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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Unruly Bodies: Modernity, Dissensus, and the Political Subject in the Postcolonial Arab World

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Comparative Literature

by

Ghada Mourad

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2017

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DEDICATION

To

my parents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	
CURRICULUM VITAE	
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: 'THE ROMANTICISM OF STRUGGLE IS OVER': DISSENSUS AND/AS MODERNITY IN SONALLAH IBRAHIM	39
CHAPTER 2: 'DIEU A CRÉÉ LA BEAUTÉ COMME UNE *FITNA'* : MODERNITY IN THE MAKING IN MOHAMED LEFTAH'S *LE DERNIER COMBAT DU CAPTAIN NIMAT*	78
CHAPTER 3: 'THE SUFFERING OF THE RULE IS US' : UNRULY BODIES IN HODA BARAKAT'S *AHL AL-HAWA AND HAJAR AL-DAHIK*	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY	147

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The role of dissenting gendered bodies in the instigation of modernity in postcolonial Arabic and Francophone literature in the Middle East and North Africa

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Unruly Bodies: Dissensus, Modernity, and the Political Subject in the Postcolonial Arab World

By

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Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Irvine, 2017

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This dissertation studies the articulation of modernity in its understanding as dissensus through the performativity of queer bodies in post-1960 Arabic and Francophone literature in the Middle East and North Africa. More specifically, I study Sonallah Ibrahim's *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* Mohamed Leftah's *Le Dernier combat du Captain Nimat,* and Hoda Barakat's *Ahl el-Hawa* and *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* I challenge the prevailing depiction of the modern Arab subject as ideological and/or submissive, an image that has been tainting this subject since the 1967 Defeat, and which has re-emerged in force following the recent political disappointments in the Arab world, by demonstrating that this subject is formed and expresses itself as a subject of desire, the engine of change.

The introduction theorizes modernity as a dissenting attitude that is both atemporal and historically contextualized, framed by the intersection of various theories: Adonis's theorization of Arab modernity as creative and innovative forces instigated by the marginals and seditious (*al-khurūj)*; Michel Foucault's understanding of modernity as an attitude, and his theorization of *assujetissement*; Jacques Rancière's configuration of politics in the aesthetics of literature, as an

intervention in the sensible; Judith Butler's conceptualization of the subject through a psychoanalytic lens that adds the gender dimension to this subject that, as a biopolitical subject, dissents from the prism of sexuality; and Dina Al-Kassim's elaboration on Judith Butler's work by theorizing the abject expression of dissent by sexual minorities. My first chapter studies how the male narrator's body registers dissent through the performativity of sexual, social, and literary non-conformity. The second chapter builds on Abdelkebir Khatibi's understanding of decolonization to analyze dissent through the male narrator's sexuality. I conclude that Mohamed Leftah envisages modernity as a process in the making, looking for an epistemology to articulate its ontology. The third chapter analyzes male queerness to assess the war's role in society's multifaceted regulation of its marginals and seditious. This chapter imagines modernity in the space opened by Barakat's deconstruction of binaries. Centered around male queerness and abnormality, these texts register dissent while pointing at the need to recenter Arab feminist discourse on queerness away from women's veil.

INTRODUCTION

In the fourth volume of *Al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil (The Static and the Dynamic)*, Adonis writes that modernity or *ḥadātha* started in Arab culture as an attitude (*mawqef*) that takes the past as an example and interpret it by virtue of the present. This modernity consists mainly of forces of change (*taghiīr*) and creativity (*ibdāʿ*) in tension with the forces of conservation and imitation of ancestral traditions and texts (*salafiyya* and *ittibāʿ*). Adonis dates the inception of modernity to the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, where two currents of modernity existed: one intellectual-political, and another artistic. While the intellectual strand was expressed through Sufism and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), poetic modernity was mainly founded by outsiders and marginalized people (*khurūj*).[1] Modernity, Adonis explains, was born historically out of the clash and interaction between the two positions or mindsets, during a time of change and the emergence of new circumstances brought by Islam. Adonis also notes that *ḥadātha* (modernity) shares common roots with *iḥdāth* (innovation, creation) and *muḥdath* (the modern, the innovated), thus situating creation and innovation within modernity. He defines it thus:

> Modernity is a new vision. It is, in essence, a vision of interrogation and contestation: interrogating the possible, and contesting the predominant. The moment of modernity is a moment of tension, i.e., contradiction and collision between the prevailing structures in society, and what its deep transformative movement requires of the structures that respond and correspond to them.[2]

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[1] It is noteworthy that the Arabic term *khurūj,* which is a plural of *khārej,* means an outsider as well as a dissident.
[2] Adonis. *Al-Thābit wa al-Mutaḥawwil vol. 4.* 17 (my translation).

After having defined modernity as an innovative and creative attitude, Adonis catalogues the various poetic modernities that marked Arabic literature. In his *Introduction to Arab Poetics,* Adonis writes

> [T]hose in power designated everyone who did not think according to the culture of the caliphate as 'the people of innovation'(*ahl al-iḥdāth*), excluding them with this indictment of heresy from their Islamic affiliation. This explains how the terms *ihdāth* (innovation) and *muḥdath* (modern, new) used to characterize the poetry which violated the ancient poetic principles, came originally from the religious lexicon. Consequently, we can see that the modern in poetry appeared to the ruling establishment as a political or intellectual attack on the culture of the regime and a rejection of the idealized standards of the ancient, and how, therefore, in Arab life the poetic has always been mixed up with the political and the religious, and indeed continues to be so.[3]

According to Adonis's explanation, modernity or *ḥadātha* is not limited to the literary movement that originated in Europe and spread to the rest of the world. He conceptualizes modernity as being an ongoing process of creation and innovation that takes different shapes according to the realities of various epochs. I would like to reiterate Adonis's emphasis on creation in modernity, for modernity creates a new reality rather than mimics the existing one. In *Sufism and Surrealism,* Adonis elaborates on the Sufis' ability to reinterpret the religious texts as well as create "a world inside the world" through their deployment of language. The Sufists' contestation of the established regimes of truth and creation of their own partly explain their role in the

[3] See Adonis' *Introduction to Arab Poetics.* 76.

instigation of modernity in Islamic cultures. Nonetheless, Adonis offers a conceptualization of modernity that is both historically conditioned and atemporal. As a dialectical movement with and resistance to the power structure in place, modernity is conditioned by the nature of this power structure and its historical condition. This dialectical movement is recurring throughout various historical periods. Also, the understanding of modernity should not be limited to the religious or Sufi context; various instigators of Arabic literary and intellectual modernity have been known to be secular.[4] Moreover, Adonis's reasoning leads us to envision the antagonistic forces—modernity and tradition—as fluctuating and mutating throughout various historical situations.

In his essay "What Is Enlightenment?" Michel Foucault offers a conceptualization of modernity similar to Adonis's. For Foucault, modernity is "rather…an attitude than…a period of history… a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task."[5] It is also, Foucault adds, "a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment."[6] Foucault's configuration of modernity converges with Adonis's; both see that modernity, as a recurring and innovating movement, always derives from the circumstances at hand and is historically contextualized. It is a process whereby new subjectivities take form and actualize through positions and acts, whether on the artistic, intellectual, or political levels. From a political perspective, Jacques Rancière situates the production of political subjectivity at

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[4] In *Al-Thābit wal-Mutaḥawwel, volume IV,* Adonis enumerates several 8th-century Arab poets whom he considers modern by the definition of modernity he elaborates. The list includes such poets as Abū Nuwās, Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, and others.
[5] "What Is Enlightenment?"39.
[6] Ibid. 39.

the heart of this process of contestation (which he calls “dissensus”) leading to innovation and creation (because the need to innovate and create presupposes a sentiment of dissatisfaction and disagreement with the current state of affairs). For Rancière, dissensus constitutes the foundation of the production of the political subject. A political subject, he writes in *Dissensus,* “is a capacity for staging scenes of dissensus” which “is not a confrontation between interests or opinions… [but] the manifestation of a distance of the sensible from itself”.[7] A dissensus effects a redistribution of the sensible and a reshaping of space to include the invisible and the uncounted, including those Adonis calls *al-khurūj* (meaning both “the outsiders” and “the marginalized”). Rancière adds that since the subject’s action “is continually thwarted,” it is indispensable that “the power of the people [be] re-enacted ceaselessly by political subjects that challenge the police distribution of parts, places or competences, and that re-stage the anarchic foundation of the political” (54). We can say then, according to Rancière, that political subjectivity is sustained through a repetitive re-enacting of dissensus. It is the vulnerability and contingency of dissensus, its dynamic and unstable nature that necessitate its recurrence, always changing in function of the shifting situation. I note that Rancière's understanding of politics (*la politique*) as “an intervention in the visible and the sayable” (37) and a philosophical object of thought that encompasses more than the political (*le politique*) or the police (*la police*)—which can also be understood as *l’étatique*—orders and thwarts them.[8] A crucial distinction between these terms is that politics cannot presuppose the pre-existence of a subject. Subjectivation takes place along the process of dissensus; a subject is formed and

[7] Jacques Rancière, “Ten Theses on Politics.” Trans. Rachel Bowlby and Davide Panagia. *Theory & Event.* 5.3 (2001).
[8] Jacques Rancière, « Dix thèses sur le politique. » In *Aux bords du politique.* Paris: Gallimard, 2004.

framed; it participates in its own subjectivation. On the other hand, the political or the police operate on already formed subjects; more, the political or the police cancel out the political subject (*le sujet de la politique*).

At the risk of reducing Rancière's *le sujet [de la] politique*—which we cannot translate into "the political subject" without oversimplifying it—to Foucault's subject as formed and framed in the process of subjectivation or *assujettissement*, I believe that the two are not completely equals, but the process of subjectivation Foucault conceptualizes has parallels to Rancière's theorization of politics. Locating dissensus at the heart of politics, Rancière situates the formation of the subject, *le sujet politique* or *the dissenting subject* (my translation/ interpretation) within this process. Politics does not presuppose a pre-existing subject, but operates in a simultaneous fashion with the formation and framing of this subject, just as Foucault's *assujettissement* produces a subject in the process of subjugating it.

Jacques Rancière conceptualizes politics as an intervention in the domain of the perceptible or the sensible. This intervention carries importance because it challenges a practice of exclusion meant to silence some parts of the sensible. In this way, politics makes visible what is unsayable and invisible. This perception of politics is pertinent to the politics of literature, as also Rancière views it. In line with his own thinking, Rancière posits that literature enacts politics not by the fact that an author is expressing his/her own political views, but by the mere fact that what is considered to bear the name of literature is what intervenes again in the sensible and effectuates a distribution and redistribution of this domain, coupled with a symptomatic and ambivalent reading. This project proposes to read the redistribution of the sensible as symptomatic of the

formation of the political subject. In his framing of politics and the way it operates, Rancière writes that the police distributes the sensible in a way that produces exclusions that are unacknowledged by the regime of the police: "C'est cette exclusion de ce qu' 'il n'y a pas' qui est le principe policier au coeur de la pratique étatique."[9] The intervention of politics, by bringing to light 'ce qu'il n'y a pas'—what is invisible under the police distribution of the sensible—is including an excess that exposes the (unacknowledged) lack. Accordingly, this project proposes to read the redistribution of the sensible as symptomatic of the formation of the political subject in both ways: through the production of the (haunting) excess as well as the (constitutive) lack. The sensible is in part that what makes us subjects, as bodies, corporeal, human subjects with human senses with their particularities. Art speaks to this particularity and idiosyncrasy; the sensual being is valorized, kept in suspense, as political act:

> Si la politique proprement dite consiste dans la production de sujets qui donnent voix aux anonymes, la politique propre à l'art dans le régime esthétique consiste dans l'élaboration du monde sensible de l'anonyme, des modes du *cela* et du *je,* d'où émergent les mondes propres des *nous* politiques.[10]

Art, according to Rancière's view, does not step out of itself into "the real world" in order to be political. There is no "real" that exists on its own. Rather, it is configurations of what is presented as "our real," which is a construction of the space where the visible, the sayable, and the doable intersect. It is this consensual fiction, parading as "the real", that "artistic fiction and political art…hollow… fracture, and multiply on a polemical mode," thus effectuating dissensus, which consists of a conflict between different

[9] "It is this exclusion of what 'isn't there' that constitutes the police principle at the heart of State practice" (my translation). See Rancière's *Aux bords du politique.* 177.
[10] "les paradoxes de l'art politique" 73.

sensorial regimes producing within the spectator or the reader new perceptions and new rapports to the world. [11]

Examined closely, Rancière's conceptualization of the politics of literature as intervention in the distribution of the sensible is an application of Foucault's configuration of the relations of power in the artistic and literary world. Furthermore, it can be useful to juxtapose this mode of thinking to the conceptualization of literature in the Arabic tradition, where literature, or *adab,* has both didactic and aesthetic functions. It is supposed to "instruct through entertainment," and this perception of *adab,* although largely informed by classical Arabic tradition, was revived during the 19th-century *Nahda,* and persists till our days. The conceptualization of *adab* as literature and as morality has been exploited by both the censors disapproving the "amorality" of certain literary works, and the writers contesting this function attributed to literature.[12] These writers, more particularly the authors studied in this dissertation: Sonallah Ibrahim, Mohamed Leftah, and Hoda Barakat, have not so much been asserting a certain disregard for the didactic function of literature as negotiating, reconfiguring, and reimagining this function in their works. This reinterpretation of the function of *adab* presupposes a reimagining of the sensible, of the politics of literature, and the emergence of new subjectivities, a vision that is not incompatible with Rancière's dissensus and the politics of literature. Here Rancière's conceptualization of politics is useful to the understanding of modernity as defined by Adonis and Foucault (although one can argue that Adonis's configuration might presuppose a pre-existing subject, and that contestation of axes of power identified as modernity places the dissenting forces in

[11] *Ibid* 84. My translation.
[12] See Richard Jacquemond's discussion of *adab* in *Conscience of the Nation.* 9-11.

a subsequent order to the dominating power; at stake for Adonis is not the formation of the subject as much as his perception of modernity in Arab culture as an ongoing movement). Putting the three in dialogue is of interest to the present project as it sets the ground for discussing modernity and political subjectivity in the contemporary Arab world as they are articulated in the abovementioned works.

Hence, this project is by no means a claim to investigate the essence of modernity; rather, I look into one aspect of modernity—dissensus/politics—as it is articulated in the following novels: *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* by Sonallah Ibrahim, *Le Dernier combat du Captain Niʻmat* by Mohamed Leftah, and two of Hoda Barakat's novels: *Ḥajar al- Ḍaḥik* and *Ahl el-Hawa*. More particularly, this dissertation analyzes the capacity of these novels to be political, in the sense that they are able to register dissent against and expose various forms of domination by having unruly bodies directly embody "the sense of the common." This unruliness materializing as the inadequate sexual performance and economic productivity as in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*, unclassifiable older-man-younger-man sexual relationship as in *Le Dernier combat du Captain Niʻmat,* and fragmented male sexuality as in *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* and *Ahl el-Hawa.* However, while this unruliness is able to register dissent, I argue, it does not contest the perception of modernity as exclusively male and centered on perceptions of manhood and masculinity; it also meets with frustration on two levels, the first of which is the productive frustration of all avant-garde projects that are looking for a hitherto inexistent epistemology to articulate the ontology they envision and narrate; the second frustration emanates from the fact that this unruliness, which is also queerness and/or abnormality, is always confronted with the absence of a queer feminist discourse, even though a

variety of Arab feminisms are featured in the works in this study. For while the discourse about male queerness has been helping rethink masculinity and queer theory from the context of the Arab world, Arab queer feminist studies have largely been absent. Accordingly, the framework of my approach helps recenter the feminist discourse in the Arab world, which is still revolving around the veil, towards a discourse focalized on the fragmentation of female sexuality that has yet to look for a taxonomy and a typology.

Critically engaging studies focusing on modern Arab subjectivity has been emerging since the turn of the twenty-first century. Recent works on this subject have been theoretically compelling, as they are shedding light on hitherto unstudied facets of the modern Arab subject and initiating a much-needed critical conversation about the subject; however, these works are premised on notions of "failure" and "trials" in their approach to modern Arab subjectivity. In *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity,* Stephen Sheehi traces the formation of modern Arab identity by examining works by some notable *Nahda* intellectuals and writers through a compelling engagement with psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and post-structuralist theories. In his work, Sheehi demonstrates how these thinkers developed an indigenous modern identity, but this identity has interiorized the concept of failure attributed to it by colonial discourses, and this failure became inherent to modern Arab identity. Tarek El-Ariss's *Trials of Arab Modernity* initiates a discussion whereby bodies perform modernity through "symptoms and affects" by drawing on texts from both classical and modern Arabic literature and thought. El-Ariss's study of modernity as a somatic condition shifts the discussion of literature as representation to literature as an aesthetic experience whereby the "trials as a violent and ongoing confrontation with and within modernity, decentering yet also

redefining and producing it."[13] El-Ariss's critique puts the body on center stage and shifts the conceptualization of modernity from as an essentially western project or a universal narrative of progress to one that is contextualized and has indigenous roots, which destabilizes commonly held dichotomies and hierarchies. For this dissertation, which is neither a departure nor a continuation of the previously mentioned works, but a differently framed project that takes on the study of the expression of Arab modern subjectivity, I propose a reading of modernity through a study of the performativity of the unruly gendered body.

My study of the dissenting capacity of the unruly body as an expression of modernity in literary texts is framed by the Foucauldian conceptualization of subjectivation, Judith Butler's elaboration of Foucault's theory through a psychoanalytic prism, and Dina Al-Kassim's reworking of this process in her theorization of the articulation of practices of freedom in literature through the lens of the literary rant. We have learned from Foucault that the subject is produced at the expense of the body. Judith Butler explains that "the destruction of the body that allows the subject to form happens in normalization (constitutive loss). This body not only constitutes the subject in its dissociated and sublimated state, but also exceeds or resists any effort at sublimation."[14] We also know that normalization of the body materializes through gender and race. For the purpose of this project, however, and following Foucault's argument that the gendered body is the site of the application of biopolitics, and its normalization happens through the normalization of its gender, I focus on the unruliness of the body mainly through its gender and sexuality. Accordingly, the failure to normalize is the site

[13] Tarek El-Ariss, *Trial of Arab Modernity*. 3.
[14] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power.* 29.

of discourses of modernity, and these discourses of modernity, as Butler suggests in a gesture that departs from Lacan, are situated at the level of the symbolic through reiteration, which produces the possibility for resignification and subversion.[15] In more concrete terms, normalization takes shape through the heterosexual imperative of producing and regulating masculine and feminine identities, which leaves a wide range of other identities as the "constitutive outside…and in the case of the bodies, those exclusions haunt signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed: the unlivable, the nonnarrativizable, the traumatic."[16]

Dina Al-Kassim uses the mechanism of subjectivation and the entailing foreclosure for her theorization of narratives articulated from the margins. She writes, "Marginality—not as a group identity but as the resistant effect of having become a subject—engenders writing in the mode of a critical examination of the social world."[17] Unlike the narratives of resistance that are limited and intimately connected to forms of power, the narrative produced by the margin "implies a certain seizing upon power, participating in its reach and rerouting its potential through untrafficked or unprecedented terrain."[18] Like the performativity of the body that subverts through resignification, this narrative disrupts forms of power through reiteration. This narrative has the capability to expand the boundaries of normative subjectivity mainly by "expos[ing] the forms of power's reach" as it rearticulates intelligibility, Al-Kassim adds. From this optic, then, dissenting narratives that feature abject or "inassimilable" sexualities and unruly bodies articulate the modern by "testing the limits of normative

[15] *Ibid*. 29.
[16] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter.* 140.
[17] Dina Al-Kassim, *On Pain of Speech.* 23.
[18] Ibid. 24.

subjectivity"[19] not only on the level of heteronormativity, but also on the level other normativities, as is the case of the novels under study in this dissertation. The choice of these novels is governed not only by the fact that they register dissent through the unruliness of the body, but also because their narratives do not offer a resolution that can be encapsulated as resistance positioning itself in a dialectical opposition to the power structures; their discourse, uttered from their marginal, abject position, is "a symptom of modern subjection" as it exposes the "lawlessness of the law" and recenters itself through the fantasy of addressing this law.[20] Accordingly, the novels I study in this dissertation have been misread by critics who are accustomed to the realist prose writing in Arabic literature (as in the case of Sonallah Ibrahim and Hoda Barakat) and to the iconoclastic francophone text targeting the king, the father, and the *fqih* in the North-African society (as in the case of Mohamed Leftah). I show in this study that these works address a multitude of forms of power through the discursive performativity of the body and sexuality that promises "a radical democratic notion of futurity"[21] and imagines modern Arab subjectivity as one of desire.

In the first chapter, "'The Romanticism of Struggles Is Over': Dissent and/as Modernity in Sonallah Ibrahim's *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*," I analyze *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*'s dissenting qualities through the performativity of the unruly body, and more particularly by analyzing the failures of the male narrator's body to have intercourse with a prostitute or look for a remunerated work as a refusal to conform to social norms, from the heterosexual imperative, to the modern nation-state's call for steady productivity, and to capitalism's glorification of the laboring body. Furthermore, by the fact of staging a

[19] Ibid. 4-5.
[20] Ibid. 46.
[21] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter.* 142-143.

malfunctioning body in the narrative, Ibrahim is also registering dissent against the social realist literary norms of his time period, whereby a narrative is expected to present disembodied characters and depict a world full of beauty, rather than focusing on ugliness. Taking issue with the predominant critique that interprets the failures in this novel as precursory of the theme of the impotent male in Arabic literature, hence determining that the narrative was premonitory of the 1967 Defeat, I argue that the body's failures register dissent by signaling an unbridgeable gap between the narrator and the forms of power in place while also pointing to the crisis of the leftist intellectual in the 60s and their inability to carry to terms any fruitful endeavor, hence the narrator's failed attempts to write a coherent novel. These dissenting qualities, examined through failures, are still overlooked and/or misinterpreted by critics, mainly because this book has been studied and analyzed from the post-1967 Defeat perspective and literary productions wherein the theme of disillusionment and disempowerment predominates, and which feature powerless and defeated Arab characters. Hence, my examination of the articulation of dissensus/modernity in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* has a wider implication, which resonates as well in the following chapters, and whose aim is to redefine the Arab political subject as one of dissensus and desire[22] rather than—as it is widely held (especially since the 1967 Defeat and more recently after the demise of the 2011 Arab uprisings)—ideological, backward, or/and submissive.[23]

[22] I use "desire" in a way similar to the psychoanalytic use of "libido," i.e., as the energy associated with human activity in its wide range of manifestations, and this energy essentially constitutes the engine of change in society.

[23] I take cue for this assertion from the Moroccan psychoanalyst Jalil Bennani who writes in *Un psy dans la cité,* published in 2012, in the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings, that these uprisings are "le movement, non pas des pères, mais des pairs. Les jeunes devenus adultes, mûrs, se situant au plus près de leur époque, une époque qui ne repose plus sur les idéologies, mais sur le désir" (187). Moreover, recent scholarship has been largely dominated by reflections on "the Arab plight," the "disease," of a "disembodied 'Arab nation'" as a result of the recent political disappointments in the Arab world. See

The 1967 Defeat, or as it is sometimes inaccurately called *Al-Naksa* (the Setback), was a watershed moment in the twentieth-century history of the Arab world, and has also caused a profusion of inkshed. A great number of works have tried to surmise on the root cause of this defeat (which arguably was mainly a military defeat, but assumed much wider dimensions and had repercussions that extended to the psychological realm, causing what Abdallah Laroui called "a moral crisis"). A great number of political analysts have incriminated the nature of the Arab citizen, and waves of disillusionment and soul searching rippled over every aspect of the Arab world. A brief list of some of these works includes Ṣaḍiq Jalal al-'Aẓm's influential *Al-naqd al-Dhāti baʿdal-hazīma* (Self-Criticism after the Defeat), where the author asserts that the defeat is a reflection and an expression of the actual/existing reality of the Arab world ,calling for a radical revolution of the masses and working classes *à la russe* (the October revolution) to save themselves from "backwardness," a term widely circulating at the time and adopted by Mohammad Hasanayn Haykal, who attributed the defeat to the Arabs' backwardness in comparison to the Israelis' "modernity" in *Ḥarb al-Thalāthīna ʿāman: Sanawāt al-ghalayān* (The Thirty-Years War: The Boiling Years).[24]

More recent critique still reiterates the same disappointment with the incapacity of the Arab subject to emancipate themselves. In her review of al-ʿAẓm's book, "39 Years Later," Dima Wannous deems that 39 later (in 2006), this book is still relevant to Arab politics, social issues, etc. Wannous states that backwardness, ignorance, and decadence are rampant in the Arab world, pointing out that Arabs have maintained the

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Hanadi al-Samman, *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship, and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings.* 2015: 166.

[24] Ṣādiq Jalal 'Aẓm, *Al-naqd Al-Dhātī Baʿda Al-Hazīmah.* Dimashq: Dār Mamdūḥ 'Adwān lil-Nashr wa-Tawzī', 2007: 34-35.

same mentality of throwing the responsibility of their woes on imperialism and Zionism, while censorship, the media, and the ossified educational systems are mainly to blame for hindering critical thinking and creativity in the Arab world. Those who reviewed this book in 2007-2008 agree on the fact that the situation has not changed since the 1967 Defeat. They express the dire need for self-criticism in the Arab world.[25] In *Considérations sur le malheur arabe*, Samir Kassir defines the Arab woe/misfortune (*le malheur arabe*) as essentially a condition of impotence *(impuissance*) stemming from a dwelling in a phantasmatic past while living under conditions of Western hegemony, domestic dictatorships, and stagnation: « L'impuissance, incontestablement, est l'emblème du malheur arabe aujourd'hui. Impuissance à être ce qu'on pense devoir être […] Plus précisément encore, le malheur des Arabes serait dans leur impuissance à être après avoir été. »[26] In his discussion of Egypt, Kassir posits that the Egyptian "impasse" extends to the elites of this society (for him, the elites are the agents of change in any society), who are prisoners of an ideology of stagnation. The few protesting voices are swiftly transformed into defendants of the regime.[27] In "Bayān al Siyāsa wal-Thaqāfa," (and notoriously after the 2011 Arab uprisings, particularly the Syrian one), Adonis has repeatedly expressed his distrust of the revolutionary potentials of the Arab subject for the latter's alleged incapacity to dissociate from religion as well as for his political immaturity and naiveté.[28] Finally, in *Why Are the Arabs Not Free? The Politics of Writing* (originally written in colloquial Arabic), Moustapha Safouan argues that the Arabs' lack of liberty or their "voluntary submission" dates from pre-Islamic

[25]*Self-Criticism After the Defeat.* See the afterword including reviews of the book 39 years later.
[26] *Considérations sur le Malheur arabe.* 15-16.
[27] Ibid. 28.
[28] Adonis. "Bayān al Siyāsa wal-Thaqāfa" in *Fātiḥa li-nihāyāt al-qarn.* 191-224.

times, and has lasted until modern times because of “a politics of language” practiced by the rulers, and that has always separated and hierarchized the written and the oral languages. Safouan believes that the only way Arabs can attain freedom is by reclaiming their language and unshackle it from religion. The choice of these Arab critics is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, their writings reveal that the theme of impotence and failure is clearly enduring throughout the decades following the 1967 Defeat and well into the 21st century, while also writers are still responding to this accusation in their works, as the analysis of Mohamed Leftah’s *Le dernier combat du Captain Ni‘mat* in the second chapter of this dissertation demonstrates.

In the second chapter, “Unruly Bodies, Dissenting Sexualities, and Modernity in the Making of Mohamed Leftah’s *Le dernier combat du Captain Ni‘mat,*” I show that through the unruliness of the male body’s sexuality, i.e., its refusal to conform to any sexual regime of truth, be it *Scientia Sexualis* or *Ars Erotica,* Leftah registers his vision of a modernity in the making. This modernity-to-come, looking for an epistemology, is lacking, however, queer feminist discourse as the novel features Egyptian state feminism as trapped in a restrictive discourse that reproduces those of heteronormativity that controls women’s and men’s bodies and sexualities. This discussion recenters the woman question in the Arab world around the need for a queer feminist discourse, rather than the usual one replicating the dichotomy between modernity and tradition revolving around the veil. In this chapter I frame the conceptualization of modernity and dissent through the lens of decolonization as it is conceived by Abdelkebir Khatibi’s reading of Frantz Fanon. In the opening chapter of *Maghreb Pluriel,* Abdelkebir Khatibi starts with Frantz Fanon's famous call: “ Come on,

comrades, the European game is definitely over; we must find something else."[29] For Khatibi, this Europe evoked by Frantz Fanon is "an interrogation, that is to say, an inevitable event that is neither a disaster nor a blessing, but the condition for a responsibility yet to be taken in charge beyond resentment and unhappy consciousness."[30] To assume this responsibility, Khatibi proposes what he terms "*une pensée-autre*," or an alternative mode of thinking, a thinking otherwise, that on one hand detaches itself from the hermetic duality opposing the once colonized and colonizer, the Maghrebian subject in a face-à-face with France, and on the other, refrains from returning to a past Arab civilization he qualifies as "finished in its founding metaphysical element," meaning that "it is incapable of renewing its own thought [without] the insurrection of "*une pensée-autre*" that is in dialogue with its own time.[31] Affirming that the decolonized subject's first impulse is to assert their right to be different, Khatibi argues, in line with Fanon's thinking, that a subject's claim to difference has to start with a questioning and a subsequent production of the self, which will happen by taking "a leap": "Once again, there is no choice. It's an endless debate: let's take a leap."[32] In the conclusion of *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Franz Fanon reiterates the importance of the creation of the self: "In the world in which I make my way, I endlessly create myself."[33] As an insurrection against the decolonized subject's own

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[29] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb Pluriel*. Paris: Denoël, 1983. All translations are mine unless otherwise specified. "Allons, camarades, le jeu européen est définitivement terminé, il faut trouver autre chose" ; *Maghreb Pluriel.*11.

[30] "une interrogation, c'est-à-dire un événement inévitable, qui n'est ni un désastre ni une bénédiction, mais la condition d'une responsabilité qui reste encore à prendre en charge, au-delà du ressentiment et de la conscience malheureuse" ; *Maghreb Pluriel.*11.

[31] *Maghreb Pluriel.* 13.

[32] « Encore une fois, il n'y a pas de choix. Débat interminable : faisons un saut » ; *Maghreb Pluriel*. 51.

[33] « Dans le monde où je m'achemine, je me crée interminablement.» More precisely, Fanon writes, "Je ne suis pas prisonnier de l'Histoire. Je ne dois pas y chercher le sens de ma destinée. Je dois me

alienation, this endless creation of the self, happening only through a *leap,* is meant to be an act of transcendence of the self that "introduces invention into existence," outside History.[34] Fanon's statement suggests that this leap is a movement that is both ahistorical and rooted in its historical context, a point to which I shall return below.[35]

Writing this text in 1983, Khatibi considers that this subversive "*pensée-autre"*, which must be free from the *ressentiment* that characterized then post-colonial Maghrebian subjectivity and that rests in plurality and diversity because it renounces "the totalizing Arab identity, the obsession with origins… and servile morals," is still in the domain of "the unthought" (*l'impensé*).[36] In his review of Laroui's work, Mohamed Leftah reflects on the question of decolonization. The Moroccan historian Abdallah Laroui thinks that *ressentiment* has not been the only characteristic of the decolonized Arab subject's attitude toward the metropole; this Arab subject has for a long time been locked in "a situation of complementarity" (*une situation de complémentarité*) with Europe, considering it as its Other, and a model to emulate.[37] Accordingly, Laroui urges for the necessity to shed this dependency, because dialogue with others is always

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rappeler à tout instant que le véritable *saut* consiste à introduire l'invention dans l'existence" ; Franz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952 :186.

[34] Fanon also cautions them against imitating European modernity because it is a succession of murders and negations of the human; it is unable to invent "la totalité de l'homme" that Fanon sees can be achieved through collaboration between people and through invention. In *Peau noire, masques blancs,* Fanon expands on his conceptualization of this invention that he sees fundamental for the creation of the new human; it can be achieved through "the leap" (le *saut*) that takes place outside of the exigencies of History (i.e., outside of this destabilizing dependency on Europe as a model, as well as beyond the alienation and the non-being experienced by the colonized and resulting from their encounter with Europe) and brings invention into existence: "le véritable *saut* consiste à introduire l'invention dans l'existence" (the real leap consists of introducing invention into existence) (186).

[35] Other postcolonial theorists, such as Ngũgĩ Wa Thiongo, have conceptualized the process of decolonization as first and foremost decolonizing one's language in an effort to reclaim one's language and culture, ending with the inferiority complex that keeps tainting the relationship between the formerly colonized and the former colonizer.

[36] *Maghreb Pluriel.* 13-14.

[37] One can argue that *ressentiment* toward the former colonizer is closely related to—it can even stem from—the feeling that this former colonizer complements the decolonized subject.

traversed by European culture.[38] This statement, although true for large segments of Arab societies, it does not apply to them entirely because it homogenizes them by not taking into consideration the Islamist and Salafist categories for whom the West is first and foremost a model to be combated. Therefore, Laroui's reasoning that envisages this relationship in terms of dialectics rather than dissemination, does not prove completely helpful nor nuanced enough to convey the subtleties of various discourses of modernity in Arab societies. More recently and in the same line, others have been rethinking the idea of the emancipation by sidelining the West from the process.[39] From this optic, Khatibi has played a decisive role in conceptualizing the way francophone Maghrebi literature should transcend the dichotomy of Maghreb/France and create a new, third space that allows the francophone writer to free themselves from this restrictive dualism through what he calls "*double critique,*" a critical attitude directed at both Islamic and western disciplinary traditions and foundations; he calls instead for a "de-constitution of knowledge" (*une dé-constitution du savoir*) modeled on Derrida's and Foucault's deconstructing and archeological methods, respectively. This double critique, as a violent "uprooting" *(arrachement),* results in "a thought other than the fabric of the episteme" (*pensée autre que l'édifice d'une épistémè)* that is attached to its origin while moving away from it.[40] Although two separate processes, *double critique* and self-

[38] In an article about Laroui titled « ---- « Mohamed Leftah writes, "Quand nous dialoguons aujourd'hui avec les autres, c'est à travers la culture européenne. Notre enrichissement exige des contacts directs avec ceux qui nous posent des questions sur l'homme et l'univers différentes de celles que nous a léguées notre tradition" (Today, when we dialogue with others, we do it through the European culture. Our enrichment requires direct contact with those who ask us questions about man and the universe different from those bequeathed to us by our tradition).

[39] In *Penser l'obscurantisme aujourd'hui: Par-delà ombres et lumières,* for example, Jean Zaganiaris has been rethinking the contemporary understanding of *obscurantism* by discrediting the binary obscurantism/enlightenment and arguing that *obscurantism* should in fact be opposed to and fought by pluralism, because *obscurantism* means a rejection of multiplicity and pluralism.

[40] *Maghreb Pluriel.* 50.

critique go hand in hand and they are necessary for the decolonization of thought (*une décolonisation de pensée)* that for Khatibi is, most importantly, yet to come and always in the making: "This *pensée-autre,* this 'still unnamable' is perhaps a promise, the sign of an advent in a world to be transformed."[41]

Michel Foucault's conceptualization of modernity as a critical attitude is expressed not unlike Khatibi's *pensée-autre*. For Foucault, modernity is "rather…an attitude than…a period of history… a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task."[42] This critical task "requires work on our limits" in the sense that it is not to be practiced as a doctrine, but is "the permanent reactivation of an attitude—that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era," and as "a historical-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings."[43] Foucault also calls this critical attitude "the attitude of modernity," because it is "a mode of relating to contemporary reality… [that] ever since its formation, has found itself struggling with attitudes of 'countermodernity.'"[44] Foucault's configuration of modernity converges with Adonis's, the Arab poet and literary theorist; both see that modernity, as a recurring and innovating movement, always derives from the circumstances at hand and is historically contingent. While the intellectual strand was expressed through Sufism and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), poetic modernity was mainly

[41] "Cette pensée-autre, cet 'encore innommable' est peut-être une promesse, le signe d'un advenir dans un monde à transformer" ; *Maghreb Pluriel.* 63.
[42] Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, "What Is Enlightenment?" *The Foucault Reader.* 32-50.
[43] Ibid. 47.
[44] Ibid. 50.

founded by outsiders and marginalized people (*khurūj*).[45] Modernity, Adonis explains, was born historically out of the clash and interaction between the two positions or mindsets during a time of change and the emergence of new circumstances brought by Islam. According to him, modernity or *ḥadātha* is not limited to the literary movement that originated in Europe and spread to the rest of the world; it is an ongoing process of creation and innovation that takes different shapes according to the realities of various epochs. Adonis offers a conceptualization of modernity that is, like the *leap*, both historically conditioned and atemporal.

As the above discussion draws the interconnectedness between decolonization, the *leap,* double critique, self-critique and subsequent self-production as processes that contribute to the making of postcolonial modernity, particularly in the context of Moroccan literature of French expression, I would like, at this juncture, to explore how these notions are manifested and converge in postcolonial Moroccan literature. First, I would like to draw attention to the multicultural and multilinguistic nature of Maghrebian, and particularly Moroccan Francophone literature. For this literature channels a variety of cultures—Arab, Amazigh, and Jewish—that define Moroccan society; its French is traversed by Arabic, Amazigh, and *Darija* (dialectal Arabic).[46] Hence, Francophone literature produced in post-independence Maghreb took upon itself to assert its irreducible difference and insubordination to Western discourses on one hand, and to

[45] It is noteworthy that the Arabic term *khurūj,* which is a plural of *khārej,* means an outsider as well as a dissident.

[46] The multifaceted-ness of Moroccan Francophone literature cannot be reduced to a bilingualism, or to a dichotomy between Arabic and French. Many authors have paused and agreed on this point. The late Jewish Moroccan writer, Edmond Amran El-Maleh, for instance, has noted in an interview in *le Magazine littéraire* in March 1999 that his French is "grafted" on his native language, Arabic, which articulates his experience as a Moroccan Jew: « Écrivant en français, je savais que je n'écrivais pas en français. Il y avait cette singulière greffe d'une langue sur l'autre, ma langue maternelle l'arabe, ce feu intérieur ». See also Abdelkebir Khatibi's *La mémoire tatouée,* among others too numerous to include.

the totalizing Arabic tradition on the other, and it has been paving the way in this direction. If, according to Khatibi, to be truly decolonized is to be able to articulate *une pensée-autre* that subverts the hegemonic discourses in Maghrebi cultures, this subversive power is always threatened by being recuperated and instrumentalized by any of its constitutive traditions against which it is rebelling. Hence, while Maghrebian literature's rootedness in various soils and cultures defines its multifaceted nature, it also frames and limits its subversive potentials. At the same time, Khatibi suggests that the western episteme is put in a state of crisis by "critical thoughts" (*des pensées critiques*) that decenter it by operating on the margin of this episteme and radicalizing its margin through this *pensée-autre* that takes into consideration the plurality and the differential gaps between its cultures, that speaks in *languages* rather than in one that is authoritative and phallic.[47]

Post-independence Moroccan Francophone writers have been wrestling with the problematic of writing in French as postcolonial subjects. Even though *Souffles* (1966-1972), through its contributions to the national heritage, helped legitimize Moroccan literature of French expression, identity wanderings remain the most indelible feature of this literature; they guide its thematic and narrative strategies, and inform the violent and subversive quality of its texts.[48] For instance, some writers like the poet and novelist Mohamed Khair-Eddine opted for subversive writing rather than thematic engagement,

[47] Khatibi uses 'episteme' in its Foucauldian meaning, i.e., as a dispositif that is specifically discursive. Michel Foucault, "Le jeu de Michel Foucault." In *Dits et Écrits II, 1976-1988*. Foucault, Michel, Daniel Defert, François Ewald, and Jacques Lagrange. Paris: Gallimard, 2001: 300-302.
[48] I am using the expressions "Moroccan Francophone literature" and "Moroccan literature of French expression" interchangeably. This problematic has been the subject of much discussion and analysis. For a detailed history of postcolonial Francophone Moroccan literature within the context of the Maghreb, see Charles Bonn, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Jean Déjeux, among others.

for fear that the latter is recuperated by discourses of power.[49] Khair-Eddine aimed at reproducing within the French reader the same destabilizing experience he and other Moroccans underwent as colonized through his "*guérilla linguistique*" that aimed to deterritorialize and disrupt the French language through various features including violent imagery, neologisms, disjointed syntax, and fragmentary texts: "The aim is to make the French reader feel alienated in their own language."[50] The author also used disjointed syntax to convey that the French language is unable to accommodate a different ontology and discourse, and to express a fragmented reality.[51] Another salient feature of Khair-Eddine's works is the establishment in his texts of a geography that alludes to the African and Southeast Asian former French colonies, as well as to the mountainous Berber region "*sudique*" (southic) of southern Morocco. "*Sudique*", one of Khair-Eddine's neologisms, allows for a mapping of subjectivities through a return to nature that establishes a territory for those who are already foreclosed from the North, be it Northern Morocco where the central authority is located, or the North as Europe, the Metropole.[52] The connection Khair-eddine establishes with other "*sudique*" subjectivities, however, is premised on each party's relationship to the metropole; thus France remains central to this South-South connection. Other writers have rebelled against the rigidity of the patriarchal Moroccan society. The early generation of Francophone Moroccan writers such as Driss Chraibi rebelled against the Troika: the

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[49] Charles, Bonn. "La littérature algérienne serait-elle sortie de son face-à-face postcolonial?" in *Modern and Contemporary France*. 10.4 (2010): 486.
[50] "Il s'agit de rendre le lecteur français étranger dans sa propre langue" (qtd. in Bonn 486).
[51] For an account of this literature throughout the Maghreb, Hédi Abdeljaouad, "The Dialectics of the Archaic and the Post-modern in Maghrebian Literature Written in French" *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*. 15.1 (1991): 69.
[52] Anna Cavness, "Sudique Territories and the Berber King in Mohammed-Khaïr Eddine." *ACLA Meeting: Collapse Catastrophe Change.* March 2012, Providence, RI. Unpublished conference paper. Brown University, 2012.

king, the *fqih* (the clergyman), and the father, and their discourse played into the hands of those who needed a confirmation from the mouth of the natives that Moroccan society *is* in fact oppressive of its own, particularly its women.

The predominant thematic in Francophone Maghrebian literature has changed in recent decades. The prevalent sense of alienation has been replaced with a reappropriation and self-preservation, articulated through the reclaiming of one's marginalized position. To locate this transformation from the optic of gender and sexuality, the centrality of the father/phallic figure in previous texts is giving way to a decentered masculinity that rejects the heteronormative definition once applied on it, and proclaims a new ontology that contests the definitions made available by both the archaic and the modern, the metropole and the periphery, the sacred and the profane. Moroccan francophone literary productions emerging recently, and particularly since the 2000s, articulate the liberation of sexuality, female sexual pleasure, fragmented masculinities, and the subversion of gender roles. This articulation of diverse sexualities in literature contributes to the unraveling of the heterogeneity of identities in Morocco while also continuing to stage sexuality in literature as a site of contestation and articulation of postcolonial modernity. Writers like Rachid O. and more recently Abdellah Taïa have opted for a transgressive literature in homoerotic récits that aim to contest the oppressive heteronormativity in Moroccan contemporary society. These narratives are articulating different, fragmented masculinities, but this literature can be easily recuperated by western discourses of power and discourses of homonationalism for its adoption of a western perspective of the confessional mode of "coming-out" and the modern western typology of sexualities, especially that both writers reside in France, as

some critics have argued.[53] As the homosexual narrators and protagonists in these authors' texts are contesting the heteronormative forces of the 'traditional' Moroccan society, these writings reproduce the relation between metropole and periphery as one between modernity and tradition, respectively.

The focus on body and sexuality in transgressive narratives is characteristic of Maghrebian Francophone literature in general; it reflects a history of violent colonialism and stems from an understanding of the close connection between sexuality and politics as well as the role of the gendered body and performativity in effecting *une pensée-autre.*[54] Frantz Fanon closes *Peau noire, masques blancs* with an "ultimate prayer: O my body, make me always somebody who questions!"[55] This 'prayer' illustrates the fundamental role of the body in initiating change; the leap as corporeal movement initiates an epistemological and an ontological change that cut through history and introduce invention, i.e., a new episteme and a new human, in the world.[56] The body's ability to articulate a silent language of its own through movements, which are a call for desire, is echoed in Abdelkebir Khatibi's *Le corps oriental*.[57] Fanon's statement is also

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[53] Charles Bonn, *Littérature Maghrébine d'expression française.* See also Khalid Zekri, "Récits homoérotiques et récits au féminin » and Calargé, Carla and Emmanuel Jean-François, « Masculinités, homosexualité et homonationalisme dans le Dernier Combat du Captain Ni'mat de Mohamed Leftah. »

[54] Mohamed Leftah demonstrates a particular awareness of the body's ability to create and communicate a language of its own. As Islam massages Captain Ni'mat, the narrator relates that they were communicating "a silent dialogue…it was a conversation between skins in an extraordinary tactile language… whose first letters Captain Ni'mat started to discover, to spell"(40).

[55] "Mon ultime prière : O mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge" (188).

[56] In "No Lords A-Leaping: Fanon, C.L.R. James, and the Politics of Invention," David S. Marriott explains the invention introduced by the leap in these terms: "Invention represents, for Fanon, the perpetual generation of contiguities, or carrying-over; crossings in which the self is forced to bear witness to a certain feeling of unfamiliarity, where its easy security breaks down, where the giddiness and 'almost pathological trance' following the 'death of the other' (the enemy) becomes, as it were, possessed by the real of revolution; it follows that through the continuously subversive force of invention the self can be itself only in its difference to that which exceeds and jolts it"(521).

[57] In *Le corps oriental,* Abdelkebir Khatibi writes, « Le geste de la main ou tout signe des yeux, des sourcils ou de la tête, relève d'une grammaire de signes. L'expression gestuelle fait partie d'un langage. Ce qui fait le lien (magique) de séduction (*fitna* signifie à la fois séduction et guerre) entre, par exemple,

echoed in the centrality of the body in Foucault's theorization of subjectivation and later in Judith Butler's conceptualization of the materiality of the body as the effect of a dynamic of power that regulates through norms that materialize through the process of sexuation. Hence, as subject formation cannot be dissociated from sexual identifications whereby certain sexed identifications are enabled and others disavowed and/or foreclosed, it is at this juncture that resistance comes in as performativity and reiterability of abjected sex categories. Performativity intervenes in political discourse because it has the power to bare the instability of the categories of sex. Butler writes,

> Although the political discourses that mobilize identity categories tend to cultivate identifications in the service of a political goal, it may be that the persistence of *dis*identification is equally crucial to the rearticulation of democratic contestation. Indeed, it may be precisely through practices which underscore disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized that both feminist and queer politics are mobilized. Such collective disidentifications can facilitate a reconceptualization of which bodies matter, and which bodies are yet to emerge as critical matters of concern.[58]

Resistance of the body as sexuality takes place when the norms regulating the bodily desire become constricting, and this body redirects the desires through which it is recognized. Thus, the sexed body resists the normalized sexual identity mediating its attachment to itself. As a result, the subject must face two consequences: first, the subject is different from itself, and second, it risks losing legibility and social recognition

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un grain de beauté et le clin d'œil chez une femme, c'est le mouvement qui vous appelle au désir. Le sensorium met en scène la séduction, la femme de désir » (11).

[58] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex".* New York: Routledge, 1993. xii-xiii.

that makes it known to itself and others. This “redirection of the norms” entails that the subject has to introduce an epistemology that corresponds to the shifting desire.[59]

Expanding “desire” to mean “the libido” in psychoanalytic sense, the fuel for change, allows us to examine the way desire operates on two levels: in political discourse and in the literary text. Bruno Perreau and David Paternotte rightly argue that “thinking sexuality implies interrogating the history of the production of sexual categories and of modes of self-nomination and, as a result, deconstructing the corporeal analogies that authorize the belief in the existence of a social body.”[60] Although Perreau and Paternotte’s main concern is the “lateness” of political science in relation to other disciplines in inscribing sexuality as an essential dimension of analysis, their argument that “the political dimension of sexuality meant opening oneself to the shifting borders between private and public” intersects with the porousness of the private and the irreducible presence of the public within the private, as one of Jacques Rancière’s configurations of the democratization of the sensible. In his theorization of “dissensus,” Rancière makes a rapprochement between resistance of the body and dissensus in its textual articulation through what he calls “the redistribution of the sensible.” Rancière conceptualizes politics as an intervention in the domain of the sensible. This intervention carries importance because it challenges a practice of exclusion meant to silence some parts of the sensible. In this way, politics makes visible what is unsayable and invisible. This perception of politics is pertinent to the politics of literature, as also

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[59] Judith Butler, “Bodies and Power Revisited.” In *Feminism and the Final Foucault.* Edited by Dianna Taylor and Karen Vintges*.* 2004: 190.

[60] “Penser la sexualité implique d’interroger l’histoire de la production des catégories sexuelles et des modes de nomination de soi…et, partant, de déconstruire les analogies corporelles qui autorisent la croyance en l’existence d’un corps social.” Bruno Perreau and David Paternotte, « Sexualité et politique en francophonie : état des lieux et perspectives de recherche.” 4. Translator not indicated, probably the authors.

Rancière views it. In line with his own thinking, Rancière posits that literature enacts politics not by the fact that an author is expressing their own political views, but by the mere fact that what is considered to bear the name of literature is what intervenes again in the sensible and effectuates a redistribution of this domain. Rancière defines fiction as "a way of changing existing modes of sensory presentations and forms of enunciation; of varying frames, scales and rhythms; and of building new relationships between reality and appearance, the individual and the collective."[61] Hence, it is within the power of fiction to intervene in the sensible to effectuate change. In his framing of politics and the way it operates, Rancière writes that the police distributes the sensible in a way that produces exclusions that are unacknowledged by the regime of the police: "It is this exclusion of what 'is not there' that constitutes the police principle at the heart of State practice."[62] The intervention of politics consists in bringing to light 'what is not there,' what is invisible under the police distribution of the sensible. Accordingly, if we consider that the part of the sensible that is acknowledged by the police corresponds to what is legible by the norms, and what remains unacknowledged and excluded from the sensible is what is the non-narrativizable and hence the illegible or unintelligible, we can then read Rancière's project from a Butlerian perspective whereby performativity of the literary body through redistribution of parts brings new epistemologies into the sensible. The sensible is in part that which makes us subjects, as bodies, corporeal, human subjects with human senses and with their particularities; it is also the sensuous and the sexual with their typologies and epistemologies. More importantly, this redistribution

[61] Jacques Rancière, and Steve Corcoran. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Continuum, 2010: 139.
[62] "C'est cette exclusion de ce qu''il n'y a pas' qui est le principe policier au cœur de la pratique étatique" (*Aux bords du politique* 177).

enacts at the same time a decentering and destabilizing of the visible and perceptible, and this enactment is repeatedly effectuated throughout various parts of the sensible. This procedure, Hédi Abdeljaouad argues, is particularly pervasive in postcolonial Maghrebi Francophone literature through what he coins *Sufialism.*

Abdeljaouad calls *Sufialism* a mixture of Sufism and Surrealism that constitutes one of the *fugues*[63] of these two movements and that has crystallized the subversive nature of most Francophone writings across the Maghreb since the 1950s. Abdeljaouad's argument is premised on the rapprochement between Sufism and Surrealism—two contestatory movements aiming at challenging orthodoxy and the tyranny of normativity and established orders in their respective traditions.[64] Maghrebian Francophone writers have adopted *Sufialism* "naturally," Abdeljaouad argues, because it is inherent to their imaginary and their irreducible plurality, which in turn reflects Sufism's heterogeneous and heretic nature as well as the propensity of Surrealism to encompass otherness and to be a pluralistic movement.[65] Based on refusals and contestation, *Sufialism* seems to correspond to and articulate closely Khatibi's *double critique* in literature, a space wherein conflicts are staged and the sensorium is reconfigured, and where "strategies are intended to make the invisible visible or to

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[63] Abdeljaouad uses *fugue* in two senses: in its meaning in music, namely as a contrapuntal style composition, founded on imitation and proceeding from a generating theme, named 'subject;' the second meaning being escapade outside of one's familial home. By interpreting Maghrebian surrealism as a sort of *fugue,* Abdeljaouad is merging these two definitions, as this movement is based on the ontological rather than the historical surrealism, and takes a life of its own in its Maghrebian setting. The Négritude writers, and particularly Aimé Césaire, have adopted another *fugue* of Surrealism, which allowed them to liberate themselves from many forms of repression that has been burdening their conscience as *Antillais* (West Indians).

[64] Adonis, the Syrian poet and literary theorist, made this rapprochement first in his book *Al-soūfiyya wal surriyāliyya* (*Sufism and Surrealism)* without, however, discussing Maghrebian literature in this context. Also, in 1978 Habib Tengour published "Le manifeste du surréalisme maghrébin" in *Peuples méditerranéens* in 1981 in which he famously declares "Le Maghrébin a été longtemps surréaliste sans le savoir" (The Maghrebian has long been surrealist without knowing it).

[65] Hédi Abdeljaouad, *Les Fugues de Barbarie. Fugues de Barbarie: Les Écrivains Maghrébins et le Surréalisme.* New York: Les Mains Secrètes, 1998*.* 217, 17.

question the self-evidence of the visible; to rupture given relations between things and meanings and, inversely, to invent novel relationships between things and meanings that were previously unrelated."[66] From this perspective, Maghrebian Francophone literature seems a propitious terrain for *Sufialism*, considering that Francophone Maghrebian writers have been marked by their anti-colonial, anti-traditional, and anti-Islamic stances. Maghrebian writers have tapped into Sufism as a source of dissidence and subversiveness in the Islamic tradition, as well as surrealism as another model of dissidence in the French literary and artistic tradition.[67] In the Maghrebian Francophone text, which is a site of syncretism of traditions and histories, mysticism, as an expression of the experience of excess, is reinvested in modernity as "*un corps jouissant, souffrant*." This sexual and erotic excess derives from the Sufis' relationship to God, which is equated with physical passion. [68] Maghrebian francophone writers explore this passion, this "*amour fou*"[69] in their texts as a way of cultivating the heterogeneous that dissolves the borders inherited by history: "The man of exile is the one who crosses the best guarded borders," says Abdelwahhab Meddeb.[70] The centrality of the heart for the Sufi does not stop at the literal level; it encompasses the figurative as well. The heart, the center of passion, is also the center of the body, fusing

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[66] Jacques Rancière, "The Paradoxes of Political Art." 141.
[67] Hédi Abdeljaouad. *Fugues de Barbarie: les écrivains Maghrébins et le surréalisme.* 5.
[68] Ibid. 223-224.
[69] *L'amour fou,* or mad love has been a widespread theme in Arabic literature. *Majnun* has also incarnated the Sufi's confusion between "mad in love" (*fou d'amour*) and "mad in God" (*fou de Dieu*) and this figure made it to surrealist poetry, where the figure of "the mad in love" emerges in the poetry of Aragon and other surrealists. See Abdeljaouad's discussion of *Majnun* in *Fugues de Barbarie* as a figure in common between Sufists and surrealists. 228-232. See also the recent discussion of the figure of *Majnun* in Tarek el-Ariss's *Trials of Arab Modernity.* 114-144.
[70] "L'homme de l'exil est celui qui traverse les frontières les mieux gardées" (qtd. in Abdeljaouad 226).

spiritual passion with the physical one. From this perspective Abdeljaouad makes the rapprochement between Sufism and Surrealism.

As I will argue below, Mohamed Leftah's novel is able to transcend the dissenting capacities of Sufialism mainly because of the author's situation as an expatriate in Egypt, which for a Moroccan stands as a queer diaspora displacing France as the main location of Moroccan diaspora. This queerness of location results in a queer text that tests the limits of the taxonomies and typologies of the sexually queer male and signals the need for a queer feminist discourse in the context of the Arab world, as it represents homosexuality as fragmented and opens with representation of multiple Arab feminisms that are focalized on this fragmented male homosexuality. This representation recenters the discourse of Arab feminism in the MENA by redirecting it form the discussion around the veil to one around queerness. This discourse will raise the question of taxonomy and typology in the context of queer woman, the matrix developed, and the nature of the critique of feminism in the contemporary moment, as well as the way it is brought into the state. At this juncture Adonis's discussion of modernity in terms of *khurūj,* the seditious and the marginalized, provoking *fitna,* is illustrated by Leftah's intervention in and enactment of Arab modernity. The fact that these indigenous terms for sedition have roots in the psyche and spirit other traditions struggle to find a similar term that capture the variety of meanings we find in these terms confirms Adonis's claim. Male queerness, whether sexual or social (abnormality) is also exploited in another author studied in this dissertation: the Lebanese Hoda Barakat.

In the third chapter, "'The Suffering of the Rule Is Us': Unruly Bodies in Hoda Barakat's *Ahl al-Hawa* and *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik*," I analyze Barakat's two novels from the

prism of the male protagonists' queerness and fragmented sexuality. Unlike the widely prevailing scholarship on Barakat's works, which holds that the male protagonists are androgynous, I demonstrate that the protagonists in these two novels represent the *khurūj,* the seditious and the marginalized, through the unruliness of their gendered bodies rather than merging the masculine and the feminine in the figure of the androgynous, which restricts and polarizes sexuality between the masculine and the feminine, hence reproducing the heteronormative discourses. I argue that these men's non-heteronormative performativity of their sexualities serves to dissociate manhood and masculinity from its heteronormative social and political associations. This fragmented masculinity, be it homosexuality or non-conforming heterosexuality, has neither a taxonomy nor a typology in Arabic language, and finds itself constantly threatened by the heterosexual imperative. This instability that haunts it exposes the vulnerability of heteronormative masculinity, as it always resorts to force and violence to reinforce its norms. As the novels take place in the Lebanese war, the reader witnesses the pressure exerted by war, as a patriarchal venture that glorifies hyper-masculinity, to further oppress, contain, and erase non-normative male sexualities as well as women. From this perspective, as women protagonists in Barakat's texts depart from the stock characters the reader of Arabic literature is accustomed to encounter—they are not the patriotic, self-sacrificing, women who depend on the men in their family for their livelihood—they are still victimized by the effects of the war, whether it is through the men in their lives or by the devastations of the war. This situation exposes the need for queer feminist discourse and narrations that first bypass the need for marginalized masculinities to expose the vulnerability of heteronormativity, and second enables

female marginalized sexualities to engage with the political and social discourse in which they are currently either entrapped in their reductive and limiting versions of feminism or unable to claim a taxonomy and typology that reflect their reality.

My claim draws on Judith Butler's explanation of the implication of disembodiment for questions of power. As part of the excluded Other, Butler writes, women are considered less rational because they are assigned the task of reproducing the conditions of domestic life. Butler argues that the production of man as the rational being deprives him of a body that performs bodily functions, making him a disembodied body that carries masculinized rationality. Butler writes,

> This figuration of masculine reason as disembodied body is one whose imaginary morphology is crafted through the exclusion of other possible bodies. This is a materialization of reason that operates through the dematerialization of other bodies, for the feminine, strictly speaking, has no morphs, no morphology, no contour, for it is that which contributes to the contouring of things, but is itself undifferentiated, without boundary. The body that is reason dematerializes the bodies that may not properly stand for reason or its replicas, and yet this is a figure in crisis, for this body of reason is itself the phantasmic dematerialization of masculinity, one which requires that women and slaves, children and animals be the body, perform the bodily functions, that it will not perform.[71]

At the same time, though, the bodies of those who do not possess masculine rationality and reason are dematerialized by the body that is reason. The male protagonist and narrator in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* performs bodily functions, and male protagonists in Barakat's novels do not claim to possess reason, shedding the monopolization of reason, and

[71] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*. 21-22.

therefore any right to dematerialize other bodies as well. Featuring queer, abnormal, and marginalized male protagonists facilitates the materialization of the bodies of women and other marginals. At this juncture, it is incumbent for queer feminist discourses to claim the materialization of their bodies, which will in turn allow them to reclaim these bodies outside of objectification and domesticity.

For my argument against the androgynous characterization of Barakat's protagonists and narrators, I base my analysis on Judith Butler's theorization of the emergence of the masculine and the feminine as the "accomplishments" of a formation process culminating in the "achievement of heterosexuality" whose imperative is to stabilize gender identities in these two poles, which develop alongside "the anxiety that they are constantly threatened."[72] The power that heteronormativity induces in humans living in society results in a "fear of homosexual desire" within both women and men, who panic at the thought of losing their femininity and masculinity, respectively. For men, Butler specifies, "the terror of homosexual desire may lead to a terror of being construed as feminine, feminized, of no longer being properly a man, of being a 'failed' man, or being in some sense a figure of monstrosity or abjection." Hence, the heterosexual imperative dictates repudiating one's identification—a repudiation one sustains as at once identification and the object of one's desire.[73] Consequently, a man wants to mark his difference from what he is repudiating in order to desire it. Founded in the prohibition of homosexual attachments, heterosexuality takes shape through the loss of these attachments. One has to renounce and foreclose homosexual attachment not only to the object of attachment—the person to whom one is attached—but also to

[72] Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification" in *The Psychic Life of Power.* 135.
[73] Ibid. 136.

“the possibility of homosexual attachment itself,” Butler adds. For a man, the heterosexualization of sexual desire can be achieved by repudiating femininity and culminates in “becoming a ‘man’” who desires “the woman he would never be.”[74] Butler analyses the becoming of a heterosexual, whether a man or a woman, but for the purpose of this chapter, I focus on her analysis of the process of becoming a heterosexual man and the impossible grieving that it entails. For repudiating homosexual desire entails a sacrifice and a loss of a love that “cannot be grieved” but that constantly haunt masculinity.[75]

This process of becoming homosexual is marked by a doubly unavowed grief, Butler argues:

> If we accept the notion that heterosexuality naturalizes itself by insisting on the radical otherness of homosexuality, hen heterosexual identity is purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love that it disavows: the man who insists upon the coherence of his heterosexuality will claim that he never loved another man, and hence never lost another man. That love, that attachment becomes subject to a double disavowal, a never having loved, and a never having lost. This ‘never-never’ thus founds the heterosexual subject, as it were; it is an identity based upon the refusal to avow an attachment and, hence, the refusal to grieve.[76]

Following Butler’s reasoning, then, masculinity (and femininity) emerge as the residues of “an ungrieved and ungrievable love.” But this process is melancholy in the sense that this loss in incorporated within the self. At this point, Butler’s analysis of

[74] Ibid. 137.
[75] Ibid. 138.
[76] Ibid. 139-140.

Freud is very useful for the progress of my argument, as she takes up Freud's definition of melancholy to transpose it in the case of the formation of the heterosexual, arguing that "melancholy is both the refusal of grief and the incorporation of loss, a miming of the death it cannot mourn."[77] By incorporating the prohibited object of desire means that this object is preserved within the self, which in turn translates into the preservation and sustainment of homosexuality as a result of its prohibition, but they are preserved to be used for the purpose of the heterosexual imperative as it serves to consolidate heterosexuality and the heterosexual subject. In the case of *The Stone of Laughter,* this loss is more aggravated by the physical loss, the death, of both men to whom Khalil is attracted: Naji and then Youssef. This doubly disavowed loss is the greatest contributor to the making of the violent Khalil that we witness at the end of the novel, and would not have taken place were the novel's events not taking place during the Civil War. Accordingly, and contrary to the critics who consider Khalil as androgynous because he does not display normative physical and behavioral masculine traits, be it by participating in the fighting or by leading his life indoors while the war rages outside, I argue that by labelling him androgynous we confine his sexuality to the masculine/feminine binary rather than, as Hoda Barakat has repeatedly declared and claimed to seek, and as her novels aim to do, namely to go beyond gender binaries and normative typologies.[78] Furthermore, by reiterating the binary that the novel seeks to undermine, we not only participate (albeit unwittingly) in the reproduction of the heteronormative discourse, but also sustain the close connection between patriotism

[77] Ibid. 142.
[78] Hoda Barakat, "I Write Against my Hand." Translated by Shirley Eber and Fadia Faqir *In the House of Silence: Autobiographical Essays by Arab Women Writers*, 1997; "Ta'athabtu fi al-Saytara 'ala shakhsyyiat al-Rajul bi-Riwāyāti." *Al-Bayan.* 25 July 2014; and "Thukūra wa Unūtha." *Al-Kātiba* Dec. 1993.

and virility. Rather than being androgynous, Khalil is a character who is struggling to negotiate throughout the text his homosexual desire, as he is guilt ridden to harbor such a desire while surrounded by hyper-masculinized men fighting and waging war, especially that the virilization of Youssef, concomitant with his involvement in the war and disparagement of the women in his family, unfolds under the reader's eyes, and foreshadows Khalil's later dramatic transformation. In *Ahl al-Hawa,* I demonstrate that Barakat calls into question the stability of gender positions by probing the dynamic of the war through her careful and perceptive narration of a psychotic male protagonist and narrator who creates out of his hallucinatory imagination a woman who becomes his lover whom he kills, only to deny the killing later.

The Civil War in Lebanon was the result of overdetermined factors and conditions, both domestic and foreign, of social inequalities and political crises, of conflicts with both secular and religious characters. The fact that the Lebanese nation-state is structured along confessional lines has given class conflicts and inequalities a sectarian character, so that political parties draw on confessional sentiments and affiliations. Although frequently referred to in terms of return to barbarism and pre-modern cruelty, this war—and the intensified sectarian sentiments that contributed to its outbreak and were aggravated as a result of it—was a military conflict resulting from the many failures of the Lebanese state and its representative system. This sectarianism, as it has been demonstrated, is a recent problem dating back to the nineteenth century, and closely connected with the nationalist creation that dates to the modern times when European colonial powers and local elites constructed the modern nation-state along

confessional lines.[79] Furthermore, and on a larger scale, the Lebanese Civil War is a part of a global phenomenon of civil wars in direct connection with colonialism, modernity, and the substantiation of the intimate relation between the nation-state and capitalism.[80] Much scholarship on civil wars has been studying this subject as a global phenomenon of the latter half of the twentieth century and establishing a closer relationship between capitalism and wars, even demonstrating the fundamental role wars play in the sustainment and development of capitalism. Further, detecting the centrality of war to modern governmentality and to the functioning of politics as well as the continuity between war and politics, Michel Foucault discusses the statement "politics is war by other means," whereby he famously inverted Clausewitz's statement: "power relations, as they function in a society like ours, are essentially anchored in a certain relationship of force that was established in and through war at a given historical moment that can be historically specified." Hence, politics "sanctions and reproduces the disequilibrium of forces manifested in war," meaning that one reinforces the other on one hand, and they are not mutually exclusive on the other hand.[81] In the context of the Lebanese Civil War, or as Elise Salem Manganaro points out, the Lebanese wars,[82] has had detrimental effects on the relations of power as they are played after the war. In line

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[79] Ussama Makdisi, *The culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon.* 2000. In this book, Makdisi traces the history of sectarianism in Lebanon to the nineteenth-century Tanzimat, unraveling its close connection with modernity and its emergence in the modern era with the intervention of the Ottomans and the European powers. In *A History of Modern Lebanon,* Fawwaz Traboulsi also show how the 1849 sectarian clashes, which are considered to amount to a civil war with sectarian overtones, originated in class inequalities that were distributed along confessional lines by the Ottomans, hence transforming class conflicts into sectarian ones as social classes corresponded to religious confessions.
[80] Maurizio Lazzarato and Éric Alliez, "To Our Enemies." *e-flux 78.* In this article, which is the translated introduction to the authors' recent book *Guerres et Capital,* demonstrate the inherent position of wars to Capital, and that the many forms of war are the secret engine of modern liberal governmentality.
[81] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended.* Picador, 2003: 15-17.
[82] Elise Salem Manganaro, "Negotiating Feminist Ideologies Within Lebanese Women's Writings." *Bahithāt:* 2. Bairūt: Markaz Tawfiq Tabara al-Idjtimai, 1995. 163-173.

with the analytical framework I have been pursuing in this dissertation, I will consider governmentality's regulation of the gendered body in light of the Civil War, as Hoda Barakat examines how society manages its marginalized, either by strapping the marginalized to the center, normalizing them, or isolate and institutionalize those Barakat calls *ahl al-hawa*, those "who do not fight in these wars, have no sex to offer to [their] women," and those who are "the exception to the rule," because they are "the utmost suffering of the rule."[83]

The Lebanese war has generated a profusion of writing in all genres. Novelistic productions about this traumatizing sixteen-year war are still being published. In an article published in 1987, Myriam Cooke argues that the group of women writers she calls the Beirut Decentrists feminize Lebanese society in their writing by responding in a maternal fashion to the chaos generated by the war and by putting "the survival of the whole before the survival of the self."[84] In *Sexuality and War* published in 1990, Evelyn Accad points out that men and women's writings about the Lebanese war are markedly different in the way they represent the suffering of their male and female characters. While they both agree that everyone is hurt by the war, women's suffering is greater and men's victimization is presented in heroic terms.[85] More recently, in her study of Arab women's avant-garde writings, Kifah Hanna states the writers like Hoda Barakat, Ghada al-Samman, and Sahar Khalifeh brought women's issues out of the recurring domestic sphere and out of the situation of subordination to national issues by contextualizing women's rights in political and national situations. Hanna examines Barakat's use of the

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[83] Hoda Barakat, and Marilyn Booth. *Disciples of Passion.* 114, 133.
[84] Miriam Cooke, "Wormen Write War: The Feminization of Lebanese Society in the War Literature of Emily Nasrallah." 66.
[85] Evelyne Accad. *Sexuality and War*. 95-96.

“aesthetics of androgyny” and of “alternative masculinities” in tandem with “surrealist aesthetics,” which opens the space for “a reconfiguration of dominant discourses of gender in Arabic literary feminism, as well as of the canon itself.”[86] Hanna’s insightful conclusion of the import of Barakat’s work comes through her perception that binaries of gender persist in the author’s war novels. Rather than interpreting Barakat’s project as finding alternative masculinities to be channeled in the heteronormative space, I argue that Barakat’s project is more radical—the author seeks to dissociate masculinity form the norms attached to it.

The former prisoner who remains under house arrest in Sonallah Ibrahim’s *Tilka al-Ra’iḥa*, the sexually-unclassifiable Captain Ni‘mat in Mohamed Leftah’s *Le Dernier combat du Captain Ni‘mat,* and the nameless narrator and Naji in Hoda Barakat’s *Ahl al-Hawa* and *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik,* all four of them are excluded and marginalized from society by the same regulatory and disciplinary forces, although for different reasons. Michel Foucault makes the rapprochement between the accused and mentally ill, as normalizing forces are deployed to normalize the abnormal. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault argues that the introduction of psychiatric expertise in courts implies that “every offense now carries within it, as a legitimate suspicion, but also as a right that may be claimed, the hypothesis of insanity, in any case of anomaly. And the sentence that condemns or acquits is not simply a judgment of guilt, a legal decision that lays down punishment; it bears within it an assessment of normality and a technical prescription for a possible normalization.”[87] The abnormal became the focus of the carceral network, thus legitimizing and naturalizing the power to punish. Moreover,

[86] Kifah Hanna. *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel.* 122-123.
[87] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish.* 21

Foucault proves that incarceration perpetuates delinquency by simultaneously punishing and producing it. Accordingly, the abnormal or anomalous becomes part of the carceral rather than a marginalized figure. Similarly, in his archeological study of madness, Foucault asserts that psychiatry has aimed to control and contain madness, rather than find a cure for it, through the psychiatric institutions. As Sonallah Ibrahim conceptualizes modernity in the dissenting male body, his critique of feminism remains faithful to his status as a Marxist, as heternormativity has more place in his work than Leftah and Barakat. Leftah demonstrates more audacity in his transgressive narrative, and his pointed critique of various regulatory norms is able to gesture towards a modernity to come that starts by decolonization and is looking for an epistemology to articulate an ontology in the making. For Barakat, as Khalil's sexuality is contained, the nameless narrator's psychosis shows us that modern subjectivity is wrested from the space unfolding between the archaic and the modern, the heteronormative masculine and the sexually marginalized, hallucinated memories and the disorienting present. Unlike the previous articulations of Arab modernity as experiences of loss, interiorized failure, or trials, my dissertation frames it as dissensus reiterated in the gendered body. As the dissenting body is mainly male, this critique also aims to point at the lack of queer feminist discourse in the MENA, re-centering Arab feminist discourse from the veil question to a productive queerness that reorient the discourse about gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER ONE

"The Romanticism of Struggles Is Over": Dissensus and/as Modernity in Sonallah Ibrahim

Before introducing Sonallah Ibrahim, I will start by situating his first work, *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* within the socio-political and literary contexts. First I would like to examine shortly some of the defining moments of Abdel Nasser's rule (and vicariously the political life in the Arab world), since the 1952 coup d'état by the Free Officers Movement that brought to power Abdel Nasser. This year revealed to be a defining moment in the history of the Arab world, as it marked the period of Egypt's domination in politics and literature within the Arab world.

[1] Other notable moments include the 1956 victory in the Suez crisis, the failure of a United Arab Republic in 1958, and the defeat and Abdel Nasser's subsequent resignation in 1967. Abdel Nasser's regime, emerging victorious from the Suez crisis of 1956, allowed itself much liberty at home; it practiced "a controlled pluralism" in its limited inclusion of the assenting factions of society under the umbrella of the state by providing financial support to the cultural aspects of society. During the fifties, arts flourished, and a Pan-Arab literary field emerged along with national fields, although various literary productions were divided rather arbitrarily across political lines. Literary productions throughout the Arab world continued to be considered a coherent body due

[1] See Richard Jacquemond's *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt* for a thorough account of the development of literary movements in Egypt in tandem with the country's social and mostly political upheavals. The author states that Egypt's dominant position within the Arab world reached its climax during Nasser's rule. Also, the country served as a model emulated by other Arab nations for nation-building and the edification of the ideological apparatuses. This role started to decline during the 60s, and suffered greatly under Sadat's and Mubarak's regimes, marked by repression of free expression and lack of support for cultural life and the intellectual.

to the unity of language and the intimate connection between politics and aesthetics.[2] The year 1958, however, witnessed the failure of the project of the United Arab Republic, because of which many leftists and communists were persecuted or imprisoned for the reservations they expressed toward this project. Hence a sense of disenchantment with the slogans of the modern state and their non-correspondence with its practices, a destabilization of the self in the face of the advancing modernity, and an acute and new form of "the crisis of the intellectuals" inaugurate the 60s.[3]

On another level, the committed literary social realism produced in the 1940s and 50s had the objective of consolidating a national identity based on difference with the other, the latter ranging from Israel to the British or French (or even the ascending American) imperial powers. This identification through differentiation presupposes a homogenized configuration of identity, be it nationalist, Pan-Arab, secular, or Muslim Arab, or other forms of identity. The underlying assumption of this line of thought is that the sign is a stable entity, reposing on an unmediated and immutable correspondence

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[2] Ibid. 13.

[3] A number of works have offered variously nuanced and politically and historically contextualized accounts of the intricate situation in which the Arab (particularly the Egyptian) intelligentsia has been undergoing states of crises, varying in nature according to the transforming power in place. Richard Jacquemond's *Conscience of the Nation,* Anouar Abdel Malek's *Égypte, société militaire,* Alain Roussillon's "Intellectuels en crise dans l'Égypte contemporaine," Abdallah Laroui's *La crise des intellectuels arabes,* Samah Idriss's more literary study *Al Muthaqqaf al-ʿArabi wal-Sultah: Baḥth fi Riwayāt al-Tajribah al-Nāsiriyya.* [The Arab Intellectual and Power: A Study in the Novel of the Nasserist Experience], and Edward Said's "Arab Prose and Prose Fiction after 1948" are just some examples of these studies. For example, Alain Roussillon states that "one of the structures of meaning the most regularly mobilized to give an account of the state of the modern intelligentsia in the Near East is the paradigm of a recurrent crisis that constitutes the principle of their periodical recompositions as well as the engine of their progress. Under the regime of the Free Officers the intellectuals experienced relative autonomy, but the social instrumentalization of their production was left to the discretion of the state." As a consequence, and citing 'Izzat Higazi, Roussillon concludes that any critical thought (*une pensée critique*), if it emerges, risks facing difficulties in finding a social base and thus is doomed to silence "because the distance or even the rupture it assumes vis-à-vis the power structure either exposes it to repression pure and simple, or deprives it of the means to propagate its message. Hence, for Higazi, the crisis of the intellectuals is an avatar of the crisis of democracy in Egypt" (226, my translation). The Nasserist regime then sought to regulate the formation of subjectivities by predetermining the parameters of what is considered an acceptable discourse through 'implicit censorship.' My discussion of this form of censorship follows.

between signifier and signified, as well as on an irreducible difference with another sign. Soon the exclusionary practices of the postcolonial nation, the deracination and displacements prompted by the Nation-state, an emblematic form of modernity,[4] complicated seemingly stabilized forms of identity, resulting in a restructuration of communitarian bonds and the definitive destruction of others with the rapid and arbitrary urbanization and the failure of national consciousness to crystallize into social consciousness, to quote Frantz Fanon.[5]The postcolonial Arab subject soon finds themselves in discord with the postcolonial state, and the fantasy of the unified national imaginary starts to dissipate. The writer's function as “the conscience of the nation” reveals to be elusive, as writers articulate their alienation from society and question their role as writers in a world marked by its hostility and unpredictability toward them. The new literary experimentations of the 60s emerge then more as an answer to a literary need motivated by an ontological and epistemological shift than a calculated effort to innovate.[6] In her study of the literary avant-garde in the 1960s Egypt, Elizabeth Kendall cites the sociopolitical conditions that led to the emergence and proliferation of the avant-gardists in that decade. However, for Kendall, the 1960s avant-gardists wrote mainly in *Gallery 68*; she does not seem interested in identifying any avant-garde

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[4] In "The Cause of the Other," Rancière cites Bruno Etienne's explanation of the rise of radical Islamism as a spiritual community to fall upon as a result of deracination practices under the Nation-state. I would argue that deracination started with colonialism, then with decolonization as the Sykes-Pico agreement in the Middle East and France’s partition of the Tuareg territory among Lybia, Morocco, Algeria, Mali, and Niger in 1962. To consider then the Nation-state the sole responsible of deracination is to ignore the exterior(Western) forces operating, and continuing to do so through neo-colonial and neoliberal practices, on the non-Western people, further pressuring them into relapsing into and tenaciously adhering to identifications believed to be foundational.

[5] See Fanon's discussion of the pitfalls of national consciousness in *The Wretched of the Earth.*

[6] For a detailed discussion see “Experimentation and Modern Sensibility” and “The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel’s Aesthetic Response,” among other works, where Sabry Hafez establishes the direct connection between the social changes brought by modernization, urbanization and the political crises and literature’s efforts to come to terms with these upheavals witnessed in the late 19th through the twentieth century Arab world in general and Egypt in particular.

novelists from the sixties, as she believes that this period remained steeped in immaturity and incoherence, and these young writers had a hard time establishing themselves because of the government's increased hold on cultural activity through the nationalization of press and publishing houses. The lack of a noticeable emergence of experimental avant-garde novels during the sixties has led Kendall and many other critics to first overlook *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* and second to analyze it through the lens of the 1970s novelistic productions. Kendall rightly remarks though that writers had to face censorship under Abdel Nasser's regime, which tends to be overlooked by contemporary writers nostalgic for the 1960s.[7]

Hence, by practicing this "controlled pluralism," i.e., delineating the contours and parameters of "speakable discourse,"[8] the Nasserist state and its ideological apparatuses regulated the production of subjectivities by implementing what Judith Butler has called "implicit censorship."[9] This form of censorship that operates through explicit and implicit norms has proven more efficacious than explicit censorship, whose legibility exposes its vulnerability and paradoxical nature, because it "*states what is does not want stated*, thwarts its own desire, … [and] introduce[s] the censored speech into public discourse, thereby establishing it as a site of contestation, that is, as the scene of public utterance that it sought to preempt."[10] Butler ties regulation of speech directly to the formation and production of subjectivities through the explicit or implicit norms through which censorship operates. The domain of the sayable is interconnected to and produced by the kind of citizen made possible in this context. Returning to

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[7] See Kendall's "The Theoretical Roots of the literary Avant-garde in the 1960s Egypt." (2003).
[8] See Judith Butler's "Implicit Censorship" in *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* New York: Routledge, 1997. Print. 133.
[9] Ibid. 127-163.
[10] Ibid. 130.

Rancière's conceptualization of the police, whose intervention consists in "prescrib[ing] what can be seen and what cannot be seen, what can be said and what cannot be said," we can perceive censorship as a specific form of the police, and an individual's noncompliance with censorship translates into a redistribution of the sensible, and results in (or coincides with) the formation of the political subject.[11] When implicit censorship fails to interpellate an individual (or a citizen, in the case of the implicit censorship necessary for the consolidation of the nation) we witness the production of an "impossible" citizen, to use Butler's term. This citizen's speech (as well as the citizen) is unintelligible because it does not correspond to the norms imposed by censorship. At the same time this unintelligibility exposes the limits of this normative exercise of power that operates through "a tacit set of norms" which is one source of its invulnerability. [12] In light of this conversation, Sonallah Ibrahim stands as the subject whom censorship in its implicit form failed to interpellate in the case of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*. By removing this novel from circulation *after* it was published, explicit censorship betrayed the implicit censorship that was transgressed against by the author, which consequently led the authorities to resort to explicit regulation to articulate this implicit constraint. What Butler rightly perceives as a source of invulnerability proves in Ibrahim's case a source of vulnerability as well. *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* exposes the lacuna in the normative exercise of power as it had to resort to juridical power through explicit censorship. Simultaneously, as a dissenting subject, Sonallah Ibrahim is also made an impossible/unintelligible citizen, and his text an illegible one precisely because it speaks the unspeakable, thus exposing the limits of the legible and the speakable.

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[11] Rancière, Jacques. "The Cause of the Other." *Parallax.* 03 Dec. 2010. Web. Rancière reiterates his definition of the police in other writings as well. See his "Ten Theses on Politics."
[12] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech.* 134.

Butler transposes the term “foreclosure” from Lacanian psychoanalysis into her discussion of the productive capacity of censorship. Taking my cue from Butler in her observation of the parallel between the role of foreclosure in the inauguration of the speaking subject on one hand, and that of censorship in the inauguration of the political subject on the other hand, my interest in this parallel is to employ it in the reading of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa.* For the question that arises at this juncture concerns the configuration of this ‘impossible speech’ uttered by this ‘impossible citizen’ who is formed as a political subject (un sujet de la politique) by the same process that censors its speech, hence its limited agency and its intimate proximity to foreclosure. Moreover, and as Butler has taught us, the unsovereign nature of this discourse is cancelled out by the only fact that it has been uttered, which secures for it a potential, itself realized through the course of performativity as well as iterability. Dina Al-Kassim also writes in her discussion of the literary rant as a practice of freedom that the sovereignty of the address “disappears in the moment of its exercise. What inheres, then, in its wake is a practice of writing that proceeds from its mode of address and its active ability to foreground or expose the forms of power’s reach, the symbolic law and order that subtends it.”[13] For both theorists, the sovereignty of a discourse resides in its latency materialized through citationality, which is generative as a result of the historical contingency of the law.

Such has been the trajectory of Sonallah Ibrahim’s discourse since the publication of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* and throughout his later works, which have become more explicitly contestatory. He has been able to ascertain his disinterestedness throughout his career as an independent and autonomous voice, maintaining his unwavering

[13] Dina Al-Kassim, *On Pain of Speech: Fantasies of the First Order and the Literary Rant.* 24.

adherence to his leftist principles in his political positions and praxis as well as to his aesthetic ideals in his novelistic works with by constantly regenerating his writing style, articulating contestation through the insertion of documentary and journalistic elements (newspaper clippings, reports of documentaries, historical accounts, political analyses, etc.) into the fictional narration of his novels. Sonallah Ibrahim's increasingly open dissenting style translates an urgency to expose the increasingly degraded current affairs on political, social, and literary levels. By including substantive non-fictional elements in his novels, Ibrahim reveals his skepticism toward the dissenting aptitude of fiction. Furthermore, by combining journalistic and fictional writings, his novels provide a space of osmosis where fiction and fact permeate into and inform each other, evoking another kind of osmosis operating between sexuality and politics—two foundational components in the formation of the subject.

In their study of post-1967 literature produced in the Arab world, literary critics have closely associated the political defeat with sexual impotence and emasculation thus contributing to crystallize the post-1967 literary productions as mainly characterized by defeatism and emasculation. This discourse is problematic not only because it presumes that the Arab subject as a man, but also because it claims that defeatism and passivity are closely correlated with emasculation, even in some recent studies that dissect the contradictions and vulnerabilities of masculinities in the post-1967 Arab world. Samira Aghacy offers a nuanced analysis of various masculinities proving the fragility of masculinity as a construct, and shifting away from the binary of masculinity and femininity. Nonetheless, Aghacy seems to subscribe to the dominant discourse and reading—whether circulating in the studied novels or among literary

critics—associating emasculation, impotence, and castration with submissiveness, defeatism, and humiliation, thus thwarting the reading of fractured and insecure masculinities as they converge into emasculation.[14] Hoda El-Sadda, in her study of the intersection of gendered identities and national conflicts in the Arabic novel, remarks that *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* "inaugurates the character of the ineffectual, impotent male who has lost interest in everything and everyone."[15] El-Sadda juxtaposes "ineffectual" and "impotent" in her depiction of the Arab male of the late 60s and subsequent years in Arab history, thus connecting directly sexual performance with social and overall competence. Hanadi Al-Samman, in her examination of the increased representation of homoerotic desire in modern Arabic literature, links the depiction of male homosexuality to a sense of powerlessness, as the Arab male citizen is being stripped of his masculinity (raped) just as he is denied political agency. The male homosexual act is a reenactment of the master/slave dynamic in terms of domination and abuse of power.[16] To associate loss of manhood with political powerlessness is to keep adhering to the idea that masculinity is a prowess that is not limited to the sexual realm, but encompasses other domains, including the political. Al-Samman's interpretation might be reading accurately some Arab novelists subscribing to the idea whereby male homosexuality reflects a general state of impotence, but this analysis leads her to misread Sonallah Ibrahim's *Sharaf* by missing Ibrahim's attempt to show the absurdity of perceiving a man's integrity and 'honor' solely through the lens of sodomy while being

[14] Samira Aghacy, *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967.* New York: Syracuse University Press. 2009. Print.
[15] Hoda Elsadda, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892-2008*. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2012. 124.
[16] Hanadi Al-Samman, "Out of the Closet: Representation of Homosexuals and Lesbians in Modern Arabic Literature." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008): 270-310.

oblivious to countless violations perpetrated by the Egyptian state's apparatuses as well as by multi-nationals and Western governments. From this prism, then, Sonallah Ibrahim is one of the rare dissenting voices of the 1960s (and subsequent decades) that could neither be instrumentalized nor categorized. As I will argue below, Sonallah Ibrahim seeks in his work to dissociate both masculinity and emasculation from their sociopolitical implications.

Sonallah Ibrahim is a contemporary Egyptian novelist and short story writer born in 1937 and who considers political activism his life mission.[17] In 1959, as a part of the Communist Party trial by Abdel Nasser's regime, he was sentenced to seven years in prison for his activism in the Communist party, but was released in 1964 in anticipation of Khrushchev's visit to Egypt. He worked as a journalist for some time before receiving in 1973 a grant to study film in the Soviet Union. Upon his return in 1975 he decided to devote himself to writing, refusing any official position in the civil service, making a living from the copyrights mainly paid by his foreign publishers. In 2003 he was awarded the Supreme Council of Culture's Novel Conference Award by the Egyptian Ministry of Culture under the Mubarak regime. He attended the award ceremony, and instead of accepting the prize, he delivered a diatribe against the regime and refused the prize because "it was awarded by a government that, in my opinion, lacks the credibility to bestow it."[18] Ibrahim was also the first recipient of the AUC Naguib Mahfouz Medal for literature, which he declined because "he refuses that the name of such a famous writer as Naguib Mahfouz is used by a U.S. institution whose government supports Israel's occupation of Arab lands, the oppression of the Palestinian people, and also supports

[17] Sonallah Ibrahim, "The Smell of Dissent." Interview by Youssef Rakha. *Al-Ahram Weekly.* 27 Nov. 2003. Web.
[18]Robyn Creswell, "Sonallah Ibrahim: Egypt's Oracular Novelist." *The New Yorker* 20 Aug. 2013. Web.

rulers who oppress their people in the name of freedom and democracy."[19] Ibrahim's novels, from the first, *That Smell (Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa),* to the latest, *Berlin 69,* are written in an increasingly austere style; the common denominator of the ensemble of his oeuvre, however, remains a voice that repeatedly and relentlessly articulates and stages scenes of dissensus with the various structures of power, challenging their regimes of truth, and reiterating its dis-identification with them. As a result, his writings, and particularly *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* are pervaded with frustrated moments and failed attempts that reflect the tension between the irreducible conflict between the author and the forms of power in place. As the author's position vis-à-vis the regime(s) in place becomes increasingly more openly oppositional, his style in later works is more overtly critical and his sarcasm is more biting. Nonetheless, his first work, *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* the readers witness the author's conviction in the potentials of dissent enabled by fiction, as the text repeatedly enacts failure and frustration thus paradoxically asserting its ability to register dissent. Repetitive failures and prevailing unproductivity on various levels make up the bulk of the narrative, haunting it and confirming the author's complex relationship with the power structure under Abdel Nasser's regime. Besides signaling this conflict, these moments of failure are characteristic of the abject address that, according to Dina Al-Kassim, "is avowed to truth telling but unable to secure its own speech from the clutter of its own undoing." Al-Kassim proposes the term "rant" to call this abject mode of address, which is "a speech characterized by its excesses and unintelligibilities [that] expose the presence of a norm, its contours and its authority."[20] As my analysis of *Tilka*

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[19] Jihad ʿAql, "Sonʿallah Ibrāhīm, al-muqāwim al-ḥurr" [Sonallah Ibrahim, the Free Resistant]. *Al-ḥiwār Al-mutamaddin.* 5 Dec. 2003. <http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=27596> Web. (My translation).
[20] Dina Al-Kassim. *On Pain of Speech.* 3-4.

al-Rāʾiḥa will show, this text shares many characteristics with the literary rant, but in my discussion I am more interested in Al-Kassim's discussion of the characteristics of dissenting speech rather than the rant itself.

Sonallah Ibrahim wrote *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* after his release from prison, which was according to him "a cruel but rich experience…that [he] began to feel the need to tell. Once again [he] resolved that certain things must be communicated and expressed."[21] The author's decision to write fiction is rooted in a self-assertive sentiment: " يكفي أن أقول اني قد اتخذت قراري بكتابة الرواية تأكيداً لذاتي ودفاعاً عنها في ظروف صعبة للغاية هي ظروف السجن."[22] *-Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* was published in 1966 in Egypt, but immediately after publication pulled from the shelves and banned until it was published again in a censored form in the Beirut-based magazine *Shi'r,* then to be published again in Sudan and Morocco in 1986 in its integrality. *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* remains Ibrahim's most controversial novel and the one that made the most impact on readers and critics alike, although to this day critics have been reading this novel through the lenses of the 1967 defeat, overlooking the way this novel depicts the complexity of the situation and the latent potentials of the Arab subject had the defeat not occurred. Whether in Arabic or in English translations, this text has had a complex and convoluted trajectory that signals its dissenting and innovative nature on one hand, and the light it helps shed on the nature of the Arab political subject on the other hand.

[21] Sonallah Ibrahim, "The Smell of Dissent." Interview by Youssef Rakha. *Al-Ahram Weekly.* 27 Nov. 2003. Web.
[22] See Ibrahim's article in *Al-Adab magazine* 1980 titled "Tajirabti al-riwa'iyyah." 100.

Composed in “a short-winded” or “a telegraphic style,”[23] this novel was translated twice into English. Its first translation into English by Denys Johnson-Davies in 1971under the title *The Smell of It* is symptomatic of the bewilderment with which the novel was received, as Johnson-Davies attempted to normalize the prose by dividing it into paragraphs and neat sentences that replaced the original’s unending ramblings. It was retranslated by Robyn Creswell in 2013 as *That Smell,* and this translation attends to Ibrahim’s stylistics and acknowledges the author’s intention to write in an “inelegant” style by keeping this inelegance in the English. The English translations of this work capture the shift in its critical reception that first denied this text its reliance on the abject address and produced an “ennobled” version, to use Antoine Berman’s term by which he designates a deformation that occurs in translation and which is only a rewriting, a “‘stylistic exercise’ based on—and at the expense of—the original.”[24] (282). This practice, frequent in the literary field, aims at producing a text that is “‘readable,’…rid of its original clumsiness and complexity so as to enhance the ‘meaning.’”[25] This ennoblement is exactly what Robyn Creswell sought to change in his 2013 translation of this text, identifying awkwardness, clumsiness, and disturbing “inelegance and even ugliness” as essential and irreplaceable qualities of the work. Creswell’s retranslation signals also a shift in the critical reception of this work that acknowledges these qualities, yet most of the critics still miss on its strategies of dissent as an abject address.

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[23] According to Sonallah Ibrahim himself: “ النفس اللاهث” and “ اليوميات التلغرافية” (*Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* 17, 16) (*That Smell* 72, 71) respectively.
[24] See Antoine Berman’s “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign” in Lawrence Venuti’s *The Translation Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print. 245.
[25] ibid. 282.

Indeed, the text is told in a bare and unornamented style that has been unique to Ibrahim, and was unsettling to his contemporaries used to the adorned and descriptive style of Naguib Mahfouz and others writers of the sixties. Most of the critics till our days have been at loss when it comes to determine the elements that contribute to this novel's stylistics and dissenting nature, most of them reiterating the censors' uneasiness with the narrator's refusal to have sex with the prostitute, interpreting it as impotence.[26] In a kind of throwing in the towel gesture, Creswell is unable to explain Ibrahim's style.[27] My examination of this author's oeuvre seeks to remedy this lacuna by approaching it as an essentially dissenting work, a quality not fully acknowledged by critics for two main reasons: First, the fact that the 1970s are regarded as the decade that witnessed the inauguration of the literature of disillusionment and alienation dismisses the importance of the literary productions of the 1960s such as the present work under study.[28] Second, every study of the experimental works that emerged in the sixties examines them through the lenses of the present, attributing to them features pertinent to 1970s literature. The 1967 defeat and its repercussions still leave their imprints on any attempt to study the 1960s literature that preceded it.[29]

The novel's unnamed narrator is just released from prison but kept under state surveillance, and a policeman has to check daily on him at sunset to sign in a

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[26] In the novel's Sonallah Ibrahim relates his conversation with the censors after they confiscated the novel in 1966. See also my discussion above about the inferred impotence of the narrator and its repercussions on the interpretation of the novel and post-1967 Arabic literature in general.

[27] Creswell writes in the translator's introduction: "I've noted that there is a little mystery about how Ibrahim arrived at the style of his first work, a style that is at once simple and strange, or strange because it seems to simple"(7).

[28] I use "dissent" and its derivatives such as "dissenting" in Rancière's sense of the term and its relation to modernity as I explain above.

[29] Even attempts to interpret *Tilka-ra'iha* as a text that forshadowed the 1967 defeat still maintain the imperative of reading this text through the lenses of this defeat, which as many have argued, was a military defeat but proffered with a multitude of additional dimensions

notebook—which is probably the register of his house arrest. This narrator lives in an apartment he rented at his release from prison, and spends his time idly, wandering through the city's (probably Cairo's) streets, visiting some friends and relatives, or smoking, reading, and masturbating in his room. The narrator is incapable of expressing his feelings or exhibiting any reaction to the world around him. As he is released from prison, he declares,

"هذه هي اللحظة التي كنت أحلم بها دائماً طوال السنوات الماضية. وفتشت في داخلي عن شعور غير عادي، فرحة أو بهجة أو انفعال ما، فلم أجد."[30]

This impassivity soon manifests in the scene wherein the narrator watches with striking indifference an older detainee raping a sleeping child in the presence of the equally indifferent detainees. Moreover, the child's lack of reaction during the rape as well as to the rest of the cell's insensitivity towards him signal the culmination of a process of desensitization that might have resulted from a prolonged exposure to violent stimuli in his environment, which informs in turn the narrator's desensitized attitude toward his surroundings while also highlighting his paralysis and marginality. This monotonous and detached narrative is interspersed with another in italics characterized by its inclusion of emotions, and that consists of memories of times past, either of his childhood, prison days, or romantic meetings with his lover. This part of the narrative acts as an attempt to transfigure the narrator's austere surroundings through the inclusion of fantasy, as I will discuss this subject below.

Throughout the text, Cairo is described as an unappealing place saturated with a pervading stench and exhausted people:

[30] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa* 29. "It was the moment I'd been dreaming of for years and I searched myself for some feeling that was out of the ordinary, some joy or delight or excitement, but found nothing" (*That Smell* 19).

[31] "ركبت المترو. وكان الزحام فظيعاً وكدت أختنق. وراقبت وجوه السيدات المتعبة وقد ساح الكحل عليها."

A stench smell pervades Cairo's streets:

"وكانت مياه المجاري تملأ الارض. والمضخات منصوبة في كل مكان تحملها من داخل الحوانيت الى الشارع. وكانت الرائحة لا تطاق." [32]

The insistence on the smell in the text as well as in the title calls to mind the Arabic expression "you stink" or "طلعت ريحتك" meaning that a stench smell emanates from a person signaling a certain dysfunction or corruption that will be brought to light sooner or later. This subjacent meaning partly explains the censorship of this text. Yahiya Haqqi, a major literary critic and one of Ibrahim's early mentors, wrote that he was 'nauseated' by the novel, decrying "its lack of sensibility, its lowness, its vulgarity."[33] Hence another interpretation of the title emerges; *that smell* is the unpleasant smell this text generates and propagates among the rest of its contemporaneous literary productions subscribing to the norms of social realism, and adhering to bourgeois ideals and aesthetics that are sustained by the Nasserist cultural establishment. Just as the narrator of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* passes gas in a neat bourgeois living room, the text infests the literary milieu with unsavory aesthetics and themes.

The novel is written in a breathless style with no concerns for stylistic embellishment. By refusing to paint a beautiful semblance of life in Egyptian society under Abdel Nasser and desisting from satisfying the readers' needs for hope in achieving the bourgeois social ideals, *That Smell* presents itself as an artistic project that repudiates the aesthetic choices made by Ibrahim's contemporaries and thus

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[31] *Ibid*. 40. "I got on the metro and the crowds were horrendous and I almost suffocated. I looked at the faces of tired women with eyeliner running down their faces" (31).
[32] *Ibid.* 62. "Wastewater covered the ground. The pumps set up everywhere carried water from inside the shops out into the street. The smell was unbearable" (*That Smell* 58).
[33] *That Smell*. 67.

situates itself outside of the stylistic norms of its time, instituting its own aesthetic criteria as the author explains in his introduction to the 1986 edition:

"وكان ثمة جمال في فعل قبيح من قبيل إطلاق غازات المعدة في صالون برجوازي ."[34] The criticism *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* received from its contemporaries demonstrates that the stylistic means employed were unacceptable by both the ruling social class and the literary establishment, that this work violates and commits an infringement on the stylistic and thematic norms set in Abdel Nasser's Egypt and betrays or falls short of fulfilling the mission of the writer as the conscience of his nation, according to the vision propagated by Abdel Nasser's regime.[35] For this regime instituted a monopoly of culture that allowed the intellectuals relative freedom, but put them under some kind of moral obligation towards the state and a sense of lack of independence and freedom.[36] Even if Jacquemond argues that "the drive to uniformity imposed by nationalist ideology and the censorship apparatus" of Abdel Nasser's regime temporarily cancelled "the traditional conflict between high culture and vulgar art,"[37] the attacks initiated by literary critics targeting *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* demonstrate the persistent prevalence of bourgeois aesthetic ideals in the 1960s literary circles. On the other hand, the 1970s experimental fiction shows the influence of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* in its disillusionment with the project of nation building in the Arab world, in the way it expresses a new literary consciousness, sensibility, aesthetics, and semantics, although most of the scholars have attributed the

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[34]*Tilka al-Ra'iḥa*.16. "And there was a *beauty* in ugly actions, like passing gas in a bourgeois living room" (71).
[35] See Richard Jacquemond's *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt*.
[36] In "Intellectuels en crise dans l'Egypte contemporaine," Alain Roussillon examines the crisis of the intellectuals under Abdel Nasser regime, defining it as a result of "[une] alliance, jamais exempte de 'frictions'" between the regime and the intelligentsia whereby the latter were asked to provide the former with an ideology: "[C]'est au moment précis où le régime militaire crie son besoin d'idéologie et de cadres, que cette gauche, écrasée par le fer, se voit invitée à revivre, à condition toutefois qu'elle abdique toute existence indépendante, toute personnalité autonome, toute velléité d'être elle-même"(198).
[37] Jacquemond 42.

emergence of the postcolonial avant-garde literature to the 1967 defeat. While it futile and erroneous to deny the latter fact, this periodization of the emergence of postcolonial avant-garde in Arabic prose fiction as a post-1967 defeat has been mostly unhelpful in the sense that it has stigmatized the Arab political subject as a submissive and ideological one. By throwing light on the leftist intellectuals and the regimes of the 1960s, *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* expresses the disenchantment felt during the sixties, but largely repressed by the military regime of the time, and self-censured by the writers whose relation with the ruling establishment was fraught with tension, ambiguity, and what Rancière calls "impossible identification."

In one of his discussions of the process of production of political subjectivity,[38] Jacques Rancière relates the events of October 1961 in Paris, wherein French police ruthlessly killed and drowned dozens of Algerian demonstrators, and kept the number of the casualties and details of the killings in an utmost secrecy. French leftists, outraged that the killings were perpetrated in their names and yet hidden from their eyes, protested the French government's action without, however, immediately identifying with the Algerian FLN fighters. As a result, they adopted what Rancière calls "an impossible identification," chanting "We are German Jews," a formula meant to transform a stigmatized name into "an open subjectivation of the uncounted" without confusing the various groups politically with "any representation of an identifiable social group."[39] This dis-identification, Rancière argues, marks the formation of the political subject who is

[38] See Rancière, Jacques. "The Cause of the Other" Trans. David Macey. *Parallax* 4.2 (1998): 25-33. I take cue from Olivia Harrison in her discussion of Rancière's essay to show how the Jewish political subject (in this case the Jewish writers and intellectuals such as El Maleh, Derrida, and Serfaty) is formed through a dis-identification with the Jewish/Zionist state, a negation of the alterity of the Palestinian, without however directly identifying with them.
[39] Ibid. 30.

located in the space between the citizen and the (national) subject.[40] The parallels between French and Arab intellectuals in this situation do not completely correspond; this moment of dis-identification as the formation of the political subject sheds light on the impasse in which the Arab leftist intellectuals find themselves. Unlike French leftists and intellectuals who dis-identified with the French state and the Algerian at once in a gesture meant to oppose their state's repression of Algerians, Arab leftist intellectuals could not dis-identify with their respective states because of the latter's engagement in anti-imperialist and anti-Israeli wars—to dis-identify with their states in their repressive practices towards their dissenting citizens can have the adverse effect of reinforcing some regimes' monopolization of the Palestinian cause in order to legitimize and consolidate their rule;[41] it can also translate unequivocally into an act of betrayal, whence the undeservedly outlasting endurance of the term *Naksa* to refer to the 1967 defeat. The term *Naksa* translates into "relapse," "setback," and "reversal," implying that it marks a halt in an upward or forward movement or progression, which does not correspond to reality.[42] The adherence to this reference has had many implications, one of which is to apply the shame and disgrace as the foundational traits of the post-war Arab subject, and to stigmatize them as uncritically docile. As an inaugurating moment in experimental fiction, this periodization depicts Arab literary modernity as an expression of disgrace in identification with the power structure, as though these subjects saw the ruler as an extension of themselves, which is not the case as the

[40] Ibid. 31.
[41] While some Baathist regimes have certainly monopolized the Palestinian cause in order to legitimize their rule, the same logic cannot be applied to Abdel Nasser's regime support of the Palestinian cause or to his fight against western imperialism.
[42] According to Halim Barakat, the first person to use this term was King Hussein of Jordan, followed by Nasser, then it was repeated by the people despite their conviction in the discrepancy between the term and reality. See his *Days of Dust* for more details.

fiction under study reveals. The Arab leftist intellectuals' impossible identification is the public identification with the regime, while symptoms of dis-identification can be detected in works such as *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*.

In his introduction to *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* Ibrahim relates candidly his inability to imagine Abdel Nasser other than a caring figure. He likens his condition to those Bolsheviks imprisoned and tortured by Stalin in the Soviet Union: "إن عدداً من البلاشفة القدامى الذين قبض عليهم وأسيئت معاملتهم ظلوا يعتقدون أنهم اضطهدوا دون علمه، ولم يسلموا أبداً بأنه هو الذي أمر شخصياً بما حل بهم. وكان الكثيرون منهم يكتبون بعد عودتهم من التعذيب على جدران الزنازين 'عاش ستالين."[43]

Likewise, the author expresses the feelings of guilt he experiences whenever he criticizes Abdel Nasser. Sonallah Ibrahim professes his struggle with this dilemma on multiple occasions. In *Warda*, the narrator articulates the predicament the communists under Abdel Nasser had to face. He explains that the communists were aiming to bring down a military regime accused of collaborating with the U.S., but the Suez crisis of 1956 and its aftermath proved to them that this same regime became a pan-Arab force against imperialism and was striving to 'Egyptianize' the economy and build a strong public sector, thus preventing the establishment of a western-led capitalism.[44] For this reason, as loyal citizens they could only support this regime and defend it.

The conflicted feelings are particularly apparent throughout *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*, as the narrator unsuccessfully tries to write a novel that the author presents in the epigraph as a confessional project. The novel's epigraph is an excerpt from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "أنا نتاج هذا الجنس وهذه الحياة... ولسوف أعبر عن نفسي كما أنا...

[43] "A great number of former Bolsheviks who were maltreated in prisons kept believing that they were oppressed without his (Stalin's) knowledge, and have never admitted that he had ordered personally what happened to them.. Many were writing, after their return from torture, with their blood on the cells' walls: 'Long Live Stalin'"(*Yauwmiyāt al-Wāḥāt* 84; my translation)
[44] Sonallah Ibrahim. *Warda.* 51.

The original text reads: “This race and this country and this life produced me…/ I [45].“ shall express myself as I am.” The Arabic version, which was translated by Sonallah Ibr Ibrahim himself for the purpose of including it as an epigraph to *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*, omits “this country” and endows the narrator with more agency as أنا becomes the subject of نتاج rather than being the object of “produced” as it is in the original. In an email exchange with the author, I have learned that he translated himself the epigraph, which he had randomly encountered while reading a magazine. He was not able to provide any explanation for omitting “this country” from his translation, citing forgetfulness, and leaving space for interpretation. In fact, the author’s rebellion and (unconscious) willingness to dissociate himself from “this country” contributed to the altered Arabic version. Accordingly, the author (again, unconsciously) denies the role his country has played in shaping him, and positions himself in a less passive role as he changes the syntax of the sentence.

On another level, this statement, while emphatically declaring that the narrator intends to disclose himself *as he is*, reveals the underlying cynicism (not to say the impossibility) of this statement that presents a subject affirming himself to be self-identical and capable of giving an account of himself that corresponds perfectly to his reality, thus paradoxically discrediting his self-assurance. Judith Butler writes that a subject giving account of him/her self is addressing the structure of power from its point of view, because this “I” whose account is given, “does not stand apart from the prevailing matrix of ethical norms and conflicting moral frameworks.”[46] This poses a dilemma for Ibrahim whose writing is precisely aimed at addressing the lack of ethics in

[45] *Tilka al-Raʾiḥa.* 23.
[46] See Butler's *Giving Account of the Self.* 7.

the structure of power on one level, and ideology on another level, who precisely never *express themselves as they are*. We know from Butler the predicament belying the account of the self and the fact that it is doomed to failure. Nonetheless, the account's narration of its own failure is by itself an indicator that the writer's address to the power structure reaches its purpose, for this failure exposes the unbridgeable gap between the individual's and the collective's morals. For in the first place, moral questions would not have arisen had "the moral norms of behavior ceased to become self-evident."[47]This failure manifests in other circumstances throughout the narrative, signaling the distinction between intention and the unintentional, the unconscious. We have learned from psychoanalysis, and from Judith Butler in particular, that the body represents the superfluous and the unintentional that exceed the "I" that proclaims to give an account of itself. Consequently, the excessive representation of the narrator's body throughout the text along with its successive failures to fulfill the narrator's promises or to substantiate societal norms confirms the author's dissensus. In the scene whereby the narrator and two other men hire a prostitute, the other two sleep with her, but the narrator finds himself unable *and* unwilling to have intercourse with her: لن أستطيع... لا أستطيع... ليست لدي رغبة."[48] Although the narrator is the one who asks for a prostitute, which signifies his intention to make his body comport itself in a certain way, thus presupposing to include his body in this promise and proclamation, the body becomes the vehicle of the failure of this proclamation.[49] Rather than signifying the inauguration of the Arab subject's "impotence" (for Ibrahim registers his dissent through impotence or

[47] Ibid. 3. Cited from Adorno's *Minima Moralia.*
[48]*Tilka al-Ra'iḥa* . 54. "I can' t… I couldn' t... I don' 'feel like it"(49).
[49] I draw on Judith Butler's discussion of the speech act and its relation to the body in her afterword to Shoshana Felman's *The Scandal of the Speaking Body.* 113-123.

failure, while the prevalent impotence in post-1967 Arabic literature aims to express the Arab subject's sense of disillusionment and defeat), this scene represents the subject as one of desire. The moment the narrator fails to have intercourse with the prostitute is rather a moment indicating the failure of the contours of masculinity, where interpellation of the heterosexual male fails so that a space of resistance and dissensus opens, and the political subject is produced. In a similar fashion, the protagonist's body fails once more to conform to societal norms in a moment of futile rebellion when he is a guest at Nihad's table:

" وكانت أختي قد حذرتني وقالت حذار أن تأخذ الورك لأنك لن تعرف كيف تأكله بالشوكة والسكين. لكني لم أدر كيف اندفعت وقلت لها أعطيني الورك. ووضعته أمامي وأمسكت بالشوكة والسكين، وعندما غرزت فيه الشوكة قفز من صحني في الهواء وسقط في إناء السلطة. وقالت نهاد بهدوء: الفراخ لا تؤكل هكذا، كلها بيديك. وقلت لها إن أختي حذرتني لكني لم أستمع إلى تحذيرها. وقالت الأم إنهم في أوربا يأكلون الورك بالشوكة والسكين. ولم أعرف كيف آكل بعد ذلك."[50]

As mentioned above, this novel's nameless narrator reiterates regularly his failure to write a novel. The narrative follows him as he wanders aimlessly through the streets of Cairo, meets his acquaintances, and returns home by dusk so that his police minder signs the paper daily. Although this narrator promises himself to write a novel, he fails to produce anything but fragments. The novel concludes after the narrator's maternal grandmother announces to him the death of his mother. The narrator then returns home to get his paper signed by the minder. This denouement folds into the beginning of the narrative, registering a non-progressive movement, one like the

[50] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa*. 44. "We sat at the table and I took some salad and rice on my plate and Nihad asked me, Thigh or breast? My sister had warned me. Don't take a thigh, she said, you won't know how to eat it with a knife and fork. I don't know what got into me but I said to her, Give me the thigh. She put it in front of me and I grabbed the knife and fork and when I stuck the fork in the thigh flew up from my plate and landed in the salad bowl. That's not how chicken is eaten, Nihad said calmly. Eat it with your fingers. I said that my sister had warned me but I didn't pay attention to her warning. Her father ate his thigh with a knife and fork. The mother said that in Europe they didn't eat the thigh with a knife and fork and after that I didn't know how to eat"(*That Smell* 37).

wave's, to borrow the analogy from Rancière, which goes countercurrent to the steady and forward progress of modernity.[51] It is a movement that resists stubbornly the urge for productivity and advancement that constitute the core values of the modern nation-state. On another level, the death of the mother, who had undergone a failed suicide attempt earlier in her life, but died later as a result of an illness for which she refused to receive treatment, was probably indirectly killed by the father, as the narrator obliquely insinuates: This oblique claim draws attention to "كيف يستطيع الحياة بعد أن علم أن أباه هو القات."[52] the complicated relationship the narrator harbors towards the father figure, whether his biological father, the symbolic father, or the father of the nation, Gamal Abdel Nasser. The ambivalence of his attitude toward Abdel Nasser's regime accounts for the intricacy of the novel, whether on the stylistic or thematic levels—Ibrahim's later works criticize the subsequent regimes more openly, hence the inclusion of journalistic fragments beside the fictional components that lack the multi-layered and complex critique embedded within the narrative that we witness in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*.

The complexities of this relationship are revelatory as the readers witness the narrator's conflicting sentiments oscillating between love and hate towards Abdel Nasser and his regime. Melanie Klein explains how feelings of hate and love are inherent in one's relationship towards the parents, and guilt and reparation are in constant tension with hate as they influence one's love towards their parents "both in quality and quantity."[53] One's relationship to others as an adult is greatly influenced by

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[51] See Jacques Rancière's lecture titled "An Archaeology of the Temporality of Modernism and Avant-Gardism." Online video clip. *Youtube.* Youtube, 4 Feb. 2015. Web. 14 Apr. 2015.
[52] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa.* 60, 65. "How can I live when I know my father is a murderer?" (*That Smell* 62). While the Arabic text conveys the father's crime in a specific case, the English translation makes the father a murderer which does not necessarily pertains to the mother'' death, but describes him as a murderer in general.
[53] See Melanie Klein's "Love, Guilt and Reparation" in the collection of essays by the same title. 311.

the early relationship to parents, although it is not a mere repetition. One's feelings as an adult draw on precipitated "memories, feelings and fantasies" that one has stored from the relationship with parents. As one's feelings of guilt accumulate, they come to form "an incentive towards creativeness and work" in general, but if they are too overwhelming, they might inhibit productive activities.[54] This point is crucial to understand Ibrahim's self-claimed failure to complete a novel, as it illustrates the interplay between the will to express his dissent and the feelings of guilt it generates, and the wish to make reparation resulting from these feelings. The narrator mentions the feelings of guilt he harbors for his father because he neglected to accompany him to the hospital when the father was screaming in pain:

" كان ذلك بالليل. وكان أبي يصرخ من الألم. وكنت أريد أن أنام. وعندما أخذوه إلى المستشفى بقيت بمفردي في البيت. وكنت سعيداً. وعندما ذهبت إليه اصطدمت بعينيه. وكانتا واسعتين جزعتين. وسألني لماذا تأخرت. ولم يكلمني بعد ذلك أبداً. [55]

Hence, I suggest we view the narrator's relationship with his father not as an allegory to his attitude towards Abdel Nasser, for the allegory suggests an otherwise unbridgeable distance between the domestic and the public or the political, while in fact the two are enmeshed within each other. Rather, drawing on Klein's analysis, I propose to examine and analyze the author's relationship to Abdel Nasser in light of the narrator's relationship to his father, which illuminates Ibrahim' the crisis of the intellectual. We can see residues of the author's persisting guilt in *Sharaf,* where the narrator is utterly insensitive to the father's deteriorating health condition and subsequent lengthy stay in

[54] Ibid. 335-336.
[55] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa*. 59. "*It was night and my father was screaming with pain. I wanted to sleep and so when they took him to the hospital I stayed at home by myself and was happy. When I went to see him, I was shocked by the look in his eyes. They were wide and anxious and he asked why I'd taken so long"* (*That Smell* 54).

the hospital by insisting that his mother bring him the goods he demands, and remorselessly complaining from her lack of compliance with his wishes.

From this perspective then, we can see the novel's refusal to conform to the implicit demands incurred by the intelligentsia to provide the regime of the Free Officers with an ideology as an illustration of the dynamics of the crisis of the modern Egyptian intellectual since Rif'at al-Tahtawi discussed by Alain Roussillon.[56] Roussillon considers the condition of the Egyptian intellectual as fundamentally paradoxical because of their vital need for a strong, "even dominating, State and political will" to fulfill their social, economic, and ideological needs. Yet as soon as this State sees light, "it instrumentalizes the production of the intellectuals to its proper ends, and submit them to a pure and simple repression." Hence the ambiguity of the condition of the intelligentsia during the Nasserist period: "It appears at once like the golden age of the Egyptian intelligentsia and at the same time like one of the darkest periods they went through."[57] In his turn, Anouar Abdel Malek discusses the crisis of the intellectual in Egypt under the regime of the Free Officers from a perspective similar to Roussillon's. Yet, his analysis addresses the case of the rare Marxists, among whom Sonallah Ibrahim figured, who resisted the instrumentalization of their works by the regime. Abdel Malek believes that those experiencing a crisis were mainly the Marxists, communists and leftists of the 40s and 50s. By being told to provide the regime with the ideology the regime needs, these intellectuals were essentially denied the right and the power to

[56] As indicated above, Alain Roussillon writes that the crises of the Arab intellectual manifest themselves in the intellectuals' relation to the State which is their sole employer and under which they prosper and reproduce; a crisis in their relation with civil society and the middle class which they claim to represent, but from which they are detached by the virtue of their modernity; a crisis in their rapport toward the 'Other,' the Occident, the source of their foundational values as 'intellectuals' and 'modernists,' "but which irremediably compromises the 'authenticity' of all those who deal with it"(214). All translations from Roussillon's text are mine.
[57] Roussillon. 252.

formulate in an autonomous way, or even in agreement with the regime, an alternative different from the one proposed by the military regime.[58] Abdel Malek explains that the crusade of hatred launched against Marxism in the aftermath of the Suez crisis, particularly in 1959-1960, cites it (Marxism) as a Western, internationalist, and atheist ideology to which Arab and Islamic nationalism cannot accommodate themselves.[59] The anti-democratic measures, the nationalization wave, and the suppression of the plurality of political parties—all these measures came as a riposte to the Suez crisis and an affirmation of national sovereignty. It is the regime's confirmation that it is capable of achieving progress, socialism, and independence on its own terms.[60]

Encouraged by the regime's leftist façade and the release of the communist-leaning intellectuals from the internment camps in 1964, the young avant-garde writers contested the situation imposed on them by the regime's patronage and putting them under a kind of moral obligation towards the state. Under Abdel Nasser's regime, the state theoretically guaranteed the same chances of access to the public for all writers, but in practice this access was conditioned by several criteria including the writer's politics and his/her proximity to the center of power. As a consequence, these avant-garde writers were marginalized by the literary establishment that "set about turning the authorities against them by accusing them of various charges" and opposed literary innovations such as free verse or the use of the vernacular in prose fiction. In fact, these

[58] See Anouar Abdel Malek's *Égypte, société militaire.* p. 198. All translations of this text are mine. Also, Alain Roussillon and Richard Jacquemond concur on the way Egyptian intellectuals found themselves in a "kind of pluralism-under-surveillance" in "the Nasserist republic of letters" to use Richard Jacquemond's terms. The flipside of this absence of an official art or philosophy in Abdel Nasser's Egypt is "the flourishing of eclectic forms of thought taken from the most diverse areas of world culture" (*Conscience of the Nation* 17). Sonallah Ibrahim registers the influence of world literature in his introduction to *That Smell,* where he lists the foreign literature he and other prisoners were avidly reading in the internment camp *Al-Wāhāt* (*That Smell* 69-70).
[59] Ibid. 211.
[60] Ibid. 348.

avant-gardists experimented with forms and themes that were unfamiliar to the social realist writing endorsed by the Higher Council for the Protection of Arts and Letters. Furthermore, the strict limits imposed on political discourse under the regime of the Free Officers led those writers to channel their political and social criticism in their literary productions.[61] This criticism assumes different forms in the literary productions of the time. Like the rest of his writings, *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* is not a work that is widely read by the general public, and Sonallah Ibrahim's fame remains confined to the literary circle.[62] It is at this moment when one is not allowed the opportunity to participate in the political that politics comes into play, as we learn from Rancière. The task of the litterateurs, according to him, "consists in constructing a new community, a new sensory fabric where the prosaic problems are given poetic dimension for which we construct a common world."[63] The new sensory fabric is materialized through a redistribution of time and space, partly, as Rancière tells us.

In Sonallah Ibrahim's writings, particularly *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* sexual desire interferes so as time and space are redistributed, yet this interference is thwarted by

[61] See Richard Jacquemond's *Conscience of the Nation* pp. 20 and 36.
[62] Some critics attribute the lack of a wide audience for Sonallah Ibrahim's work to his tireless stylistic innovations. Olivier Dalle, for example, believes that Sonallah Ibrahim's " continuelle recherche de nouvelles formes et d'expressions littéraires touche peu le grand public égyptien. C'est d'ailleurs pour cette raison peut-être que le pouvoir actuel et les comités de censure le laissent en paix" (*Le Caire* 68). In regard to the censure's evolving relationship to Ibrahim's works, it is well known that censoring a work contributes to its circulation and fame among the general readership. Dalle's hypothesis, written in 1999 under the Mubarak regime, is accurate. This regime tried to capitalize further on Ibrahim's work by not censoring it and even awarding it literary prizes—a move that fired back as Ibrahim refused the award after an angry tirade against the Egyptian government. This episode is mentioned in more detail elsewhere in this chapter. I would add that the complexity and austere themes of Ibrahim's works alienate the readers looking for pleasurable distracting readings, and this is the case of most readers, especially Arabs, who are steeped in politics in their everyday lives, and looking for escapes from reality in novelistic works. Ibrahim seems aware of this fact in *Amrikanli,* where the narrator retains the reader's interest throughout a long and dry read involving documents about multinationals, the practices of American foreign policy, etc., with the help of a supposedly mysterious letter that reveals to be nothing but an illusion..
[63] Jacques Rancière's lecture mentioned above.

getting folded within the conventions of the gendered distribution of space and situations. The partition of time, marked by the policeman's daily visits at sunset, sustains the social and spatial subjection of the narrator by keeping him under the supervising gaze that regulates his time daily. The text follows the movements of the narrator during sixteen days of his life following his release from prison. The teleological course of his days is regularly interrupted by seemingly purposeless and unproductive phantasms, dreams, and recollections from various moments of the narrator's life. This disruption of the telos of the narrator's life intervenes to effectuate a disruption puncturing the monotony and steady patterns introduced by the policeman's regular visits. Desire intervenes to disrupt the linearity of temporality through the narrator's voyeurism. The text contains erotic scenes witnessed by the male narrator: Two women kissing at a window; a woman lying naked on her bed:

ومن النافذة رأيت فتاة في المنزل المقابل تحتضن فتاة أخرى وتقبلها في شفتيها; ومن خلالها (النافذة) ظهرت فتاة جعلت تخلع ملابسها ببطء. ووقفت أخيراً عارية تماماً. ثم ارتمت على سرير في ركن الغرفة. ورقدت على وجهها وظهرها للضوء ورأيت استدارة جسمها والظلال الداكنة التي تركها الضوء في ثناياه.[64]

He is also a voyeurist gazing at various women throughout the city. He even fantasizes a sexual encounter with one of the young women he sees on the metro, and he is left frustrated and weeping from desire:

أكاد أبكي من الرغبة. وعرفت الألم عندما كنت أنظر إلى عينيها اللامعتين وخديها الشهيين. وعندمت كانت أصابعي تتسلل إلى ساعديها وساقي تقترب من ساقيها وترفضني. وفي آخر مرة كنت سأجن." (Italics in original).[65]

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[64]*Tilka al-Ra'iḥa*. 63, 47. "Through the window I saw a girl in the house opposite embrace another girl, kissing her on the lips"(27); "a young woman slowly removing her clothes [until] she was completely naked [and throwing] herself on a bed in the corner of the room and lay face down, her back turned to the light […] I stared at her shapely body and the dark shadows the light left along her curves"(40)

[65] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa.* 53. "*I almost wept with desire. It hurt to look at her bright eyes, her mouthwatering cheeks. It hurt when my fingers crept over her arm and my leg inched toward her leg and she refused me. I was finally on the point of madness"* (*That Smell* 47-48).

The parade of female bodies as objects of male desire and gaze return, albeit in a distinctly ironic tone, in Ibrahim's later works including *Najmat Aghustus (The Star of August), Amrikanli (Amrikanli),* and *Al-Jaleed (Ice)* where the reader witnesses them through the narrator's longing gaze which betrays a sustained subscription to a heterosexual normative desire. Scenes of voyeurism frame the representation of the female nude body as an object of male desire, and the attainment of this object of desire is inhibited by repressions and interdictions, and reminiscent of the trajectory of the narrative whose access to the object of desire, or truth, is always problematic and nonlinear, and creates a narrative temporality of desire that "simultaneously seeks and puts off the erotic dénouement that signifies both its fulfillment and its end: the death of desiring, the silence of the text."[66] However, rarely do the narrators in Ibrahim's texts reach orgasm through intercourse, thus sustaining an unrelieved level of desire. This sexual frustration resonates with the frustration experienced by the writer and the communist living in the Arab world, more specifically in Egypt, in the 1960s.

In most of Ibrahim's works frustration and unfulfillment characterize the narrator's sexual encounters; in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* the narrator does not engage directly in intercourse at any moment in the narrative, thus never consummating his desire except by masturbating, leaving traces on the floor: (54)"على الأرض ظهرت بقع سوداء من لذتي"[67] The narrator's solitary orgasm, leaving black residues on the ground, evokes writing as a solitary activity whose main purpose is to substantiate the (male) writer's desire, and

[66] See Peter Brooks' *Body Work* for the author's discussion of the way desire is narrated informs the temporality of the narrative (20). Brooks' reading of the implications of the way desire intervenes in temporality is particularly relevant to the way Ibrahim intervenes in the sensible, showing that the narrator, a subject of desire, is disrupting the normative distribution of the sensible, ultimately conveying the frustrated desires facing the subject on any level.
[67]"The traces of my pleasure looked like black spots on the floor"(48).

whose black residues (black ink on the page) keep the writer's desire unfulfilled rather than annihilating it with the silence of the text, i.e., the end of the narrative. As such the letter is not only a signifier but also an object. Which means that the materiality of the letter as a remainder manifests itself as the black spot on the floor, the trace of the narrator's desire: Just like the ink on the page, the black traces of the narrator's unquenched desire, the black spot materializes on the apartment's floor. Elsewhere, his encounter with his lover who comes to visit him consists of cuddling, as she does not allow him to penetrate her. He ends up masturbating in the bathroom: مددت يدي إلى صدرها. لكنها أبعدت يدي. وقالت: لا. وتركتها. وتمددت بجوارها. وانتظرت أن تستدير فجأة وتحتضنني. لكنها لم تفعل. وظللت مستيقظاً. ثم شعرت بألم بين ساقي. فقمت إلى الحمام. وتخلصت من رغبتي. وعدت فتمددت بجوارها.[68]

These scenes operate in two distinct ways: First, we can read them as intentional failure, i.e., the narrator's body fails to substantiate the law of the heterosexual imperative, thus exposing the political subject's failure or inability to conform to the law of bourgeois ideals prevalent in Egypt on one level, and on another the experimental writer's refusal to submit to the literary conventions of the period; in a nutshell, this failure represents the subject's ability to evade and resist the disciplinary mechanisms of the ruling literary and political establishments, thus bringing to light the law. For, as Dina Al-Kassim reminds us, "the law appears because the characters fail to manifest its accomplishment."[69] Second, noting that the materiality of the body is central to this narrative; keeping in mind what we have learned from Judith Butler (following Foucault), namely that the body cannot be perceived as a materiality that exists independently of

[68] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa*. 39. "I reached my hand toward her chest but she pushed it away and said, No. I rolled away, then stretched out beside her. I waited for her to turn and embrace me but she didn't. I was awake. I felt the pain between my legs. I got up and went to the bathroom. I got rid of my desire, then came back and stretched out beside her (30-31).
[69] Dina Al-Kassim. *Pain of Speech.* 120.

the power relations invested in it and external to it, “but it is that for which materialization and investiture are coextensive;”[70] and also remembering that the law is constitutive of desire, we can read these scenes on the psychoanalytic level whereby the subject’s frustration translates the negotiation undertaken by desire between the subject and the law, hence the tension in the narrative between a heterosexual, heteronormative representation of desire, and a resistance to comply with the heterosexual imperative.[71]

Furthermore, noting that the narrative in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* imagines the creative activity as gendered, where the male writer constructs the parallel between lovemaking and writing, Sonallah Ibrahim’s efforts to disrupt the phallic meaning and order in his writings results in a tension between resistance to and the prevalence of phallogocentrism in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*, while Sharaf, the protagonist of the novel by the same name, becomes the object of desire of his inmates; in *Warda* women and men are equally desirous of each other, and Warda is the author of the diary interrupting the narrative; and in Ibrahim’s later works such as *Amrikanli, Ice, The Star of Augustus,* and *Berlin 69* the author satirizes the objectification of women as the target of male desire, thus assuming a detached and morally superior position to the object of satire. The gradual movement away from the heteronormative imperative in Ibrahim’s works translates the increasing distance and widening conflict between the author and the subsequent political régimes in Egypt. As the author is increasingly able to differentiate

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[70] Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex".* New York: Routledge, 1993. 9.
[71] One can read the writing process as a masculine activity in other writings of the sixties, such as Rachid Boudjedra’s 1968 novel *La Répudiation* where the author institutes the parallels between the writing process and lovemaking whereby the male writer uses the female body to write his narrative. Ibrahim’s *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* written earlier than Boudjedra’s, refrains from complying fully with the heteronormative imperative. Later, Mahmoud Darwish’s *Dhakira Lil-nisiyan* imagines the writing process first as a solitary and risky trajectory that defies all odds while also exposing the writer to all these odds, and second as a form of the writer’s own perception of community and weaving the fabric of a new one, as the narrator manages to traverse an apartment exposed to the shelling of the Israeli bombs in order to make his own coffee.

and distance himself from the political authorities, the transfiguration of his desire (which finds its meaning in the desire of the other, as we learn from Lacan: "le désir de l'homme trouve sons sens dans le désir de l'autre, non pas tant parce que l'autre détient les clefs de l'objet désiré, que parce que son premier objet est d'être reconnu par l'autre")[72] is increasingly distant from the heterosexual norms promoted by the nation-state, the literary establishment, and patriarchy. For, while "le sens" has been translated as "the meaning" in the English translation of Lacan's text, I argue that two meanings of "le sens" are implied in this sentence, namely "meaning" and "direction; orientation." Therefore, man's desire is oriented according to the other's desire. The narrator's male body in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* "in which the hysterical symptom reveals the structure of a language,"[73] along with the escapades from the account of the narrator's days, printed in italics, articulate the narrator's return to the imaginary for wish fulfillments he is unable to attain in the course of the conscious part of his daily life. This imaginary coexists with, and is sometimes indistinguishable from, the symbolic while disrupting its teleological course.[74]

As desire in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* is transfigured as heterosexual male desire, entrance into the symbolic order is seen as a negotiation of the phallus and the name of the father. In the introduction, Ibrahim relates his earlier attempts at disrupting the symbolic order by writing in a mistake-ridden language, and then giving up on this superficial and

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[72] See Jacques Lacan's "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage » in *Écrits I.* 146.
[73] See Jacques Lacan's "Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis", and more particularly his discussion of the ways the unconscious—that chapter of the subject's history that is marked by a blank—is decipherable. 50.
[74] It is also, if we go back to Lacan's explanation, the narrator's unconscious manifesting itself within the narration of the protagonist's days following his release from prison: "L'inconscient est cette partie du discours concret en tant que transindividuel, qui fait défaut à la disposition du sujet pour rétablir la continuité de son discours conscient (*Écrits I* 136).

inconsequential transgression by making corrections to the language of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*. He ultimately resorts to disrupting the symbolic order on the levels of its form and content, knowing that he is operating from within this order as an unsovereign subject exceeded by language, hence the tension at the heart of the narrative. Accordingly, even though the novel is male-centered, the absence or the elusiveness of the phallic meaning leads to non-heteronormative impulses and moments of crisis: It is the return to the real of the castration that is foreclosed from the symbolic. As the symbolic lack of an imaginary object, the narrator's castration complex materializes in his rejection of jouissance, which often reoccurs in his novels, preserving the narrators' desire. This elusiveness is first manifest in the title, تلك الرائحة, first translated into English as *The Smell of It,* exemplifying Johnson-Davis' uneasiness with the impossibility to arrest the meaning of this smell by attempting to capture it through "it". By translating the title into *That Smell,* Creswell renders the intangibility of this smell, which is evocative of the narrative's indescribability whether on the formal or the content levels. The denouement scene of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* wherein the narrator learns from his grandmother that the mother had died articulates the irretrievable loss of the Real (represented by the mother who has always already been lost to the author) probably killed by the patriarchal order of culture (represented by the father, whether the narrator's father or the nation's father, or the father of the law), signaling the state of permanent loss in which the narrator dwells—defining him as a subject of desire, the engine of emancipatory change and social transformation. The author never knew his mother because she died when he was very young, as we know from his novel *Al-Talassus (Stealth)* and from *Yauwmiyyāt Al-Wāhāt,* and as his narrator of *Al-Qānūn al-Faransi (The French Law)* confesses:

عانى وما زال من فقدان الأم في سن مبكرة وقضى حياته في البحث عنها. [75]

What we encounter in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* is the element of alienation as the foundation of the subject as such. There is no meaning to the plotless narrative, but "a metonymic interminability"[76] of the subject, a series of *méconnaissances* of desire that keep feeding this desire that remains elusive, just like 'that smell' that pervades the narrative as well as Cairene streets. The narrator's return to the apartment just in time for the policeman to sign in his notebook does not much signal defeatism or the futility of dissent. Rather, this moment of seeming resignation underlines the vulnerability of dissent and the necessity to re-stage and reiterate it. This dénouement reappears in Ibrahim's other works, including *Al-Jalid (Ice)* as the narrator returns to his dorm room at the end of the text, as well as in *Al-Lajnah (The Committee)* as the narrator prepares to put into effect the committee's order to eat himself, starting with the most vulnerable limb: his injured arm. The ending scene of this particular novel, combined with the committee's humiliating anal exam, expose the State's intrusive disciplinary practices regulating the body, eventually forcing its citizens to eat themselves in a gesture mimicking the State devouring its own, thus practicing eventually self-cannibalism.

Moreover, one cannot judge *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* for its gender politics without reading the rest of Ibrahim's works —in fact, the novel has to be analyzed in light of the author's subsequent novels. For moments of crisis and uncertainty recur in his texts, repudiating any uncritical subscription to a steady progress characteristic of modernity, and an array of differing identities emerge, illuminating each other through differentiation as well as confirmation, and giving us a glimpse at Ibrahim's configuration of the modern. The

[75] *Tilka al-Raʾiḥa*. 38. "He has suffered the loss of his mother at a young age and spent his life looking for her."
[76] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits I.* 195.

destabilized, frustrated, and conflicted male narrator returns in his novels, confirming Ibrahim's detachment from the usual association of modernity with a certain textual representation of masculinity. The author also makes visible other marginalized sexualities, from the lesbians the narrator of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* purveys from his window to the lesbian couple in *Beirut Beirut.* Repressed male same sex desire haunts *Sharaf* and emerges in the denouement of *Al-Jaleed (Ice)* to purge masculinity of the social status and privilege associated with it. The first impulse of the committee in *Al-lajnah (The Committee)* is to conduct an anal exam on the male narrator to determine his sexual orientation, in a gesture reminding the narrator of the criminalization of homosexuality in Egypt. Marginalized sexual practices and identities do not occupy central positions in Ibrahim's narratives, but the appearance of these practices and bodies—unauthorized and forbidden from circulation in society—imagines its own configuration of community at the level of the sensible, the forms of its visibility and organization.[77] We have learned from Judith Butler that "the heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/or disavows other identifications [through] discursive means" thus producing abject beings who do not qualify as subjects, dwelling in a zone of "uninhabitability" that defines the limits of the subject's domain.[78] Ibrahim extends the domain of the visible by including socially unintelligible bodies along with the socially intelligible ones. This visibility, albeit limited and framed within the preoccupation with masculine fantasy, does not operate as a representation of marginal sexualities as

[77] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London: Continuum, 2004. Print. As already stated above, I base my analysis on the way Rancière imagines and conceptualizes the relationship between aesthetics and politics at the level of the sensible.
[78] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter.* New York: Routledge, 1993.

much as it serves to further destabilize the narrators' sense of masculinity in its normative configuration.

A feminist reading of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* configures this work as a project seeking to expose the fractures of masculinity while being couched in a phallocentric perspective. If the masculine is traditionally confined to rationalization and sustained production, then Ibrahim undermines this definition of masculinity in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa.* Nonetheless, a closer and comparative look at Ibrahim's works reveals that the author's project encompasses a broader perspective that cannot be reduced to phallogocentrism, nor can be simplified as a project positioning modernity as an opposition between the masculine and the feminine. His project aims at representing the contradictions inherent in the modern. Woman in Ibrahim's works does not stand outside the modern. The modern is not exclusively masculine. Zaat and Warda, for instance, are diametrically opposed characters in the way they practice modernity, and they are both considered embodiments of the modern woman according to two conflicting yet contemporaneous and equally thriving epistemologies of the modern woman in the 1960s. Zaat embodies the Nasserist idea of the modern woman, while Warda is the quintessential independent Marxist revolutionary, intellectual, and sexually liberated woman. The reader can identify Ibrahim's predisposition, which reflects the Marxist radical feminist ideals: Zaat is portrayed in a satiric way that exposes the contradictions inherent in the State-sponsored modernity, while Warda is the only female character to be allowed a voice of her own in Ibrahim's works.[79] On the other hand, Sharaf exhibits the consumerist attitude and commodity fetishism typically attributed to women, yet guards jealously his

[79] For a detailed discussion of the idea of a modern woman during the Nasserist era, see Laura Bier's *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt.* See also Alain Roussillon and Fatima Zahra Zryouil's *Être femme en Egypte, au Maroc et en Jordanie*.

"honor/sharaf," a euphemism for his virility, which he considers to be threatened by the numerous men pursuing him sexually.

On another level, throughout *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* another body—the narrator's—parades in front of the reader's gaze. As each day of the narrator's life breeds another dismal day, the only way to escape his daily life seems to occur in his escapades in the text. In *Yauwmiyyāt al-wāḥāt*, Ibrahim writes that the space of the prison is so limiting that the only way to survive life there is to give in to phantasms:

كانت هذه فترة قاسية حقاً. فالمكان شديد البرودة... ونقضي اليوم كله ونحن نقفز كالقرود التماساً لبعض الدفء وخلال ذلك نتبادل الحكايات. هكذا بدأت أتذكر أحداث طفولتي التي انشغلت عنها بحاضري. وعندما انتهت الحكايات واستنفدت ذكرياتي إنفتح المجال لأحلام اليقظة، وتأليف القصص. وتحولت كل حكاية سمعتها الى قصة فنية بعنوان مثير.[80]

As life in Cairo evokes prison's life, life in prison and life in liberty become so similar that prison life is constantly haunting daily life in Cairo. Sonallah Ibrahim's narrator, which was subject to both bodily and mental torture, once out of prison, and still under the surveillance of the legal apparatuses, reduces the narrative to his bodily functions and dysfunctions. He is not a "bodiless" character, but a character overflowing with body movements and saturates the narrative with his body while absenting his emotions, thoughts, or state of mind. As the protagonist comes out of prison at the beginning of the narrative, he confesses, "هذه هي اللحظة التي كنت أحلم بها دائماً طوال السنوات الماضية. وفتشت في داخلي عن شعور غير عادي، فرحة أو بهجة أو انفعال ما، فلم أجد."[81] The exposure of the body as a sole materiality operates on several levels: the emphasis on the body and bodily functi

[80] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa*. 26. "This was a really tough period. The place was very cold... and we would spend the whole day jumping like monkeys seeking some warmth while sharing stories. Thus I began to remember my childhood that I almost had forgotten because of my preoccupation with the present. When there were no more stories to be told, and my memory recollections were exhausted, a space for daydreaming and inventing stories opened. And every story I had heard turned into a creative story with an exciting title" (my translation).

[81] *Tilka al-Ra'iḥa*. 29. "It was the moment I'd been dreaming of for years and I searched myself for some feeling that was out of the ordinary, some joy or delight or excitement, but found nothing" (*That Smell* 19).

functions and movements, or even the body failing the narrator as in during his encounter with the prostitute can be read as a defiance of the literary norms of Ibrahim's time. This excessive presence of the body and its physiological functions and needs first contrasts with the romanticism of disembodied bodies prevalent in the predominant social realist fiction, and second brings to mind that the narrator, who was subjected to both bodily and mental punishment and torture in prison, once out of it, and still under the surveillance of the legal apparatuses, reduces the narrative to his bodily functions and dysfunction. He is not a bodiless character, but a character overflowing with body movements, saturating the narrative with his body while absenting his emotions, thoughts, or state of mind. The exposure of the body signifies resistance to the apparatus of punitive justice that operates on "a bodiless reality" by hiding the spectacle of punishment behind the walls of the remote internment camp of *Al-Wāhāt* where Ibrahim was detained along with other political prisoners.[82] The traumatic inscriptions on the body, the enduring effects of prison and torture and interrogations unfold in the narrative as a desensitized and affect-less speech on one hand, and excessive presence of the body on the other hand. Rather than becoming obedient and submissive, the protagonist's body fails at reproducing the heteronormative practices required of a heterosexual male: he refuses to have an intercourse with a prostitute; he is indifferent to his entourage's implorations to marry and start a family; he refuses to eat chicken with his hands, ignoring his sister's directive; he confirms his non-adherence to the norms thus confirming his abnormality that was the presumption for

[82] In *Discipline and Punish,* Michel Foucault relates that, as the old spectacle of punishment was replaced by the apparatus of punitive justice, the body is removed from public view as an object of punishment, but it is still under the hold of the power relations which "invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (25).

his prison sentence in the first place.[83] To depict the narrator—who is a political prisoner sentenced for his political activities rather than for an offense he committed against his fellow citizens–as an abnormal person implies that prison and its punitive methods have not succeeded in "normalizing" his condition.

If, following Foucault's reasoning, we situate the punitive methods of the prison within the political technology of the body and as a technology of power, then we can perceive the visibility of the narrator's body's unproductive and often aimless wandering throughout city streets as a substantiation of the extra-penal detention of political activists and the illicit torture behind the prison walls.[84] For, political detentions and the torturing of political prisoners came in the context of the declaration of the state of emergency in 1958, following the announcement of the Syrian Egyptian Unity.[85] As mentioned above, in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* the narrator's body serves to expose the discrepancies between the discourse and practices of the regime. Although officially claiming to be a modern governmentality, Abdel Nasser's regime operated in some respects (particularly during the 1958-1964 state of emergency) as a sovereign rule.

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[83] In *Discipline and Punish,* Michel Foucault proves that incarceration perpetuates delinquency by simultaneously punishing and producing it. Accordingly, the abnormal or anomalous becomes part of the carceral rather than a marginalized figure. In the inaugurating scene of *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* the prison inmate asks the narrator about the nature of his offense or crime, and after enumerating the most frequent and recognizable crimes, the narrator keeps answering in the negative, in an alluding gesture to his political activism as the reason for his incarceration. This offense remains to be classified by the legal apparatuses. Political activism is reminiscent of of Foucault's conceptualization of abnormality as an unclassifiable offense that is rendered illegible yet warranting punishment and discipline.

[84] In his notes from prison, *Yauwmiyyāt Al-Wāhāt,* Sonallah Ibrahim details the various cases of torture and violent treatments experienced by him and other political prisoners. Torture was never officially admitted by the regime, as was the case of Shuhdi Atiyya who was beaten to death in Abu Zaʿbal prison camp. 27-34.

[85] Seif el-Islam, A. "Exceptional Laws and Exceptional Courts." In Bernard-Maugiron, Nathalie, and Baudouin Dupret. eds. *Egypt and Its Laws.* London: Kluwer Law International, 2002. Law No. 162 of 1958 empowered the President of the Republic "to take steps to maintain public security and order." Among the privileges given to him were the prerogative to restrict individual freedom, arrest and detain individuals suspected of endangering public order, censure the press and all means of expressions, among many others. 364-365.

The unnamed protagonist in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* parades throughout the city his frail body bearing the traces of the sovereign's physical as well as psychic torture and coercion. From this perspective, then, the body's movements constitute a defiant gesture to the "strict economy that has the effect of rendering as discreet as possible the singular power to punish."[86]

Foucault's study focuses on the history of the prison in Western culture, more particularly France. However, the scope of his study can be extended to former French and British colonies such as India and Egypt where, as Timothy Mitchell demonstrates, the panopticon and other disciplinary institutions were introduced and developed before their application in the metropole.[87] In a more recent study, Hazem Kandil writes that political detention had been practiced and widely used by the British against political dissidents in Egypt in the years before the Second World War. Prisons were expanded during the 1930s. "[A]nother example of enhanced state capacity was surveillance," Kandil confirms, which existed in Egypt for centuries, but was modernized by the British and called "the City Eye."[88] Also, in *Yauwmiyyāt Al-Wāhāt* Ibrahim describes The Citadel, one of the prisons in which he was detained, as initially used as a prison by the British, but kept in use even after their withdrawal out of the country to be later turned into a museum. The world of the prison haunts the outside world of the narrative where the protagonist leads his life after being released from prison. The effects of the

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[86] See Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, 302.

[87] See Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt.* University of California Press, 1988. In the first two chapters of the book, Mitchell relates how the panopticon and the new forms of military practices introduced by Napoleon's officers called 'The New Order' or *nizam jadid* into the Ottoman Empire: "The rebuilding of Cairo and other Middle Eastern cities according to the principle of the exhibition was intended…like the construction of exhibitions and exhibition-like cities in Europe, to promote the global economic and political transformation" (Mitchell 17).

[88] Hazem Kandil. *Soldiers, Spies, and Statesmen: Egypt's Road to Revolt*. London: Verso, 2012. 19. Kandil's study also includes the intervention of the CIA and then of the Soviets—at the demand of the regime of the Free Officers—in Egypt to help modernize and expand intelligence services in the country.

disciplinary and penitentiary apparatuses seep through the practices of everyday life of the protagonist, so that the boundaries between the two worlds blur and sometimes disappear. At such moments the outside world becomes indistinguishable from prison. The reader is reminded that the two are two separate entities in such moments where the paragraphs in italics relate episodes from life in prison. In these moments not only is prison life depicted as a discrete reality of the protagonist's life, but also dreams, phantasies, and childhood reminiscences, which punctuate the plotless automatism of the text, anchored in the present, focused on the bodily, and organized by the secular regulatory practices of the State through the regular visits of the minder at sunset. This automatic and bodily writing, relating the immediacy of the present, depicts a(n) (a)temporality different from the one articulated in the parts in italics where temporality stretches into the past and the timeless.

This takes us back to Sonallah Ibrahim's monotonous, bare, unadorned style in *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa*, which can also be explained as a dissenting practice. For, besides its departure from the social realist style of his contemporaries, Ibrahim's prose is reminiscent of the prisoner's confessions under torture. The restrained text is told by a narrator who has just left prison where he was interrogated and tortured for six years, yet still operating in the mode of prison interrogation, where a prisoner is required to answer briefly with facts and confessions. He is not to elaborate about his feelings, nor is he to provide subjective descriptions of the world from which he is isolated. By bringing the interrogation process into public view, not only is Sonallah Ibrahim exposing the torture tactics of Nasser's prison system into the public sphere, he is also implying that the public sphere has become a site very much similar to the prison where

speech acts are tightly controlled and regulated, and the only freedom one gets is through phantasmagoric escapades. On another level, this interpretation brings to mind the epigraph to *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa* whereby the author promises to tell about himself as he is, responding obliquely to his previous interrogators and torturers, albeit with a great deal of irony as the confession following the epigraph serves only to expose the tactics of these jailers.

In this chapter I have tried to provide a reading of Sonallah Ibrahim's novels, with a particular focus on *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa,* that problematizes earlier readings by demonstrating that these readings have been unable to detach themselves from, and thus have always been traversed by, the consequences of the 1967 defeat that has tainted the Arab subject as submissive and/or ideological; these characterizations have just been revived as the Arab uprisings either turned into civil wars or were repressed by anti-revolutionary forces. My aim is to unshackle the postcolonial Arab subject from the conventional attributes wrongly cast on them by reading the substantiation of this subject's desire, the mechanisms of dissent in Ibrahim's text, and the limitations of this author in his quality of a heterosexual man whose symbolic order is constituted and configured by the same order he is contesting. The author's continuous innovation and transcendence of his own stylistics is a testament to his perception and practice of modernity/dissent; it is also an acknowledgement of the limitations of fiction to accomplish his goals of contestation as a modern/political subject. The inclusion of nonfictional elements coincides with his more openly dissenting tone, and consequently of his increasing distance from the political and literary ruling establishments in Egypt. In tandem with this change his fiction is increasingly less layered and more ironic than it is

in his first and most powerful work, *Tilka al-Rāʾiḥa.* It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to delve into the transformation of Ibrahim's stylistics throughout his works, but an investigation in this direction is well worth the while.

CHAPTER TWO

‘Dieu a créé la beauté comme une *fitna*’ : Modernity in the Making in Mohamed Leftah’s *Le dernier Combat du Captain Ni‘mat*

In this chapter I would like to examine how the Moroccan writer Mohamed Leftah (1946-2008) configures the process of decolonization and modernity and gestures towards a new episteme by effectuating a decentering of multiple registers and on several levels in his novel titled *Le dernier combat du Captain Ni‘mat (Captain Ni‘mat’s Last Battle),* which he wrote in Egypt in 2006, but under the author’s request, was published posthumously in Paris in 2011, because he reportedly feared that the publication of this novel would lead to his expulsion from Egypt where he enjoyed living and writing.

[1] Mohamed Leftah wrote his novels and short story collections while living in Egypt from 2000 until his death.[2] Although this novel was awarded *La Mamounia* literary prize in Marrakesh upon publication, it remains unavailable in Morocco, thus subject to an implicit censorship. Although Leftah’s multilingual/ multicultural position certainly enabled him to occupy an interstitial space that helped him and his narratives to remain on the margins of several borders, what mostly helped him to preserve a certain in-

[1] I will hereafter refer to this novel as *Le dernier combat.*
[2] There are two divergent accounts on the reason for Leftah’s choice of Egypt as a place of residence. In his introduction to *Mohamed Leftah ou le Bonheur des mots,* Abdellah Baida cites Leftah’s struggle with alcoholism in Morocco, citing the relatively controlled sale of alcohol in Egypt as the reason for his relocation there; Leftah’s daughter, Nezha Leftah, confirms in an interview with La Mamounia in 2011 that her father relocated to Egypt to follow his sister and mother who were residing there. The latter account seems more plausible.

betweenness and critical distance is his own dislocation, his life as an expatriate in Egypt.

Le dernier combat is set at the turn of the twenty-first century in Cairo, namely around thirty years after the 1967 defeat of the Arab armies against Israel. The protagonist, Captain Ni‘mat, is an Egyptian air force officer who is forced to retire after he expresses Marxist views during the Yemen campaign and the 1967 defeat. As a result, unlike his colleagues who participate in the “immortal victory” of the 1973 war and are able to “save their masculinity” and pursue a life that preserves the (albeit illusory) status quo, Captain Ni’mat has to live with the bitterness of the defeat and a sense of shame one of whose outcome is a feeling of isolation from the group.[3] Captain Ni’mat lives with his wife in an affluent neighborhood in Cairo while his two daughters study in Europe; he and his wife spend a significant portion of their days in the swimming club Maadi where the narrative opens as Captain Ni‘mat gazes at the bodies of the young male swimmers training in the pool. Captain Ni‘mat discovers that he is attracted to Islam after he has an erotic dream in which Islam appears to him as an archer that saves him from the young swimmers. He then seeks intimate massage sessions from Abu Hassan in the club Maadi, during which his homoerotic inclinations are confirmed, and decides to pursue an affair with Islam. Mervet, Captain Ni‘mat’s wife, discovers her husband’s relationship with Islam, and is outraged to know that Ni‘mat is the passive partner in the relationship. After a long period of mutism, she eventually asks for divorce and, under the persecution of his neighbors and his wife’s rejection of

[3] In “De la honte,” citing Imre Hermann, Jean-Michel Hirt writes, « Le sujet humilié par la honte est séparé non pas d’un individu, mais d’un groupe. Les faits qui commandent la honte sont soit admis, soit condamnés par la collectivité » (170).

his affair, Captain Ni‘mat leaves the conjugal house for a popular neighborhood where he lives with Islam until their affair is noticed again by the neighbors who start to harass them. Islam eventually moves out of the apartment, leaving Captain Ni‘mat alone. The narrative concludes with Captain Ni‘mat sinking into alcohol and life in complete isolation. *Le dernier combat* is divided into three titled parts: I. La beauté indécidable, II. L’offrande nubienne, and III. Kom Ombo, each being inaugurated with an epigraph from Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal*. The second part ends with the beginning of Captain Ni‘mat’s diary, or *journal intime* that continues into the third part, interspersed with brief narrative sections.

Through a reading of the unruliness of the body and sexuality on one level and that of language, onomastics, and the narrative on another, I argue that Mohamed Leftah’s work activates a *double critique* that targets the foreclosure-producing homogenizing and heteronormalizing practices of the Islamic tradition, the postcolonial nation-state, and western modernity at once. Leftah’s multifaceted critique ends up being more far-reaching than other Francophone Moroccan writers; by including unintelligible sexualities and unruly bodies, or the unrepresented outside of western, traditional Islamic, and postcolonial ideologies, Leftah is able to transcend the dissenting capacity of *Sufialism.* He also juxtaposes in his novel various narrative modes in an attempt to problematize both modes in order to signal their inability to capture the entirety of an ontology and a discourse which are “other”, “*autre*.” Furthermore, Leftah's transgression through deployment of the body and sexuality assumes the awareness that the body is the locus of subjectivation, which means that biopolitical modernity operates by regulating the body through norms, and that

subversion of the norms takes place at the same moment as *assujetissement* whereby the body refuses to reiterate these norms, and instead assumes a performativity that diverges from these norms. His strategy is based in the conceptualization of the body as a language expressed with bodily gestures and movements.[4] In line with the thought of Abdelkebir Khatibi, Mohamed Leftah negotiates a conceptualization of modernity in *Le dernier combat* as *pensée-autre* that achieves a *double critique* of its constitutive elements. This modernity, however, is an epistemology and an ontology to come, in the making. Leftah's alternate disavowal and embrace of the archaic (Islamic) and the modern (Western) sexual typologies, *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis,* various derivations of Arabic within French, the third person omniscient narrative and the first-person confession, decenters the hegemonic discourses of postcolonial Arab modernity and opens the space for an episteme to come.

Due to the relatively recent publication of Leftah's oeuvre, and to the irreducible queerness of *Le dernier combat,* few studies have been published on this text. The volume of essays on Leftah's works edited by the Moroccan academic and writer Abdellah Baida and written by Moroccan academics has a wealth of articles that cover a variety of subjects in Leftah's oeuvre, but surprisingly none of them addresses *Le dernier combat.* Carla Calargé and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François's study offers a compelling analysis of Leftah's deployment of sexuality to resist the hegemonic discourses of heteronormativity through Connell's conceptualization of various masculinities. However, the authors miss the markers of Sufism and Sufi love in the novel, which itself is a conduit to queer theory in the Islamicate world as it is elaborated

[4] Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Le corps oriental.* Paris: Hazan, 2002 :11.

by scholars such as Afsaneh Najmabadi, hence remaining within the realm of typologies of sexuality characteristic of western modernity, and falling short of extending their perspective outside of the western model. Even though the authors identify the necessity for a third space for Arab-Muslim (homo)sexualities, they fail to notice that Leftah has in fact opened this space in this novel. They rightly point out that Captain Ni'mat's didactic and straightforward defense of homosexuality in the diary makes the text vulnerable to homonationalist discourses; however, they fail to read the diary in light of the rest of the narrative, where the narrator's discourse contrasts sharply with Captain Ni'mat's in the diary, which sheds light on Leftah's attempt to look for epistemologies outside the purview of either Maghrebian or Western traditions. By not separating the discourses of the narrator in quest for a modernity inspired by the Arab-Islamic tradition and the protagonist who is mainly someone who has interiorized the culture of the military and secular modernity, Calargé and Jean-François neglect to assess Leftah's critique of modernity.[5] Ziad Elmarsafy's "Mohamed Leftah: Le corps dans l'ordre poétique" studies the political, material, and semiotic significance of the body in some of Leftah's works, yet omits *Captain Ni'mat* despite the significantly subversive power of the body in this text.

In *Queer Maroc,* Jean Zaganiaris's perspective as a sociologist reveals its limitation in studying a literary text.[6] For although Zaganiaris repeats that transgressive sexuality is not an end of itself in *Le dernier combat* but an excuse to contest normativity in more realms, he declares that this novel is one of the strongest defenses of

[5] Carla Calargé and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François, « Masculinités, homosexualité et homonationalisme dans le Dernier Combat du Captain Ni'mat de Mohamed Leftah. »107.
[6] Jean Zaganiaris. *Queer Maroc: Sexualités, Genres Et (trans)identités Dans La Littérature Marocaine.* s.l.: lulu.com, 2014.

homosexuality written by an Arab writer, even though Leftah was not homosexual. Whether the narrative has its roots in Leftah's life is irrelevant to the implications of its literary quality and transgressive dimension and should not be a defining criterion of the novel's tackling homoeroticism. Furthermore, Zaganiaris fails to notice the political dimension, which requires the reader to see in Captain Ni'mat's act not simply homosexuality at work, but also an act of dissidence attempting to assert its decoloniality through a critique that distantiates itself from its constitutive traditions, hence confirming its capability to formulate its own thought. Zaganiaris rightly argues that defense of homosexuality in Leftah's text is not an end of itself, and Leftah is more concerned about the theocratic norms raised as a technique of governability, yet he seems to dismiss the Sufi dimension of Leftah's work, therefore envisioning his project as secularity against religious fundamentalism. Additionally, even though theocratic governability is playing a significant role in Islamicate societies, Leftah is equally targeting secular and religious normativities. Captain Ni'mat's friends who reject him from their circle belong to the Nasserist culture of secular modernity; his wife Mervet expresses views against women's veil. Heteronormativity is not consistently associated with religion to be reinforced in society, and Leftah takes this fact into account in his works. In *Le jour de Vénus,* Aisha, the protagonist who is a strong feminist character, has to face not only the religious extremist Jalal and his group of religious fundamentalists; she confronts the Moroccan authorities who confiscate her passport as well as Khabir, the commissioner of general information who is in charge of her dossier. In *Demoiselles de Numidie* and *Hawa,* it is government authority figures and pimps who impose heteronormative rules on the female characters in the novels. Leftah attacks the

rigid norms regulating desire in postcolonial societies in the Arab world. These norms form alliances with religion but are not based in it. In fact, the history of the Egyptian discourses on gender in twentieth-century Egypt prove that Islamists and secularists relate differently on gender issues, but converge in their lack of commitment to the liberalization of women and to the liberal process in general.[7]

In the novel's opening scene, the protagonist is sunbathing in the Club Maadi in Cairo as a group of young men swim in the pool. As he gazes at their bodies, he recites an injunction that, according to him, belongs to "a dissolute libertine or a dazzled Sufi" (*un libertin dissolu, ou un soufi ébloui*): "O God, you have created for us beauty as a *fitna,* and you have ordered us to adore you only. You are beautiful and you love beauty; how would your creatures be able to remain insensitive and not succumb to it?"[8] This injunction, repeated several times in this novel and in other narratives by Leftah,[9] is partly excerpted from the *ḥadīth* of the prophet Mohammad: "God is beautiful and he loves beauty" (*Allāhu jamīlon yuḥibbu l-jamāl*);[10] it also evokes Ibn 'Arabi's Sufist vision of *tajalli* (manifestation)—the belief that worldly creatures are manifestations of divine beauty—while also referring to the Sufi ritual of gazing at young men's bodies. This narrative taps into Sufism, a branch of mysticism that has been historically marginalized in traditional Islam, and whose adepts believe (especially in the case of Ibn 'Arabi) that one can see God in His creatures, who in turn reflect His beauty. Sufis, according to

[7] Mervat F. Hatem, "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularists and Islamists Views Really Differ?"

[8] « Ô Dieu, tu as créé pour nous la beauté comme une *fitna* et tu nous as prescrit de n'adorer que toi. Tu es beau et tu aimes la beauté, comment tes créatures pourraient-elles y être insensibles et ne pas y succomber ?" (17).

[9] This injunction is repeated in one of the stories in *Récits du monde flottant* by a sheikh who falls in love with a younger man.

[10] https://sunnah.com/muslim/1/171

Afsaneh Najmabadi, were among the practitioners of the older man-young man (*ghulam*) sexual relationships in conjunction with marital ones.[11] Najmabadi traces the development of sexual practices and norms in Iran, and sheds light on the close connection between State building and encounter with the West in the nineteenth century on one hand, and the feminization of beauty, the gendering of national symbols, and the gradual instillation of heterosexual norms within Iranian society. Sufists are an inherent part of Islamicate societies, and by drawing on the Sufi heritage, Mohamed Leftah anchors modernity as a francophone Moroccan writer within Islamic tradition, therefore suspending the Mashreq/Maghreb divide and shifting the transnational connections characterizing francophone North African writings by decentering the French Metropole and reinscribing the archaic within modernity.[12] For, as the narrator does not know whether the author of the aforementioned injunction is "a Sufi or a dissolute libertine," this brings to mind the literary genealogy of the author, namely the poetry composed by "dazzled Sufis" on one level; on another level, the "dissolute libertine" that is a reference to Leftah's other modern literary inspirations, namely Jean

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[11] Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity.* Berkeley: UC Press, 2005.

[12] Although it has geographic and demographic roots that precede Western colonialism that started in the 19th century and has its repercussions that endure until the 21st century, the Mashreq/Maghreb divide significantly aggravated and became palpable and discussed in its post-independence materialization in these regions. Even though Middle Eastern and North African subjects are committed to similar goals of freedom and are aware that they share somewhat distinct yet interlacing traditions, they developed strategies of resistance and critical tools that are informed by their respective colonial experiences and engagement with European educational paradigms. Françoise Lionnet sees the crystallization of this distinction in her comparison of the two influential intellectuals: Edward Said and Abdelkebir Khatibi. Although Lionnet points out to their distinctive engagement with different European paradigms, she does not factor in her discussion the influence of these two thinkers' life experiences as Middle Eastern and North African. On a broader scale extending to the regions to which these two intellectuals belong, namely the Middle East and North Africa as two peripheries, it is incumbent on subjects from these respective areas to rethink their rapport as "transcolonial," whereby their longing for freedom surpasses their differences without, however, erasing them. See Françoise Lionnet's "Counterpoint and Double Critique in Edward Said and Abdelkebir Khatibi."

Genet, Charles Baudelaire, and the French surrealists, in the inclusion of erotic dreams and the apparent decadence of the protagonist —also an oblique reference to postcolonial decadence. Hence, too, the title of this part: “the undecidable beauty” (*La beauté indécidable*), an insinuation or even a directive to the reader not to engage in figuring out the source of inspiration, but rather to focus on the outcome of this beauty and the fact that it opens an infinity unknown to the speaker before:

> *Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l’enfer, qu’importe,*
> *Ô Beauté ! Monster énorme, effrayant, ingénue !*
> *Si to œil, ton souris, ton pied, m’ouvrent la porte*
> *D’un Infini que j’aime et n’ai jamais connu* (7).

Leftah mobilizes beauty in his effort to reinscribe the archaic within the modern, which is at the same time a reinscription of the religious within the secular, the latter being often uncritically equated with modernity. Blurring the lines between religious and secular, archaic and modern, Leftah’s project becomes one of the many attempts—whether on the creative or academic levels—to explore the “enchanted modern” in the Arab world.[13] This ambiguation is also an indication that dissent or modernity is inherent to Islam and cannot be a movement that is external to it. The invocation mentioned above and calling beauty as *fitna* works in this context on multiple levels. Not only is it unprecedented, even in Sufi literature, to refer to young (beardless) males rather than women as *fitna,* but it is also collapsing Islam and *fitna.* As the reader discovers later in the narrative that Islam, the Nubian servant, is the beauty through whom Captain Ni‘mat expresses his dissent against the culture of virility predominant in religious, nationalist,

[13] One of the offshoots of the 1967 defeat was the return to the religious, or rather a rejection of the secular, or the idea that modernity cannot be but disenchanted, that was championed by the postcolonial Arab states and considered to be a part of western imperial hegemony. One of the most insightful studies on this phenomenon in a Shiite community in Lebanon is Lara Deeb’s *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi’i Lebanon.* Another seminal study is Talal Asad’s *Formations of the Secular.* In both works the authors problematize the indissociability of the secular and the modern.

and military milieus, *fitna* as a term that has meant seduction, strife, civil war, trial, and sometimes dissent against the status quo, comes to assume the latter meaning in the context of this novel, especially that it traverses the private and the public at once.[14] Indeed, seduction being closely associated with sexuality and the body, this dissent is materialized through the body's sexuality. From another angle, the superimposition of Islam and *fitna* also exposes the paradox at the heart of Islam, which as a doctrine and a religion does not condemn sexuality and the erotic as long as they are inscribed within the legitimate, heterosexual rules. Simultaneously, woman, as the seductress, is considered *fitna* because she represents an obstruction between the Muslim man and God as she diverts her man's attention, thus preventing him from worshipping God.[15] Having replaced the figure of the beloved woman with Islam as the recipient of his *amour fou,* Leftah marks his departure from the heterosexual discourses of this mad love, hence marking his difference from the conventional *Sufialist* narratives of *amour fou* that developed a cult for woman. Furthermore, by associating *fitna* with beauty, Leftah is also decentering the figure of woman as either the sole object of man's desire or the beauty standard, hence destabilizing the modern gendering of beauty. On

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[14] See Abdulkader Tayob's "An analytical survey of al-Tabari's exegesis of the cultural symbolic construct of *fitna"* for a history of the various meanings of *fitna* and their constructed nature.

[15] In most of his studies of sexuality in Arab-Islamic societies, and particularly in *L'érotisme arabe,* Malek Chebel writes that sensuality, the flesh, and eroticism—as long as they are dressed in legitimate framework—were strongly defended and promoted in Islam through ancient history, poetry, social organization, and the Quran. Hence, erotic literature flourished and to appreciate it became a strategy to affirm individual liberty. Chabel notes that erotic texts by authors such as Tifashi, Sheikh An-Nafzawi, Ali al-Baghdadi, Ibn Fulayta, and Suyuti emerged around 1000. However, homosexuality was overtly condemned because "la parole de Sodome met en danger l'architecture morale de la sexualité arabe, laquelle passe pour être franchement hétérosexuelle" (246). Nonetheless, men and artists of high social ranks benefited from the protection conferred on them by their ranks and entertained sexual relations with young men, which was frowned upon and even condemned equally by society and the doxa (246). Chebel also explains that social control exerted over lesbians prevented them from satisfying their desire, because it was believed that this would decrease their charms and make them less sensitive to men's love (251).

another level, and recalling that Islam first emerges in Captain Ni'mat's dream as an archer, he comes to encapsulate religious and carnal passions—Islam and Eros—in addition to symbolizing the Nubians, historically known to be experts archers. From this perspective, the association of *fitna* and Islam accomplishes various objectives at once, which is further confirmed in the narrative as lovemaking between Captain Ni'mat and Islam coincides with the muezzin's daily prayers throughout the narrative: "Both of us aware of the transgression by which we sealed our reunion, we made love furiously, while the calls for Friday prayers by three or four muezzins answered each other in the sky of *Al Fajjala* and penetrated, slightly amortized, into the room of our frolic, diving in the dim light."[16] In one of his *Chroniques,* Leftah reproduces Ibn 'Arabi's statements about the latter's vision of the practice of Islam: "It is in your downfall where your elevation is, and in the Earth is your heaven," which explains his conceptualization of prayer: "The time of prayer: an uprooting from the time of the profane world, the most intimate conversation, *mounajat,* between the praying person and God."[17]

Islam also functions to denounce the marginalization of the other and problematize the "love for boys" in Islamicate societies. By writing in Egypt a novel that features Egyptian characters, Mohamed Leftah, as a Moroccan Francophone writer, is communicating his disregard for the nation-state and its restrictions and exclusions. Furthermore, overlapping *fitna* with Islam, a Nubian working as a servant in Cairo away from his family who still resides in the south of Egypt, exposes the marginal position of

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[16] « Tous les deux conscients de la transgression par laquelle nous scellions nos retrouvailles, nous fimes l'amour rageusement alors que les appels à la prière du vendredi de trois ou quatre muezzins se répondirent dans le ciel de Al Fajjala et pénétraient, légèrement amortis, dans la chambres de nos ébats plongée dans la pénombre »(142).

[17] "*C'est dans ta chute qu'est ton élévation, et dans la Terre que se trouve ton ciel," and "Le temps de la prière: un arrachement au temps du monde profane, l'entretien le plus intime, mounajat, entre l'orant et Allah."* Mohamed Leftah, *Chroniques (II): Culture arabe-islamique.* 81, 82. Unpublished.

minorities in Islamicate societies, and how these minorities are labelled as *fitna* from the perspective of traditional Islam transposed into the national realm. For even though all categories and individuals outside of the heterosexual Muslim man are considered marginal in Islam, they play a central role in reproducing the normative rules in these societies, namely by being marginalized, feared, and classified as *fitna.* Nubians were converted to Islam mostly through Muslim invasions from the 14th to the 16th century; Nubia was divided between Egypt and Sudan in 1956; and in the 1960s and the 1970s they were forced into displacement from the land they inhabited for thousands of years to live in Egypt and Sudan in marginalized and precarious conditions, but whose labor is essential to consolidate and maintain the status quo in Islam in general and Egypt in particular: "Islam's parents told him how they had been settled by the government in this village [Om Kombo] near Aswan, after the land where they lived, Nubia, was swallowed by the waters of the lake Nasser, following the erection of the High Dam."[18] For although the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser was known for his anti-imperialist stances, his treatment of Nubians in Egypt is not consistent with his anti-colonial attitudes.[19] Also, Captain Ni'mat's treatment of Islam at the beginning of the narrative reflects a deep-seated contempt for Nubians within the Egyptian society. Frustrated that Islam has not showered yet, Captain Ni'mat snaps at him, "How many times have I told you, animal, to wash yourself and change your clothes more often?"[20] Captain Ni'mat repeatedly calls

[18] "les parents d'islam lui avaient raconté comment ils avaiaent été installés par le gouvernement dans ce village proche d'Assouan, après l'engloutissement de la terre où ils vivaient, la Nubie, sous les eaux du lac Nasser, suite à l'érection du Haut Barrage »(24).

[19] Fatin Abbas, "Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and Nubian Diaspora Identity in Idris Ali's *Dongala: A Novel of Nubia*." *Research in African Literatures*. 45.3 (2014): 147-167.

[20] "Combien de fois t'ai-je dit, animal, de te laver et de te changer plus souvent ?" (35).

Islam an animal until they become lovers, when he starts to treat him with affection. Islam, on the other hand, displays a respectful attitude toward Captain Ni‘mat throughout their interactions, addressing him formally.

Islam disrupts and problematizes the dichotomies that are drawn on the sexual, communal, and social levels, hence exposing the boundaries and lines of exclusion between self and other, heterosexual and homosexual, Arab and Nubian, master and servant. As those “othered” by the exclusionary practices of nationalisms are depicted as feminized *ma’bun*s, Islam unsettles this pattern by holding the role of the active partner in the sexual relation, a role that has been hypermasculinized by modernity.[21] Furthermore, by naming the gardener Islam, Leftah is not desacralizing this religion; in fact, by endowing the name Islam on the Nubian gardener, Leftah reclaims the figure of the marginalized, as throughout the novel lovemaking is equated with prayer. In addition to his racial otherness, Islam’s economically and socially inferior status in relation to Captain Ni‘mat are both encapsulated and highlighted by his name. Hence, by entertaining a love relationship with Islam, Captain Ni‘mat willingly identifies with Islam’s otherness, as he crosses Islam’s various markers of identity and builds a link of solidarity with him that brings them into a community of resistance. Through Captain Ni‘mat’s relationship with Islam, Leftah raises awareness about the margins of the Arab-Muslim world, and the communities living on its fringes, and demonstrates attentiveness to the alterity of those who are silenced by oppressive discourses. As singularities in alliance, the margin is “the community of those who have nothing in common,” those

[21] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men without Beards.* 59.

who are considered queer in the heterosexual body of the nation and Islam.[22] Scholarship on premodern homoeroticism in the Arab-Muslim world converges on the fact that the beardless boys are situated in a socially and economically inferior position to their older lovers; Islam is no exception.[23] Having entered this space of "critical marginality," Captain Ni'mat can only team up with Islam in a queer sexuality that reappropriates and actualizes a pattern of premodern, archaic sexuality and that resists multiple forms of oppressions.

Hédi Abdeljaouad considers Maghrebian literature from a historical-generic perspective; it is "a literature … that fuses traditional materials and modes of narratives, the archaic, with avant-garde concerns and modes of expression, the post-modern,"[24] defining the archaic as the site of "an impossible difference… the blueprint for the post-modern discourse of plurality and alterity," and the postmodern as "an esthetics and a theory in the making, that is an epistemology of the future."[25] Accordingly, what is for Khatibi *une pensée-autre* and for Abdeljaouad *the post-modern* is for this project what I consider *the modern* or *the postcolonial avant-garde,* which is, as this paper will explain, is an epistemology in the making. The conceptualization of the modern as a dissenting attitude actualizing its decoloniality sidelines the post-modern in this discussion. The

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[22] For this point, I draw on Lisa Guenther's conceptualization of the ethics and politics of otherness as a negotiation of alterity and racial difference. Lisa Guenther, "The Ethics and Politics of Otherness: Negotiating Alterity and Racial Difference". *Philosophia* 1.2 (2011): 199.

[23] A proliferating body of work studies these relationships. Examples include Khaled El-Rouayheb's *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Muslim World: 1500-1800,* J.W. Wright's and Everett K. Rowson's *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature,* and Everett K. Rowson's "The Traffic in Boys: Slavery and Homoerotic Liaisons in Elite 'Abbasid Society."

[24] Hédi Abdeljaouad, "The Dialectics of the Archaic and the Post-modern in Maghrebian Literature Written in French." 59.

[25] Ibid. 60.

dichotomy Abdeljaouad establishes between the archaic and what he calls the post-modern helps configure the factors at work in Maghrebian literature, but it ends up essentializing and isolating the various confluences onto which these texts are mapped. For these components are transformed through their interaction and intertwining with other elements of the text. Moreover, Abdeljaouad opens the archaic and the post-modern to multiple interpretations intermingling and transcending the temporal and the spatial to encompass the generic and thematic. Hence, it becomes obstructive to the analysis of the text, especially when one ceases to see these categories as dynamic rather than static. For this reason, I believe that it is more productive to analyze the relationships and connections between the various forces at work in a text, rather than focusing on identifying these forces as static categories, for these relationships can reveal to us the dynamics operating at the level of the text. Hence, the archaic, this irreducible difference lodged within the modern, as Dina al-Kassim explains, comes to us in a reworked anachronistic fashion that merges with the present in a syncretic way and provides us with a direction, a gesture towards the present. This archaic, Al-Kassim notes, is simultaneously disavowed and integrated within our configuration of our present.[26]

Dina al-Kassim reads Michel Foucault's argument opposing an Eastern *ars erotica* to a Western *scientia sexualis* that define the formation of two different and contrasting subjectivities, the first (Eastern, premodern) characterized by its reliance on instruction, and the second (Western, modern) on its confession. Considering

[26] Dina al-Kassim, "Epilogue: Sexual Epistemologies, East and West." Edited by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi. *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations Across Temporal Geographies of Desire*. Cambridge, Mass: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 2008: 297-340.

Foucault's observation that *ars erotica* shifted into a modern form, *Scientia sexualis,* without completely disappearing, Al-Kassim writes,

> Excess within the heart of the scientific will to knowledge the *ars erotica* may come down to us as a queerness we find within the modern discourse of sex— "a pleasure in analysis" of things sexual…One might say that the *ars erotica* haunts the *Scientia sexualis* but not in its native guise or original form. The lost tradition is reworked to release the old function in the new form, as knowledge artfully secured to intensify pleasure and with a subtle rearrangement of the norm.[27]

More significantly, Al-Kassim adds that this notion of "haunting excess…escapes the control of erotic technique and state regulation [and] complicates efforts to distinguish premodern from modern sexualities as much as it complicates the task of locating the modern."[28] It is this "excess" that I try to excavate in Leftah's texts in search for the queerness looking for an epistemological and ontological space, and that is disrupting the normative distribution of categories of sexuality. By adopting Foucault's view that gender identities and sexual practices are contingent and result from the regulation of sexuality and desire, and by extending his analysis to the regulation of desire in Islamicate societies, we can read the deployment of sexuality in Mohamed Leftah's novel as first an excess, and second as a dynamic process "haunted by an archaism or traditionalism, alternately disavowed and embraced."[29]

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[27] Ibid. 308.

[28] Ibid. 309.

[29] Ibid. 298.

From this perspective, then, archaism takes the shape of sexual relations between older-men and younger-men once prevalent in Sufi milieus in Islamicate societies before the advent of western modernity through the contact initiated by western colonialism.[30] Throughout *Le dernier combat,* Captain Ni'mat's sexuality exemplifies the excess of the archaic haunting the modern, as both narrator and protagonist struggle to categorize Captain Ni'mat's sexuality. The characterization of Captain Ni'mat in the novel has no suggestions that he might be the *ma'bun* type used in reference to men assuming passive/receptive roles in the intercourse, nor is the narrator using *lūtiy* in reference to sodomites.[31] What's more, the narrator relates that Captain Ni'mat proudly proclaims the term *khawala,* which has a history in modern Egyptian society that carries pejorative connotations. In fact, this term originated around the turn of the twentieth century in reference to young men who performed belly dancing and were rumored to illicitly engage in sexual relations with their male clients. The narrator says, "for the first time he assumed without shame what he had become, daring to name it and whisper it to himself as the most beautiful name: *Khawala*!"[32] Reclaiming this name signifies resisting and refusing the abnormality and marginality associated with it in modern Egyptian society, while also signaling a distance from the archaic to which the narrative is referencing, as both practices are not similar, have different histories and social contexts, and cannot be clumped in the name *khawala.* According to the narrator then, the love affair Ni'mat entertains with Islam does not emanate from

[30] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustache, Men without Beards.* (give a synopsis about this book).
[31] For a detailed discussion of homoeroticism in the premodern Arab-Islamic world, and for an extensive list of the nomenclature associated with various sexual types in Arabic, see Khaled El-Rouyaheb's *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800.*

[32] « Pour la première fois, il assumait sans honte ce qu'il était devenu, osant le nommer et le murmurer en lui-même comme le plus beau des noms: *Khawala !* » ; *Le dernier combat.* 82.

Ni'mat's sense of emasculation much discussed by Arab critics in reference to the aftermath of the 1967 defeat.[33] On the contrary, it comes as a liberating experience that frees the protagonist from adherence to the norms that, under the pretext of being faithful to tradition, exposes this "tradition's" western roots, thus operating as a reinscription of foreclosed sexualities. As Captain Ni'mat discovers the writings in red on his gate he states, "it must be these bad-behaved youths who tag for fun, imitating by this, as in many other domains, western youth. These ill-bred monkeys!".[34] Leftah is able to contest the heteronormative regulatory practices that are derived from discourses of western modernity, but parading as either Islamic or secular national "tradition" in religious as well as nationalist discourses, respectively.

The novel, however, features in its third section another discourse that departs from the continuous narrative of the novel's first two sections to include Captain Ni'mat's diary, as the latter decides to start a diary in defiance of the norms that prohibit declarations in the name of "I" insisting that this "I," the individual, is subsumed by the collective. In contrast to the "archaic" practice of *ars erotica* on which draws the novel's text, this diary belongs to *scientia sexualis*, to the confessional mode of western Europe that claims to seek the truth. The inclusion of the diary, written in the first person by captain Ni'mat himself, illustrates this captain's subscription to this kind of confessional modernity that places the "I" at the center of the narrative as an act of rebellion against the collective that is valorized by Islamic tradition, the "I" being a heresy and a denial

[33] The writings generated by the 1967 are too numerous to include, but among the writings that emphasize the Arab intellectual's need for a "spirit of masculinity/virility" to remain free is Adonis' "manifesto of June 5, 1967" where the author laments the disintegration of Arab thought and life conditions.

[34] "Ce doit être des jeunes mal élevés qui s'amusent à taguer, imitant en cela, comme dans tant d'autres domaines, la jeunesse d'Occident" ; *Le dernier combat.*125.

of the rule of the collective. Here, Captain Ni'mat emerges as an adept of western modernity through the confessional mode associated with introducing the "I" into Maghrebian Francophone literature[35] as well as with subjectivity formation in the western tradition. Captain Ni'mat also explains his choice of writing in French, a language "so sweet, so singing, the preferred language of our old aristocracy,"[36] while wishing he had pursued a career in literature and languages[37] rather than following the dictates of virility by joining the military. Captain Ni'mat refers to himself as "a *khawala,* a wimp, a wet rag, a pederast…an old, poor, and lonely woman" in a contemptuous way that contrasts with the narrator's earlier declaration that the protagonist is proud to identify as *khawala*; this self-contempt illustrates the burden Captain Ni'mat carries from having interiorized the military and society's association of non-heteronormative male sexualities with the feminine as well as its condemnation of this category and the social alienation this entails.[38]

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[35] It is important to mention the intricacies of using the "I" in postcolonial Maghrebian Francophone literature. Although Jean Déjeux observes that within the Sufi tradition Sufis use "I" to relate their spiritual experiences, their introspection, and purification of the heart, he and the majority of scholars of the Maghreb agree that the "I" in the sense of the affirmation of the individual's singularity is ignored, that subjectivity is not recognized in the Islamic tradition that regards with suspicion Sufis. From another prism, the subjective "I" is an affirmation of the existence and survival of the postcolonial subject who was reduced to a zone of 'non-being' to use Fanon's term. Nonetheless, the diary in *le dernier combat* reflects a tone of confession that corresponds to the western way of 'coming-out' by narrating one's sexuality, rather than anything else. One can argue that French influence cannot be claimed for works such as Mohamed Choukri's *For Bread Alone (Al Khubz Al-Hafi),* written in Moroccan darija.

[36] « Ce français si doux, si chantant, la langue préférée de notre ancienne aristocratie » ; *Le dernier combat.*127.

[37] French is associated with the feminine element in twentieth-century Egyptian society, and more women learn French than men; Madiha Doss, "Le français en Égypte. Histoire et présence actuelle." *Cahiers de l'Association internationale des études françaises.* 56 (2004) :75-98.

[38] "khawala, une femmelette, une serpillière…un pédéraste… une vieille et pauvre femme esseulée » ; *Le dernier combat.* 128, 145.

Through the inclusion of the diary, Leftah's text opens a space that belongs to neither norms: *ars erotica or scientia sexualis,* remaining on the threshold separating them. From this perspective, the body's unruliness is manifested by its refusal to belong to any typology. This nomenclature points to the illegibility of the protagonist's position in modern discourses, whether eastern or western. Mohamed Leftah demonstrates meticulous attention to philology and language choice throughout his text. The modern Arab subject, according to Leftah, needs to invent a new epistemology, which is located in a space in-between the premodern eastern and the modern western; it is an invention of the self that corresponds to neither, yet draws from each without however being dwelling in them, because these discourses fail to capture the complex reality of the modern Arab subject.

The diary and the narrative are the two parts of the novel and cannot be read in isolation, but in light of each other. In each of these parts Captain Ni'mat is filtered through different lenses. In the narrative, the narrator mediates between protagonist and reader, but in the diary the narrator disappears and Captain Ni'mat emerges in a new light through his confessions. Whereas the "I" in the diary is traversed by the objective "he" in the rest of the narrative and the "we" in the diary claiming the community, a 'we' of Arabs reclaiming their individuality from the communitarian oppressive and homogenizing order, whether religious or secular, the function of the diary in the novel cannot be taken at face value as Clara Calargé and Jean-François have done in their otherwise insightful analysis of homosexuality in *Le dernier combat.*[39] The authors

[39] Clara Calargé and Emmanuel Bruno Jean-François. « Masculinités, homosexualité et homonationalisme dans *Le Dernier Combat du Captain Ni'mat de Mohamed Leftah*." *Nouvelles Études Francophones.* 30.2 (Fall 2015): 93-110.

consider rightly that the Arab writer defending individual sexual rights in the Arab world is in a delicate situation because they risk getting their discourse recuperated by imperialist hegemonic and homonationalist discourses. Hence the necessity for preserving the literary all the while defending the political; at this point the authors think that Leftah fails in this task by including a diary that uses direct language to attack conservative orders and denounce the arrest and humiliation of 52 homosexuals who were partying on a boat in Cairo in 2001. This argument is paradoxical because it first reduces Leftah's novel to "a defense of the rights of homosexuals," yet denounces the lack of literariness in the diary because it makes it a pamphlet that can be easily recuperated by discourses of power. A careful look at the text reveals that the author maintains a critical distance from the diary, and invites us to read it in light of the rest of the narrative. The fact that the "I" interiorizes the shame associated with *khawala* in the diary while in the narrative Captain Ni'mat reclaims it proudly raises the question as to which position the author subscribes. Is Captain Ni'mat's sexuality a liberated expression of his subjectivity, or is it, as the captain claims in his diary, his revengeful response to the humiliation and shame he still feels in the aftermath of the1967 defeat? I argue that Leftah's novel opens a space for reimagining Arab subjectivity both in light of and at a distance from the two positions.

In the diary Captain Ni'mat emerges unmediated by the narrator, and the reader discovers a man about to lose yet another battle in his life to the oppression of a virility "that is no more than an instinct of domination and death."[40] As he denounces the ravages of the 1967 defeat to his self-esteem, he tries to understand his love for Islam,

[40] « Le cadavre d'une virilité qui n'est plus chez nous que pulsion de domination et de mort. » *Le dernier combat.*129.

> May it be that the scathing defeat of '67, which I lived as an inadmissible, unacceptable powerlessness, unforgivable remorse, would have plunged me into a feeling of guilt so atrocious, which, silently, slowly but relentlessly, led me more than three decades after the traumatic event to aspire to a strange redemption, assuming in my body and my flesh—and not only in my heart and in my soul—this powerlessness, this feminization of the atrociously vanquished warrior, put on his knees, flat on his stomach? Would my metamorphosis into *khawala* be the extreme, desperate form of my protest and revolt against fantasized virility, grandiloquent and hollow rhetoric, tyranny and unconsciousness of the chief, the supreme male, all things that have led us to disaster and?[41]

Captain Ni 'mat adopts the language he has interiorized from the very virile milieu of the military and society in general. He sees himself a feminized *khawala,* although he declares that he prefers giving free reins to his desire rather becoming "a real petrified mummy" like the other retired generals who spend their time in homosocial conversations that celebrate virility while engaging secretly in homoerotic relations with Abu Hassan in the massage room. It is true that Ni'mat's declared war on virility adopts the binarism of patriarchy that considers anything not corresponding to the heterosexual virile male to be feminized and hence not worthy of respect, by including his rant on the boat incident confirms the author's understanding that public and private are indistinguishable when it comes to sexuality. The diary, or *le journal intime,* is supposed to be a private text about one's private life, but the diary in this novel blurs the boundaries between the public and the private, hence demonstrating that sexuality cannot be relegated to the private space as modernity has it; rather, it is always already

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[41] " Se peut-il que la défaite cinglante de 67, vécue par moi comme une impuissance inadmissible, inacceptable, un remords inexpiable, m'eût plongé dans un sentiment de culpabilité si atroce, qui, me travaillant en silence, lentement mais de façon implacable, m'a conduit plus de trois décades après l'événement traumatisant à aspirer à une sorte de rachat étrange, en assumant dans mon corps et ma chair-et pas seulement: en mon cœur et en mon âme aussi-cette impuissance, cette féminisation du guerrier atrocement vaincu, mis a genoux, à plat ventre? Ma métamorphose en khawala serait-elle la forme extrême, désespérée, de ma protestation et de ma révolte contre la virilité fantasmée, la rhétorique grandiloquente et creuse, la tyrannie et l'inconscience du chef, du mâle suprême, toutes choses qui nous ont conduits à la catastrophe et à la honte ?» ; *Le dernier combat.* 129-30.

political, not only because governmentality controls and regulates sexuality in daily practices, but also because, as Foucault and Butler explain, the gendered subject is always already the target and locus of biopolitics. In the pages of this diary, Captain Ni'mat emerges as a defiant yet guilt-ridden Nasserist officer interrogating his sexuality. He repeatedly and bitterly denounces the homogenizing imperatives of the traditional Arab-Islamic societies that prohibit and suppresses the individual "I" in favor of the collective "we": "'We': The Group who summoned the individual in its singularity that I wanted to be from now on."[42] He claims that he wants to retaliate against this pathologic masculinity and virility affecting modern society through his love affair. We have then two versions of subject formations juxtaposed to each other—the archaic reinscribed within a modern setting, and the modern inspired by masculinist discourses—which leads us to believe that Leftah does not fully subscribe to either; instead, he is looking for this space between the two where the production of the Arab modern subject unravels by looking and carving for itself a new epistemology and ontology. The oscillation between two narrative structures reflects a search for an epistemology, and the narrative's desolate ending gestures towards an avant-garde narrative as a modernity to come, in the making. Captain Ni'mat's discussion of the ravages of virility, which is the name of Captain Ni'mat's wife, Mervet, directs us to the author's attention to onomastics in the novel.

As subjectivity is imagined through language, Leftah's special attention to language and onomastics plays a central role in this subject formation and in shedding light on his vision of modernity. Leftah's linguistic, geographic, and ontological in-

[42] " 'Nous': Le Groupe. Qui sommait l'individu singulier que je me voulais désormais" ; *Le dernier combat.* 133.

betweenness conditions his writing[43] and blurs the boundaries between: Morocco and Egypt (the novel is set in Cairo with Egyptian characters), which are metonymies of the Maghreb and the Mashreq, two regions that are for most of their postcolonial history the blind spots of each other, and the novel's languages (French is interspersed with Egyptian Arabic, literary Arabic, and Turkish Arabic). The author decenters the novel's language, French, by inserting Turkish and Arabic references that evoke the history of exchanges and colonialism between these regions, hence opening the landscape to more than a dual between Morocco and France. Also, to date and situate the inception of modernity in 19th century Europe is to negate the exchanges that took place before and led to this overdetermined event. Hence, by bringing into his French Turkish, Nubian, and Egyptian elements and characters, Leftah is gesturing towards this rich multidirectional flow and exchange of movements, ideas, and languages in various directions. Besides decentering French, this strategy lays out the network of forces at play in the fabric of the text as forces of modernity. As the protagonist asks for an intimate massage from Abu Hassan, the narrator informs the reader that the word *massage* comes from the Arabic verb, *massa*, which means *to touch*. This philological mini-lesson transports the reader to the stories of European men seeking in the Orient these intimate massage sessions in *Hammam* hence unraveling archaic spaces within western modernity yet located in the Orient.[44] This moment has twofold implications: first, it is a reminder that the author's (and the narrator's) native language is Arabic,

[43] I draw on Edward Said's discussion of the intellectual as an outsider and a parrhesiastes in *Representations of the Intellectual*.

[44] One famous example of these narrations is Gustave Flaubert's homoerotic encounters in massage parlors during his travels to Egypt.

which entails that French, the language of the text, is a translation of a native language that has an autonomous epistemology articulated in it. Abdelkebir Khatibi believes that the future of this Arab knowledge (*savoir)* resides in the space of non-knowledge (*non-savoir)* of thought between two or more languages, as the native language has the ability "to think the other by translating them, by grafting them to this possibility, and opening this possibility toward the unknown."[45] Second, this moment also evokes the significance of movements across languages and across time as a visible sign of cultural and human exchanges. Hence Leftah's historicization of French in his narrative shows that this language is susceptible to change and flux by adding and mixing in his text other languages. This practice also shows that French is far from static and complete; the insertion of other languages suggests the vulnerability of French through openness to the other.[46] Considering that Leftah is himself an exile of language, and constantly moving between texts, he is also an exile in Egypt. Hence, his life experience is a way of thinking about himself moving between texts, languages, and places rather than being at home in any of them. He is suspended between languages, dwelling in that third space that is called "a comparable space" that might not be thought of as "no space" of the exile; it can be thought of as the space the exile carves for themselves as writers, a space where they could be "loyal to themselves."[47]

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[45] "[L]e savoir arabe entretient une certaine autonomie, grâce à sa langue natale. De là sa possibilité de penser et de penser l'autre en le traduisant, en le greffant en cette possibilité, ouvrant cette possibilité vers l'inconnu: le non-savoir à penser encore et encore entre deux ou plusieurs langues. Cette entrée à la mondialisation par cette transformation de la langue arabe est probablement l'avenir de ce savoir, son accession à une parole planétaire, laquelle est encore, et combien, une parole d'ethnocentrisme et d'autosuffisance" ; *Maghreb Pluriel.* 59.

[46] For translation as a recognition of a language's vulnerability and acknowledgment of lack, I draw on Karen Newman and Jane Tylus's "Early Modern Cultures of Translation." In *Early Modern Cultures of Translation*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015: 1-24.

[47] Karen Newman and Jane Tylus, "Early Modern Cultures of Translation." 20-21.

More importantly, the dwelling in this "no space" through resistance to gender typology can be noticed in the transitional references: as he calls Captain Ni'mat an amphibian, the narrator refers to the young male swimmers as "androgynous beauties": "a bold or imprudent amphibian, Captain Ni'mat did not join the shore and found himself trapped in this auroral sea of origins."[48] Naming practices signal Leftah's defiance of the rigid and hierarchizing codes of sexual difference encoded in language. Ni'mat is a woman's name, while Mervet comes from *muruwwa*, virility. Ni'mat is a typical woman's name deriving from Ni'ma, but acquired the "t" after the Ottomans borrowed it from Arabic and adapted it to Turkish. The name returned to Egypt in its Turkish version, exactly as the rest of the characters who are named *Mervet, Bahgat*, *Medhat*, etc. Nonetheless, by ascribing the name Ni'mat to his protagonist, Leftah hybridizes this character on several levels while signaling his liberated sexuality as the additional final "t" in his name is excessive in comparison to the Arabic "*Ni'ma.*" This character is not simply feminine, as would heterosexual norms perceive a man who engages in a sexual relationship with another man; rather, he exceeds this categorization because the sexual relationship he engages in has been repressed and foreclosed from the registers of sexual practices. Note also the name *Mervat*, which derives from "virility," has traversed the same spaces between Arabic and Turkish (*Muru'a* or *Muruwwa*, given to women as *Marwa*, meaning 'virility'). Like Islam, Mervet's name invokes two concepts that are intertwined in patriarchal societies: the virile and the feminine element. It is in the name of virility that the masculinity of the active male homosexual partner is

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[48] "Amphibien audacieux, ou imprudent, le captain Ni'mat n'a pas rejoint le rivage et s'est retrouvé piégé dans cette mer aurorale des origines » (10). The figure of the androgynous lover was introduced into postcolonial Moroccan literature by Abdelkebir Khatibi in *Le livre du sang.* Paris: Gallimard, 1979.

considered to be intact, but lacking in the passive partner. Mervet has interiorized the primacy of virility: she calls proudly her husband “mon faucon” (my falcon) and recoils in silence when she learns that he is the passive partner in the relationship with Islam. She appropriates her husband’s presumably lost virility, and considers it a humiliation of her own person because she sees herself as an extension of her husband, and his soiled reputation is her own. At the same time, the fact that she withdraws in her mutism signals her inability and/or willful foreclosure of any utterance.

Mervet’s position seems to align closely with her name, which is (or maybe not so) coincidentally feminine but denotes everything but the feminine. In his account of why “la virilité” is a feminine word, Jacques Hassoun explains that *virilité* excludes woman from its scope, since it derives from *vir,* man. *Muru’a*, or *Muruwwa* in Arabic also come from *mar’,* meaning man, and reflects man’s ability to engender and not to be a father. Hassoun remarks that when we refer to virility, to the master and to engender (*enfanter*), we vacate the father function of its symbolic dimension by inscribing it within the order of nature. Hence, “the genitor will be always looking for proof of his virility, proof that he will try to snatch from that woman that he will make a mother.” Fascination with the penis and virility, accentuated under oppression and humiliating colonial conditions, manifests itself in the virile anti-colonial struggle and is highlighted in the postcolonial condition as it exposes this notion’s hollowness and extreme vulnerability in a society trying to come to terms with the devastation of its present caused by its colonial past. More importantly, virility is transformed from virtue to virtuousness as it is guarded and reinforced by the mother who dissociates herself from her femininity and requires virility from her male children as a solace from the assaults she endures from

her husband in the name of the same virility. In this sense, virility signifies the violence of castration and the ban on desire, the mark of the singularity of the subject. Although Mervet believes in women's liberation and education—she has sent her daughters to European universities and expresses views against the Islamic veil and yielding to husbands' pressure—her views seem to derive from a secular modernity that champions women's rights as long as they remain under the control of the state and do not interfere with men's supremacy. Her friend Shaima tells her, "Your husband Ni'mat has always had more advanced ideas about women's condition; he has even had at a certain time Marxist ideas," [49] suggesting that an Egyptian woman is bound by her husband's views.[50] In line with the hegemonic discourses about masculinity, Mervet upholds the normative view that regards the passive partner in the relationship as the *ma'bun* who lost his virility, while the active partner as the one preserving his virility, and from this perspective her name corresponds to the concept of virility as Hassoun explains it.

The narrator vacates Mervet of a felt sense of self by relating that her opposition to her husband's affair stems exclusively from her zeal to adhere to patriarchal rules. It is true that women are socialized in such a way that the concerns of the male in their immediate surroundings prime over their own, yet by letting her sink into voluntary mutism, the narrator underlines his inability to express her condition, or maybe the

[49] "Ton mari Ni'mat a toujours eu des idées plus avancées sur la condition féminine, il a même eu à une certaine époque des idées marxisantes" ; *Le dernier combat.* 45.

[50] For a detailed discussion about women's waves of feminism in Egypt and the relationship between secular modernity, state feminism, and Islam, see Mervat F. Hatem's "Egyptian Discourses on Gender and Political Liberalization: Do Secularist and Islamist Views Really Differ?", Laura Bier's "Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminism, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt," and Hala Kamal's "A Century of Egyptian Women's Demands: The Four Waves of the Egyptian Feminist Movement."

unspeakable nature of her condition as the symbolic is predicated on the prerogative of the masculine and the othering of the feminine, whether this masculine is gender conforming or not. Mervet's silence signals that, far from being subjects, women are the unspoken other. Her silence articulates the silencing of women's voice in modernity. As Mervet seems to uphold the values of a system in which she is othered and oppressed, her mutism intervenes to call attention to the inexpressibility and unspeakability of her situation. As the novel blurs the boundaries between Egypt and Morocco, Mervet's mutism might also refer to the condition of Moroccan women in post-independence Morocco, where women struggle in their fight for their usurped rights. The wife's silence operates paradoxically as a disavowal of the foreclosure Moroccan feminism.[51] More significantly, the fact that Mervet's outrage has no trace of her feeling offended at her husband's infidelity suggests that she lacks sexual desire, especially that the sight of young female swimmers in the pool arises in her and her friends a feeling of guilt and jealousy at the thought of the decrepit state of their own bodies:

> The sight of the young female bathers, in the flower of their age, plunged them into a melancholy reverie. They were now almost ashamed to ask about each other's health, talk about their little pains or more serious health problems such as diabetes or rheumatism, to compare the various diets they had followed to lose weight, without result.[52]

Compared to Captain Ni 'mat's gaze on the bodies of the male swimmers, Mervet and the other women in the novel flagrantly lack desire, and this discrepancy might be more than an interiorization of patriarchal norms. An EDHS report from 2014 states that

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[51] Mounira Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

[52] "la vue des jeunes baigneuses, dans la fleur de l'âge, les plongeait dans une mélancolique rêverie. Elles avaient maintenant presque honte de prendre des nouvelles de leur santé, de parler de leurs petits bobos ou d'ennuis de santé plus sérieux tels que le diabète ou les rhumatismes, de comparer les divers régimes qu'elles avaient suivis pour maigrir, sans résultat » ; *Le dernier combat.* 44.

ninety-two percent of the ever-married women age 15-49 had undergone genital mutilation, and virtually all the women were circumcised before age 15.[53] Frédéric Lagrange affirms that female excision is practiced across all religious communities in Egypt as in the Nile Valley mainly to curb women's desire, comparing it to the clitoridectomy practiced in the 19th and early 20th centuries U.S. to fight against masturbation. Lagrange notes that women excision is almost absent in the discourses of Egyptian feminists of the early 20th century.[54] Mervet's mutism that registers her opposition to his affair draws attention to the fact that the queer male articulation of sexuality always runs the risk of stabilizing sexual and gender hierarchies. Female sexuality, whether queer or heterosexual, is elided. Unless queer female sexuality and subjectivity is central to a writing project, this project risks of replicating heteronormative and patriarchal structures of kinship and community.[55] As Mervet plunges into silence, the reader is able to reflect on the irony of her situation: she is bound to preserve an institution that marginalizes her and discriminate against her. As the Real the only place for alterity, or as the space between *langue* and *parole* the only place for alterity outside of the law/language, and every utterance is "to speak the law", then Mervet's silence illustrates her resistance and refusal to participate in the law. Whether she decides to sanction her husband's love for Islam or not, she is condemned to be complicit with the

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[53] For a detailed report on female genital mutilation in Egypt, see http://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR302/FR302.pdf

[54] See Frédéric Lagrange's account of female genital mutilation in *Islam d'interdits, Islam de jouissance*: 57-66. According to Lagrange's account, female genital mutilation was banned officially by a government decree in 2007, a year after Mohamed Leftah wrote *le dernier combat.* Still, the DHS report of 2014 demonstrates that it remained widely practiced in Egyptian society despite the ban.

[55] I draw on Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South-Asian Public Cultures.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

law that silences and oppresses women. For Mervet, silence is the only way out of the law or language; she cannot negotiate a way of being in language or in the law as long as she is abiding by the law's edicts. Whether the law is in force or suspended, i.e., whether Captain Ni'mat is able to sustain a relationship with Islam or not, Mervet is still dwelling in her silence. Mervet's silence is a desubjectivation that is integral to and folds into her subjectivation; a silence that is part of her speech as she eventually decides to separate from her husband.

Living and writing in Egypt, an unlikely place of exile for a Moroccan, Mohamed Leftah would have been pondering on questions of Arab cultural identity in terms of one shared culture, which is one of the two ways cultural identity can be perceived, according to Stuart Hall. As oneness, cultural identity is conceived as a production, a process constituted within representation.[56] As "practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write," one also produces cultural identity by the process of writing, which is rather a *re-telling* because "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."[57] According to Hall, then, rather than being an archeological search in the past, cultural identity is a process of production by re-telling the past in the present. What Abdeljaouad calls "the archaic" in the Maghrebian Francophone text corresponds to the oneness, "the truth, the essence" of cultural identity in Hall's terms. This archaic, as sameness and identity, is not necessarily static, nor is it to be excavated in the past; rather, it is inspired by a common past, but performed by a writer

[56] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." In *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference.* Edited by Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990: 223.

[57] Ibid. 222, 225.

as an act of imaginary reunification of a fragmentary present. Here comes Hall's second view of identity, which consists of "critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened— 'what we have become.'" Cultural identity in this sense is constantly in the making and is situated within a certain history, place, time, and culture, hence subject to these factors' changes, including the trauma of colonization.[58] From this angle, cultural identity is produced in the second sense in part as a negotiation between metropole and periphery. This statement has two implications: First, Hall explains that, as the colonial encounter involves a repression and erasure of the cultural identity of the colonized, a post-colonial subject looks for ways to resurrect this repressed and absented cultural identity. We can read this scenario in the mid-twentieth century Arabic poetry that sought to resurrect the decolonized subject from the ashes of colonialism through the pervasive theme of the phoenix. In the case of Mohamed Leftah and many post-1967 Arab writers, however, it is question of creating the new man as the resounding wave of reassessing Arab values and the Arab subject had everyone calling for a radical change to these values and this subject.[59] The second implication is that two peripheries with a shared past but with two differing colonial histories, the Maghreb and the Mashreq, developed different perceptions of themselves, structured as a palimpsest superposing one layer over the other.

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[58] Ibid. 225.

[59] This subject has been extensively discussed and debated. I would like to mention Hussein Muruwwa's article in a 1967 al-adab issue titled "Ṭarīquna ila taghyīr al-insaan al-'arabi" (Our way towards changing the Arab human) in which he argues that the anger experienced by the Arab subject after the defeat is a constructivist force that has the potential to build the battle for change; it only needs leadership that will organize this wave and leads it into the right direction. Muruwwa's article contrasts with Adonis's "Bayān khamsa ḥazīrān" (Manifesto of the 5th of June) published in the same al-adab issue, where Adonis declares that rujūla (masculinity) is needed to save the Arabs from their degenerate state.

For Mohamed Leftah Egypt is a sort of queer[60] exile, and this fact shapes and determines significantly the effectiveness of *Le dernier combat*. As the majority of the Moroccan diaspora reside in France, their diasporic condition is usually drawn between two poles: Morocco and France, which correspond to the formerly colonized and colonizer countries, respectively. Hence, by setting his novel in Egypt where he was living at the time, Leftah disrupts the hierarchal relation between home and diaspora, the superiority of the metropole over Morocco, while also contesting the purity of the nation from a gendered and racial perspective. Hence, Egypt provides an alternative, third space that is another periphery situated inside the Arab-Muslim identity, yet outside of the dichotomy opposing Morocco and France, enabling a "queer diasporic" text.[61]

Living in Egypt as an outsider, Leftah was conscious about the gaze of the other, and this other's perception of him. Hence, his writing, like his position in Egypt as a Moroccan Francophone writer, verges on the abnormal, the queer, as Egypt is a queer place for a Francophone Moroccan writer. There are many indications that the author's condition of displacement has the power to initiate change, and this transpires in the negotiation of space in the novel. Captain Ni'mat's affair with Islam starts as the former asks his servant to take a shower in the main house, an otherwise transgressive action, as Islam is never allowed to shower in his masters' bathroom. This breach of the hierarchy of space signals the beginning of a displacement, a movement from one

[60] I draw on Gayatri Gopinath's usage of "queer" as "a range of dissident and non-heteronormative practices and desires that may very well be incommensurate with the identity categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian'"; Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South-Asian Public Cultures.*11.

[61] I borrow the expression from Gayatri Gopinath as I will discuss the love relationship between Captain Ni 'mat and Islam partly from the perspective of a queer diaspora that she theorizes in *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures.*

social space to another, from a sexual practice to another, and from a periphery to another. Mervet's refusal to accept her husband's love affair translates into the latter's displacement into a new apartment in a new neighborhood, which is accompanied by a degradation of his financial and emotional states as he keeps facing more rejections from society.

Therefore, Leftah's estrangement and solitude as an expatriate in Egypt—similar to the feelings of an exile but without the suffering—is central to the understanding the transgressive dimension of his text and its "destabilizing effect."[62] As a Moroccan living in Egypt, Mohamed Leftah is an observer that stands on the interstices between Morocco and Egypt, which means that every idea is "always counterposed with another," endowing him with a unique analytical perspective.[63] The author's condition reverberates in the protagonist's. Having been radiated from the army and consequently not given the opportunity to participate in the 1973 war, Captain Ni'mat feels isolated from his ex-fellow soldiers (*ex-compagnons d'armes*) who view this war as a victory while he has "a more measured, more objective appreciation of this glorious event."[64] Hence, when these retired army generals relate their exploits during the wars, unashamedly skipping the 1967 defeat and focusing on anecdotes from the Yemen campaign or the 1973 "immortal victory," Captain Ni'mat remains distant, as the only memory he retains from his career is the memory of the defeat. Being excluded from the

[62] Edward Said, "Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals." *Representations of the Intellectual.* 56.

[63] Ibid. 60.

[64] "Le captain Ni'mat avait toujours eu quant à lui une appréciation plus mesurée, plus objective, de ce Glorieux événement » (14).

national normative narrative, Captain Ni'mat develops the perspective of a marginalized and repressed subject, which surfaces in full force in his diary.

Leftah's project can be summed as an avant-garde articulation of a modernity to come, a modernity that is not yet signified, looking for a new epistemology, as this work challenges conventions through thematic and stylistic innovations, ushering a new form of consciousness. As the Maghrebian Francophone author rewrites the archaic within the modern, this archaic is being rewritten with a new aesthetic, a new mediation that contests both the original and the hegemonic ones. This moment represents the nodal point wherein the creation of a new language coincides with the reinscription of the archaic within the modern. Then challenging aesthetic and patriarchal norms by expressing non-normative queer desires and sexualities has far-reaching implications. For non-conforming desire transcends the moralism of society, which gestures towards the broader significance of Leftah's work beyond its defiance of patriarchal norms. It is also a reminder and vindication of Jalil Bennani's claim, at the beginning of the Arab uprisings, that the Arab subject is neither submissive nor ideological; it is a subject of desire.[65]

Stefania Pandolfo discusses the Moroccan subject's experience of modernity in light of the fieldwork she conducts in Morocco.[66] She demonstrates that modernity, which is experienced as loss, can be rendered in literature, "[a]nd the subject, 'wrenched' and 'torn' in every direction, discovers in this non-resolution the possibility of

[65] Jalil Bennani, and Ahmed E. Amraoui. *Un Psy Dans La Cité*. Casablanca : Éditions la croisée des chemins, 2013 : 186.
[66] Stefania Pandolfo, "The Thin Line of Modernity: Some Moroccan Debates on Subjectivity." *Questions of Modernity.* Mitchell, Timothy, ed. Minneapolis: UM Press, 2000: 115-147.

speech and perhaps the path of another emancipation."[67] While Pandolfo's interpretation of modernity as loss corresponds closely to the defining negativity of the institutional foreclosures which the modern Moroccan subject encounters, I wish to emphasize the latter part of her conclusion, i.e., the path of emancipation that this subject carves for themselves within this non-resolution. It is precisely this space that *Le dernier combat* unfolds for the reader to unravel the production of modern subjectivity through reiteration of muted speeches and foreclosures that define and determine the modern postcolonial Arab subject. They might be unintelligible and even mute, but they gesture towards a new epistemology and ontology of the modern. *Le dernier combat* is Mohamed Leftah's only novel set in Egypt; the rest of his work is loosely set in Morocco and Numidia. This novel's ability to effectuate *une double critique* is overdetermined by its author's exilic conditions that produced a text that remains on the fringes of the discourses it critiques, hence resisting being recuperated by any of them. The modernity it articulates, however, faces a silent moment signifying an irreducible lack of women's voice because the narrative, though queer, still centers on male queer desire. Women's queer desire is still flagrantly absent.

[67] Ibid. 143.

CHAPTER THREE

"The Suffering of the Rule is Us": Unruly Bodies in Hoda Barakat's *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* and *Ahl al-Hawa*

Hoda Barakat (1952-) is a Lebanese novelist who has been living in Paris since 1989. After living through the Lebanese Civil War, she decided to move to Paris a year before the official ending of hostilities.[1] This was not Barakat's first move to Paris. In 1975, after she received her Bachelor's degree in French from the Lebanese university, she had moved to Paris to pursue doctoral studies. As the war broke out, she decided to interrupt her studies and move back to Lebanon. Her second move was instigated by the same war for which Barakat had gone back to Lebanon in the first place. In an interview with Youssef Rakha in 1999, Barakat expresses her mitigated feelings as she examines her decision to leave her war-torn country for Paris: "The war is why I left, yes, it was why I finally decided to leave. Well, I left in 1989. That was the last year of war. It's not as if... I mean, I lived through the entire Lebanese civil war, in Lebanon. But during the last battles—of course I didn't know they were the last battles then, otherwise I would've waited—I started to get scared in a real way, I had genuine fear. Because by that time I had children. I was afraid for the children."[2] Barakat writes in Arabic, and her novels, since the first, *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* (1990), are set in the Lebanese Civil War. Unlike other Lebanese women's writings, be they about the Civil War or not, narrating the

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[1] It is important to note from the outset that the 1975-1990 war in Lebanon did not only consist of a civil strife. I completely agree with Jalal Toufic (*Undeserving Lebanon*) that it should be always referred to as "the civil war and the Israeli invasions," but I will use "the civil war" or sometimes just "the Lebanese war," for the sake of brevity, which undeniably includes the Israeli invasions of the country.
[2] Rakha, Youssef. "Hoda Barakat: Starting Over." Ellipsis in original.

violence incurred on women by the war as well as by patriarchal society, Barakat's novels feature male narrators struggling to negotiate the performativity of their sexualities while living under the conditions of the war. Approaching the subject of the civil war from the perspective of non-normative masculinity and illustrating the violence exerted on men by heteronormativity, Barakat opens the space to reflect on masculinity away from its normative socio-political associations, which allows in turn a reconsideration of both men's and women's modern condition and the role of the war in reinforcing heteronormativity on them. Rather than analyzing the "androgynous" in Hoda Barakat's work, as the vast majority of critics have been doing, my analysis in *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* considers the formation of a hyper-masculinized war fighter, the idealized form of a heterosexual man, out of a homosexual man, and the detrimental effects of this formation on him and his surroundings. In *Ahl al-Hawa,* I argue that by dissecting the dynamics of the civil war through an analysis of a madman, Barakat mimics the narrative of patriarchy and war as primarily a men's venture, while tracing the way patriarchal society, bolstered by the war, manages another marginalized man—the mad. I argue that Barakat's texts, which center on male protagonists victimized and destabilized by forces directly connected to the war and women characters navigating the war's labyrinthine violence, allow an emancipatory promise to the women away from the usual Arab nationalistic feminist discourses, albeit ultimately thwarted and occluded by the grip of the war.

The two novels I study in this chapter, *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* (*The Stone of Laughter*), and *Ahl al-Hawa* (*Disciples of Passion*), were published in 1990 and 1993 respectively. Each of these two novels feature a male protagonist struggling to cope with the violence

brought by the war, pervading their daily lives and psyches. Khalil, the protagonist of *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik,* whose difficulty to accept and assume his homoerotic desire and disinterest in the performativity of virility throughout the narrative culminates in making him a violent, aggressive, and immoral man. The nameless protagonist and narrator in *Ahl al-Hawa,* who relates his story from the psychiatric hospital of Deir el-Ṣalīb, suffers from psychical and memory problems that constantly undermine the veracity of his account of his love affair with, and subsequent killing of, a married woman who came from the other side of Beirut to live with him during a particularly violent episode of the war. While the vast majority of the critics claim that Barakat uses strategically androgyny in reference to these two protagonists to reconstruct the horrors of the war, I argue that in the case of *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* Barakat offers a detailed process of the making of hyper-masculinized criminal fighter, "a male who laughs," and who victimizes everyone around him, including himself, while establishing the link between capitalism, modernity, masculinity, and civil war. In the case of *Ahl al-Hawa,* I argue that through the narrator's madness, Barakat adds to the connections that she had established in her previous novel the problematic brought by amnesia, which is reminiscent of the amnesty law signed in 1991 and which forbade remembering of the war crimes, ultimately concluding that the imperative to forget does not erase hate or repress memory. Hence, I argue that by centering the abnormal male body ("abnormal" as both "queer" and "mad") in her texts, Barakat opens a space for a feminist discourse allowed by the decentering of heteronormative patriarchy and nationalism.

Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik has a male narrator, which the reader can distinguish in the Arabic version only, as Arabic is gendered for the first-person singular. The narrator tells the

story of a young man, Khalil, who lives alone in an apartment in Beirut during the war. The narrative switches seamlessly between first and third person, between Khalil's inner thoughts and the male narrator's voice, respectively. Khalil is described as inadequate (both from the perspective of his physique and behavior) compared to other men around him. He spends most of his time in his apartment cleaning and putting things in order, as though he is trying to counteract the chaos of the war. He is not interested in participating in this war, nor does he act like any of the militiamen we encounter in the novel. His circle of friends consists of journalists and intellectuals who spend much of their time discussing and debating questions of nationalism and ideology. He is attracted to Naji, his neighbor who lives with his mother, Madame Isabelle, and always finds himself waiting for Naji's daily visits. Khalil becomes attracted to another young man, Youssef, after Naji is killed by a sniper for his spying activities and Youssef moves in the building with his mother and sister. Whereas Naji's participation in the war went completely unnoticed by Khalil, Youssef's transformation into a fighter happened in front of Khalil's watching and approving gaze. As Youssef gets killed by other militiamen for fiercely killing two valuable fighters, Khalil's psychological and physical conditions deteriorate, making him realize the importance of caring for himself. He sells some of Madame Isabelle's furniture and undergoes a surgery, and in the aftermath of this surgery he starts to transform into an egotistic, immoral, and violent man. Although a wealthy arm dealer actively pursues him sexually, he rejects his advances, and ends up raping and beating his neighbor, a young woman who moved recently in his building with her son. He starts storing arms in Madame Isabelle's apartment whose furniture he sold, and discards the neighbors' complaints that he is endangering their lives through

his arms deals. The novel ends with a dramatically transformed Khalil, both physically and morally; in fact, he has changed to such an extent that the female author (or the function of the female author as I will argue below) can barely recognize the man she created in the beginning of the novel.

Ahl al-Hawa is narrated in the first person by a man who is institutionalized in Deir el-Ṣalīb, a psychiatric hospital in the Christian suburbs of Beirut, funded by a Catholic priest, operated by Catholic nuns, but treating patients from all religious sects. This narrator, who remains nameless, claims to have been kidnapped and held hostage by militiamen who later exchanged him against other captives by another militia. He was tortured during captivity, and he blames his failing memory partly on this experience and the violence he was subject to as a hostage. His family decides to send him to Deir el-Ṣalīb, although he implores them not to, as he feels fit to sustain a normal life in society. During his stay in this hospital he narrates his life prior to coming to the hospital, including his love affair with a married woman who came from the other(Muslim) side of Beirut leaving her husband behind, and staying with the narrator and his sister Asmaa until the fighting subsided, at which point she escaped, crossed the line into West Beirut to join her husband and family. Although the narrative starts with the narrator's confession that he had killed this woman, it ends with him refuting this declaration, claiming that his memory fails him frequently. Throughout the narrative, the narrator reflects on the complementarity of the masculine and the feminine, on how he needs the feminine element to become whole, human.

Khalil's non-heteronormative performativity of masculinity in *The Stone of Laughter* and the nameless protagonist's hallucinations about his feminine genes as an

embryo in *Disciples of Passion* have led the vast majority of critics who have studied these novels to label these characters as "androgynous," combining female and masculine characteristics. One can argue that the mention of androgyny might have traces in the texts in question, but as I argue below, analyzing the texts from this prism thwarts both texts' attempt to deconstruct the binary of masculinity and femininity by consolidating both genders in a binary structure that excludes the rest of gender expressions. What the critics have been identifying as androgynous I perceive as the unruliness of the male body to conform to the imperatives of heteronormative masculinity in a simultaneous attempt to ward off the psychic violence of the war. In contrast to the thesis of the androgynous that contributes to the reproduction and essentialization of the feminine and masculine genders as they are normatively defined and performed, the thesis of the unruliness of the male body allows for the dissociation of heteronormative performativity of gender, decentering masculinity and recentering the feminist discourse around something other than the veil because, to use Afsaneh Najmabadi's words, "if we use gender analytically, sources about men are also sources about women."[3] For, as both novels end with the victimization of the women characters—Khalil beats and rapes his neighbor and the narrator in *Ahl al-Hawa* claims to have sequestered his lover against her will and then killed her, only to deny the killing later—I will argue below that the grip heteronormativity has over the male characters extends to victimize women in this society as well.

For Hoda Barakat has been facing recurring questions about the reason behind her choice to have male protagonists in her writing, unlike other women writers who

[3] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity.* 2005. 1.

feature the female protagonists in most of their texts. One of the answers can be found in an article Barakat published in *Mawāqif* in 1994, wherein she expresses her impatience with the academic secular feminist discourse that is perpetually centered around the veil. In this article, Barakat voices the imperative need for her to justify, if not to apologize, for not privileging, or as she expresses it, for not “obsessing” with women’s issues in her writings, although she admits it is an important and valid question. In this article, Barakat relates growing up in a family that was not affected by consumerism, and where the father did not oppress the mother because of her inability to work outside the house and earn money. She also recounts that she does not consider that her upbringing was oppressive as it is typically presumed for an Arab woman. This upbringing, however, contrasted with the parents’ conviction that their family was incomplete until the birth of a boy after his three sisters, the oldest of which was the author. She recounts her mother’s tears and sadness, which disappeared and were replaced by a sense of wholeness after the birth of the little brother. She then relates her encounter with the many forms of oppression women were facing after she moved to live in Beirut with its complexities and contradictions, and she became aware of the political and social problems facing the Lebanese society in general and women in particular, whose conditions she sees as undissociated from the complete picture. Most importantly, Barakat explains that the work being done for the liberation of the Arab woman provokes her as it demonstrates to her that this work is part of and symptomatic of the failures of what is being attempted for the liberation or modernization of the Arab human being or intellect. She also asserts her conviction that literature is not to yield to the pressure of the collectivity; rather, its dissent takes a more indirect and concealed

shape that cannot be controlled easily. For to protest the community is to protest authority, not only the authority that oppresses women, but also the one that claims to protect her and champion her cause.

For Barakat, this deeply engrained political and social authority consists of all the ideological discourses that are reproduced to benefit their authors while having little in common with reality, hence producing nothing of substance. She provides the example of the veil, against which the advocates of women's issues have persistently been siding since the nineteenth-century *Nahda*; what's more, their discourse has not changed since that time, referring to it as "the phenomenon of the veil" as though it is an incidental contingency. Barakat decries this discourse's disconnection from reality, as it refuses to admit its mistakes and its commonalities with the authority that imposes the veil in its narrowmindedness and bigotry, for it opposes it on the surface, not in essence. Barakat does not spare the secular feminist (mainly female) academics who align themselves with this discourse, bringing what she calls "a stupid intelligence" that ends up reinforcing fundamentalism and radicalism. Rather than seeing the veiled woman as a victim, Barakat asserts that veiled women have agency and are successful individuals, and their veil is an accusation and a marker of the failure of the advocates of women's condition. These women object to the economic and political failures of their governments; after getting an education and joining the workforce, their disappointment is such that they would rather endure their husbands' oppression rather than their employers'. Their veil has become their protection against a hostile and pathological public space, proving once again that woman's condition is symptomatic of her society's health. Barakat refuses to instrumentalize her writing for women's struggle, asserting

that literature is much too complex to be strapped for a cause or another. It is the author's way, she concludes, to wear her own veil, i.e., resistance. She can only see the world in masculinity and femininity; she also sees it in a complex relationship between the two, and she aims that her writing is "both [genders] together, completely." [4]

I explained Barakat's position at length to illustrate a point that she made more than twenty years ago, yet is still discarded by many academics. Her article also opens the space for reflection on Arab women's writing, as it is always already presumed to have women's issues as the guiding principle of its thematic and aesthetics, as well as the imperative to adhere to a secular ideology that privileges the subject of women's oppression at the detriment of the literariness of the text, hence restricting women's literature and reducing it to sociological and ethnic studies that reproduce the Orientalizing and othering practices blamed on western critics in general. Another issue facing women authors writing about the war is the assumption that all women are anti-war, associating them uncritically with pacifism and anti-war stances, hence delegitimizing any form of war and neglecting the participation of some women in the war, as Elise Salem Manganaro argues.[5] Salem's remark calls attention to the homogenizing approach to women's writing. Yet, and even though one can argue that all women are not anti-war, war remains mainly a man's venture, and the mutual reinforcement of patriarchy and war is undeniable, and it is from this perspective that Hoda Barakat tries to understand the mechanisms behind the making of a militiaman, detailing in the process the detrimental effects of war, which is to be considered in this context as indispensable to capitalism and to the nation-state—two quintessential

[4] Hoda Barakat, "Ru'yia wa-'tirāḍ." *Mawāqif.* 1994. 210-215.
[5] Elise Salem Manganaro, "Negotiating Feminist Ideologies Within Lebanese Women's Writings."

manifestations of modernity. For although war creates cataclysmic conditions that enable the emergence of marginalized social forces and groups, it does not enable the expression of non-heteronormative gender forms, contrary to what it has been argued; as the example of Khalil shows, war makes it impossible for men to be anything other than hyper-virile fighters.

Hoda Barakat makes it clear that her texts reflect her literary vision and philosophy as well as her worries and preoccupations as a writer and a human being, one of which happens to be her condition as a Lebanese woman who lived through a war; through this reasoning, Barakat contributes to the understanding of women's issues as an inseparable part of the social and political context of society. In fact, Kifah Hanna traces the development of the feminist discourse in Arab women's writing, observing that post-1967 defeat Arab women's literature brought women's issues to the public realm by making women's liberation part of the wider political domain. By positioning their characters within the nation, Arab women writers politicized the feminist discourse.[6] From another perspective, Rafik Chikhani argues against the categorization of writers according to their gender, because such categorization burdens the texts with preset expectations that assign them a certain sensitivity and a certain space. He rather advocates for an androgynous reading that does not take as a primary criterion the author's gender, but their individual style, citing many examples from French literature, which ignores the fact that Arabic literature is much more politically contextualized than French.[7] Although this reading has the benefit of erasing the prejudices deriving from the author's gender, it risks removing the differential positionalities of different genders

[6] Kifah Hanna, *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel.* 2016. 4.
[7] Rafik Chikhani, "L'androgyne." *Bahithat: 2.* 1995. 207-216.

in society, as realistically they do not enjoy the same status, nor do they occupy the positions. By homogenizing genders across the spectrum, this reading does not take reality into consideration and becomes disconnected from the problems facing the writer because of their gender position. Hence, my analysis of Barakat's texts takes as its central concern the author's exploration of the construction of masculinity in light of the pressure exerted by patriarchal society as well as the war. From this perspective, and in light of Accad's claims, Barakat traces the process of victimization of men by both heteronormativity and war.

In her explanation of the fact that Barakat's protagonists are men, Barbara Winckler points out that women's writing is reduced to autobiographical writing and to women's issues. By choosing male protagonists, Barakat expands the problematic she intends to treat in her texts. Indeed, in a book published prior to the emergence of Hoda Barakat's oeuvre, in which she examines the relation between sexuality and war in the context of Lebanon, Evelyne Accad explains how men and women authors represent war differently in their texts. While "all of the writers show how war and violence have roots in sexuality and in the treatment of women, [and] most of the characters meet a tragic fate due to the war, … women are the principal victims of both political and sexual violence."[8] Furthermore, Accad observes that in men authors' fiction, men characters' death is always depicted in heroic terms, as they are the victims of the war; male protagonists are also depicted as progressive in regard to relationships, but when it comes to women's liberation they hesitate to actualize their progressive visions. In short, men authors' fiction is inscribed in codes of masculinity, and seem aware of the link between war and sexuality, but "their difference from the female authors is that they

[8] Evelyn Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks in the Middle East.* 1990. 4.

are unable to imagine alternatives."[9] In her texts, though, Hoda Barakat narrates the plight of her male protagonists as they are victimized by the heteronormativity of patriarchy, intensified by the pressure of war. One of Hoda Barakat's departures of other Lebanese writers comes from her vision about writing: "When I write about men and women I try to be man and woman—and to go beyond both. After all, writing means stepping outside all boundaries."[10]

Barakat's works have been much analyzed from the prism of androgyny, which ends up bolstering and essentializing the binary of masculinity and femininity rather than evaluating her aesthetics as one aiming to transcend this duality in order to undermine the oppressing mechanisms of heteronormativity, reinforced by the pressure of the raging war. In her study of Hoda Barakat's *The Stone of Laughter,* Samira Aghacy describes the novel as one about an "effeminate man…trying to survive the war…[told by] a female narrator."[11] Aghacy claims that Khalil is emblematic of "a new mode masculinity that became prevalent during the war"; she argues that Khalil's masculinity is of the "less aggressive, indeed effeminate type," and he harbors contradictory sentiments toward women, and definitely blames his mother for his lack of patriotism.[12] Aghacy depicts and analyzes Khalil and his life in binary terms anchored in masculinity and femininity; any characteristics he displays and any activities he partakes in that do not fit with the heteronormative understanding of masculinity she classifies as feminine. It is true that the author's epistemological framework of sexuality is constructed through

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[9] Ibid. 163.
[10] Cited in Barbara Winckler, "Androgyny as Metaphor: Hoda Barakat and *The Stone of Laughter.*" 386.
[11] Samira Aghacy, *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967.* 2009. 134-135.
[12] Ibid. 135. Aghacy bases this remark on her claim that one of the outcomes of the 1967 defeat has been the proliferation of non-heteronormative masculinities and their representations in the literature and arts in the Arab world.

this binary; however, Barakat published this book in 1990, a time during which Modern Standard Arabic had not elaborated a vocabulary specific to the variations of gender spectrum as it has now thanks to activism and raising of consciousness about the subject. The lack of terms of reference to whatever lacks masculine traits implicates a relegation to the feminine realm with a certain tinge of disdain. Hence, both the male narrator and the protagonist refer to Khalil in disdainful feminine or pathological terms; as Khalil waits for Naji's visit, the narrator states,

" يقرف خليل من وضعه كمنتظر، ويقرف من شكل إشفاقه على نفسه ويقرف من المطلّقة المدعبلة التي فيه" or as "زوجة جنس آخر ", and as Khalil tries to convince himself that he is heterosexual after he wakes up from a homoerotic dream, he wonders whether he is not "شاذّ ", which Marilyn Booth has translated into "queer."[13] Although the term "queer" has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ community, شاذّ has not; it has been replaced with مثلي, although it is still used in some circles hostile to non-heteronormative sexualities. Hence, Booth's choice of "queer" is justifiable, but following both terms' trajectories in their respective languages, it would have been more appropriate to opt for "deviant," as it reflects the pathologizing perspective with which homosexuality was perceived in the 1980s and early 1990s in Lebanon. Nevertheless, Aghacy's book was published in 2009, and by that year gender studies had transcended the dichotomy in which the 1980s were still dwelling. It is noteworthy that Foucault's *L'histoire de la sexualité* was translated into English in 1978 and into Arabic in 2004; Butler's *Gender Trouble* was first published in 1990. I include this brief history of the publication of the seminal works that inaugurated the field of gender studies to situate the current discussion within a broader context and

[13] *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 28, 133, 86. These are translated in *The Stone of Laughter* as "Khalil was disgusted with himself for waiting like this, disgusted at his self-pity and disgusted at the way he behaved like a plump divorcee," "I'm a wife of the wrong sex," and "queer." 23, 115, 75, respectively.

explain the discrepancy that I perceive in Hoda Barakat's gender terminology, which reflects the dearth of the non-derogatory terms and the absence, in the imaginary as well as in the epistemology, of the terms that reflect an ontology that had yet to be made sense of. Nonetheless, this explanation is not to be considered a condemnation; on the contrary, it is a justification for the restricted imaginary that conceives gender as polarized between femininity and masculinity, and finds no term other than شاذّ to refer to Khalil's homoerotic inclinations. On another level, this discourse about gender mimics the discourse that posits that any gender expression that does not correspond to heteronormative masculinity is labelled feminine, as a way to illustrate the extent to which heteronormativity has infiltrated the psyche of the narrator and the protagonist who comes to regard his homosexual desire with disdain, which reflects his guilt for experiencing it. Critics justify androgyny by the fact that Khalil refuses a legible gender; however, this decision does not mean that he fluctuates between genders, nor does he combine both; rather, he hesitates to act on his homoerotic desire, because he has interiorized the heterosexual imperative whose grip on him is strengthened because of the surrounding war.

Rather than reiterate this binary in their analysis, contemporary critics ought to examine it from the critical distance allowed by time and the deep transformation of the study of gender that has taken place since the 1980s, particularly as we examine works from the Arab world, where gender typologies and the representation of gender in literature and art has been complicated by the intrusion of Western modernity in the nineteenth century. For critics have appreciated and unanimously applauded the literary and thematic qualities of *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik,* as well as its courageous depiction of male

homosexuality in a time of war.[14] As a matter of fact, it is incongruous to use the term "androgyny" in reference to Barakat's strategy and characters, as the author writes in Arabic, and the equivalent of the term "androgyny" in Arabic is زنمردة, which comes from the Persian زن مرد, meaning "woman man." In her articles and interviews reflecting on her texts, not only does Barakat never uses this term, she also repeatedly confirms that to be a writer is to be neither feminine, nor masculine; it is to transcend the limits of gender, to be beyond this binary. Nonetheless, "androgyny" does exactly this—it restricts gender to a binary from which there it is hard to escape. To be androgynous is not the same as to be beyond gender; in fact, it is just the opposite—to be confined to the binary of masculine and feminine. In another study of *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik,* Samira Aghacy concludes that "the novel demonstrates, if anything, that the state of androgyny is unattainable and that the gap between the masculine and feminine worlds is unbridgeable. Khalil has finally managed to stage a new self largely disconnected from the real inner self."[15] While I agree that this Khalil is far removed from the one with whom the narrative starts, it is not a proof that androgyny is unattainable; it is rather a substantiation of the conspiration between patriarchy and war to consolidate the performativity of heteronormative masculinity through the collapse of virility and masculinity and the production of the hyper-masculinized fighter, which in turn is an indication of the permeability of the public and domestic sphere, of the long and strong grip biopolitics has over one's sexuality. The novel's denouement proves, if anything,

[14] In an article published in the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbār* in 2014, Hoda Barakat reflects on her first novel (which took her five years to write) and the conditions during which she published it as she was leaving Lebanon for Paris. She mentions that the accolades the novel received were probably due to the prize the novel won; most critics did not understand the novel, and some of them even analyzed it so inaccurately that their analysis went counter to what the novel is trying to achieve.
[15] Samira Aghacy, "Hoda Barakat's *Stone of Laughter*: Androgyny or Polarization." *Journal of Arabic Literature* (1998). 200.

that the war normalizes masculinity perforce so much so any non-conforming performativity is doomed to failure.

Whether it is attributed to the narrator or the protagonist, androgyny has been the most discussed attribute among critics, who have identified it as a strategy, a metaphor, or a transitional phase as the adolescent Khalil grows into a broad-shouldered man.[16] For Barbara Winckler, Barakat uses androgyny as a metaphor in *The Stone of Laughter,* basing this androgyny on Khalil's sexuality and physique, and extending it to the political realm.[17]This metaphor allows the reader to perceive androgyny in all realms, blurring boundaries between public and private, political and sexual, and sexual orientation. For Winckler believes that Khalil's sexuality is ambiguous, and this ambiguity spills over other domains in the novel. I agree that constructing the analysis through the frame of androgyny as ambiguity can be productive, but it is based on a false foundation and leads to projections that are already clear from a Foucauldian reading aware that the political is always already present in and regulating the private, particularly the sexual. Besides the argument that Khalil's non-normatively masculine traits do not make him androgynous, the falsity of the foundation lies in the fact that the object of Khalil's sexual desire is not ambiguous; on the contrary, and as shown above, it is Khalil's suppression of it and interiorization of the guilt associated with homoerotic desire that it at work in the narrative.

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[16] Mona Fayad, "Strategic Androgyny: Passing as Masculine in Barakat's *Stone of Laughter*;" Barbara Winckler, "Androgyny as Metaphor: Hoda Barakat and *The Stone of Laughter*;" Samira Aghacy, "Hoda Barakat's *The Stone of Laughter*: Androgyny or Polarization;" and Ken Seigneurie, "Decay of Elegy in *The Stone of Laughter.*" In *Standing by the Ruins.* This is a non-exhaustive list of the kind of study that *The Stone of Laughter* has received.
[17] Barbara Winckler. "Androgyny as Metaphor."

Other critics perceive androgyny in the narrator, as a feminine voice emerges at the end of the novel. Mona Fayad states that *The Stone of Laughter* presents two figures who are marginal to the war: the homosexual Khalil, and the androgynous narrator.[18] As the narrator speaks in the first person masculine voice throughout the text, but a feminine voice emerges in the novel's last page, Fayad decides that this narrator is androgynous. Contrary to what Fayad and other critics maintain, I argue that voice that emerges at the end of the novel is neither the narrator's nor the author's; it is the function of the author, as I will explain below. To discuss Barakat's novels in terms of androgyny is to reduce them to this binary of the feminine and the masculine, while what Khalil is in fact exploring throughout the narrative is the possibility of living one's masculinity without subscribing to the norms of heterosexuality imposed on men. This performativity is not to be classified as feminine; it can be considered living one's manhood without the performativity of masculinity and virility as prescribed by the heterosexual imperative. Nonetheless, the narrator as well as the protagonist use the term "feminine" in reference to this way of life. Critics follow suit without giving much thought about the psychic mechanism of Khalil's transformation. For Khalil's violent and virulent virilization does not come really as a surprise if one carefully observes the extent to which heteronormativity—along with patriotism—haunt Khalil's psyche, as he neither initiates homosexual intercourse with Naji and Youssef, the two men to whom he was attracted, nor surrenders to "the Brother's" sexual advances, even though he confesses to the reader that he feels a desire for him: " في ذلك المكان عرف خليل أن ما يشدّه إلى الأخ، ما يمغنطه هو معرفته لشدّة رغبة الأخ فيه. رغبة هي من القوّة بحيث راحت تتوالد داخل غرضها، أيّ خليل، إذ لم يعد

[18] Mona Fayad, "Strategic Androgyny: Passing as Masculine in Barakat's *Stone of Laughter.*" 162-182.

rejection of Khalil persists in his "ممكناً أي تجاهل. يرغب الناس ويشتهون من يدركون مدى رغبتهم بهم."[19] the Brother's advances: " أننا حتماً نصير نشبه من نمارس معه الجنس، وأنه لا يريد أن يشبه هذا الرجل."[20] confirming that he has gained control over his desire and over his body. The same way as gender is constituted through performativity, Timothy Mitchell considers that nationality is performed through patriotism, one form of which is partaking in the war, which in turn reinforces normative masculinity in patriarchal society.[21] Whence Khalil's revolt against his mother, who according to him, failed to inculcate patriotic sentiments in him, and whom he secretly blames for the homosexual inclinations, because she would rather pretend that he is a girl than let him fight the war: " صار يخجل بأمّه الجاهلة الخائنة، صار يخجل بها كثيراً... أين أمي من نساء قرطاجة اللواتي أذبن مصاغهن وحليهنّ وطناجر المطبخ لصنع السلاح، قصصن شعورهن الطويلة اللمّاعة ليجدلنها حبالاً للأسطول الوطني الذي يدافع عن شرف الوطن."[22] By highlighting the mother's role in passing to her male children the values of virility and patriotism, the aut author underlines the parallel between the two, as a fighter's valiance is measure by his virility.[23]

Fayad considers "Barakat's use of androgyny as a strategy through which to approach gender construction," positing that the text resists gender stereotyping by registering "Khalil's reluctance to abandon one type of gender identity in favor of

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[19] *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 221. "In that place, Khalil realized that what drew him to the Brother, what drew him like a magnet, was that he knew how intensely the Brother desired him. Desire so strong that it began to be reproduced in its object, that is, Khalil for to ignore it was no longer possible. People desire and lust for those who realize the extent of their desire for them" (*The Stone of Laughter* 194).

[20] Ibid. 222. "we certainly become like the people we have sex with and I do not want to be like this man" (194).

[21] Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity.* See particularly chapter 6, "Heritage and Violence." 179-208.

[22] *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 128-129. "he began to find his mother, that ignorant traitor of a mother, embarrassing, he began to feel deeply embarrassed… What is my mother compared to the women of Carthage, who melted down their jewelry and finery, who cut their long, shining hair to plait into ropes for the national fleet which defended the country's honor" (111).

[23] See my discussion of virility from Jacques Hassoun's perspective in chapter two.

another."[24] In contrast to Fayad's reasoning, I argue that Khalil is not hesitating whether he adopts feminine or masculine gender identity; rather, he is reluctant to act on his homoerotic desire, which produces in him feeling of shame and guilt. Khalil recalls the days before he entered language and was forced to pick a gender. To be "outside of gender" as the narrator claims is not the same thing as to be androgynous. The narrator states that once one is gendered, one ceases to speak in a voice and start to speak in a language, and needs to know whose language is it. It is the entrance into the language/law of the father that initiates the gendered subject, who must perform a legible gender. To say that one is outside of gender means that one's gender is illegible, which amounts to saying that one's gender is outside of normative gender classifications:

كلّما تكلّم كانت شكواه تخاف، تنفر منه وتبتعد إلى الخارج، خارج المملكة التي يعرفها والتي سوف تموت النساء فيها. وبعد الآن لن يتكلم بصوت بل بلغة.. وعليه أن يعرف لغة من. كل صوتي سوف يكون خارج لغتي، وسوف تتقشّر عنه وتنخلع كما انخلعت الآن ولن أستطيع أبداً... أن أعرف من كنت وأن أتذكر كما ينبغي التذكّر. التفاحة الصغيرة التي علقت في حنجرته دون أن يقضم منها سوف تحيل كلّ الألوان، من الآن فصاعداً إلى تنويعات حمراء.[25]

It is critical to note in the above passage the mention that women will die in the kingdom from which Khalil is excluded, i.e., the kingdom of heterosexual masculinity as well as of the language, the law of the father that sidelines women. This moment signals the author's concern with the exclusion of women as well as non-conforming men from this kingdom, highlighting the shared plight of the categories of society that are not defined

[24] Mona Fayad. 164, 166.

[25] *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 161-162. "Whenever he spoke, his complaints fled from him in fear and ran away outside, outside the kingdom in which he knows the women will die. From now on he will not speak in a voice but in a language… and he has to know in whose language. All of my voice will be outside my language, my language will be peeled of my voice and it will be stripped, as I was stripped now and I will never…be able to know the person I was and to remember him as he should be remembered. The little apple that hangs in his throat without being eaten away will change all colors, from now on, to variations on red" (142-143).

as heterosexual men. It is at this moment of extreme sickness that Khalil realizes that his survival, which will be effectuated through the care of the self, will inevitably include accomplishing heterosexual masculinity. Indeed, the end of the novel illustrates the collapsing of virility and masculinity, and the damage this collapse brings to both men and women. If to affirm one's heteronormative masculinity is to be deprived of moral values, commit violence on others, be they animals or women—as does Khalil by raping and beating his neighbor and kicking the ḥajjeh's cat—then the author shows the hollowness and bankruptcy of these two categories and the need for physical violence and aggression to validate them.

Throughout the novel, Khalil maintains his control over his desire for Naji and then for Youssef, never expressing it to them or to anybody from his surroundings. He disavows his desire, and then as they both die, he also disavows his loss by not getting to publicly mourn their death. In fact, in a passage that switches seamlessly from Khalil narrating in the first person to the narrator referring to Khalil in the third, we can read Khalil's lament for not getting the opportunity to grieve the loss of Naji and Youssef, in contrast to women, whom he envies, and who mourn their dead, which allows the opportunity to process their grief publicly, express solidarity with each other, and even domesticate death in the process:

يا للنساء، فكّر خليل المستوحش في غرفته وهو يئن حسداً.. إن كل الحكمة معطاة لهن. حكمة هذه الحياة وموتها وحكمة ما هو أبعد منها... يبكين الميت فيدفنّه لأنهن يعرفن التراب وكل حقول جاذبيته ودورانه أفلاكه... إنهن يدجنّ الموت بالسليقة. ينزلنه عن مطيّته يجلسنه قربهن باستحياء لكن بثقة القادر... وأنا كمن يسرقون منه موتاه، قال خليل بتحسّر على نفسه.. أو كمن يسرقون منه قتلاه ويتركونه على طرف الصحراء، قبل القتل بلحظات... إني كمن يربّي قتلاه بدموع العين.. ينقش صورتهم نقطة نقطة ودائماً قبل أن تستوي الرغبة، قبل أن يلوح ما يشبه موسم الينابيع أو

دائماً قبل أن تتضح رغبة خليل الدفينة الكامنة بقتلهم يقتلونهم ويسرقون جثثهم ويتركون له نقصان البكاء وغياب ملكة الدفن ليذكّروه دائماً بأنه ليس رجلاً ليستوهم وليس امرأة ليصدق.[26]

This double disavowal reinforces the heterosexual within him, hence his unexpected violence at the end. The fact that he does not let his homoerotic desire materialize—he neither accepts it nor pursues the men who are the objects of his desire—emanates from two sources: first, this desire is surrounded by guilt, and second, the chaos, the human losses, and the violence generated by the Civil War around him is greatly unsettling to individuals living this war. As the reader watches him withdrawing into his apartment as a way of isolating himself from the violence in the hopes of preserving his mental stability, he feels that he needs to contain and suppress his homoerotic penchants in a way of taking control of his own situation. For giving free reins to his homoerotic desire, and acting on it, would only add to his disarray.

For Khalil feels a sense of guilt and inadequacy for experiencing homosexual desire, which he might be blaming for his lack of patriotism as well. The awareness of the prohibition on homosexuality prevents the grieving process, Judith Butler tells us, which "effectively turns homosexual desire back upon itself. This turning back upon itself is precisely the action of self-beratement and guilt."[27] Furthermore, this folding-in of homosexuality and it preservation within heterosexuality as a constant threat in fact

[26] Hoda Barakat, *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 151-152. "Women, thought Khalil, moaning in envy alone in his room…all the wisdom is given to women. Wisdom of life and death and wisdom of what is farthest from it…they weep for the dead man and they bury him because they know this clay and all its fields of gravity, they know the turning of the planets…They tame death, instinctively. They make it dismount and make it sit by them, shyly but with the confidence of mastery…I'm like someone whose dead have been stolen away, Khalil said to himself, regretfully… someone whose two dead have been stolen from him, someone who's left on the edge of the desert a few seconds before the murder… someone who raises his dead with the tears of his eyes… carves their pictures chip by chip and always, before Khalil's buried desire to kill them makes itself clear they kill them and they steal away their corpses, leaving him only the inability to weep for them and the lack of will to bury them, to remind him, always, that he is not man enough to forge his world of dreams and not woman enough to accept"(*The Stone of Laughter* 131-132).
[27] "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification." 142-143.

incorporates homosexuality as an identification with heterosexuality; the homosexual is ceaselessly defined in relation to the heterosexual. As the male narrator, who is a third-person limited narrator whose knowledge is limited to Khalil's thoughts and whereabouts, describes Khalil's physique, he does so in a comparison to other heterosexual men, highlighting Khalil's inadequacy from the perspective of social norms. It is this depiction that inaugurates the novel: "لم تكن ساقا خليل طويلتين بالقدر الكافي. فيما كان ناجي ينفض رأسه بخفة لتتطاير عنه قطرات المطر، كان خليل يلهث وراءه وهو يخبط قدميه في الأرض محاولا إزالة الوحل عن حذائه، على الدرجة ما قبل الأخيرة، قبل أن يتقدم ويلحق بناجي إلى داخل الشقة..."[28] In the first part of the narrative, Khalil relates his attachment to Naji in self-deprecating terms that betray his self-loathing and liken him to women:

> يقرف خليل من وضعه كمنتظر، ويقرف من شكل إشفاقه على نفسه ويقرف من المطلّقة المدعبلة التي فيه... استغرق خليل في جسم المطلّقة المدعبلة. واستغرق في تمنّي أن يوصد العالم أبوابه دون ناجي. قال خليل في نفسه إنني أشبه مطلّقة ناجي التي ما تزال تخفي عشقها، تدّعي الصداقة مع من تتشهى أن يضع إصبعه على كتفها ويسحب عنه شعرة عالقة بعد أن كان يضعه في بزرة الروح فتنفجر... يا للتشبيه![29]

After Naji's death, however, Khalil becomes confused and is about to lose control of his mastery over himself " لذا صار يخربط كثيراً ولذا تشقق سطح سداداته وغزته الأحلام المشكّكة و فكّكت رباطات تماسكه إلى التباسات كثيرة أقلّها كانت أحلامه الجنسية التي كانت تهزّه كعاصفة عنيفة."[30] At this moment, as Khalil doubts his ability to overcome and contain his homoerotic desi

[28] Ibid. 7. "Khalil's legs were not long enough. While Naji tossed his head, scattering the raindrops, Khalil panted behind him, on the step before last, stamping his feet to get rid of the mud on his shoes before he caught up and went into the apartment with him…" (*The Stone of Laughter* 7).
[29] Ibid. 28-29. "Khalil was disgusted with himself for waiting like this, disgusted at his self-pity and disgusted at the way he behaved like a plump divorcee… Khalil was absorbed in the body of the plump divorcee, in wishing that the world would close its door on Naji. He said to himself, I'm like Naji's divorcee, who still hides her passion and begs for the friendship of whomever she desires to brush a stray hair from her shoulder with his finger, after he has put it into the kernel of her soul and made it explode… what a comparison!" (23-24).
[30] Ibid. 86. "so it (Khalil's body) began to get confused, the surface of his inhibitions was split open and his suspicious dreams invaded him, they unfastened the ties by which he kept a grip on many intricate and ambiguous matters, the least of which were his erotic dreams which used to shake him like a violent storm" (75).

desire, that his physique, considered not very masculine by society's norms, comes to haunt him again. He repeats to himself, in an attempt to assuage his anxiety, that his not-so-masculine physical appearance does not make him a not-so-masculine man, and that what he experiences "اعطال موقّتة ما هو إلا أزمة نفسية فرضها الخارج المجنون... ولذا فهي أزمة عابرة وستزول... وهو حتماً يشتهي النساء، وبقوّة وقابلية عظيمتين، لا يشتهي امرأة معينة في الوقت الحاضر."[31] ited the Hence, the impossibility to grieve for Naji reign homoerotic desire that Khalil has been suppressing under normal circumstances. At the resurgence of this desire, Khalil's suppression tactics become more forceful and direct, using language, the symbolic, to refute the validity of his dreams, acknowledging that although his analysis of these dreams helps to improve his state, it is not successful in reducing his anxiety, probably because he has not much faith in psychology.[32]

The sense of guilt Khalil experiences does not emanate only from the fact that he harbors homoerotic desire; Khalil suspects a connection between his sexual inclinations and his lack of patriotism, (which might reflect in turn the author's sense of guilt for leaving Lebanon in 1989, as this novel is the first to be published after her departure from the country).[33] When Youssef consults with Khalil before deciding to join the militia so that he would be able to provide for his mother and sister, Khalil expresses approval, only to feel guilty afterwards as he

[31] Ibid. 86. "the temporary breakdown that he was suffering was only a psychological crisis that the mad world outside had imposed upon him…so it was only a passing crisis, it would come to an end…he definitely desired women but, at this moment in time, he did not feel particularly susceptible to any particular woman" (75).
[32] Ibid. 86.
[33] Even though Hoda Barakat confirms to Youssef Rakha that she does not regret leaving Lebanon, she confesses that had she known that the war was going to end in 1990, she would not have left the country in 1989, just a year before the end of the fighting. See Youssef Rakha's "Hoda Barakat: Starting Over" in *Al-Ahram Weekly.*

learns of Youssef's death. Hence, Khalil experiences guilt not only for failing to prevent Youssef from becoming a fighter, as partaking in the war turned him into an uncontrollable militiaman and an aggressive and arrogant man. In fact, his sense of guilt that emanates from his perceived role in Youssef's death evokes the narrator's confession that his cowardice is the reason behind him pushing Khalil to take on certain acts. From this angle, then, Khalil's sexuality comes to haunt him as he believes his cowardice is due to his lack of patriotism, in turn blamed on the fact that his mother had not inculcated in him through her disregard for his masculinity; hence, Khalil maintains his willingness to stay in control of his desire and his body in his interaction with the "brother" who attempts to seduce him. Although Khalil confesses that he also desires the brother, he declines his sexual advances for the sake of preserving control of his body, which endows him with a sense of sovereignty over his body and the chaotic situation. Consequently, I argue that although Khalil struggles with homoerotic desire throughout the novel, the fact that this desire never materializes physically demonstrates that heterosexuality haunts him throughout until it materializes in acts of violence. This process is fed and sustained by the war, a capitalistic and patriarchal venture that transforms the men involved in it into aggressive, unethical, and violent heterosexual killers.[34]

These violent aggressors are, just like Khalil at the end of the novel, are men who laugh, because they have been transformed through the alchemy of the

[34] The valorization of violent and aggressive masculinity in the war has been commonly recognized, but the connection between the lack of ethics and the hyper-masculinized militiaman can be inferred from Sune Haugbolle's account of the association between the figure of the "repentant militiaman" and his small physical body size. See "The (Little) Militiaman: Memory and Militarized Masculinity in Post-War Lebanon."

stone of laughter. This laughter is not only an indication of these men's absence of feeling, as well as lack of concern and empathy for the world around them; nor is it only a suggestion that they form a community in which they laugh together, because laughter is a quintessentially collective activity.[35] In fact, and most importantly, laughter as the reader witnesses it in the transformed Khalil is an expression of contradictories: superiority as well as weakness; pride as well as aberration; and finally a reaction to the ugliness in humans.[36] As this stone of laughter invokes the philosopher's stone, which purifies metals by transforming them into gold, one thinks of Khalil's masculinity purified from the non-heteronormative contaminations that had been affecting it. The irony of this transformation also lies in the fact that a woman emerges at the end of the narrative to claim her place in effectuating this change, although she expresses her surprise at the fact that this "male who laughs" or "ذكر يضحك "has escaped her control.[37] Simultaneously, Barakat's condemnation of the gender politics of patriarchy and war highlights the victimization of men through their sexuality, and this denunciation of the regulating mechanisms of these forces emerges at the end of the novel. Hence the intervention of the voice whom I call after Michel Foucault "the author-function."

Critics have variously interpreted the woman's voice that emerges in the novel's last page, addressing Khalil with an expression mixing disbelief and distress at his dramatic transformation: " كم تغيّرتَ منذ وصفتك في الصفحات الأولى! صرت تعرف أكثر مني. الكيمياء. حجر

[35] Henri Bergson, *Le Rire.*
[36] Charles Baudelaire. "De L'essence du rire et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques."
[37] I translate ذكر يضحك into "a male who laughs" rather than "a man who laughs" as Marilyn Booth has done, because I believe that male renders Khalil's transformation in a way "man" does not.

This voice "الضحك. وغاب خليل، صار ذكراً يضحك. وأنا بقيت امرأة تكتب. خليل: بطلي الحبيب. بطلي الحبيب..."[38] is sometimes interpreted as the androgynous narrator's, other times it is the author who comes to address the protagonist she created, and other times it is the narrator who has been all the way feminine because the narrator is in fact one with the protagonist. As mentioned above, even though the narrative voice seamlessly slips into the first person does not necessarily mean that they are one. It is the narration that gives voice to Khalil directly without the intervention of the narrator's voice, transitioning the narrative into Khalil's stream of consciousness.[39] Also, there are indications throughout the Arabic text that the narrator is male. For instance, as the narrator reflects on Khalil's actions, explaining that he, the narrator, makes Khalil do things for him because of his own lack of courage: " الحقيقة أنني أجرّب فيه.. أجرّب فيه كيفية العودة إلى كنف الجماعة، أجرّب فيه ما أقصّر في اختياره بنفسي لأنني جبان. أدفعه لأرى النتيجة وأنا كلمن كلصّ خلف جدار."[40] Accordingly, the feminine voice that emerges at the end of the novel, I argue, is that of what Michel Foucault calls "the autho author-function," which is "characteristic of a mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society," and in the case of *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* it is characteristic of the mode of existence of a certain literary discourse by a woman that emerges to signal its accomplishments as well as limitations.[41]

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[38] *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 234-235. "You've changed so much since I described you in the first pages. You've come to know more than I do. Alchemy. The stone of laughter. Khalil is gone, he has become a man who laughs. And I remain a woman who writes. Khalil: my darling hero. My darling hero…" (209).

[39] In her *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel,* Kifah Hanna discusses at length Barakat's appropriation of surrealism in her war novels, including *The Stone of Laughter*, detailing the surrealist features and comparing them to those of the French surrealists, which sometimes ends up simplifying and decontextualizing Barakat's texts as imitations of surrealist "original" works. One of these surrealist techniques is the frequent shifts of the narrative voice into streams of consciousness.

[40] *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 132-133. "The truth is, I'm using him to test what I'm not able to test for myself because I'm a coward. I push him to see what happens while I hide like a thief behind the wall"(*The Stone of Laughter* 115).

[41] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" all translations from this article are mine unless otherwise noted.

Michel Foucault identifies a function in a text that he calls "the author-function," which is a voice that can be found in the schism between the author and the narrator. This author-function can exceed the texts a certain author has written; it can encompass the ensemble of a genre or a discourse or a certain mode of writing that this author has enabled and initiated and that did not exist before this author. This author-function, Foucault explains, creates the conditions of possibility, creates the space, for a certain discourse that did not exist before; this discourse enables also differences that are always in relation to it, hence creating a heterogeneous space that allows for subsequent transformations and application possibilities. From this perspective, then, we can see the emergence of this feminine voice as Barakat's indication that she is initiating a new discourse as a woman; she creates a male protagonist whose life she controls and directs; she analyzes the detrimental effects of war and heteronormative masculinity on men's psyche as no Arab woman writer has done before, opening a heterogeneous space that enables henceforth other women writers to create stories about vulnerable men, detailing the formation of their sexualities. Also, as in Kifah Hanna's assessment of Barakat's intervention in the feminist discourse in the Arab world, this author-function provides a perspective on gender and sexuality therein unprecedented in the Arabic literary canon, and offers a politics and poetics that demands a reconfiguration of dominant discourses of gender in Arabic literary feminism."[42] More importantly, this author-function initiates a discourse whereby not only masculinity, but also sexuality, is reconfigured outside of its normative socio-political associations. The fact that this sexuality was expressed in terms of a binary

[42] Kifah Hanna, *Feminism and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in the Levantine Novel.* 123. It is noteworthy to add, although I agree with Hanna's statement above, I do not subscribe to her argument that Barakat's aesthetics are "aesthetics of androgyny" that test the limits of heteronormative sexual typologies.

conceptualization of sexuality and later labelled by critics as androgynous is an indicator of its avant-garde quality. And yet, this female author-function is caught unaware by the transformation of her protagonist into a hyper-virile, aggressive, unethical man, signaling the limitations of her imaginary as it is powerless in the face of the heteronormalizing forces of society and war. This powerlessness, I hypothesize, stems from the absence of a queer feminist discourse whereby the formation of female sexuality can be detailed in dissociation from the heterosexual imperative.

Furthermore, as the function of the woman author claims "I remain a woman who writes" at the novel's last page amounts to a declaration asserting, "I am the woman creator of all these characters; I fashion them according to my liking, although this protagonist escapes my grip." She mimics the phallogocentric discourse from whose control the margin escapes. By sending her readers a final reminder that she is a woman writing about men, a woman who creates male characters and has the authority to control their destiny, Barakat is explicitly affirming the woman author's position of power vis-à-vis phallogocentric discourses. She mimics these discourses through repetition and displacement. As this female voice emerges from a world of men she created and fashioned according to her will, the fact that she declares that her protagonist escapes her control by confessing that she cannot recognize the man she created at the beginning of the narrative, she performs another sort of control, i.e., she prefers transforming her protagonist into a virile and vicious man rather than having the proliferating readings of the text take control of him. As the phallus is the marker that puts a stop, that arrests meaning, such is the author's final decision to make Khalil perform aggressive actions against his surroundings. Civil war can be defined as acts of

aggression perpetrated by members of the same community against each other, and these acts are fostered by patriarchal values that celebrate virility as acts of aggression of heterosexual males against each other as well as the rest of the creation. Accordingly, the author's decision to surrender to the heterosexual imperative does not stem from a sense of conformity; on the contrary, this act performs the function of the phallus, reclaiming an authority and agency that have been denied to women, and by the same token making flagrant what it means to be virile, and the indispensability of virility to war waging. This gesture, following an entire text that follows Khalil as non-virile man but nonetheless a man who claims sovereignty over his body, juxtaposes two masculinities and exposes the devastations that can be caused when masculinity is indissociable from virility. For this reason, I interpret the laughter of Khalil who becomes "a laughing male" as the laughter provoked by man's moral and physical ugliness, as Charles Baudelaire has argued.[43]

Ahl Al-Hawa, the novel Hoda Barakat wrote after *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik,* features a delirious male narrator and protagonist negotiating the disembodying effects of the violence of war and claiming to have killed his lover, a woman who left her husband and came from the other side of Beirut to live with him. Rather than conceptualizing this novel in terms of transgression of boundaries through androgyny, I argue that modern subjectivity is wrested from the space unfolding between the self and the imaginary ego, madness and reason, the archaic and the modern, hallucinated memories and the disorienting present.[44] As a confused and delirious patient, this novel's protagonist

[43] Charles Baudelaire, « De l'Essence du rire ou généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques. » *Curiosités esthétiques*.

[44] Critics have also analyzed this novel from the prism of androgyny, as the male narrator and protagonist reflects on his androgynous state as an embryo before he became male. I believe that a more productive

creates a woman out of his imaginary. This woman—coming from the other side of Beirut and belonging to another religious community (it is implied that he is Christian and she is Muslim)—is necessary for the achievement of the unified self he lacks; she functions as a salutary *imago* and a unified figure that brings back together his splintered self by mustering, to use Lacan's terms, the "kaleidoscopic structure" the male protagonist lacks to fill his being of nothingness.[45] The psychotic delusional mechanism of projection functions, according to Lacan, in such a way that "something whose source is within the subject appears without." This woman provides the narrator with an image onto which he projects a totality to which he aspires, and with which he becomes able to interact with the outside world. Ultimately, the male narrator kills (or not) this woman, who is in fact his other and ideal ego, and with whom he entertains an intimate relationship. This murder, recalling the Freudian connection between aggressivity and self-destructiveness, is an evocation of the Lebanese Civil War. As the protagonist's imaginary other actualized in his psyche and necessary for his transition and integration into the symbolic order, this woman embodies "the fictive redoubling necessary to become a self [that] rules out the possibility of strict identity,"[46] as the protagonist ends up denying that he murdered her, and declaring that his mind is disintegrating. By posing the parallel between the quest for selfhood in the formation of modern subjectivity and the quest for truth through literature, Barakat also offers a meditation on the ambivalence of the self, the mechanisms at play in the civil war, and the war memory on one level; on another, and in an effort to explore further the same

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way to study this work is to see the non-normative masculine as not necessarily androgynous, for the latter restricts the spectrum of gender and sexuality, as I have argued above. See Kifah Hanna's

[45] Jacques Lacan, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis." 27.

[46] Judith Butler, "Psychic Inceptions." *The Psychic Life of Power.* 198.

space enabled by Barakat in *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik*, it is useful to examine the implications of gender politics in *Ahl al-Hawa,* as the protagonist's ideal ego is imagined as a woman rather than another man. Further, unlike the vulnerable protagonist who is characterized by his "stasis," this woman demonstrates a disregard for restrictions and unrestrained mobility on multiple levels; she crosses geographical, religious, and social boundaries by moving across two religiously and politically divided parts of Beirut, living with a man who belongs to another religious confession, and leaving her husband for him.[47]

It is also useful to establish the parallels between the protagonists of the two novels as they are both considered to be in excess of society's norms and bounds, hence in need of being normalized or contained. Their shared trait, which emerges through society's attitude toward them, is their marginal status; they are "the suffering of the rule… [they] do not fight wars; and [they] have no sex to offer their women."[48] This depiction corresponds to Khalil before his transformation at the end of the narrative, as well as the nameless narrator in *Ahl al-Hawa.* Neither of them participates in the war and they live in isolation; however, unlike the protagonist in *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik* who isolates himself from the rest of society as a way to protect himself from the outside, the protagonist in *Ahl al-Hawa* is confined in a psychiatric institution against his will in order to protect society from him. As reason has a sovereign and superior relation to madness, and as the mentally ill or the mad are confined to institutions where they are isolated from the rest of the population, which is considered to be not mad, the mad narrator and protagonist in *Ahl al-Hawa* plays a game whereby he brings the two into contact with each other. For my analysis of madness, I extend Foucault's study on this

[47] I use stasis in both meaning: civil strife and a state of stagnation and immobility.
[48] This is the narrator's definition of "the disciples of passion." *Disciples of Passion.* 114.

subject in Europe, for psychiatric institutions in Lebanon such as Deir al-Ṣalīb as well as the discipline as it is practiced by French-educated psychiatrists follow the teachings and visions of the discipline as it is theorized and practiced in French institutions.[49] In fact, there was no psychiatric institution in Lebanon besides religious confinements until the end of the nineteenth century when the English Quaker Theophilus Waldmeier opened the Lebanon Hospital for Nervous and Mental Disorders, known as Asfouriyeh.[50] Following the opening of this hospital, Father Yacoob (Père Jacques) opened Deir el-Ṣalīb in 1919, which was transformed into a psychiatric hospital in 1951. It is currently run by Catholic nuns, health professionals, and psychiatrists that come mainly from the Jesuit Saint Joseph University and Medical Center.

Accordingly, besides the historical specificities of madness particular to Europe, Foucault's writing about madness can be extended to the Lebanese context. Foucault explains how the mad in Europe, particularly in France, became representative of those excluded from the city for various reasons, particularly economic ones.[51] In fact, the confinement was mainly used to contain unproductive individuals, or "les gens oisifs."[52]Although I have not yet located a history of madness in Lebanon that goes back to the seventeenth century, the rapprochement between the idea of unproductivity in reference to madness and confinement is plausible and can be established through the concept of unproductivity. According to the dictionary of *Le Centre National de*

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[49] Sami Richa, "la formation en psychiatrie au Liban." *L'Encéphale.*
[50] For a detailed history on the subject, see the AUB reports http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/saab/asfouriyeh/annual-reports/index.html
[51] *Madness and Civilization.* 485.
[52]"**c)** 1572 *vie oisive* (Ronsard, *Franciade*, 822 ds *OEuvres compl.*, éd. P. Laumonier, t.16, p.70). Issu, sous l'infl. de *oiseux**, de l'a. fr. *oisdif* 'oisif' (av. 1188 *cose widive* 'chose futile, vaine', *Partonopeus de Blois*, éd. J. Gildea, 895), adjectivation de *oisdive*, subst. fém. 'oisiveté' (1155, Wace, *Brut*, 10739 ds T.-L.), lui-même formé sur *oiseux* d'après le couple *voisos* 'prudent, habile, avisé' (lat. *vitiosus* 'gâté, corrompu') −*voisdie, voisdive* 'subtilité, adresse' (d'un représentant du lat. *vitiare* 'gâter, corrompre')" http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/oisif

Resources Textuelles et Lexicales, *oisif* comes from *oiseau*, bird. The first psychiatric institution in Lebanon is commonly called *'Asfouriyeh*, deriving from *'asfour*, bird in Arabic.[53] There are no etymological dictionaries of spoken Arabic regional dialects that would allow us to trace the origin of *'asfouriyye*, which is a word used also in *Bilad el-Sham*, which includes modern Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. Bird is a term that is connected to madness or at least to unreason in many languages, including English, French, and Arabic, which might suggest that the connection between madness and unproductivity can be made in both French and Arab (or at least Levantine) cultures. Foucault then sketches the development of the treatment of madness from exorcism to somatic, and how this treatment started to target more and more the body, as madness turned to be thought as having physical origins rather than being rooted in the soul. In fact, Ibn Sina (Avicenna)'s contributions to medicine in general and mental health in particular, although not mentioned in Foucault's book, is instrumental to the development of Western medicine. Moreover, the Arabs' translation of Greek medicine manuscripts into Latin was instrumental in transmitting Greek medical concepts and treatments to the West. Hence, the rapprochement is not completely groundless in the case of psychiatry in Lebanon, and particularly in Deir al-Ṣalīb.

Hence, by having a protagonist and narrator a man who first escaped from kidnapping and sequestration by militiamen, and then relating his story from the psychiatric hospital where he resides, Barakat gives madness or "reason dazzled" a central voice in her novel. And this madness, along with the residues of unproductivity,

[53] Many who have written about Asfouriyeh trace the name of the institution to the land on which the buildings were constructed. Some attribute the name to the birds that congregate there, and others like Sami Richa speculate that the land on which the hospital is built belonged to the family Asfour. See Sami Richa's *La Psychiatrie au Liban : une histoire et un regard.* 2015. See also Herant Khatchadourian's "The Historical Background of Psychiatry in Lebanon."

archaism, and exclusion, addresses those who are supposedly sane, those who claim to represent reason, productivity, and normativity—modernity's archetypal values. As the male protagonist comes to represent what might be labelled as archaic, the reader what is modern, this dichotomy is complicated by the fact that the protagonist is brought to his current state by the violence of the war, a product of modernity *par excellence*. Furthermore, by having a narrator and protagonist who is mad, who has spent some time in the asylum where he underwent treatment by water, was infantilized, and who then recalls his relationship with this woman who represents everything opposite to him: he is a man, she is a woman; he is Christian, she is Muslim; he is insane, she is not; he is static; she is mobile; yet, he says that they resemble each other: " هذه المرأة التي تتابع النظر إلى أصابع يديها تتأكد مثلي، كل مساء، من فراغها. الآن وقد غدونا نحن الاثنين صورة مكانينا، صرنا نتشابه إلى حدّ بعيد، كأخوين أو أختين. أنظر إلى وجهها، وأقول كم صارت تشبهني. كم صرت أشبهها."[54] On one level, if civil war is the unreason of reason, then the protagonist should be the complete opposite of this wo woman, and yet he declares that they resemble each other. But if we consider civil war as an indirect culmination of the Age of Reason, holding as a mirror to itself through the civil war, then we force Reason to face its arrogance and recognize itself in civil war and violence. From this perspective then, the fact that the narrator is unsure whether he killed this woman or not takes us to the question whether civil war is the negation of reason or whether madness is unreason. Foucault writes, "Madness is made to observe itself in others: it appears in them as a baseless pretense—in other words, as absurd… Madness, as simple delirium, is projected onto others; as perfect unconsciousness, it is

[54] *Ahl al-Hawa.* 161. "This woman whose gaze lingers on the fingers of her hands reconfirms her own emptiness every evening, and so do I. Now, as the two of us have become the image of our places, we have come to resemble each other very closely as if we're a pair of siblings, brothers or sisters. Looking at her face, I tell myself how greatly she has come to look like me and how much I look like her" (111).

entirely accepted…It is at this point that the mirror, as an accomplice, becomes an agent of demystification. Presumptuously identified with the object of his delirium, the madman recognizes himself as in a mirror in this madness whose absurd pretensions he has denounced; his solid sovereignty as a subject dissolves in this object he has demystified by accepting it. He is now pitilessly observed by himself. And in the silence of those who represent reason, and who have done nothing but hold up the perilous mirror, he recognizes himself as objectively mad."[55] It is in relation to this woman that the narrator sees himself as mad; after presumably killing her, once he is in the psychiatric hospital, he observes and reflects on himself and his madness by relating his story.

The narrator's identification in relation to his lover indicates their complementariness. Each complements the other, as one can fill the void the other experiences. One of the cures used in psychiatric hospitals that Foucault cites is water: "from the end of the seventeenth century, the water cure takes or regains its place as a major therapeutic of madness."[56] Baths and cold shower were prescribed, and hot water and liquids in general were believed to stimulate distinctive traits of the female body, including "the softness, the habits, and the inclination of women." A man will resemble a woman "in the physical and the moral realm" as a result of drinking and being bathed in hot water.[57] Hence, from this discussion, and as the narrator in *Ahl al-Hawa* undergoes water treatment regularly in the hospital, as it is believed that hot water contributes to the feminization of man's body, then this is what the protagonist undergoes. Unlike other men in his community who fight the war, he refuses to partake in the fighting,

[55] *Madness and Civilization.* 263-264.
[56] Ibid., 168.
[57] Ibid., 170.

ignoring the insulting remarks other fighters at the checkpoint address to him. His meditation on him having xx chromosomes while in the embryonic water can be attributed to his mental illness, as the mentally ill takes the illusions for reality. The water he sees himself swimming in as an embryo before the separation from the mother might be the water he was immersed/bathed in in Deir el-Ṣalīb, and which has the potential to feminize him. Alternatively, and more importantly, the fact that he claims to have XX chromosomes as an embryo and to have acquired a Y chromosome and transformed into a man in the last months of embryotic life evokes another transformation, which is the entrance into the symbolic order and the acquisition of language and the separation from the mother. Khalil also reminisces on the time he ceased to speak with just a voice and started to speak with a language: "وبعد الآن لن يتكلّم بصوت بل بلغة... وعليه أن يعرف لغة من."[58] As fiction's foremost claim is to be a search for truth, this narrator mimics fiction's missio mission. He also destabilizes the reader's reason and undermines society's claim to sanity as it institutionalized him. This move is reminiscent of the civil war itself, as it is an interpenetration between madness and reason, the modernity brought by Enlightenment reason and the excesses and violence resulting from this modernity.[59]

On another level, as the madman is considered often to say the truth, as this narrator claims insanity and repeatedly tells the reader that he has many memory lacunae, hence confounding accuracy, fiction, and truth telling, the reader is reminded of the truth-telling function of fiction, regardless of whether it recounts accurate facts or not. The narrator is, by the same token, warning the reader against looking for the veracity of facts or accuracy of his memory in his discourse; rather, the narrator

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[58] *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik.* 161.
[59] Ussam Makdisi. *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon.*

demands that the reader look for truth behind the erroneous facts. Published two years after the amnesty law of 1991 that covered all political and wartime crimes in the name of reconciliation, this novel's highlight on amnesia and memory gaps is evocative of Jalal Toufic's reminder that not-to-remember is not the same as to forget.[60] This brief inclusion of *Ahl al-Hawa* does not intend to probe the issues connected with memory and reconciliation in this novel. In line with the analysis pursued in this dissertation, the inclusion of this novel is rather intended to examine the way unruly bodies are registering dissent in the narrative. The nameless protagonist and narrator claims that he has been experiencing episodes of amnesia because of the torture he endured when he was kidnapped during the war. He also goes through many clear-headed and insightful episodes nestled within his hallucinatory narrative, thus blurring madness and sanity. This ambiguity contaminates the novel on many levels and registers. The narrator and his lover are unnamed, their relationship is overwrought with tension, and the weakness the narrator gradually experiences vis-à-vis his lover contrasts with his aggressivity towards her, eventually culminating in killing her, as he initially presumes but later denies. She, on the other hand, tries twice to escape from him and go back to her husband and family who live in the other side of the city. The events of the novel unfold against the backdrop of the war waging in Lebanon, thus projecting political and public dimensions onto the narrator's madness, his constant questioning the limits of gender identities, and the relationship between the unnamed lovers.

Based on Stefania Pandolfo's statement that modernity can be rendered in literature as a hallucinatory speech that best renders the subject's loss, which is modernity, but is foreclosed by the space of Western rationality, this protagonist's

[60] Jalal Toufic. *Undeserving Lebanon.* Forthcoming Books, 2007.

hallucinatory speech haunts the moments of lucid thinking as a premodern and archaic madness in contrast to, yet formative of and folding in, the lucid and enlightened moments. The same mechanism of haunting excess operates on the level of religion, echoed in the religious/sectarian conflicts in the Lebanese war. The woman's religion is not directly mentioned in the novel, yet any reader familiar with the geopolitics of Lebanon and Beirut in particular would be able to guess that the woman is a Muslim living in West Beirut. Oblique references to her religious identity come as archaic religiosity and sectarianism haunting modern Lebanon, but manifesting itself as a product of modernity rather than a vestige from premodern times. In a similar vein, the narrator ponders repeatedly on and yearns for his forceful entrance into maleness:

لكنّي أنا أتذكّر، أتذكّر سبب غرامي بها أوّل زمان تكوّني. حين كنت جنيناً أوّلياً، وفي الشهور الأولى، حين كنت جنيناً أوّلياً، وفي الشهور الأولى، حين كانت كروموزوماتي كلّها مؤنثة. كلّها "** " وقبل أن تدخل "^ " في شهور سكناي الأخيرة في بطن أمّي وتحوّلني إلى ذكر. حتى ذكراً كنت سابحاً في مياه الرحم الأنثى. وحتى ذكراً لم تكن ذكورتي معطاة. أتذكّر ما قبل نضالي المستميت لأكون رجلاً، قبيل ولادتي وبعدها، وبعد بلوغي، وهي تنسى.[61]

We also know from psychoanalysis that his aggressivity towards her is a formative episode of the ego, especially that he claims that he merged into her after killing her: " عرفت، حسن قتلتها ورأيت أنّي قتلتها، أنّي شربت روحها. أنّي شربت ملاكها فصار فيّ."[62] is ccordingly, thA narrator is incapable of either confirming whether he has killed his lover or not; nor can he then completely merge with her, and that is because of his “lethal struggle to be a

[61] *Ahl al-Hawa.* 120. “I remember the grounds of my passion for her, at the very beginnings of my emergence into life as a tiny embryo in its first months when all of my chromosomes were still female, still XX, before the Y entered me in my final months in my mother's belly and transformed me into a male. Even as a male I swam in the waters of the female womb, and my maleness could not be assumed. I remember what came before my lethal struggle to be a man, before my birth and after it, and then after I reached puberty. But she forgets” (*Disciples of Passion* 82).
[62] Ibid. 8. “At the moment I killed her, when I saw and realized that I had killed her, I knew that I had breathed into her soul” (2).

man.” His entrance into the law of the father has destroyed his ability to love this woman. As one of the marginalized who represent “the suffering of the rule,” the protagonist and narrator is not helped by a stable male identity. He yearns to a state of being that is not immutable and without the fundamental loss that maleness implicates. Once again, Hoda Barakat demonstrates the harmful effects of the entrance into the law of the father, as it ends up harming first the man in question, and then his surrounding, starting with the women in his entourage.

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