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“Life/Lines”: Narrations of the Self in Arab Women’s Autobiographies

Author
Alfares, Dalal A M A

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“Life/Lines”:

Narrations of the Self in Arab Women’s Autobiographies

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Gender Studies

by

Dalal A M A Alfares

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Life/Lines": Narrations of the Self in Arab Women's Autobiographies

by

Dalal A M A Alfares

Doctor of Philosophy in Gender Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Sondra Hale, Co-chair

Professor Kyungwon Hong, Co-chair

This dissertation explores the ways in which some Arab women's autobiographies radically depart from normative conventions of traditional autobiography both in the Western and the Arab-Islamic tradition(s) that insist on linearity and progressive temporality as foundations of autobiographical narration which promote masculinist and colonialist notions of the individuated, self-willed subject. I read these Arab women's autobiographies' formal innovations as interventions into the autobiographical form because they challenge narrow concepts of subjectivity. I explore the ways in which Arab women's cultural production redefines the very idea of the political sphere, and I argue that they enact new definitions of agential subjects. By highlighting linearity as a concept adopted and deconstructed in Arab women's life-writing, my project analyzes texts that illustrate: how life narration can orient an alternative textual trajectory informed by subverting the genealogical family line; how autobiographies can be transformed

from life narratives into theoretical frameworks that provide an analysis of lines of power through Muslim women's sense of spatiality and embodiment; and, how autobiographies can disrupt the straight line of narrating the history of the postcolonial nation by providing a fragmented re-collected narration of Arab political commitment. Arab women autobiographies subvert these normative conventions by instantiating alternative temporalities of hesitation, interruption, repetition, and circularity, and by organizing autobiographical narratives around spatiality rather than linear temporality.

This dissertation of Dalal A M A Alfares is approved.

Gil Hochberg

Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo

Sondra Hale, Co-chair

Kyungwon Hong, Co-chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my friend Isra' Albanna, who passed away too young. Our scholarly paths started in first grade, and would've continued into graduate school. She has been a constant companion in my heart during this program. It was our dream to do our PhDs together and I'm sure she would have been very proud to see me complete my doctoral studies. This PhD is also for my mother, Laila, the first feminist in my life. She taught me my first lines of poetry, and embodied how strength can be found in vulnerability and persistence. I am forever grateful for her wisdom, humor, and loving support.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION

2014-2017 PhD Candidate, Gender Studies, UCLA
Dissertation: "Life/Lines": Narrations of the Self in Arab Women's Autobiographies"
– Co-Chairs: Prof. Sondra Hale (Gender Studies and Anthropology) and Prof. Grace Hong (Gender Studies and Asian American Studies)
– Committee Members: Prof. Gil Hochberg (Gender Studies and Comparative Literature) and Prof. Thu-huong Nguyen-vo (Asian Languages & Cultures)

2009 Masters in Women's Studies, San Diego State University
– Co-Chairs: Prof. Huma Ahmed-Ghosh and Prof. Anne Donadey

2005 Bachelors of Arts in English Literature, Minor in Comparative Literature, Kuwait University (Distinction with Class Honors)

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

2015-2016 UCLA, Graduate Division, Dissertation Year Fellowship

2012-2013 UCLA, Department of Gender Studies Fellowship

2006-2015 Kuwait University, Department of English Language and Literatures
– Full funding scholarship for Masters and PhD in Feminist research

2006-2007 San Diego State University, Department of Women's Studies
– Recipient of Carsten/Wertz Graduate Sistership

TEACHING AND RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

2017	Research Assistant	UCLA, Department of Gender Studies, Prof. Mishuana Geoman
2017	Reader	UCLA, Department of Gender Studies and School of Law, Prof. Claudia Pena, "Women of Color in Social Movements"
2016	Teaching Associate	UCLA, Department of Gender Studies and Department of Film, TV, Digital Media, Prof. Purnima Mankekar, "Sex, Race, and Difference in Transnational Film"
2015	Reader	UCLA, Department of Gender Studies and School of Law, Prof. Beth Ribet, "Gender, Law, and Disability"
2007-2009	Research Assistant	San Diego State University, Department of Women's Studies, Prof. Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "Islamic Feminism(s)/Gender and Islam" Book Project
2008	Teaching Associate	San Diego State University, Department of Women's Studies, Prof. Huma Ahmed-Ghosh, "Women in Multicultural Perspectives"
2007	Teaching Associate	San Diego State University, Department of Women's Studies and European Studies, Prof. Anne Donadey, "Women in Literature
2006-2007	Graduate Assistant	San Diego State University, Department of Women's Studies

GUEST LECTURES

2006 "Contextualizing Moufida Tlatli's 'Silences of the Palace'," Women's Studies 352: *Women in Literature*, Professor Anne Donadey, San Diego State University, Department of Women's Studies

2006 "Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass*: Flight into Feminism," Women's Studies 352: *Women in Literature*, Professor Anne Donadey, San Diego State University, Department of Women's Studies

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

"Friends, Lovers and the Spaces in Between". Review of *Bisexual women: Friendship and Social Organization*. Reviewers: Dalal Alfares, Denise Goerisch, Amber Guthrie, and Esther Rothblum. *Sex Roles*, 2008, vol. 58, pp. 595-596.

"Becoming Minor and Veiled in Kuwaiti Women's Blogs" (February 1, 2008). UCLA Center for the Study of Women. Thinking Gender Papers. Paper TG08_Alfares.

"My Experience in the US," *Transformations*, Department of Women's Studies Newsletter, San Diego State University, March 2007.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2008 "Becoming Minor and Veiled in Kuwaiti Women's Blogs", UCLA, Center for the Study of Women's Thinking Gender Conference, Los Angeles, CA

2007 "Kuwaiti Women's Blogs: Crossing Subversive Boundaries of Politics, Language, and Identity", Pacific Southwest Women's Studies Association Conference, Los Angeles, CA

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, SERVICE, and COMMUNITY INVOLVELEMT

2007-2014 Member of the Board, Head of the Graduates Committee, *National Union of Kuwaiti Students* (USA), Washington, DC

2007 Coordinating Committee Member, *National Union of Kuwaiti Students* (USA) Conference "*Lina'mal bi Jad li Kuwait Alghad*", Los Angeles, California

2005-2006 Administrative Coordinator, Office of the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs, Research, and Graduate Studies, College of Arts, Kuwait University

2005 Program Assistant, *Film Week: films from the Gulf*, Department of English Language and Literature, Kuwait University

2005 Volunteer, Women's Cultural Social Society, Kuwait

2003 Intern, Lothan Youth Achievement and Development Center, Kuwait

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Topic

In this dissertation, my main questions are centered on how Arab women have reshaped linear forms of articulating the autobiographical subject in life narratives and how they have used that as a medium of expressing subversive narrative politics. I examine autobiographical works of Arab women writers to trace the formations and constructions of a feminist consciousness and identity through the articulation of the autobiographical subject. My aim is to shed light on the many expressions of what it means to be a feminist through an examination of the autobiographical form. By addressing the multiple ways in which these Arab women writers articulate their feminist politics in relation to the deconstruction of autobiography, I propose that these writers contribute to a new understanding of Arab feminism as a construct both locally and globally. I argue that by illustrating the multiple ways in which Arab women writers articulate and reinvent forms of narrating the self, we can understand how they resist and challenge the over-determined, orientalist ways of reading their lives, ways that oscillate constantly between the dichotomies of nationalist and religious discourses.

I explore the ways in which Arab women's autobiographies radically depart from the normative conventions of the traditional autobiography, whether the Western tradition which narrates the individual in liberal society or the Islamic tradition, which privileges a masculinist nationalist trajectory. I attend to the ways in which both autobiographical traditions create a definition of subjectivity predicated on the public/private split, and explore why such a split is not possible for these autobiographical subjectivities because of the material and historical conditions of imperialism, anti-colonial nationalism, and contemporary geopolitics. I examine how Arab women's autobiography challenges such traditions, not only through content, but also

form. I investigate the ways in which such challenges to the traditional autobiographical form enable unconventional expressions of Arab feminist subjectivities and political engagement.

"Life/lines" attempts to demonstrate how Arab women writers produce autobiography in ways that illustrate that they are making crucial political interventions. Their interventions must be made through cultural production because of the historical moments and contexts in which they write. Consequently, I argue that the interventions Arab women make through cultural production redefines the very idea of the political sphere. In addition, I have insisted on referring to linearity as a concept that is adopted and deconstructed by Arab women to illustrate not only their complex understanding of the weight of the autobiographical form in promoting the colonial notion of the individuated, self-willed subject that is at the heart of the Western political tradition, but also how these women were critical of the constructions of masculinist nationalist heroic subjectivity upheld by Arab anti-colonial and post-colonial political traditions that emerged in the mid- to late-twentieth century as these women were coming of age. I view Arab women writers' formal innovations as interventions into the autobiographical form because they challenge such narrow concepts of subjectivity and the political sphere and enact new definitions of agential subjects. Arab women autobiographies subvert these traditions by instantiating alternative temporalities of hesitation, interruption, repetition, and circularity, and by organizing autobiographical narratives around spatiality rather than linear temporality.

My dissertation begins with analyzing the autobiography of famous Palestinian poet, Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography* (published in Arabic in 1988, translated to English in 1990 by Olive Kenny). Tuqan's autobiography describes her path of becoming a nationalist poet and "mother of the nation" by recounting early childhood memories of living in Nablus first under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, British colonialism, and then

Israeli occupation. Tuqan narrates the constrictive conditions of patriarchal family structures that prevented her from pursuing a formal education after puberty. The text relies on an anti-linear formal structure and I argue that highlighting the autobiography's anti-linear form exposes the conditions of death under which a text of "life" gets to be written. In doing so, I find that Tuqan adopts rhetorical strategies of silence, ambivalence, and hesitation to dismantle the hetero-patriarchal genealogies of the family and anti-colonial nationalist movements. Through the process of anti-linear narration, Tuqan reinvents herself and attempts to forge her own alternative lines of becoming and creates moments of her claiming her own self-births.

I then turn to analyze Moroccan Islamic feminist Fatima Mernissi's autobiography *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994). The text follows a young girl living in a 1940s upper class Moroccan "harem" as she parses out the interlocking religious, colonialist, and nationalist discourses governing Muslim women's bodies. I explore the ways in which an autobiographical text can be transformed into a theoretical critique of the politics of spatiality and embodiment by emphasizing how Mernissi provides multiple interpretations of the ways power draws lines/*hudud* around women's bodies (territorial, codified behavior, and moral). I argue that Mernissi's autobiography not only presents an autobiographical subject who is acutely aware of the spatial orderings of her life in a harem, but also narrates how women in the harem deftly and subtly negotiate and challenge relations of power by embodying and envisioning different spatialities.

The third text I study is Egyptian author, activist, and intellectual Latifa Alzayyat's autobiography, *The Search: Personal Papers* (published in Arabic in 1992, translated to English in 1990 by Sophie Bennett). I compare it with her semi-autobiographical bildungsroman, *The Open Door* (published in Arabic in 1960, translated to English in 2000 by Marylin Booth), to

illustrate the different ways in which she expresses her politics of commitment (*iltizam*). Looking at the ways in which Alzayyat narrates the fate of her *The Open Door*'s protagonist with the historical and political conditions of the Egyptian post-colonial state, I argue that Alzayyat expresses politics of commitment in the form of progressive and linear narration. In contrast, her autobiography, *The Search*, is a text that is heavily critical of the authoritarian nation state and narrates a fragmented political autobiographical subject. The autobiography's disjointed and repetitious narrative form resists the continuum of linear historical nationalist narration and proposes a new political expression of *iltizam*.

My project's main purpose is to analyze autobiographical texts of Arab women to illustrate the political connections of form and content in the narration of the autobiographical subject. As my literature review demonstrates, Western feminist studies of autobiography encouraged fruitful critiques of selfhood, embodiment, and spatiality. My work attempts to bridge an analytical and theoretical gap when it comes to discussing Arab women's autobiographical subjectivities. I focus specifically on undoing Western autobiography studies' concepts of linearity that are constructed by imperialist and masculinist modes of narration that promotes a representation of the autobiographical subject as autonomous, rational, progressive, and confident. In contrast, this dissertation looks at the multiple ways Arab women's autobiographies have deconstructed notions of linearity in their texts and created their own practices and narrative strategies to express a feminist and subversive autobiographical subject.

My dissertation's title borrows the term "life/lines" from feminist theorists of autobiography Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk's book *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (1989). Brodzki and Schenk demonstrate the multiple ways women's autobiographical narrative strategies resist linearity. In my project, I expand on their work and

apply life/lines as a concept that is only foregrounds formal narrative rhetorical strategies, but could also bring to the forefront issues of identity formation and historical content. I argue that Arab women's autobiographies have not only deconstructed the linear autobiographical form to express a subversive autobiographical subject, but they have also adopted linearity as a conceptual theoretical paradigm to highlight gendered politics of territoriality and embodiment.

I use the term "Arab" with a critical awareness of the racial and cultural erasures a blanket term can perform. As I will demonstrate in my historical context section, these Arab women's texts illustrate complex diversity and challenge a homogenous identity. I cautiously use the phrase "Arab women's autobiographies" while also rejecting the essentialist claim that Arab women's autobiographies inherently express different qualities than texts by Arab men, or women from other backgrounds. Rather, I hope that my work complicates the relationship of gendered and racial difference with regards to autobiographical writing. Syrian literary critic Nawar Al-Hassan Golley puts it perfectly when she proposes that we "use the term 'Arab women' strategically […] to contribute to availing required critique and knowledge about Arab women through their autobiographical practices while inviting further critique and dialogues with women from other parts of the world" ("Strategically Speaking" 163).

I also strategically use the term "autobiography," rather than "life writing" or "life narrative. The difference between the terms "autobiography" and "life-narratives" lies in their intellectual genealogies. Autobiography, as I will detail in my literature review, refers to a formal textual account of the narrator's life. Traditionally, this is usually an accomplished person, male, and it employs a "complete" progressive linear narrative. On the other hand, "life-writing" is a term deployed by feminist theorists of autobiography to broaden the rigid restrictions of definition to include a variety of texts that narrate subjectivity through diverse forms, such as

autobiographies, memoirs, journals, comics, blogs, and, even cook books. Feminist literary scholar Marlene Kadar, in *Essays on Life-Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (1992), describes life-writing as a "genre of documents or fragments of documents written out of life, or unabashedly out of personal experience of the writer" and these texts are connected by "a thematic concern of life or self" (5). While the texts analyzed in this dissertation can definitely be referred to as life-writing, I use the term "autobiographies" in a deliberate move to highlight the important ways in which they re-invent and defy the generic restrictions of traditional autobiography.

My dissertation's narrative analysis of the process of writing through "life/lines" of the autobiographical subject extends theorizations of the autos/bios/graphia emanating from literary criticism to necessarily include a closer analysis of feminist identifications and subversive formal techniques of the Arab woman as central autobiographical subject. I situate the autobiography not only as a textual practice and genre but also as a means by which Arab women redefine subjectivity and reframe the parameters of political engagement. Throughout this work, I attempt to take literary analysis and cultural production seriously and as politically situated. I read these cultural productions of Arab women to destabilize and complicate how they define subjectivity and agency.

While the autobiographical subject has recently been acknowledged and redressed as an understudied phenomenon in literary Arab and Islamic studies, my literature review below illustrates that the existing research largely overlooks new feminist interventions and understandings, and especially comparative literary perspectives, of subversive agency in life-writing and the formal stylistics of that writing process, in particular. My research project involves rereading Arab women's life-writings in a way that traces political feminist engagement

as it is narrated, in their own context, and in their own form. This is an opportunity for my work to serve as a correction to Arabic studies of autobiography that neglects to research Arab women's autobiographies as well as to Western feminist theories of autobiography that overlooks or does not engage with Arab women's life-writings. Furthermore, I find that the existing scholarship rarely places Arab women's texts in conversation with one another, treating each text as if it emerges from a vacuum rather from a literary genealogy that is steeped in literary Arabic tradition with its own formal stylistic qualities and contextual politics. This scarcity of research on Arab women's autobiographies propelled me to craft and employ a reading practice and methodology of life/lines that highlights how both the content *and* the form of these autobiographies need to be understood as significant in creating this new definition of the political subject.

Moreover, the central purpose of this dissertation is to intervene in mainstream discourses that take the autobiographies of Arab women as the main representational narratives of their subjectivity. In this work, rather, I deconstruct the stereotyped subjectivities of the Arab woman who have been rendered as perpetually oppressed, and I unpack the complexities from a theoretical, cultural and political standpoint. My specific treatment of the literary configurations of these autobiographical texts and traditions refuses to oversimplify the genre and the figure of the Arab woman and explores a range of Arab women's approaches to subverting the autobiographical genre and subject. Thus, I see my dissertation as an important and timely corrective given the recent marketing and publications of Arab women's autobiographies and life-writings that tug on the heartstrings of a Western readership expecting an Orientalizing and "authentic" account of the tale of the "oppressed" Muslim woman who overcomes the brown

men in her life.[1] Given that my chosen archive has recently been circulating the academic rounds and appearing in multiple syllabi focusing on gender in the Middle East courses, this not only places my dissertation at a crucial historical time of intervention and critical inquiry, my project also makes an important analytic contribution across the fields of Arabic literature, autobiography, and gender studies.

Literature Review

Because my dissertation centers the autobiographical writings of Arab women, it is necessary that this literature review highlight key theoretical schools of thought of autobiography studies. In an effort to define the Subject and subject matter of autobiography, I explore the historical scholarly genealogy of the genre in order to situate how and from where Arab women's autobiographies emerge. I have structured this review into three separate yet connected sections: the history of classical autobiography studies; the Islamic-Arabic tradition and reconfiguration of autobiography studies and the recent upsurge in scholarship on Arab women's autobiographies; and finally feminist interventions into the field of autobiography studies.

Historicizing the Genre of Autobiography Theory: Classical Autobiography Studies

Autobiography is a genre with a particularly problematic critical history. Below, I categorize this critical history into three main themes that illustrate each critical wave's main conceptual concerns when defining autobiography: (a) the early beginnings' fascination with

[1] Samira Ahmed in "Misery memoirs: why is it different for Muslim women?", for example, labels such texts as "misery memoirs" when referring to I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban by Malala Yousafzai and Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books by Azar Nafisi, and I would add Daring to Drive: A Saudi Woman's Awakening by Manal al-Sharif to the list as well. Hamid Dabashi, Anne Donadey, and Huma Ahmed Ghosh have also critiqued Nafisi's book for appealing to Western markets in neo-Orientalist frameworks as "native informants".

"life" as history; (b) the shift to focusing on the creative "self" as individual author and master; and, (c) the move to centering the "text" as structural representation of a written life.

Autobiography as History of "*bios*"

In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), feminist theorists of autobiography Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson provide a simplified description of the waves of scholarly work on autobiography. Put simply, the first wave starts with German philosopher Georg Misch's *A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* (1907, translated into English 1950). Misch's book discusses a range of "proper" examples from each age in order to document historically the gradual development of conscious human individuality. Misch defines autobiography as "the description (*graphia*) of an individual human life (*bios*) by the individual himself (*autos*) (5). Misch's survey reaches its apex when it analyzes St. Augustine's *Confessions*. In tracing a history of the soul, Misch holds Augustine's individual self-portrayal in high regard because it exhibits a conscious individuality higher than that found in texts of antiquity where the self is inferior to the political community. The self, expressed in *Confessions*, not only exemplified for Misch an interiority unsurpassed in previous texts, but it also engaged in a search and eventual orientation in Christianity and towards a self-resolving through confession to God.

Furthermore, Misch sets a trend in autobiography studies centered around two trajectories: first, exposing historical truth and events, and, second, defining the exceptional subject (individual) worthy of that History. Misch's project argues that through autobiography proper, one can trace the progression of Western history. Therefore, the lives that are included in the canon should be representative of those who participated in a particular achievement of civilization and History. Misch states:

> Though essentially representations of individual personalities, autobiographies are bound always to be representative of their period, within a range that will vary with the intensity of the authors' participation in contemporary life and with the sphere in which they moved (12).

Thus, what characterizes the first wave of autobiography studies is the concern with the *bios*, i.e. the life and its particularities. What the self thinks of itself is not as important as what the self tells us about the life lived. The self exists as a narrator of history, and the critic of autobiography is merely required to investigate its accuracy for the sake of documentation. Misch strives to provide a macro view of the individual self's involvement in public events and achievements of Western civilization to instate an imperial project of the European nation-state at the turn of the century.

The other trajectory of the first wave of autobiography studies is Misch's definition of the exceptional individual worthy of historical inclusion. If autobiography is to be of "high culture," then a particular individual, usually famous or illustrious, is to be studied and promoted. The appropriate autobiographical subject, for Misch, is unquestionably male, white, and Western. Misch acknowledges, "in the literature of various races, […] there appear at a certain stage of development writings of the autobiographical type, and the tendency to self-portrayal" (6). However, Misch resolves that "a history of autobiography, since it has to deal with the more complicated phenomena of mental life, cannot reach back to the primitive peoples" (18). This statement is not only a comment on the availability of written texts from "primitive peoples," but a condescending statement on their ability to access and articulate an advanced consciousness that is aware of the sophisticated engagement that autobiographical writing requires. Misch's

understanding is that only a few select individuals are capable of providing the historical demands of the canon of autobiography of Western Civilization.

Autobiography as Creation of "Autos"

Postcolonial scholar Bart Moore-Gilbert, in his book, *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics, and Self-Representation* (2009), identifies the second wave of autobiography criticism as starting with American literary critic James Olney's edited volume *Autobiography, Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980). The shift here focuses on the author as creator of a representational narrative of the self who is self-knowing and complete. Olney published for the first time an English-translated version of French philosopher Georges Gusdorf's influential essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (1956). Moore-Gilbert notes that Gusdorf moves away from Misch's moralistic tendencies and cultural relativism to situate the genre as "expressing a concern particular to Western man" and that it is the "late product of a specific civilization" (qtd in Moore-Gilbert xii). Indeed, Gusdorf situates autobiography as particularly Western only because other non-Western cultures seem not to have been exposed to Western colonialism *yet*. Furthermore, Gusdorf contends that for "primitive" cultures, a consciousness of self and personality does not exist because of a lack of the historical temporality of Western civilization required to chart the development of the subject (Moore-Gilbert xii). Gusdorf even goes as far as to admit that even in the rare case that autobiography proper emerges from non-Western contexts, it is an accomplishment that attests to the success of the Western imperial project. Gusdorf argues that "the genre has been put to good use in [the West's] systematic conquest of the universe" (qtd in Moore-Gilbert xii). Gusdorf goes on to state:

> [It] has been communicated to men of other cultures; but those men will thereby have been annexed by a sort of intellectual colonizing to a mentality that was not their own. When Gandhi tells his own story, he is using Western means to defend the East. (29)

It is important to note here that Gusdorf's contention is not a political analysis of the self in history. Rather, Gusdorf is particularly interested in the "art" and "creativity" of the self through its *re*telling of memory. The subject of autobiography proper has to engage in an act of "reconstructing the unity of a life across time" (37). According to Gusdorf, this reconstruction serves as "a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself *consciousness* of it" (my emphasis 38). Gusdorf sees the autobiographical self as both unique and universal but only because it is disciplined and adheres to Western progressive time and linear history. Gusdorf views individuality as the only impulse from which to initiate writing an autobiographical text because the subject alone holds the power and privilege over constructing temporality and consciousness of the artifice of memory: "the witness of each person about himself is […] a privileged one" (35).

Thus, whereas previously historical events act upon and inform the autobiographical self, Enlightenment philosophy and Rousseau's *Confessions* heavily influenced Gusdorf's theorization of the autobiographical self. Here, we have an active self-knowing subject whose timeless universality is a secular one, thus severing the ties of the individual from God (as opposed to, for example, St. Augustine's *Confessions*). Gusdorf's concept of the autobiographical self is a creative, active master of its own teleology. Autobiography is perceived as an act of self-construction from inner consciousness and memory. The self here knows itself from the inside out and not the other way around, as perceived previously by Misch. The autobiographical text then becomes a product of mastery by the autobiographer who is

assumed already to have a complete self; and the critic's responsibility is to trace that self's ability at attempting construction of memory and own reality from within.

Autobiography as Text / "graphia"

Gusdorf's work sets a trend in autobiography criticism that centers around the "art" of memory construction written onto text and from there emerges a sort of a criticism influenced by structuralist theory, exemplified by James Olney and Philippe Lejeune. Olney shifts autobiography criticism from the realm of historical documentation and situates it within the bounds of literary production. He argues: "the shift of attention from *bios* to *autos* –from the life to the self– was […] largely responsible for opening things up and turning them in a philosophical, psychological, and literary direction" (19).

Olney argues that the autobiographer has three strategic ways of employing the memory in the act of writing the self: memory can be deployed in a creative but rather fairly ordinary sense, abandoned completely, or transformed out of all recognition. For Gusdorf, memory is what makes the self but it exists unchanged in consciousness. Olney, on the other hand, gives more power to the author and acknowledges that writing and creativity comes into play. It is the *act of writing* of memory that shapes the self, and not the retrieval of memory.

French theorist of autobiography Philippe Lejeune takes autobiography studies to focus explicitly on the language and textual structure of the autobiography in his essay "The Autobiographical Pact" (published in French in 1975, translated by Katherine Leary in 1989). Lejeune essentially extracts the text and the self from history and locates the interpretive authoritative power in the hands of the reader by providing a structural method for unpacking the elements of an autobiographical text. It is language and writing that construct reality and, therefore, it is the meaning provided by the reader that matters to criticism. Lejeune even

provides a clear definition of autobiography proper as a *"retrospective prose written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality*" (3, emphasis in original). Mathematical formulas and linguistic diagrams supplement Lejeune's essay to aid the reader in extracting meaning from the text. The important understanding of the self, for Lejeune, is ultimately what the reader will extract about the author as well as him/herself in the reading experience.

For Lejeune it is important to tease out the structural elements of autobiography to distinguish it from other forms of literature, such as poetry and novels. Lejeune emphasizes the author's "vital statistics": dates, place of birth, education. Those are understood to be identical to the narrator if the text is to be called autobiographical. He writes, "what defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the *proper name*. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text" (19). To Lejeune, it is the proper name for all those involved (reader, writer, publisher) as what quintessentially defines the existence of autobiography as a genre, and what constitutes the "autobiographical pact." The assumed pact, then, is essentially between the author and the publisher, but Lejeune situates the reader as the judge in attesting to the truth of the signature (8). Lejeune maintains, however, that "the author, the narrator, protagonist must be identical" (5) and this is the "affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the final analysis to the name of the author on the cover" (15).

Lejeune grants authoritative power to the reader. Autobiography, for Lejeune, is just as much a method of reading as it is of writing. He orients the act of writing autobiography as reading in both ways; the author is reading experiences from the past but most importantly, it is the recipient who is performing a double reading in assessing the narrative for truth or fiction and reading multiple texts at the same time. For Lejeune, the pact is an important aspect because the

reader of a novel constantly looks for similarities between author and narrator's lives whereas in an autobiographical text, the reader is constantly looking for differences or "lies" to refute the validity of the text. Lejeune brings to autobiography studies a shift in focus towards a reader who is on a quest to distinguish or find similarities.

Autobiography in the Islamic-Arabic Tradition

I have attempted to outline thus far the major theoretical trajectories that have shaped autobiography studies in Western literary traditions to provide a clearer foundation for understanding the interventions of Arab, postcolonial, and feminist theories of autobiographies. Although in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998), Smith and Watson argue that the third wave of autobiography studies lies in a textual analysis phase, I want to argue that it is within the interventions of Arab, postcolonial, and feminist theories of autobiography that we can locate a theoretical wave that engages and contributes to a critical understanding of the classical theorizations of the autobiographical self.

Two main sources of autobiography criticism for Arabic studies stand out: *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature* (1988), edited by Robin Ostle, Ed de Moor, and Stefan Wild; and *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (2001), coauthored by Dwight F. Reynolds, Kristen Brustad, Michael Cooperson, Jamal Elias, Nuha Khoury, Joseph Lowry, Nasser Rabbet, Devin Stewart, and Shakwat Toorawa. Both texts participate in revisionist historical retrieval of autobiographical texts to debunk orientalist myths put forth by Georg Misch and Franz Rosenthal, who implemented exclusionary frameworks in measuring what counts as autobiographical texts and who is worthy of being deemed and analyzed as an autobiographical subject. I argue that Arabic studies of autobiography has limited itself thus far to the task of establishing its own genre with an impulse

toward archival retrieval of its own conceptions of selfhood. This autobiographical subject differs from that produced in the classical Western, imperial modality. Both *Writing the Self* and *Interpreting the Self* strongly counter the misconception of autobiography's Western origins by tracing the historical roots of indigenous expressions of selfhood in Arabic literary traditions.

The authors of *Interpreting the Self* expand the capacity and definition of the Arabic autobiographical self by looking at "texts that present themselves as a description or summation of the author's life, or a major portion thereof, as viewed retrospectively from a particular point in time" (30). In this way, the authors argue that noteworthy expressions of autobiographical selfhood in the Arabic tradition can be found in poetic form, not only in narrative prose. Additionally, the authors stress the importance of locating the origins of Arabic autobiography in the Islamic tradition of historiography and biographical dictionaries (*tarjama*) because "whereas Western autobiography achieved its greatest popularity as a genre in tandem with its fictional counterpart, the novel, the threads of the pre-twentieth century Arabic autobiographical tradition were spun from the raw material of historical inquiry" (5). Moreover, the authors point to strategic narrative characteristics of traditional Arabic autobiographies. First, the narration of dreams serves as a central method of knowing and expressing the autobiographical self. Dreams become motifs through which inner self-reflection is expressed and culturally specific rules of dream interpretation are followed. Second, autobiographical narration takes shape in the form of the journey of education and becoming an exemplary Islamic scholar. Third, a characteristic of these autobiographical expressions is the prevalence of humility where expressing individual exceptional status (to God and community) is generally avoided and therefore prevents expression of autobiographical self as expected in the Western tradition. Also, the authors state

that third-person narrative voice is often employed to blur the lines of speaking self and emphasize this aspect of humility.

While *Interpreting the Self* takes a more historically grounded approach to the tradition of autobiography in classical Arabic literature, *Writing the Self* describes the range of themes and topics from modern Arabic literature. In the introduction to the collection of essays, editor Robin Ostle dismantles the parameters of defining an autobiographical text by stating that a general autobiographical tendency haunts all writing and a student of literature should exercise a freedom of approach that "releases one from the often futile game of tracing a specific genre across historical lines of demarcations with all the arbitrariness which this entails" (18). In this way, for example, the essays in *Writing the Self* put forth the idea that autobiographical selfhood in Arabic literature is expressed in travel literature where the colonial encounter becomes central to the process of constructing and narrating the autobiographical self as Other. Ostle argues that autobiography in modern Arabic literature "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" (22).

I refer to these edited collections to illustrate how autobiography has been studied in classical Arabic literature as an established literary genre with traceable articulations and conventions of individuation and of speaking of inner selfhood and private life. *Writing the Self* and *Interpreting the Self* are two major texts that illustrate the ways in which Arab literary tradition has developed its own notions of narrating the self and self-awareness and therefore has its own ways of portraying them. Both of these collections, however, fail to engage in feminist research. The authors of *Interpreting the Self*, for example, while opening up the parameters of defining the autobiographical text and delving deep into various historical documents, do not

provide any examples of texts in classical Arabic literature by women that express an autobiographical self. Likewise, in *Writing the Self*, discussions of gender are reserved only to the three chapters that discuss autobiographies written by women, proving that gender analysis necessitates an additive approach and cannot be integrated into the analytical framework of the collection. While these collections have challenged definitions of autobiography based on Western literary standards through a historical revisionist approach, for a productive political and critical dismantling of the canonization of the concepts of "*autos*", "*bios*", and "*graphia*", there needs to be a critical engagement of Arabic literary studies with feminist theories of autobiography.

Scholarship on Contemporary Islamic-Arabic Autobiography and the Question of Gender

While the scholarship on Arabic autobiographies is relatively small, there have been a number of books published that focus specifically on Arab women's life-writing. The works that I turn to in this section take seriously the task of interrogating the political role Arab women's life-writing plays in shaping or responding to orientalist stereotypes. While this growing scholarship tends to rely heavily on using the harem and the veil as modalities of reading to emphasize public space as the primary site for political resistance, I do see frameworks that recur in this scholarship with which I engage. These are 1) an attention to childhood as holding a capacity for memory and narrative renewal; 2) the focus on redefining articulations of subversive resistance and connecting the political and personal personified in life-writing as a medium of expression; and, 3) a notable analysis of "voice," particularly under the rubric of narrative genealogy by tracing Arab women's literary tradition to the folklore of Scheherazade in *A Thousand and One Nights*.

Even though the research on Arab women's autobiographies remains scarce, scholar of Arab feminism(s) Nawar Al-Hassan Golley's *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (2003) stands out as an important book that contextualizes key Arab women's autobiographical texts and engages with the politicization of their English translations. Golley fills a gap in the scholarship on Arab women's autobiographies and interrogates select Arab women's autobiographies' positions for both Western and Middle Eastern audiences. Golley intersects her reading of the texts with interrogating the political contexts and positionalities of the authors to emphasize that an understanding of their feminist politics must be embedded in the authors' specific locations.

Golley's analysis first interrogates the use of the term "Arab" in a Western context. Addressing a Western audience, she historicizes commonly used terms in scholarship on Middle Eastern women such as "hijab," "harem," "Shahrazad," and even "Islamic culture." She argues that intellectual scholarship on Middle Eastern/Arab/Muslim women tends to conflate or erase these terms' specificity, thus allowing for the authors to emerge as stand-in figures for any generalizations. Furthermore, in historicizing these terms and specifying what they mean in different contexts, Golley argues that, contrary to the arguments of Orientalists and "well meaning" liberal feminists, these conflations prevent a reading of autobiographies that locates indigenous forms of feminist politics and resistance.

In the first two chapters, Golley sets up the context and theoretical framework of her project. Providing extensive history and context of women in the Arab world, Golley contends that the emergence of a feminist consciousness in these autobiographies needs to be contextualized within an analysis of colonial discourse. She therefore relies heavily on postcolonial feminist theory. Golley argues for the inclusion of gender-related issues within

colonial discourse analysis and for the necessity of adopting Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism" when speaking of "Arab women". In outlining a brief history of Arab feminism, Golley strives both to demystify the "aura of exoticism" that has surrounded Arab women, and to demonstrate that Arab feminism is "not alien to Arab culture" (16).

Golley traces the theoretical debates within a Western literary context, showing how definitions of this genre have changed over the last forty years to accommodate both a deconstructionist approach to language and subjectivity as well as a concern for analyzing gender issues. Golley rejects a deconstructionist framework, as articulated by Paul de Man, but finds recent scholarship by such well-known figures in the field as Sidonie Smith and Estelle Jelinek equally unsatisfactory. Despite the emphasis that Western feminist theorists of autobiography place on women's writing as an act of construction of the self, Golley states that the concept of "uniqueness" underlying it is problematic for non-Westerners who have very different "conceptions of self, self-creation, and self-consciousness" (66). At the same time that Golley argues that Western autobiography must expand its notion of the self, she affirms that a particular sense of individualism is indeed found in both pre-Islamic and Islamic Arab culture.

Furthermore, in 2007, Golley published an important collection of essays on Arab women's autobiographical writings, *Arab Women's Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing*. She edits this collection with a critical eye towards the establishment and continuation of a tradition of writing the self in Arabic literature. Golley maintains that Arab women have demonstrated courage and creativity in writing their life narratives because they are constructing their own "images of the self through the act of writing" (xxvi). Golley argues that issues of self and subjectivity, the private and the public, ethnicity, nationalism and transnationalism, and post-colonialism heavily intersect in Arab women's autobiographies to establish a polyphony of

readings that overlap, challenge, and digress from each other (xxvii). She is careful to select life-writings that do not fall under autobiography in the classical sense. The edited collection of essays focuses on several interlocking themes concerning Arab women's autobiographies. Firstly, Golley proposes that these texts could be analyzed in relation to how they express an autobiographical self's sense of cultural hybridity. Arab women's autobiographies, to Golley, devote and articulate the "interwoven strands of identity" (xxviii). Secondly, Golley locates Arab women's autobiographies in the liminal spaces that transnationalism creates. These texts describe rhetorical strategies of how the identity of "Arab" is negotiated, nationally and transnationally, and how such identity formation can create solidarities and communities. Accordingly, Golley's third point is that Arab women's autobiographies not only express a communal identity, but that relationality is an important aspect of self-definition for the autobiographical subject. For example, the autobiographical self is narrated through the use of "a polyphonic narrative voice" of a community of women where self-discovery can also be a process of narrative self-making (xxxi). Finally, Golley states that Arab women's autobiographies, by blurring the lines of the public/private, constantly engage the personal in a process of political critique.

While Golley's research is central to my dissertation, I turn also to Australian scholar of postcolonial life-writing Gillian Whitlock's *Soft Weapons: Autobiographies in Transit* (2010) as another important book on autobiographical writings from the Middle East. Whitlock centralizes the politics of publication and circulation of Middle Eastern life-writing. She focuses on the ways in which recent autobiographical writing and life narrative production have become "more implicated in history, politics and the conduct of a war than had seemed possible in previous ways of thinking about autobiography in the world" (200). She argues that subaltern writing, in particular, cannot be critiqued without attention to the way these texts are marketed for and

consumed by the West. She goes on to assert that "life writing has played a major role in the global commodification of cultural differences that has been a boom industry in the recent past" (54). Whitlock highlights one of the major changes in the textuality of life narratives, and looks at the figure of the "cyberlebrity" and blogs as offering new figurations of the constructed and multilayered subject. Whitlock examines the ways these texts operate and are received by a particular classed and racialized audience in the Imperial center (the U.S.). She characterizes autobiography as a "soft weapon" because "it is easily co-opted into propaganda" (105). Life narratives are therefore important because they can perform "small acts of cultural translation in a time of precarious life" (23). Even though Whitlock does not focus on Arab women's autobiographies per se, her work, nonetheless, provides an important critique of the ways in which Middle Eastern life-writings are circulated and published and the different ways they can be ideologically co-opted.

Feminist and Postcolonial Interventions in Autobiography Studies

It would be remiss of me not to include in this survey of autobiography theory the important work that feminists and postcolonial scholars have done in deconstructing the genre and reviving it as a fertile ground for theorizing subjectivity in life-writing. Feminist and postcolonial debates around autobiography theory intervened through theorizing difference, rewriting history, and personalizing power. Feminist and postcolonial theories of autobiography critiqued the erasure of different voices in the canon of autobiography theory and argued against the centrality of the Western colonizing enlightenment model of the author/subject as self-knowing and universally representative. Although the trajectory of feminism and autobiography theory was one which, in the beginning, tended to privilege and essentialize "women's voices," the influence of poststructuralist theory began to transform the genre and open up ways for

feminists to deconstruct the "truth" mask of autobiography. Paul de Man's article "Autobiography as Defacement" (1979), for example, critiqued the autobiographical subject as created in a fiction all together. He argues that it is the autobiographical text that produces "life" as both read and written in the narrative. De Man states that technical demands of self-portraiture are governed by the resources and mediums available to the author (920). As autobiography studies scholar Linda Anderson points out in her article, "Autobiography and the Feminist Subject" (2003), feminist critique of autobiography theory works alongside de Man's argument in that "the subject did not preexist the process of its formation within language, and that all identities, including gendered identities, are never fully realized but instead are a story of repeated failures to achieve fullness or closure" (2).

There are several key interventions made by feminists and postcolonialists in theorizing the autobiographical subject. First, feminists and postcolonial theorists of autobiography argue for the rejection of the model of sovereign, centered, unified, Selfhood often represented in the masculine subject of the Western canon. Feminist literary critic Susan Stanford Friedman, in "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" (1988) for example, provides a thorough investigation of canonical texts of autobiography theory from Misch, Gusdorf, and Olney to uncover an articulation of the "isolated being" in "classic" autobiography. Furthermore, Sidonie Smith, in *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (1993), argues that in uncovering the "politics of fragmentation," decentered autobiographical subjectivities become not only moments of countering masculinist notions of selfhood, but are also moments of opening up the definitions of the autobiographical subject.

Second, feminists and postcolonial theorists of autobiography stress the multiple and

relational aspects of personhood in autobiography. Leigh Gilmore argues in *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-representation* (1994) that, unlike masculinist forms of autobiography that place the self at the center of drama, women's autobiographies tend to explore selfhood in relation to others (xiii). This is also echoed in Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's article, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition" (1989), where she stresses the importance of dialogism and heteroglossia in autobiography as challenging the concept that self-narration is a monologic expression of a solitary compete Self/subject. Françoise Lionnet, in her book *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (1995), provides another view of autobiographical selfhood that is narravatized through hybrid multiple voices that is also rooted in collective selfhood. Lionnet states that in postcolonial life-writing, "the individual necessarily defines him – or herself – with regard to a community" (22).

Third, feminists and postcolonial theorists of autobiography attempt to reconceptualize the constitutive role of the body and embodiment in autobiographical narrative. By stressing the connection of the personal and the political, autobiography becomes a space where the body is itself narravatized and politicized. Bart Moore-Gilbert, in *Postcolonial Life-Writing: Culture, Politics, and Self-Representation* (2009), points to the ways in which the body represents an important discursive material aspect of subjectivity in autobiographies (48). The body becomes an autobiographical narrative opportunity through which talking about race and gender can be subversive.

Fourth, feminists and postcolonial theorists of autobiography emphasize the material history and geo-political location of the subject. Françoise Lionnet, in her book, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (1991), stakes out an intercultural

territory of writing by women of color and proposed a theory of *métissage* to articulate how marginalized subjects voice their lives. Lionnet argues that as historically silenced subjects, women and colonized peoples create weaved or "braided" texts of many voices that speak their cultural locations dialogically. Postcolonial theories of life-writing, therefore, suggest that autobiographical selfhood cannot be studied separately from processes of (dis)location. It is not only that the discourse of socio-political space that affects the articulation of the autobiographical subject in its language and form, but that (dis)location is a theme that highlights different political identifications of home and tradition.

This literature review traces a teleological trajectory of articulations of the Self in autobiography. However, it is important to note that these theories of the autobiographical self are by no means isolated nor fail to influence each other. Rather, feminist and postcolonial theories of autobiography provided several frameworks for deconstructing the classical canonical autobiography studies discipline to argue that contemporary articulations of the self in autobiography constantly engage in issues of the self's political location and audience reception, the gendered and racialized embodiment of the self, the relational collective, and the hybridized linguistic text. I provide this literature review not only to identify the main turns of the field and demonstrate the lack in addressing Arab women's autobiographies, but to also state how all these theoretical contributions inform my methodological approach to the autobiographies I analyze in this dissertation.

Theoretical Framework

In this work I examine expressions of autobiographical subjectivities in Arab women's autobiographical texts. This dissertation intervenes in Arabic literary studies of autobiography to stress the importance of utilizing a feminist framework as reading practice. I respond to the

feminist and postcolonial theories of autobiographies that overlook an analysis of Arab women's autobiographical subjectivities. My literary analysis of these autobiographies is informed by my training in a Gender Studies program that emphasizes understanding theories of power and oppression in transnational perspectives. This training brings to the forefront the importance of foregrounding the literary, the personal, and the unsaid in the political. I suggest that it is impossible to study these autobiographical texts without attention to the historical context and its effects on cultural production.

Key to my analysis of the autobiographical texts is the concept of "life/lines" put forth by feminist theorists of autobiography Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk in their book *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Brodzki and Schenk argue that women's autobiographies revolutionized the form of classical autobiography by narrating their lives in ways that resist progressive and cohesive linearity. Brodzki and Schenk call attention to how traditional autobiography's linear logic is a masculinist approach for its insistence on "mirroring" a representation of man's universality (1). They state, "masculine autobiographies rest upon the Western ideal of an essential and inviolable self, which, like its fictional equivalent, character, unifies and propels the narrative" (5). In a similar vein, autobiography scholar Estelle Jelinek, in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, sees the politics of progressive linearity of autobiographical writing as a patriarchal project that insists on reflecting a sense of orderliness, cohesion, and continuity of the confident self-knowing narrator (17). Jelinek states that "the unidirectionality of men's lives *is* appropriately cast into such progressive narratives" (emphasis in original 17).

"Life/lines" helped me uncover the fiction of imposed linearity on women's lives. Therefore, I adopt the concept of "life/lines" as a guiding reference to how Arab women's

autobiographies have resisted the pull of the linear logic of traditional Western autobiography in interconnecting textual and metaphorical modes. First, I highlight the ways in which non-linearity and fragmentation of narration is an important characteristic in terms of how these women choose to represent the autobiographical self. By not conforming to traditional progressive linear narrative forms, these women articulate autobiographical subjectivities that are defiantly on the periphery of the autobiographical genre and unfold new approaches of *becoming*. Second, "life/lines" helps me explore how these women's autobiographical narratives can become textual spaces of self-reinvention by forging alternative genealogical lines. Tracing the orientation, trajectory, and directionality of lines of narration, "life/lines" is a useful concept in understanding how Arab women create narrated textual lineages outside the patriarchal structures of the family or the nation. "Life/lines," in this sense, is instrumental in uncovering a subversive autobiographical subject in these Arab women's texts. Lastly, I use the model of "life/lines" to understand how autobiographical narration can expose the gendered and racial territorial boundaries and spatial power dynamics governing women's bodies. I refer to lines as literal "boundaries" or "frontiers" that provide a way to narrate spatial rhetorics of critical thinking of the autobiographical subject.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* highlight a lack of spatial and body-centered interpretation of women's autobiographies. Therefore, I use Julia Watson's chapter, "The Spaces of Autobiographical Narrative," to use space as a theoretical basis for reading life narratives. Watson makes an argument that one should read spatiality as a necessary component of understanding the autographical subject. The autobiographical subject is born into a space, in a specific classed, gendered, racialized place. Life narratives are inherently about moving from one

place to another, literally or metaphorically. Watson argues that in exploring autobiographical narrations of space and embodiment, we can bring to the surface pivotal questions on identity and becoming.

Additionally, I found myself returning to feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's book, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) for my readings of these autobiographical texts. Ahmed's personal account of breaking down concepts of life-lines, understanding the body in relation to space and orientation, has heavily informed my reading of the autobiographies discussed here. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed takes a playful look at the often taken for granted notion of being *oriented*. What does it mean exactly to be oriented towards something? To be positioned in relation to objects, people, feelings? Why are ideas about cultures, objects, or sexes framed in a specifically directional or oriented manner? The ways in which Ahmed posits thinking as an orientation in and of itself, as being spatialized in its own way, informs my analysis of the politics of directionality in autobiographical narration.

Furthermore, Ahmed's discussion of embodiment rearticulates the body from being centered on an abstract version of the "self" to how that body is a situated, *gendered* and *raced* body was helpful to my analysis of the autobiographical subject. Her emphasis on a body-based subjectivity that interrogates how philosophy has deemed that body as abstract and apolitical brings a new understanding of how we theorize experience. The body does not become something that is transcended. Rather, the body, with its markers and daily physical histories, is centered. Ahmed's book helps me analyze how these autobiographies have thought about sexuality, race, and gender in terms of them being positioned spatially and directionally oriented. As I connect Ahmed's book with theories of autobiography studies, I was able to find a fruitful ground on which I can base my analysis of Alzayyat, Tuqan, and Mernissi's life narratives.

Historical Context

In this section I provide a contextual overview of the main historical and cultural shifts in the Arab region that have influenced the authors in this dissertation. My aim here is to touch upon how specific historical events shaped Arab critical thought and influenced the development of gendered critical debate and feminist consciousness. My usage of the term "Arab" broadly refers to authors who come from Arabic-speaking backgrounds or regions and who share an Arabo-Islamic culture and history. It is not my intention to overlook the specific historical and geopolitical events that shape these autobiographical writings, but to look at the shared historical commonalities that affect the region. While I do refer to the region as the "Arab world," I am aware of the generalization and over-simplification this term implies. However, these autobiographical texts emerge out of a broadly shared Arabo-Islamic culture with a shared colonial past and history of anti-colonial nationalism. It is my intention, therefore, to provide the contextual overview while paying attention to the complicated intricacies of specificity. I write this contextualizing narrative with a self-conscious knowledge of omitting other significant events as well as with the knowledge that I will possibly impose another colonial narrative that is difficult to escape.

Colonialism and the Establishment of the Arab Nation-States

The authors mentioned in this dissertation come from areas that stretch from the Maghrib (Western regions of the Arab world, Morocco) to the Mashriq (Eastern block of the Arab world). From 1516, the vast majority of Arab Mashriq was been under Ottoman rule up until the First World War, with the exception of Egypt, which was formally colonized by the British from 1882-1953. The autobiographical texts I deal with here rely extensively on exploring the effects of colonialism. The historical geopolitical shifts in power provide an important background to

these autobiographical texts' main events. For example, in Fatima Mernissi's text, we get a child's view of the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the history of European colonial intervention, and how it began to solidify in the region. Morocco became a French Protectorate from 1912-1956 (Sadiqi 17-18). The anti-colonial resistance movement in Algeria against the French (1830-1962), although not dealt with in this work, plays an important role in shaping the political consciousness of neighboring national entities. Mernissi draws heavily on the effect of Morocco's anti-colonial history in her childhood life-narrative. She presents in her autobiographical work a Morocco that has undergone several forms of colonialism with the Arabs, the Spanish, and the French. It was in Fez, Fatima Mernissi's hometown, that in 1912 Morocco was signed over to become a French Protectorate: theoretically "independent" but still economically and politically dominated by the French (Berman 207). Around the time of Mernissi's childhood, the 1940s, Morocco's nationalist movements were beginning to mobilize from military struggles of resistance to political demands for independence, which sprang from Fez as well (Baker 285). In 1956, with the Moroccan King Muhammad V's return from exile, Morocco was officially declared an independent nation (Sadiqi 18). Mernissi's childhood narrative recounts not only the Nationalists' declarations of "equality for all," but also pays tribute to anti-colonial resistance in which indigenous Berber women participated (Mernissi 35). Mernissi's cloistered childhood was not unaffected by the turmoil of the anti-colonial struggle as her father was part of the Istiqlal nationalist movement, and also Tamou, one of her grandfather's wives, was a Berber resistance fighter. Mernissi's questioning of the *hudud* (borders, frontiers) of gender, race, and class politics is brought on by a tradition of resistance to continued oppression.

In the 1920s, the Levant was broken up into the states of Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan under British and French mandates. The history of Palestine is of particular

importance to this contextual overview as much of its history plays an important role in shaping Arab critical thought during and post the anti-colonial independence period that later comes to be an extension to the Arab renaissance (*Al-Nahda*). It can be argued that the cultural and political Pan-Arab and Pan-Islamic intra-national alliances in the Arab world mostly center on the construct of the Palestinian struggle as a "cause" to be won or lost. Several key events in Palestinian history are pivotal moments in my intended autobiographical archive: the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the 1922 British Mandate for Palestine, the 1948 *Nakba* (Catastrophe)/Declaration of Israel as an independent state, the 1956 Suez Crisis, the 1967 Six-day war *Naksa* (Setback), and the 1973 October War. The establishment of the state of Israel became one of the most significant events in shaping Arab critical thought and political consciousness. These events were simultaneously accompanied by significant regional changes as well: the anti-colonial struggles and establishment of Arab nation states in the 1950s and 1960s exemplified by military coups in Egypt (1953), Iraq (1958), Syria (1963) provided an ideological political backdrop of mobilizing populations to vindicate "Arabness" (*Al-Oroobah*) as well as a convenient excuse for the development of military states that suspended political life by establishing states of emergency.

A wave of nationalist decolonial movements ushered in the relative formal independence from colonial powers in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s in the region. In her book, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, Arab philosophy scholar Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab explains how, at first, these independent states were ruled by monarchs, but were soon replaced by revolutionary military coups that adopted a secular discourse (4). Those in power played the two intensified political discourses of the Left and the Islamists against one

another. The twentieth century saw an increase in neocolonial and neoliberal influences in the region exemplified by the Gulf Wars and the US invasion of Iraq (Kassab 3).

Kassab identifies the 1967 Naksa War as an event that left a significant mark on Arab critical thought in terms of defeat, shock, and disbelief. It shook the previously firm belief in national resistance to Israel and brought to the surface a willingness to critique governmental and national movements for their implicated roles in this "Arab failure." Kassab notes that universalizing systems of thought have become subjected to critical questioning for not "delivering" the Arab hope/dream. She argues that most Arab thinkers saw the defeat by Israel in 1967 as a turning point for popular and intellectual consciousness (2). It was a crisis that called for a reassessment and revisiting of the goals of the decolonial and liberation movements that failed. Kassab sees Arab critical thought as moving in two directions: the search for safety in indigenous totalizing doctrines (the polarization of religious discourse, leftist nationalism, etc.) and the intensity of radical critique and suspicion.

The writers of the autobiographical texts I selected for this study all refer to ideological systems of colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism(s), and patriarchy as driving forces in their lives in many conflicting ways. These events and ideological shifts have served as impetus for articulating a particular "personal" sense of life within the grand writing of Middle Eastern "History." I maintain that life-writing for these women, is not only a response to their erasure from the historical narrative, but a process of critique in and of itself. I argue here that these autobiographical texts of the self have provided a medium that not only tracks these historical and political shifts in power but also theorizes against systems and ideologies of oppression.

Al-Nahda: Education, Language, and Culture

An important aspect of my argument is how these autobiographical texts negotiate the politics of language and education which are heavily influenced by the overlapping ideologies of colonialism, nationalism, and patriarchy. Different colonial experiences in the Arab world influenced the degree to which secularization entered the cultural lexicon and influenced educational institutions and linguistic assimilation. For example, in the Maghrib, French colonial policies, such as those in Morocco and Algeria, enforced cultural and religious assimilation as well. French replaced Arabic or Turkish as the official language, obliterating not only Arabic as a social collective connector but also indigenous minorities' languages, such as Berber. This continued after the anti-colonial nationalist victory that established the independent nation. In the Mashriq, in contrast, while one can argue that the British interference was not as intrusive, it nonetheless enforced a heavy administrative and financial superstructure. In their introduction to *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*, scholars of Arab women's literature Margot Badran and miriam cooke provide an overview of colonialism's effect on systems of education. There was a move towards secularization influenced by the new class of Western-educated Arab elites. This would move the education system from religious authorities to the colonial missionary education model (the Christian missionary schools and the opening of French, English, and American schools). While the aristocracy and bourgeoisie spoke Turkish and later adopted English and French in the 1920s, standardized Arabic (overriding local dialect and indigenous languages) was still considered an official language in rural and urban areas, even after the waves of national independence movements. Furthermore, the scope of Islamic legal jurisdiction was restricted mainly to family law. In most cases, French colonial law overrode Islamic law in all matters in the Maghrib.

For women, modern education was introduced at varying degrees. Foreign missionary schools in Egypt and Lebanon began to admit girls in the late-nineteenth century (Badran and cooke xxix). In Egypt, for example, the first state secondary education institution dedicated to educating girls was not opened until 1925. University education for women became available in 1929. This signifies a shift for women's education from the private home parlors, where the elite were able to afford limited private tutorship for their daughters, to the public sphere that necessitated a need to adopt a changing moral view about gendered behavior in public. These changes are reflected significantly in the autobiographies I analyze in this dissertation. For example, Alzayyat's access to university education allows her to explore the autobiographical self as an activist and as a Marxist committed writer. For Mernissi, the shift in education from Islamic instructors to secular modern French formal schooling is expressed by her family as realizing the "nationalist dream" (64). For Tuqan, on the other hand, access to education outside the confines of a patriarchally governed home is framed as an immoral transgression. Tuqan narrates an important event when her family prevents her from going to school when she reaches puberty and her older brother, Ibrahim, takes over the duties of her home-schooling. These autobiographical texts express the historical cultural and educational changes brought by anti-colonial nationalism.

Organization of the Dissertation

Structurally, my dissertation is organized around exploring the narrative politics of life/lines in three intertwined formations: anti-linearity, spatial linearity, and fragmented linearity. In the first chapter, I argue that in subverting traditional forms of linear autobiographical narration, Tuqan opens up new ways of asserting self-agency by narrating her own self-births in a text written under conditions of death. I argue that her rhetorical strategies of

ambivalence, silence, and death produce interruptions in the text that allow her to express her own moments of self-birth. I then turn to Mernissi's autobiography to look for the ways in which she narrates spatial linearity in a territorial sense that shapes the formation of a critically thinking autobiographical self. By looking at how patriarchy, colonialism, and nationalism create borders that run through women's bodies, I argue that Mernissi's autobiography exposes the ways in which discursive and ideological lines can have material impacts. Thus, spatiality and embodiment, in this chapter, are central frameworks through which the autobiographical subject theorizes the oppressions that colonial, patriarchal, and religious discourses perpetuate. My third chapter explores the ways in which Alzayyat narrates the committed autobiographical subject. I comparatively analyze two texts of Alzayayt's to illustrate how her politics of commitment shift from nationalist linear narrations to fragmented disillusionment. By examining the ways in which Alzayyat narrates a fragmented autobiographical self, I also trace the strategies that helped her resolve this disillusionment with the politics of the nation-state to express a new form of political committed autobiographical subject.

My dissertation begins with a chapter analyzing the autobiography of famous Palestinian poet, Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography* (published in Arabic in 1988, translated to English in 1990 by Olive Kenny). In this chapter, I look specifically to the ways in which a narrative of life, the autobiography, is written in shadows of death imposed by the conditions of patriarchal seclusion, colonial/Israeli occupation, and masculinist expressions of nationalism(s). I argue that Tuqan narrates an autobiographical subject that subverts traditional forms of representing the self. Turning to life/lines as a framework to read the text, I argue Tuqan presents an autobiographical subject in the form of interrupted and anti-linear trajectory that resists the coherence of nationalist narration and contests the resolution of patriarchy in a

heteronormative genealogy. Building on that, I state that Tuqan's interrupted linearity allows her to reinvent her own biological and literary genealogy, an alternative queer "life/line." Tuqan persistently exposes the patriarchal family structure as a failure and shuns the imposed conventional hetero-normative "mother of the nation" figure. In doing so, Tuqan creates several narrative self-births in the text that emphasize creativity as her mode of reclaiming the self. I look for the ways in which Tuqan's autobiography uses rhetorical and literary devices of silence, voicelessness, and anxious hesitation as ways to narrate a life birthed in the shadow of death, a mode of living that shapes a queer relationship to motherhood and nationalism. I argue that Tuqan utilizes these silences, deaths, and narrative interruptions as ways to open up complex ways of viewing and theorizing Arab women's life narratives. I ask: how might the autobiographical genre be a productive medium to create a literature of life that speaks to conditions of living under conditions that foster death? What formal stylistics are deployed in reframing the archetypal autobiographical subject that speaks of life, and how does Tuqan reinvent a new form of autobiographical narration of life?

In the next chapter, I turn to a Moroccan autobiography that focuses on childhood as a site of memory retrieval and the basis of the autobiographical narrative: Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994). Mernissi is widely known as a pioneer of Islamic feminist theory. Her scholarship on gender and Islam has definitively paved the way for scholars working on women in Arabo-Islamic contexts. In this chapter, I explore the spatial rhetorics involved in narrating the autobiographical subject in Arab Muslim women's texts. My reading of *Dreams of Trespass* traces discourses of spatiality within the text to explore how theorizing the territoriality of power affects and produces an autobiographical subject. I argue that Mernissi's use of spatialized discourse enables her both to highlight how gendered and

colonial power relations are maintained and operate by ordering specific meanings of space and embodiment. Mernissi's autobiography not only presents an autobiographical subject who is acutely aware of the spatial orderings of her life in a harem, but also narrates how women in the harem deftly and subtly negotiate and challenge relations of power by embodying and envisioning different spatialities. I focus on how Mernissi's narrative trajectory follows a spatial orientation of history. By centering the main question of the autobiography, "what is a harem?", I explore how Mernissi provides multiple interpretations of how power draws lines/*hudud* around women's bodies (territorial, codified behavior, and moral). In this chapter, I ask: how are borders and liminal spaces used to understand gender, bodies, voice, and language in an autobiographical narrative? How does Mernissi subvert the genre of autobiography through her narration of the discursive memory of space? How does a theory of power through spatiality get to be articulated in an autobiographical voice? What does that mean to the process of narrating an autobiographical subject?

In my third chapter, I analyze Egyptian author, activist, and intellectual Latifa Alzayyat's autobiography, *The Search: Personal Papers* ((published in Arabic in 1992, translated to English in 1990 by Sophie Bennett) and her semi-autobiographical bildungsroman, *The Open Door* (published in Arabic in 1960, translated to English in 2000 by Marylin Booth). In comparing the two texts, I illustrate the different ways in which she expresses her politics of commitment (*iltizam*). By historically situating her texts in the literary movement of *iltizam* in newly-independent Egypt, I argue that Alzayyat shifts from participating in a discursive project of committed nation building to a fragmented narration of disillusionment with a postcolonial nationalism that proved to be not immune from corruption and authoritarianism. I argue that, in *The Open Door*, Alzayyat narrates committed subjectivity and nationalist culture through linear,

progressive, and teleological form. In contrast, in *The Search*, Alzayyat reinvents a form of what a "committed" autobiographical subject looks like by adopting a non-linear, repetitive, and fragmented style of narration. Alzayyat's *The Search* employs aesthetic narrative strategies of autobiographical subject formation that is in a continual process of "retrieval" or "piecing together." I contend that Alzayyat presents a new form of Arabic autobiography that is both "committed" to the collective and simultaneously individualistic and concerned with politics of difference. Alzayyat's autobiography, with its formal and stylistic narrations of hesitations and repetitions, not only resists the linear narration of the nationalist *bildung* form but also narrates a new politically committed subjectivity where the reader participates in the retrieval of the fragmented autobiographical self, thus expressing a different understanding of "political commitment." I ask: how might autobiographical narration offer not only an alternative narration of history, but also, how might new forms of autobiographical narration express different politically committed subjectivities? What are the politics of engagement and nationalist participation as it relates to writing in the autobiographical genre? Furthermore, how does Alzayyat write about cultivating a feminist consciousness in her autobiography through content and form?

I conclude my project by connecting the three autobiographies to the importance of thinking transnationally and across disciplines by thinking about these autobiographical narratives as theoretical texts that rethink the political experience through personal narration. They resist the dominant structures of narration and expose them at the same time and offer new discursive strategies of becoming and narrating the self. How might these texts help us rethink Arab women's feminism(s)? How might they shift our understanding of Arab women's self-representational approaches? I situate my project as offering to help trace an alternative

genealogy of Arab feminism(s) that challenge normative linear thinking practices (linearity of historical and nationalist narration, linearity of transnational belonging and addressing both Western and Arab audiences, and linearity and directionality of positional subversive practices). I state that life/lines as offering a reading methodology that opens up how we can read these texts as testimony that Arab women have expressed a formation of the self in their own innovative ways. Lastly, I conclude by circling back to these texts moments of beginnings as central narrative strategy of linear orientation and deconstruction that situate Arab women's subjectivity in community and collectivities.

CHAPTER ONE: Autobiography as Site of Self Re-Birth in Fadwa Tuqan's A Mountainous Journey: A Poet's Autobiography

In this chapter, I analyze how Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography, *A Mountainous Journey: A Poet's Autobiography* (1985; trans. 1990), presents an autobiographical subject that resists traditional forms of autobiographical narration. In particular, I argue that Tuqan narrates an autobiographical subject that emerges as a nationalist poet and political icon through a complicated and interrupted anti-linear trajectory that resists the imposition of coherence of nationalist narration and challenges the resolution of patriarchy in a heteronormative genealogy. I will illustrate how Tuqan reinvents her own biological and literary genealogy, distinguishes herself from a conventional hetero-normative "mother of the nation" figure, and creates several moments of self-birth in the text that emphasize creativity as her mode of reclaiming the self.

I argue that Tuqan's autobiography is different from the traditional modes of autobiographical narration because her self-articulation is an ambivalent, ambiguous one narrated through hesitation and death. I analyze the ways in which Tuqan uses rhetorical and literary devices of silence, voicelessness, death, and endings as ways of narrating life birthed in the shadow of death, a mode of living that through which Tuqan forms a complicated relationship to motherhood and nationalism. I read her autobiography to locate instances where Tuqan utilizes these silences, deaths, and "endings" as a means to open up complex ways of viewing and theorizing Arab women's life narratives. *A Mountainous Journey* is a narrative that retells the multiple ways in which Tuqan reclaims agency over her life by narrating autobiographical self-birth as something she does to herself. In particular, I argue that Tuqan

complicates the ideas of birth, mothering, and death and narrates her life by relating herself to an alternative genealogy and self-made family.

I read Tuqan's autobiography while intersecting several theoretical paradigms that I found helpful in substantiating my arguments. I borrow the framework of life/lines explored by feminist theorists of autobiography Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenk in their book *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. They argue that autobiography, as a genre that was adopted by women, has been revolutionized in its form in opposition to the rigid restrictions of the genre articulated by Georg Misch and Philippe Lejeune. Those traditional paradigms have narrowed the field of autobiography studies by maintaining, for example, that autobiographical narrative has to be progressive, linear, and cohesive. Brodzki and Schenk point out that autobiography is a masculine tradition that has "taken as its first premise the mirroring capacity of the autobiography: *his* universality, *his* representativeness, *his* roles as spokesman for the community" (emphasis in original 1). In addition, they call attention to how "masculine autobiographies rest upon the Western ideal of an essential and inviolable self, which, like its fictional equivalent, character, unifies and propels the narrative" (5). Brodzki and Schenk, instead, argue that (Western) women's autobiographies have opened up the genre to incorporate narrative styles that allow for a multiplicity of forms of autobiographical writing to create different "life/lines" that resist the rigidity of the genre.

Along the same line of thought, feminist theorist of women's autobiography Estelle Jelinek argues in her book *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism* that women's forms of autobiography have often existed outside the lines of the genre. She highlights polyphony, fragmentation, and non-linear progression of life narratives as examples of forms that are

oppositional to traditional forms of autobiography, which view the cohesion and resolution of autobiographical narration as a completion and mirroring of the male self-images. Jelinek states:

> A feature upon which critics agree is that autobiographers consciously shape the events of their life into a coherent whole. By means of a chronological, linear narrative, they unify their work by concentrating on one period of their life, one theme, or one characteristic of their personality. It is not surprising that with men socially conditioned to pursue the single goal of a successful career, we find such harmony and orderliness in their autobiographies. Such unity betokens a faith in the continuity of the world and their own self-images. The unidirectionality of men's lives *is* appropriately cast into such progressive narratives. (emphasis in original 17)

On the other hand, women's autobiographies, in their fragmentation and multi-generic style, have often been neglected due to their complex styles of narration that do not conform to a style that reflects an all knowing God-like narrator. Both Jelinek's and Brodzki and Schenk's texts call attention to how autobiographies have therefore become life/lines for women to narrate lives outside the periphery of the genre, both saved by the extension of this opening up the limitations of the genre, and claiming new forms of life-writing.

I illustrate how Tuqan resists traditional forms of autobiographical narration by overlapping Jelinek's and Brodzki and Schenk's analysis of autobiographical life-lines with feminist post-colonial theorist Sara Ahmed's theorization of lines of orientation in her book *Queer Phenomenology*. Turning specifically to Ahmed's conceptualization of lines is complex and productive for my reading of Tuqan's autobiography, because it opens up not only lines of orientation as spatially directed, but also as disruption of the reproduction of the family line. In discussing compulsory heterosexuality, Ahmed points out how the family line has become an

invisible straightening device in its "gifting" of reproduction of the father's bloodline. Ahmed states, "the point of the straight line […] is the reproduction of 'the father's image'" (78). Ahmed calls attention to how "genealogy itself could be understood as a straightening device, which creates the illusion of descent as a line" (122). In my reading of Tuqan's autobiography, I trace the direction and orientation of narrating life-lines as both deviating from the heteronormative straight lines of the family, and as proliferating of alternative lines of genealogies in poetry and literature.

Using Sara Ahmed's concept of lines as it relates to genealogical family lines, I am able to expand on postcolonial scholar Bart Moore-Gilbert's scholarship in "Time Bandits: Temporality and the Politics of Form in Palestinian Women's Life-Writing." Moore-Gilbert provides a survey of Palestinian women's life writing and observes that they are characterized in form by non-linearity, temporal disjuncture, and "intergenericity" (195). Moore-Gilbert's study highlights how Palestinian women's life-writing crosses and blends genres. My reading of Tuqan's autobiography expands on Moore-Gilbert's survey by illustrating how *A Mountainous Journey* is not only a non-linear text, it is also a text in which an autobiographical subject creates a multitude of interrupted linear life-lines that oppose and resist the resolution of patriarchal family and national lines.

In terms of autobiographical narration, both Moore-Gilbert's concept of non-linearity and Sara Ahmed's concept of genealogical lines are helpful in viewing how Tuqan creates her own life-lines of genealogy by narrating her own self-rebirth in the text. Although I do not label Tuqan's sexual and gender identity as queer, I argue that the autobiographical self in *A Mountainous Journey* is narrated and presented in a text that invents alternative non-heteronormative life-lines and genealogies that preside outside the confines of the lines of the

family and the nation. I read Tuqan's autobiographical subject as opening up alternative ways in which gender non-conformity gets expressed outside the heteronormative lines of the family unit.

I argue that genealogy—as serving the heteronormative line of the family—is a concept that is undercut continuously in Tuqan's narration of the self in *A Mountainous Journey*. I read Tuqan's text as not only an anti-linear form in how it deconstructs a heteronormative line of the patriarchal family, and by extension the nation, but also as it produces lines of self-continuation and self-rebirth. By reading *A Mountainous Journey*'s form alongside content, I explore how Tuqan's autobiographical narrative exposes the failures of the patriarchal family and the nationalist failure of feminist equality. Instead, Tuqan's narration provides an opportunity where the autobiographical self narrates an active reclamation of a rebirth in a chosen family, namely, a community of poets. Therefore, Tuqan's legacy of the autobiographical self is textual and literary. In choosing a line of metaphorical literary reproduction, Tuqan undercuts the primacy of mothering and heteronormative procreation. These lines of genealogy, for Tuqan, are self-made in opposition to prescribed modes of self-reproduction that are tied to constrictive embodiment. For an autobiography, this runs against the imposition of a linear cohesive narration (a straight line), and the recreation of the text in a male image (an all knowing, developed subject). For Tuqan, these self-created lines of autobiographical narration resist the patriarchal family structure as the basis of autobiographical subject formation, and imply an agency in claiming and reinventing her own line of life production, in both embodied and textual formations. I emphasize, in my reading of Tuqan's autobiography, the importance of a female Palestinian poet in creating multiple trajectories and life-lines and I highlight the aesthetic qualities of those lines of self-creation and rebirths.

Fadwa Tuqan is perhaps one of Palestine's most revered and well-known female poets. She was born in 1917 in Nablus to an educated and affluent family. Her brother, Ibrahim Tuqan, was a professor of Arabic literature and was famous for writing fiery poems of resistance against the British colonial presence in Palestine. Ibrahim was Tuqan's mentor and initiated her into composing poetry. Fadwa Tuqan's first poetry publications were initially written in the classical *qasida* form which has traditionally prescribed thematic constrictions as well as a strict formal rhyming style. She then turned to modern free verse, becoming one its chief innovators in modern Arabic literature. Tuqan states in her autobiography that she was heavily influenced by Mahjar Poets[2] and Iraqi female poet Nazik Al-Malaika, who championed an era of experimentation in form for Arabic poetry (*A Mountainous Journey* 72). Although Tuqan's early work would later become criticized for its individualistic tones as opposed to nationalist poetry that expresses a collective resistance, Palestinian poet Salma Khadra Jayyusi praises Tuqan's early work for its "unpretentious poetry of feminine self-discovery and self-realization" (*Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* 20). Tuqan's phase of involvement in Arab Romantic poetry with its personal tones is central to female Palestinian poets because of its emphasis on "the liberation of the erotic" (Jayyusi 20).

Following the death of her brother Ibrahim, and later her father, Tuqan's themes in poetry changed to fiery and charged resistance songs against Israeli occupation, and her poetry acquired a more "collective," nationalistic tone. Commenting on this tension between the personal and political, the famous Palestinian poet of resistance and her friend Mahmoud Darwish remarks: "it

[2] The Mahjar Poets comprised of Syrian and Lebanese poets who emigrated to North and South America in the early twentieth century such as Gibran Khalil Gibran and Elia Abu Madi. They championed an era of Arab Romantic poetry that emphasized a break from conforming to traditional social norms and institutions; identification with and celebration of natural beauty; and, intense emotional introspective state of the poet. The poets of the Mahjar were influential in introducing poetry that uses language which was simple and accessible. (*Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature, Volume 2,* 608). See also, *A Critical Introduction to Modern Arabic Poetry* by Muhammad Mustafa Badawi.

is true that Fadwa wrote poetry about the Palestinian tragedy, and why would she not! But her subdued voice was different: it was the voice in love, in pain, the contemplative, and the lonely, which does not resemble another voice; she was simultaneously in and out of the group" (qtd in Shackleton 8).

Fadwa Tuqan was awarded the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Jerusalem Award for Culture and Arts in 1990 and the Honorary Palestine Prize for Poetry in 1996 (Abdelmotagally 213). When she passed away in 2003, Darwish eulogized her legacy and stated that

> she was a contemporary of the Nakba Poets and was not part of them; she was a contemporary of the Arab modernist poets and was not part of them; and she was a contemporary of the resistance poets and was not part of them. She kept up her own poetic identity. And she also maintained what resembles the 'constant' in poetry – that is the romantic tendency. And she also guarded what resembles the 'constant' in romanticism – love. (qtd in Shackleton 8)

A Mountainous Journey: A Poet's Autobiography was not intended to be an autobiography in the classical autobiographical narrative sense. Several friends and poets initially asked Tuqan to begin writing her life story. As the story goes, Darwish was the editor of Al-Jadid magazine and had a running column called, "*Safahat Min Mufakkarah*" (trans. "Pages from a Diary") (Abdulwahab). The idea was to publish "snippets" of memories of famous Palestinians of great stature. In the introduction to the Arabic version of *A Mountainous Journey*, Palestinian poet Samih Al-Qasim writes of the efforts it took to convince Fadwa Tuqan to publish her "honest" and "daring" tales into an autobiographical text (5). In the introduction to Tuqan's autobiography, Salma Khadra Jayyusi, a close friend to Fadwa Tuqan, rallied to

translate the text into English because the text stands as "testimony" of not only Palestinian identity, but also of its centuries-old "rootedness" (viii). Tuqan's is an autobiography wanted and needed by her community of poets and peers who saw it as necessary to demystify the title given to her by Darwish as the "Mother of Palestinian Poetry."

In 1993, Tuqan published a second volume to her autobiography, *Al-Rihla Al-as'ab: Sira Dhatiyyah* (trans. *The More Difficult Journey: An Autobiography*). In this volume, Tuqan turns her attention mostly to the 1967 Six Day War and its aftermath. She recounts stories of communicating with her peers and other poets, as well as her meetings with Arab and Israeli political personalities. This second volume has not been translated into English. In this chapter, I refer mainly to the first volume.

In style and form, *A Mountainous Journey* as an autobiography does not adhere to a chronological progressive seamless narration. Nor does it stick to conventional modes of classical autobiographical narration. In her introduction to the translated autobiography, feminist scholar Fedwa Malti-Douglas proclaims that Tuqan's narrative is "an attack on the traditional autobiographical form itself" (3). The autobiography is split into two sections: one that contains numbered vignette-like chapters, and another section that is stylistically different and written as a diary and journal. The first section of chapters, despite being numbered, are non-sequential, short, and self-contained. Each chapter contains its own story and timeframe. The historical temporality jumps around and each chapter does not elaborate on the previously narrated one. The chapters are not fragmented, rather, they are disjunctive and recursive in character. Even though the chapters do not fall in a sequential progressive order, each chapter neatly closes its own narrative, like a short story. Furthermore, the chapters do not adhere to a single narrative

prose as they shift from prose to include letters, poems, pictures, musings on literary theory of poetry, and quotations from historians of Nablus.

Despite its episodic chapter structure, there is a narrative arc that holds the text together: from an introverted and alienated childhood, to learning poetry and becoming a poet, to the tragedy of Ibrahim's death, to traveling to Oxford. The text shifts from reflective memories to actual letters from siblings and friends. The autobiography breaks autobiographical conventions by bringing in several quotations from travelogues and historians of Tuqan's city of Nablus. *A Mountainous Journey*'s form reflects the community brought into it.[3] For a text specifically about her life, Tuqan provides several annotations to scholarly texts to give an added layer of "historical context" to her memories. Yet she contrasts her own memories' solemnness with translations of folk songs and pictures of childhood and the Tuqan house in Nablus. There are instances when the narrative switches to lines of poetry, and the English translation of the autobiography includes several translated poems at the end.

Towards the end of the text, the narrative arc abruptly shifts from narrated memories to short and truncated journal entries under the heading "Pages from a Diary 1966 – 1967." This section of the autobiography changes the tone of the narrative arc from retrospective storytelling to immediate documentation of events with statements of friends' names and quotations from their conversations. The chapters' numbers reset and a different narrative arc introduces itself, that of a realistic trepidation and fear of the Israeli occupation and an upcoming war, and of silence and anxious reflections on looming writer's block. Tuqan closes the diary section with

[3] In "The Poetics of the Poet's Autobiography: Voicings and Mutings in Fadwa Tuqan's Narrative Journey," Ariel Sheetrit argues that the text's central tension lies in the polyphonic production of many characters' voices, and the mutings of those voices into Tuqan's very own. Sheetrit argues that the text "subverts patriarchal tradition[s] from within ostensibly masculine cultural and literary structures" (102).

the imminent beginning of the 1967 Six Day War and with a statement that ends her poetic silence.

The "Pages from a Diary" section differs from the first collection of chapters in its sense of immediate narration. The affect and temporality of the first section, for example, are placed in the past. There is a sense of "looking back" and orienting the narration towards reflecting on the past. Whereas the Diary section, in its immediate documentation of events and diary form, lacks the privilege of a temporal break from events to rarely have the introspection afforded the past memories. Although these sections differ in style of narration, having both of them serve the heading of autobiography contributes to how Tuqan is resisting the traditional form and providing a new template that suits a narration of her own life-lines.

In her autobiography, Tuqan utilizes several modes of narrating her life that do not conform to the conventional modes of the genre. I argue that Tuqan's style, form, and method of historical polyphony produce several lines and trajectories of narration that resist the normative linear trajectory of narrating the development of an autobiographical subject from birth to self-fulfillment. Instead, I trace the multiple moments in the text where narration takes several lines and trajectories that highlight claiming silence and ambivalence as productive and generative. In what follows, I look at the text and narrative of *A Mountainous Journey* as essentially Fadwa Tuqan's site of self-rebirth as an accomplished poet. It is by narrating an alternative life-line outside the patriarchal family line and through literature that she is able to assert the rebirth of herself as a poet. By paying close attention to the ways in which Tuqan reclaims the narrative as a space of self-re-articulation, we can see the ways she recreates her own life-lines and her own future genealogies. *A Mountainous Journey* is Fadwa Tuqan's narrative of bearing witness to the

fruition and survival of her own poetic legacy. The poet, Fadwa, emerges as a figure that survives and prevails through the word (and its silences).

Self Rebirth in Place, Self Rebirth in Beginnings

In this section, I turn to how Tuqan describes the birth of her autobiographical self in the narrative in three different times and places. First, she narrates a self-birth in a line that starts a cultural and literary lineage amongst her poets and peers. The second chapter sees her trying to start a line from the family, which, as she illustrates, is doomed to failure and is always in the shadow of death. In the third chapter, we find Tuqan beginning an autobiographical narrative in a specifically named space and timed historical moment, creating a genealogy in the national line. These three autobiographical beginnings and narrations of self-births are all placed in different spatial and temporal modes. I will analyze the significance of the title and the moment of autobiographical self-births in narration.

It is no coincidence that Tuqan invokes mountains in the title of her autobiography. The original Arabic title *Rihla Jabaliyya, Rihla Sa'ba* is translated as "A Mountainous Journey, A Difficult Journey." Starting from the title alone, we have Fadwa Tuqan establishing herself and her narrative on multiple levels. Tuqan is introducing herself through poetic technique; she is situating herself as rooted in Palestinian land, thus emphasizing rootedness and grounding in a place as central to the narrative. She also foreshadows the autobiographical narrative as both a literal and figurative journey to the reader and herself. I analyze the title's significance as not only serving an introduction to the text but also as a standalone statement of reclaiming of the literary birth of Tuqan as a Palestinian poet.

The title itself employs several poetic techniques. Fadwa Tuqan is famous in Arabic literary circles for playing a major role in revolutionizing modern Arabic poetry. Her early training from her brother in the traditional form of classical Arabic poetry provided her with a scholarly foundation to work with contemporary Arab poets to revolutionize Arabic poetry to its modern free verse. Specifically, and against her brother's instruction, Tuqan worked through and theorized "*shi'r al-taf'ila*". In classical Arabic poetry, poetic skill was exhibited in demonstrating how verses in a traditional poem (*qasida*) adhere to strict mono-rhyme scheme, and to conventional themes, i.e., elegy, panegyric, defamation, etc. (Moreh 2). Tuqan, along with modernist poets such as Nazik Al-Malaika and Bader Shakir Al-Sayyab, wrote poetry in a new form that emphasized the musicality of the feet rather than the rhyming of the verse. Arabic free verse emphasizes feet, the *al-taf'ila*, as the governing unit of the poem and foregrounds breath and words' syllables. This new form reflected the political use of poetry at the time, it had to speak to the people and not be pretentious. The form was in service of the content and not tied to it as opposed to the classical *qasida*. Thus, the main idea behind *shi'r al-taf'ila* is that a poem had to use a form and style that reflected the ideas and content of the time. The Arabic title of Tuqan's autobiography is very significant, especially for a poet who was instrumental in revolutionizing modern Arabic poetry. Every word is accounted for, each syllable plays a musical role, and every break has an aesthetic purpose. The title comes across as a line of poetry. There is a repetition and a rhyme; there is a caesura and a sense of rhythm and emphasis on breath. The title does not provide autobiographical identifying information about Fadwa Tuqan. Rather, we get a poetic representation of her artistic skill. Tuqan claims and states herself as an assured, accomplished poet from the very title.

With the repetition of the word *rihla* (journey), Tuqan foregrounds the idea of continuation and perseverance. The autobiographical narrative in *A Mountainous Journey* ends in 1967, and the rest of her life is told in a following text, published only in Arabic, titled "*Al-Rihla Al-as'ab*" ("The More Difficult Journey"). At first glance, the metaphor of the journey strikes the reader as cliché, because it is an overused trope in describing life narratives. However, it becomes a sly, ironic statement of a life narrative that documents Tuqan's upbringing in two-fold imprisonment: the patriarchal home and the Palestinian nation. There is no journey of any kind for her, in other words. Indeed, Tuqan devotes the majority of the text to a time in her life where her family confined her to the home. Tuqan later mentions the British and then Israeli occupations' restrictions that confine her to the limits of Nablus. Thus, Tuqan meticulously details the multiple ways in which her body was imprisoned. She does so to emphasize the significance of the narrative's arc, which concludes with her arrival in England, on her own in 1962.

Furthermore, the mention of the image of the mountain in the title plays a significant role in situating the autobiographical text in a Palestinian space. Tuqan emphasizes the importance of belonging to Palestinian land by alluding to the Nablus Mountains (Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim), historically known as Mountains of Fire (*jabal al-nar*). While the narrative proudly provides copious accounts of Nablus's place in history, Tuqan's choice to allude to mountains, in my opinion, is twofold. First, the mountains surrounding Nablus are referenced in her accounts of solitude and writing pastoral Arabic Romantic poetry. In the text, Tuqan notes that she cannot leave the house by herself and, often, excursions to Mount 'Aibal occur when she is accompanied by her brother, Ibrahim. In these instances, Tuqan would "leap like a goat from rock to rock, looking around, searching for sweet smelling fennel greens" (52). Tuqan's "delight

in these simple adventures was marked by the absence of fear of family punishment […] I was free of any nagging anxiety" (52). She experiences joy and immersion in nature as her own space that is free of familial imposition. Later in the narrative, the mountains become symbols of national resistance. She quotes the crowds of men who cheer patriotic chants in support of her uncle, a leader of the National Party that was formed in Nablus in 1925: "the crowd would echo his words, "We are men of the mountain of fire" (26). In the notes section Tuqan elaborates: "Nablus has been named the Mountain of Fire because of the courageous participation of its young men in the fight against colonialism" (193). Nablus, for Tuqan, is a nationalist space that holds a grander history; whereas the mountains are her own personal, private space. Tuqan foregrounds the land, and her sense of belonging is expressed by emphasizing this rootedness. The land and space are two motifs that are central to Palestinian literature. From the title alone, Tuqan purposefully attaches her life narrative to a grand nationalist Palestinian narrative.

Furthermore, it is important to mention here how Tuqan connects the mountainous journey in her title to the mythical figure of Sisyphus. In her autobiographical narrative, Tuqan states "I carried the rock and endured the fatigue of the endless ascents and descents" (12). Tuqan also alludes to the Sisyphean myth in both her nationalist political poems and personal individualist poems. In the poem "The Rock", from her first published book of poetry *Alone with the Days* (1952), Tuqan turns Sisyphus's tragedy with the rock into a symbol of the Palestinian people's struggle with the Israeli occupation. The recurrence of the Sisyphean myth in modern Arabic poetry has been studied by scholars of Arabic literature, who highlight the parallels between Sisyphus's struggle and that of people who are continuously fighting oppression (Jayyusi 1977; Moreh 1976; Masarwah 2015). The meaning changed for many poets; it carries nationalist and collective meaning as well as individualistic connotations. In a single image,

Tuqan ties herself to a larger community of poets who were struggling to build a new literary form and genre that went against classical Arabic poetry. I argue that the Sisyphean reference is also relevant for Tuqan because it resonates with the echoing voice and the regressive, repetitive style of her autobiographical narrative. As the autobiography itself starts from a moment of death and end, calling on the figure of Sisyphus does not simply stand for the never-ending struggle against oppression on a personal and nationalist collective level. For Tuqan, it also provides a tonal shift in autobiographical narrative that emphasizes repetition and continuity. Even though Tuqan propels the narrative of life events forward, the narrative voice is echoing, shaky, hesitant, and forced. For example, Tuqan begins her autobiography by connecting herself to the figure of Sisyphus: "I carried the rock and endured the fatigue of the endless ascents and descents" (12). She later states that "life is motion, forever going forward. A relentless quest for new horizons, even though it may be a hopeless one" (137). However, the formal structure of the chapters reflects a narrative that stops, halts, circles back to moments and repeats them. The movement forward is not in fact ever seamless or uninterrupted. The form of the autobiography reflects how Tuqan makes it clear that the struggle upwards does not reach a peak. Rather, the episodic form of the autobiographical narrative and its consistent return to beginnings and multiple points of rebirth ironically suggest that there is no salvation; there is no end in sight. The end of the narrative stops at the precipice of the 1967 War, which famously saw Tuqan change her poetic themes from individual romantic themes to nationalist poetry and shift from classical Arabic as a form to modern free verse, or *shi'r al-taf'ila*. Thus, what we expect to be a "conclusion" to the story of her life implies a tonal shift in autobiographical voice rather than a concrete satisfactory "end."

This brings me to a curious moment in *A Mountainous Journey* that illustrates how Tuqan approaches autobiographical narratives' beginnings: beginnings are births in death and failure. Rather than view her text as "beginning" somewhere and at a certain time, I argue that we need to see her first three chapters as three separate attempts at beginning the process of birthing herself in narrative form. The first chapter places her narrative as beginning amongst her peers. She begins from the soil of her literary career, placing herself as a poet in conversation with her fellow literary peers. The first chapter, thus, attempts to begin the birth of the first line of her genealogy, grounded in literary community. The first sentence refers to her "literary career" and the protection of her private life. She describes herself as a seed battling "hard rocky soil" to become a tree and bear the fruits of "great achievements" (11). Tuqan alludes to the iron molds of family: "I yearned continually to escape from my time and place. The time was an age of subjection, repression and dissolution into nothingness; the place was the prison of the house" (12). In grounding the first line of rebirth as a poet amongst her peers, Tuqan is introducing the idea that her rebirth as poet, amongst her literary community takes precedence over her actual bloodline. The literary community replaces the bloodline as it gives her freedom from the constraints of the patriarchal structure. She emphatically asserts her right as a woman to struggle and to unabashedly seek self-fulfillment in the path of poetic expression and autobiographical narrative.

The second chapter brings another, more literal, beginning. Tuqan states: "I emerged from the darkness of the womb into a world unprepared to accept me. My mother had tried to get rid of me during the first months of her pregnancy. Despite repeated attempts, she failed" (12). In contrast to the first chapter's beginning where autobiographical birth is within a community, this attempt at autobiographical birth is rooted in failure and the will to terminate. Where the first

attempt was grounded amongst her peers, this second beginning is her line of blood, i.e. family lineage, and grounded in negation and failure. This chapter of second beginning tells the story of self-erasure, and yet, we are curiously following a line of self-enunciation of the autobiographical narrative itself. The expectation of the classical "I was born in…" statement is unmet; instead, Tuqan summons failure and defeat. She narrates how her father expected a fifth son, and thus, that the family bloodline was not extended by her birth: "my arrival dashed his hopes" (13).

A Mountainous Journey goes into further detail to explain this erasure and being-into-nothingness when Tuqan relates how her mother thought of the pregnancy that carried her. Tuqan states that her mother constantly referred to her pregnancy with derision and she tried to abort the fetus. Tuqan states, "she bore me reluctantly and tried to induce an abortion, but I clung on to her womb like the trees in Palestine cling to their soil" (12). In *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing*, Malti-Douglas refers to this incident as revealing a "matriphobic text" (165). This is an autobiography written with unease not only towards the poet's mother, but with motherhood as a concept. For Tuqan, motherhood is not productive but a failure. For her situation, it is embedded in erasure and rejection. This utterance reveals several issues. Tuqan does not present motherhood with the reverence expected from a woman of her class and family where motherhood is supposed to elevate one's status and is almost a sacred position. Instead, she subverts that ideal into a harsh reality where mothering depletes and demands of women's bodies and selfhood. Motherhood, in Tuqan's autobiography, is narrated as an act intricately tied to forms of erasure. Her existence is one that not only relates to the death of the cousin, but also to the realm of events that *should not be*. In this sense, the attempted abortion marks simultaneously a point of beginning—of her creative energy and

poetry, of her autobiography, and of her life—and a point of being expunged from the history and lineage of the family.

Furthermore, in this second beginning, Tuqan refers to her mother's womb as "the soil of Palestine" twice. Tuqan "clung to [Mother's] womb with the tenacity of a tree to the soil" (12), referring back to the seed in the first chapter and also claiming herself as a seed in the soil of Palestine as land and nation. Indeed, the mother's womb dominates Tuqan's birth story inaugurating in this chapter the trope of the failure of the "family line" that will run throughout the autobiographical narrative. Though the text has officially begun, the actual narration of life is still based in the affect of rejection in the story of the mother's attempted abortion. We also learn that Mother's story of abortion is one of Tuqan's earliest memories: "I have listened to her relating this from my earliest childhood" (13). Thus, Tuqan's being-into-consciousness and being-into-narrative circle back to being-into-nothingness.

It is in the second chapter that Tuqan introduces another form of self-rebirth that is extracted from the shadows of death. Tuqan circles back to how her presence is erased from her family's memory. To emphasize the presence of erasure in her autobiography, we encounter the first instance Tuqan's family erased her from their memories: "the date of my birth vanished from their memories in the mists of time" (13). Tuqan tells the story of when her family requested her passport, a symbolic document for anyone embarking on a journey, but especially so for a Palestinian living under occupation. Tuqan narrates how the family forgets her exact birth date, observing that her mother can only remember her birth date when it is linked to the death of her cousin during a war. Tuqan states,

> In 1950 I had to apply for my first passport. 'I'll tell you where you can find a reliable clue to the year you were born,' said Mother. 'when my cousin, Kamil Asqalan, fell in

> action, I was seven months pregnant. […] the day of the tragedy I felt I was being consumed by fire. I went to wail and weep with his mother and sister. You were bumping and jumping from side to side in my belly'. […] I felt sorry for myself, so, to dispel these feelings, I humored her by replying: 'tell me where I can find your cousin Kamil's grave. *Then all I have to do is obtain my birth certificate from your cousin's gravestone.* (my emphasis, 14-15)

This memory shows that the poet clearly connects her cousin's death to the declaration of her birth, and therefore life and existence. Indeed, Fedwa Malti-Douglas notes that "it is the death of a male that permits the establishment of the birth of the female" (*Woman's Body, Woman's Word* 166). We can also infer that the family's remembrance of Tuqan is connected to death, therefore highlighting the sense of nothingness to which the poet refers again and again. Tuqan contextualizes the beginning of her existence to a concrete event of death.

I see Fadwa Tuqan's passport beginnings as a demonstration of her hesitations and anxiety over self-affirmation. Tuqan recursively returns to the idea that her narrative of self-rebirth is arduous labor that is enshrined in death. Tuqan cannot identify the exact date of her birth and is offered an ambiguous answer. Furthermore, this event of affirmative self-rebirth is extracted from death. She is simultaneously starting a line, cutting it, and starting another one again. By detailing the history of the dead cousin and memorializing his gravesite in her own autobiography, she is allowing her cousin's legacy to become a part of the genealogy of her self and her autobiography. Moreover, her process of self-affirmation in literary form (the autobiography) requires incorporating those in her family who have passed away. Thus, she will carry the memory of her cousin's death. However, what gets erased from memory is *her*

presence. Even in her autobiography, Tuqan has to foreground the cousin and relegate her own beginning to his death; her beginning is in the place of absence.

This pattern of stop-and-go self-birth/beginning is both cyclical and repetitious and emerges in the third chapter on a larger scale. Here, Tuqan brings a different dimension to the autobiographical "I was born" narrative by placing it within a wider context. Specifically, she brings the autobiographical narrative to a particular place; she births herself in the city of Nablus, thus beginning a narrated life-line that stems from the time and space of the land; a national line. She states: "I arrived at a time when one world was in its death throes and another was about to be born: the Ottoman Empire was breathing its last; and Allied armies were continuing to open the way for a new western colonization – 1917" (15). The sentence structure parallels and returns to the story of her cousin's death and her own birth story. She also relates her birth to two contextual historical moments that shape her existence in relation to both her family and her identity as an Arab Palestinian with a Turkish grandmother. Tuqan foregrounds the fact that her birth occurred at a moment in Palestinian history that was shaped by the Ottoman Empire's downfall in the first world war. Amidst a world that presented a dying powerful empire, there was also a new form of imperialism encroaching Palestinian soil. This is not a temporality of fruition; rather, we encounter a decaying empire and a gloomy history. Tuqan narrates this moment of beginning from the events shaping the history of Palestine and Nablus (from Ottoman rule, to the British mandate, to Israeli occupation). Intersecting the history of the dying Ottoman Empire with the push of the oncoming colonialism, Tuqan places her birth in the midst of a history of national erasure.

Tuqan, however, contests this erasure from history by narrating the centrality of her city of Nablus to the nationalist resistance movements that started there. It is in this third chapter that

Tuqan introduces a scholarly, academic voice that is different from the first chapter's "poet line" and from the second chapter's "family line." Here, Tuqan begins a line that connects her autobiographical narrative beginning to the national struggle. Tuqan centers the city of Nablus and narrates its historical significance through scholarly texts. She cites a multitude of voices, including both scholars and tourists who wrote travelogues about Nablus, and we get to see their vision of the city in Tuqan's own voice. She begins as she cites historians of Palestine who speak specifically of the significance of the anti-colonial resistance movements that started there, and in particular in her city of Nablus. For example, she extensively quotes the historian Dr. Emile Touma's book, *The Roots of the Palestinian Question*, which chronicles the nationalist movements of resistance (15). I see Tuqan's inclusion of these voices as not only her resistance to the singular voice an autobiography is usually expected to have, but it also makes her autobiography a historical document that stands against colonial erasure of indigenous histories of struggle.

Furthermore, through this fixation on Nablus, Tuqan anchors the movement of the autobiographical narrative. Spatially, the journey that this autobiographical narrative takes us on is expansive and moves from the confines of the Tuqan home to Oxford, England. However, Tuqan emphasizes again and again the centrality of Nablus. It is the place that anchors the autobiography as the beginning of the Tuqan's "nationalist line." Furthermore, it is not only affirmed as her chosen site of self-rebirth in this beginning, but it also becomes the revisited site. In following chapters, we return with Tuqan to the streets and markets of Nablus.

Tuqan narrates her rootedness in Nablus while simultaneously destabilizing the biological family genealogy. In contrast to the Turkish tourist Awliya Chelebi who, upon his visit to Nablus, wrote "'if you asked any of the inhabitants about his lineage he would tell you he was a

descendant of one of the apostles or prophets'" (34), she observes that "at any rate, it is quite certain that the origins of the family I descended from did not go back to any apostle or prophet" (34). Moreover, Tuqan's "faith in the veracity of the history of genealogy is somewhat shaky" (34). She undermines the men in her family who insist on the Tuqan family's presence in Nablus as not only ancient and old, but also central to its historical formation. In contrast to "the knowledge handed down for five centuries" (34), the Tuqans belonged to a travelling Bedouin tribe who "pitched their tents in the desert between Hims and Hama" (34). Tuqan changes the origin and genealogy of the family from city dwellers to travelling nomads. Tuqan alters the sense of fixity of genealogy and origin and would rather connect with the nomadic Bedouins travelling through the city, thus foregrounding "travel" as a way of *becoming*. Tuqan approaches narrating rootedness to Nablus with a malleability and flexibility of a traveling nomad.

I see Tuqan's multiple lines of narration as disrupting and resisting the masculinist form of traditional autobiography that insists on a singular coherent progressive line of narration. Tuqan creates a mode of narration that is proliferative, polyphonic, and productive while simultaneously being self-aware of the negation that is imposed on her gender and national identity. Tuqan's multiple lines of beginnings, or rebirths, amplify the multiplicity of autobiographical subjectivity in narration. It stands in contrast to the traditional insistence that autobiographies should have a single all-knowing narrator and a developed autobiographical self. The repetitious, non-progressive linear form of Tuqan's autobiography opens up ways we could read it as productive and prolific. Tuqan generates multiple life-lines in her beginnings to undercut the rigidity of structural genealogy of the family as narrated in traditional autobiography.

Literary Lines of Rebirth and Alternative Genealogies of Becoming

Tuqan's autobiographical narrative stops at several points in her life that present literal and figurative deaths so as to highlight the necropolitical conditions of Palestinian life. I argue, furthermore, that Tuqan utilizes these silences, deaths, and "endings" to create for herself an alternative genealogy and self-made family. In my reading of Tuqan's autobiography, I find that she tries, although anxiously and self-consciously, to forge alternative lines of becoming that are outside the fixity of the biological family. Tuqan's process of self-rebirth happens when she reinvents her own biological and literary genealogy, differentiates herself from a conventional heteronormative "mother of the nation" figure, and through grounding several moments of her self-births in the text at points that emphasize creativity, literature, and the word as her mode of reclaiming the self. In what follows, my analysis will turn to the links and lineages Fadwa Tuqan severs in the autobiographical narrative: "a person's life is a chain whose links are continually being severed, beginning with removal from the mother's breast and ending with loss of life itself" (27). Tuqan explores the failure of the patriarchal family unit and in exposing these failures, she produces new lines of self-creation, on her own terms, i.e. a genealogy that is reproduced not through the family bloodline, but, as I argue, through poetry. I read how Tuqan's narration of a specific genealogy in this autobiography as expressing how belonging is forged through affect and creativity.

From the first pages of *A Mountainous Journey*, Tuqan presents a conflict-ridden relationship with her traditional Arab-Muslim family. She portrays the family unit, and by extension, heteropatriarchy, as essentially failing to produce a healthy human subject. She describes the hierarchy of grandparents, parents, and siblings, highlighting the power dynamics of gender and age. Tuqan presents her gender as one of the main characteristics that hinder her

progress as a "human," since it was the basis on which her oldest brother enforces her home imprisonment. From her description of the early stages of her life, we learn how young Fadwa feels alienated from her father and senses his absence deeply. She absorbs fatherly love from her uncle, instead, and writes, "I did not have any strong attachment to my father. My feelings towards him remained neutral: I did not hate him. Neither did I love him. He never had any place in my heart" (110). Tuqan portrays her father as a failure due to his lack of compassion, and aligns herself with her uncle's family: "my attachment to my paternal uncle, al-Haj Hafez, was stronger and deeper than my attachment to my father. The way Uncle played and laughed with me revealed the warmth of his heart and made me feel he really loved me" (25). Tuqan makes a point to mention the Uncle's death as being the first grief she had to endure. Belonging, therefore, changes her line of loyalty to her uncles because of the generosity of feelings. Tuqan challenges the linearity of patrilineage by forging genealogies of belonging through affect, not through blood.

Tuqan repeatedly narrates a severance of the connection with the line of the father while narrating the beginnings of her creative rebirth as a poet. Creative rebirth, for Tuqan, is implicated in exposing the father/family line as a failure. The autobiographical self that is trying to emerge here, I would argue, is a creative poet. Yet, for Tuqan, that cannot fully emerge without severing paternal lines. When Tuqan later shows the budding signs of becoming a poet under the tutelage of her brother Ibrahim, she narrates a moment of her father's dismissal of that creative self. Her father received the news of Tuqan's emerging poetry with a bodily gesture of silence:

> My sister, Fataya, thinking she was revealing exciting news, said to Father: 'Do you know that Ibrahim is teaching Fadwa to compose poetry?' With a flick of his wrist, he

> resumed drinking his black coffee. This wave of the hand conveyed his complete contempt, making me cringe and recoil within myself. He doesn't believe I am good for anything, I said to myself. He has no feelings for me except indifference, as though I'm nothing, as though I'm a nonentity, a vacuum, as if there is absolutely no need for me to exist. (59)

Tuqan emphasizes the severing of her connection to her father by continuously presenting their relationship in the autobiographical narrative as one that is haunted and shrouded in silence. Tuqan states that on the rare occasion that her father acknowledges her presence in the room, he usually speaks of Tuqan in the passive "her" and barely mentions her name: "often when [Father] wanted to tell me something he would use the third person, even if I were there where he could see me" (49). While the mother's relationship to Tuqan is characterized by active negation and disavowal, the father's relationship with Tuqan is one of neutral, apathetic silence: "the wide emotional gulf which separated me from Father remained. Silence was our common language" (105).

For Tuqan, death becomes a figure for self-expression and freedom from the patriarchal constraints of family. Tuqan narrates two instances of clear severance with and defiance against the patriarchal institution of family. Both describe attempted suicide, and both instances happen after moments during which Tuqan is narrating instances of reinventing the self in a genealogical line of poetry. The first suicide attempt happens in defiance to her enforced imprisonment in the home and learning poetry from Ibrahim. The second instance happens when her father attempts to placate her into writing nationalist poetry following her brother Ibrahim's death. These suicide attempts intersect with moments when Tuqan is trying to claim her own narrative but is thwarted by the influence of patriarchal oppression and genealogical limitations to the family.

The first attempted suicide is narrated after a mention of how she came to grow as a person in the space of her school. Learning is how Tuqan flourished and the teachers not only acknowledge her love of the word and poetry, but also shower her with love. Tuqan states how "school fulfilled many of the psychological needs that remained unsatisfied at home" (46). School becomes a space of positive affective belonging where the seeds of a creative Tuqan begin to flourish. It also becomes a site for the possibility of other kinds of love: Tuqan narrates the story of a young boy who expresses interest in her and innocently gives her a flower. It fills her with excitement and begins her discovery of the erotic body: "I had begun to notice my developing body. […] I had discovered something new in me and in the world, something very strange that made me stand breathless at the wonder of first love" (47).

Apparently, there are witnesses to this "scandalous" event, and news of this disgraceful connection reaches her oldest brother, Yusuf, who responds with a threat: "I told him the truth to escape […] the harsh blows from his iron fists, […] He issued his magisterial sentence: compulsory confinement to the house till the day of my death. Threatening to kill me if I crossed the threshold" (48). When her father sees that she is not going to school, he does not object and eventually supports Yusuf's decision. Tuqan is not allowed to leave the house or cross the threshold. Thus begins Tuqan's critique of patriarchy's crushing oppression: "the seeds of low self-esteem were planted in my tender young soul" (49).

Confined to the solitude of the house, watching her sister go to school, feeling herself being cut off from a world of knowledge, Tuqan's feelings of alienation intensify. She states:

> Sometimes I would go to the kitchen to stand before the kerosene tin with a box of matches in my hand […] I often thought of taking poison. […] Suicide was the only way I could take back the personal freedom that had been taken from me. I wanted to express

> my rebellion against them by committing suicide. *Suicide was the only way, my one chance of revenge on the family's tyranny.* (My emphasis 50)

This attempt is not narrated as an end to her life, but rather, it is a young child's attempt to reclaim her own fate. I find that this attempt of defiance is not "failure" per se; it highlights the ambiguity and paradox in Tuqan's work. Sifting through this, Tuqan is narrating the limited choices available to her. The only way she can have power and ownership over her body is by attempting to erase it.

Shortly after narrating that suicide attempt, Tuqan begins to develop her own game of bodily detachment as her way of actually claiming and owning her selfhood. Attempting to burst out of the prison bars, Tuqan states:

> the ability to detach myself from the real world was nothing new. From childhood I used to sit under a tree in the yard and fix my eyes on my left thumb without blinking, doing this with such concentration that my thumb, and eventually my whole hand, seemed extraneous to me, lacking connection to my body. Then I myself would become a stranger to myself. In my silent contemplation, I would repeat: who am I? who am I? I would repeat my name over and over in my thoughts but my name would seem foreign and meaningless to me. (51)

I view this as instrumental to the ways in which she understands that her body does not belong to the house of the father, but rather, to herself. She illustrates the ways in which the pressures of the family have not only alienated her from the outside world, but also from her own self. The ways in which Tuqan comes to understand her body as her own are narrated through a process of disidentification, not only from the family line, but also from her self. In order for the child to survive in the confines of the familial home, she invents her own methodology of survival, a

form of detached embodiment. This form of cognitive defamiliarization allows her to come back and create her own relationship to her environment in her own words.

Up until this point, the text has not mentioned the name "Fadwa" at all. It is not even mentioned in this game as an answer to "who am I?". Thus far, the recurring name is the Tuqan family name, referencing her lineage, rather than her individual subjectivity. Tuqan continues:

> At that point any connection I had to my name, myself, or my surroundings would be cut, leaving me submerged in a very curious state of non-presence and nothingness. […] when I raised my eyes from my thumb to look around me, *I would come back to myself and the outside word, rejoicing at the power I possessed to get out of myself in this inscrutable manner and then come back.* (My emphasis 51)

Tuqan does not clarify her reasons for not going through her first plan in the kitchen. What is narrated at length is the process by which Tuqan searches for spaces of her own, even if they are in solitude and her own meditative states. If journeying through the outside world is physically impossible, then Tuqan turns to meditative journeying as part of her own strategy of self-recovery. It is in this process that the body is reclaimed as her own, in the space of her own mind.

Tuqan's narration of the second suicide attempt is also fraught with complications of claiming the self as a poet. The second time Tuqan mentions an attempt at suicide repeats the pattern of reclaiming self-rebirth, but this process happens in reverse. After her mentor, her brother Ibrahim, passes away, her father asks her to move from writing personal poetry to writing with nationalist themes. Tuqan had been undergoing a process of literary birth under Ibrahim's tutelage. While she is under house arrest, Ibrahim saves her by teaching her lines of poetry. Tuqan begins to forge connections, poetic lines, with other poets, such as Nazik Al-

Malaika, and embraces free verse. She insists on pursuing her own themes of individual self discovery and writing Arabic Romantic poetry. She defiantly stands up to Ibrahim when he one day tells her "people aren't interested in our personal feelings" (70). After Ibrahim's passing, Tuqan mourns the loss of not only her mentor, but her co-creator: "I am thus the workmanship of Ibrahim, he being my literary creator" (qtd in Donohue and Tramontini 1131). Ibrahim not only initiates her into poetry, he guides her creative process to becoming her own poet. Her feelings of being cut from the biological line of the family, i.e. her alienation from her father, is intensified with the loss of her mentor. This alienation is further highlighted by the fact that her access to the outside world, through Ibrahim, has been cut off and Tuqan is unable to forge her own access to the public sphere. Tuqan states that in that period,

> While I was in this state of alienation and psychological siege, Father often came and asked me to write political poetry. He wanted me to fill the empty place Ibrahim had left behind. Whenever a national or political occasion arose, he would come asking me to write something on the subject. A voice from within would rise up in silent protest: *How and with what right or logic does Father ask me to compose political poetry, when I am shut up inside these walls? I don't sit with the men, I don't listen to their heated discussions, nor do I participate in the turmoil of life on the outside. I'm still not even acquainted with the face of my own country, since I'm not allowed to travel.* (Emphasis in original 107)

Tuqan narrates the second suicide attempt, during which she swallows the entire content of a bottle of medication, as coming shortly after (112). This second attempt is held in protest, a way to refuse, and rebel against, the multiple consequences of being cut-off. In the absence of viable options, her view of suicide is one of reclaiming power over the self. I view this moment as

showing how Tuqan's anxiety does not only come from the pressures from the father, but the fear of losing the connected lines of creativity she has forged as a self-made poet with her community and peers. It does not escape the narrator that the imposition of patriarchal oppression carries multiple dimensions: "Since I was not socially emancipated, how could I wage war with my men for political, ideological or national freedom? I still lacked political maturity, just as I had no social dimension. I possessed nothing but a literary dimension that itself was still incomplete" (110). This speaks to both Tuqan's struggle to maintain her own lines of poetic lineage as well as her anxiety to approaching the political public sphere from which she is excluded. If she cannot yet mature as a poet in her own personal voice, she cannot forge a line of belonging in what she views as the political discourse of men. It is not that Tuqan's protest indicates a lack of anti-colonial sentiment. Rather, Tuqan uses this moment of protest to highlight the duplicity of the false inclusion of women in nationalist movements.

Tuqan narrates the struggle to claim her political poetic voice as going through several personal and national traumas. Her ability to claim nationalist consciousness converges with the death of the patriarch and the death of the nation. The anxiety of establishing a lineage connected to collective nationalist poetry happens only after the death of her father in 1948. Tuqan paradoxically connects both her personal and creative freedom to *Al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) in 1948. Following the silence of writer's block after Ibrahim's death, both the encroachment of the war and the death of her father drive her to come to a nationalist consciousness: "after Father's death my reaction to politics was no longer lacking […] it would catch fire" (113). Tuqan connects several moments of familial deaths, national deaths of the war, and the death of what she views as a patriarchal symbol: "in the first half of the fifties, I escaped from the prison of the harem. When the roof fell in on Palestine in 1948, the veil fell off the face of the Nablus woman"

(113). Tuqan's path from personal sentimental poetry to nationalist collective consciousness is claimed through the death of the father. Furthermore, gender emancipation, in her view, is affirmed through the tragedy of war. Both of these moments of self-emancipation and textual rebirth happen in the shadow of death.

Tuqan further extricates herself from the family unit by not only presenting the father figure as a failure, she also problematizes the figure of the Mother. Tuqan emphasizes the imperfections of motherhood and highlights the fact that the "mother as life" concept does not apply to her. Motherhood is not presented as generative of life, rather, it is an erasure of subjecthood. Tuqan mentions a story that left a significant mark on her and paints her childhood perfectly. She writes of how the young siblings would sit around the mother awaiting retellings of joyous memories from their childhoods. As young Fadwa awaits her turn patiently, she asks her mother if she has anything to say so she can share this familial joy. Tuqan is disappointed to witness how her mother not only skips young Fadwa's turn, but also states out loud that she does not remember anything about her daughter's childhood. Tuqan is devastated, writing, "cringing with a feeling of nonentity I would tell myself: I am nothing. I have no place in her memory" (19). To Tuqan, this lack of connection from her parental figures further accentuates her feeling of nothingness in the family unit. She not only has to excavate her own birth certificate from the tombstone of her cousin, the official state document that would biologically assert her connection to the family, she also attempts (and fails) to sift through memories that would unify her, at least in shared memory, with other members of her family. Thus, Tuqan presents the biological family as a failure in her narrative. Her feelings of belonging, therefore, have to take different shapes and forms. I would argue that Tuqan's positive connections are fostered through affect (love) and creativity (poetry) with other important figures in her life that form alternative parental figures

and familial units. She produces her narrative of becoming by painfully recounting the severing and disconnection from her family, and then through the continual process of rebuilding and reaching out to loving adult figures who foster her love for poetry. Tuqan takes control to recreate her own alternative mode of family in the text, where connection is made through creativity and affect, not biology.

In the following section, I trace the alternative genealogies that Tuqan forges in her autobiographical narrative. Tuqan's narration of her rebirth as a poet is closely tied to Ibrahim's mentoring and this genealogy of the line of the poet that she creates through this tutelage is a feminist lineage of poets, specifically in the elegiac poetic form. These connections that Tuqan draws, I argue, are narrated as modes of survival and self-recovery. Tuqan narrates these modes of creation of alternative lines of lineage as necessary for her legacy. Throughout *A Mountainous Journey*, we find the multiple ways in which Tuqan stages her rebirth. In adopting different forms of connection, she disrupts traditional concepts of lineage, and I would argue that Tuqan does so through a literary reinvention of the self. Tuqan highlights literature as a central paradigm of self-(re)birth.

Tuqan narrates the process of coming into herself as a poet with the re-appearance of Ibrahim in her life after the school incident. She describes him as not only as an established poet, but also as a man who does not possess the qualities of dominance associated with Arab masculinity. According to Tuqan, Ibrahim was "a man of broad vision, sympathetic and knowledgeable about the human soul, his view of the affair was fifty years ahead of his time. He didn't interfere nor did he impose his will on Yusuf, who was a severe man. He just showered with me with loving kindness" (57). When Ibrahim sees an eager student in the 13-year-old Fadwa, he begins to teach her classical poetry. The chapters following this incident change tone

from a melancholic and secluded narrator to an elated and happy child. He was the "psychological healer" and "Ibrahim's hand was the lifeline let down to pull me up out of the desolate, enveloping darkness of my personal well" (54).

Tuqan emphasizes the vividness of rebirth by describing how temporality and space shifted when Ibrahim starts mentoring her. A defining moment occurs when Ibrahim gifts Tuqan her own green exercise notebook to write poetry. Breaking the prose of the autobiographical narrative, Tuqan writes:

> Name – Fadwa Tuqan
>
> Class – (I crossed out this word, writing in its place: Teacher – Ibrahim Tuqan)
>
> Subject – Learning Poetry
>
> School – The House
>
> These were not just words to me; they were suns and moons. Before them, my life had come to a standstill, not moving with time. I had not known what to do with it. Now, here was a life in motion, its pace quickening, giving me the feeling of restored self-confidence. How marvelous is the first step, how beautiful, how entrancing. I felt as light as a bird. No longer was my heart weighed down with grief and boredom. In one moment the mountain of ignominy had disappeared. The spaces of the future stretched in its place, bright with sunshine, vast and green like wheat-fields in spring. (58-59)

This is a significant moment in the autobiographical narrative when both spatial and temporal markers shift. For example, she states that through this home schooling "I was returning to my lost paradise" (58). Not only is she regaining a sense of herself as a successful student, she is also stating that the "mountain" of disgrace has lifted. She is no longer relying on external judgement

to define her self. Furthermore, by crossing out "home" she is placing herself back into a place where she flourishes and is productive. Tuqan, here, is not only reframing conventional understanding of school in the public sphere to fit her constrained life, she is also challenging the constraints of that life itself.

This break in prose is different from the quotations of historians and travelogues. Here, Tuqan breaks the prose to introduce a new mode of developing, the pupil who is becoming a poet. This reference to the heartbreaking carceral existence of a thirteen-year-old and her resurrected joy in education and literature is where we find the first explicit mention of the main character's name. It is the first instance where the narrator names herself, the main character of her own text. This moment of self-naming also comes late in the autobiographical narrative, leaving the "autobiographical pact" incomplete until the narrator feels the confidence to claim a semblance of self, the poet, and to name it. Through this moment of learning, the narrator now acquires a name. By embarking on a poetic path, Tuqan develops her poetic identity. The gift of the notebook from Ibrahim marks the beginning of the Fadwa Tuqan as the poet and as the character of her own narration.

The shift in narrative's temporality underscores the importance of rebirth. For example, after Ibrahim's first lesson, Tuqan states: "Putting all my misery and defeat behind me, I began living the future in the present that Ibrahim had turned into green meadows and promising fields of ripe grain. I could see the coming harvest in my daydreams. I could now anticipate time on the wings of a dream" (62). Tuqan returns again to the metaphor of the seed in the first pages of the autobiography, linking all these beginnings and births together. Tuqan's intertextual self-(re)birth is contingent upon claiming the beginning of her autobiographical, poetic, and creative journey.

Tuqan's narration of Ibrahim as her mentor into poetry places him as a father figure. When she describes his death, she states that "something inside me broke. The agony of orphan hood overwhelmed me" (103). Tuqan attributes her "psychological rebirth and the development" (67) not only to his instructions but also because of his affection to her as a child. The reason this specific severance of biological lineage affects her deeply is because this was a connection that was built on love and affection. She felt that being brought back to belong to the line of the family was done through affect and not the primacy of the bloodline.

Tuqan's narrates her rebirth as a process that occurs through literary engagement. She mentions that her name, Fadwa, is not a family tradition, but the name of a heroine extracted from a novel. She also claims the poetic figures of Dananeer and Al-Khansa' as not only inspirations that ignited her poetic voice, but also as alter egos under which she would publish her early poetry in magazines to avoid her family's criticism (73-74). Both Al-Khansa' and Dananeer are narrated as subversive and significant feminist figures in classical Arabic poetry. As Ibrahim instructs her through the process of creating her poetic lineage. The first poem he instructs her to learn is an elegy by Al-Khansa' ("A Woman Laments Her Brother"). Al-Khansa' is a 7th century female poet famously known for her elegiac poems to for her brothers. Tuqan even dedicates a section of the autobiographical prose to quote the poem to highlight this poem's importance in the narrative. Ibrahim then tells her that she needs to know that Arab women know and have written beautiful poetry: "I chose this poem for you so you could see how Arab women write beautiful poetry" (58).

Tuqan then begins to narrate a genealogical line of female poets who have not only inspired her, but also create a community with her. Tuqan's initiation into writing poetry is a process of being introduced and establishing a feminist literary line. By connecting with avant-

garde poet Nazik Al-Malaika, she is able to assert her self as writing in free verse and part of the Arabic modernist poetry movement. Tuqan also has the courage to connect with Iraqi female poet Rabab Al-Kazimi. For Tuqan, Rabab "became the high ideal I strove to reach. The emotional impression, and the deep psychological effect her picture made on me, had much to do with directing my thoughts towards poetry, even before I was sentenced to forced confinement in the house" (60). The first poem she credits as being written without metrical or grammatical error was an elegy dedicated to Rabab's father. Tuqan's rebirth as a poet happens as a process of writing about death. The starting points of establishing her rebirth paradoxically happen when she perfects the elegiac form. It is through narrating Ibrahim's mentoring and later his death that Tuqan is able to establish her poetic lineage. Tuqan establishes a poetic lineage through a paradoxical process that narrates rebirth in death.

Establishing a poetic lineage in the autobiography enables Tuqan to narrate the creation of a community in the text. She pays tribute to the history of female poets who came before her. It is a documentation of a feminist influence that highlights the models whose work to which Tuqan aspires. These female poets are an inspiration and ideal that is concrete in history. It is also through this poetic lineage that Tuqan finds a source that breaks her writer's block. When we reach the end of Tuqan's autobiographical journey, we are confronted with another crisis, the Six Day War of 1967. Although Tuqan wrote the autobiographical narrative in the late 1970s, she ends at this moment of national crisis. At this point, Tuqan has established herself as a poet of resistance, traveling to the villages of Palestine, meeting refugees, and writing poetry with Mahmoud Darwish and Nizar Qabbani. Tuqan makes a deliberate point to narrate her involvement in the movement of resistance and her recognition amongst her peers as essential to establishing her lineage in a creative family. However, up until this point, Tuqan states that she

was still anxious about her political poetry because she feared claiming the political sphere of men. Her response is to ventriloquize Ibrahim: "I tried to clothe myself in Ibrahim's poetical robes and to imitate him by writing patriotic verse" (71). In the last chapter of the autobiography, titled "Diary Entries from 1966-1967," Tuqan reaches an impasse and suffers from writer's block. Tuqan writes: "another month has gone by and I have written nothing… silence… continual silence… however, it is a conscious silence, aware and vigilant, not a silence of absence and emptiness" (191).

This companion of silence is different from the silence of 1948. Now, the conditions of living in Palestine mirror the living conditions she endures as a woman. Whereas the 1948 anxiety of authorship around political verse occurs in response to her conflict with her father, a symbol of the patriarchal bloodline, Tuqan's embrace of the emergence of her political consciousness in '67 happens when the political becomes intensely personal. Both men and women are exposed to the vulnerabilities of spatial confinement. It is her experience of oppression under patriarchy that enables her to understand the multiple dimensions of colonial occupation. This shift connects the personal and political away from the exclusive influence of the father; oppression, at this moment of self-silence, carries intersectional connections that she is able to materially experience and use to connect with others. She writes in her diaries of the defeat of the nation: "the Arab lands have been humiliated" (190). The autobiographical narrative reaches a point where no lineage can continue, there is no opportunity to continue the family line or the Palestinian national line of the land, and in this inability to write poetry, she finds herself creatively cut off from herself. What enables the continuation of a creative lineage happens in the 1966-1967 "Diary." The voice of Lebanese singer Fairuz singing for the Palestinian cause and to the refugees inspires Tuqan to write again and to join the collective:

"when I hear her songs about my country, my emotions rise and glow" (185). Here, she is inspired to join the movement not because she is alienated from men's political discourse. Rather, in finding inspiration from Fairuz, a female counterpart, she establishes an alliance and creates a political genealogy from a feminine voice. Finally, we see how "the chain of silence has been broken; I have written five poems. I feel somewhat at ease. I shall write, I shall write a lot. I feel I have been for some time living moment by moment in a drama, moved by every act in it. All of a sudden I, myself, am a poem, burning with anguish, dejected, hopeful, looking beyond the horizon!" (191). Tuqan directs her own line of poetic genealogy away from her brother, and to a fellow woman. The creation of her self as poem happens from a connection of solidarity, rather than alienation.

In conclusion, Tuqan's complicated narration resists fixed structural forms of self-narration. It reinvents the autobiographical form to fit her life choices while exposing, at the same time, the limits and restrictions of the classical autobiographical genre. The autobiography thus carries a political weight in the ways it exposes vulnerabilities to multiple forms of oppression. Tuqan's autobiography presents us with a voice that rejects the primacy and rigidity of the family unit and it opens up ways for Arab female writers to reconceptualize their lives. As a feminist project, finding and creating a genealogy outside the biological confines of embodiment is critical and it manifests in an autobiographical narrative in Tuqan's case. Tuqan's autobiography attests to how Arab women have adapted means of self-narration and reinvent them to fit their own life stories. This autobiography provides a complex representation of Tuqan's life; it resists the imposition of a singular identity and provides multifaceted imaginaries of personal and political life narration.

CHAPTER TWO: Spatiality and Embodiment as Theorizing Autobiographical Subjectivity in Fatima Mernissi's *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*

While in my previous chapter I discuss Tuqan's articulation of alternative feminist agency by deconstructing linearity in narration, here, I turn to the ways in which Mernissi organizes her autobiographical narrative around spatial linearity. In this chapter, I turn specifically to the ways in which a narration of the autobiographical subject in Arab Muslim women's texts explores spatial rhetorics. I focus on Fatima Mernissi's autobiography *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1994) to highlight the ways in which she narrates the autobiographical development of her younger self through a discourse of spatiality and embodiment. I argue that Mernissi's use of spatialized discourse enables her both to highlight how gendered and colonial power relations are maintained and are operating by ordering specific meanings of space and embodiment. Mernissi's autobiography not only presents an autobiographical subject who is acutely aware of the spatial orderings of her life in a harem, but also how women in the harem deftly and subtly negotiate and challenge relations of power by embodying and envisioning different spatialities.

I begin this chapter with a focus on how Mernissi's narrative trajectory follows a spatial orientation of history. By centering the main question of the autobiography "what is a harem?", I turn to explore how Mernissi provides multiple interpretations of how power draws lines/*hudud* around women's bodies (territorial, codified behavior, and moral). I argue that Mernissi narrates an autobiographical subject who learns and employs *spatial thinking* in the ways she develops her feminist consciousness. I specifically emphasize the ways in which Mernissi narrates

experiences of the body to highlight how formations of space affect and inform the production of the autobiographical subject.

My reading of *Dreams of Trespass* traces discourses of spatiality within the text to explore how theorizing the territoriality of power affects and produces an autobiographical subject. I am interested in the particular ways in which Mernissi provides nuanced context to theorize power and oppression—and therefore women's bodies—through the analytic of space. How are borders and liminal spaces used to understand gender, bodies, voice, and language? In what follows, I want to focus on the ways in which the autobiography, and Mernissi's in particular, has become a genre that is subverted through the discursive memory of space. How does a theory of power through space get to be articulated in an autobiographical voice? What does that mean to the process of narrating an autobiographical subject?

My analysis of Mernissi's autobiography builds upon questions that feminist literary theorists Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson ask in their book *Reading Autobiography* (2010) with regards to spatialization and autobiography studies. Smith and Watson argue that "emplacement, as the juncture from which self-articulation issues, foregrounds the notions of location and subject position, both concepts that are inescapably spatial" (43). By providing a survey of autobiographical works that center spatiality in narration, Smith and Watson maintain that considering location in life-writing not only opens up ways of understanding identity in relation to place, but also to understanding the autobiographical subject's orientation and political positionality. For Smith and Watson, the narration of the autobiographical subject, in many ways entails a narration of relationships to space as material place, of the social dynamics of spaces, of the geopolitical boundaries of space, and even of memory as archival space.

Furthermore, my analysis of Mernissi's autobiography echoes the scholarship of Lindsey Moore in her book, *Arab, Muslim, Woman: Voice and Vision in Postcolonial Literature and Film* (2008) in which she focuses on how Arab and Muslim women deploy vision and voice as transforming discursive paradigms that are produced about them (1). Specifically, Moore offers a theoretical framework that resists in advance a hermeneutical approach to the creative works of Arab Muslim woman. Moore proposes an "overarching poetics of the threshold" (16). According to Moore, these poetics of the threshold resist a teleological continuum where feminism is treated as a process that Arab or Muslim women strive to "come out" as. Rather, she pays special attention to the sartorial, temporal, historical, spatial, and transnational threshold motifs generated *within* creative work (16). In particular, my analysis of Mernissi's autobiography builds upon Moore's analysis of how Arab women re-imagine the politics of the "home" in their cultural production. Exploring spatial thematics in Arab women's creative practices, Moore argues that "Arab Muslim women use 'situated knowledges' to transform marginal social spaces into heterotopic, palimpsestic, and *threshold* locations" (emphasis in original 127).

Both Moore and Smith and Watson's claims to highlight the spatial rhetorics of autobiographical narration is especially important when reading Mernissi's earliest book, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (1975). Published a decade after Morocco gained its independence from France, this sociological research studies the contradiction of new gender dynamics in a postcolonial state that still operated under a Muslim ideology of sexuality. I refer to this Mernissi text to highlight one of her earliest attempts to explain sexuality in Islam through analytics of spatiality as a mode of understanding the separation of gendered bodies. Mernissi states: "Muslim sexuality is a territorial one, i.e., a sexuality whose regulatory mechanisms consist primarily of a strict allocation of space to each

sex and an elaborate ritual for resolving the contradictions arising from the inevitable interferences between spaces" (81). Through an investigation of early Muslim ideology, Mernissi illustrates how women in Islam are viewed as active and powerful sexual beings and the relationship between power and sexuality in Muslim ideology is a spatial-territorial one that requires a strict division between the space of the Umma (men's–public–space) and the women's (domestic–private–space). From her early work, Mernissi's conception of these spatial divisions around women's sexuality and power is introduced through *hudud* (trans. boundaries, lines, frontiers). As I will illustrate in this chapter, it is in her autobiography that Mernissi elaborates on the concept of *hudud* to elucidate its multiple dimensions through not only a Muslim context, but through a colonial perspective. I therefore argue that Mernissi's autobiographical narrative becomes a site for exploring the development of her past self, but also a textual site through which an autobiographical narrative becomes a transgressive and political space for theoretical intervention. Thus, reading *Dreams of Trespass* alongside her earliest work, I argue that Mernissi provides a theoretical intervention for understanding Muslim women's sexuality and the territorial aspect of power through an autobiographical narrative.

Activist, sociologist, and Islamic feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi was born in Fez, Morocco in 1940. As Morocco was transitioning from a French Protectorate to an independent state, Mernissi experienced both a traditional religious education as well as formal "secular" education promoted by the nationalist movement. Mernissi would go on to study political science at the Sorbonne in Paris, France in 1957 (Shelton 324). She obtained her PhD in sociology from Brandies University in 1974 ("Featured Alumni"). She returned to work in Rabat, Morocco as a lecturer and researcher in Mohammed V University until her passing in 2015. While her first book, *Beyond the Veil,* focuses on the spatial dynamics of Muslim women's sexuality, her

second book solidified her status as an Islamic feminist with a turn to focus on interrogating and revising canonical hadiths of the Prophet that popularly circulate to justify sexism and misogyny against Muslim women. In *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1988), Mernissi famously argues that "not only have the sacred texts always been manipulated, but manipulation of them is a structural characteristic of the practice of power in Muslim societies" (8). Revising the canonical Islamic texts that have been misinterpreted and used to subordinate women by the benefiting male elite, Mernissi maintains that Islam was a feminism revolution for pre-Islam Mecca that invited equality (cooke 205). Furthermore, Mernissi juxtaposes the Prophet's modest lifestyle with that of the extravagant Caliphs to highlight class as a primary intersecting analytic in understanding Muslim women's seclusion and veiling practices.

Dreams of Trespass is an autobiography that focuses on Mernissi's childhood growing up in a harem in her hometown of Fez, Morocco in the 1940's. Structurally, the journey of the young child to becoming a young teenager is told through episodic Shahrazadian vignettes. The main plot revolves around the young narrator's questioning of the gender and colonial dynamics of power governing her life in the harem. As the child narrator maneuvers her way in the spaces of the harem, she is met with different expectations based on her gender. The narrative ends when young Fatima experiences a sexist encounter with her cousin and she understands the gendered aspect of this discrimination after having talked to the multiple women of the harem who shape her skills of critical thinking. Mernissi narrates and emphasizes the multiple and diverse voices of women who shape young Fatima's feminist consciousness. The text makes a political statement by prioritizing the tales and voices of the harem as a formative collective in the young child's upbringing. All the women in the narrative, whether involved in subversive

action towards the patriarchal limits of the harem or not, leave an imprint on Fatima, the young narrator. They impart their past onto her as a way of imagining and realizing the "nationalist dream" of the educated and free Moroccan woman (64). It is a narrative that repeatedly stresses the significance of women's solidarity and highlights the indigeneity of feminist politics in Arab-Islamic contexts.

Attempting to understand the power dynamics governing the space of the harem, Mernissi presents the young narrator as constantly surrounded by women who lift her and encourage her curiosity to critique the practice of women's seclusion. Her mother, for example, demonstrates to the young narrator the audacity of rebellion against the harem's codes of conduct, teaches her how to develop the muscles for happiness to always squeeze "one hundred percent happiness" out of her situation (81). Her cousin Chama, the teenage rebel, acts out plays about Arab feminists and always looks for ways to escape out of the harem gate. Her wise grandmother Yasmina, who is resourceful and lives on an unwalled "farm" harem with 8 co-wives, calls for an egalitarian Islam. Her Aunt Habiba, divorced and shy, instills subtle subversion in Fatima with her stories and imagination. And Mina, kidnapped as a child and forced into slavery, comes to live in the harem as an old woman with dignity and becomes part of Fatima's family. These women impart onto the young Fatima their own concepts of spatial thinking that analyze oppression, power, and freedom.

Dreams of Trespass is also the story of Fatima's navigation of the parameters of her friendship with her male cousin Samir. While growing up together, the text shows how they ask similar questions but receive different answers. The narrative illustrates the emergence of gender differences and the boundaries and limitations governing Fatima and Samir. Through her incessant questioning, young Fatima is obsessively preoccupied with understanding territorial

and codified lines of power. At its center, the narrative follows young Fatima as she tries to understand the spatial dynamics of the institution of the harem. On a grander scale, exposing these dynamics becomes a window for Mernissi to highlight relations of power in patriarchy, religion, and colonialism.

In many ways, Mernissi's narrative represents the harem as a space that oppresses women, but which is also a homosocial space that fosters community and a collective subversive consciousness. Narrated through the point of view of a young child, the main quest of this autobiographical journey is to resolve the contradictions arising from introducing a modernity of nationalist movements enmeshed with a colonial ideology of gender equality. Mernissi overlaps this critique with the continued presence of the "old" ways of upholding practices of women's seclusion. The young narrator presents a community of women who foster in her an indigenous sense of collective feminist consciousness through solidarity. In asking "what is a harem?" to the men and women who surround the young child, Mernissi presents an autobiographical subject who is acutely aware and inquisitive of the spatial dynamics of power governing the bodies of women in the harem.

In what follows, I argue that Mernissi presents intersecting systems of power (patriarchy, nationalism, colonialism, and religion) in the first lines of her narrative to create a spatial framework that informs the narrative trajectory of the autobiography. While *Dreams of Trespass* seems to begin in a conventional manner, in actuality, it remaps and subverts the autobiographical genre by underscoring the spatial dimensions of autobiographical memory. With the generic "I was born…" statement, readers anticipate a traditional, classical autobiographical narrative. However, the first sentence does not take us into a genealogy of the

family as one might expect. Rather, the narrative begins with offering a location, as if giving map coordinates:

> I was born in a harem in 1940 in Fez, a ninth century Moroccan city some five thousand kilometers west of Mecca, and one thousand kilometers south of Madrid, one of the dangerous capitals of the Christians. The problems with the Christians start, said Father, as with women, when the *hudud* or sacred frontier, is not respected. I was born in the midst of chaos, since neither Christians nor women accepted the frontiers. (1)

Right from the beginning, Mernissi's narrator measures her distance from centers of power. It is a weighted history that is imparted onto young Fatima, and to the reader, as it is one of colonial contact and of religious difference. By using the language of spatiality and distances, Mernissi narrates the autobiographical subjects through a process of a defamiliarization of "history" as she changes the established frames of reference (Moore 116). The narrative contextualizes this memory not only in terms of familial genealogy, but also in relation to the weight of religious and colonial effects. Indeed, the autobiographical narrative will proceed with constant oscillations between what Mecca (religion) and Madrid (colonial intervention) represent to the men and women of the harem. While the distance is far, thousands of kilometers, the utterance of this spatial tie to those symbolic locations implies a continuing, overarching relationship between the influence of religion and colonialism on the life narrative of the young narrator. Furthermore, by remapping of the world of young Fatima around Fez, Mernissi is able to underline the city's significance to Morocco's history and to her national identity. Mernissi presents a Morocco that has undergone repetitive forms of colonial encounters, first with the Arabs, then the Spanish, and later the French. It was in Fez, in 1912, that Morocco was signed over to become a French Protectorate that was theoretically "independent" but still economically and politically

dominated by the French (Berman 207). Thus, Mernissi places Fez (and the harem) as the center of a world that is surrounded and influenced by the locations of Mecca and Madrid. Fez is a religious city. It is a colonized city. It is a city with an identity that has been changed from an independent place of nationalist resistance to become half of the new French colonial attachment labeled the Ville Nouvelle. With her introductory statement, therefore, Mernissi stresses the importance of temporally-specific place to the ongoing narrative of autobiography.

This autobiographical narrative beginning becomes a central space of orienting the trajectory of the autobiographical subject's journey. This beginning moment of autobiographical narrative locates the reader between two forces, religion and colonialism, orients its main character and narrator as not only entrapped between the two but also resisting the back-and-forth pull between these encroaching influences. What we read is young Fatima's constant reorientation of her sense of self between what religion proscribes and what colonialism "offers." The nationalists, for example, represented in the voice of Fatima's father, see the discourse of gender equality and emancipation as a foreign colonialist imposition. Mernissi's narration of the native voices of women suggests that colonialism does not indeed "offer" women's liberation, and that the young narrator encounters indigenous forms of feminist politics. This is important when we follow young Fatima's lines of questioning, wondering, and theorizing, "what is a harem?" This central question of the narrative, the question upon which rests the narrative trajectory of "growing up" and becoming a woman/adolescent, is one where she will encounter the spatial lines that separate and emphasize gender difference. Therefore, encountering lines, the *hudud*, or, "sacred frontiers," means getting a deeper understanding of how power operates.

And so it is no coincidence that it is in the very first paragraph of the autobiography that readers encounter the recurring concept of the *hudud*, the sacred frontier, that young Fatima's

father is obsessed with enforcing. While calling for separation and clarity in the division of Muslim and Christian spaces (a sea divides Morocco from Spain as a God-drawn line), the father declares women as the crux of the many ways in which the boundaries are drawn. With the first lines of the autobiographical narrative, Mernissi brings to light how the borders of the nation are drawn upon the bodies of women.

Mernissi introduces the concept of *hudud* as the main framework of theoretical inquiry for young Fatima. It is the structure from which her lines of questioning stem. Young Fatima's main concern throughout the text is to figure out what the harem is in all its complexities so that she can find ways to escape. From the very beginning of the narrative, Mernissi explains that *hudud* are the sacred frontiers, moral dictates. These sanctions are imprinted upon her by young Fatima's father, her traditional teacher Lalla Tam, and the matriarch of the family, Lalla Mani. Time and time again, the *hudud* are emphasized as lines that must not be crossed.

Translated from Arabic, *hudud* is the plural of *hadd*. This term literally means limits, but it can also mean boundaries, borders, frontiers, and confines. *Hudud* also has its roots in Islamic jurisprudence, which emphasizes the heavy imprint of Islamic tradition in the very use of the term. In the Quran, *hudud* are mentioned as "God's limits," and transgressing them entails an appropriately "divine" punishment (Quran *Albaqarah* 187 and 229). Mernissi references this in *Dreams of Trespass* and explains through the voice of her Koranic teacher how *hudud* delineate what is *halal* (permissible) and what is *haram* (forbidden) (61). While there are laws in Islam that are open to contemporary interpretation (*ijtihad*), the *hudud* are divinely set. In addition to their spatial meaning, the *Fiqh*[4] term of *hadd* also means the actual punishment for such a

[4] *Fiqh* is the theory or philosophy of Islamic law, based on teachings of the Quran and traditions/*hadith* of the Prophet Mohammed.

transgression: for example, the term serves as both a descriptor of the *hadd* of thievery and the *hadd* of cutting hands. Defining God's *hudud* means defining what is criminal in society. *Hudud*, then, is a concept that narrates religious morality as a form of spatiality. The use of *hudud* in *Dreams of Trespass* is generally interpreted as a spatial term (borders and lines on a map, boundaries of the house, and rules of conduct, etc.), and I argue that Mernissi uses the term for its double meaning as a Koranic reference.

In the process of having the narrator ask questions about the *hudud*, Mernissi is also deconstructing the concept of the harem. As I will illustrate in my reading, Mernissi's use of the word "harem" is strategic and purposeful not only to deconstruct Orientalist tropes but also to explore the spatial dynamics of power that govern Arab-Muslim women's bodies in private spaces. In the autobiographical narrative, Mernissi provides copious footnotes regarding the historical context of the harem. She oscillates between the voice of the child narrator and the scholarly voice of an academic historian to explain the institutionalization of this domestic space. First, Mernissi tells us that the word "harem" connotes in Arabic both a territorial aspect as well as a genealogical one: "the word 'harem,' [Yasmina] said, was a slight variation of the word *haram*, the forbidden, the proscribed. It was the opposite of *halal*, the permissible" (61). It is a "forbidden" space as well as a familial line of women that is forbidden to the patriarch and thus should be protected by him: "harem was the place where a man sheltered his family, his wife or wives, and children and relatives. It could be a house or a tent, and it referred both to the space and to the people lived within it" (61). By having the narrator examine the linguistic roots of the word, Mernissi underscores how women's bodies are discursively spatially bound and territorialized in religious and patriarchal practices.

Second, Mernissi understands the symbolic significance of the "harem" in colonial discourse and explains the difference between the orientalist depictions and the historical manifestations of the harem as imperial spaces and domestic ones that are essentially about control (34-35). A long footnote, for example, provides a historical survey to how imperial harems grew as a territorial demonstration of accumulative wealth in the Muslim imperial dynasties of the Omayyads in Damascus and later the Ottomans in Turkey (34). Mernissi then explains that the continued practice of the "domestic harems" after 1909, "when Muslims lost their power and their territories were occupied and colonized" (34) carried quite a bourgeois dimension: "What defines a harem is not polygamy, but the men's desire to seclude their wives, and their wish to maintain an extended household rather than break into nuclear units" (35). The "domestic harem" described in this autobiography, for example, is not a luxurious space and has no mention of eunuchs or reclining indolent women. Mernissi presents the space of the harem as a communal home where women are not idle and libidinous, but as constantly working to change the circumstances of their lives. Contrasting this version with the orientalist imagination of the harem, Mernissi describes her home as "quite dull" (35). Thus, through the autobiographical narrative, Mernissi describes the overlapping internal and external processes that have defined the harem as a concept and an institution that governs women's bodies.

Third, Mernissi shifts the narrative to the point of view of women living in the harem space to provide their own understanding of the harem as system of "codes of conduct" that surround them even as they transgress to the public spaces of men. Her grandmother, Yasmina, for example, who lives on an open farm type of harem, explains to the young child that "Mecca, the holy city, was also called Haram. Mecca was a space where behavior was strictly codified. The moment you stepped inside, you were bound by many laws and regulations" (61). The

women in the harem understand that private space is also carried with them when they are outside and what allows them to transgress those territorial boundaries is the practice of the *hijab* that allows for the private space of the body to still be in a "harem" that regulates their behavior. Mernissi presents the women in her autobiography as intuitively aware of the harem's hudud as not only territorial, but as codes of behavior that represent intersecting systems of power.

Throughout the autobiography, Mernissi makes sure that the characters not only feel the imprint of *hudud* but also makes a point to illustrate how each person explains the term differently according to their frames of reference. *Hudud* is a concept defined differently according to each character's position of privilege and framework. When the father defines the harem, he defines its *hudud* as spatial borders. It is a territorial understanding that marks the spatial boundaries of patriarchal property. Lalla Tam, the teacher, defines *hudud* as religious moral instructions thus transforming the territorial aspect into a religious moral code. The grandmother, Yasmina, on the other hand, defines the *hudud* as social codes that can be practiced and carried outside the boundaries of the harem. After young Fatima's father explains the Christians' (i.e., colonials') infringement upon the sacred frontiers of the land (Morocco), her cousin, Samir, explains that an enforcement of the frontiers needs only soldiers, and that "in the landscape itself, nothing changes. The frontier is in the mind of the powerful" (3). Here, Samir's conceptualization of *hudud* is formed in a secular framework and stands in contrast to *hudud* as the boundaries and measure of religious morality.

Young Fatima eventually becomes unsatisfied with these different interpretations of how power is organized because the *hudud*/lines decreed upon her female body and mind are much more complex and require different skills to sift through. She cannot physically go on trips with the male grownups to look at "the frontiers" that are represented on a map, for example. She has

to understand them conceptually. Young Fatima then is instructed in her schooling about the definition of the frontier:

> Education is to know the *hudud*, the sacred frontiers, said Lalla Tam, the headmistress at the Koranic school where I was sent at age three to join my ten cousins. […] To be a Muslim was to respect the *hudud*. And for a child, to respect the *hudud* was to obey. […] But since then, looking for the frontier has become my life's occupation. *Anxiety eats at me whenever I cannot situate the geometric line organizing my powerlessness.* (my emphasis 3)

Essentially, this is the quest of the narrative: to try to understand and think through the parameters that organize spaces, and how, by extension, power is organized. Trying to figure out what the harem is or what the *hudud* are is an attempt to figure out how the self and subjectivity are molded and (re)created within the confines of limitations.

Trying to ameliorate the anxiety of unknowing, young Fatima asks her grandmother Yasmina, who lives on an open farm harem, what the *hudud* are. Fatima receives a different answer than from the didactic instruction of her teacher and her father. Yasmina explains that lines of power are invisible: "any space you entered had its own invisible rules, and you needed to figure them out. And when I say space, it can be any space – a courtyard, a terrace, or a room, or even the street for that matter" (62). Here, Yasmina respects and engages with the thought process of the child. Young Fatima is the one who has to figure out the rules of conduct and how "unfortunately, most of the time, the *qa'ida* [trans. the rule/foundation] is against women" (62). Yasmina theorizes the invisible boundaries created by power, and in doing so, contrasts the vague and rigid instructions that comes from men and which has been imposed onto the child. She offers her own indigenous theory that opens a space of critical engagement and re-

interpretation. She enables Fatima to see that *she* is the one who figures out where and how power draws lines of governing and therefore *she* is the one who chooses whether to obey, or to uncover spaces of subversion.

Making sure that this explanation of power and oppression does not stifle the young protagonist in her quest, Yasmina highlights opportunities for subversion. Explaining the parameters of the traditional harem to a young girl, and her grandfather's implication in slavery and polygamy, Yasmina ensures that young Fatima does not get discouraged. Yasmina stresses to young Fatima that a search for happiness is imperative, despite all the invisible lines of power surrounding her. She describes to Fatima the search for happiness, saying, "figuring out who has *sulta* (power) over you is the first step, that information is basic. But after that, you need to shuffle the cards, confuse the roles. […] Life is a game, look at it that way, and you can laugh at the whole thing. *Sulta*, authority, games" (153). The young girl's confusion and anxiety over the *hudud* is somewhat abated because Yasmina's instructions remove the sense of defeat and finality. Instead, Yasmina offers her a critical lens with which to look at the world, one that emphasizes Fatima's agency, playfulness, and subversion. Even if Yasmina's actual situation came out of a compromise of happiness, she offers it to young Fatima as a possible *solution*. Yasmina reroutes the young girl's quest from figuring out what the harem is to figuring out what makes her happy. This is a mission that reorients her life's trajectory.

By explaining frontiers as essentially invisible lines of power, Yasmina instills in young Fatima a sense of analysis and a drive to interrogate how power and oppression are systematic in her world. On multiple occasions in the narrative, instances of gender and racial discrimination are revealed to young Fatima as structural and working together and they are articulated in spatial language. To simplify these concepts for a "child's mind," the women of the harem

always explain them in spatial terms that use the familiar concept of city borders akin to the Fez Medina and Ville Nouvelle. For example, both Mina and young Fatima inquire about the nature of American race politics when they query why Americans are in Casablanca (186). Aunt Habiba explains to them "Americans did not intermarry. Instead, they kept the races separate. Their cities were divided into two medinas, one for the blacks, and one for the whites, like we had in Fez for the Muslims and the Jews" (184). Aunt Habiba also teaches them about the cultural history of resistance in Casablanca, in particular about Hussein Slaoui who wrote a sarcastic song "welcoming" the American soldiers, but which, in actuality, commented on their transgression of the "frontiers" of Moroccan identity ("The Blue-Eyed Guys Brought All Kinds of Blessings" 183). This concept of spatial infringement as explained to young Fatima connects the local fate of the character to a transnational framework. She comes to understand the violence of racial segregation as imposed and exhibited through space, and she connects it to her own *hudud* in and around Fez. As shown through the character of young Fatima, Mernissi demonstrates how the autobiographical subject practices spatial thinking and theorizes power early in an oppressive environment, and within that understanding, how one can work out the ability to connect and forge possible lines of solidarity.

Furthermore, Mernissi provides an additional commentary on *hudud* in relation to colonial power by having the young narrator work through the spatial differences between Fez and the French city of Ville Nouvelle. Starting from Fez as a location and with links to her identity, she explains the city's history of colonial encounters and in doing so, illustrates the centrality of her home, the harem. In a chapter called "The French Harem," Mernissi takes a closer look at the location of the house in relation to Fez as a city. We learn that the Mernissi harem lays at the threshold between the old Medina and the new French city. Giving the reader a

map of the city puts the important location of the harem in relation to colonialism into perspective. The narrative describes the house gate as "a gigantic stone arch with impressive carved wooden doors. It separated the women's harem from the male strangers walking in the streets. (Uncle and Father's honor and prestige depended on that separation, we were told)" (22). The Mernissi harem's gate, we learn, also "protected" the women from the foreigners standing outside in a "busy and dangerous frontier – one that separated our old city, the Medina, from the new French city, the Ville Nouvelle" (22). The harem stands at the borders of colonial encounter. It separates the native population from the colonial intruders. Placing the harem on the borderlands between the old Medina and the Ville Nouvelle symbolically represents the interlocking discursive systems of representation around women's bodies. This location emphasizes and highlights the *hudud* around women. Now, not only do the French pose a threat to Morocco as a nation, but as a violation of male privilege and patriarchal power. The Mernissi harem *is* the embodiment of a frontier that has been transgressed.

Using spatial analysis, we can see how this existence on the borderland provides the children in the harem with a view of how different the French are. We learn that the Ville Nouvelle is built on colonial anxiety. Its streets are very wide, as opposed to the narrow alleyways of the Medina, which scare the French soldiers. Mernissi states: "the French were afraid to walk. They were always in their cars. Even the soldiers would stay in their cars when things got bad" (23). The structure of the city shows how the streets are built for the purposes of separation. The French are always in cars, in contrast with the Medina where most people walk. This organization of the Ville Nouvelle spaces also allows for a clear separation of bodies. The soldiers rely on a separation of bodies in this new city for "safety" and where the wide streets allow for visual surveillance. We learn that everything is lit as opposed to the darkness of the

streets of the Medina. As explained through young Fatima, the French could not live in this new land without building their own "new city for themselves: they were afraid to live in ours" (23). Looking outside the harem gates, the child narrator learns early on that this infringement upon boundaries comes with a whole set of anxiety and fear. Young Fatima then attempts to draw connections between the imposed lines of power (*hudud*) of the French and the male adults in her life. She explains:

> Their fear [of the French soldiers] was quite an amazing thing to us children, because we saw that grownups could be as afraid as we could. And these grownups who were afraid were on the outside, supposedly free. The powerful ones who had created the frontier were also the fearful ones. The Ville Nouvelle was like their harem; just like women, they could not walk freely in the Medina. So you could be powerful, and still be the prisoner of a frontier. (23)

From this visual description of the Medina and the Ville Nouvelle, the narrator draws the topography of colonial power in between the Medina and the new colonial city. Young Fatima sees that adults are subject to the same *hudud* that are imposed on her. Yet she also notices and mentally grasps their anxiety by analyzing how they exercise their power spatially. Mernissi's spatial analysis of the colonial city illustrates the ways in which power always undermines itself, how the powerful are also trapped and weakened by the management and expression of their power. This also highlights the ways in which colonial projection structures the colonial psyche.

Young Fatima also notices how colonial *hudud* are not as invisible or conceptual as the ones drawn by her religious teacher. Here, we see how colonialism is structured through space and how it manifests in the literal control of mobility. Transgressing these *hudud* materializes as violence: "the French soldiers, who often looked so very young, afraid, and lonely at their posts,

terrorized the entire Medina. They had power and could hurt us" (23). Mernissi describes how the men of the harem always had to ask the French soldiers for permission to move. The young Fatima notices that and theorizes about double oppression. Mernissi mentions early in the narrative that the harem is not impervious to colonial violence. Fatima's mother explains how the children of the harem witnessed the traumatic event of the French soldiers' invasion of the Medina following King Mohammed V's 1944 demand for independence. While this history of the violent encounter is told in a simplified and "childish" voice, the horrors of colonial presence infiltrate through the "safe" space of the harem. I want to argue that this particular event is mentioned early in the autobiographical narrative to highlight not only the material manifestation of colonial transgression, but to stand as a narrative commentary of the parallel fate of women should they also transgress the harem boundaries. Mernissi is careful to draw connective lines that illuminate the workings of colonial transgression, gendered oppression and the narrative of national emergence.

Autobiographical narration of embodied experiences of space

Thinking through the ways in which Mernissi narrates different forms of spatiality in her autobiographical narrative, I want to focus on the ways in which constructed experiences of space are intimately embodied. In this section, I argue that Mernissi's autobiographical subject comes to conceptualize the self within these *hudud* through an embodied phenomenology. I focus on examples where Mernissi narrates an exploration of spatial experience that is intimately felt through narrating the autobiographical subject's embodied phenomenological experience. By embodiment, I am referring to a methodology of thinking about the bodily experience that highlights materiality of the body, its sensual engagement with its spatial environment, and the

vulnerabilities and capabilities of the body to produce knowledge. I argue that Mernissi narrates an autobiographical subject that understands the body as a central framework to the spatiality of power in the harem.

There are several instances in *Dreams of Trespass* where Mernissi focuses on the tangible and sensual elements of skin and the body. Most importantly, Mernissi theorizes the body as located within a topography of spatial lines. In this autobiographical narrative about women's containment in a traditional harem, the body is not a mobile instrument that takes the character through life events. Rather, the "body" in *Dreams of Trespass* is a medium of knowledge and cognition. It is through the skin, for example, the body's first *hudud*, that Mernissi explores a subversion of power. In the following reading, I will stop at moments where the body becomes the main vehicle through which the autobiographical subject can understand and theorize relations of power in different spatialities.

I return to the first chapter of *Dreams of Trespass* where the narrative does not begin with a family genealogy, but by remapping autobiographical consciousness. After decentering the self in favor of a focus on the city of Fez, Mernissi narrows the point of view to focus on life in the harem. The narrative moves to deconstruct the harem not only as a social and historical construct, but also as a literal built structure that frames and shapes the autobiographical subject's embodied consciousness. By providing a description of the harem's architecture through the child's embodied experience of it, Mernissi presents an analysis of power relations that govern life in the harem space.

Following the description of the *hudud* of the city, Mernissi recounts a game that the young Fatima invents, *l-msaria b-lglass* (the seated game). One only need three things to play this game: "the first is to be stuck somewhere, the second is to have a place to sit, and the third is

to be in a humble state of mind, so you can accept that your time is worth nothing" (4). She goes on to describe what is actually being done: "the game consists in contemplating familiar grounds as if they were alien to you" (4). What is narrated afterwards is a detailed description of the architecture of the harem providing us with her views of the house.

First, we are told that we are sitting in the threshold of the house. The courtyard, the central open space, is presented to us as "a rigid square" where "symmetry rules everything" and details are controlled that "even the white marble fountain, forever bubbling in the courtyard center, seemed controlled and tamed" (4). The courtyard represents the foundation of the built structure, on which all the floors' inhabitants have a visual view. Marble columns surround the courtyard and "gigantic gates" shut off the salons. Not only do we get a description of the windows and the state of the wind and sunrays coming through in different seasons, but we get a glimpse of how the architecture and outside elements affect the narrator's body. In the corner of the courtyard is a set of stairs. This is important not only as an anchor of the architecture's structure, but also as a space of mobility and movement: "even grownups could play a sort of gigantic hide-and-go-seek" (5). The corners and the stairs are hidden and where the view is obstructed, rigid codes of behavior are somewhat relaxed.

Moving from the foundational structure, Mernissi lifts the point of view upwards. The architecture of the courtyard repeats itself in the two floors up. The narrator's gaze points upward to reveal how the sky is "hanging up above but still strictly square shaped" by the structure of the house (5). Mernissi writes:

> Looking up at the sky from the courtyard was an overwhelming experience. At first, it looked tame because of the manmade square frame. But then the movement of the early

> morning stars, fading slowly in the deep blue and white, became so intense that it could make you dizzy. (5)

Mernissi narrates how the child's body experiences the architecture of the harem in a relationship that contrasts with the untenable outside sky. Lindsey Moore, in her exploration of spatial thematics in Arab women's literature, points out that the rigidity of architecture reframes the sky as representing the "unlimited potential of outdoors" (120). The narrator is aware that the built structure is aimed at directing the visual gaze of its inhabitants in guided ways, as well as how its square "manmade" framing is meant to "tame" the natural sky. Fatima notices how the architecture of the courtyard, with its rigid symmetry, domesticates even the water of the fountain, which becomes "controlled and tamed" (4). Control is not only exercised in placing women's bodies inside the harem, but also its architecture is meant to regulate embodied experience towards nature and the outside.

The detailed description of the harem's architecture goes on to list who lives where, which floors are occupied by whom, who has access to certain rooms, who holds the keys to the doors, and who gets to move freely within the confines of the harem. This description of the building depicts the power relations of the household. Young Fatima comments on the correlation of power to the allocation of physical space. For example, her uncle, who is the first born, richer than Fatima's father, and effectively the patriarch of the household, has a bigger immediate family and therefore is "entitled to more elaborate living quarters" (5). Young Fatima's mother protests this inequality and the uncle acquiesces by moving some of his children to the top floors. The uncle had to "unscrupulously respect" an equal arrangement (at least on the surface) because, as Mernissi comments: "the more power you have, the more generous you ought to be. […] Power need not manifest itself blatantly" (6).

Mernissi's description importantly grounds the autobiographical subject's consciousness in an embodied experience of space. Young Fatima learns about power relations and hierarchy through an analysis of architectural space. Each floor holds a patriarch and his family. The higher the floor, the less power in the social order one has. Once the narrator's view reaches the top floor, we learn that it is where the forgotten women live. For example, Aunt Habiba, "the divorced woman," and Mina, "the former slave" "occupied a maze of small rooms" (16). We learn that power was centered on the ground, the foundation. Lalla Mani, the paternal grandmother and strict upholder of tradition, lives on the ground floor near the courtyard. As the gaze turns upwards to the top floors, the rigidity begins to give way. These spaces, furthest from the courtyard, reflect the distribution of power of those who are marginalized in society. The sociality of those upper spaces often value and incite subversion ("the forbidden terrace"). Young Fatima learns how power is located in different spaces through this exercise of architectural defamiliarization.

Mernissi narrates the autobiographical subject's experience of "the forbidden terrace" as a formative by understanding the space of the terrace as hosting social practices of subversion. The forbidden terrace, we learn, is a place where "officially, men were not allowed; it was the women's territory" (189). The forbidden terrace is located on the top floor "as the very ceiling of Aunt Habiba's room" (147). With no stairs leading to it, climbing onto a makeshift ladder heightened the danger and transgression that women had to go through to access an open terrace with no walls. The child associates this space as a place of mischief and contemplation. It was where the troubled women of the house went when they had *hamm* (depression). It is also where Chama the cousin enacts her feminist theater plays and where she re-enacts with the children "the 1919 women's street march" (131). At "a key moment in the buildup of Chama's plot that

allowed almost everyone to invade the stage" (131), the children and adults became equally silly and participated in their own entertainment and story-making in that space. The forbidden terrace is also a place for teenagers and women to do forbidden things; smoke cigarettes where "the entire operation had to be performed without making a sound, as if pleasure had paralyzed your tongue" (182), where boys flirt with the neighbors' girls on rooftops, where the children as direct questions about being enclosed in the harem. The forbidden terrace was the reversal of the *haram*/forbidden. Contrasting the terrace with the men's salon on the bottom floor where seriousness and politics reigned, the child absorbs a different political consciousness in the terrace that is constructed around transgression and breaking rules. She learns about politics from participating in a play rather than passively hearing it from men. The child learns that the rigid *hudud*, or frontiers, of the harem are not only malleable but also engender their own resistance. We see Mernissi narrating how the women of the harem always find and create spaces where they can subvert these rules. It is important for the autobiography as a narration of spatial power to point out the many ways in which subversion is learned and cultivated. The child experiences the forbidden terrace as subversive, as a space of community, and as a space of actualizing subversive embodiment. Here, the child's experience of a marginal spatiality informs the development of subversive consciousness.

"The seated game" becomes more than an exercise of meditative mindfulness. I argue that through this device, Mernissi illustrates how, at a very young age, the narrator visually sees the spatial dynamics of power and theorizes it as it is laid out. The young narrator visually grasps how lines of power are drawn to work through the architectural structure of the harem. The power of adults is circumscribed by the harem's complex spaces. We see how movement and mobility are controlled and limited by the visual access that architecture provides. Furthermore,

the child narrator is highly cognizant of the weight assigned to each space. For example, the men's salon, which has the radio—a window to the outside world—is exclusive to certain bodies that are allowed access to this knowledge. Young Fatima, then, is not only aware of the power dynamics and *hudud* around the space, but also learns how spaces are socially constructed, and how place carries specific values that eventually shape and ground identity and consciousness.

What I also wish to emphasize by mentioning "the seated game" is how Fatima learns at a young age the significance of a critical awareness of the body in relation to space. The description of the harem's architecture in a way that centers the self is vital to the development of this autobiographical subject. Take for example how the movement of the sky causes the young narrator to feel so overwhelmed that she feels dizzy. The sky, in its vastness, is contrasted and framed by the rigidity of the harem's architecture. The narrator is not only aware of this physical imprisonment, but is also constantly reminded of its presence every time she looks at the sky in respite. Architecture here is not only presented as what shapes her view, but also how it orients her consciousness and how it physically affects her body.

Furthermore, we glean through this exercise in narrative mindfulness how embodiment is a key component to the construction and consciousness of the autobiographical subject in *Dreams of Trespass*. There is an architectural memory carried through the narrative that not only exposes power hierarchy and dynamics, but also explores where memory and how bodies are structured and positioned in a specific space. I turn here briefly to Sara Ahmed's text *Queer Phenomenology* where she argues that bodies are not only oriented towards spaces and lines in particular ways that shape consciousness, but that objects carry an imprint that repeatedly redirects our arrival into the world. Ahmed states: "objects also have their own horizons: worlds from which they emerge, and which surround them. The horizon is about how objects surface,

how they emerge, which shapes their surface and the direction they face, or what direction we face, when we face them. So if we follow such objects, we enter different worlds" (147). In the following section, I focus on the ways in which power becomes visible in an autobiographical narrative through relational embodied attachments to objects.

One of the key memories in *Dreams of Trespass* is Mernissi's retelling of Mina's story. Mina was a former slave, "*maqtu'a*, old and poor" (trans: "cut off" 159). She did not have a clear relationship to the family but came to live in the harem after the abolishment of slavery in Morocco in 1922 (165). Although considered outside the bloodline of the family, she is considered by the children as part of the family through the *hanan* (trans: tenderness) she constantly provides: "*Hanan* is such a divine gift, it bubbles up like a fountain, splashing tenderness all around, regardless of whether or not its receiver is well-behaved and careful not to stray outside Allah's *hudud*. Only saints and other privileged creatures provided *hanan*, and Mina had it" (159). Young Fatima constantly pesters Mina to tell her the story of the abduction. She was a young girl, "barely [Fatima's] age" (166). We learn that Mina was kidnapped by slave traders, transported over forests, deserts, and rivers and exchanged by various slave traders who "spoke different dialects" (167). In those travels, Mina struggles and attempts to escape. To punish her, the kidnappers lower Mina into a dark well for days:

> The horrible thing was that I could not even afford to tremble with fear, because if I did, the rope would slip out of my fingers […] I am still so angry that they did not give me a chance to be afraid […] There was another little girl beside me, another Mina who was dissolving with fear as her body was about to touch the cold, dark water filled with snakes and slippery things, but I had to disassociate myself from her so as to concentrate on the rope. (169)

In order for the subject, Mina, to survive this traumatic event, she has to split her consciousness into another separate subject and disassociate from the body in the actual well. Mernissi writes that despite the grownups' objections to children listening to such violent tales, she still needed to "hear that story told again, and again, and again so that [she], too, could cross the desert and arrive safely at the terrace […] [she] needed to know how to get out of the well" (169).

We then learn that young Fatima starts experiencing nightmares and anxiety. Fatima identifies with the tiny body of the child Mina, her fear of the enclosed well, and her fate being determined by men. She asks on separate occasions if Allah ever did punish the kidnappers to pry an answer to a perplexing question "do the powerless ever get a chance to jump out the well?". Somehow, the only way these fears are abated is when she starts develop the compulsive habit of "jumping into dark, empty olive jars" (171). This helps her forget all her fears and makes the nightmares disappear. The narrator's voice interjects mid-story and states that she understands Mina's experience in the well. Mina transforms herself into "two little stars twinkling in the dark" that haunt and defy her torturer. The child narrator places herself in Mina's plight and states that "I needed to train myself to get out of the well" (171). Sliding into the jars becomes not only a soothing act of diving into Mina's experience, but also a representative of the practice of defiance. Sliding into olive jars becomes soothing for the child for its possibility to "visualize hope springing from within" (171). Young Fatima already knows how both her current situation and Mina's traumatic experience are similar. However, what is explicitly different is that while Mina was alone, young Fatima has a helping hand to shake the olive jar and save her: "I was so happy every time Mina helped me get out of the well" (171). Through identifying with Mina's story, the child not only learns about "surprising the monster"

with defiant eyes, but also that the practice of self-liberation requires solidarity and a helping hand; getting out of the well is not a solitary act, it entails an active community.

Mernissi's use of the olive jars here is vital to a narrative that explores the dynamics of embodiment in relation to space and power. The "jars" are imbued with characteristics that allow young Fatima to inhabit a different experience that she can identify with. Furthermore, Mernissi uses these objects to vocalize the harem women's voices and their experiences of oppression, and allows the young narrator to materially embody those experiences. Young Fatima absorbs Mina's experiences through her body in that object. It paradoxically opens up other realms of embodied cognition through an experience of immediate and material containment.

The olive jar here becomes an even more intimate material container of the body. Young Fatima already identifies with Mina's story because of her experience of containment in a harem. Yet she feels the need to place herself in an even tighter space. The olive jars become a device through which young Fatima creates her own experience of containment. The body, in the space of the harem, does not feel like her own just yet. While she is aware that her body is within limits of structures and lines of power, through an exercise of willful habitual containment, she gets to work through its actual materiality on her own terms. Indeed, this becomes an object through which she can physically practice her own process of "liberation." Once the young girl slides into the olive jars, she waits silently, hiding from others. Then, Mina instructs young Fatima that

> "when you are in trouble, you need to put all your energies into thinking that there is a way out. Then, the bottom, the dark hole, becomes just a springboard from which you can leap so high that your head might hit a cloud […] there is always a little part of the sky you can raise your head to. So, don't look down, look up, up, and off we go! Making wings." (170)

The act of looking at the sky here is invoked again in a way that mirrors the commentary on how the sky juxtaposes life in between the harem walls. However, here, it acquires a different connotation. Mina orients the child to look up in defiance. Here, the framing of the sky does not cause a dizzying effect. She instructs the child to control the direction of her vision and look for a way out. Understanding that the child is in the "dark bottom" of the harem, Mina transforms the notion of the ground as "hopelessness" to one of purpose as a springboard. Mina instills in the child a sense of understanding that oppressive circumstances could always be challenged and that she is the agent of changing the framework of looking at the outside/the sky. The olive jars become liberation-training devices, both embodied and theorized.

By centering Mina's story and narrating the child's experience with the olive jars, Mernissi's autobiography not only incorporates embodiment as a form of understanding oppression, she is also able to explore Mina's pedagogy on powerlessness. The jars here become a central narrative device that shifts the focus of the autobiography to Mina's story. It is not simply the story of Fatima, but of those around her who lifted her from the jar and helped her escape. Most significantly, it is Mina's voice closes the autobiographical narrative of *Dreams of Trespass*. Towards the end of the autobiographical narrative, as young Fatima becomes aware of the threshold of puberty and the gendered separation of the *hudud*/frontiers, Mina solidifies in young Fatima her thoughts about power. In the final scene, Mina explains to young Fatima how gender difference separates the world as one grows from a child to an adult. The boundaries separating the terrain "indicate the line of power because wherever there is a frontier, there are two kind of creatures walking on Allah's earth, the powerful on one side, and the powerless on the other" (242). When young Fatima asks which side she stood on, Mina's answer was "quick, short, and very clear: 'if you can't get out, you are on the powerless side'" (242). The

autobiographical narrative ends with Mina's voice and leaves the reader with the knowledge that Mina continues to live within the confines of the harem. The autobiography ends on the side of the powerless but the story continues as Fatima grows up to be the educated Mernissi. Mernissi is careful to depict freedom and liberation as not entirely opposed by, for example, in her story of how voluntarily submitting to confinement in the olive jars paradoxically makes Fatima free. After all, she eventually does become the scholar who fulfills "the nationalists' dream" thus implying that she does escape, and that she does cross over to the side of the powerful. However, it is because of Mina and the other women in the harem who supported and "liberated" young Fatima that she becomes able to reach such a conclusion. By choosing to have Mina's voice uttering the last words of the autobiographical narrative, Mernissi closes off the discursive memory fusing the voice of the powerless, trapped in the harem, and the powerful, young Fatima leaving the harem.

This brings me to a crucial point in how Mernissi's autobiography represents embodiment spatially. Mernissi articulates the materiality of the body as site of political consciousness. Throughout the autobiography, Mernissi highlights how the women instill in young Fatima a subversive sense of embodiment. We are reminded again and again how young Fatima learns that the *hudud* are created differently around women's bodies than around men, even though both experience different relations to power and oppression. While containment is proscribed differently around gendered frontiers, Mernissi describes how women have developed specific tactics and have theorized modes of subversion realized *within* the materiality of the body. For example, Aunt Habiba instructs young Fatima on her skin theory, telling her that the body's skin is the first frontier with the world: "a human being was connected to the world through his or her skin, and how could someone with clogged pores feel the environment or be

sensitive to its vibrations? Aunt Habiba was convinced that if men wore beauty masks instead of battle masks, the world would be a much better place" (220). Later, having described the processes of making their own masks and beauty treatments and emphatically rejecting European commercial products, Aunt Habiba emphasizes to young Fatima that "skin is political (*A-jlida siyasa*). Otherwise why would the imams order us to hide it?" (226). The body is conceptualized as a space, indeed, the first "home" and the "skin" as the *hudud* and frontiers that grasp the first impacts of the world. Here, there is a direct connection to how space is both felt and feeling.

Aunt Habiba instills in the child a sense of raised political and feminist consciousness through experiencing the materiality of the body. She instructs the child that the body, in sensing the environment's vibrations, reacts to it directly and immediately. Aunt Habiba teaches her that the body, sensual and vulnerable, is also strong, resilient, and holds the capacity to change circumstances, to transgress, and to be free. For example, Aunt Habiba tells the young narrator that "the magic of the *hammam* beauty treatments and ritual came not only from feeling that you had been reborn, but that you were the *agent* of that *rebirth*" (226, my emphasis). Aunt Habiba thus imparts to Fatima the importance of going to the *hammam*, of joining other women in this communal activity, and of *always* treating your body with reverence, for it can be a source of liberation. The self-work that goes into that rebirth is produced, owned by, and directed towards women's bodies. Through the work that goes into a *hammam* cleansing, the child learns how be the agent of her own rebirth. Skin is framed as a device through which she can sense the *hudud* around her, but also subvert them by owning and her claiming her own process of rebirth. The body in this autobiographical narrative becomes a site of embodied political consciousness and knowledge.

One of the ways Mernissi narrates the body as a marker of space and boundaries is through her narration of how the child experiences the Sufi ritual of the *Hadra*. I argue that Mernissi narrates the body as a medium of transcendental mobility that enables an alternative spiritual knowledge of liberation. In what follows I focus on one of the most interesting sections of *Dreams of Trespass*, the beginning of the chapter "Mina, the Rootless," in which Mernissi provides a vivid description of attending a Sufi ritual called the *hadra*. The *hadra* is "dance possession ritual" in which the dancer is possessed by a *djinni* (157). The *hadra* represents a fringe aspect of religiosity where women dominate and claim the discourse: women are the organizers of these religious festivities, distribute "super-natural power," create "female saints," and promote "a host of female functionaries" who "hold religious positions that may be legitimized through election, through the ritual transmission of power or through birth" (Mehrez 278). In "Women, Sufism, and Decision Making in Moroccan Islam," Daisy Hilse Dwyer argues "the aspect of Islam on which women have the most impact in Morocco is the mystical or Sufi tradition in which saintly personages are venerated and supplicated" (585). Yet, as Egyptian scholar Samia Mehrez argues in "Subversive Poetics of Radical Bilingualism: Postcolonial Francophone North African Literature," the "popular mystical tradition [of Sufism in Morocco] has always been marginalized" (276). Mernissi presents this event of embodiment so as to envision alternative and subversive modalities for narrating autobiographical subjects. Mernissi's narration of the *djinn*-possession ceremony is a central incident in *Dreams of Trespass* through which the autobiographical subject learns and theorizes liberation tactics not only through the materiality of the body, but through spiritual and transcendental embodiment. My intention here is to argue that Mernissi's focus on situated embodiment complicates a strict separation of the

materiality of the body in opposition to the mind. Rather, Mernissi presents an autobiographical subject that learns through spiritual engagement and movement.

When Mernissi introduces the character Mina, she also observes that Mina is possessed by a *djinni*. In a matter-of-fact tone, we learn that Mina obeys the *djinni*'s instructions to wear only saffron yellow and to dance in certain religious ceremonies. Lalla Mani, the grandmother with traditional views, comments, "only bad or half-crazy possessed men and women danced in public" and that "when you were possessed by a *djinni*, you lost all sense of the *hudud*, or the frontier between good and bad, between *haram* and *halal*" (157-8). We learn that the nationalists, including young Fatima's father and uncle, forbid attending the possession ceremonies "declaring them to be against Islam and *shari'a*". In the same vein, the grandmother extends a classist and sexist disgust about how "women possessed by *djinnis* leap high in the air when they hear their rhythm playing and they shake their bodies shamelessly, with their hands and legs flying over their heads" (158). For those in positions of power, the *hadra* is frowned upon for how it allows its participants to transgress the proscribed *hudud* of conduct and spatiality.

In contrast to the grandmother's judgmental and classist stance, young Fatima learns that *djinnis* "possessed slaves as well as the freeborn, men as well as women" (159). In fact, Mina particularizes it even more for young Fatima and tells her that, indeed, the powerless and the poor might be more reliable devotees for *djinnis* because "for the rich, the *hadra* is more of an amusement, while for women like me, it is a rare opportunity to get away, to exist in a different way, to *travel*" (159, my emphasis). Even though the women of the Mernissi harem are forbidden to attend, practically most of the women and children joined Mina once a year during the festival anniversary of the birth of the Prophet: "we all were irresistibly drawn to the

evidently subversive possession ceremony, during which women would dance away with their eyes closed and their long hair floating from left to right, as if all modesty and bodily constraints have been abandoned" (160). It is also one of the incidents through which the children realize they could blackmail the adults for permission to participate in these forbidden ceremonies. Both women and children test and transgress *hudud* by attending and participating in the *hadra*.

Mernissi describes the event though the young child's eyes as an exploration of space and a deconstruction of the multiple proscribed *hudud* (spatial, codes of behavior, religious, and moral). The event is hosted by Sidi Belal, an uprooted former slave who is "so good at taming *djinnis*, his owners went into business with him" (159). We learn that events of *hardra* at Sidi Belal's house are exclusive and require secret invitations to attend his lavish dances because he always brings a special orchestra of musicians from Marrakesh. The narrator observes that there are implicit power dynamics in the spatial structure of Sidi Belal's house: "the four rooms around the courtyard would be occupied by women from the richest families, those who had brought the most expensive gifts and did not want to be seen dancing, while the poorer women sat in the courtyard" (160). Fatima observes that Sidi Belal's house, because of the *hadra* dance, exhibits different power dynamics accorded to different places. The courtyard's centrality to the space of the house is different from the harem's. This courtyard is where the poor women take center stage and dance. Women from the richest families do not want to be seen and retreat into the rooms. Fatima witnesses how the poorer women are the ones afforded the ability to experience the powerful release of the dance. At the same time, young Fatima notices the moral judgment of shame and publicity that control and regulate women's behavior in this setting. Rich women are able to buy their way into privately exploring their spiritual journeys and possession dances while the poor women have no choice but to publicly exhibit their vulnerability to the rest

of the crowd. However, young Fatima comes to realize that the "public shame of dance" is irrelevant and that there is a lot to learn from this ephemeral and affective public exhibition of dance and movement.

Furthermore, we note that Sidi Belal's house is a house built with a purpose. It functions as a space where those who live on the fringes discover the possibilities of being possessed and traveling while in the same physical location. It is a space big enough to hold hundreds of women and it lacks the luxury of the Mernissi harem. Noticing the structures of walls and the rooms, the young narrator registers that not all houses are built to be harems of containment. She observes that there are homes with multiple purposes and this one, in particular, invites the public inside. In contrast to the harem, which is built on the premise of separation, Sidi Belal's event blurs the *hudud*. The rules of this house are not rigid. It protects the powerless as well as enabling them to safely engage with the spiritual unknown. It also resists institutional powers, of the nationalists for example, by continuing to exist for and cater to those who live in the periphery.

As young Fatima sits in the corner of one of those rooms, she observes what those possession ceremonies enable women to do and *be*. At first, the musicians play so slow that the women would keep on talking. The drums progress and introduce a strange rhythm that beckons the women to spring to their feet and sway. Often, the movements become violent and jerky and even when Sidi Belal commands the orchestra to slow down, the dance has already taken its own turn: "the women would ignore the music and carry on at their own impetuous speed, as if to indicate that the master of ceremonies no longer controlled anything. It was as if the women had freed themselves for once of all external pressures" (161). With light smiles and half closed eyes, the women eventually collapse with exhaustion, getting carried away by friends and

congratulated with rosewater for "travelling" through the *djinn* into the unknown and "returning" safely. Witnessing how these women dictate the codes of the dance, the child learns that the participants, mostly women, choose a different entity to serve and obey. This form of gaining religious knowledge and pious participation is not accessed through the established route of religious teachers or the *Ulemas* ("men of learning" 88). The women are essentially actively choosing to submit to a *djinn* on a much more intimate level than to their husbands or their religious institutions. The *hadra* is narrated as a mode of piety that allows the women to participate in alternative forms of transgressive embodiment.

Furthermore, young Fatima learns here that dance, movement, and *djinn* possession allow for the body to experience alternative modalities of knowing by transgressing different spatialities (physical body to trance/*djinn* travel). The women gain an experience of travel and spiritual engagement not through a prescribed prayer or reading the Quran, but through a performative act of dance with the aid of intangible *djinn*. What young Fatima sees is not only the opportunity and ability to "travel" while being possessed, but that the women chose to submit their bodies to entities beyond the conventionally known modes of Islamic spirituality. These possession ceremonies create the space for women to experience spiritual movement that is otherwise inaccessible to them. Submitting to the power of *djinn* through the *hadra* dance illustrates to the child how women can interact with spirits outside the realm of institutional knowledge and the rules and jurisdiction of patriarchy. For these women, the *hadra* dance enables their bodies to move in and out of physical spaces into trance-created spiritual spaces. Ontologically, these are different modalities of producing and accessing knowledge. I argue that one of the central frameworks for Mernissi, then, is the idea that embodied action is embodied *knowing*. Mernissi conveys this through a narrative of embodiment and a discourse that is aware

of how space is inhabited and informs this knowledge production. Performance scholar Deidre Sklar argues in "Can Bodylore Be Brought to Its Senses?" that embodied experience, and movement in particular, provide grounds for conceptualizing the world. She focuses on the bodily basis of religious experience stating "movement is a corporeal way of knowing" (11). Sklar points to how "the medium of embodied knowledge is not words but sensations in which are stored intertwined corporeal, emotional, and conceptual memories" (14). To Sklar, thinking *depends* on corporeality: it is not separated, it does not supersede it, it requires it (14). Cultural knowledge is corporeally constituted and situated.

Mernissi narrates how the child learns to occupy an important liminal space of thinking by witnessing Mina's experience of the *hadra*. Young Fatima focuses on Mina, who is deliberately dancing slowly and "off of the rhythm of the beat, as if the music she was dancing to was coming from inside" (162). The child is mesmerized and notices how during the dance "Mina managed to combine two seemingly contradictory roles – to dance with a group, but also to keep her own offbeat rhythm. I wanted to dance like her, with the community, but also to my own secret music, springing from a mysterious source deep within, and stronger than the drums" (162). In narrating carefully how the *hadra* introduces sound and rhythm, Mernissi is alluding to how the body is an instinctive sensual vehicle that learns and illustrates knowledge in ways that are beyond the textual and the "documented" Mina's dance transfers values about relating to a community to young Fatima through dance and movement. Young Fatima's role in the possession ceremony dance is not of neutral observance. She is an observer who learns how the body has value in its ability to perform in different ways. It becomes a vital instrument and an agent in decidedly forming subjectivity for her. Mina's dance allows the child to see the possibility of being an individual while also being relating to a community. The body in the

hadra in its varied states of deliberate movement is a dancing body that is a relational body with communal and individual characteristics.

Most importantly, young Fatima is able to see the *beauty* of such sensual movement and embodied existence. This state of being on the liminal becomes desirable, a condition that she aspires to possess. Mernissi narrates this process of cognitive transmission through the ephemeral event of a dance performance. In *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, performance scholar Diana Taylor argues that "we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices. Performance [...] functions as an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis" (xvi). Taylor underscores that "performances function as *vital acts of transfer*, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called 'twice-behaved behavior'" (3, my emphasis). Furthermore, Taylor states that "if performance did not transmit knowledge, only the literate and powerful could claim social memory and identity" (xvii). Thus, we can argue that Mernissi provides here an opportunity to glimpse both an archive (a materially enduring text) and a repertoire (an ephemeral social practice). Mina is a testament that the powerless contribute to cultural production of Mernissi's autobiography. Mernissi shows how knowledge is transmitted and transferred through the body, an inherently non-archival/non-discursive object. Therefore, it shapes, quite literally in rhythm and dance movements, the young narrator's path of knowledge production. The body and its movement become epistemologies for the autobiographical subject to envision possible ways of *becoming*.

In narrating the event of the *hadra*, Mernissi illustrates that these women do not "transport" to a new place or location, but their bodies experience movement on a spiritual level

that can only be described as "travel." It is an immobile movement heightened by dance and rhythm. For Mernissi, this is a way to narrate the subtle tactics of liberation that these women choose to participate in. She narrates different experiences of spiritual embodiment for these women so as to show how they have survived, how they have created their own spaces of cultural transfers, and how liberation tactics take many shapes and forms. In the chapter "Mina the Rootless," Mernissi articulates the various ways that people experience up/rootedness. The young child narrator learns that homes and places can be anchors as well as springs from which to spiritually travel and escape the well. The *hadra* is a purely sensual experience where liberation is sought and thought of in movement. The *hadra* of spiritual possession allows Mernissi to illustrate alternative ontological and epistemological formations of political consciousness that are grounded in space and embodiment. For Mernissi, an embodied situated autobiographical subject has to be embedded in discourses that are beyond institutionalized knowledge such as religion or patriarchal secular nationalism, for example.

In conclusion, Mernissi narrates an autobiographical subject that is constructed through analytical frameworks of spatiality and embodiment. I read *Dreams of Trespass* as a text in which the autobiographical subject narrates a theorization of how power organizes different forms of spatialities and experiences of embodiment. More specifically, Mernissi is re-narrating the production of autobiographical subjectivity as coming out of relational experience of embodiment in constructed spaces. Mernissi's autobiographical narrative presents techniques in of spatial thinking in which the narration of the subject provides us with ways of seeing what patriarchal and colonial spatial epistemologies would erase.

CHAPTER THREE: Expressions of Political Commitment in Latifa Alzayyat's Life-Writing

While in my previous chapter I examine Mernissi's articulation of the spatial rhetorics and how spatial linearity affects Muslim women's bodies, in this chapter, I turn to the works of Egyptian writer and activist Latifa Alzayyat to explore the different ways she articulates notions of "*iltizam*" (political commitment) in her life-writing. I trace the different expressions of political commitment they are is articulated in her seminal work, a semi-autobiographical bildungsroman, *The Open Door* (1960) and I compare it with how a committed autobiographical subject is narrated in her autobiography, *The Search: Personal Papers* (1992). By highlighting the recurring concept of "*iltizam*" in Alzayyat's work, I ask how an Arab feminist writer narrates political commitment through an autobiographical self in constant negotiation with nationalist and anticolonial struggles.

While the idea of *iltizam* in Arabic literature found fruitful ground in poetry and prose, scholarship remains scarce in studying political commitment specifically in relation to Arabic autobiography. It is my intention here, therefore, to uncover not only the different ways the political might be expressed, but also, how the personal might adopt different mediums of expression.

In order for me to elucidate the difference between Alzayyat's autobiographical texts, I trace a history of Egypt that goes from initial excitement of anti-colonial revolution and the establishment of an independent nation-state to disillusionment created by political factionalism, unsuccessful wars, authoritarianism, and complicity of Egyptian governments with imperialist

states. I argue that Alzayyat's expression of the self in *The Open Door* is an optimistic and conventional narration that is easily resolved to the form of collectivity represented by narrating a national linear progressive history. In contrast, I find that Alzayyat transitions to a more fragmented notion of the self in her autobiography, *The Search: Personal Papers*, a fragmentation that allows her to articulate a more complex understanding of relationality with others defined more through difference than through identity. In both texts, Alzayyat presents a literary commitment to the project of nation building, yet the narrative voice of that commitment changes from hopeful exaltation to disenchantment and critical fragmentation. I read for the ways in which Alzayyat not only traces this transition through content, but through form, as well.

In what follows, I provide a brief overview of how the concept of "commitment" was adopted in Arabic literary circles to highlight the ways in which Alzayyat absorbed the political conditions and adopted them in her literary production. In her life-writing, Alzayyat centered political commitment and the struggles of her people in national anti-colonial resistance. Therefore, in order for me to explore Alzayyat's multifaceted nuanced expressions of the political autobiographical self, I introduce Alzayyat's biography as I lay out a concise historical survey of the main events in Egypt and the Middle East. I then provide an analytical comparison between the two texts to highlight the ways in which the politically committed autobiographical subject is narrated.

The conditions of Alzayyat's literary production emerged out of a literary culture that was engrossed with the concept of "commitment" (*iltizam*). The term "*iltizam*" gained popularity in Arabic literary circles in the 1950s through a translation of Jean Paul Sartre's concept of *littérature engagée,* as mentioned in his 1948 text "*Qu'est-ce que la literature?*" (Badawi 24). Sartre argues that the writer bears responsibility towards his people and their social and political

conditions. The dialogic relationship between the writer and his readers is one of mutual and responsible respect in the sense that the result (art) should arise from moments of injustice and must articulate and provide a lens for the readers to understand the conditions of their oppression. Art, though, should be revolutionary and produce change: "the 'engaged' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can only reveal by planning to change" (Sartre "What Is Literature? 37). According to Sartre, the writer's key function is "to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare" ("What is Literature?" 38) Furthermore, Sartre emphasized the significance of freedom as a basis for and a message of committed literature (Klemm 52).

As I will detail in the following section on the historical context of Egypt, the rapid political changes in the 1940s and 1950's heavily influenced critical literary thought. In the Arab context, Sartre's concept of "engaged" literature was translated by Taha Hyssayn in his article "Observations on the Egyptian Writer" to "*iltizam*" or "commitment" ("*Mulahazat Al-Katib Al-Misri*"). According to scholar of English and Arabic literature Mohammed Mustafa Badawi, *iltizam* came to denote the Arab artist's adaptation of a Marxist stance, an existentialist position, or most often, a nationalist leaning. The common thread was that the artist must have a message for his people rather than simply delight in writing for writing's sake (Badawi 24).

Verena Klemm, in her article "Different Notions of Commitment (*iltizam*) and Committed Literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq," states that the theoretical basis of these committed writers was their socialist politics and observes that their ideas were derived from dialectic materialism. She writes, "they were convinced that artistic creation is not an isolated activity but has to be understood in terms of reference to society" (52).

The figure of the intellectual is part of society and "the demand for conscious and responsible artistic creation is only a consequence of the recognition that literature is socially and politically dependent, but at the same time socially and politically *effective* and *significant*" (Klemm 52 [emphasis in original or added?]). Thus, as early as 1951, Egyptian professor of literature, Muhammad Mufid Al-Shubashi, defines "committed literature" as "literature that fights in the field of life to help the peoples to progress" (qtd. in Klemm 53).

The shift in literary circles to adopt "commitment" as a stance was largely motivated by not only the revolutions and political upheavals that were mostly socialist in ideology, but also as a rejection of literary traditions and classic Arabic literary restrictions. Arab writers and literary critics received the concept of "commitment" and adapted it to create their own "model." In *Committed to Disillusion: Activist Writers in Egypt from the 1950s to the 1980s* David DiMeo summarizes Arab writers' unique development of the concept in the following points. First, "committed literature" required the interaction, but independence of three principal actors—the writer, the state (or political power), and the mass public (41-50). Second, the committed writer must write in "the language of the people." Committed literature vehemently rejected the restrictive and exclusivist language and form of Romantic and Classical Arabic literary movements. This rejection is based on the view that traditional literary movements were viewed as not only apolitical but as an "ivory tower" that did not speak to the realities of the people. Thus, thirdly, the committed writer must write of the masses, not the elite, and away from "literature of the royals" ("*Adab almulook*"). An imperative point, too, for writers of *iltizam,* is to underscore class-consciousness. Fourthly, *iltizam* urges the writer to draw from a shared experience with the people in the creation of the literary work. Committed literature calls for that that emerges of the moment, both linguistically (dialect) and in relation to subject material

(content). Thus, new literary forms were adopted and created to suit this new sensibility that had to fit the emergent of the modern Arab identity in the independent postcolonial nation. With the creation of new literary forms and styles came also the adoption of "realistic" themes that had to speak directly of "the people" and their social and class issues. Accessible content in direct, oftentimes vernacular Arabic that could be understood by the people was paramount for this new committed literary movement. Finally, the ultimate goal of the committed writer should be to raise political consciousness of the social and political issues of the day.

In what follows, I provide a concise historical context of Alzayyat's life to illustrate how her expressions of political commitment are intertwined with the process of narrating her life in both *The Open Door* and *The Search*. While I have adhered to describing Egypt's modern history in a "straight" and linear narration, I am conscious that that I incur a flattening of historical complexities. My intention here is to have the following historical context as a background for how I will be reading Alzayyat's complicated fragmentation of historical narration through the form and structure of her autobiography. Because of the density of Alzayyat's autobiography and its emphasis on the linking the personal to the political, I consider this context as an important backdrop to my analysis of her work.

Egyptian writer, professor, and political activist Latifa Alzayyat was born in the delta town of Damietta, Egypt. As she details in her autobiography, she spent the first six years of her life in a house inherited from a family that benefited from old feudal landownership systems. Alluding to her inherited upper middle class privilege in her autobiography, Alzayyat details how because her father held several municipal positions throughout Egypt, the family was able to move to Mansoura, then settle in Cairo. After her father passed away in Cairo when she was twelve, she attributed much of her political upbringing to her brother Abdelfattah's nationalist

influence on her. Alzayyat lived through some of Egypt's major political upheavals, events that she documents in her major coming of age novel, *The Open Door* (1960; translated by Marilyn Booth 2000), and in her autobiography *The Search: Personal Papers* (1992; translated by Sophie Bennet in 1996). Alzayyat attended Cairo University from 1942-1946 and received her bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature. These four years in the University form the foundation of her student activism and subsequent political involvement. As an undergraduate student, she became passionately involved in Marxist organizations and was elected secretary of the National Committee of Workers and Students (Almutee'i 122).

In her autobiography, Alzayyat mentions several slippages from physical to metaphorical prisons while being discreet about the details or chronology of these events. Alzayyat was married twice, and was imprisoned by the state twice. After completing her undergraduate degree, Alzayyat married Professor Ahmed Shukri Salem, the first communist to be sentenced to seven years in prison (Almutee'i 122). After being in hiding in the coastal town of Sidi Bishr, both Alzayyat and Shukri were arrested in March 1949 under charges of plans to overthrow King Farouq's government. In a short section in the autobiography *The Search*, Alzayyat documents her time in solitary confinement in the City Women's Prison in Alexandria (59). Shortly after her release in 1950, Alzayyat divorced Shukri and, much to the shock of her political colleagues, she married right-wing playwright Dr. Rashad Rushdie. In her autobiography, Alzayyat explains that in this marriage "I was the prisoner of my own creation" (45). After thirteen years, Alzayyat files for divorce to "recover" from "being stuck with mental paralysis" that prevented her from producing writing after publishing *The Open Door* (1960). It is worth noting that Rushdie would later become Anwar Sadat's cultural affairs advisor. The president famously arrested Alzayyat

and fellow political activists in 1981 for opposing his involvement in the Camp David Accords (Almutee'i 125).

In 1957, Alzayyat earned a Doctoral degree in English Literature from Cairo University. She was also the Head of the Department of Criticism and Dramatic Literature at the Institute of Dramatic Arts from 1970 to 1972, and then served as Director of the Academy of Arts since 1972-1973. Following the Camp David accords in 1979, Alzayyat founded the Committee to Defend National Culture with fellow leftwing intellectuals to protest the Egypt–Israel Peace Treaty. She served as professor in Ain Shams University and translated several books on Marxist literary theory to Arabic. It would be 26 years of creative silence until she published her collection of short stories *Old Age and Other Stories: A Short Story Collection* (1986).

In 1960, Alzayyat's published her semi-autobiographical novel *The Open Door*. As Radwa Ashour describes it in her obituary of Alzayyat, the novel was a milestone in the writing of Arab women, not only for the cohesion of its structure and the vitality of its characters, but because the writer pushed the woman and her story to the center of a historical event and out of the social margin to which both her life and writing was relegated ("Biqalam Radwa Ashour - Latifa Alzayyat"). In an interview with Sumaya Ramadan, "On Political Commitment and Feminist Writing," Alzayyat explains that the novel was meant to be called "Four Years," as it was based on her years of student activism in the university (250). While the novel's events rely heavily on autobiographical events, Alzayyat states that she resorted to the form of the bildungsroman novel as a way to circumvent self-censorship. Alzayyat narrates the life journey of the protagonist, Layla, in parallel to Egypt's anti-colonial struggle. As the new nation emerges from colonial domination, Layla negotiates the intersecting oppressive structures of patriarchy, classism, and colonialism. The novel follows a girl growing up in a burgeoning Egyptian middle

class as she struggles to prioritize education, political consciousness-raising, and professionalization with the personal struggles of conforming to paradoxical family and societal "*usul*" (rules of propriety). The novel ends with Egypt's military victory and with Layla's liberation as she goes through "the open door" of modernity. It is considered one of the first committed novels for its realist form, its revolutionary language and dialect, and its socialist anti-colonial perspective on narrating political and personal history. Alzayyat not only links the emancipation of women with the liberation of the homeland but also, more importantly, she presents a text produced by a woman who enters the course of the Arab historical narrative by expressing her most pressing concerns.

In her autobiography, *The Search: Personal Papers*, Alzayyat narrates the events of her life as intertwined with the political events of Egypt's history. In this text, however, she departs from *The Open Door*'s optimistic and hopeful style as she pens her memoirs with a critical awareness and disillusioned self-reflection. Where the determined self, represented in Layla in *The Open Door*, comes out victorious and realizes her full potential and liberalization, Alzayyat dissects the autobiographical self in *The Search.* Here, she confronts her personal life choices as intersecting with the realities and disillusioned realities of postcolonial nation building. The autobiography relies on fragmented and vignette-like episodes of memories. It is sectioned into short chapters with no sequential or chronological narrative. The temporal line of narration is continuously cut and restarted and recursive. The text starts with the author pushing away death as her brother lies in his deathbed in a room next door, and ends with narrating an episode of resistance to a prison raid. While the autobiography can be read as individualistic and deeply personal, I view it as reframing the connection between the personal self and history. Placing Alzayyat's bildungsroman alongside her autobiography, I believe we can trace not only a

deconstruction of committed historical narration but also a production of a new form of personal committed literary narration.

Alzayyat's understanding of her middle class background and political revolutionary consciousness comes from a particular material engagement with several narratives of the history of modern Egypt. On the one hand, Alzayyat provides in her famous bildungsroman, *The Open Door*, a burgeoning nationalist narrative that imagines new possibilities of Egyptian women and their sexuality in a narrative of the birth of the nation and its independence. On the other hand, the historical narrative advanced in her autobiography, *The Search*, is one that is very choppy, anxious, and fragmented. I argue that in both texts, Alzayyat presents a literary commitment to the project of nation building, yet the narrative voice of that commitment changes from hopeful exaltation to disenchantment and critical fragmentation. In order to better understand Alzayyat's entangled committed narrations of the history of the nation and the autobiographical self, I provide here a brief historical and cultural context of the events in which Alzayyat anchors herself through her bildungsroman and through her autobiography.

Alzayyat lived through and narrated Egypt's tumultuous nationalist anti-colonial struggle. She was born four years after the leader of the Wafd (Delegation) party Saad Zaghlul famously led an independence movement that was specifically anti-British in 1919. In 1922, after forty years of occupation, Britain declared its recognition of Egypt as an independent state. However, Britain was still commanding financial organization, stationing troops, and controlling Egyptian military and the Suez Canal (Booth xix). The following year, the leader of the revolution, Saad Zaghloul, returned from exile to form the first constitutional government in Egypt's history. However, Egypt continued to be a monarchy that was heavily backed by the British. The Wafd

party, the majority party that led the revolution, had to share the political scene with the Palace and the British embassy.

In her autobiography, Alzayyat ties a critical moment of the development of her political consciousness to the time in Mansoura when she witnessed the pro-Wafd Party 1936 violent demonstrations. Giving the reader a personal view of this historical event, Alzayyat writes:

> That was one day in 1934, when the Prime Minister, Ismail Pasha Sidki, refused to permit Mustafa El-Nahhas, the leader of the majority Waft party, to tour the provinces, which included a visit to Mansoura. Sidki stopped all the trains from running, so El-Nahhas came in a procession of cars. The municipality of Mansoura turned streets including ours into a series of trenches to prevent the procession from advancing […] the dull black guns put an end to the precession and to the demonstration. (*The Search* 42)

She then ties this personal witnessing of a major traumatic event to her political awakening and states:

> at the age of eleven […] I was destined to enter the door of commitment to the nation by the harshest and most violent door. […] Twenty-four dead, which the girl counted, one by one, every time the ambulance door slammed shut, in Sharia El-Abbasi in Mansoura one day in 1934, when his guts exploded and he was lying there, raped, when a handful of policemen remained, when blood no longer flowed like a waterfall deep red, […] the child becomes a young woman, acquainted with evil on the level of the state. The child who found refuge in the embrace of her mother from the evils of the world is lost. (43)

Alzayyat even reflects her negative sentiments towards Sidki by naming *The Open Door*'s upper class anti-hero after him (Booth xxi). These uprisings were not strictly about government change; Alzayyat narrates witnessing farmers and factory workers protesting poor work conditions, food

shortages, and a lack of education resources. Through the point of view of the child narrator, Alzayyat ties together nationalist history with unpublicized local and private histories of labor and class conditions in Egypt. Witnessing this event heavily influenced her political commitment as a writer, activist, and as a woman.

In February of 1946, public anger against the Egyptian monarchy and the British presence was increasing. Notably, the National Committee of Workers and Students, for which Alzayyat was a key leader, organized demonstrations and strikes demanding national independence and opposing colonial economic domination. According to historian Selma Botman, in *Egypt from Independence to Revolution, 1919-1952*, "students called a massive strike. They massed by the thousands and marched from the university grounds in Giza towards Abdin Palace, chanting, 'Evacuation: No negotiation except after evacuation'" (47). Alzayyat relates the events of the February demonstrations in both of her life narratives. *The Open Door*, for example, begins in the midst of the fervent chaos. In *The Search*, Alzayyat documents the spirit of the march and the treachery of the police:

> a sea of youth ripples over Abbas Bridge in 1946 and the young woman who found refuge in the whole is a drop in the sea, wild joy is she and powerful, active strength […] The roaring sound it makes works loose the tent pegs of the old colonialism, while the new colonialism lies in wait […] suddenly the sea convulsed and the young men and women sweep down to the Nile by the dozen. Those who are saved are saved and those who die, die. (43-44)

Botman explains that when the students were about to cross over to the royal palace, the police opened the bridge and over twenty students drowned and eighty-four students suffered casualties (47). These student demonstrations continued to ripple through the towns of Egypt: "the student

demonstrations from Fouad I University reaches the heart of town; it reaches every town and village and hamlet in Egypt and the Arab world; the revolution begins when they thought it had ended" (*The Search* 44).

In 1952, the student movement organized training camps on university grounds to send 10,000 students to the Canal zone to fight British troops (Booth xxi). Alzayyat describes the unity of students with Suez Canal workers and military offices in *The Open Door* as being poorly provisioned by the government. The resistance volunteers' clash with the British resulted in the death of 50 Egyptians, which caused further uprisings in Cairo. There, protestors set fire to neighborhoods and institutions affiliated with the colonial presence. This time, however, policemen abstained from arrests in passive solidarity (Booth xxii). The events of January 26, motivated by the student's' movement, precipitated the end of the Egyptian monarchy and Jamal Abdel Nasser and Mohammed Naguib of the Free Officers movement orchestrated a military coup and brought the downfall of King Farouk.

The 1952 revolution established Egypt as a republic with a new constitution and set up a one-party system made up of all Free Officers called the Liberation Rally. As Mohammed Naguib became the first president of Egypt, he established a new constitution that was opposed by the Muslim Brotherhood. The religious organization was later declared an outlawed illegal political group by the nascent government and large numbers were arrested as political prisoners, especially during Jamal Abdel Nasser's presidency (1956-1970). The political changes following the 1952 revolution greatly affected the cultural production of the writers of *iltizam*, especially for Latifa Alzayyat. Naguib's successors, Jamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat, would eventually create different and distinct nationalist narratives that advocated for freedom of

expression and at the same time suppressed any opposition from both Islamists and leftwing writers of *iltizam.*

The Nasserite period provided a climate fervent and charged with anti-colonial nationalist rhetoric that carried the promise of creating a nation-state "by the people." Writers of *iltizam* were initially in favor of a socialist government that was openly committed to educating the public and overturning the class system. Nasser's plans for Agricultural Reform included the removal of feudal landownership systems and the nationalization of much of Egypt's agricultural land. However, as Yoram Meital explains in *Egypt's Struggle for Peace*, Nasser's attempts to nationalize Egypt's economy created challenges for the new nation's foreign affairs. For example, Nasser's first plans in government were to build the Aswan High Dam, which would revolutionize Egypt's agricultural and industrial economies (3). However, Nasser's simultaneous arms deal negotiations with the Soviet Union, and his diplomatic recognition of China, let the the United States, Britain, and the World Bank to pull their offers of financial aid for the Dam's construction. Nasser reacted by declaring the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. This triggered the Israeli attack on the Suez Canal, an act motivated by Britain and France (Meital 4). Despite the casualties of the Suez Canal Crisis, Nasser's success at resisting Israeli and European incursions consolidated his reputation in Egyptian public consciousness as a hero of the people against imperialist powers; the Crisis was a historical moment and surviving the "Tripartite Aggression" was considered a national accomplishment.

Nasser firmly believed that the State of Israel represented the continuation and extension of Western imperialism in the region and therefore continued to publicly renounce any form of reconciliation (Yotam 5). Nasser's anti-Israel stance helped reinforce a strong sense of Pan-Arab nationalist pride both locally and in the Arab countries, which led to the creation of the United

Arab Republic with Syria from 1958-1961. Locally, Nasser called for nationalist identity that was bound in unity rather than difference. Following an assassination attempt on him by the Muslim Brotherhood, Nasser suppressed the Islamist movement and jailed many of its leaders. Nasser's nationalist rhetoric focused more uniting his people under the banner of "Arab" rather than "Muslim," gaining supporters from Christian Coptic minorities and folding them into his project of nation building.

The defeat of the 1967 Six-Day War (*Al-Naksa* /The Setback) created a significant cultural and social shift in public Egyptian nationalist consciousness and was considered to be a severe blow to the confidence generated by pan-Arabism. Alzayyat's autobiography refers to the Six-Day War as a watershed moment: "the 1967 defeat knocked me down and marked the dividing point between two phases, two lives" (*The Search* 52). Post-*Al-Naksa*, Nasser's government was subject to public demonstrations that demanded transparency rather than its usual policy of censorship and control over the information about the War. For example, the public knew that the Egyptian army had suffered in Sinai, yet Radio Cairo was required to announce that "three hundred enemy crafts" were destroyed over Sinai (Yotam 14). Piecing together the war's events, Alzayyat writes: "weaving flimsy threads, I pushed the knowledge away from me and hung it from them so it did not touch me, fled from the burden of a truth heavier than I could bear" (54).

For writers of *iltizam*, this was a key opportunity to bring to the surface public discussions about Nasser's authoritarian style of rule. In her autobiography, Alzayyat defiantly blames the left wing intellectuals, including Tawfiq El-hakim, for their inability to stand up to Nasser: "everyone one of us is responsible for this defeat. If we said no to wrong whenever it was done, we would not be faced with defeat now […] if all the intellectuals said no, they

wouldn't be able to put us all in prison" (53). Alzayyat held forums and wrote anti-Nasser letters and raised the question: is this brand of nationalism worth being silenced? Alzayyat referred to Nasser's continued infringements on the freedom of speech laws guaranteed in the constitution, as well as the waning revolutionary spirit of the *iltizam* writers. David DiMeo provides another view as to why Alzayyat's colleagues were silent: "a monarchy with foreign roots and backed by foreign powers was much easier to criticize than a socialist state that threw writers in jail in order to guard the revolution" (55). Nasser's control on the media was so tight that there was a surge of Egyptian artists and writers who moved to Lebanon in pursuit of less stringent publishing laws. DiMeo clarifies that "beginning in 1960, the government nationalized the press and publishing houses outright" (56). Nasser imposed tight controls on publishing, which essentially nationalized "*al-adab al-multazim*" (committed literature). At this time, DiMeo remarks, artists and writers had to carefully walk a tightrope between simultaneously being a flatterer of political authority, a hack journalist, and a dedicated artist (56).

Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor, solidified his reputation by leading Egypt to win the Battle of Sinai/Yom Kippur War in 1973, a victory that redeemed the regime's status in the Arab world. This allowed Sadat to promote his "*'asr al-infitah*" (age of openness) policies. In an effort to assuage the public and intellectual supporters' fears on freedom of expression, he lifted the ban on the Muslim Brotherhood and released many of Nasser's extreme left political prisoners. Annette Ranko explains that Sadat needed to align himself with the Islamists to legitimatize his presidency and this initiated a shift in state discourse from Nasser's Arabism to Islamism (53-54). Reversing Nasser's ties with the USSR, Sadat turned to the West as he opened Egypt's economy to foreign investments, shifting the focus from the public sector to privatization.

Sadat's *infitah* brought a surge of consumerism where the middle class joined the ranks of the elite while ignoring the welfare of the lower classes (DiMeo 59).

For writers of *iltizam*, Sadat was considered another disappointment because his *infitah* was viewed as a reversal to the nation's promise of solidarity with the poor and the dream of a classless society (DiMeo 60). Furthermore, Sadat's participation in the Camp David Accords in 1978 and signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1979 generated strong opposition from both the Islamist groups and Leftist intellectuals. Alzayyat was one of the many activists imprisoned by Sadat for publicly opposing how his actions were ostracizing Egypt from the Arab world. In her autobiography, Alzayyat describes in detail the events of her arrest: "the investigator was stifling a mocking laugh at all that had happened and all that was happening, at Anwar Sadat and at me, at the order that Sadat had issued to restrict the rights of 1,500 people opposed to Camp David, at himself, at the ten soldiers armed to the teeth guarding a woman of fifty-eight years old" (*The Search* 82). Alzayyat would remain in Women's Prison at El-Qanater until Sadat's assassination in 1981 by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.

This historical context serves as a backdrop of some of the most pivotal moments in Alzayyat's life narratives. In what follows, I analyze her autobiography alongside her seminal text *The Open Door* to illustrate the shifts in her narration of political commitment. I provide my analysis in two sections, focusing first on the narration of national voice of commitment in terms of how it shifts from upholding the project of nation building in *The Open Door* and how the nationalist voice of commitment is deconstructed in the autobiography. I then turn to focus on how the national narration is fragmented in Alzayyat's autobiography in form and structure. My aim is to illustrate how form cannot be divorced from content. In fact, the autobiography's

intervention, I believe, is in how Alzayyat provides a gendered element to Arabic commitment theory through the form and structure of the autobiography's narrative.

The Search: Personal Papers as Fragmentation of The Open Door's Commitment

Originally published in 1960, *The Open Door* solidified Alzayyat's reputation in the Egyptian literary scene. *The Open Door* gained so much attention that three years after its publication it was made into a film written and directed by Hilmi Barakat and starring Faten Hamama. The novel gained her a nomination for a National Culture state award and the unanimous vote in her favor was thwarted only by permanent member of the Higher Council on the Arts and Letters, the famous writer Abbas Alaqqad, for Alzayyat's "immoderate use of the colloquial" (Booth xxviii). Her innovative style in reinventing realist Arabic in literary form later became a staple in modern Arabic literature.

The Open Door follows the story of a middle class woman, Layla Suleiman, from her teenage years in the 1940s to the 1950s. As the story unfolds portraying her budding interest in national political activism in high school and her interest in Marxist ideals during her university years, we are also introduced to the intimate life of what it means to be a young woman trying to find and articulate her authentic self while navigating family obligations, class mobility, and nationalist politics. The novel also heavily interrogates the educational institution of the university in crafting a specific Egyptian middle class subjectivity, while also taking a macro lens to look at the concerns and interests of this new *geel* (generation) of Egyptian youth vocalizing in a new Arabic sensibility of their fears and hopes in a changing political atmosphere (Kahf 227).

Alzayyat binds the fate of her main character Layla with the turbulent events of Egypt at the time. The historical timeline of Egypt undergoing anti-colonial struggle is reflected in Layla's life changes. The protests, regime changes, and wars of Egypt at the time are not simply background events for Layla, but they are the occasions through which she grows up to be her free thinking and active self. Quoting the scholarship of Egyptian feminist Hiba Sharif, Booth indicates that "every advance or retreat in the political realm is matched by one in Layla's personal realm and vice versa – one realm does not precede the other" (xxiii). Both Egypt and Layla are intertwined and their paths move together from "childhood" innocence to mature independence. For example, one of Layla's love interests writes to her from the battlegrounds, "then I think of Egypt, I think of you" (*The Open Door* 217). This bildungsroman, therefore, takes its main female character to articulate first and foremost how a nation should evolve in its anti-colonial struggle to assert itself. This text reflects how the genre of bildungsroman finds fertile ground in postcolonial literature to tie an individual's story with the national imaginary of an emerging "nascent" nation.

The Open Door—in its complex and ironic depictions of the hypocrisies of Egyptian middle class society—continuously comes back to a hopeful narrative of achievement and overcoming. The narrated committed self is first and foremost political and nationalist. The character that binds her fate with Egypt's is a woman with her own personal and political struggles. This woman, Layla, emerges victorious in the end, having achieved what the new nation has hoped and imagined. She is not only articulate and educated, but also secure and self-actualized having reached her potential on her own. While the novel's commitment to the collective comes in broad strokes that bring together the voices of characters from various working and political backgrounds, the main narrative remains true to the idea of self-

actualization through a collective dialectic. Layla experiences a shift in understanding her self and comes to know her true purpose after having been immersed and "melted" in the marches and the protests (the collective). Alzayyat expresses her early notions of the committed self when she narrates how Layla joins

> the crowd of thousands, and herself melting into the whole. Everything around her was propelling her forward, everything, everyone, surrounding her, embracing her, protecting her. She began all of a sudden to shout again, in that voice that belonged to someone else, a voice that joined her whole self to them all. (51)

In the interview "On Political Commitment and Feminist Writing," Alzayyat states that "during this period […] it was a collective action into which the self dissolved in the whole, yet which enriched the self by making it part of the whole" (247). Alzayyat's idea of the politically committed self, narrated through Layla, is one that is dialectically actualized through immersion in a collective and the main purpose is always a nationalist struggle.

Furthermore, the novel reflects Alzayyat's earliest beliefs in commitment and the nationalist vision of Nasser where unity and diversity is emphasized. Her brother's letters to her from the warzone echo the early Nasserite ideology:

> time after time, a person is liberated from the selfishness that governs everything in our lives. [Here], you feel like you are one in a collective, that your life is significant as long as you are serving this collective, and that if you were to lose your life the world would not stop turning. To the contrary—others will continue the work you start, the work for the sake of which you might lose your life. And at that point, one is freed of one's fear, liberated from one's concentration on "me." (110)

It is a story of both Layla and Egypt's determination and utmost belief in the nationalist movement and its "successful" results. This is a narrative of hope that delivers. The text carries a tone of political commitment that is tied to self-renewed optimism grounded in nationalist collectivity that is not only warranted and believed, but it is also the driving force that carries the nationalist dream.

Even the formal narrative structure of the plot reflects its assured and confident character. The narrative follows a woman searching for her voice and then "succeeds" in mission/life journey. The use of space and time is very deliberate and its chronological seamlessness provides the reader with clarity that Layla is seeking. The text leaves little space for confusion; both reader and protagonist are lead to be on the same page. *The Open Door*'s sense of time is sequential, progressive, and chronological. It contains the reader in a familiar structure of temporality. It utilizes a nationalist framework of goals and corroborates the success of the national Egyptian dream as it ticks off the checklist of goals in Layla's life (women's education, freedom, self actualization, etc.).

The space of the novel is contained by Layla's environment of the wealthy neighborhood. Letters from her soldier lover mentions of the desert (war in Sinai); however, Layla does not experience the physical break from her family's space until the end of the novel, when she joins the armed forces on the war front. Layla's independence and freedom are not only intertwined with the land's liberation, but it is also narrated as an assured achievement that is tied to breaking free from an oppressive space. This is in stark contrast to Alzayyat's autobiography where space is scattered and the autobiographical journey is expansive and stretched out. The autobiographical narrator travels physically and goes literally to many lengths (and spaces) to find meaning.

The Open Door was written at a time when Alzayyat's firm belief in Nasser's political ideology was unwavering. The June 1967 War debacle changed local popular support and Alzayyat was among the Egyptian intellectuals who questioned and doubted the government's corruption and false propaganda to the public. We can see these affective shifts in Alzayyat's life narratives in both the bildungsroman and the autobiography. The narrative voice of the woman in *The Open Door* is confident and forward-looking and emphasizes the collective. However, in *The Search*, the autobiographical voice is broken and its cracked memories allude to a more personalized experience of the self where the relational aspect to the national collective is faintly present yet not highlighted. The autobiography is textured with a distrust of authority. It highlights the people's disillusionment with governing political bodies and the idea of "political progress." We can see Alzayyat attempting to go beyond politicizing experiences in the collective, the nation, the family. Rather, the political shift boils down to focusing the self as individual. This version of a narrated self is not the Western individuated model of traditional autobiographical narratives (i.e. the self as whole and complete); rather, the individuality of the self as expressed by Alzayyat here is one of fragmentation, self-conscious reflection, and anxiety. This fragmented self, then, becomes a new form of expressing political commitment.

Alzayyat's autobiography is by no means a typical autobiography of narrating a journey of the self from birth to old age. It attempts to defy generic formal expectations of an autobiography in the classical Western sense. Rather, it is can best be described as a collection of personal writings that include fragments from her personal diaries, unfinished life stories, and sections of unpublished fictional works. Magda Al-Nowaihi points out in her study of "silence" in the writings of Arab women's autobiographies that Alzayyat, due to her pessimism from the nationalist movement in Egypt, refrained from publishing after her major novel *The Open Door*

(493). Al-Nowaihi sees this silence as a stage for the finding and resolution of the self's crisis *within* the text. Indeed, we see in *The Search* why Alzayyat views this moment of "lack" as a moment of giving hope to those who have no lost hope yet. From these shards of memory and fragments, Alzayyat will articulate how her silence was meant to be a productive catalyst for those still willing to speak.

The title of Alzayyat's autobiography alludes to both the narrative structure (searching for personal papers) and the major theme of connecting the personal to the political. The autobiography is structured into two parts that incorporate different modes of narration. "Part One – March 1973" is mostly written in 1973 and is divided into three sections. The autobiographical text includes narratives of Alzayyat's childhood, the old house in Damietta, hiding and being on the run, and the characterization of her father and her grandmother. This part mostly resembles "autobiographical writing"; yet it is about the decay of the old class system of the monarchy and serves as a "deathly" text that is written while her brother Abdulfattah is bedridden and dying. Alzayyat then includes a collection of creative vignettes that belong to unfinished projects, full of potential to be published, yet stuck in unformed hesitation ("plan for a novel"; "In the Women's Prison"; "The Journey"). At first glance, these vignettes seem unrelated, but they are scattered and punctuate the autobiographical text not only to provide a stylistic pause, but also serve the thematic function of standing in for Alzayyat's public creative silence in the 1960s and 1970s. I view this part as the "failed creation" portion of the autobiography. Then, Alzayyat recounts memories that are tied to significant historical dates in Egyptian history, including the 1967 defeat (Al-Naksa), Jamal Abdel Nasser's death in 1970, and the 1973 October War (Yom Kippur War). This "historical" text places Alzayyat's memories of her divorce and self-recovery around nationally important dates to further emphasize the

commitment of the author and to highlight the interconnectedness of the personal and political. This section reflects Alzayyat's personal narration of experiencing history rather than simply offering an alternative narration of it. Finally, "Part Two – 1981" is a series of reflective memories written in El-Qanater Prison in 1981 and ends with an anxious and intense section entitled, "The Search," that retells the events of one specific day, the 13th of November 1981. It is the longest single narration in the text and it is a straightforward narrative that tells the story of her arrest by Sadat's police and recounts the process of her interrogation as well as her moments of solidarity with the other women in her prison ward. This is the "self in dialectic" text that culminates and ties the entire book's silences and fragments and resolves them. The events in both sections are relayed neither chronologically nor sequentially. Instead, the reader is left with fragments and shards of memory waiting to be collected after a persistent search. These modes of narration overlap and express different lines of autobiographical narration that defy the generic forms of Western autobiography.

The Search's narrative structure presents a construction of the self that stands in contrast to the confident and self-actualized self in *The Open Door*. Autobiographical narration here is deliberately incomplete and filled with gaps. Alzayyat starts the text with a statement that her brother is dying in the next room: "March 1973 – my brother Abdel Fattah is dying in the next room. He does not know that he is dying and no one in the house knows but me. […] I sit down to write. *I push away death as I sat writing what seems to be an autobiography not destined to be completed.* My brother dies in May 1973 and my autobiography ends with his death. What follows is what I wrote during this period" (my emphasis 3). Alzayyat begins with breaking down the illusion of a completed narration of life-events. She does not even trust that she will finish the text. In the first sentence, she extends a sort of Le Jeuneian "autobiographical pact"

with the reader but also breaks it with the inconsistency of temporality as well as exposing the author's lost control over the narrative as a whole. (Significantly, the autobiography does not actually end with Abdel Fattah's death, but with a prison raid.)

This hesitant beginning deconstructs the writer's authority in several ways. First, Alzayyat exposes her vulnerability by stating that she is collecting the autobiographical self *as* she is writing the text. The process of writing bolsters the narrator to push away death to produce a "life-writing." And second, the nonlinear narration is filled with gaps and temporal shifts that allow Alzayyat to invite the reader to participate in the process of re-collection with her. Alzayyat carefully constructs a multilayered structure of vignettes, fiction/reality, and historical narratives filled with inner commentaries and carefully edited thoughts to create an "autobiographical space" that could be traced and measured throughout. I mean this to refer to the literal space on the pages as well as the thematic and temporal space given between these texts and multiple narratives that give the time to breathe between sections as well as contemplate the position of the particular section in the grand scheme of the autobiography. What Alzayyat constructs in this autobiographical space is a template for her readers to participate in the process of piecing together her process of making sense of her life-narrative. Alzayyat does not go to great lengths to reveal every significant moment in her life. If we are to restructure or demand a traditional autobiographical narrative structure, we would expect Alzayyat to narrate moments of birth, childhood, school, first marriage, second marriage, brother's sickness and death, prison… etc. Instead, Alzayyat leaves the autobiographical text open with its vulnerabilities and gaps and invites the reader to rewrite or re-suture the pieces left by the author. Alzayyat expects the reader to have prior knowledge of her life's events and hold the autobiographical text as her internal commentary on what the reader might know. In early

forms of commitment literature the writer seems to "guide" the reader to an enlightened political consciousness; Alzayyat, however, relies on the people to become participants in the formation of the autobiography. Alzayyat's new autobiographical commitment shifts the authoritarian narrative voice of *The Open Door* and creates a narrative form that invites a collective process of readership to the typically solitary or singular autobiographical process.

Furthermore, Alzayyat breaks down the confident narrative voice of previous iterations of literary nationalist commitment in her presentation of the looping, recursive, and repetitive narrative voice. Where previous representations of literary commitment rely on an accumulative, continuous linear narration to legitimate the authority of the author, Alzayyat's autobiographical narrative voice seems to be stuck in a present moment repetitively performing the past. Alzayyat presents a pressing concern with the present and the obsession of the narrator to locate when consciousness changes and shifts is felt in the very skeletal structure of the autobiography. Alzayyat resurrects events and memories with all their anxieties and tensions to provide a space for a present consciousness to comment on them (the present of a writer, the present of recalling memories, the present of attempting to understand and reconfigure her motives and experience). This is shown now and again when the narrating subject rears its head and comments with a consciousness that is acutely aware of the present moment: "*Now I know* that the woman from the City Prison was still there in one form or another throughout her second marriage" (*The Search* 108). And Alzayyat repeats this process of self-recollected realization, "*Now I know* that this acknowledgement must lead me to another, more painful acknowledgement […] something in my present is crystalizing that rids me of the need to have a legend, to twist my neck to look back" (109). For Alzayyat, memory is documented from a particular present moment that is conscious of the process of recalling and moments of a past that is in itself a dynamic change in

memory that gets to be reshaped as events are restructured in writing. Alzayyat makes no pretense over the illusion of a glossed-over memory. She makes it known to the reader that even as she has already written these present and in-the-moment "memoir"-like entries, they are still reflections of a past that is being reevaluated as she is writing it.

Furthermore, Alzayyat expresses multiple selves by changing and mixing first, second, and third person narration to create and analyze separate parts of her autobiographical self in different moments in time. This fusion of her self recurs heavily throughout the text and I refer here to a moment in the last section in the El-Qanater Prison memoirs that represents both separation and fusion of the self. Alzayyat writes:

> the woman at the beginning of her second marriage was a different woman from the one she was at the end of it, and during both these phases, she was different from the woman who entered the City Prison in 1949 and from the shy woman who began at Fouad I University in October 1942. No doubt some line draws together the many faces of the one woman who is me, a line that joins these scattered points to the moment I entered El-Qanater prison at the age of fifty-eight. As I entered El-Qanater Prison it seemed that it was important for me to find this unifying line. (99)

Not only does this allow Alzayyat to express the multiplicity of the self, in the sense that she is not simply a political activist, nor just a writer, nor just a wife. Here, each mode expresses a fragment of a self that Alzayyat attempts to piece together in the text as a whole. Moreover, these expressions of multiplicity of autobiographical selves stand against the self-erasure demanded by Alzayyat's earliest forms of nationalist literary commitment. For example, Alzayyat comments on the process of nationalist self-actualization in *The Open Door*: "man in this novel does not really find himself, does not become whole, unless he first loses himself in a whole, a totality

greater than his narrow individual self" (100). Where Layla had to immerse herself in the collective in order to self-actualize, Alzayyat, in her autobiography, circumvents self-erasure when she narrates the moment she joins a march in the third person: "a sea of youth ripples over Abbas Bridge in 1946 and *the young woman* who found refuge in the whole is a drop in the sea, wild joy is *she* and powerful, active strength" (my emphasis 43). Switching from first person to third person allows for Alzayyat to express a different process of self-actualization and political engagement. Here, separating the narrator's "I" to "the young woman," Alzayyat is able to step back and express ambivalence towards a nationalist discourse that demands the erasure of the self in the collective. The relationship of the reader and the narrative "I" to the collective, here, is once removed. Alzayyat aligns herself with the reader, overlooking "the young woman," rather than speak from the authoritarian author and all-knowing narrator position. I view this not as a slippage, but a careful presentation of committed autobiographical self that has learned to retain a sense of individuality within and difference to the overwhelming collective.

I turn here to a pivotal moment in the text where the textual and narrative conflicts of Alzayyat are resolved. By textual conflict, I refer to the non-linear fragmented sections, the "papers" referenced in the title. And by narrative conflict, I refer to the separated multiple selves that are referenced throughout the text: the imaginative child; the young woman activist; the beaten down imprisoned communist; the divorced, silenced writer. In what follows, I show how Alzayyat brings together form and content to illustrate a resolution of scattered isolated selves and papers.

I want to identify a crucial point where Alzayyat has presented different aspects of her self through out the text. Up until this moment, Alzayyat has been recollecting vignettes of how discourses of nationalism and patriarchy inflicted forms of erasure to different aspects of her self.

Those vignettes are recollected separately throughout the text. Referring to her self as the nationalist activist, she states that "the young woman acted as a person, not a woman […] people turned her from a person to a picture into whose frame she was careful to fit" (105). Participating in protests and marches, "she no longer felt confused by her body, *she no longer felt that she had a body*. As people literally transformed her, […] appointing her as a thinker and a leader and turning her into a legend, she forgot that was a woman at all" (my emphasis 104). Describing the shift from her first imprisonment to her second marriage, Alzayyat writes, "she came out of the City Prison after six whole months of solitary confinement with half of her human faculties engaged, and the other half latent, almost dead. She had to move from one extreme to another, as the woman in her sought revenge for having been denied for so long and fought for the opposites to be reconciled for the complete being to emerge, an extremely individual person as much as an intensely committed social one" (106). Alzayyat buries deep the trauma of solitary confinement and dramatically dissolves her self in a second marriage. She states that as "she discovered the image of the woman who is loved and desired […] in the beginning, she dismissed this new image as worthless, laughing at it, disbelieving it, *but it imprisoned her*" (107). Alzayyat's narrative is connecting enforced state oppression (prison) to her self-imposed patriarchal oppression (marriage): "I know the emotional state that made the prison gate signify the gate of the second marriage" (109). Alzayyat states that she suppressed and split these parts of her self as a push against admitting personal defeat of failing to embody what she holds ideal. For example, admitting that she married for love means she is turning back on her activist self. Admitting that the first prison experience traumatized her means that she is not as strong as her political beliefs hold her to be. Clinging to the myth of the separated aspects of self allows her to compartmentalize and fragment her self throughout the text.

However, it is in the last section of the autobiography that she comes to understand the implications of self-fragmentation and the resolution of such conflict. In the chapter, "El Qanater Prison, 13 November 1981, The Search," Alzayyat focuses on a warden raid during her second imprisonment at the age of 58, when president Sadat orders to arrest, without trial, 1500 opposition figures of different political and religious affiliations. It is the process of recounting the experience of going to her second imprisonment that allows her to embrace the woman who was stifling her previous trauma of self-defeat. Here, the experience of a raid crystalizes how structures of oppression intersect and silence both Alzayyat's political activism and her understanding of her self as a woman. She is now able to see the connection by witnessing state violence that affects both the "politically nationally committed" and what she perceives as the "de-political Islamist woman" – a connection based on gender oppression.

It is in the second section that Alzayyat explains why these personal papers (the sections in the autobiography) are in a context of constant and search and why these life writings are in scattered chaos (the fragmentation of self/form). The El Qanatir Women's Prison, to which Alzayyat is taken in 1981, hopes to break the women's spirits and cause conflict, and places women from the Muslim Brotherhood in the same ward as the leftist political prisoners, a list that includes Marxist activist Amina Rashid, feminist Nawal El-Sadaawi, and leftist journalist Dr Awatef Abdel Rahman (116). The text in this section is distinctly different from the introspective reflections of previous section. Here, narration of events is fast and abrupt. The prisoners have organized a strike to protect Amina from disciplinary action. The group of women, having "grasped the dialectic of the struggle between warder and prisoner […] predict the search before it happened and hid everything that had to be hidden" (115). Prior to the first search, Alzayyat hides her diaries and papers and as she is covering evidence of a burnt newspaper, she anxiously

remembers “it occurred to me, as I filled a bucket with water, that my papers were all jumbled up in their secret hiding place and that although I always tried to keep them in order, they were not” (118).

As the women recover from the first search in the courtyard, the Islamist women take off their veils and Alzayyat heads to the lavatory. As the women let their guard down, they are ambushed with another search raid. This time, however, there are no officials to guarantee their safety or rights, and the raid is run entirely by men. The unexpected appearance of men in the prison ward throws the uncovered women into chaos. Alzayyat, worried about the pieces of writing she has left hidden in various places in the cell, abandons her shame of nakedness and tries to distract the prisoners. At this moment, however, she witnesses the beating and unveiling of her Islamist friend Sabah. Seeing how the Islamist prisoners have been stripped of their veils, she connects their dehumanization with how the wardens are degrading her by taking away her diaries. As Alzayyat is writing this memory down, she interjects to recall multiple facets of herself and states how the “terrified child,” the “bold girl who found salvation in belonging to the whole,” the “young woman debilitated by the inability to act,” and the “woman in middle age” all burst into consciousness in a hysterical collision:

> it had never happened before that the dividing line between reality and imagination, life and art, had slipped down from my consciousness, or that the terrified child and the bold girl who found salvation in belonging to the whole, and the young woman debilitated by the inability to act, and the woman in the middle of her life pressed between the covers of a book to avoid a clash, all burst into life from nothing, at the same conscious moment. (114)

Standing "on the brink between nightmare and reality," Alzayyat recalls "Rayya and Sakina, the most savage killers in Egypt" (121). She associates the prison guards with gangs: "the dividing line in my mind between oppression inflicted by those in authority and oppression inflicted by a gang of killers and thieves disappeared […] there was no mix up" (121). Alzayyat makes a link between the corruption of Sadat's government and ties it to the gang-like manifestation of state violence she witnesses at this moment and what she has witnessed before during her activism: "the young woman [had] an account she did not settle the day the police bullets felled fourteen people, dead, right in front of her eyes and she did nothing, was not able to do anything" (122).

Making this link to her past self who was unable to act, Alzayyat changes direction and attempts to block the guards from reaching the uncovered women. As the Commissioner seizes evidence of her diary, Alzayyat "screams at [her own] nakedness" (123). Not only do her "papers," her facets of her self, get exposed, she realizes that "the only dress I own to leave this hole has disappeared" (123). The dress represents the hope of leaving prison and she accuses the Commissioner of being the thief: "my existence depends upon getting back what has been stolen from me. Was it my dress? My humanity? What has been stolen from me? From us? Was it just at that moment, or in every decade past?" (124).

At that moment, Alzayyat connects her own nakedness with the Islamist girls who had to stand like captives in front of the Commissioner "stripped of their cloaks" (124). Picking up the girls' cloaks from the pile, Alzayyat remembers one last vision of her past self. Referring to the moment in history when local police betrayed student activists on their anti-colonial march towards the Palace, Alzayyat writes:

> Now I know I was the young woman […] sat on the edge of Abbas Bridge, her salt tears turning to stone as she waited for her companions, drowned one after the other, waited

> for the corpse of one companion after another, covered with the green flag, the victims of the Abbas Bridge Massacre. (124)

Going back and forth across the ward, "to each woman I gave something of her own" (125). She notices "as the parts of their outfit came together bit by bit […] my most private possessions were flying through the air" (125). As the raid concludes, Alzayyat writes:

> my eyes weep as I finish what I am doing. I drape the last cloak over Sabah and hold her to my breast, the salt tears in my eyes that turned to stone are spent, the tears in the eyes of a young woman who sat on the bank of the Nile in 1946, watching one person after the other drown. (125)

Tying the nationalist covering of the flag with the covering of her fellow inmate, Alzayyat is finally able to close the autobiography with the resolution of her fragmented self and the organization of her papers: "it crossed my mind, as I settled comfortably on the end of the bed, that I could now put my papers, that were all mixed up where they lay in their secret hiding place, in order" (125).

Whereas before the raid, Alzayyat's fragmented conception of the self had been in conflict, the active process of this search and resistance to the guards brings to the surface a feminist consciousness that sees a different relationship of the self and the other to the collective. While nationalism insists on collectivity based on similarity of identity, in this vignette where Alzayyat prioritizes the experiences of the Islamist women, Alzayyat finds a way to understand relationality to the collective through difference, which is reflected in her narration of a fragmented self. Here, Alzayyat's conceptualization of her self as a "woman" with "feminine concerns," once deemed as irrelevant to the activist movement and derailing the nationalist project of resistance, now changes. Realizing the importance of this fragment of different self

becomes intrinsic to the change in her political consciousness and resistance. Solidarity with the Islamist prisoners is done on the basis of gender knowing fully well they are both imprisoned because of their subversion to Sadat's government. The moment of the search, though it unravels her papers (memories), fuses the individual with the collective in a material and symbolic manner. It literally manifests the reconciliation of different selves.

Furthermore, not only do we see an actual enactment of collective solidarity with the prisoners, we also see the fusion of the body's nakedness with the writing. The scattered papers not only represent her memories, but this hysterical textual moment fuses the female body with her writing and memories to reveal them as epistemology. The dignity of the body stands at the core of this incident. In this literal and metaphorical un/covering and re/collection, Alzayyat draws our attention to the centrality and vulnerability of the feminine body. Her writings and memories are part of the re/creation and the reconciliation of her multiple selves and their relation to other vulnerable women's bodies (i.e. Muslim women and veil/modesty). When the search is over, so do we reach the end of the autobiography where Alzayyat "could now put [her] papers, that were all mixed up where they lay in their secret hiding place, in order" (125).

While Alzayyat is careful to illustrate solidarity amongst women in the prison, she is careful not to reduce them to a background chorus of supporting women. Rather, she includes herself in their struggle. The nakedness of the body that Alzayyat feels with the scrambling of her papers is intertwined with the Islamist women in her prison suite who are shamed into scrambling for a headpiece as the prison ward barges in. It is in the process of writing down her memories that Alzayyat is able to connect the headscarf and the green flag in their purpose of covering a nationalist martyr/an Islamist prisoner. This is not simply an act of solidarity, it is a comment on the nationalist discourse showing how despite different political ideologies, this

violent act of exposure/uncovering places the women under the different articulations of oppression.

Alzayyat's autobiographical subject is actualized in the fragmentation and recollection of the self in the process of writing. Compared to her most famous novel, *The Open Door*, this autobiography critiques the nationalist "committed" dream that was being built and advocated for in the novel. The formal structure of the autobiographical text reflects the political disillusionment that Alzayyat felt towards the *iltizam* (committed) literature movement. Where *The Open Door*, for example, is narrated through a seamless coherent narrative of a politically active woman, the autobiography, *The Search*, is fragmented, hesitant, and continuously ambivalent. By comparing the two texts, I argue that Alzayyat's autobiographical voice decidedly breaks down the stoic hopefulness of her famous novel by presenting a life-narrative that is critical of the postcolonial nation-state. Alzayyat reinvents what a "committed" autobiographical subject looks like in form and style. The form and structure of the autobiography mirrors the connection of the personal to the political in Alzayyat's life writing. While previous critics have illustrated that Alzayyat's work does indeed present a kind of committed literature, I argue that Alzayyat's autobiographical voice is "committed" to a changing literary voice that deconstructs gendered and classed politics of nationalist movements and literatures. In other words, while *The Open Door* can be read as a form of committed Arabic/Egyptian literature, the autobiographical voice of *The Search* is "committed" for other reasons that have seen Alzayyat's literary life-narrative *change* into something that requires a decentering of the conventions of autobiography. In my reading of Alzayyat's autobiography, I see that her way of presenting life changes had to be fragmented, highly symbolic, and

ambivalent precisely because of the changed political atmosphere, i.e., from a seamless "coherent" decolonial nationalism to a burgeoning Egyptian neoliberalism.

EPILOGUE: Autobiography as Theory

My dissertation's contribution to the field of feminist studies has been to argue for the potentialities of using the analytical framework of life/lines to understand Arab women's autobiographies' political and historical interventions. Arab women's autobiographies demonstrate an awareness of colonialist and nationalist subjectivities and they not only deconstruct formations of selfhood in narrative but also present new formal and rhetorical strategies for representing feminist agency. I adopt to the framework of line/lines not only as a way to reveal Arab women writers' innovative formal interventions, but also to highlight how these texts present theoretical understandings of discursive subjectivity's potentialities. I read these autobiographies not simply as narrations of life events or history, but as of ways of knowing how Arab women's lives have been politicized in intersecting ways. Using the framework of life/lines helped me trace various forms of narrated epistemologies. These narratives show that Arab women have developed complex ways of conceptualizing their circumstances and have connected lines of thought that understand their privilege and oppression in ways beyond the limitations of constricting colonialist and nationalist frameworks. I view these texts as modes of epistemological expression. These autobiographies are theory in narration.

Furthermore, I argue that life/lines and linearity helps trace the directionality in thought and development of feminist consciousness in these autobiographies, which can help shift our understanding of feminist subversion from Western liberal feminist frameworks that measure subversive agency as located in the public sphere, i.e. recognizing feminist subversion only through its capacity for visible action. In other words, I trace how Arab feminism(s) can be

articulated in nuanced ways that do not subscribe to the public expression of subversive action. Rather, we need to shift our understanding of Arab feminism(s) to see how agency can be traced in the multiple temporalities of silence, ambivalence, and hesitance, for example, to problematize our understanding of Arab women's self-representational approaches. The importance of my project is that it complicates what it means for an Arab woman to be a feminist. I read these autobiographies for how they negotiate silences and ambivalences as sites of self-definition, for example. By redefining feminism from its traditional sense (the public/political), I trace an alternative genealogy of Arab feminism that challenges the implicit public/private split of the traditional definition of politics. Moreover, I challenge how these traditional definitions of what feminism means can have dire consequences by erasing the extant vibrant Arab feminist traditions. Tracing linearity and direction of thought in these texts helps us see how these texts speak to both Western and Arab audiences. It engages and combats liberal Western feminist readings of Arab women as "oppressed." It shows that feminist consciousness can articulate both a native "homegrown" sensibility while simultaneously adopting Western feminist frameworks.

I have argued here that Mernissi articulates the autobiographical subject through a language of space and embodiment. By narrating the autobiographical subject's understanding of life in a home/harem through relational aspects of the body in space and architecture, we are able to garner an alternative understanding of how women understand their oppression and how power operates in those spaces. Mernissi does not only articulate a theory of oppression through a language of spatiality and embodiment, she also brings to the forefront a lineage of women who participated in passing on this epistemology.

One of the reasons I turned to theories of commitment, embodiment, and spatiality is because religion is not *the* determining factor of understanding Arab women's lives. I reference

these analytics while resorting to Islamic frameworks as cultural peripheries. Mernissi's theorization of power and autobiographical subjectivity necessitates much more space than is permitted in a strictly Islamic feminist framework. Tuqan and Alzayyat's life narratives are too complex to be read through an Islamic feminist framework. In fact, most of the time, Islamic feminism is on the periphery, or might not even factor in. Reducing diverse expressions of Islam to a simple prism of view not only limits a complex understanding of Arab women's lives, but it is also sometimes not the applicable frame. In Tuqan and Alzayyat's life narratives, for example, the reference to religious texts or practices as forming the subject is really only part of the cultural background; it is not the driving force of actions.

Nonetheless, in writing my future projects, I see Mernissi's intervention in narrating spatial and embodied experiences of women through an Islamic framework as productive and helpful in that she offers a comparative analytical lens when looking at contemporary texts by women from the Arabian Gulf countries, for example, who write of living under similar "enclosed" and classed spatialities. How would they narrate a discursive understanding of embodiment and spatiality and how power operates? How might we complicate Mernissi's Islamic framework of understanding women's spatiality and embodiment in situations where women have a different understanding of their class privilege? Furthermore, Mernissi's work inspires me to engage with and contribute to feminist theories in the fields of cultural geography and architecture. Additionally, my reading of Mernissi's text can be expanded further when read in conjunction with Sara Ahmed's text *Queer Phenomenology*, in the sense that Mernissi helps us rethink the orientation of liminal thinking for transnational hybrid Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern feminists. This would expand on my project's contribution to transnational feminist

theory by highlighting Arab women's cultural production as continuing and engaging political interventions.

I have demonstrated how Latifa Alzayyat's autobiographical work is important because she takes the concept of political commitment from the public sphere and personalizes in her own narrative. I view Alzayayt's life narrative as a theoretical text in the ways in which she exposes the masculinist and nationalist limitations of previous iterations of political commitment. By exploring her life's fractions, she discovers vulnerabilities espoused in her own formulation of what political commitment could be. Her life narrative suggests that the confidence and straight lines that national political commitment demands are false and need to be challenged. In my reading, I see her autobiography as providing political commitment in a new personal medium. She is reframing literary commitment and what political autobiography could look like. When I was researching theories of commitment in Arabic texts, I noticed a visible absence of women's representation. "*Qadhiyyat almar'a*" (trans. the issue of woman) was a topic discussed on the periphery of nationalist and committed involvement. However, Alzayyat was not only a central contributor to the formation of political commitment theory, but she also revolutionized it, which was barely acknowledged. Therefore, I strategically place Alzayyat's texts in connection to Egypt's political history and to Arabic commitment theory – as opposed to being placed in relation to Western Marxist feminism(s), for example – to emphasize the absence of feminist trajectories in her local contexts. It is my hope that my project highlights Alzayyat's work as a starting point for young Arab feminists to uncover a rich theoretical feminist tradition in activist and political revolutionary thought and cultural production.

Among my project's main goals, I sought to trace an alternative genealogy of Arab feminism(s) and also to stress how these feminist narrative strategies could be helpful in

challenging normative linear thinking practices. In this way, I see Alzayyat's autobiographical narrative strategies as not only expressing a feminist subjectivity, but also offering a lens by which to deconstruct historical and nationalist linear narration. It would also be productive for future research on Alzayyat to place her autobiographical narration of Egyptian postcolonial temporality alongside Homi Bhabha's ideas on nationalist discourse in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, And The Margins Of The Modern Nation." It would be productive, for example, to read Alzayyat's narration of two nationalist temporalities of political commitment alongside Bhabha's explanation of nationalist discourse's ambivalent disjunctive temporality and its "double narrative movement" between the "pedagogic" mode of nationalist representation (continuist, accumulative temporality) and "performative" discourse of nationalism (repeated, recursive temporality). Engaging Alzayyat's autobiographical work with postcolonial theories of nationalist narration would provide a complex view of how historical narration is deconstructed in Arabic literary practices.

For Fadwa Tuqan, I argued that autobiography is the site of self-reinvention and a continuing legacy and genealogy. Tuqan understands and narrates her life in the shadow of death. Exposing the necropolitical conditions of living in Palestine under British colonialism and Israeli occupation is the first step of narrating her life. Narrating a perpetual self-birth into narrative, a continual legacy, by exposing deathly conditions, becomes its own subversive political act. Tuqan's life narrative provides an understanding of the contextual living conditions that bring forth her hesitations and silences. Her choice to have death and silence as companions to the text – rather than the foundation – is a political act that connects her to the national line of continual Palestinian rebirth. For Tuqan, then, the choice to be individual and insist on self-rebirth is not always exclusive of the collective; rather, it is a part of it. In this way, I have

attempted to connect literary studies of autobiography as a central site of political cultural production. As I was reading Tuqan's autobiography for the alternative ways in which she recreates her own future genealogies, I wondered what other Arab women's texts have also expressed queer relationships to their families, their communities, and their nations? I hope that my reading of Tuqan's text enables a critical reading of Arab women's potentialities in queerness.

Tuqan's circular attempts of narrating life from moments of death is a feminist tactic shared by Mernissi and Alzayyat. They all begin their moments of being-into-narrative by addressing the ghostly companions of death that brought them into being. Tuqan locates several instances of familial deaths; Alzayyat begins to write as her brother is dying in the next room; and Mernissi places her birth at the intersection of colonial crusades and religious influence. Initiating the autobiographical act of writing coincides with a process of memory retrieval that begins with histories and genealogies of oppression. Beginning a line of life narration from death allows these writers to expose the necropolitical conditions that not only shaped their communities' pasts, but also structure their futurities. In my opinion, this tactic not only places these texts as theoretical texts in narrative, but these acts of writing-from-death reveals how intricately these women tie their fates to their past and future collectives.

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