But why did the rich take it? Do they need it?"
>   "The ocean is always thirsty (*l-baḥr yiḥibb l-ziyādah*)."
>   "And why did they pick on you all?"
>   "The nail does not part from the flesh (*l-ḍifr yiṭliʿ mi-l-laḥm*). Who arrests who in this world? Could anyone get away with saying that the mule is in the pitcher, as the saying goes? (*Ḥadd yiʾdar yiʾūl inn 'l-baghl fi-l-ibrīʾ*?) Who's going to stand up to the Doctor […] and all the rich? Such a person has not yet fallen from his mother's womb (*dāh lissah manizilsh min baṭn ummuh*)."
>   What Ṣudfah didn't say was that letting the rich take a portion of aid they don't deserve—indeed, taking the aid *from* her the way they did—constitutes the rule of one class over another. I could tell she still had more to get off her chest, more to say and tell me, but—as she put it—"Words are a waste when the enemy is strong" (*al-qawl ḍāyiʿ wa-l-ʿadū rāyiʿ*).[93]

al-Qaʿīd points out that Ṣudfah cannot fully grasp the injustice of what was done to her precisely because she lacks the appropriate *language* to describe that injustice. Unlike the peasants in other socialist realist novels, she would never describe the confiscation of her aid as "the rule of one class over another" (*ḥukm ṭabaqah ḍidd ukhrā*); such Marxist terminology isn't in her vocabulary. In al-Qaʿīd's "new realism," peasant characters like Ṣudfah are not merely mouthpieces for the tenets of socialist realism. The linguistic reality of the peasant is much more complex than this, as al-Qaʿīd affirms here. Lacking the language to describe the world in terms of class, labor, and the conditions of production, Ṣudfah describes it in terms of signs and wonders, parsing her reality with the inherited knowledge of proverbs rather than the more

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[91] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 58.

[92] "…*musajjil fī al-lūḥ al-masṭūr.*" Ibid., 141.

[93] Ibid., 93.

learned discourse of Marxism. It takes the Cairo-educated, Leftist author-character Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd to add this language to the novel, but unlike other socialist realist authors in Egypt at this time, al-Qaʿīd does not hide the fact that he is imposing those words—"the rule of one class over another"—on Ṣudfah. Rather, he *shows himself imposing them* only after faithfully transcribing Ṣudfah's "actual" words. Moreover, Ṣudfah's litany of resigned aphorisms in the above passage culminates in the ultimate gesture of exasperation—a meta-proverbial proverb that describes in pithy terms the futility of pithy words in the face of a much stronger enemy. Once again, the rhyming form of this final aphorism—*al-qawl ḍāyiʿ wa-l-ʿadū rāyiʿ*—drives its irony home: rhymed speech, once considered the pinnacle of eloquence in Arabic literary culture, has become completely powerless in the face of a government where bureaucratic prose reigns supreme.

This encounter with Ṣudfah is only one in a series of instances in which the author-narrator attempts to avoid exploiting his characters by bringing his own romanticized, idealized imagination of village existence into conflict with the real conditions of poverty that he encounters upon returning there. In another moment from his interview with Ṣudfah, the author-narrator describes the strikingly sparse the conditions of her home: broken bits of furniture, the rags that pass for the family's clothing hanging on a single clothesline, and empty grain sacks in place of mattresses all shatter his romanticized memory of his village childhood.

> I laughed at myself in bitter mockery, realizing that I am one of those people who gain their livelihood from other people's pain. On the way to al-Dubbaysh's house, I had been thinking about the words I would use to describe the furniture in a typical village house. Words from a distant childhood floated to the surface of my mind—the wooden clothing chest (*saḥḥārat al-malābis*), the low, round table we ate on (*al-ṭabliyyah*), the clay water-jugs (*al-qilal*), the bed of yellow brass (*al-sarīr al-naḥḥāsī al-aṣfar*), the small gas burner (*wābūr al-gāz*). But reality shattered all my expectations. I didn't see any of these things in al-Dubbaysh's house.[94]

The words that float to the surface of al-Qaʿīd's author-narrator's mind are not arbitrarily chosen. Each item the author remembers, from the wooden clothing chest and low table to the clay water jugs and yellow brass bed, is hand-crafted and individually shaped, the products of labor in a pre-capitalist time, when everyday objects bore witness to the work of the craftsman. In this passage, al-Qaʿīd turns his derision inward, away from the corrupt agents of an exploitative bureaucracy and onto authors not unlike himself, who receive state remuneration (in the form of publishing contracts with state-operated presses) in exchange for novels that romanticize village life and heroize the figure of the fallāḥ, or that stage fictional peasant revolts that never seem to materialize. Al-Qaʿīd shows that his own memory has been marked by this romantic, nationalist ideology, but he also stages the scene of his own disabusing. He laughs at himself, but it is a "bitter," "mocking," even "ironic," laugh (*sukhriyyatan*), because he realizes his unwitting complicity in the system he seeks to denounce. "Despite having drafted hundreds of pages, having stained them with the ink of our treacherous time, I still feel guilty by association," his author-narrator writes in the novel's last chapter. "We writers, who transform the corpses of the destitute into cars and bottles of whiskey, we don't say very much."[95] To wrest material gain from fallāḥī death by transforming the very real fact of that death into an amusing, fictionalized

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[94] Ibid., 87-88.

[95] Ibid., 170.

tale is to be equally as exploitative and corrupt as the Doctor, Chairman, Officer, Public Scribe, or OPMW President, in al-Qaʿīd's estimation.

Worn Out Words: al-Qaʿīd's Satire of Socialist Realism

Up to this point, we have seen how al-Qaʿīd parodies a number of linguistic strata in the Egyptian village, from the dehumanizing language in which the Doctor and the "Feudal Lord of the 1975 variety" speak about the peasants to the written languages that sustain relations of social and economic inequality in the Egyptian village; and from the false optimism of free market capitalism promulgated by the *ʿarḍḥāljī* to the OPMW bureaucrat's stringent adherence to bylaws that ironically hurt the peasants they were designed to protect. In each of these cases, the narrator of *Yaḥduth* stylizes the language of a specific individual to frame and parody his or her mode of speaking and writing, to wear it as a mask and put it on display.

In the final chapter of the novel, however, the narrator moves beyond the world of the village and into the realm of literature itself—specifically the literary establishment in Egypt during the 1970s. Adopting the language of a typical Leftist critic, he reveals the extent to which literary writing about rural Egypt frequently only reiterated and perpetuated the exploitation effected by the police reports, testimonies, and other documents cited elsewhere in the novel (making the author equally as complicit in the oppression of the *fallāḥīn* as those whom he mocks). The author-narrator satirizes the mode of literary writing most prevalent among authors and critics of the committed socialist-realist school. To him, these authors' dogmatic adherence to the plotlines, stock characters, and themes prescribed by the state-supported literary-critical apparatus has made writing about the countryside an exploitative, rather than socially committed activity. In response, he adopts the voice of a typical critic and conducts a mocking appraisal of his own novel (the novel *Yaḥduth* itself) in order to mock and ultimately reject these critics' version of committed realist fiction.

The "ideological socialist realist" trend in literary writing and criticism against which al-Qaʿīd's narrator reacts in the final chapter of *Yaḥduth* is one that emerged in Egypt following the 1952 Free Officers' Revolt, during the era when "committed literature" was a frequent topic of discussion. As Samah Selim describes it, the writers and critics who contributed to the formation of this trend (especially Maḥmūd Amīn al-ʿĀlim, ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm Anīs, Muḥammad Ṣidqī, Yūsuf al-Sibāʿī, and others) preached a dogmatic, prescriptive strain of criticism that was more ideological than practical, concerned primarily with "the explicit content of fiction rather than an analysis of its formal features and its implicit, dialectical relationship to history and ideology."[96] In order not to be deemed bourgeois, reactionary, or decadent by the socialist realists, committed authors had to ensure that their novels "revolved around irrepressibly optimistic revolutionary heroes and ended with the requisite signposts pointing the way to the new utopia."[97] As delineated by this school of critics, "realism" became synonymous with predictable plots and stock characters, all in the interest of portraying popular revolt in simple, positive, accessible terms, with little or no attention paid to form. By contrast, the "committed realists" whose work Samah Selim discusses, "shifted the discursive space of fiction from the fixed morphology of the biographical mode" (as in *Zaynab*, *Return of the Spirit*, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *The Days*, and many

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[96] Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 140.

[97] Ibid., 142.

other early twentieth-century novels) "to the social mode in which social reality is written as a contested field of power between classes and social institutions."[98]

The socialist realists' thematicism, along with their insistence that every committed novel necessarily center around a popular, peasant hero who emerges to foment a successful revolt against the state, are precisely the tenets of socialist realism against which the author-narrator of *Yaḥduth* reacts in the novel's final chapter. Instead of forcibly inserting such heroes and plots into his novel as the marks of realism, this author-narrator stages his own confrontation with reality, laying out the hopes he originally had of his countrymen—namely, that they would refuse food aid coming from an enemy country on ideological and political grounds—and contrasting these hopes with a more accurate representation of what a hungry, destitute peasant given the opportunity to collect American food aid might say:

> It would have been easy for me to add to the characters of this novel a man whose sole purpose would have been to refuse the American aid and incite others to refuse it as well, boycotting Nixon's visit to Egypt and refusing to participate in the welcome parade. […] I would find colloquial translations for the words used by Cairene revolutionaries, convinced that the revolution in our time will be conducted with words, speeches, articles, and meetings held by theorists isolated from reality with all its pesky rules and givens. But this didn't happen in my village. I asked more than one man, "Didn't you think for one second about refusing the American aid coming to us from an enemy country?" One of them thought for a moment, then replied: "You say that because your mind is at ease. You're a well-off gentleman, a bachelor with a good salary at the start of every month. There may be blood between us and the Americans, but this is a different matter altogether [*dī naqrah, wi dī naqrah*]."[99]

The author-narrator exposes the paradox undergirding the ideology of socialist realism as it developed in Egypt at this time: in mandating a very specific depiction of "reality" by insisting on the inclusion of particular plots, events, and stock characters, it actually *distanced* the literary work even further from reality by forcing authors to describe in fiction situations that they had never actually encountered. This final chapter of *Yaḥduth* offers not answers, but "some naïve and innocent questions from the author," as its title states.[100] And among the questions that the author-character poses to villagers in al-Ḍahriyyah is, why didn't the peasants refuse the U.S. food aid, knowing that it comes from a country which was their enemy by association in the 1973 war only a year earlier, and whose tanks, guns, and bombs were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Egyptians during that war? The answer, as it comes to him from one villager, is that desperation is the enemy of all conviction; the villagers accepted the food aid because they

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[98] Ibid., 142. Selim does not distinguish between the nineteen-fifties, -sixties, and -seventies generations in *Rural Imaginary*. Indeed, her goal, particularly in the fourth chapter of the book, is to "explore the continuities between what are often read as three distinct periods in modern Egyptian cultural history," namely pre-revolutionary (late 1940s and 50s), Nasserist (1950s and 60s), and Open-Door (1970s and 80s). Instead, she draws parallels between earlier experimentations with village prose (such as Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Maze of Justice*) and later experimental works of the so-called sixties generation. For her, "committed realists" are not necessarily those who wrote in the era of "commitment" strictly speaking, but those who interrogate the politics of representing reality through their fiction.

[99] al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 171.

[100] Ibid., 169.

were hungry and in desperate need of it. It is easy for the author-narrator, a "well-off gentleman (*afandī*), a bachelor with a good salary at the start of every month," as the peasant describes him,[101] to propose that the villagers should have refused the American aid on ideological grounds. Yet for the villagers themselves, there was no alternative: either accept the food and support Nixon's visit or starve. To depict some other story, to forcibly insert a fabricated popular hero or mass movement of resistance into the novel (complete with colloquial translations of the slogans chanted by Cairene revolutionaries) would be to betray what al-Qaʿīd perceives as the actual situation of village life in this particular moment. Al-Qaʿīd's "new realism," in this sense, uses metafictional intervention to expose the falsifications of socialist realism while simultaneously demonstrating a renewed commitment to the lives of the *fallāḥīn*.

Later in the final chapter of *Yaḥduth*, al-Qaʿīd's author-narrator parodies the dogmatic voices of socialist realist critics in even more blatant terms, returning to the modes of ironic citation and parodic stylization practiced earlier in the novel. He describes a writer whose very livelihood is grounded in hypocrisy, given that he "works mornings as an employee in one of the state offices that he calls conservative, then when evening comes […] miraculously transforms into a Leftist committed to revolution," and thereby "lives off the money of the Right and the prestige of the philosophical Left."[102] Like the socialist critics described by Samah Selim and Ghālī Shukrī, this young clerk is not an author himself, nor does he devote any significant time to analyzing the intricate relationship between form and content in his reading of Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd's novel (i.e. *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān*, the novel we too are about to finish reading). Instead, he decries al-Qaʿīd as a "bourgeois" intellectual undermining the revolutionary project, citing György Lukács like sacred scripture and also making oblique reference to the most revered of committed Egyptian novels, al-Sharqāwī's *al-Arḍ*:

> This clerk will write an article about the novel in which he asks: "Where are the poor masses? Why was their revolution aborted?" After these two questions, he'll go on to say: "Yusuf al-Qaʿīd's vision falsifies a reality ripe for revolution. Because Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd is bourgeois in both his style and his thought, and emerged on the literary scene at a time when the Right controls the means of publication and evaluation, remuneration and impoverishment, and when the original Leftist writers have all left the country to publish their works, […] he prefers to skirt the true problems in the Egyptian countryside from a safe distance, without facing the central problem: that of the land [*al-arḍ*]. Any literary work about the countryside that doesn't discuss the issue of land is a spurious work that undermines the force of Revolution." Memory will supply this critic with a steady flow of talk that everyone has ground up and chewed on so much that *the words have lost their features, like piasters worn down from use*. He'll then quickly jump to his conclusion, saying that my realism isn't socialist, critical, or progressive, because it doesn't correspond with what György Lukács wrote in the seventh line of the seventy-fifth page of his *Theory of the Novel*. The *fallāḥīn* must move into action after learning about the murder of al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis from the strange visitor. In the style of novels that divide reality into smaller pieces and then re-pour it into readymade molds, the *fallāḥīn* must carry axes and raise up blue flags on which they've written in letters of blood: "Poor people of Egypt, unite!" and then tear everything down.

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[101] Ibid., 171.

[102] Ibid., 172.

Unfortunately, this isn't what happened. I don't think my job is to make people close their eyes, transforming the novel into a factory for distributing readymade dreams to poor readers, each one according to his social station. Perhaps what is required instead is for words to transform into an attempt at incitement, and for letters to take on the round shapes of open throats, the sharpness of knives, and the heat of gunshots.[103]

Here in distilled form is al-Qaʿīd's rejection of conventional, socialist "realism" as it was developed and practiced in Egypt in the 1950s and 60s, and his substitution of a different literary mode, a new realism, in which words are not like "piasters worn down from use," "ground up and chewed on so much that they have lost their features," nor are they mechanisms that "divide reality into smaller pieces" and "re-pour it into readymade molds." Instead, what is "required" (*maṭlūb*) (and note that the author-narrator does not imply that he has necessarily achieved this goal in *Yaḥduth*) is for words to transform into "an attempt at incitement," for letters themselves to take on the same embodied qualities that characterize popular revolts, the "sharpness of daggers," the "heat of gunshots," the "round shape of open throats." What is perhaps most remarkable about this passage is the way al-Qaʿīd's own voice—that is, the voice of the biographical author Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd—merges with that of his narrative stand-in. In the final paragraph, the narrator and author give the reader one of the rare, un-ironic, unmasked linguistic moments in the novel, a moment not of commentary but of assertion, of sharing an artistic conviction rather than revealing the hypocrisy in the various languages of power.

This passage reveals that al-Qaʿīd's authorial stand-in is, like the other authors examined in this dissertation, searching not only for the unmarked grave of the novel's absent protagonist, but for a *language* beyond the ones at his disposal, which he wears only as masks, only to reveal their hypocrisy and insufficiency by distancing himself from them. He is searching for words that are not yet worn down, that still carry the sound and "heat of gunshots," and letters whose "round shape" reminds one more of "open throats" than of marks on the page. al-Qaʿīd's new realism, in this sense, is also a project yet to come; the novel gestures toward this other language, but does not guarantee that it itself is an example of such language. It imagines a unity between sign and referent long considered by linguists and semioticians alike, with the added fantasy that Arabic might transform from a phonetic into an ideogrammatic language—one in which the loops of *fāʾ*'s (ف), *qāf*'s (ق), and *hāʾ*'s (ه) might signify "open throats," while the pointed final tails of these same letters, together with *baaʾ* (ب), *taaʾ* (ت), and others might signify "the sharpness of daggers" rather than sounds.[104] The letters themselves generate a protest.

As the voice of the author-narrator begins to approach that of the biographical author himself, it becomes clear that al-Qaʿīd's new realism not only rejects all "worn-out," "featureless" words, and the "readymade" plotlines and character-types proper to socialist realist

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[103] Ibid., 173-74 (emphasis added).

[104] Of course, al-Qaʿīd's dream and deferral of such a literary language is subject to the same contradiction Jacques Derrida identifies in Plato's condemnation of writing—that is, al-Qaʿīd depends on phonetic Arabic to articulate his dream of an ideogrammatic Arabic just as, in Plato, "the exclusion and the devaluation of writing must somehow, in their very affirmation, come to terms with: 1. a generalized sort of writing and, along with it, 2. a 'contradiction': the written proposal of logocentrism; the simultaneous affirmation of the being-outside of the outside and of its injurious intrusion into the inside… Thus it is that the 'linguistics' elaborated by Plato, Rousseau, and Saussure must both put writing out of the question and yet nevertheless borrow from it, for fundamental reasons, all its demonstrative and theoretical resources." See Jacques Derrida, "From *Dissemination*," trans. Barbara Johnson, cited in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 1867-68.

fiction (peasants awakened to class consciousness by charismatic leaders, who march with banners bearing Marxist slogans in popular revolts that never actually happen). It also stands against the normalization of state violence through its resigned classification as something "everyday," "ordinary," or "to be expected" (ʿādiyy). This one word—ʿādiyy—is at the heart of al-Qaʿīd's political critique in *Yaḥduth*, and it appears in two crucial passages from the very beginning and very end of the novel (the final paragraphs of the first and last chapters, respectively). In the first passage, the narrator criticizes the facility with which the residents of al-Ḍahriyyah transform al-Dubbaysh's murder from a recent, real-life event for which the Officer, Doctor, and Village Chairman should be held accountable, into a fantastical tale along the lines of other popular folk ballads such as that of al-Ad'ham al-Sharqāwī or al-Zanātī Khalīfah:[105]

> With the coming of night, al-Ḍahriyyah forgot the story of the farmworker. […] In the alleyways and on the stone benches, opinions differed. Some said that the worker was a poor man. Others said he deserved what happened to him and more, that water will never flow uphill, and that not even al-Ad'ham al-Sharqāwī or al-Zanātī Khalīfah could have gotten away with saying the mule was in the pitcher, as the saying goes. Feelings were divided between pain, fear, and the kind of boldness that night grants liberally to those who remain awake. They agreed that what happened was ordinary (ʿādiyy). A farmworker had attacked a doctor and paid the price for it. But not one soul tried to understand the matter any further than that.[106]

By transforming al-Dubbaysh's story into a kind of tall tale, the villagers accept his murder as an "ordinary matter" and never question the government's role in it. Here again, al-Qaʿīd's narrator does not applaud but overtly criticizes the oral narrative forms and languages proper to the *fallāḥīn*—what Yūsuf Idrīs calls their "cleverness with words,"[107] and what Selim has described as a "contrapuntal subaltern dialogue that both exemplifies peasant culture and challenges […] the discursive authority of institutional power in a rural context."[108] al-Qaʿīd puts the language of the folk tale conspicuously on display by citing the colloquial language of the villagers: "water will never flow uphill," "not even al-Ad'ham al-Sharqāwī or al-Zanātī Khalīfah could have gotten away with such a feat" (literally: "said the mule is in the bottle," *al-baghl fī al-abrīq*).[109] In this passage, folk narrative forms such as the *mawāwīl* (sing. *mawwāl*) of al-Zanātī Khalīfah and al-Adham al-Sharqāwī do not contrapuntally contest the discourses of power, but merely reinforce the violence of the state by naturalizing it, transforming historical, human-wrought injustice into a timeless tall tale.

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[105] Al-Ad'ham al-Sharqāwī and al-Zanātī Khalīfah are both heroes of popular ballads or *mawwāwīl* (sing. *mawwāl*) from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For more on this form and its role in modern Egyptian culture, along with English translations of some of the most popular odes, see Pierre Cachia, *Popular Narrative Ballads of Modern Egypt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). For a translation and analysis of the *mawwāl* of al-Ad'ham al-Sharqāwī in particular, see Margaret Larkin, "A Brigand Hero of Egyptian Colloquial Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23:1 (1992): 49-64.

[106] Ibid., 12.

[107] Idrīs, *The Sinners*, 48.

[108] Selim, *Rural Imaginary*, 174.

[109] For this expression, see Hinds-Badawi, *Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic*, 89.

In the second passage, the author-narrator adopts a different strategy to combat the rhetoric of the ʿādiyy. Rather than mimic the language of the villagers in order to reveal indirectly the process through which the violent becomes the "everyday," he makes a direct appeal to the reader, illustrating how the passive voice construction in Arabic (al-mabnī li-l-majhūl) erases the responsibility for the violence it describes:

> Let me remind you again, and it won't be the last time, that al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis was killed [qutila]. All I ask is that you recognize that there are many more people other than al-Dubbaysh dying every moment. But at the same time, I beg you not to see al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis' murder as something ordinary [amran ʿādiyyan] and console yourselves in an escapist fashion, saying that a lot of other things are also happening in Egypt.
> What happened is not ordinary. Its transformation into something normal, recurrent, and everyday [ʿādiyy wa yawmī wa mutakarrir] reiterates a treachery that must be confronted. I want to torture your consciences. I want to prevent you from enjoying the magic hidden in this disturbing statement:
> al-Dubbaysh ʿArāyis was killed (qutila).[110]

Al-Qaʿīd reminds readers not only of al-Dubbaysh's death, but also of the many linguistic tricks that have been marshaled throughout the novel to conceal that death. He focuses particularly on the "magic" of the passive voice in the verb qutila (al-Dubbaysh "was killed"), which in effacing the subject of the verb essentially absolves the culprit(s) from guilt. The grammar of the sentence itself pacifies readers before they have had a chance to be outraged, pushing them toward resigned acceptance of the "everyday" (ʿādiyy, yawmī) instead of the "outrage" that al-Qaʿīd deems necessary. These two moments from the very beginning and the very end of Yaḥduth frame the entire novel, dispelling the rhetoric of the ordinary through first indirect and then more direct confrontational narrative tactics.

Al-Qaʿīd's campaign against the rhetoric of the ʿādiyy, and by extension, against widespread Egyptian inurement to state violence, extends beyond the (semi-)fictional world of Yaḥduth and onto the pages of the novel's paratexts as well—specifically, the critical introduction the author composed for the book's fourth edition (and first to be published by an Egyptian press) in 1986.[111] There, al-Qaʿīd describes some of the questions he faced from friends, colleagues, and loved ones on the occasion of the book's fourth edition: what would he do about the word "now" (al-ān) in the title? And the verb "it's happening" (yaḥduth) in the present tense? Why not rename the 1986 edition of the novel "It Happened in Egypt in 1974"? al-Qaʿīd re-

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[110] al-Qaʿīd, Yaḥduth, 174.

[111] The first edition of Yaḥduth fī miṣr al-ān was, according to the front material of the fourth edition, published "at the author's expense" in 1977, the year al-Sadat officially lifted the policy of advance censorship for all novels by the Ministry of Culture. See Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd, preface to Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān, 4th edition (Cairo: Dār al-mustaqbal al-ʿArabī, 1986), 4. This statement is corroborated by a footnote on the title page of the first edition, from 1977: "It was not possible to publish this novel, which was written at the end of 1974 and the beginning of 1975, until after advance censorship of books was lifted in Egypt. For this reason, it is reaching the reader two years after it was written, during which time it had been seized by the censors, thus making this note necessary." al-Qaʿīd, Yaḥduth, 2. For similar reasons, the second and third editions of the novel were published outside Egypt: the second in Beirut by the publishing house Dār Ibn Rushd in 1977, and the third in Acre, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, by the publishing house Dār al-Aswār in 1979.

poses these questions in his own terms: what is the state of the American dream that came to Egypt with the American president, driven out of his own country by the Watergate scandal, twelve years later? To justify his retention of the original title, al-Qaʿīd returns to the rhetoric of the ʿādiyy:

> I looked around me, reviving the eyes of my distant childhood in order to see with the greatest possible degree of shock and contemplate everything we have come to understand as customary in an unaccustomed way. I tried to view my country as though I were seeing it for the first time, with all the innocence that implies. And I discovered that the "now" of 1974 is the same "now" of 1986, that the age of American domination is protracted, and that the American sideshow continues in the land of Egypt even today. The twelve years that have passed in my country [since the original publication of *Yaḥduth*] have made the exceptional into the ordinary, the temporary into the permanent, and the unacceptable into something that not only remains but—and I am sad to even write this with my own hand—is very close to being accepted, so accustomed have we grown to it.[112]

Al-Qaʿīd's "new realist" poetics of the novel, as elucidated both implicitly (within the chapters of *Yaḥduth*) and explicitly (in the preface to the fourth edition) thus falls somewhere in between socialist-realist commitment and sixties-generation modernist formal experimentation as described by al-Kharrāṭ in his "Introduction" to *Ḥassāsiyyah*. Like the committed realists, al-Qaʿīd wants to shock his readers into outrage and resistance, portraying "everything we have come to see as customary" (*kull mā aṣbaḥnā narāhu wa kaʾannahu min al-umūr al-ʿādiyyah*) in an "unaccustomed way" (*bi-ṣūrah ghayr ʿādiyyah*), and thereby dispelling the facility with which the oppressed internalize their oppression as an "ordinary" (*ʿādiyy*), "permanent" (*mustamirr*), "accepted" (*maqbūl*) phenomenon. But like his contemporaries Idwār al-Kharrāṭ, Gamal al-Ghitani, and others, al-Qaʿīd is also wary of all the "readymade," "worn-out" words, plotlines, and stock characters that had come to define realist fiction in his moment, just as he rejects the rigid dogma of a plot-obsessed and hypocritical literary-critical establishment. Like other writers responding to the paradoxes of al-Sadat's rule, al-Qaʿīd's work seethes with outrage yet is cautious not to mirror the loud, moralizing tones of the government it opposes; it sincerely aspires toward a freer and more just society, yet is unwilling to use literature as a politically prescriptive medium. From within this space of between-ness, al-Qaʿīd himself, like his fallāḥī characters Ṣudfah and al-Ghilbān, is also searching—not necessarily for al-Dubbaysh, but for a new, simple but powerful language in which to narrate the stories of Egyptians living, working, and dying in "the other Egypt,"[113] the Egypt in which al-Qaʿīd was raised and whose legacy in his own character he cannot erase. He goes searching through stacks of bureaucratic paperwork, police files, and transcribed testimonies, and conducts interviews and casual conversations with the farmworkers, peasants, and villagers on whose behalf he wishes to speak. At every turn he confronts yet another insufficient, threadbare language, yet another system of oral or written,

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[112] al-Qaʿīd, preface to *Yaḥduth fī Miṣr al-ān*, 4th edition, 6.

[113] "Miṣr al-ukhrā." al-Qaʿīd, *Yaḥduth*, 9. *Man yudhkir Miṣr al-ukhrā?* [Who speaks of the other Egypt?] is also the title of a collection of short stories al-Qaʿīd published first with the Syrian Ministry of Culture and then with the popular Egyptian publishing house Madbūlī. See al-Qaʿīd, *Man yadhkur Miṣr al-ukhrā: Sittat nuṣūṣ qiṣaṣiyyah* (Damascus: al-Jumhūriyyah al-ʿArabiyyah al-Sūriyyah, wizārat al-thaqāfah, 1984) and *Man yadhkur Miṣr al-ukhrā: Sittat nuṣūṣ qiṣaṣiyyah* (Cairo: Madbūlī, 1992).

official or unnofficial signification inadequate to his purpose. But the novel—that "bewilderingly capacious" genre, as Robert Alter has described it[114]—serves as an ideal space for putting these languages on display. Somewhere in between commitment and modernist experimentation, between the "village novel" and the novel of investigation, al-Qaʿīd negotiates ambivalence through polyphony, dramatizing expectation and disappointment, and giving the lie to both pastoral Romanticism and socialist realist plot construction. The result is a novel of investigation that questions the very premises of "investigation," "truth-seeking," and "realism" (*taḥqīq, wāqiʿīyyah*) presumed by police officer and literary author alike.

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[114] Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), xii.

Chapter 4:

Piles of Palaver, Scraps of Words:
Driss Chraïbi and the Berber Critique of Enlightenment

> Entre la première question et la dernière réponse, les éléments de l'enquête s'accumulèrent en un gigantesque tas de palabres et de rognures de paroles sans nom et sans forme.
>
> —*Une Enquête au pays*[1]

Like the investigations conducted by Jawād Ḥusnī, Khoury's unnamed frame narrator, and Qaʿīd's author-narrator, the titular investigation in Moroccan author Driss Chraïbi's 1982 novel *Une enquête au pays* is announced as a failure before it can even begin, its elements reduced to "a giant pile of palaver, scraps of nameless, formless words." The failure of this plot-level investigation also points to the larger, metafictional investigation that Chraïbi himself conducts in the novel—a search for the autochthonous, Amazigh roots from which colonial administration and education have estranged him. Yet this search too is doomed to fail before it can even begin, because it relies on language to uncover a space, identity, and psychic realm beyond language; and because it seeks to re-suture the connections between language, the body, and cultural memory whose rupture formed the basis of colonial rule, yet its medium is the novel, a written form estranged from oral language and the body by definition. Rather than eschew or sidestep the complexities that attend these paradoxes, however, Chraïbi works within them, satirizing state language through heteroglossia, staging both the comedic and the tragic possibilities available to hybrid language, inhabiting an autochthonus psychic realm, yet also revealing the impossibility of that realm's complete return. The result is a novel that strains at the seams not only of the French language, but of language in general.

One of a small cadre of Moroccans selected for education in colonial French schools,[2] Chraïbi found himself in the interstitial position of the colonized intellectual: having been subjected, in the words of Abdellatif Laâbi, to the "violent graft" of Western culture (conceived as "a foundation intended to give access to a world of wholesome values and ensure his liberation and self-mastery"), yet simultaneously "in the throes of disorientation, uprooted, split in half… at odds with his environment, his people, either in a state of shock or disgust before the traditional values that first shaped his personality."[3] Disorientation and deracination are revealed

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[1] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 89.

[2] Chraïbi has reflected on his biography and colonial schooling in a number of interviews, especially one with the Moroccan critic and founder of the magazine *Souffles/Anfās*, Abdellatif Laâbi. See Driss Chraïbi, "Driss Chraïbi and Us (Interview)," trans. Safoi Babana-Hampton, in *Souffles/Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics*, ed. Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2016), 74.

[3] Laâbi, "Realities and Dilemmas of National Culture," trans. Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio, in *Souffles/Anfas*, 63. The literature on the fraught position of the colonized intellectual is vast; see especially Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil 1955) and *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), as well as Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) and Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé, précédé de Portrait du colonisateur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) (translated as *The Colonizer and the Colonized* by Howard Greenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991). What distinguishes Laâbi's portrait of the colonized intellectual from, say, Bhabha's is the way it resists generalization and abstraction, as Laâbi is concerned with very specific situation in North Africa, as distinct from other colonial contexts in the sub-Saharan Africa, India, and southeast Asia.

as the real face of colonial education, which aimed not only to form a "small elite of subaltern natives," but also to "erect an abyss between the individuality of the colonized and anything that could connect him to his own culture and memory."[4] The work of forging a national culture, then, is for Laâbi "*a will, a necessity, and a condition of being...* an epic of the body and of memory involving a measure of risk."[5]

To bridge the abyss forcefully and violently created by colonial education, then, Chraïbi, working within the interstices of his own formation, sets out to rediscover his own suppressed culture and memory in what has come to be known as his Berber trilogy: *Une Enquête au pays* (1981), *La Mère du printemps/L'Oum-er-Bia* (1982), and *Naissance à l'aube* (1986). In all of these novels Chraïbi's explorations take the form of what Laâbi, in a 1967 essay, refers to as "atavism:"

> In today's standardized world, where the technical power of the West imposes the uniformity of its sociocultural products, there is a frequent tendency to reduce *atavism* to irrational remnants of primitiveness, if not of latent racism. Yet this atavism exists. I believe in its liberating force. Europe is distrustful of atavism only because it allowed millions of human beings to perish in its name, resulting in a feeling of immense guilt that Europe is valiantly flaunting today… The kind of atavism to which we are claiming a right does not partake of this racist reductionism. It is rather an organic consciousness of lived cultural experiences, a descent into the history of the body and of memory.[6]

Here and elsewhere, Laâbi affirms that Maghrebi writers must reclaim and repurpose the rhetoric of atavism. Once pejoratively associated with primitiveness or backwardness in racist colonial discourse, this same atavism must now serve as a "liberating force," one capable of resuscitating the colonized population's long suppressed ties not only with memory and the body, but also with the kinds of memory embedded in the body, including oral storytelling practices. What Laâbi theorizes in the abstract Chraïbi puts into practice in his Berber trilogy, which reimagines the history of the Arabo-Islamic conquests in North Africa from the point of view of the land's native inhabitants, the Imazighen (Berbers). In each novel, Chraïbi adds another brushstroke to his portrait of the Aït Yafelman, a modern day Amazigh family, whose naïvité he portrays as a mode of resistance to the violence of colonial Enlightenment.

What distinguishes *Enquête* from the other novels in the trilogy, however, is the way it plays with the *roman policier*, subverting the conventions of the genre to create a novel that, in its very form, mirrors the suppression of oral language, the body, and memory enacted by colonial education. *Enquête* narrates the misadventures of a police chief and his assistant, Inspector Ali, as they travel to a remote village in the High Atlas Mountains looking for a "dangereux subversif" who, according to the chief's sources, has recently returned to his native Moroccan village after living in Europe for quite a long time.[7] Their efforts are quickly foiled, however, by the scorching heat of the mountains and the simple, everyday resistance of the

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[4] Laâbi, "Realities and Dilemmas," 63.

[5] Laâbi, "Realities and Dilemmas of National Culture II," trans. Safoi Babana-Hampton, in *Souffles/Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics*, ed. Olivia C. Harrison and Teresa Villa-Ignacio (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 103 (emphasis in original).

[6] Laâbi, "Realities and Dilemmas II," 97.

[7] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 167.

peasants, who slash the tires on their car, steal the brass buttons from the chief's uniform, and repel the policemen's best efforts to interrogate them. The state authority and "officialité" that the police chief so cherishes become meaningless when transplanted into the remote context of the village, and he is forced to rely instead on his inspector, whose Amazigh origins and trickster's way with words give him readier access to the peasants' world. The police "enquête" thus quickly becomes an "enquête sur soi-même" conducted by Ali, who in communicating with the peasants also communicates with his own past—both his personal memories of his parents and the transgenerational memories of immemorial Amazigh time as transmitted to him through his mother's storytelling. The "dangereux subversif" who was the original object of the *enquête* is later identified as Basfao, a blind man who escapes the village on a donkey even before the first witness is interviewed. Yet the description of this subversive as provided by the chief—"un dangereux subversif, citoyen de notre pays, a longtemps vécu en Europe et a franchi la frontière la semaine dernière, illégalement"[8]—also matches the author of the novel himself, Driss Chraïbi, who lived most of his adult life in France.[9] Like the police chief and his inspector, Chraïbi too is an interloper, a foreigner, an "insectuel" parasitizing his characters' native authenticity in order to conduct his own search for himself. In the "enquête sur soi-même" that Ali conducts, therefore, Chraïbi explores the possibility of an atavistic return to his own origins and roots, while in his own, metafictional "enquête," he reveals this return as a fantasy.

In this chapter, I argue that Chraïbi navigates the fraught, interstitial space of the colonized intellectual by opening out the plot-level police investigation that serves as the premise of *Enquête* into a broader "search" or "quest" that penetrates and structures the novel on a formal, meta-textual level. Like his characters, Chraïbi too is on an "enquête au pays," searching the remote Atlas Mountains for what I am calling an autochthonous alterity, a form of being native to the earth that both precedes and exceeds language, and that thereby cannot be captured in words. This indigenous identity is also inextricably linked to the figure of the mother and matrilineal transmission (a recurring theme in Chraïbi's work, as in the work of other authors from across the Maghreb in the post-colonial period).[10] This alterity resists the languages of the

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Chraïbi left Morocco for Paris in 1945 to study chemistry and engineering, and for the most part he remained in France until his death in 2007.

[10] Starting with *Le Passé simple* in 1954 and proceeding all the way through *Inspecteur Ali* in 1991, the mother is a recurring figure in Chraïbi's novels, both as character and as analog for the colonized land, most notably in *La Civilisation, ma mère!* (1972) and *La Mère du printemps/L'Oum-er-Bia* (1982). Some critics deride Chraïbi's early depictions of mother-figures as neo- or auto-Orientalist. See especially Jacqueline Kaye and Abdelhamid Zoubir, *The Ambiguous Compromise: Language, Literature, and National Identity in Algeria and Morocco* (New York: Routledge, 1990). However, Danielle Marx-Scouras contends that "Driss's [*sic*] revolt stems from the love he bears his mother; in fact, the unhappiness to which she is subjected causes Driss to rebel against his father and all the patriarchal and theocratic values that he embodies." "A Literature of Departure: The Cross-Cultural Writing of Driss Chraïbi." *Research in African Literatures* 23.2 (1992): 134. Chraïbi is one of many Maghrebi writers who figured French colonialism as an "abduction" from the mother; others include Kateb Yacine, Jean Amrouche, and Rachid Boudjedra. In *Le Polygone étoilé*, Kateb describes French education as a "seconde rupture du lien ombilical" and an "exil intérieur qui ne rapprochait plus l'écolier de sa mère que pour les arracher, chaque fois un peu plus au murmure du sang … Ainsi avais-je perdu tout à la fois ma mère et son langage, les seuls trésors inaliénables—et pourtant aliénés!" Kateb Yacine, *Le Poygone étoilé* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), 181-82. In Kateb's description as in others, the mother quickly becomes a metonym for both language and land. Yet among this group of writers and within this figural knot of signification, what distinguishes Chraïbi's work, according to Marx-Scouras, is this writer's "willingness to employ the mother figure not merely as a symbol of loss and victimization, but also as the necessary

state and the violence that undergirds colonial Enlightenment by rendering those who inhabit it unknowable and thereby uncontrollable, resistant and quite literally illegible to state discipline.

Chraïbi unearths (or perhaps, invents) this resistant, autochthonous realm because he is searching for a third term, an identity beyond the hard and fast distinctions between state and land, city and country, writing and orality, father and mother, French and Arabic that saturated anti- and post-colonial Maghrebi writing. He offers up the largely imagined, atavistic world of the Aït Yafelman as an alternative to the administrative French associated with colonial violence and the enforced Arabic associated with post-colonial authoritarianism. This autochthonous alterity also responds to those critics who derided Chraïbi for his critique of repressive and patriarchal elements in Arab and Muslim family structures in his first novel, *Le Passé Simple* (1954). Accused of betraying his country at the very moment it was fighting for liberation, and of providing justification for continued French colonial rule,[11] Chraïbi spent the better part of his later career seeking out a realm of signification that would elude alignment with either the French-colonial or the post-colonial Arab-Muslim elites.

Yet because the language and identity Chraïbi seeks can only exist in a utopian "non-place," the metafictional investigation—like the fictional one—is slated to fail before it can even begin. In *Enquête*, therefore, Chraïbi dramatizes a paradox: he is searching, in language, for a world outside, beyond, or perhaps before language, a world beyond state practices of knowing and control. Put another way, in his attempts to narrate the features of this alternate, unclassifiable subjectivity, he employs the very tools of surveillance he is trying to escape: lists, descriptions, and passages of free indirect discourse that pry into the minds of his supposedly unknowable Berber characters. In short, the narration and form of the novel undermine the search it is attempting to conduct, placing Chraïbi in an impossible position. For Chraïbi as for the other authors whose work I examine in this project, operating from this impossible position is to be the new face of authorship—the "new realism"—in the postcolonial Arab world at the end of the twentieth century.

The narrator of *Enquête*, however, is not unaware of this paradox. Rather, he conspicuously puts it on display in a number of ways, primarily by tracing lines of analogy between himself and his protagonist Inspector Ali, an intermediary between the people and the state who, though he might have liked to join the Aït Yafelman in their mountain seclusion, in the end remains enthralled "body and soul," to "the massive machinery of the State."[12] Ultimately, Ali will become "un vrai chef" just like the oppressive superior he initially criticized, and the parallels between Chraïbi's author-narrator and his protagonist imply that the author too—as a manipulator of (French) words—is in thrall to state practices of knowing, power, and discipline. His narrative practice enacts a mode of knowledge-production analogous to those used by the state to exploit and exert power over the Imazighen.

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foundation upon which he effects his liberation—a liberation that results not from hatred, revenge, and violence, but from compassion and understanding." Marx-Scouras, "Literature of Departure," 135.

[11] In the interview with Laâbi from *Souffles*, Chraïbi says: "A publisher… published my first novel in the middle of the Moroccan crisis. As a result, it is the right-wing media that seized hold of it—the French right-wing press and the right-wing press in Morocco, led by Moroccans." Chraïbi, "Driss Chraïbi and Us," 75-76. See also Marx-Scouras, "Literature of Departure," 131.

[12] "… le gigantesque engrenage de l'État." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 200. On Inspector Ali as intermediary, see Anjali Prabhu. "Theorizing the Role of the Intermediary in Postcolonial (Con)text: Driss Chraïbi's Une Enquête Au Pays." *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 27.1 (2003): 167-90.

Yet unlike the state whose languages he parodically stylizes, the author of novels can effect the disappearance of the Imazighen—this sought-after alterity—from his text, as Chraïbi does at the end of *Enquête*. The disappearance of the Aït Yafelman in the novel's final chapter thus poses one of the novel's most pressing questions: has disappearance functioned as the Berbers' *ligne de fuite*, promising their preservation from the prying eyes of the state and the novel alike? Or is this simply the author breaking the spell of his own fantasy, acknowledging the fictionality of the autochthonous world he has created? In the end, Chraïbi's text seems both utopian and self-critical; it elaborates the contours of a fantasy even as it acknowledges the impossibility of that fantasy's fulfillment, along the lines of Octave Mannoni's famous formulation for disavowal and belief, "Je sais bien, mais quand même…"[13] Chraïbi's author-narrator knows very well that the autochthonous, matrilineal, oral and embodied identity he's searching for doesn't exist, but still he dramatizes its presence in fiction. In what follows, I examine the features of this alterity, the fantasy of its subconscious preservation, and the self-reflexive narrative strategies through which Chraïbi acknowledges the failure of his search for origins in advance.

"Politique de plumitif": Chraïbi's Heteroglossic Satire of State Discourse

Like Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd's *It's Happening Now*, *Enquête* frequently deploys parodic stylization to reveal the manipulations and obfuscations of official discourse. Through heteroglossia, Chraïbi asserts the contingency of state power by demonstrating its reliance on language—that endlessly mutable medium—to create its illusion of immutability. One of his central targets throughout the novel is the quality of "officialité." Bestowed like a religious mantle by the state, official-ness has the power to transform everyday gestures and speech into inscrutable, momentous events. "L'officialité," the Chief reflects. "C'était quelque chose de spécial, d'indéfinissable qui imprégnait la voix, le regard, le maintien et jusqu'aux vêtements, d'une sorte d'huile à haute teneur d'immatérialité. Celui qui en était investi devenait du même coup un habitant d'une autre planète, reconnaissable dans la multitude dès qu'il avait le malheur d'ouvrir la bouche."[14] The oil of official-ness transforms language from a medium for everyday communication into an occasion for marvel, simple speech into inscrutable and potentially threatening pronouncement. It has the almost literary quality of bracketing speech off from its function as communication. "Nous exprimant ainsi," Chraïbi's narrator continues, "vous et moi nous ferions aisément comprendre de nos compatriotes, parce que nous sommes de gens simples. Mais les officiels, baignés dans l'officialité, prononçant ces mêmes mots, recevaient en guise de réponse des yeux ronds et des oreilles dressées comme celles d'un chacal."[15] Simultaneously ironic and observant

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[13] Octave Mannoni, "Je sais bien, mais quand même…" in *Clefs pour l'imaginaire, ou l'autre scène* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969). For a translation of this essay, see Octave Mannoni, "I know very well, but all the same…" trans. G.M. Goshgarian in *Perversion and the Social Relation*, ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis Foster, and Slavoj Zizek (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003), 68-92. I do not mean to argue that Chraïbi makes a fetish of the Aït Yafelman, as this citation of Mannoni might imply. Rather, I am interested in the distinction Mannoni draws between belief and faith, and the possibility he leaves open for a faith that recognizes the non-existence or non-reality of what it believes in, but believes in it all the same. I mean to suggest that Chraïbi, like Mannoni, is asking about the possibilities that open up for narrative fiction when one imagines an autochthonous alterity completely unsubsumed by modernity, even if one acknowledges such an alterity as nothing more than a fantasy.

[14] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 155-56.

[15] Ibid.

in this passage, the narrator invites the reader into the camaraderie of a first-person plural pronoun to highlight the contradiction between the arbitrariness of official-ness and the awed reaction it elicits from those "simple folk" not within its realm. Under the reign of bureaucracy, official speech is the new aesthetic: it removes language from the everyday and transforms it into an occasion for awe, wonder, even speechlessness.

Continuing this satire of officialdom as aesthetics, the narrator affirms that the closer one gets to "la politique pure, plus l'officialité était pure et dure."[16] All an official has to do is mix a few "phrases de lettré" and "morceaux choisis du vocabulaire technologique" into his speech, top it off with "quelques données d'ordinateur," and he becomes the peak of intelligence, worthy even of a televised broadcast. Having laid out the process for composing official speech, Chraïbi tries his hand at a more direct parody, spouting nonsense with the greasy shine of "officialité:"

> —*Bismillahi rahman arrahim!* commençait [l'officiel] sur un ton péremptoire et ronflant. Au nom de Dieu clément et miséricordieux…
>> Trois quarts d'heure d'horloge plus tard ou peu s'en fallait:
>> —…suivant en cela le libéralisme économique de Milton Friedman. Je vous causerai de cet Américain la semaine prochaine, *incha Allah*! Toujours est-il que le Conseil des ministres vient de décider que le fonds de promotion des produits agro-alimentaires sera mis en place incessament, c'est-à-dire dans quelques mois si Dieu le veut. En premier lieu, les organismes stockeurs chercheront à réceptionner les céréales selon leur qualité, ce qui implique des équipements nouveaux. En second lieu, pour ne pas pénaliser l'élevage, il a été convenu que les nouveaux silos seraient construits sur les lieux d'utilisation des céréales pour les animaux. Ces mesures tendraient à prouver que l'agriculture ne devrait pas connaître d'aggravation nouvelle. On peut même espérer, avec l'aide d'Allah le Très-Haut, un redressement tangible à la fin de l'année prochaine…
>> Des téléspectateurs qui n'avaient pas un milligramme de comprehension s'écriaient, pleins d'admiration :
>> —Ah! çui-là, c'est un savant. Il a la tête![17]

Official speech stuns and impresses its interlocutors through the careful, measured, and deliberate usage of obscure terms, transforming banal governmental procedure into something akin almost to poetry. The official who speaks here glosses complex French administrative terms with the more familiar, everyday language of colloquial Arabic: "incessament, c'est-à-dire dans quelques mois si Dieu le veut." Obscure, procedural details about agricultural administration are given the semblance of order and logic through the organizing phrases "en premier lieu" and "en second lieu." The state official comes off as a "savant" not because the content of his speech is particularly erudite, but because it has been bracketed as "official," full of technical language and thereby worthy of near-worship by the slang-speaking viewers ("çui-là… il a la tête"). "Officialité" has a related though somewhat distinct effect on written language. In official communiqués, simple words become strange again simply by virtue of being placed between quotation marks, "afin de les détacher du commun du vocabulaire. Des termes simples, banaux, des laxismes, des litotes, une langue de bois acquéraient de la sorte une certaine noblesse, un

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[16] Ibid., 157.

[17] Ibid., 157-8.

relief saisissant dès le premier coup d'oeil."[18] The primary quality of officialité, then, is that it affects *language*, transforming speech into an occasion for awe and writing into perpetual citation, bracketing, resignification of ordinary terms. Chraïbi's narration mocks the way that, under the reign of a bloated, post-colonial bureaucracy, the official has almost taken the place of the aesthetic. The quest for a language beyond the grasp of official, governmental manipulation thus becomes ever more urgent.

If the preceding passages satirized the public's admiration for as dry a topic as agricultural policy simply because it has the veneer (or as Chraïbi puts it, the "huile" and "matière graise") of officiality, others elsewhere in the novel use parodic stylization to mock the deadening language of the law. In a deeply ironic conversation between Ali and the chief, Ali, considering how best to break some difficult news to his superior, decides to take his inspiration from "des prestations gouvernementales à la télévision," and specifically a performance he saw the Minister of Justice give, speaking for an entire hour without having "perdu le fil de sa pensée éblouissante dans la forêt des chiffres et des virgules."[19] Yet again, Chraïbi heteroglossically reproduces this speech in order to satirize its obfuscation of violence with numbers, letters, and logic:

> Le ministre 'ne rejetait pas d'emblée l'amendement 2-21 rectifié bis, qui portait sur l'article 7-A du projet de loi sur la criminalité, lequel tendait à remplacer l'article 165 du code penal par des dispositions dont le garde des Sceaux voulait bien retenir le troisièmement mais pas le cinquièmement qui lui paraissait faire double emploi avec l'article L-267 du code de la santé, n'est-ce pas, mais…'[20]

This is the new syntax of state violence under bureaucratic rule. At stake is a new law on criminality, yet within this "forest" of numbers and commas it is impossible to tell what the implications are for the criminal justice system, nor what specific practices are being legalized here. The fact that this speech is broadcast on live television only underscores the irony of this scene: the broadcast is meant to demonstrate the democratic aspect of the legal process (it is available for all to see), yet the French language used impedes the democratic participation that was the premise for its broadcast. In order to soften the blow of the bad news he must deliver, Ali wants to speak to the chief in a language he knows will be understood. The inspector thus goes flipping through his linguistic rolodex—he commands a number of registers[21]—and finds this prime example of obfuscation masquerading as clarity. Once again, Chraïbi shows how officiality strains language at the seams of syntax, tainting the very medium the author would use as his own. The only response available to the novel is satire, or what Bakhtin calls "parodic stylization" of this official speech.

The irony of the Minister of Justice's television broadcast, then, reveals how the post-colonial monarchy under King Hassan II created a sham of democracy in order to conceal its ongoing control of society through violence, corruption, and manipulation of the political scene.

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[18] Ibid., 158.

[19] Ibid., 113.

[20] Ibid.

[21] According to the narrator of *Enquête*, Ali "avait… un vocabulaire argotique capable de faire dresser les cheveux sur la tête d'un Marocain" and "chantait aussi bien *l'Internationale* en arabe que l'hymne palestinien ou celui du Polisario." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 121.

While party politics did persist in the years immediately following independence (1956-1960), when the nationalist party, Istiqlal, still had bargaining power with the King, the situation changed as the party began to break up (aided by the Palace) and many of its former members became unaffiliated. As John Waterbury notes, "it was precisely these unattached individuals that King Hassan drew into his new governmental and administrative elite."[22] In a strategic attempt to manage and control military power and political dissent, King Hassan managed the country's new army such that "the real politics of the country became concentrated in the competition for patronage among various ministers and their protégés."[23] Thus, King Hassan made himself indispensable to the new system while concealing his political manipulations under a veil of democracy: "He was the arbiter who could turn the tap on and off at will in a game where ideas and programs counted for little and the competition for material advantage became everything."[24]

   Staging this situation in fiction, Chraïbi reveals how Ali—naïve and new to the democratic system of voting—fails to understand just how little ideas and programs count in this patronage-based post-colonial state. In another moment of hesitation over how best to speak to the Chief, Ali is reminded of the hesitation and confusion he feels every time he has to vote:

> Les formations politiques aboutissaient jusqu'à lui sous forme de bulletins de vote semblables et interchangeables, avec pratiquement le même programme et les mêmes mots. Et alors comment faire le bon choix? C'était si dur de se décider… Voter pour le parti Untel qui prônait l'indépendance nationale, le respect des institutions et le progrès social? Oui, certes. Mais il y avait le Untel parti qui se réclamait du progrès social, du respect des institutions et de l'indépendance nationale!... Mon Dieu, qu'il était difficile de ne pas commettre une erreur de jugement, capable de faire s'écrouler la monarchie constitutionelle![25]

Having internalized the triumphalist language of post-colonial democracy, Ali presumes that the entire political system rests on his vote, and that if he should make the wrong choice, the entire "constitutional monarchy" will crumble. At times, the manipulation of language by the government conceals the violence it would exert on its subjects in legal language replete with numbers, figures, and interminable sentences; at others, it offers the illusion of choice to its constituents, masking an ongoing system of royal patronage with the rhetoric of free choice, popular rule, and democracy. As Ali rightly points out later in the passage, "respect for institutions" remains at the center of every party platform, no matter how the other two terms are shuffled around. "C'était peut-être une indication de taille," he muses, understanding implicitly that institutions govern everything, while social progress and national independence are small enough to be picked up and shuffled around from one party's sham ballot to the next. In official language, everything except the "institution" comes to mean the opposite of its original meaning.

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[22] John Waterbury, "The Coup Manqué" in *Arabs and Berbers: From Tribe to Nation in North Africa* (London: Duckworth, 1973), 399.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 98-99.

Ali's earnest naïveté is the mask for Chraïbi's critique of monarchical manipulation of the political process.

Unlike Ali, however, the Chief has no skepticism or hesitation about official discourse. He obeys the language of official seals, red pencil, illegible signatures, and a whole hierarchy of chiefs above him because "il était loin d'être un irresponsable ou un idiot."[26] And yet for all his praise of Western-style bureaucracy and civilization, his belief in the oil of officiality, and his sincere desire for promotion within the patronage system, the veneer of logic, organization, and progress that he has carefully crafted crumbles in nearly every interaction he has with the Aït Yafelman. As he and Ali conduct their interrogation of the peasant Ali, for example, the chief "passa graduellement ou *ex abrupto* par toutes sortes d'états d'âme:[27] du respect inné qu'il se vouait à lui-même (et que les autres se devaient de lui témoigner, forcément) à l'abandon de tout et au découragement inerte, les bras croisés sur le destin, sans parler des divers degrés de la colère ou de la *coprolalie*."[28] As he often does, Chraïbi not only describes the Chief's many states of anger and coprolalia; he also offers a sample of this kind of speech in his style of Moroccan *skaz*. When the Chief and Ali first arrive on the mountain and speak to Hajja (the family's matriarch), the last vestiges of civility and progress quickly fall away from the Chief as his language devolves into multilingual anarchy:

> … le chef de police lançait ses bras en des moulinets saccadés et vociférait dans toutes les langues connues de lui seul: dans sa langue maternelle, en français, en anglais, en américain de poker, en allemande de taverne, en wolof, soit dans toutes les langues civilisées dont il avait parfaitement assimilé les injures. Ce faisant, il se comportait en homme du Tiers Monde qui, outre les déchets de la culture ou à peu près, avait reçu de l'Occident les detritus de ses valeurs, les armes en plus. Très loin évidemment de toute pensée discursive, pour l'heure il était en train de beugler. Quelque chose comme:
> —*Ladinmouk et de ta rrrrace!... Ch'vais t'enculer, putain de ta mègue!... Bugger off shit!... Son of a bitch!... Oukc'est mon fusil que ch't'écrabouille les claouis à coups de crosse?... Kleb des chiottes!... Schweinhalloufhund!... Banderkatolikouyyoun!...*[29]

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[26] Ibid., 9.

[27] The use of the Latin *ex abrupto* adds yet another language, Latin, to the novel's multilingualism (in addition to French, formal Arabic, Moroccan colloquial Arabic, or *dārijah*, American and British English, and even some German). The Chief, as the novel's *reductio ad absurdum* of Western Enlightenment logic, frequently has recourse to Latin terminology, just as he is fond of making lists, giving a façade of order to the chaos of the village in which he finds himself. See especially Chapter 8, narrated from the Chief's perspective, in which he affirms: "Tout le monde savait que la loi faisait peur, que c'était sa fonction *sine qua non*." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 147-48. And later, when he undertakes his own *enquête sur lui-même*: "Il n'eut nul besoin pour ce faire de corde de spéléologue ou de pitons. Il connaissait son proper dossier, son *curriculum vitae* comme disaient ses collègues latins, avant J.-C." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 148. Also in this chapter, the Chief describes the clothes his father was required to wear on the job as a French colonial police officer using the Latin "*primo… duxio…tertio… quarto.*" Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 151.

[28] Ibid., 89. In English: *coprolalia*, "obsessive or uncontrollable use of obscene language" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary). The English translator of *Enquête*, Robin Roosevelt, translates the passage as follows: "…not to mention the many stages between rage and despondency." See Chraïbi, *Flutes of Death*, trans. Robin Roosevelt (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1997), 60. Chraïbi's use of "coprolalia" seems important to me, however (and worthy of inclusion in any English translation), as it forms part of the glossary he's assembling of words describing unofficial, nonstandard, incorrect, broken, or obscene language.

[29] Ibid., 46.

The Chief offers living proof that the "civilized language" held so dear in the realms of officialdom is little more than a mask for baser, anarchic and even violent linguistic instincts. He upholds the "enquête" as the peak of civilization, as though it were a literary, philosophical, or otherwise intellectual pursuit. Unlike factory laborers, schoolteachers, and even deputies and ministers, police chiefs, according to him, "ont la faculté cérébrale de penser, de cogiter, de conceptualiser."[30] Thus, "*une enquête… c'est quelque chose! C'est très, très dur, parce que je dois partir de rien, de zero, du néant. Il me faut travailler avec le cerveau.*"[31] The Chief aims to structure his interrogation into four movements like a symphony, that pinnacle of Western cultural creation. Yet as the encounter above reveals, the symphony quickly devolves into coprolalia, just as Enlightenment quickly devolves into barbarism.[32] Even as the Chief demands correct speech from his subordinate—"*esplique, articule, cause français,*"[33] "Tu ne fais que 'charabier,'"[34] "arrête de t'exprimer en bouillie et en purée,"[35] "Parle correctement,"[36] etc.—his own speech frequently strays into obscenity. Even as he invokes the police practices of the West in the name of order, progress, and civilization, the only elements of the Occident to which he can truly lay claim are its "cultural refuse," the detritus of Western values. Very quickly, discursive thought becomes a bestial braying ("beugler").

In both of these passages, then, hybridity, and particularly hybrid *language*, becomes a source of productive comedy in the text. Through heteroglossia, the author lays bare the methods of linguistic manipulation and obfuscation with which the state justifies and maintains its power. Chraïbi thus not only interrupts standard French with interjections in Qurʾanic and colloquial Arabic (*fuṣḥā* and *dārijah*), he also disrupts the idea of "standard" French itself by compiling a veritable lexicon of French words for mispronunciation—words with which the language has historically policed its borders. As Danielle Marx-Scouras writes, "For Chraïbi, there are no pure civilizations. Any search for original purity implies intolerance."[37] To this we might add that Chraïbi's language, with its numerous words for accented and "incorrect" pronunciations of French—not only by Arabs, Africans, and other colonized subjects, but also by those who now fall within the ambit of hexagonal French identity (Bretons, Alsatians, Provencaux, etc.)—also dismantles the idea of pure *languages*.

In this context, we could point to *baragouiner*, one of the Chief's favorite insults for Ali's mongrel language.[38] A xenophobic insult for incorrect or incomprehensible speech, the word is probably derived from the Breton "bara" (bread) and "gwin" (wine), words frequently

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[30] Ibid., 96-97.

[31] Ibid., 97.

[32] On the idea of Enlightenment as barbarism, see especially Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967). See also Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

[33] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 43.

[34] Ibid., 18.

[35] Ibid., 95.

[36] Ibid., 100.

[37] Marx-Scouras, "Literature of Departure," 141.

[38] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 36 and 43.

used by speakers of this dialect at inns frequented by speakers of Parisian French.[39] Even more significantly, we might also point to *charabia*, another of the chief's insults for Ali's incorrect French.[40] From *charrar*, "hissing" or "stuttering," in the southern, Auvergnat dialect of French, the term is originally borrowed from Spanish, *algarabía*, "gibberish" or "babble," and the Spanish in turn from Arabic: *al-gharbiyyah*, "Western language." With these and other terms, Chraïbi exposes the way the French language is already unstable, imbued with derivations from numerous dialects and Mediterranean languages, including an Arabic that makes its way from North Africa to Occitania though Spain. The irony, of course, is that *charabia* was originally an Arabic word used to mock a *Western—gharbī*—way of speaking.

Hybridity is also a source of comedy in the novel's footnotes. Many of these aim to explain Ali's frequent mispronunciations—for example, "*Kalamass*" is glossed as "Karl Marx,"[41] "*makina tomatik*" as "machine à écrire automatique,"[42] and, in a more satirical moment later in the novel, "*Lassourti*" as "policier; vient du français classique *la Sûreté*, tout comme *chemins de fer* se dit *chimindifir* et *éléctricité* se dit 'couramment' *trinciti*. La coopération culturelle."[43] As these glosses of Moroccan "mis"-pronunciations of French proliferate, Chraïbi also self-critically parodies his own linguistic and ethnographic interventions. With phrases like "français classique," and the scare-quoted "'couramment,'" he mocks the subtle discriminations that inhere in the jargon of linguistics and ethnography, much as Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd does in the Soldier's falsified report from *Yaḥduth*. Here too Chraïbi also mocks his own position as cultural intermediary between Morocco and its former colonizer: "la coopération culturelle." At other times, the first-person speaker of the footnotes is more hesitant, as when glossing Ali's "*Ali Voud*" as "Hollywood, je crois,"[44] or "*la mort atomique*" as "je crois que l'inspecteur voulait dire: 'l'amour platonique,' mais je ne saurais l'affirmer."[45] This hesitancy culminates with Ali's expression "*Oxyde de dents*," as the narrator of the footnotes expresses solidarity with Ali in his confusion, rather than displaying knowing powers of explanation. "Tout comme l'inspecteur Ali, les concepts mettent mon cerveau à rude épreuve: s'agit-il là d'un produit chimique ou de l'Occident?"[46] Whatever Ali's intention, the primary effect achieved by these footnotes, as with the Chief's lexicon of words for incorrect French, is to disrupt the idea of standard French, and to do so comically.

Yet hybrid language is also a significant source of tragedy in *Enquête*. Indeed, the novel's most significant scene of mistranslation results in the violent torture and near death of one of its Amazigh protagonists, Raho Aït Yafelman. As related by Hajja, the story tells of Raho's transformation into Commandant Filagare, a fierce rebel in the Algerian war of independence who "était un paysan comme nous, oui, oui, oui!"[47] One day, knowing nothing or very little of

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[39] See Jacqueline Picoche, *Dictionnaire étymologique du français* (Paris: Dictionnaires le Robert, 1994), 41-42.

[40] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 18.

[41] Ibid., 58.

[42] Ibid., 125.

[43] Ibid., 175.

[44] Ibid., 135.

[45] Ibid., 129.

[46] Ibid., 186.

[47] Ibid., 63.

the war, Raho leaves his village in the High Atlas heading east to sell eggs and chickens at a train station in Algeria. At the end of the day, as he is returning toward the mountain, a French military jeep screeches to a halt behind him, and two soldiers ask him where he is coming from. After he taps his ear with his index finger to show them that he "ne comprenait pas un mot de français," another French officer yells in Moroccan Arabic, "*Mnin tji?*" Raho, the simple peasant, replies with relief in Moroccan: "*Nji filagare*" ("I'm coming from the train station"), not knowing that this response will provoke the soldiers' ire and land him in interrogation for the next several days.[48] The French officers, assuming he has no knowledge of French, hear "*filagare*"—"from the train station," in *dārijah*—as *fellagha*, a loan-word from Arabic that, in the French of that time, had come to mean "partisan algérien soulevé contre l'autorité française, de 1954 à 1962, pour obtenir l'indépendance de son pays."[49] As for the original Arabic word—*fallāq*—it means a bandit or highway robber. What the officers have understood from Raho, in effect, is that he's "come as a *fellagha*," an insurgent.

The hybrid language in which Raho replies, composed of the Arabic particle *fī* ("in" or "from") and the French *la gare* ("the train station"), has its origins in French colonialism itself, which, just as it forcibly imposed a series of modern innovations, also imposed a series of new words and expressions for referring to these technologies of movement. Ironically then, the peasant *was indeed* speaking French back to the officers, though he did not recognize *gare* as a French word. His inability to do so is precisely what lands him in the torture chamber from which he barely escapes alive. This one word, one instance of hybrid language and its resultant mistranslation, is enough to transform Raho from a simple, mountain-dwelling peasant into a vengeful killer. Even though his body eventually healed from the torture,

> c'était à l'intérieur de sa tête qu'un sillon s'était creusé, très profond. Et dans ce sillon il poussait, de plus en plus vivace, un chardon vénéneux, un sentiment d'autant plus violent qu'il lui était totalement inconnu jusqu'alors: la vengeance. Et les racines de ce chardon étaient la haine, la cruauté, le désir de donner la mort. Une graine avait suffi—*un mot boiteux*—pour transformer un simple paysan, né bon et resté bon jusqu'à l'approche de la vieillesse, en ce qu'il devint dans les semaines et les mois qui suivirent: le commandant Filagare.[50]

In this passage, the primal element of the earth, which elsewhere in *Enquête* is said to constitute the vitality and durability of the autochthonous Imazighen, is transformed into a metaphor as Chraïbi reveals what might happen when an "unstable" (*boiteux*), hybrid word is planted in the earth-body of the Amazigh villager. From the other, comic moments of hybrid language in the novel, it is clear that Chraïbi is interested in how unstable language can challenge power and destabilize simplistic myths of origins. Here, however, he recognizes the danger in that instability as well. We might find comedy in wobbling words, but their limp (*boiteux*) also bears the traces of a visible, continual violence.

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[48] Ibid., 72.

[49] *Le grand Robert electronique*, s.v. "fellagha," accessed July 23, 2016.

[50] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 74.

Against both the dehumanizing, obfuscating languages of the state and the hybrid language of the colonized subject, which can incur violence and torture, Chraïbi constructs an almost fantastical "third" language: the language of earth and stone, sun and sky, rain and stars. This is the language of the Imazighen, who resist reification in the written identities of the state precisely because they speak a language of rock and dirt rather than numbers and figures. Every night after killing, for example, Raho plunges his knife into "la terre nourricière" which, as a primal and protective force, becomes the Imazighen's best form of resistance against the violent forces of colonial modernity.[51] They survive the war and expel the French by taking on the characteristics of this earth, blending with it in a way that Chraïbi equates with time-travel—returning to a space that is not only outside the twentieth century, but also outside *language*:

> Et là-bas, là-bas et partout, épars et semblables à des petits tas de pierres, d'autres paysans désoeuvrés et démunis dormaient, eux aussi, identiques dans leurs djellabas couleur de terre, dans leur vieillesse et leur sommeil pétrifié. […] Et, de l'horizon à l'horizon, une terre sterile et hostile où tout était étranger, *à la langue*, aux moeurs, au temps—au XXe siècle.[52]

In this passage, the peasants resist not through any politically organized anticolonial movement, but simply by virtue of the fact that they resemble "piles of rocks" in their "petrified sleep," their "earth-colored djellabas." In this land, nothing is native; "everything is foreign" here, including *language itself*. These Berber sentinels and silent warriors have no use for a language that has betrayed them as it did Raho/Filagare. His hybrid language, quite literally the product of two successive colonizations (Arab and French), is what shattered his idyllic, rural innocence, landing him in a torture chamber from whose wounds he would never fully recover. Because of his experience as Filagare, Raho understands the violence that misunderstanding can occasion. Unlike Ali, a verbal chameleon who solicits information through lengthy conversation, Raho selects the very few words he deploys with caution; for him, words have become a dangerous commodity to be carefully measured rather than copiously spilled.

Thus, Raho is the only member of the Aït Yafelman clan who remains resistant even to Ali's oral form of interrogation—a form the inspector deems much more effective in this country context than the chief's writing-bound "politique de plumitif."[53] ("Oui," Ali emphatically affirms, "la véritable enquête digne de ce nom était *orale* tout comme la culture orale du pays.")[54] Encountering Raho in the village, digging what turns out to be a grave in the ground, Ali holds forth at great length on a series of topics, from jackhammers, construction workers, and labor syndicates to Hollywood (*Ali Voud*), television, drugs, and helicopters—a "flot de paroles" intended to elicit information about who the grave is for, but that Raho merely "chassait par un demi-circle de la pioche, de haut en bas."[55] The only response Raho offers to Ali's stream of

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[51] Ibid., 76.

[52] Ibid., (emphasis added).

[53] Ibid., 132.

[54] Ibid., 131.

[55] Ibid., 135.

words is the sound of shovel striking earth, as words are replaced by non-verbal—indeed, non-*human*—sounds. Stones thus take over what are normally the signifying powers of language in Chraïbi's description of this encounter:

> En dépit d'un interrogatoire très serré, mais plein d'affabilité, de pâte d'amandes et de miel, et qui dès les prolégomènes sortit de l'ornière des faits rationnels et desséchés pour se noyer aussitôt dans le marécage ésotérique des grands thèmes universels, tells "l'irréel de la terre et des cieux et de ce qu'il y a entre eux" ou ces "paradis et enfer qui ne sont rien d'autre que des jouets pour petits enfants, voyons, Raho! faut ce qu'il faut, grand-père! Faut que la religion marche au quart de tour, voyons!," l'inspecteur Ali ne tira plus un mot du montagnard, aucun renseignement complémentaire sur la tombe qu'il était en train d'approfondir méthodiquement, ni même sur l'identité approximative de celui qui allait mourir, pas la moindre fiche signalétique, aucune cooperation—rien d'autre que des *ponctuations* d'acier trouant le sol. Arrachées à la mère nourricière, les pierres voltigeaient comme autant de *réponses* d'une seule et même *syllabe* métallique (139, emphases added).

Ali's metaphors get mixed up in the morass of words, from the "rut" (*ornière*) of the rational to the esoteric "marsh" (*marécage*) of grand, universal themes. He is trying to set the scene for Raho to confide in him in the same way that he has garnered other peasants' friendship in the village. But his stream of words can elicit nothing from this man who was tortured over a mistranslation. Stone itself serves as his only "punctuation" and "response," a "single, metallic syllable" repeated indefinitely to break apart and through Ali's oral *enquête*. Autochthonous in every sense of the word, even Raho's language is of the earth, a syntax of stone.[56]

Chraïbi too is searching for a form of language, identity, and even existence untouched by civilization with all its barbarity, and to do this he paints an almost fantastical portrait of the alternate, earth-bound existence that Raho, Hajja, Bourguine, and the other Aït Yafelman live. It is an existence outside language itself, characterized primarily by an elemental reverence of sun, earth, and sky. Alone in the arid, craggy landscape of the mountaintop, Raho considers the sunset, performs his ablutions and prayers, or simply stands still, flanked by his red donkey and emaciated goats, supposedly "sans pensée,"[57] but nevertheless remembering both his own past and the multilayered histories of conquest that have structured his country's existence. Indeed, no fewer than five of the novel's eleven chapters begin and end from Raho's perspective. At the end of Chapter 2, for example, we're told that Raho, with his "mémoire séculaire… nourrie par des générations," remembers another earth, another land entirely, of plains saturated with green, orchards of fruit trees, and grass.[58] And then, "comme des armées de sauterelles ou autres

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[56] Also essential to this particular iteration of Ali's verbosity is the way Chraïbi's long-winded sentence structure mimics Ali's way of speaking: the sentences themselves are full of subordinate clauses, insertions, and interjections. In describing the "stream of words" that Ali unleashes upon Raho to solicit more information, in other words, Chraïbi himself unleashes a similar stream upon the reader, building up to the clause "l'inspecteur Ali ne tira plus un mot du montagnard," then building away from it as well, listing all of the information Ali *wasn't* able to garner from Raho. Chraïbi's style mirrors his content here, putting the author himself in the same place as his inspector-protagonist. I examine further parallels between Chraïbi the author and Ali the character, as well as these similarities' metafictional and political implications for the novel, at greater length below.

[57] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 27.

[58] Ibid., 39.

calamités de Dieu, les invasions au nom de Dieu, de la civilisation ou des hommes avaient chassé le clan, ou ce qu'il en était resté, vers d'autres horizons."[59] Pressed within the folds of Raho's mind are memories not only of European colonization, but also of other invasions, ones that predate his life by generations, including the Arabo-Islamic conquests, and perhaps also the incursions of the Roman empire. Yet through all of it, "la vie était toujours là," and Raho—like a tree—draws his vitality from the earth:[60]

> Bien avant la civilisation ou l'Islam, derrière les événements de l'Histoire, il y avait eu le culte de la terre. De génération en génération et de fuite en fuite devant les conquérants de toute race, il s'était perpétué jusqu'à lui, par voie orale. […] Maintenant, par les mains et par son siège il était en train de percevoir la terre, d'avaler en lui la force élémentaire et prodigieuse de la terre. C'était très simple: il lui suffisait de s'ouvrir, comme les racines d'un arbre. La sève était là, la vie, tout au fond.[61]

Although he prays five times a day, Raho's true affiliations lie "before" civilization, Islam, and indeed, all the events of history, in the depths of the earth, the "culte de la terre." In the same way that Raho here draws nourishment and strength from the earth, at the end of a subsequent chapter he contemplates the sun and its heat as "une force," a "soleil souverain" from which "toute chose était issue" and "toute chose y était incluse."[62] The same sun that gives life to plants and animals also dries them up and causes them to die. Although Raho dutifully observes the five prayers of Islam, his pre-historic cosmology places sun and earth at the center of a creation usually organized around God.

Where the final passages of chapters two and three are devoted to earth and sun respectively, the final passage of chapter four is devoted to the stars. In Raho's cosmology, not only do the stars erase "les ténèbres de la nuit et du coeur des hommes,"[63] they also serve as as a model for immemorial continuance, for all that persists as if outside time, rather like the spiritual and existential tradition of the Aït Yafelman itself:

> Transmise jusqu'à lui, de génération en génération, à travers les religions et les cultures comme si toutes les entreprises humaines étaient trouées et laissaient passer malgré elles l'essentiel de la vie, il y avait la tradition antique où les éléments étaient dominants: la terre, l'eau, l'air et le feu. Tout le reste n'était qu'éphémère.[64]

Here and in the other short sections that bookend the majority of the novel's chapters, Chraïbi offers us not merely a glimpse, but an expansive and detailed blueprint of Raho's view on the world. In Raho's mind, civilized human enterprise is "perforated" and, like a sieve, allows this

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[59] Ibid.

[60] Another Aït Yafelman character is also said to be more like a tree than a human being—the peasant Ali, whom the chief and Ali interrogate in their cave: "… il entra dans la caverne un espèce de peuplier à forme humaine dont le tronc, presque à hauteur de la cime, était à angle droit." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 115.

[61] Ibid., 40.

[62] Ibid., 60.

[63] Ibid., 82.

[64] Ibid., 82-83.

ancient, earth-bound tradition to pass through it. Beyond the nourishing and vital elements of earth, water, air, and fire, there is nothing. The religions and civilizations that have come and gone have brought with them "rien d'autre que la pensée." But Raho "était né sans pensée et mourrait sans pensée," all of which makes his life "si simple de vivre."[65] A great deal of the novel's narrative energy, then, is dedicated to recording, chronicling, and enumerating the precepts according to which Raho, Hajja, and the Aït Yafelman live. Through these descriptions, the reader is made to understand that this community has maintained a vital bond between body, earth, and memory—a bond that renders them unknowable to State systems of control and surveillance that rely on proper names, identification cards, and writing in general.

Chraïbi's fantasy of autochthonous alterity expands beyond the pages of *Enquête* to fill all three novels in his Berber trilogy, particularly *La Mère du printemps*, published just one year after *Enquête*. There, he offers an even fuller picture of the "third language" that lies somewhere between (or rather, before… and after) the Maghreb's two colonial languages, each historically fraught in different ways. Against champions of French, who affirmed that the language offered them more freedom of expression than the state-controlled Arabic press, and the legacies of anticolonialism that were articulated as projects of Arabization,[66] Chraïbi offers this more passive, Berber dismissal that resists colonial incursions on identity and community by recognizing the ephemerality of all languages in the vicissitudes of time:

> Mais, par Allah et le Prophète, Raho n'avait jamais su si ces immigrés [les arabes] avaient cinq siècles de retard ou d'avance sur les Nazaréens […] En actes ou en paroles, étaient-ils si différents les uns des autres, somme toute? A tour de rôle, se faisant la guerre puis négociant la main dans la main, ils avaient imposé leur ordre. Mais le temps était le temps, souverain des hommes. Et les mots n'étaient que des mots, de quelque façon que l'on agitât sa langue dans la bouche: dans deux ou trois millénaires, ils finiraient bien par s'effacer de toute mémoire. Tous. Resteraient les montagnes, le désert et les plaines dont les civilisations de tous mots n'avaient gratté que la croute. Resteraient la terre et son peuple, comme très autrefois.[67]

In *Mère*, Chraïbi resolves the dilemma of colonial language by moving both backward and forward in time—back to a prehistorical time-before-time, "très autrefois," and forward to a time three or four millennia in the future, when words themselves, no matter what language they belonged to, will be completely erased from memory. In this far-distant future, it will become clear that the "civilizations of words" have only barely scratched the surface of the earth, with all of its mountains, deserts, and plains. Perhaps in response to the many critics of *Le Passé Simple*, then, who accused Chraïbi of compromising the Arabic-focused anticolonial struggle against the French, Chraïbi creates in his Berber trilogy a world in which language itself is relative, ephemeral, and ultimately inessential to an original identity, an autochthonous alterity to civilization and progress.

The Aït Yafelman counter the State's pervasive attempts to classify, identify, and thereby control them in another way as well: they resist the proper names and fixed identities that the

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[65] Ibid., 61.

[66] Anne Armitage, "The Debate Over Literary Writing in a Foreign Language: An Overview of Francophone in the Maghreb." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 20 (2000): 41.

[67] Driss Chraïbi, *La mère du printemps/L'Oum-er-Bia* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 16.

state would force upon them in the form of paperwork (ID cards, licenses, etc.). In resisting these fixed identities, the Imazighen's intention is not chiefly to resist the State, but rather to preserve certain ways of relating to family, community, and self that are (quite literally) illegible to national formations. Later on in *La Mère du printemps*, an omniscient narrator explains that "certains d'entre [les Aït Yafelman], de mémoire de Berbère, n'avaient jamais eu ni patronyme ni prénom—et pourquoi faire puisqu'on venait au monde tout nu?"[68] Instead of adopting abstract names à propos of nothing, the villagers refer to each other either by distinguishing characteristics—e.g., "the old one," "the sage," "the limper," etc.—or by the actions and labor they habitually perform, the role they serve in sustaining the community—e.g., "the charcoal-woman," even "the woman who tells stories by the light of the moon."[69] These names not only map more squarely onto the villagers' identities; they change from season to season, as a person's function falls out of usage and is replaced with another. "C'est à tour de rôle, tu comprends?" Chraïbi writes in the voice of one Aït Yafelman addressing "Monsieur Léta" (l'État).[70]

By resisting the abstraction of proper names, the Aït Yafelman also resist the heavily bordered and policed identities of modernity—identities that, as Michel Foucault has illustrated, enable classification and control,[71] and that in the Aït Yafelman's estimation are not only impractical, but also *inhuman*: "Or, l'État attachait une importance élémentaire aux appellations contrôlées, il désirait des faits et des chiffres inhumains."[72] In creating a space populated by subjects who refuse to be hemmed in and bordered off from each other by proper names, Chraïbi has built a kind of Berber heterotopia. In contrast with Utopias, Foucault writes, "*Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together.'"[73] Raho, Hajja, and the other Aït Yafelman challenge the police-centric, post-Protectorate "order of things" precisely because they refuse to be constituted as objects of state knowledge, subjects existing in measured relationships of identity to and difference from one another. One Aït Yafelman is indistinguishable from the next, not for lack of differentiating features, but simply because, in Raho's words "on est tous pauvres, on est tous pareils."[74]

Indeed, other peasants from among the Aït Yafelman family also affirm that the kind of identity attested in driver's licenses, marriage certificates, passports, and other state forms of identification are the purview of the rich, not of poor, multiply displaced mountain dwellers like them. Inspector Ali explains the operations of the State and its reliance on official paperwork to the peasant grounded in a world of oral contracts and communal rites in the following terms: "Imagine-toi une grande maison de la ville, pleine de gens bien habillés, bien nourris et qui

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[68] Ibid. 25.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995).

[72] Chraïbi, *Mère*, 25.

[73] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xviii.

[74] Chraïbi, *Mère*, 31.

vivent entourés des tas de papiers. Il leur faut des papiers. Et tu n'en as aucun. Donc tu n'existes pas pour eux. Voilà l'histoire. Tu n'es pas né, tu ne vis pas, tu n'es même pas mort. C'est triste, hein?"[75] Yet the peasant refuses to share Ali's sadness. Rather than despair over the fact that documentation determines existence (as Yūsuf al-Qaʿīd's author-narrator does in *Yaḥduth*) or desperately try to garner official recognition from the state (like Umm Muḥammad in Khoury's *Wujūh*), the Aït Yafelman peasant shrugs off documentation as nothing more than the province of the rich, then uses a popular proverb to indicate his indifference to the matter: "C'est pour les riches, pas pour nous autres. Il y a des marmites qui bouillent et rebouillent, il y en a d'autres qui sont toujours vides. C'est ainsi. Que ta journée soit paisible, mon frère!"[76] The indifference manifested in this proverb becomes the very source of the peasants' liberty in Chraïbi's alternative, autochthonous world. Chraïbi upholds the oral, paperless world of the Aït Yafelman as a "human" antidote to the "inhuman" world of the written word, the reduction of identity to a series of cards and papers.

Thus, the Imazighen's resistance to state paperwork is also a resistance to abstraction and reification of all forms, since, as Adorno and Horkheimer suggest, "all reification is forgetting."[77] To require paperwork for such various occasions as attesting marriage or justifying movement is to estrange these actions from the *body*, from orality and other practices that have structured human existence far longer than paper. It is thus to enforce a kind of violent forgetting, a severing from roots and origins (or, in Kateb's formulation, a severing of the umbilical cord connecting one to mother-land-language).[78] The tree-like peasant also named Ali, for example,[79] repeatedly fails to understand why he should bother with papers at all. Inspector Ali tries to explain that in the city, people's pockets are full of identity papers, some of which allow them to drive cars: "Il y en a pour conduire une automobile, deux: une carte grise pour avoir cette automobile et une rose pour la mettre en route." In his simplicity and naïveté, however, the peasant underscores the absurdity of this idea: "Je n'ai pas d'automobile, dis donc! Il y a juste une mule et un bourricot par là, va voir. Et essaie donc de leur presenter du papier pour les faire bouger!"[80] The same goes for the peasant's marriage, which was not recorded in writing but simply attested in oaths exchanged between the bride and groom and celebrated by the family:

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[75] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 128.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 191.

[78] Kateb, *Polygone*, 181-82. Towards the end of *Enquête*, resistance to the forgetting enforced by the vengeful gods, lords of the written word, becomes a persistent feature of Ali's mother's tale. "*Il ne faut pas qu'on perde la mémoire,*" she insists, "*il ne faut pas qu'on succombe aux legends de nos ennemis.*" Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 205. Again, later in the myth, the mother ironically equates writing not with recording and remembering, but with *forgetting*: "*Ça n'en finira jamais. Parce que les dieux ont brouillé nos têtes, ils ont mélangé leur langage de mensonge et de magie au nôtre, ils ont effacé notre mémoire des temps anciens*" Ibid. 207. Like Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the mother's tale reveals progress, civilization, and Enlightenment as their own form of "magic" and myth; all the science and thought Enlightenment brings is little more than another, replacement fable to compel submission to a new world order.

[79] Chraïbi's narrator describes the peasant as "une espèce de peuplier à forme humaine dont le tronc... était à angle droit." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 115.

[80] Ibid., 124.

Oh! monsieur, non! répondit le montagnard. Ici, c'est le pays. Il n'y a rien eu à scribouiller. Personne ne sait scribouiller, du reste. Nous avons tous recité proprement un petit chapitre du Coran après nous être lavés le visage et les pieds, selon la coutume. On a chanté, dansé, et puis mangé. Et alors, avant d'entrer sous la tente… j'ai dit à ma femme: 'Zohra, fille des Bani Mellil, je te prends pour épouse. C'est juré.' Je luis ai donné ma langue, comprends-tu? Elle m'a donné la sienne aussitôt.[81]

Like the novel's title, the peasants offer Ali persistent reminders that being "au pays" is not simply a question of relocation in space. It is also a relocation in time, a return not only toward Ali's personal past—his own memories of his mother, father, and childhood spent in a poor neighborhood of the medina—but also toward a pre-national, pre-colonial, immemorial past. As Ali remarks after his first conversation with Raho, "Le sentier qui montait vers le djebel lui semblait descendre vers le passé."[82] One of the defining features of this distant past is the absence of writing, of "scribouillement," an irrelevant practice in this predominantly oral world, where truth is cemented not by official seals and signatures in red pencil (as for the Chief and other bureaucracts), but by communal practice and recognition. Constrained by a written world in which language choice is fraught with political implications, Chraïbi imagines a world in which writing serves no purpose and has no bearing on identity or everyday practice.

Bridging the Abyss: Autochthonous Turns and Returns

Even though Ali currently works for the police, Chraïbi maintains the possibility that some elements, fragments, and structures of this unwritten, autochthonous alterity have been preserved in him, despite his many attempts to suppress and erase them. Two moments early in the novel signal this possibility. When Ali and the Chief first meet Raho, and Raho refuses to offer them directions to his village, Ali utters what seem to be magic words in order to gain access to the village: "Grand-père, nous sommes des hôtes de Dieu."[83] Raho's face lights up, and he wishes Ali and his companion every welcome. The familiar words that Raho offers in response— "L'hospitalité est sacrée"[84]—summon forth for Ali long-buried memories of his father, a poor man who managed a small, dark, public oven:

L'inspecteur ne dit rien. Il pensait à son père, mort depuis des années—mort et enterré avec toute son époque. Lorsque frappait à la porte de sa petite échoppe sombre un homme plus pauvre que lui, voyageur, mendiant, étranger, disant: "Je suis un hôte de Dieu," le sourire qui illuminait aussitôt la face du gardien du four avait la même inondation de joie que celui que le policier venait de voir sur le visage de ce vieil homme de la montagne.[85]

Ali has just had his first premonition that he is entering both into his own past—memories of childhood—and into the far-distant, native past that his parents kept alive by offering hospitality

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[81] Ibid., 125.

[82] Ibid., 38.

[83] Ibid., 37.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid., 38.

to wandering holy men (*awliyāʾ Allāh*). Perhaps this is why Chraïbi replaces the French "montagne" of the second sentence with the Arabic "djebel" in the third. Just as the path that rises toward the mountain also seems to descend toward Ali's past, so too the diction of this passage also moves backward through the linguistic history of the Maghreb, from French to Arabic. To welcome an ascetic wanderer (often a member of a Sufi brotherhood) was to invite blessing upon one's home. This old, autochthonous knowledge, illegible as "knowledge" to the colonial and post-colonial state apparatuses, is precisely what gains Ali access to the world of the Aït Yafelman, in this passage and throughout the rest of the novel.

Just as Ali's conversation with Raho summons forth an otherwise forgotten memory of his father (the phrase *hôte de Dieu* operating like a Proustian madeleine), so too Ali's first encounter with Hajja reminds him of his mother, also a woman of poor origins who remained penniless to her last day. Immersed in darkness both literally and figuratively, trapped inside the dark world of the oven-shop and that of her own "unthinking" existence,[86] there was only one occasion on which Ali saw his mother in the full light of day: the day of her death. Addressing Hajja as he would his own mother, Ali once again feels a buried past surge up within him:

> —Salut à toi, mère! Bénis-moi, petite mère, que les âmes de tes parents et de tes ancêtres reposent en paix là où elles sont, par Allah et le Prophète!
> En retrouvant les mots de la tribu remontait en lui son enfance, par flots. Il n'avait jamais vu sa mère à la lumière du jour. Lorsqu'elle rentrait après sa journée de domestique, c'était le soir—et le four où ils habitaient était noir par tous les temps. Une seule fois il avait pu l'apercevoir en plein soleil de printemps, paisible et apaisée sur une civière de bois—avant que le fossoyeur l'eût descendue dans la tombe. C'était autrefois, là-bas…[87]

In the words Ali says to Hajja, Chraïbi has done his very best to render colloquial Moroccan Arabic (*dārijah*) into French. One particularly recognizable phrase is, "que les âmes de tes parents et de tes ancêtres reposent en paix là où ils sont," or *Allāh yarḥam al-wālidīn*, a colloquial way to say thank you. Like the phrase "hôte de Dieu" (*walī Allāh*), dārijah itself has the power to summon up once suppressed memories that now come flooding to the surface of Ali's consciousness. The words he uses with Hajja are the words of family, of simple folk, and Ali affirms that Hajja "était de la même espèce que sa mère, pure et fruste, protégée du monde des chacals par son inexperience même, par son manque de pensée."[88] Thoughtlessness here, far from being imposed by the Orientalizing gaze, is actually a form of *protection*. To be rough is to be pure; to lack thought is to be untainted by a world of violence, the violence of colonial Enlightenment.[89] In Hajja, Ali rediscovers the simplicity of his origins, and thus the fundaments

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[86] Ali describes Hajja as protected by her "manque de pensée." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 44.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] In this, the figure of Hajja recalls the figure of the Mother from *La Civilisation, ma mère!...* There, the world of (Western) History and all the violence it entails—"l'Histoire des hommes et leurs civilisations [qui] muaient, faisaient craquer leurs carapaces, dans une jungle d'acier, de feu et de souffrances"—this world remains utterly outside the mother and therefore has no effect on her childlike purity and joy. "Mais c'était le monde extérieur. Extérieur non à elle, mais à ce qu'elle était, mais à son rêve de pureté et de joie qu'elle poursuivait tenacement depuis l'enfance." Driss Chraïbi, *La Civilisation, ma mère!...* (Paris: Denoël, 1972), 20.

of his identity, "les quelques souvenirs gris qui lui tenaient lieu de repères," and it brings him to tears: "Il sentait les sanglots monter dans sa gorge."[90] He is transported to a time he has largely suppressed, an identity he has *had to* suppress to be the policeman he has become, tasked with beating and arresting the street kids who, in another life, might have been his brothers.

In these two early moments—with Raho and with Hajja—Ali maintains the illusion of control over his past, believing that he is summoning forth memories of his poor parents and their language in order to gain the confidence of the Aït Yafelman and facilitate his investigation. However, as the memories multiply, it quickly becomes clear that Ali's past is controlling him— that what's at stake here is the power of a buried past to return and of a form of alterity to survive within an apparently unified, modern subject. Ali carries that alterity within himself in the form of myths transmitted to him by his mother, as well as customs and expressions (*walī Allāh, Allāh yarḥam al-wālidīn*) he remembers from his father. The question Chraïbi poses through Ali in the final chapters of the novel is whether these preserved but suppressed alterities can be translated into productive modes of anticolonial resistance, alternative forms of subject-constitution not bound up in the notion of agency and individuality inherited from the Enlightenment, nor in the equally fraught rhetoric of Arabization.[91]

Ali's recognition of the buried alterity within himself surfaces once again, and with even more force, as he is returning for the final time to the cave where he and the Chief have been conducting their interrogations. As the Aït Yafelman prepare a feast or *diffa* (unbeknownst to Ali, it is to celebrate the murder of the Chief), the sounds of drums fill the air around him, and he is certain he's heard them before. "Sans discontinuer, leurs résonances tissaient l'espace et le temps et c'était comme la voix enivrante de la solitude enfin retrouvée… Il reconnaissait confusément ces inflexions profondes et 'terriennes' pour les avoir tant aimées. Où et en quelle existence antérieure les avait-il entendues?"[92] Still, he insistently tamps down these flickers of recognition with the Chief-like rationality he's acquired through his police training: "Réveille-toi, hé! se dit l'inspecteur. C'est rien que la nouba qui se prepare pour ce soir. Hajja me l'a dit." And again a moment later: "N'aie pas peur, Ali. C'est rien que des tambours. Ces paysans n'en jouent pas comme dans les studios de disques modernes, etc. C'est pour ça que tu dresses l'oreille avec étonnement." When the sounds of "desert flutes" (*naÿ/nāy*) join the drums, another, even more urgent shudder of recognition and warning shakes Ali, but yet again, he suppresses his instinct: "C'est que des flûtes de rien du tout, s'admonesta-t-il."[93] Whereas earlier in the novel, Ali drew on his poor, popular background as a resource to gain him access to the world of the Aït Yafelman, facilitating the investigation and thereby also securing a promotion for himself, here that very same past returns to disturb his peace of mind, disrupting the modern identity he's constructed for himself with flashes of primal recognition.

Yet only in the novel's final chapter does the autochthonous alterity buried within Ali surface for more than a line or two, remaining within and indeed structuring the narrative in a much more profound way than the shivers of recognition Ali felt upon hearing the mountain drums and flutes. Here at the end of the novel, Chraïbi holds out the possibility of an indigenous

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[90] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 45.

[91] On the need to rewrite the narrative of anticolonial liberation against the grain of Romantic emplotment, see Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*.

[92] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 198.

[93] Ibid., 199.

return in the form of an alternate creation myth told to Ali by his mother and transmitted matrilineally for generations. Ali carries this myth within him, yet has suppressed it and the wisdom it offers to become the police officer the State has required him to be, for his own material wellbeing. Even as these tales return to structure the narrative, Ali continues his attempts to suppress them, dismissing them as so many "sornettes,"[94] "foutaises,"[95] and "chimères de vieille femme,"[96] not proper to a twentieth-century subject like himself.

     To illustrate the finer points of Chraïbi's fantasy of return, let me first describe in detail the alternate creation myth that emerges in Ali's memory via his mother's tale. Like the passages dealing with Raho's state of mind and outlook on the world, this myth describes "la vie terrienne des hommes" from a time before religion, civilization, and the State, "très *autrefois*, avant *le temps*."[97] In this time before time, the *earth* is actually paradise, a land full of "*l'herbe et le lait en abondance, et des champs de céréales sans nombre et tous les fruits de la terre nourricière*," while the sky is the source of danger: "*le vent, les météores, la sécheresse et le déluge, les calamités*."[98] The way Ali's mother tells the story, the Abrahamic religions have it wrong; human beings were the original inhabitants of a paradise on earth, while the gods were a wicked and vengeful tribe, a "peuplade sauvage… jaloux, envieux" living in a sky more like hell than heaven.[99] The gods so coveted the earth that "*ils avaient épuisé les astres… brûlé la lune et le soleil*," making the sky empty and lifeless.[100] Having nothing left in the sky for themselves, they came down to earth with a slew of fabrications, intending to make the earth their own and enslave mankind. In the process of the subjection, no tool was more effective than the written word:

> *Ils ont apporté avec eux ce qu'ils appelaient la loi, des livres qu'ils nous ont obligés à lire: le livre des Youdis, celui des Nazaréens, le Coran des islamiques... quantité d'autres qu'ils ont prétendus saints et sacrés. Et c'est ainsi qu'ils ont changé* l'ordre des choses *et mis le mensonge à la place de la vérité… [A]insi, nos ancêtres et leurs descendants ont commencé à* lutter avec leur propre corps, *à croire que le ciel était le vrai paradis et l'enfer notre mère nourricière, la terre. Quelques-uns qui refusaient de se convertir à la religion des dieux ont fui, pas beaucoup. Mais la plupart ont succombé aux sortilèges. Et c'est ainsi qu'ils se sont mis à travailler pour leurs maîtres comme des esclaves, et à bâtir des maisons et des villes, à construire des machines et des machines dont ils n'avaient nul besoin. Et leurs descendants continuent de plus en plus, à peiner et à espérer dans le vide. Ça n'en finira jamais…*[101]

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[94] Ibid., 205.

[95] Ibid., 208.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 205 (emphasis in original).

[98] Ibid. Part of Chraïbi's affirmation of autochthonous alterity is also typographical here: he italicizes the entire mother's tale, setting it off from the rest of the novel both linguistically and visually.

[99] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 205.

[100] Ibid., 207.

[101] Ibid. (emphasis added)

The greedy gods of the sky have subjected the majority of the earth's inhabitants by convincing them that their "*mère nourricière*," the earth, is the real hell, while heaven is in the sky. But beyond even this, they instituted a culture according to which "*ce qui doit être raconté pour de bon n'existe que dans les livres.*"[102] Very quickly, these gods come to resemble colonizers of various sorts: "*[Q]uand ils se sont aperçus que leurs livres étaient usés… et qu'ils ne pouvaient plus rien en tirer ou presque rien, alors ils ont inventé un autre sortilège: le progrès, la civilisation.*"[103] From invaders belonging to various monotheistic religions, with their holy books, to the scientists, technicians, historians, and bureaucrats of modernity, the people of the sky have not only replaced an oral inheritance with a written one, thereby causing the original inhabitants of the land to forget their time-honored knowledge. They've also replaced one mode of narration and cultural transmission with another, one form with another. They've sidelined the *body*, an integral part of their orally transmitted inheritance, and replaced it with the page, and in so doing they've instituted a mode of reification that has alienated the indigenous inhabitants of the earth from their terrestrial identity. Replacing the mother's age-old myth of origins with their sacred texts, these godly invaders also replaced one kind of identity with another, disqualifying embodiment as a mode of being. Now only the page counts; now truth can only be found through reading, not through existing, performing, and interacting as a community.

Simultaneously mystical, anti-capitalist, and environmentalist, the mother's origin story becomes a critique of reification in all its forms—including the reification of speech by text and the attendant replacement of embodied forms of knowledge and identity with paper. The tale thus articulates a fear of forgetting, of being forced to sever ties not only with old stories, but with old forms of storytelling. In renouncing their heritage, these original people of the earth are also battling their own bodies ("luttant avec leur propre corps"), resisting the embodied instincts on which oral narrativity relies in order to embrace the reified world of writing created by the greedy gods. To be true to oneself, in this alternate, autochthonous cosmology, is to return to one's body, just as to be true to these mythical origins is to be true to the earth, to the "vie terrienne des hommes." Such are the contours of Chraïbi's atavistic fantasy.

The Body, the Soul, and the Machinery of the State

However, even as Chraïbi fantasizes about the possibility of an autochthonous alterity and its return, the author-narrator acknowledges the impossibility of this fantasy's fulfillment—again, along the lines of Mannoni's signal formulation "Je sais bien, mais quand même…" Unable or unwilling to read the signs within himself, Ali ascends the mountain for the final time to check on his superior without realizing that he is also ascending toward a crucial moment of anagnorisis. Caught between what Chraïbi has elsewhere called "two doors,"[104] between the earth-bound indigeneity of the Imazighen (orality, childhood, the nourishing mother) and the

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[102] Ibid., 205.

[103] Ibid., 207-8.

[104] In a 1959 radio interview with J. Pivin for France-Culture, broadcast on November 14 1959 and cited by Houaira Kadra Hadjadji, Chraïbi said that he wrote *Le Passé simple* because he found himself stuck between two doors: the eastern door that had closed behind him and the western door that refused to open before him ("il se trouvait bloqué entre deux portes, la porte orientale qu'il avait claquée et la porte occidentale qui refusait de s'ouvrir devant lui"). Kadra Hadjadji, *Contestation et révolte dans l'oeuvre de Driss Chraïbi* (Algiers: E.N.A.L., 1986), 313.

paper-bound machinery of the state (writing, adulthood, the tyrannical father), Ali is essentially "without any true identity:"

> Car il savait maintenant qu'il était devenu sans identité réelle, un simple exécutant, un fétu de paille. Pris corps et âme dans le gigantesque engrenage de l'État, il était devenu incapable de faire quoi que ce fût, sinon de continuer à arrêter et à tabasser les gens. Pour survivre.[105]

Ali is caught, "body and soul," in the "machinery" of the state, the gears of a Foucauldian surveillance apparatus that exceeds individual control. His body is caught in this apparatus because he's become dependent on its money to feed and clothe himself, his soul because he's lost any sense of connection with a non-reified, indigenous identity. Talking with Hajja, Raho, and the other peasants has revived not only memories of his personal childhood, but also more distant echoes of the oral, terrestrial, and embodied time immemorial, bequeathed to him by his mother. Still, he finds himself unable to act on these desires precisely because the acculturation of modernity has limited the horizons of possibility for his actions. He ceaselessly represses these tremors of recognition and familiarity even as he vows to leave his police post and join the Aït Yafelman family; the compulsions of his super-ego, trained in modernity, are ultimately impossible to break.

Thus, although the considerable amount of space devoted to this alternative creation myth in the final chapters of *Enquête* seems to promise the possibility of a return, Chraïbi will ultimately withdraw that possibility when Ali becomes "un vrai chef" at the end of his encounter with the Aït Yafelman.[106] Neither the resurfacing of his mother's tale nor his trickster's facility with words ultimately saves the inspector from the Aït Yafelman, who intend to kill him.[107] Instead, only his insistence on the durability of *paper* in the hands of the government convinces the village council to spare his life. "Bon! d'accord!" the inspector insists in one last ruse,

> qu'on démonte cette vieille chignole en pieces détachées et qu'on les vende jusqu'au Soudan, ce serait une agréable solution! Qu'on enterre leurs cadavres, à lui et au chef Mohammed, dans un trou d'enfer, d'accord! Oh! d'accord, bon Dieu! Mais comment

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[105] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 200.

[106] Ibid., 214.

[107] Here I disagree with Anjali Prabhu, who claims that "it is through his advantage in language that Ali saves himself. […] The Chief has been killed by the peasants, […] and it is now time for them to take care of Ali who is also part of the establishment. Language, which he produces endlessly through the night much like Sheherazade does in the *Arabian Nights*, saves his life. He weaves a masterpiece of a text […]" Prabhu, "Theorizing the Role of the Intermediary," 185-86. While it is true that Ali has a great facility with language, a closer reading of the text reveals that, even though he does talk through the night, we cannot be sure that the content of his speech matches the content of the narration. That is, the memories of his mother's tale that surface in his mind may not be precisely what he recounts to the Aït Yafelman when he "dit tout, fut tout, avec une totale sincérité… fabriqu[ant] des mots et des expressions qu'il ne comprit pas lui-même, jamais." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 211. This is *remembered* speech, not spoken in the present—bracketed off by italics and parentheses rather than quotation marks. Furthermore, the "post-Orientalist" position Prabhu claims in the beginning of the article seems inconsistent with the invocation of the *Nights*, as though Shahrazad were the only lens through which to read the figure of the Arab storyteller. My point is that Chraïbi is looking somewhere beyond both Arab and French narrative frameworks and histories in this novel.

supprimeraient-ils les papiers du Central, là-bas, dans la capital des flics et du gouvernement? Les paperasses, les ordres de mission avaient la vie dure…[108]

Cars and bodies can be disposed of, taken apart and sold for scraps as far south and east as the Sudan, or buried in this far off corner of the world and forgotten. But *paperwork*, in the cop-centric capital city, will live forever. It is paperwork that will bring the tanks, guns, and shells to the Aït Yafelman village to destroy them all. Enthralled, "body and soul," to the immense machinery of the state, Ali transmits his fear to the Aït Yafelman in one last effort to convince them to spare his life. And indeed, it is the only ruse that works. Soon after, the tribe gather around him, asking him what he will do to "supprimer les papiers du gouvernement."[109] And he, "si humoriste dans la vie, si fantaisiste dans son langage quotidien (et dans sa tête)," marshals all the tools of civilization and progress he can to counter their arguments. In short, Ali transforms from the novel's trickster into the original target of its satire, the chief whose authority his mother's stories aimed to undermine and efface: "Il sut être ce qu'on attendait de lui: un être grave, sensé, efficace. Un vrai chef."[110] The irony in this passage, of course, is that Chraïbi too has transformed into "un vrai chef:" he has recorded every detail of Ali's and the chief's investigation "au pays," from the series of events that transpired since their arrival to the dialogue and even the innermost thoughts of the Aït Yafelman, and from the comic scenes of mispronunciation and misunderstanding between Ali, the chief, and the peasants, to the legendary story of the Commandant Filagare. Indeed, "paperasses" do seem to have a long life in *Enquête*; the novel itself is living proof of this claim.

Orphans of the Modern

As the number of "enquêtes" continues to multiply, and as the word "enquête" itself splinters and takes on new meanings throughout *Une enquête au pays*, so too the parallels between Chraïbi and his trickster protagonist continue to surface. Far from being purely a police procedural, then, the novel is quickly revealed as an "enquête sur lui-même" conducted simultaneously by Ali, on the diegetic level, and Chraïbi, on the extra-diegetic level. Constantly assessing the timbre, tone, and register of his interlocutors, and therefore also attuned to the power relationships that structure every encounter, Ali has learned to speak a variety of languages in order to protect himself and earn his keep as a police inspector. He knows how to play the subservient, brown-nosing inferior to the Chief's power-hungry, authority-obsessed "Papa,"[111] just as he knows how to play the obedient, sweet son to Hajja's protective, hospitable "Petite Mère,"[112] and the friendly buddy, the "brother," the "semblable" with the tree-like peasant who shares his name. In this sense, Ali's existence within the fictional world of *Enquête* parallels Chraïbi's own existence as the author of this deeply heteroglossic novel. Just as Ali can capably adopt the languages of officer and peasant alike, so too Chraïbi ventriloquizes a series of languages throughout the course of his own metafictional "enquête au pays," from the Moroccan

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[108] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 212.

[109] Ibid., 213.

[110] Ibid., 214.

[111] Ibid., 144.

[112] Ibid., 44.

monarchy's sham of democracy in parliamentary elections to the obscurantism of "officialité," and from the folksy, colloquial *skaz* of the Aït Yafelman to the mythic, fabulous timbre of Ali's mother's orally transmitted tale. Ali's investigation into his own upbringing gradually peels away the layers of his acculturation and police training, reviving the stories, sensibilities, and languages of a childhood (and by extension, of an immemorial time) buried deep within him. Likewise, Chraïbi's investigation gradually reveals the entanglement and mutual implication of state surveillance and novelistic emplotment, the formal (if not intentional) complicity of literature and the state. What emerges, in Ali's case, is a portrait of an orphan in both the literal and figurative senses: orphaned not only by the death of his parents, but also by a post-colonial state culture that has required him to sever his embodied ties with autochthonous legends of self-understanding transmitted to him by his mother, and to her by generations of mothers before her, simply for his own material wellbeing. As the author-narrator of *Enquête*, Chraïbi too positions himself as an orphan of the matrilineal, oral culture the novel can only mourn, reifying it in text and thereby destroying precisely what it sought to preserve.

A colonized subject through and through, Ali is both severed from the inherited practices and stories that bound him to an immemorial, indigenous past (the umbilical cord tying him to the mother-land) and shut out from the offices and positions of power by the "new masters of the Third World."[113] After Ali has spoken at length with the Aït Yafelman women preparing their couscous, "agit[ant] la langue en un flot de paroles sans chronologie,"[114] as is his wont, he gets up, "les bras ballants, plus orphelin que jamais en cette fin de XXe siècle."[115] His arms "swinging" by his sides, Ali has been forcibly released from any motherly embrace and as a result, has become "more of an orphan than ever." No amount of speech, storytelling, fact-seasoning, or "griot-style" singing will resuscitate these ties for Ali,[116] just as no amount of novel-writing can recapture them for Chraïbi. Ali, Chraïbi and other hybrid middle-men like them have been forced to internalize their own interpellation as fixed individuals. They exist only *on* and *as* paper, as thinly constituted as their driver's licenses, passports, and voter registrations.

What Chraïbi is searching for, then, are the links and sensibilities embedded within Ali's subjectivity that would reinsert him (and by extension, Chraïbi himself) into the fabric of collective time, purged of the violence that has attended colonial Enlightenment and its bureaucratic, post-colonial aftermath. Yet as Chraïbi has it in the final chapters of *Enquête*, what this investigation ultimately unearths is only the impossibility of the fantasy that motivated it. Chraïbi recognizes and acknowledges his own authorship as yet another form of surveillance, and does so not only implicitly within the the text of novel, but also quite explicitly in its paratexts. On the back cover of the novel's first edition, Inspector Ali speaks the following metafictional prologue:[117]

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[113] As Ali thinks to himself in a moment of rebellion against the Chief: "Les Français étaient partis, mais demeuraient les esclaves—portiers, domestiques, secrétaires, petits intermédiaires coincés à jamais entre les nouveaux maîtres du Tiers Monde et le peuple." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 131.

[114] Ibid., 195.

[115] Ibid., 198.

[116] Ibid., 197.

[117] I am grateful to Taïeb Berrada's article for alerting me to the existence of this paratext, which was excluded from the reissue of *Enquête* in the Seuil series "Points." See Taïeb Berrada, "L'Écriture et la problématique des intrus

"Par Allah et le Prophète, le dénommé Driss Chraïbi a perdu la boule! C'est un subversive et un dangereux *insectuel*, la civilisation a mélangé sa tête […] Au lieu d'avoir pitié de nous et de nous venir en aide, ce maboul de la tête appelé Driss Chraïbi n'a pas cessé de rigoler de nous avec ses grandes dents. Il a même mené le travail à notre place, alors qu'il n'est pas un flic de métier; il a même fait l'enquête sur nous autres, le chef et moi, sur la cooperation culturelle entre les polices et sur l'État lui-même. […] Où a-t-il bien pu dénicher ce dossier? Il a employé nos propres mots, exprimé nos sentiments, à croire qu'il était en chacun de nous."[118]

The novel's only moment of explicit metafiction appears in back-cover copy that turns out to be a fictive authorial preface.[119] Chraïbi causes his own fictional character to write back against him, criticizing his authorial position (he is a dangerous "*insectuel*" spoiled by civilization) as well as his process (the author has composed the very "dossier" his characters rail against). As Taïeb Berrada has insightfully pointed out: "Dans le texte chraïbien, la représentation de l'intrus dans le monde… est également l'intrus en soi: c'est '*l'insectuel*' venu d'Occident qui s'introduit dans leur conscience, dans le texte… L'auteur devient ainsi un auteur intrus puisqu'il est remis dans le texte. Il intervient… à l'interieur de la conscience de ses personnages grâce a des procédés littéraires, tel le discours indirect libre."[120] Chraïbi acknowledges his complicity in the very practices of writing, individuation, and surveillance that he derides elsewhere in the novel.

Reading the remainder of the novel through the prism of this fictive authorial preface, the many moments when the fictional character inspector Ali derides writing begin to appear not only as demonstrations of his greater proximity to the oral culture of the "pays," but also as self-critical denunciations from Chraïbi himself. In yet another moment of rebellion against the Chief and his methods, Ali thinks to himself: "Car c'était cela le plus dur, le plus *inhumain* dans le métier: *écrire*, créer, faire galoper l'imagination dans la steppe des mots et le Sahara des idées."[121] One of Ali's myriad moments of praise for oral over written language, the sentence also reflects Chraïbi's own ambivalence about his fantastical project to write a "pure," autochthonous, untouched countryside, to create in words and in language a heterotopia whose very definition is to defy and escape language and the syntax of state control. Ali's distaste for writing, like the Aït Yafelman's aversion to proper names and fixed identities, poses authorship itself as a problem. Here as in the novel's back cover, Chraïbi uses Ali to interrogate his own authorial position, contextualizing it as a position of control not unlike that of the police.

In *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller similarly explores not only how the police function as a topic in the world of the novel, but also how the novel, "as a set of representational techniques, systematically participates in a general economy of policing power."[122] In this, Miller

postcoloniaux dans *Une Enquête au pays* de Driss Chraïbi." *Nouvelles Études Francophones* 21, no. 2 (2006): 150–62.

[118] Chraïbi, *Une Enquête au pays* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), back cover.

[119] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1997), 284-288.

[120] Berrada, "Intrus Postcoloniaux," 151.

[121] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 126.

[122] D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 2.

builds on Foucault's theoretical reconfiguration of power as "discipline," no longer corporeal but diffuse, enforced by an unseen but all-seeing surveillance, among other practices, none of which is localizable to any single institution or entity within the state. Integral to Miller's reading of the novel's police-like narrative practice is his reminder that "whenever the novel censures policing power, it has already reinvented it, in *the very practice of novelistic representation*."[123] Miller takes Émile Zola's *Nana* (1880) as exemplary of this contradiction between content and form. On the one hand, Zola's narration condemns the policing of prostitution by emphasizing both the prostitutes' terror of law enforcement (Nana's greatest fear is of being "'mise en carte': put on a police list entailing obligatory medical examination")[124] and the corruption practiced by these officers of the law, who trade protection for sexual favors. Yet as Miller points out, "the police procedures that are censured in the story reappear less corruptibly in Zola's method of telling it."[125] Making use of extensive research, new scientific notions about pathology, and the "slice of life" description for which he is famous, Zola, in Miller's estimation, creates *in fiction* the very "mise-en-carte" so feared by Nana. "*Nana*," Miller points out, "is the title of a file, referring both to the prostitute who resists the record and to the novel whose representational practice has already overcome this resistance."[126]

A similar, if not identical contradiction structures Chraïbi's *Enquête*, for what is this novel if not the "investigation" or "chronicle" of the practices, beliefs, and techniques of resistance that supposedly render the Aït Yafelman inaccessible to state classification, surveillance, and discipline? *Enquête* enacts in narrative practice what Chief Mohammed and Inspector Ali were unable to achieve through police interrogation: it penetrates into the minds of Raho, Hajja, and Ali's childhood to lay out the contours and specificities of an alternative order of things, an imagined Amazigh heterotopia. Chraïbi is looking for a pre-historic, Berber authenticity to defy the violent, classifying logic of colonial Enlightenment which he's experienced first-hand, and which has replaced the vitality of body, voice, and oral transmission with the reification of paper, ink, and writing. Yet the search is doomed to fail even before it begins, since any attempt to capture a resistant, un-writeable subjectivity in the text of a novel is already to exercise a violence of translation and severance in the transmission to writing.

Although the Aït Yafelman have, until now, resisted being written in the annals of the state, the one written realm from which they haven't disappeared is the novel itself. The novel's omniscient narrator explicitly condemns the inhuman procedures and practices of the post-colonial Moroccan state, with its oppressive police force, its deadening bureaucratic languages, and the way technologies of violence have replaced ideas, books, and culture as the most freely circulating agents.[127] Yet he also constitutes the Aït Yafelman as an object of knowledge, wielding the novel as his tool. Even as Chraïbi meticulously lays out the features of an

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[123] Ibid., 20 (emphasis in the original).

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid., 21

[126] Ibid.

[127] As the Chief notes in one of his numerous moments of praise for the modern state and its policing practices: "Quant aux échanges éxterieurs, [les policiers] dépassaient de loin tout échange culturel. Comment expliquer ce dénominateur commun qui faisait coopérer à plein rendement et dans l'amitié des États la plupart des polices civilisées? […] En cette fin de XXe siècle, où l'on pouvait aligner dix bonshommes et les transpercer tous de part en part avec une seule balle de Magnum 35, la technologie remplaçait souverainement les idés, tous les livres. Et le progress technologique… commençait par la police et y trouvait son plein épanouissement." Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 149.

autochthonous alterity that has resisted incorporation into the discipline and surveillance of the state, the novel's omniscient narration pries into the private lives and interior worlds of these supposedly resistant characters, thereby undermining their status as holdouts against civilization. Raho and Hajja no longer resist through a rejection of proper names and all the knowability they confer. They are deeply and intimately known, put on display by none other than Chraïbi himself. The success of Chraïbi's "enquête" for non-reified forms of identity is thus also its failure: it has uncovered the tales that might otherwise have remained buried within Ali's memory, yet in exposing these tales to the light of a reading, intellectual/*insectuel* public, it has also become the very document, the very kind of "dossier" whose truth-value it sought to undermine. The novel that writes against writing ultimately only writes against itself—such is the self-reflexive paradox Chraïbi has created in *Enquête*.

Disappearance as Resistance

For Laâbi, writing just after the heyday of anticolonial mobilization and Fanonian national culture, "atavism" was, on the one hand, a salutary and effective way to resist the West's distrust of the body, "from Christian precepts discrediting the human organism to the extremely mechanized intellectualism of contemporary philosophies."[128] Atavism responds to the enforced alienation of mind from body, land, and memory with "authenticity and rootedness."[129] But atavism also provides a path away from earlier, Third World-ist aspirations toward equality and universalism, built on the "internationalist ideologies" of that period. "We are no longer duped by such aspirations," Laâbi states. "In the face of the current situation of appalling inequalities that exist between the developed world and the other, granting or demanding universalism can only lead to cultural, sociological, and mental assimilation of the powerless by the more powerful."[130] On the one hand, rootedness in one's national culture and origins becomes the antidote for continued exploitation masquerading as universalism here. Yet on the other hand, because "authenticity" and "rootedness" are almost equally as vague as "universalism," Laâbi's reformulation of national culture along the lines of atavism simply replaces one fiction with another.

Writing twenty years after Laâbi, Chraïbi shares the same concern with rediscovering roots, with re-establishing the centrality of the body and its memory in the mind of the colonized subject, and with doing so largely through an exploration of oral, embodied forms of narration. The difference is that Chraïbi does not take the existence of such an autochthonous alterity as a given. He uses fiction to expose atavism as a fiction, yet continually asserts that this does not detract from its viability. In this sense, Chraïbi's Berber critique of Enlightenment shares many of the features of Adornian negative aesthetics: the disharmonies and disjunctures between narrator, author, and character, and between reality, possibility, and fantasy, when conspicuously staged, become the very vitality of the novel, a replacement for the impossible bond between the author, his memory, and the embodied word. "The moment in the work of art by which it transcends reality," Adorno and Horkheimer write in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "…does not consist in achieved harmony, in the questionable unity of form and content, inner and outer, individual and society, but in those traits in which the discrepancy emerges, in the necessary

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[128] Laâbi, "Realities and Dilemmas II," 97.

[129] Ibid., 98.

[130] Ibid.

failure of the passionate striving for identity."[131] Perhaps Chraïbi's fantasy of autochthonous alterity, together with his implicit recognition of that fantasy's impossibility, might constitute precisely such a negative truth, just as Ali's subjectivity puts the contradictions and hypocrisies of colonial Enlightenment and its post-colonial mirror image on display. Divided against themselves both linguistically and spiritually, "orphaned at the end of the twentieth century," Ali and Chraïbi still retain the traces of another language, even if the novel can do nothing but circle around and around this linguistic alterity, an unattainable point at the bottom of a vortex.

Unlike the other authors examined in this project, then, Chraïbi is not searching through the archives of pre-modern Arabic literature in *Enquête*. His is not so much a formal as an identitarian investigation, one that extends beyond Arabo-Islamic history into the less explored terrain of an immemorial, matrilineal Amazigh past. Yet like Khoury, al-Qaʿīd, and Jabra, he is concerned with questions of transmission and cultural memory, the authenticity that inheres in primarily oral literary forms, and the fraught position of the author who has nothing but writing at his disposal. In negotiating these questions, Chraïbi creates a realm beyond language, structured by a series of fundamental and embodied relationships between human, earth, sun, and sky. He invents time and place before the incursion of colonial Enlightenment instituted individual self-relfection as a compulsion of subject-formation. Just as the alternate creation myth related to inspector Ali by his mother is preserved in him despite his many attempts to trivialize, denounce, or otherwise suppress it, so too Chraïbi preserves a fantasy of cultural transmission within the novel *Une Enquête au pays*—ironically, by making it disappear. Even as he mocks his own position as an author using free indirect discourse to expose the most intimate thoughts of his characters, he also opens himself—the author of novels—to the possibility that other voices, other modes of speech and self-understanding might surface within him, spilling over into his text. He maintains the possibility of an unknown and unknowable realm, a realm that ultimately disappears, like the Aït Yafelman, from the text.

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[131] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 103.

Conclusion:

The Writer Between the Archive and the Story

In a vignette from the end of Khoury's *Wujūh*, the frame narrator has a conversation with a friend of his who, no longer able to stomach his profession as a dentist, becomes a journalist. This former dentist tells the narrator that he is working for a major newspaper, but neglects to mention that he is actually a clerk working in the paper's archives. When the narrator confronts his friend about this oversight and suggests that work in the archives is less prestigious than work as a reporter or editor, the former dentist brushes him off. "What do reporters even do? They translate what comes to them from the news agencies, which means they are only translators. The reporter is no longer a writer; he's become a machine."[1] The doctor's aspiration is to become not a reporter, but a *writer*—"I am a writer, or I want to become one," he says—and his work in the archives is part of this plan.[2] "Where do you think writers get the novels they publish from?" he asks the narrator. "Do you think they invent them? Never, no one invents anything. They steal their words from people's mouths and from newspaper archives. I went straight to the source."[3]

The narrator's friend thinks that he has cracked the code of authorship, and that by mining the newspaper archive for stories worthy of development and fictionalization he will follow a path laid out by many writers before him. Yet his portrait of the author as a kind of thief, mining both the stories told to him by others and the information collected in newspaper archives, encapsulates in miniature the anxiety of authorship that I have investigated in this dissertation. The novels I have considered place the author's positionality and the act of authorship itself at the heart of their narrative work. Through this thematization and fictionalization of authorship, they recast the postcolonial Arab author as a figure who must negotiate the archive with the people—that is, s/he must negotiate the information one can receive in historical and journalistic accounts (which lay exclusive claims to truth), and the stories one receives on the tongues of others (which many dismiss as trivial stories, or *qiṣaṣ*, but which nevertheless contain their own experiential form of truth). I have argued that these novels of investigation situate the author's task in between these two realms of inquiry precisely because his medium is language. The author, according to these writers, shares his use of the written word with the journalists and historians, who aim at objectivity. Yet his desire (and indeed, his need) to make sense of experience through storytelling ties him to a broader, less intellectual, and more general populace. The author, as portrayed in these novels of investigation, must negotiate the most personal elements in "the words from people's mouths" with the aspiration to completeness, authority, and totalization that is the very definition of the archive. The former dentist in Khoury's vignette, in short, thinks that he is engaged in a search for new *thematic* material with which the archive will furnish him. To become the writer he aspires to be, however, he will have to undertake a different kind of search—for a *form* that can inflect the univocal information recorded in the newspaper archive with the voices and stories of the many.

This is precisely the search, I have argued, that Arab novelists of the period following 1967 undertake in their work, yet rather than prescribe new models with the distance and

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[1] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 319.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

detachment of cultural criticism, they use fiction as a way to investigate fiction, making the novel its own form of critique. Far from losing themselves in the vortex of metafiction, they maintain a commitment to the stories "on people's mouths" as well as the information recorded in newspapers and the historical archive. Theirs is what the critic Magda al-Nowaihi has called "committed postmodernity." In contrast with western texts, "where postmodernity and commitment often seem to be mutually exclusive," al-Nowaihi writes, works of committed postmodernity are "postmodern in sensibility and structure, but… also fiercely concerned with the here and now and committed to struggling for its improvement."[4] As I have shown in the preceding chapters, these novels of investigation are "postmodern in sensibility and structure," in that they meditate on the multiplicity, inaccessibility, or relativity of truth, criticize reading as a flawed epistemological process, and seek out new, less rational or documentary forms of truth. Still, their use of metafiction, parodic stylizations of state discourse, and experimentations with limit-language all aim at forging a new relationship to reality via fiction. They use fiction to reconsider the narrative, historical, and political authority that has historically been granted to authors and poets in the Arab world. Instead, they use the novel as a contrapuntal medium to revolutionary, political, historical, and even conventionally "literary" discourses, searching for new *forms* and *languages* outside the educations they have received.

With this in mind, it is worth remembering that even though each of them received a very different literary and cultural education, all of the authors I have considered in the preceding chapters express skepticism about education in general, portraying it variously as exile, estrangement, deracination, alienation, or disengagement from their communities of origin. Through his education at Cambridge, Jabra developed a passion for British and American Romanticism, as well as a belief in literary translation from English into Arabic as a way to revitalize modern Arabic letters. Yet *Walīd Masʿūd* finds him returning to a pre-literate, pre-educational childhood in a quest to solidify his relationship to other Palestinians living in a continual state of loss. Khoury was variously formed by the Christian parables that his grandmother told him as a child,[5] the French schooling he received in Beirut and Paris, and the ad hoc revolutionary education to which he was exposed as a fighter, yet his novel too aims to erase the author and allow the voices of the victims to flourish. Al-Qaʿīd meanwhile, was one of the many beneficiaries of Gamal Abdel Nasser's socialized education program, which allowed a new generation of Egyptians from all over the country to attend university. Yet upon "returning" (in fiction) to his impoverished natal village as a committed Marxist author, he soon discovers how little work the learned discourse of Marxism he's acquired at university can actually perform for the *fallāḥīn*, whose lives, ironically, he had hoped to improve by becoming educated. Chraïbi too was the beneficiary of a colonial French education that, while it gained him access to the cultural sphere, nevertheless is figured in his later work as an irreparable deracination from

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[4] Magda al-Nowaihi, "Committed Postmodernity: Muḥammad Barrāda's *The Game of Forgetting*," in *Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity in Arabic Literature: Essays in Honor of Professor Issa J. Boullata*, ed. Kamal Abdel-Malek and Wael Hallaq (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 387-88.

[5] "I grew up in a Christian Orthodox family, with all the myths of Eastern Christians […] With the religious literary atmosphere there was also the influence of storytelling. Now I realize that the stories of my childhood were a popular version of *The Thousand and One Nights*. With these stories of my grandmother and a Syrian servant from Ḥawrān I discovered the pleasure of storytelling, of how all our life in the village of Ashrafiyyah was like a story. I think that these three elements: poetry, stories, and religious stories later played an important role in my novels, especially in my efforts to cross the frontiers between reality and the imaginary and to read life as a journey in unknown places." Khoury, "Conversations," 126.

autochthonous, "atavistic" roots. Although their intellectual and spiritual formations followed very different paths, then, each of these authors struggles to present education as anything other than an estrangement or exile from roots—a "severing from land and class,"[6] a "battle with one's own body."[7] They struggle, in other words, to reconcile their commitment to improving the lives of society's most downtrodden with their belief that literature should not be a politically prescriptive medium.

I have also emphasized, therefore, that these novels stage the problem of authorship as one of agency. In the course of their searches for new languages and forms, the authors of novels of investigation all ask what it means to speak from the position of the author, and how authorship is imbricated with authority, authoritativeness, and even authoritarian governance. At one limit, the author pries into the minds of his characters just as the state pries into the lives of its citizens, subjecting them to processes of individuation and identification that facilitate control by severing the individual from the community that could be a source of revolutionary power. The author picks and chooses which stories to flesh out and narrativize in his account, yet this process is as dialectically implicated with erasure as memory is with forgetting, the narrativization of authorship "marked and defined by a certain number of exclusions and restrictive conditions," in Gerard Genette's words.[8] At another limit, the author is the "medium" described by Khoury, the translator so beloved by Jabra, or the architect of literary confrontation and shock exemplified by al-Qaʿīd's metafictional author-narrator. He is the one who, in a sense, "disappears" as the voices of others emerge in him. His is the space between information and experience, at the horizon between earthly boundedness and sky-like transcendence, in the half-light and half-dark quality of dawn, and in the language that lies somewhere between the stories told on others' tongues and the dusty newspapers of the archive. The novel of investigation, I have argued, illustrates the extent to which the author is precariously perched between these two limits.

How, then, can the novel ever hope to crystallize the experiences of the many into "comprehensible lines" (*usṭur mafhūmah*)[9] or "instructive tales" (*qiṣaṣ dhāt maʿnā*),[10] while also aspiring toward archival completeness, historical authority, and truth? In contexts of historical catastrophe ranging from war, exile, and mass dislocation to state violence, torture, and forced disappearance, in political contexts where beautifully arranged words have been used to cover over atrocity, to continue to write becomes a fraught ethical choice for Arab and Francophone Maghrebi authors as for other postcolonial authors confronting such events, memories, and pasts. I would like to suggest that if the authors of Arabic and Francophone novels of investigation continue to write, it is perhaps because the possibility of recuperating something, even only a negative image, from these catastrophic historical events is promising enough to warrant the risk of complicity with deadening state discourses. Their novels of investigation stretch the boundaries of truth-telling discourse to incorporate memory, testimony, dreams, and oral storytelling forms. They want to reckon with history, in other words, in languages not yet touched by a pervasive, Enlightenment rationalization, yet simultaneously not bound by rigid or

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[6] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 355; *Search*, 272.

[7] Chraïbi, *Enquête*, 207.

[8] Gerard Genette, "Boundaries of Narrative," 11.

[9] Jabra, *Baḥth*, 11; *Search*, 1.

[10] Khoury, *Wujūh*, 304.

fatalistic traditions or conventions. They respond to an era of uncertainty, disillusionment, and doubt by imprinting themselves in reverse on the uncertain, disillusioned, and doubtful frame narrators whose very presence in their works interrogates the enterprise of authorship itself. In this interrogation, however, we can also see an invitation to the reader—to not take any narrative for granted, to complement the information given in newspapers with the supposed fiction of stories, and to always consider the material that is excluded, evaporated, or suppressed when the history of catastrophe is written.

The much-regretted Idwār al-Kharrāṭ concludes his introduction to *Ḥassasiyyah* with a brief defense of the "new sensibility" against those who would dismiss it as an ahistorical, apolitical, or uncommitted literary movement:

> Need I say […] that all of the writers of the new sensibility, without exception, work from the position of one striving for a more just and more broadly liberated value system, one that believes more deeply in basic human dignity? That these writers, being from among the oppressed, stand with the oppressed against oppression, with the dispossessed against dispossession, and with those who—with all the spirit, suffering, and will in their bodies—are searching (*bāḥithīn*) for liberty and abundance?[11]

The transformational potential of this literature, in other words, is to be found not in its ability to portray successful revolution or to completely encapsulate history in words, but in its capacity to grapple with incomplete knowledge through a poetics of "searching." In the very act of thematizing self-doubt and self-reflection, these authors refuse to be incapacitated by them, and instead they transform their self-questioning into the guiding principle for a literary quest that will forever remain incomplete. Nevertheless, as their novels attest, there is merit in the search itself, as it illustrates to author, reader, and scholar alike the politics of knowing, the poetics of memory, and the ethics of listening. Their novels of searching and investigating invite author, reader, and scholar alike to navigate the middle ground between official discourse and unofficial recounting, between the archive and the spoken words of the people.

Studying these texts, this period, and these worlds from the position of the scholar, I have tried to be more of a medium than a chief of police, more of a witness (*shahīd*) than an author (*muʾallif*) with a prefigured agenda. I have tried to offer not totalizable theories of Arabic, Francophone, postcolonial, or Third-World literature, but intricate readings of memory, language, and voice as portrayed in these contextually multiple yet formally interconnected texts. The resistance to closure, completion, and authoritativeness that I have observed in these chronicles of disappearance has thus been not only the object, but the method of my study, as I too have tried to balance education—that severance, that uprooting, that exile from self and community—with listening.

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[11] al-Kharrāṭ, *Ḥassāsiyyah*, 33.

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