LATE MODERN ARABIC LITERATURE:

GENDER AS CRUCIBLE OF CRISIS

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This dissertation explores the relation between gender and crisis in the late modern phase of Arabic literature—specifically, from the late 1960s to the present. Working with a regional Arab context, I define crisis as an endemic situation of political paralysis and cultural stagnation, one historically connected to the Arab world's failure to obtain the political freedom, economic independence, and social reform aspired to in anti-colonial nationalism. This dissertation focuses on literature that has developed out of three of the most salient crises since the late 1960s: the Israeli occupation of Palestine, sectarian strife in Lebanon, and the nexus between comprador capitalism and the police state in Egypt. The texts I read for this purpose are: from Palestine, the poems "Moans at the Permits Window" (1969) and "A Hurtful Wish" (1973) by Fadwa Tuqan, the poetic memoir *The Siege* (1982) by May al-Sayigh, the experimental novella *All That's Left to You* (1966) by Ghassan Kanafani, and the sociological novel *The Inheritance* (1997) by Sahar Khalifeh; from Lebanon, Rashid al-Daif's arguably "post-modern" novel *Dear Mr Kawabata* (1995) and Jabbur al-Duwayhi's historical novel *The Rain of June* (2006); and from Egypt, Sonallah Ibrahim's Kafkaesque novel *The Committee* (1981). My aim in reading these different literary treatments of crisis in a single framework of gender analysis is threefold: to call attention to gender as a critical dimension of historical continuity between the national and regional Arab contexts within which crisis unfolds; to present Arabic literature as a uniquely generative site for the imagining, and re-imagining, of the gender of crisis in the Arab world; and to suggest that the emergence of gender as a crucible of crisis—as opposed to an allegory of crisis—in Arabic

literature is specific to the late modern period during which the selected texts were written. Given that my choice of primary texts is based on the extent of their thematic resonance with the proposed argument, the dissertation should not be read as a literary-historical survey. However, in light of the regional context within which gender appears as a crucible of crisis, I contend that my argument has strong implications for Arabic literary history.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Khalid Hadeed was born in Kuwait, where he attended the Bayan Bilingual School. He holds a B.A. in Economics and Comparative Literature from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D in Comparative Literature from Cornell University. His research interests lie primarily in modern Arabic literature, post-colonial Anglophone literature, gender and sexuality studies, psychoanalysis, and narrative theory. He has written about homosexuality in modern Arabic literature, feminist inter-subjectivity in Anglophone women's modernism, and queerness as an analytic framework in Palestinian and Israeli cinema. He has also contributed several translations between Arabic, English, and French to the Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum, the Sharjah Art Foundation, and ArteEast, New York.

DEDICATION

To Liliane Weissberg, who enticed me into Comparative Literature

with her incomparable magic

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Introduction

In her treatise *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967* (2009), Samira Aghacy foregrounds masculinity as a pivotal network of social and symbolic relations that frames the experience of political crisis in post-1967 Arabic literature.[1] Choosing to focus on masculinity as the arena on which the crises of Arab identity and agency unfold in the literature of this period, Aghacy does an important job of critiquing the male hegemony over politics as well as literary and cultural production. Taking typologies of masculinity as the organizing frame of her text, Aghacy examines literary representations of the oppressive masculinities lying on the continuum between civil society and the state; the dysfunctional masculinities of the intellectual and the freedom fighter, caught between lofty ideals of social reform and the paralyzing status quo; the patriarchal authoritarianism of the dictatorial state, with all its diverse mechanisms of political repression and persecution; and the social spaces where masculinity appears as a fragile construct riven with contradictions between ideology and reality, and subject to the same social and political hierarchies that marginalize women. In approaching masculinity as an internally differentiated, shifting, and historically contingent construct that complicates the polarized power binaries usually perceived as masculine vs. feminine, Aghacy makes an important departure from the critical scholarship associated with miriam cooke, which proposes that male and female writers follow distinctly different approaches in their representation of their respective social realities. In this schema, male writers engage social problems through the political rhetoric of the male-dominated public sphere, and present this rhetoric as a gender-neutral language exclusively capable of addressing the oppressive facets of the status quo. Female writers, on the other hand, tend to focus on domestic spaces and concerns in a manner that confounds the public/private distinction, and interweaves the hierarchies of gender and sexuality with the crises unfolding on

the public stage. In her book, Aghacy gives due attention to writings by men that engage the fragile and contradictory nature of masculinity, and the joint subjugation of men and women by the state, the class structure, and wars that have shaped the political geography of the Arab world from the late sixties to the present. In doing so, Aghacy complicates the masculine/feminine power binary, demonstrating the diversity and historical contingency of gender as both identity and relationality, as well as the progress that Arabic literature has made, in the post-1967 period, to register and express these malleable aspects of gender as they relate to crisis.

In this dissertation, I argue that Arabic literature from the same historical period engaged by Aghacy sees an important shift in critical awareness, where gender, rather than being a mere symptom of the crises afflicting the Arab world, manifests as a matrix of social relations integral to the infrastructure of these crises. While my focus is not on typologies of masculinity, I take Aghacy's lead in the following three respects. In the first place, I concur with the historical framework of Aghacy's argument: like her, I identify the late sixties as the starting point of Arabic literature's critical revision of the separation line between gender and crisis, the public and private spheres, and its growing awareness of patriarchy as a hierarchical structure that intersects with the hierarchies of class and political power, as well as the violence erupting on the national and regional stages. Moreover, I accept the periodization of crisis that Aghacy presents as the historical ground of her argument: "The post-1967 era has been punctuated with wars: the 1970 Black September War in Jordan, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Civil War in Lebanon, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the first and second Palestinian intifadas, and the first and second Gulf wars."[2] To this list one may add the failure of the Oslo "peace process" initiated in 1993 and the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006.[3] In the second place, as Aghacy does in her book, I will deal with "femininity and masculinity...as relational patterns that shift and

change in accordance with the social, economic, and political transformations in the area."[4] This approach is necessitated by my topic, since it is less concerned with the masculinity of politics than with the diverse ways in which gender, as a compulsory matrix of relations, maneuvers both masculinity and femininity in the direction of creating, and perpetuating, the crises that constrain political agency and cultural growth. Finally, the textual repertoire that Aghacy engages, which includes fiction from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq, is determined by a comparative framework that stresses the regional historical contexts linking the crises specific to each of these countries. Quoting Hilary Kilpatrick, Aghacy opines that "the Arabic novel is 'written in one language, and [has] a shared cultural heritage and recent historical experience common to the whole area [that] provide[s] novelists in different countries with similar material.'"[5] Although the texts I have selected for my dissertation are authored by Palestinian, Lebanese, and Egyptian writers, and deal primarily with crises specific to their authors' countries of origin, there are also many historical linkages between these crises, and this, I believe, makes a comparative reading both relevant and necessary for a fuller understanding of gender's relation to crisis in post-1967 Arabic literature.

Whereas the nexus between gender and crisis in late modern Arabic literature has mostly been explored in the context of martial violence,[6] or women's and national literatures,[7] I follow Aghacy's lead and take a comparative approach to locate the regional Arab nodal points and circulation routes in the gendered geography of crisis. While Aghacy works at unsettling the self-naturalizing hegemony of masculinity, in my dissertation I examine how both masculine and feminine subjectivities and "relational patterns" appear, in literature from the late sixties onward, as primary matrices through which crises are shaped and solidified. In taking this approach, I intend to demonstrate that the period in question has witnessed an unprecedented level of critical

awareness regarding the foundational role that gender hierarchy plays as a *crucible* of crisis. I must point out here that this dissertation is not written or intended as a literary history; rather, it is a thematically guided dissertation which, however, has strong implications for Arabic literary history as well. Working with a hybrid mix of four novels, a novella, a poetic memoir, and two poems by Ghassan Kanafani, Sahar Khalifeh, Fadwa Tuqan, May al-Sayigh, Rashid al-Daif, Jabbur al-Duwayhi, and Sonallah Ibrahim—these include Kanafani's *All That's Left to You*, al-Daif's *Dear Mr Kawabata*, and Ibrahim's *The Committee*—I illustrate the dynamic role of gender in the following three national-regional crises: the Israeli occupation of Palestine; the ongoing legacy of tribal and sectarian conflict in Lebanon; and the alliance between comprador capitalism and the police state in Egypt. I argue that gender functions as an integral component of the crises engaged in these texts, so much so that it necessitates a serious revision of the gender-neutral framework within which "crisis" typically signifies, i.e. as a depersonalized, collective affliction affecting, equally, everyone under its sway.

Although the geographic scope of my literary analysis is limited to parts of the Arab East or Mashriq, I am not considering the Arab West or Maghreb as irrelevant to my project; rather, due to more practical considerations of space, as well as historical considerations regarding the significantly different complexities of the post-colonial experience of crisis in the Maghreb, I believe that a regional focus on the Mashriq is more suitable and feasible for my project. This, I feel, is particularly true given the much more violent experience of colonialism in the Maghreb and the permanent linguistic transformations it worked on Maghrebian national identity.[8] As for choosing "gender," rather than "sexuality" (or "gender and sexuality"), as my working analytical category, I do not do so with the intention of minimizing the importance of sexuality to crisis; rather, I approach the anxieties and critical points of sexuality as functions of the differently

gendered subjectivities and agencies involved in the power relations of crisis. Moreover, I designate the "late modern" period as the relevant one due to the fact that it conjoins the historical events and stages that have played the greatest role in shaping these crises: decolonization and the authoritarian patriarchal regimes established in its wake; post-classical colonialism in the case of Israel-Palestine; and globalization as a form of neo-colonial hegemony in place across the entire Arab world. Setting the crises specific to the texts I examine in this wider historical context, I adopt as the thematic scope of my analysis a more general notion of "crisis" that may be designated, for the sake of convenience, in the singular: as a condition of political paralysis and cultural stagnation linked to the historical failure of the ambitions—for political freedom, economic independence, and social reform—that shaped the anti-colonial resistance phase of Arab nationalism.[9]

In accordance with my framework of comparison, the dissertation is structured along national lines, with separate chapters assigned to texts by Palestinian, Lebanese, and Egyptian writers. I must stress, however, that this organization is equally a matter of convenience as of analytical logic: as I demonstrate in my argument, the specific crises that inhabit each text have regional as well as national origins and repercussions, and therefore they cannot be properly understood within a strictly national context. It is this insight that comprises the basis of the comparative framework I adopt to study the social "en-genderment" of crisis. By reading these different literary representations of crisis in a single framework of gender analysis, I intend to achieve three goals: to call attention to gender as a primary axis of historical continuity between the national and regional Arab contexts within which crisis unfolds; to present Arabic literature as a uniquely generative site for the imagining, and re-imagining, of the gender of crisis in the Arab world; and to suggest that the emergence of gender as a crucible of crisis—as opposed to

an allegory of crisis—in Arabic literature is specific to the late modern period during which the selected texts were written. This becomes apparent when one looks at the sexual edge in the text widely considered to represent the first radical departure from social realism in Arabic literature: Ibrahim's 1961 novel *That Odor* (*Tilk al-Rā'iḥah*). In *That Odor*, a semi-autobiographical novel that reflects on the author's five year experience of imprisonment and surveillance during Jamal Abdel Nasser's reign, the suppression of the narrator's career as a writer results in a state of male sexual impotence, where his sexual desire closes in on itself through unsatisfying masturbation and sexual fantasies. The same symptoms appear in Ibrahim's *The Committee*, written twenty years later, but under similar conditions of state censorship and authoritarianism. Like *That Odor*, *The Committee* also sees formal experiments with the novel form, mixing fiction with documentary in such a way that each genre acts as a communication medium for the motivations of the other. Thus, there is a strong case for arguing that the heightened awareness of gender's complex role as a force of social organization coincides with, or even contributes something to, the development of the formal complexity that distinguishes late modern Arabic literature from its precursors. My purpose is to examine the work that gender does as part of a complex literary *critique*—or literary re-imagining—of the infrastructure of crisis in the late modern Arab world.

Chapter One, "Embattled Nation: Gender in Palestinian Resistance Literature," engages works written by the Palestinian authors Fadwa Tuqan, May al-Sayigh, Ghassan Kanafani, and Sahar Khalifeh, exploring the gender politics of Palestinian resistance as they inform these texts. I turn to Palestinian literature in view of Joseph Zeidan's assertion that "Of all the political problems that have come up in the twentieth century, none has so preoccupied the minds and hearts of the Arab people as has the Palestinian question."[10] This chapter is divided into two sections, based on the level of critical awareness exhibited regarding the patriarchal foundations

of Palestinian national consciousness, and the relation of the Self to the Other. In the first part, "Fadwa Tuqan and May al-Sayigh: Occupation, Invasion, and the Feminization of National (Dis)honor," I read three texts by the iconic early feminist poet Fadwa Tuqan and the feminist activist and writer May al-Sayigh: Tuqan's polemical poems "Moans at the Permits Window" ("Āhāt Amām Shubbāk al-Taṣārīḥ," 1969) and "A Hurtful Wish" ("Umnīyah Jāriḥah," 1973), and al-Sayigh's stylistically hybrid wartime memoir The Siege (Al-Ḥīṣār, 1988). In the second part, "Fracturing the Nation: Kanafani, Khalifeh, and the Radical Rifts of Gender," I juxtapose two texts that make a decisive break with the masculinized structure of Palestinian nationalism: Ghassan Kanafani's experimental novella *All That's Left to You* (*Mā Tabaqqá Lakum*, 1966), and Sahar Khalifeh's darkly satirical novel *The Inheritance* (*Al-Mīrāth*, 1997). Comparing the critical gender politics that develop in these texts, I draw attention to the challenge posed, by the collusion between internal patriarchal distributions of power and the external power of foreign occupation, to the articulation of Palestinian national consciousness and an effective politics of resistance.

In Chapter Two, "Revisiting Lebanon: Rashid al-Daif, Jabbur al-Duwayhi, and the Making of Tribal/ Sectarian Masculinity," I examine two post-Civil War novels, by Lebanese writers Rashid al-Daif and Jabbur al-Duwayhi, that revisit earlier stages of tribal and sectarian violence in Lebanon. This chapter is also divided into two parts based on the deliberateness and depth of the novels' critical representations of the masculinity of tribal and sectarian boundaries and animosities. The first part of the chapter, "*Dear Mr Kawabata*: Sectarianism and Secularism via Male Homosocial Desire," covers Rashid al-Daif's semi-autobiographical epistolary novel *Dear Mr Kawabata* (*ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā*, 1995), where male homosocial desire works both to enable, and restrict, the narrator's understanding of the patriarchal matrix of tribal and

sectarian violence. The second part, "*The Rain of June*: Manning the Borders with Blood," engages Jabbur al-Duwayhi's historical novel *The Rain of June* (*Maṭar Ḥazīrān*, 2006), where he excavates from historical memory the Christian-Christian massacre that occurred in the northern Lebanese town of Mizyara in 1957, and documents the incident with a meticulously analytical language that renders it a microcosm of the tribal masculinities fomenting internecine violence across the Arab world. Focused on the male domination of violence, these novels bring to critical attention the pivotal role played by male homosocial bonds and hierarchies in developing the tribal and sectarian divisions that underlie the violent course of late modern Lebanese history.

In Chapter Three, "'Neopatriarchal' Egypt in Sonallah Ibrahim's *The Committee*," I read a (now classic) novel by Egyptian writer Sonallah Ibrahim, in which the narrator-protagonist is stuck in a double bind: to submit to the Egyptian "open-door" system under Anwar al-Sadat and give up his politically engaged writing career, or resist it and risk losing his life. Confronted by a shadowy unofficial "Committee" that represents the omnipresent power of the police state, the narrator is forced to navigate between his ethical principles and his fear of punishment. As the narrative develops, it becomes apparent that the Committee's power derives from an organic relationship between the repression mechanisms of the Egyptian police state and its comprador capitalist economy. Although the narrator initially articulates this power dynamic in a patriarchal language that takes the masculinity of politics for granted, his understanding of arbitrary power gradually develops so that patriarchy becomes a structure encompassing and linking civil society to the political apparatus that oppresses it. Thus the socio-economic crisis represented by al-Sadat's open door policy appears as an adverse turning point in a historical trajectory in which patriarchy acts as a major driving force. The nexus between comprador capitalism and the police state, generally taken to be gender-neutral, appears to be enabled and authorized by the vertical

patriarchal relations that give civil society its shape.

As there are several conceptual frames that are pertinent to the social worlds represented in the chosen texts, I will not limit myself to a single approach to gender and crisis. Rather, in my readings I will adopt a variety of theories and critical positions depending on how they suit the textual contexts concerned. In Chapter One, I draw on Joseph Massad's analysis of Palestinian nationalist discourse to provide a general framework for discussing the intersections and overlaps between patriarchal structures within Palestinian civil society and national consciousness, and the power politics of the Israeli occupation. In his article "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," Massad argues that Palestinian nationalist discourse, by portraying the occupation as the rape of the Palestinian nation/woman by a foreign, implicitly male aggressor, translates it into patriarchal terms, limiting agency and the right to representation to men, and confining women to the space and status of represented objects and symbols. This argument articulates the central dynamic that characterizes the conflicts staged in the texts, between the male domination of the social sphere and national consciousness, and the attempt to challenge this domination by reorienting the Palestinian crisis around female subjectivities.

In Chapter Two, I refer to the concept of "male homosocial desire" as articulated by Eve Sedgwick, as well as Andrea Dworkin's critique of the central role played by violence in the construction of masculine identity. For Eve Sedgwick, male homosocial desire spans the entire range of male same-sex bonds, fusing the libidinal with the affective in a manner that unsettles absolute distinctions between male homo- and hetero-sexuality, while pointing toward the masculinization of agency and the erotics of power attached to it. This conceptual schema plays a major role in my discussion of Rashid al-Daif's novel *Dear Mr Kawabata*, where the narrator's critical awareness of men's responsibility for Lebanon's tribal/sectarian divisions contradicts his

own narratorial discourse, which masculinizes the capacity for socio-political agency itself. Male homosocial desire, by fixing the narrator within an exclusively male social sphere, becomes the magnetic force that shapes both his socio-political consciousness and his subjectivity; as a result, the same male agency that he faults for Lebanon's violence becomes the default condition for the emergence of his narratorial voice and desire. A similar sphere of male homosocial interactions dominates tribal violence in the more consciously critical *The Rain of June*. The central element of the plot, a massacre that occurs at the instigation of two rival Maronite families, invites narratorial reflections on the social function of male violence, which appears to be able to create, and sustain, imaginary physical and cultural geographies. The near-metaphysical power of male violence finds a theoretical background in Andrea Dworkin's *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, where she argues that the violence men do to women in pornography is a function of the violence they are required to exercise against each other in order to secure respectable positions in the hierarchy of masculine status. Rejecting the social tendency to presume the naturalness of visibly gendered behaviors, the narratorial approach builds a conscious, and sometimes intently methodical, discourse to deconstruct the linguistic and spatial constructs that compel masculinity toward violence. As is revealed by the narratorial analysis, entrenched linguistic and spatial relations render male fluency in violence the key criterion, not only of masculine status, but of human status as well, thus transforming it into an almost metaphysical power.

In Chapter Three, I turn to Hisham Sharabi's concept of "Neopatriarchy" to highlight the patriarchal connection between the police state and comprador capitalism in the Egypt of *The Committee*. Sharabi coins "Neopatriarchy" to designate the dysfunctional modernity of the late modern Arab world and situate it in a patriarchal legacy that spans civil society and the state. Calling attention to the prevalence, in the Arab world, of police state apparatuses and economies

that serve the interests of wealthy industrial nations, Sharabi describes this condition as the result of collusion between "internal heteronomy" (i.e. the vertical relations of local patriarchy) and "external dependency" (neo-colonialism, i.e. politico-economic subordination and dependence). It is this particular type of collusion that I will reference while discussing the gender politics of the narrator's conflict with the Committee.

The first female writer to bring a (proto)feminist angle to Palestinian resistance literature, Tuqan struggles in many of her poems to bridge the gap between a socially constrained female self-consciousness, and a socially expansive political consciousness. As a result, her poetry often reflects a high degree of ambivalence between the need to identify with dominant constructions of Palestinian and Arab nationalism, and the need to reject their masculinist foundations in favor of female/feminine forms of agency. In "Moans at the Permits Window," Tuqan laments her experience at the Allenby Bridge, where she was detained by Israeli soldiers for seven hours under a searing sun, and subjected to racist verbal abuse. Here the poet appeals to the honor of her Palestinian/Arab tribe, and to the (reputedly) honorable Abbasid caliph al-Muʿtasim, so that her dignity as an Arab woman may be restored. At the same time, Tuqan assimilates the mythology related to Hind Bint ʿUtbah—by most accounts an enemy of Islam and a negative embodiment of female power—to express her own rage. In the process, she deliberately links the quietism of the Arabo-Islamic *ummah* to the oppression of the foreign occupier, and speaks both through and against the male-centered, tribal rhetoric of Arab honor. In "A Hurtful Wish," Tuqan develops her connection to Hind further, appropriating the latter's power in a distinctly sexual manner that challenges the domestication of female sexuality. Citing Hind's poetic challenge to the Muslim army at the Battle of Uhud, Tuqan feminizes tribal pride in such a way that the

public assertion of female sexuality and agency takes part in the defense of the *ummah*'s political existence and cultural dignity. Contrasting the failure of the Arabs to protect Palestine from Israel's aggression, to the success of the Vietnamese fighters at repelling the U.S. invasion, Tuqan confesses her "hurtful wish": to offer a million, genuinely Arab/noble Palestinian women to these fighters, and bear from them a new generation of fighting men admirably jealous over the freedom and dignity of their nation. In this sense, Tuqan reifies the masculinity of political praxis and agency; however, with a consciously transgressive intent, Tuqan's scenario attacks both the passive, insincere postures of outrage on the part of the male-dominated Arab regimes, as well as the male claim on the honor of the Arab woman-nation. Thus the poem both challenges and assimilates the patriarchal engenderment of agency and representation.

Next to Tuqan's poems I juxtapose *The Siege* (*al-Ḥiṣār*, 1988), a poetry-infused memoir authored by May al-Sayigh, then the president of The General Union of Palestinian Women, and affiliated with the PLO in Lebanon. Composed during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the subsequent siege of Beirut, al-Sayigh's memoir chronicles, in a feverishly urgent register that blends memoir, reportage, and poetry, the daily devastation unleashed by the Israeli army on Beirut and its Palestinian residents. Writing as a member of a revolutionary vanguard including Marxist and Arab Nationalist writers and intellectuals, as well as Palestinian resistance fighters, al-Sayigh takes a polemical approach in her memoir, focusing on exposing the regional and global coordinates of the political geography underlying the siege. In following this approach, al-Sayigh expands the scope of the criticism found in popular Arab reactions to the siege, and marks the tribalism active on the stage of the Lebanese civil war, and elsewhere in the Arab world, as a factor equally complicit in the Israeli-U.S. persecution of the Palestinians. More importantly, al-Sayigh traces a gendered fault line in Palestinian nationalist discourse that, by

excluding Palestinian women from the full status of national subjecthood, mirrors the tribal divisions isolating the Palestinians from other Arabs, as well as the colonial divide that usurps from the Palestinians their right to their land.

Al-Sayigh's alertness to the divisions internal to the tribe/nation/*ummah* develops into a feminist politics of identity that draws on empathy to bridge the gap between Self and Other. This politics is implicitly, and at times explicitly, opposed to the masculinist politics of sectarian and ethnic exclusivity and hierarchy. However, in spite of challenging the masculine foundations of Palestinian/Arab tribalism, nationalism, and cultural identity, al-Sayigh also adopts the rhetoric of tribal honor to express her rage at the victimization of her people and Beirut. Proudly distinguishing Levantine Beirut and its honorable resistance from the treachery and servility of the Arabian Gulf countries, al-Sayigh attacks the latter as the epitome of tribal backwardness and isolation. In doing so, she selectively ignores the sectarian divisions that threaten the political existence of the Palestinians in Lebanon, and in this manner implicates herself in the same tribal mentality that elevates the Self against the Other, regardless of what the objective circumstances may be. This twist in al-Sayigh's revolutionary polemic undermines the feminist politics of empathy that she develops elsewhere in the text, and reverts to the masculinist logic of sectarian divisions and animosity. Thus, as is the case with Tuqan, al-Sayigh's engagement of the discourse of honor underscores the strained attempt of Palestinian women writers to negotiate their marginalized subject positions within the imaginaries of Palestinian nationalism.

In *All That's Left to You*, Kanafani elaborately interlaces the plight of two siblings exiled from Jaffa to Gaza in 1948, and separated from their parents en route. Adopting a style indicative of Faulkner, where different narrative trajectories and interior monologues blend with each other without the help of expositions and punctuations, Kanafani orchestrates a dialogue between the

siblings' polarly gendered subject positions. Through this artfully woven dialogue, in which the desert and time take part as witnesses and interlocutors, the significance of the siblings' relationship transcends the family circle to represent, and challenge, the gendered fracture in Palestinian national consciousness. Hamid, the brother, feels trapped in Egyptian-occupied Gaza, where he has no family roots, and harassed by the dishonor his sister Maryam brought to him through her post-sex marriage to a known collaborator with Israel. Seeking refuge in his mother as a substitute for the ideal motherland, Hamid attempts to cross the Negev desert to reach her in Amman, where she has settled. On the way he runs into an Israeli soldier separated from his unit, and the encounter with the arch-enemy in the non-human-friendly desert acquires an existential dimension, one that denaturalizes both the land-woman nexus and the enemy's radical difference as constructed in Palestinian nationalist discourse.

Thus, Hamid's escape from Gaza in search of an ideal motherland parodies the masculine abstraction of land in official Palestinian discourse, where the distance of exile sustains fantasies about a faithful motherland awaiting her sons' return. Onto Hamid's abstraction of Palestine from its quotidian material realities, Kanafani overlays Maryam's narrative, which, by contrast, serves as an example of a feminine commitment to Palestine that confronts and endures the banal adversities of everyday life. When Mariam chooses to stay with Zakaria, she defies her brother's claim on her sexuality; when she decides to keep her child against Zakaria's insistence on abortion, she defies his claim on her body. Thus the brother and the collaborator become complicit in the nationalist discourse that domesticates Palestine as a woman who depends on the protection/custodianship of her men. While time, represented by the ever-vigilant clock on the wall, ushers the death of Hamid at the hands of the Israeli soldiers who rejoin their stray member in the desert, time unleashes a heroic resistance in Mariam, who kills her husband to save her

child and reclaim her body. In overlaying these scenarios onto each other, Kanafani rewrites the narratives of return and resistance from a feminine perspective, where concrete relations to, and practical sacrifices for, the land displace the abstract, masculine, *fidāʾī* rhetoric of self-sacrificing redemption.

Coming three decades after Kanafani's novella, Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance* (*al-Mīrath*, 1997), develops its own gender-focused critique in the context of post-Oslo Palestine, drawing strong analogies between the male power-mongering within Palestinian society and the power politics of the Israeli occupation. Importantly, Khalifeh focuses the critical conjuncture in her narrative around the individualistic materialism that develops in the aftermath of the failed "peace process," when Palestinian morale hits rock bottom, and cynicism leads to a disturbing cultural shift, from an ethical identity woven into the fabric of familial relations and national affiliations, to one grounded in a Hobbesian individualism. Similarly to Kanafani's novella, *The Inheritance* interrogates the gendered fracture in Palestinian national consciousness through the subject position of a Palestinian woman. In *The Inheritance*, however, the woman in question is also the narrator, and her subject position is doubly removed from the mainstream position of the Palestinian national subject: in addition to being a woman, Zayna is also half-American by birth. Born and raised in the U.S. From her childhood, Zayna develops a crisis of cultural identity, one occasioned by the equally alienating influences of her father's conservative background and the emotional poverty of her life with her American grandmother, with whom she settles after her father threatens to kills her for getting pregnant out of wedlock. Heading to her dying father's home village, Wadi al-Rihan, after she gets invited by her uncle to claim her inheritance, Zayna learns soon after her arrival that inheritance, as a financial realm ruled by male laws and interests, is part and parcel of a cultural patrimony also dominated by men; more, she perceives a

parallel connection between the cultural patrimony of Palestine post-Oslo and the longstanding Israeli occupation.

Through the multifocal lenses of female difference, cultural difference, and political distance, Zayna accesses a sharply ironic critical vision that leaves no stone unturned in the social terrain of Wadi al-Rihan, which appears as a microcosm of post-Oslo Palestine in the text. Faced with the choice of staying in Wadi al-Rihan, claiming her inheritance, and striking roots in an unstable and multiply oppressive political geography, or heading back to the imperial center of the U.S. and her comfortable post as a professor of anthropology, Zayna chooses the latter, rejecting her Palestinian "inheritance," in all its aspects. Through this gesture, Khalifeh delivers a feminist verdict on the state of Palestinian national consciousness post-Oslo, a verdict that leans heavily toward Palestinian men as the party responsible for the diffusion of Hobbesian individualism and the dispersion of national solidarity in Palestine. All together, the five texts examined in this chapter compose an elaborate portrait of the mutual influence at work between gender hierarchy, and a Palestinian national consciousness besieged by the Israeli occupation and the regional and imperial powers backing it.

Dear Mr Kawabata, written five years after the official end of the Lebanese Civil War, searches for a paradigm of citizenship that could be referenced as a rational, enlightened, modern alternative to the regressive and violent sectarianism of modern Lebanese identity. The narrator-protagonist, who assumes the author's name and many of his biographical details, interlaces his family history with the history of the civil war, thereby implicating the gender hierarchy of his family environment in sectarian tradition's lawless violence and its rejection of secular, civic ethics. By invoking, as his sympathetic and objective narratee, the late Yasunari Kawabata, a male writer and intellectual similarly ambivalent in his cultural identification with modernity, al-

Daif attempts to negotiate the ethical and cultural quandaries of his own conflicted modernity. For Rashid, who aspires to be a cultural mediator between Lebanon and cosmopolitan modernity, Kawabata is attractive as a specular phantom of modern intellectual sophistication: an opaque mirror which, while retaining its own tragic history, also reflects back to Rashid the ideal image of cosmopolitan intellectual modernity that he seeks to cultivate for himself. Importantly, Rashid's libidinally and politically charged relation to his phantom narratee builds on a long history of male homosocialization: it is in exclusively male circles that Rashid learns all the contemporary currents of thought spreading through the region, from scientific rationalism and secularism to pan-Arabism and Marxism, as well as conventional wisdom related to sexual difference and male-female relations.

Following Eve Sedgwick's lead, I adopt the schema of "male homosocial desire" as an analytic framework that can explain the hierarchical and convoluted nature of the male-male relationships that dominate the text's narrative, as well as its narrative structure. Understanding male homosocial desire as a libidinal force motivated by, and in turn motivating, the conflation of masculinity with agency and status, I propose it as the basic framework of Rashid's complex relation to the men who define or reflect his life trajectory and self-image: his self-referential Archimedean vantage point Kawabata, and the unnamed political mentor and role model who initiated him into the Lebanese Communist Party, on whose side he fought during the war.[11] On the diegetic level, male homosocial desire situates Rashid's former mentor—now a bourgeois opportunist who seems to have no regard for anyone but himself—as the focal point for his existential crisis: a convoluted state of mind that condenses his guilt at participating in the war, his bitter disillusionment with his former revolutionary ideals, and, most importantly, the loss of the charismatic masculinity which had been, and continues to be, the motivating ideal behind all

of his political and cultural endeavors and aspirations. In regard to Kawabata, however, Rashid's homosocial desire operates on a meta-diegetic level, where its political and cultural implications expand to subsume sectarianism and secularism within the wider question of modernity as it pertains to Lebanon. It is at this narrative level that the imaginary relation between Rashid and Kawabata exhibits the most politically charged aspects of homosocial desire: Rashid frequently contrasts his fashionably modern skepticism to Kawabata's romantic essentialism, and expresses his desire for Kawabata's status through a heteronormative script that positions him as sexually dominant over his narratee. By so orchestrating his specular relation to a phantom of modern anomie, Rashid transcends both this anomie—culminating, in Kawabata's case, in suicide—as well as Kawabata's qualifications as cultural mediator. As a result, the ostensibly patriotic impulse behind Rashid's reflections on Lebanon's troubled past becomes a self-interested desire: to establish an independent intellectual status that distinguishes itself, through its affiliations with cosmopolitan modernity, from the sectarian backwardness of his co-nationals. In this regard, the critique of sectarian masculinity, which the narrator builds through observation, gets undermined at the level of representation, where agency itself becomes a masculine prerogative: while women get absented from the active sphere of politics, other men get subordinated on the scale of modern secular sophistication.

The Rain of June, by contrast, approaches sectarian strife in Lebanon with a sharp critical arsenal that includes a keen awareness of the gender ideologies sedimented and solidified in language, as well as a poly-vocalism that distributes narrative authority among several different characters. While many of these characters remain unnamed, all of them are driven to narrate by the historical urgency of witnessing, and preserving in memory, a massacre whose symbolic repercussions extend beyond the sectarian geography of Lebanon, resonating with the tribal-

patriarchal matrices within which violence has flourished in the late modern Arab world. Rather than turn to the civil war of 1975-1990, al-Duwayhi turns further back to a June, 1957 massacre that occurs in the Lebanese village of Burj al-Hawa (representing the actual town of Mizyara) between male Maronite Christian members of enemy clans from the town of Barqa (Zgharta). Exploring the political function of masculine codes of honor in the context of the massacre and the escalations leading up to it, al-Duwayhi explores how masculine identity, as it is shaped in the tribal-patriarchal setting, becomes the bedrock for the cannibalistic violence of the massacre. Following Andrea Dworkin's proposal in *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, I will argue that the ubiquity of violence in the tribal/sectarian context engaged in the novel results, in large part, from the dialectic of fear and violence that flourishes in the predatory circles of male homosociality. As Dworkin argues, the male fear of male violence eventually results in a metaphysical commitment to violence, a commitment that determines the perception of the Self in relation to the Other, along with the ethical responsibilities that complement this perception. [12] This is precisely the scenario at work between the novel's male-dominated enemy clans, clans that, in spite of sharing the same town, conjure metaphysical borders between metaphysical neighborhoods to keep the imminent rupture of violence at bay. More, being bound to the law of imminent violence, men must continually assert their physical aptitude for violence by extending their bodies through space: this they often do by absorbing women and weapons as signs of their physical power. In terms that follow the schema constructed by Sarah Ahmed in her *Queer Phenomenology*, male homosocial space and male physical aggressiveness reinforce each other in their mutual orientation toward the law of imminent violence.

Crucially, language becomes the key player in the author's effort to expose this profoundly gendered logic of internecine violence, in both its tribal and sectarian forms, and to

deconstruct, more generally, the abstract gravity of collective violence. By documenting, with meticulous attention, the lexical sub-registers through which the appraisals, performances, exchanges, and challenges of masculinity take place, al-Duwayhi strips away masculinity's deceptively natural armor, exposing the bare flesh of its fearful servitude to the law of violence. Importantly, a bold contrast appears between the keen linguistic dissection of masculinity in the narratorial discourse, on the one hand, and, on the other, the gender-blind language in official and popular narratives about the massacre (and others preceding it). This sharp contrast reveals that the conflation of masculinity with tribal identity in Lebanon can be so thorough as to render the denunciation of the responsible men equal to the denunciation of the responsible clans; as a result, the collective taboo against naming the responsible clans gives men's violence free reign to roam. In all these senses, *The Rain of June* is a self-consciously and purposefully counter-hegemonic text. By resisting hegemonic masculinity's (largely successful) effort to cover its own blood-stained tracks, the novel does more than expose the patriarchal infrastructure common to Lebanon's sectarianism and tribalism. In marking the massacre with the month of June (*Ḥazīrān*) in the title, al-Duwayhi highlights its connection to the *naksah* ('setback') of June 1967, situating it as a historic/symbolic background to both the subsequent civil war in Lebanon and the failure of Arab solidarity represented by the loss of Palestine.

Distinguished by an original synthesis of the documentary approach with modernist forms of experimentation such as minimalism, impersonal irony, and collage, Sonallah Ibrahim's oeuvre frequently charts the extremes and contradictions afflicting life in Egypt, from the revolutionary days of Abdel Nasser, through the period of al-Sadat's "open door" policy, and up to the (recently overthrown) Mubarak regime. *The Committee* deals specifically with the al-Sadat period and the devastating consequences of its open door policy and the police state structure

that maintained it. Identifying the novel as a particularly rich instance of Arabic literature's reckoning with globalization, Muhsin al-Musawi opines that "…*The Committee* is likely to flourish as a world text, but it will also remain an Arab text of rich postcolonial and postmodernist implications that assume full meaning in relation to the nature of a nation-state that has been run by global capital since President Jamal Abdel Nasser's death in 1970."[13] Drawing on Hisham Sharabi's concept of "neopatriarchy," I will argue that, in order to approach the "full meaning" of the text's "rich postcolonial and postmodernist implications," it is necessary to mine the text for the complex gender dynamics at work in it, specifically in relation to the state's arbitrary power and the political economy underlying it. Defining neopatriarchy as the historical collusion between "internal heteronomy" (patriarchy) and "external dependency" (neo-colonialism), Sharabi proposes it as the paradigm according to which the socio-economic inequalities and repressive state structures dominating the Arab world take shape.[14] Importantly, Sharabi links this collusion to a history of patriarchal ideology and practice that spans state and civil society, such that neopatriarchy as the shape of the state apparatus becomes organically dependent on patriarchy as a collective societal legacy. It is along the continuum between neopatriarchy and patriarchy that *The Committee*'s trenchant deconstruction of arbitrary power unfolds.

The novel's narrator-protagonist, who resembles the author in many of his biographical details, is a critical intellectual with a strong interest in investigating the historical and political roots of Egypt's socio-economic cesspool. As a result of his anti-establishment research, he runs afoul of a supra-governmental "committee" that resorts to various forms of intimidation and mind control in order to maintain external dependency in open door Egypt. Summoned to appear before the committee, whose authority is officially unacknowledged yet ubiquitously accepted—

a scenario that situates its arbitrary power beyond even that of the state—the narrator encounters from the very first meeting the phallic sexuality of arbitrary power, as the committee discredits his intellectual authority along with/as part of his masculinity in rituals of sexual humiliation. Crucially, the narrator plays along with these rituals through a parodic type of obedience, where consent and dissent merge into an ironic indictment of arbitrary power's co-option of the Self. Thus, for example, when asked to belly dance in front of the committee, the narrator carries the performance to an extravagant level; when asked to bend over and expose his anus to a male member's penetrating finger (in order for the latter to ascertain the homosexual penetrability which he attributes to him), the narrator readily complies with this request, while acknowledging its absurdity as a privilege of arbitrary power. To an extent, the narrator shares the committee's ridicule toward the prospect of a compromised masculinity; in this sense, his parodic approach indicates his assimilation of the patriarchal model of agency, where masculine integrity means sexual dominance and impenetrability by default. On the other hand, the emphasis of the parody seems to lie not so much on the type of sexual humiliation the committee can inflict, but on the fact that it can inflict it at all. As the plot progresses, and the committee's noose around his neck tightens, the narrator's experience of marginality transitions from a masculine frame of reference to a feminine one, where men's oppression of women becomes a structural parallel to the state's oppression of its citizens.

When one of the committee members moves in with the narrator and places him under the most invasive surveillance, the sexual dynamics shaping the narrator's encounter with the man begin to unsettle the conventional gender-polarization of power that hitherto dominates the text. After the man insists on sharing the narrator's bed with him, the latter feels simultaneously attracted and intimidated by the official power embodied in the man. The specifically sexual

dimension of this fraught attraction manifests in the narrator's paranoid imagination of the man's dangerous virility, itself under question due to the role he plays as a "middleman" between foreign interests and the Egyptian economy. Conscious of the paranoid nature of his attraction to the middleman, the narrator self-reflexively undermines both the rigid heterosexual polarization of masculinity and femininity, and the naturalized association of masculinity with power. As other developments push the narrator to reorient his sexual politics, the novel makes a gradual move from universal masculinity as the closed circuit of crisis, to sexual hierarchy as a primary crucible of crisis. More specifically, the novel identifies the state's abuse of power with men's abuse of women (and physically weaker men), and the subaltern subject position with the position of oppressed women. In this way the novel grounds the alliance between comprador capitalism and the Egyptian police state in the continuum between patriarchy as a social institution, and neopatriarchy as a political economy.

Together, the three chapters of this dissertation draw overlapping social and political geographies in which gender manifests as a crucible of crisis in late modern Arabic literature. In Kanafani's *All That's Left to You*, the opposition between national resistance and treason, which frames the gendered tension between Hamid and his sister, unfolds through recollections of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip during the Suez War in 1956. Accordingly, the opposition acquires a larger significance as part of a regional Arab struggle for economic and political independence. In Tuqan's "A Hurtful Wish," the chastity-as-dignity of the female poet under occupation is inextricable from the dignity of the (implicitly male) Arab masses, and the poet appeals to the latter's dignity to protect her own. In al-Daif's *Dear Mr Kawabata*, Rashid's bid for a masculine modern cosmopolitanism is motivated by a desire to dissociate himself not only from Lebanese sectarianism, but also from retrogressive regimes in the Arab world, as well as a

collective tendency, sedimented in Arabic idioms, to escape the humiliating status quo by taking refuge in the virile conquests of the past. Al-Duwayhi's *The Rain of June* sets the intra-Maronite, male-authored violence of 1957 against the regional-international crisis of 1958, where Lebanese men fought a war for their different visions of Lebanon's national identity and strategic alliances. And in Ibrahim's *The Committee*, the Doctor acts as the paradigm of the "middleman," the class of men that holds power in every Arab country, while the Committee's role is symbolized by the image of Arab rulers genuflecting to U.S. and Israeli leaders, effectively making themselves sexually penetrable and compromising their masculinity through self-abasing subordination. By taking a trans-national comparative approach to the gender of crisis in Palestinian, Lebanese, and Egyptian literature from the late sixties onward, I hope to have demonstrated the critical role of gender in literary engagements of crisis from the late modern period. At a time when modernity's potential as a catalyst for cultural growth is chronically thwarted by a host of entrenched crises, ranging from post-classical colonialism, neo-colonialism, and dictatorship, to aggravated tribal and sectarian hostilities, the corresponding strain on gender relations and identity is bound to appear as a formative influence on the growth of Arabic literature. Sometimes undermining, and sometimes reinforcing, the patriarchal legacy absorbed by national consciousness and civic society, the texts examined in this dissertation reveal the volatile economy of gender in the late modern phase of Arabic literature.

I. Embattled Nation: Gender in Palestinian Resistance Literature

Suspended between the unrelenting realities of foreign military occupation and the failure of the dream of national sovereignty, and external pressures toward literary innovation circulated through the global literary market, Palestinian writers face the difficult challenge of engaging a continuing historical problem in innovative ways. In her introduction to the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (*Mawsūʿat al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī*, 1997), Salma al-Jayyusi addresses this difficulty by framing it within the broader context of the politicization of Arabic literature:

> And it may be said that Arabic literature on the whole is preoccupied these days with the political and social conflict the Arab people are engaged in, but there is no doubt that politics imposes a heavier burden on the Palestinian writer, for it normally determines where the writer lives and writes, and it calls for a greater extent of personal struggle that surpasses that which other Arab writers may experience, although often these writers are committed to particular political ideas and belong to the ranks of the opposition.[1]

Both situating Palestinian literature on a continuum with Arabic literature in terms of its politicized nature, and emphasizing its distinctiveness on the same basis, al-Jayyusi calls attention to the importance of historical and socio-political contexts in determining the potential parameters of literary innovation. Surveying the accomplishments of writers such as Ghassan Kanafani, Imil Habibi, Tawfiq Al-Sayigh, Sahar Khalifeh, and Fadwa Tuqan, among others, al-Jayyusi highlights as a mark of artistic and ideological maturation the move away from the meta-narratives of Palestinian nationalism and the rhetoric of masculine heroism and chivalry underpinning them. Instead of presenting a heroically sacrificing Palestinian nation united in opposition to oppressive and hostile foreign entities and conspiracies, these writers foreground

the fault lines of gender, class, tribe, region, and sect across which the Palestinian collectivity is fractured, attributing to these internal divisions equal responsibility for the thwarting of Palestinian national ambitions, and abandoning the strident rhetoric of heroism for a more muted, ironic tone that seeks agency through the recognition of historical failure and loss.

As the most visible demarcation line between public and private, and as a force that stratifies relations both within the family and within the broader social domain, gender assumes a particularly charged valence in relation to the Israeli Occupation. As Joseph Massad has argued, gender antagonism is prominent in popular imaginings of Palestine's occupied status, and of the Palestinian struggle for independence.

> In the introduction to the Palestinian Nationalist Charter, the Zionist conquest of Palestine is presented as a rape of the land. It views Palestinians as the children of Palestine, portrayed as a mother. The Zionist enemy is clearly seen as masculine, and the wrong committed by this enemy against Palestinians is considered metaphorically to be of a violent sexual nature.[2]

Massad's insight points to the male control of the social sphere and the right to representation, and the marginalization of women as objects or symbols represented in male-authored discourse. This dynamic plays a central role in all the texts discussed in this chapter, as it frames the struggle unfolding in them between the masculinization of agency and national consciousness, and female or feminist voices that unsettle this masculinizing momentum. More than contest internal male hegemony, these texts cast the spotlight on its deep implication in the occupier's power, and solder the fate of the Palestinian nation to the transformation of the gender balance of power within Palestinian society. The difficulty of challenging the status quo is reflected in all five of the texts engaged here, particularly in the poems of Fadwa Tuqan and May al-Sayigh's

poetic memoir, where the conflict causes the female writers' voices to vacillate between reifying and denaturalizing the masculinity of the subject of the Palestinian crisis.

In the case of Palestinian writers, the troubled status of gender in Palestinian society has posed a special challenge to the initiative of political commitment formalized as an aesthetic criterion by Suhayl Idris in his literary periodical *al-Ādāb* and adopted by generations of Arab writers up to the present.[3] Whereas gender concerns move writers in the direction of critiquing the internal dynamics of Palestinian society, national concerns lead them to emphasize the commonality and unity experienced by all Palestinians in relation to the actively oppressive, complicit, or indifferent outside world. Joseph Zeidan attempts to articulate this double bind in his book *Arab Women Writers*, where he presents the Palestinian problem as the central component of the crises of Arab national identity and political will in the late twentieth century.

> Of all the political problems that have come up in the twentieth century, none has so preoccupied the minds and hearts of the Arab people as has the Palestinian question. This concern was at first reflected in poetry, especially after the June 1967 war, but later it found its way into all fields of literature, including the novel. Novels written on this subject by Arab women, especially by Palestinian women, are particularly significant in that, over time, the search for personal identity became absorbed in the search for national identity, even to the extent of sacrificing the former for the sake of the latter.[4]

Whereas Zeidan is certainly right to claim that "the search for national identity" has outweighed "the search for personal identity" in the work of most Palestinian women writers, gender persists as a structuring frame even when these writers approach the Palestinian problem through ostensibly gender-neutral, abstract categories of identity and broad terms designating local,

regional, or global geo-political dynamics. In both symptomatic and conscious ways, Palestinian literature—especially but not exclusively that authored by women—demonstrates the Lebanese writer Evelyne Accad's insight that "Sexuality is much more fundamental in social and political problems than previously thought, and unless a sexual revolution is incorporated into political revolution, there will be no real transformation of social relations."[5]

In this chapter, I will read five texts that engage, in a representative manner, the fraught intersections of gender and national consciousness in Palestinian literature: Ghassan Kanafani's novella *All That's Left to You* (1990; *Mā Tabaqqá Lakum*, 1966), widely regarded as a milestone in modernist fictional experimentation as well as Palestinian self-criticism; the poems "Moans at the Permits Window" ("Āhāt Amām Shubbāk al-Taṣārīḥ," 1969) and "A Hurtful Wish" ("Umnīyah Jāriḥah," 1973) by the pathbreaking proto-feminist poet Fadwa Tuqan; *The Siege* (*al-Ḥiṣār*, 1988), a wartime memoir by the former president of the General Union of Palestinian Women in Lebanon, May Al-Sayigh; and *The Inheritance* (2005; *al-Mīrāth*, 1997) by the veteran Nablus-based feminist novelist and activist Sahar Khalifeh. The chapter is divided into two parts based on the complexity of the texts' critical approach to the gender of the Palestinian national imaginary. In the first part, I will examine Tuqan's poems alongside of al-Sayigh's memoir as expressions of female/feminist voices caught between an emerging anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal politics, and the patriarchal constraints on the language and imagery of national consciousness. Through my comparative reading of these rhetorically ambivalent texts, I hope to demonstrate that the masculinism of Palestinian nationalist discourse has restricted the feminist potential of Palestinian resistance literature. In the second part of the chapter, I will read Kanafani's novella next to Khalifeh's novel as texts that deliberately construct a highly critical perspective on the gender of Palestinian nationalism, one where the hierarchical divisions of gender are shown to

play an integral role in the dispersion of national consciousness and the consequent enervation of Palestinian solidarity and resistance. Although the chapter develops no chronological schema in terms of literary history, it may be seen that with individual authors a shift occurs from male-centered to gender-critical perspectives on the Occupation, Palestinian-Israeli relations, and the historical forces enabling and sustaining the status quo. Crucially, these shifts are synchronous with seismic rifts in the regional geo-political landscape, particular the *naksah* of 1967; the Black September of 1970; Abdel Nasser's death in 1970; the October war of 1973; the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990; the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982; and the first Intifada of 1987-1993 along with the failed Oslo "peace process" succeeding it. Constellated through a shared national and regional history, the texts discussed in this chapter demonstrate that Palestinian writers in the late modern period, like their other Arab contemporaries, bring a broader vocabulary and deeper awareness to the question of gender as it pertains to political crisis.

1. Fadwa Tuqan and May al-Sayigh: Occupation, Invasion, and the Feminization of National (Dis)honor

Invoking/Denouncing the Tribe/Ummah: Fadwa Tuqan's "Moans at the Permits Window" *and* "A Hurtful Wish"

In the introduction to his monograph *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (1997), Rashid Khalidi underscores the confrontation with the border as the paradigmatic situation within which contemporary Palestinian identity unfolds, a situation where quotidian obstacles to movement and access accumulate as an existential negation of identity:

> At a time when internal and international barriers to the free movement of people and ideas are crumbling rapidly in many places, those barriers remain in place for Palestinians, and some have been newly erected, like those around Jerusalem. The fact that all Palestinians are subject to these special indignities, and thus are all subject to an almost unique postmodern condition of shared anxiety at the frontier, the checkpoint and the crossing point proves that they are a people, if nothing else does.[1]

Paradoxically, while the borders that negate the validity of Palestinian identity create an "almost unique postmodern condition of shared anxiety," the wide collective scope of this condition leads to a reinforcement of identity: identity coheres around, and survives through, the negation of its legitimacy.

Emerging as a writer from a family history of neglect, domestic confinement, and prematurely terminated education, Fadwa Tuqan commences her writing career with a voice that

struggles against the social codes restricting the range of its desire. In her earlier collections — particularly *Alone with the Days* (*Waḥdī maʿa al-Ayyām,* 1952) and *I Found Her* (*Wajadtuhā*, 1958)—Tuqan expresses a female's longing for love and personal freedom, as well as the exile's nostalgia for the homeland, in a language heavy with pastoral romanticism and self-centered existential doubt, and at times her voice is awkwardly aware of its own politically disconnected solipsism. Tuqan's poems at this stage are also replete with naive convictions based on the rhetoric of Palestinian and Arab solidarity and honor, and on the religious notion of divine providence and its commitment to justice.[2] After the successive disasters of the *naksah*, Black September, and Jamal Abdel Nasser's death, Tuqan's poetry takes a marked turn toward a fuller political consciousness, a disillusionment with the image of Palestinian and pan-Arab dignity, a despair of God bordering on atheism, and a deep pessimism regarding the possibility of freedom. The two poems examined below are both drawn from Tuqan's post-1967 work: "Moans at the Permits Windows" ("Āhāt amām Shubbāk al-Taṣārīḥ") was part of the collection *Night and the Horsemen* (*Al-Fursān wa-al-Layl*, 1969), and "A Hurtful Wish" appeared in *Alone at the Summit of the World* (*ʿAlá Qimmat al-Dunyā Waḥīdan*, 1973). In "Moans at the Permits Window," Tuqan contributes a distinctly female dimension to the existential anguish experienced at the border. Specifically, the poem gives a female inflection to the iconically Palestinian experience, undergone by thousands on a daily basis since the 1967 conquest, of having every aspect of movement within, into, and out of the Occupied Territories controlled by Israeli soldiers. More specifically, while expressing her frustration with her humiliating experience at the barrier, Tuqan extends her frustration toward her "brethren" in the Arabo-Islamic tribe/*ummah*, who, by failing to come to her rescue, become complicit in the oppressive masculinity of her Israeli oppressors. In this sense, Tuqan's awareness of herself as an oppressed woman qualifies her

awareness of herself as an oppressed Palestinian, and as a result situates Palestinian female agency between the contradictory pulls of foreign occupation and internal patriarchy.

Focusing on an incident where the author was detained at the "Permits Window" for seven hours during a hot afternoon while trying to cross the Allenby Bridge, the poem's narrative straddles the individual and collective aspects of the poet's experience through the fraught reality of her feminine subject position. Deploying relatively direct expressions of emotion within the suggestive framework of free verse, Tuqan's poem recreates an acute moment of agony that becomes overdetermined by the psychological complexities of the encounter with the occupier. While situating the expression of affect within a narrative logic, and conjoining it to the direct, visceral appeal of interjection, Tuqan's language also draws on repetition and dissociation to evoke the existential dimensions of the experience of occupation: "My stand on the bridge, begging to cross/Oh, begging to cross/My suffocation, my broken breath carried over/The white heat of noon/Seven hours of waiting/What has clipped the wing of time/Who has crippled the feet of noon?"[3] Using nouns that congeal or replace the processual nature of their related verbs—the instance-noun "stand" (*waqfah*), the gerund "suffocation" (*ikhtināq*), and the strictly nominal "breath" (*nafas*)—the poet's language renders her psychic state as a static condition beyond her volition. The impression of paralysis is reinforced by the use of the passive participle "broken" (*maqṭū'*) and the representation of the occupying power as a mesh of unlocalizable, disembodied forces that control the movement of time: "What has clipped the wing of time/Who has crippled the feet of noon?" By maneuvering the stream of time into a slough of suffocating immobility, the occupying power also extends its hold over Palestinian identity; the permits window becomes the condition of possibility for Palestinians to maintain physical access to their lands, and this condition in turn determines the sustainability of Palestinian identity over time.

In this fashion the arrest of the poet's physical agency at the permits window translates into an arrest of Palestinian identity, and the poet's experience comes to represent the besieged state of Palestinian national consciousness and the existential crisis this state of siege provokes. The collective, existential nature of the predicament has racial roots that are revealed in the description of the language used by the Israeli soldier handling the permits: "And the voice of a lowly soldier resounds/A slap falling on the face of the crowd:/(Arabs, chaos, dogs/Move back, stay away from the barrier, move back, you dogs)." Drawing on Orientalist stereotypes of Arabs as chaotic and animalistic, the soldier's insults paint the occupation as a necessary, civilizing law. While the soldier's racist language has a direct force that falls on "the face of the crowd," this force is both distanced through the paraphrasing function of the parentheses, and intensified through the compulsive effect of repetition: "(Arabs, chaos, dogs/Go back...go back, you dogs)." Grounded as it is in the material reality of Israeli power over the Palestinians, the soldier's racist ideology falls on the poet's ear with the force of trauma, one that necessitates its own repression even as it continues to intrude on the poet's consciousness.

Whereas the physical discomfort and psychological humiliation involved in the experience of detention unite the poet with her fellow Palestinians as Arabs collectively enduring the dehumanizing indignities of military occupation, her particular experience of herself as an oppressed woman sets her apart from them. Thus, after conjugating the verb "to beg" (*istajdá)* for the first person plural in its second appearance—"Oh, we are begging to cross (*āh, nastajdī al-ʻubūr*)"—the poet appeals to the heroic figure of the eighth Abbasid caliph, al-Muʿtasim Ibn Harun, and to tribal codes of honor, for help: in these ways she marks herself as a woman whose honor is in need of male protection: "Oh, my Muʿtasim!/Oh, rightful vengeance of my clan/All that I possess today is waiting."[4] While the reference to al-Muʿtasim invokes the anachronistic

ideal of the chivalrous caliph jealous over his female subjects' honor, the reference to the clan draws on still current values of tribal honor to impress the necessity of defending the (otherwise vulnerable) kinswoman from foreign aggression. In thus situating herself, the poet effectively reproduces the traditional gender divisions of public and private space, assigning the rights and responsibilities of political praxis to men, while consigning women's agency to the domestic sphere. Moreover, in positing a particularly female honor at stake in the confrontation between Palestinians and Israelis, the poet draws on a traditional conflation between woman and nation that recreates, on a symbolic level, the patriarchal organization of social space. However, given that Tuqan also invokes the dangerous spirit of female rebellion embodied in the figure of Hind Bint ʿUtbah, her use of this patriarchal rhetoric may also be read as a rhetorical strategy, one aimed at shaming the insufficiently moved Palestinian and Arab masses into action.

If the resort to al-Muʿtasim and the tribe's honor codes serves as a culturally sanctioned strategy for the female expression of political protest, a culturally suspect strategy appears in the poet's invocation of Hind Bint ʿUtbah, wife of the prophet Muhammad's formidable enemy Abu Sufyan, and renowned for her own enmity to the prophet and his followers before her conversion to Islam. Referring to the legend that Hind tore up the liver of the prophet's uncle Hamzah and chewed it during the Battle of Uhud, in vengeance for her male relatives who were killed by the Muslims in the Battle of Badr, Tuqan adapts the details of this incident to express her boiling rage toward the occupiers:

Colocynth I have become, my taste is deadly
My rancor is awesome, reaching the farthest depths
My heart is a rock, sulfur, a fountain of fire
A thousand Hinds are under my skin

The hunger of my rancor

Has opened wide its mouth

Nothing save their livers

Can sate the hunger that has settled in my skin[5]

Here Tuqan's identification with Hind occupies a highly ambiguous position in terms of cultural legitimacy. Resented and defamed, in a long tradition of Muslim commentary, for the ferocious role she played in the Battle of Uhud (which was won by the Meccans), Hind has grown into an icon of unwholesome female power.[6] By superimposing Hind's resistance to Muslim expansion onto her own resistance to the Israeli occupation, Tuqan aligns local patriarchy with external foreign domination in their mutual oppression of Palestinian women.

As may be seen in the poem "A Hurtful Wish," Tuqan's connection to Hind develops from her education in classical Arabic poetry and her desire to become an established female poet. In "A Hurtful Wish," where Tuqan condemns the passive stance of other Arabs toward the Palestinian crisis, she cites as her preface four lines from a poem commonly attributed to Hind: "in tuqbilū nuʿāniq/wa-nafrishu al-namāriq/aw tudbirū nufāriq/firāqa ghayri wāmiq" ("Should you approach us (as friends), we will embrace you/And lay the cushions down (to welcome you)/But should you turn your backs on us (as enemies), we shall desert you/With no love lost between us.")[7] Supposedly delivered as an ultimatum to the Muslim army at the Battle of Uhud, these lines furnish the Muslims with two options: to come in peace and enjoy the benefits of cordial relations, or depart and incur the risk of a loveless (i.e. merciless) battle. Hind's poem has gained both fame and notoriety in the Arab world, being on the one hand a fine example of war poetry, and on the other a brazen challenge to God's religion and messenger—more striking for being issued by a woman. As we shall see, the contradictory resonances of Hind's symbolic

legacy, particularly with regard to tribal affiliations and their codes of honor, play a key role in shaping Tuqan's voice and political consciousness.

Seen from a wider perspective, Hind's poem derives its power in large part from the pride she takes in her paternal lineage. In the opening lines of the longer version of the poem, which she recites in the first person plural to include the women supporting her performance, Hind flaunts a femininity clad in the armor of patrlineal prestige: "naḥnu banātu Ṭāriq/namshī ʿalá al-namāriq/al-durru fī al-makhāniq/wa-al-misku fī al-manāṭiq ("We are the daughters of Tariq/Who walk on cushioned ground/Pearls adorn our necks/And musk perfumes our gowns").[8] Here the pride taken in a distinguished lineage (one meaning of *ṭāriq* is 'bright star') overlaps with the pride taken in the pearl-strung necks and perfumed gowns, signs of aristocratic femininity. By proclaiming this aristocratic femininity in her challenge to the Muslim army, Hind feminizes the discourse of tribal honor such that signs of femininity become signs of tribal power, and the authority needed to honor and dishonor men of the opposing camp falls into women's hands (or mouths). In the case of Hind, the Meccan army's victory would confirm the power of the pagans of al-Quraysh who still reside in Mecca, and thereby affirm the honor she possesses as a woman who belongs to this group. In "A Hurtful Wish," Tuqan draws on Hind's challenge to assert her right to honor and dishonor the Arab brethren/men who hold—or ought to hold—the key to her own people's salvation. Whereas Hind tries to rally the men of her tribe through the spirit of pride, Tuqan attempts to do so through the spirit of shame. The ultimatum delivered by Hind gets transformed in a manner that reflects Tuqan's ambivalent stance toward her brethren, the stance of a woman abandoned to a crushingly oppressive and humiliating fate by the first people she would expect to jump to her rescue: should you come to our aid, we will embrace you as one of us; but should you abandon us to our fate, we will sever all the ties of kinship between us. In

proportion to the tremendous anger she harbors against her brethren, Tuqan goes further than Hind in expanding the boundaries of politicized femininity. As we shall see, Tuqan explicitly castrates her Arab brethren by suggesting that other, more honorable men are more worthy of sexual access to Palestinian women.

The intertextually determined shift that occurs, from tribal boasting (*mufākharah*) against the (br)other to lampooning (*hijā'*), commences when Tuqan connects the ongoing misery of the Palestinians to a flood of (implicitly) Arab propaganda: "And the years pass, one after the other/ One after the other, after the other/And the ground sways beneath us, while the dome of the sky/Pours down on us piles and piles of debris/And lies envelop us, from the crowns of our heads/To the tips of our toes/Tell us, our brethren, how much more must we abide?"[9] After testifying to the overwhelming suffering that persists one year "after the other, after the other," unsettling the foundations of Palestinian security and bringing down heaps of destruction, the poet directs a question to her "brethren" that alludes to their power to change the Palestinian reality: the Arabs can "tell" the Palestinians how much more they must abide since they have the means to influence the trajectory of the Palestinian crisis. In alluding to these means, the poet assigns a degree of power and responsibility to her brother Arabs that makes their passive stance complicit in the active abuses of the occupying enemy. Thus the survival of the kinship loyalties that tie her to her brethren now hinges on them rising at the battle cry. Ignoring the battle cry would risk not only the loss of Tuqan's identification with masculinized Arab honor, but also the loss of this honor itself.

Immediately after Tuqan delivers her subtly phrased ultimatum, she appeals to Vietnam to send a million resistance fighters to Palestine, whose women no longer believe in the chivalry of their men. For the valiant/virile men of Vietnam, a million valiant/fertile Palestinian women

would gladly give their bodies. Crucially, Tuqan presents this sexualized female nationalism as proof of an authentic Arabness that exceeds the scope of Palestinian nationalism, reaching all the way back to the legendary ancestor of the Arabs, Qahtan:[10] "Oh, Vietnam!/What would I not give, that a million fighters/From among your many heroes/May be cast by an eastern wind/Onto the Arabian desert/I would lay the cushions down for them/And a million fertile Qahtani women would gladly be your boon."[11] By citing the fighters of Vietnam as role models for nationalist zeal and self-sacrifice, Tuqan excoriates the quietism of the Arab masses and, in particular, Arab men. Linking his status to Palestinian nationalism, Tuqan draws on the figure of Qahtan as a symbol of the true, chivalrous Arabness, one that can realize the goals of nationalist resistance and preserve Palestinian-Arab pride. Within the terms of a discourse where patrilineal prestige is conflated with chivalry, Tuqan transfers the right to claim Qahtani status from Arab men to Arab women, thereby transgressing the historically masculine boundaries within which this mythology has developed. Tuqan goes further in her transgression of these boundaries, along with the patriarchal domestication of female sexuality, by associating the nationalist zeal of Palestinian women with their sexual desire for truly chivalrous foreign men. Although it undercuts the male Arab claim to chivalry, the sexual scenario drawn by Tuqan also threatens the moral integrity of her femininity according to the patriarchal terms of the discourse of chivalry. In this sense her poetic rhetoric becomes doubly transgressive: by dismissing the chivalry of her brethren, Tuqan also denies their right to lay down the law for female sexuality.

Importantly, "A Hurtful Wish" concludes with a stanza that addresses the disappointingly unchivalrous Arab men as "ahl al-bayt" ("the People of the House)," a phrase that can refer both to one's clan and to the immediate family of the prophet Muhammad. Combining a rhetorical apology for the "hurtful wish" with a sincere expression of blame, the stanza makes it clear that

the hurtful wish is an inevitable response to the constant cant of the Arab governments and their quiescent people where the Palestinian crisis is concerned: "Pardon me, O People of the House/ This wish is hurtful indeed/But nothing of you remains with us/Except your clamoring voices/ We have lost the true ways/And we are weary, my dear ones/Of this sugarcoating of death."[12] We can see here that the poem's final stanza refers us back to "Moans at the Permits Window," where Tuqan implicates local patriarchy in the external aggression of Israel, in terms of their mutual oppression of women. In the earlier poem, Tuqan wishes to ingest the livers of the Israeli occupiers like Hind had ingested the liver of Muhammad's uncle Hamza; in "A Hurtful Wish," Tuqan adapts Hind's ultimatum to the Muslim army to the Palestinian situation, and directs it against the Arab nations/men who abandon the Palestinians to their bitter fate. Thus we see that a feminized political consciousness authors and authorizes Tuqan's discursive stance in these two poems: in both, she traces the mythology of Arab chivalry back to its roots in the mythology of the glorious Arabo-Islamic *ummah*, and in both she cites the discourse of tribal honor from the feminine position lying on its constitutive margins, thereby unsettling the gendered distribution of power that determines the center and margin, the law and its subjects, within that same discourse.

On the one hand, by invoking the hurtful prospect of Arab women's sexual preference for foreign men, Tuqan's scenario reifies the masculine gender of nationalist discourse: when Arab men default on their obligations to the nation's honor, Arab women turn to foreign men to meet these obligations. However, Tuqan's scenario also contests men's claim to the nation/woman's honor, and to the discursive authority through which the national subject gets assigned a masculine gender, and femininity gets yoked to the nation as symbolic material for the self-representations of the male national subject. In this sense it may be said that "A Hurtful Wish,"

like its precursor "Moans at the Permits Window," troubles the nation/woman nexus, while opening the possibility for women to act as social agents and as the subjects, rather than the objects, of national consciousness. That said, the political logic of the poems cannot recognize the contradiction between the tribal-patriarchal structure of national honor, and the agency the poet claims as a woman jealous over her nation's honor. In "Moans at the Permits Window," the critique of Islamic patriarchy is oblique, legible mostly from the historical context concerning al-Muʿtasim and Hind Bint ʿUtbah. In "A Hurtful Wish," the critical stance becomes more explicit, as the treacherous Arab nations are named "ahl al-bayt," and the transgressive desire for the Vietnamese war heroes is recognized as "hurtful" specifically in relation to the Arab brethren. However, in neither poem does Tuqan's disillusionment with Arab chivalry lead to a clear apprehension of Palestinian nationalist discourse as an obstacle to Palestinian women's agency. Although May al-Sayigh also stumbles on the rhetoric of honor in *The Siege*, her revolutionary politics acknowledge and challenge the masculine gender of Palestinian nationalist discourse, as well as the systemic relation between men, violence, and the belligerent ideologies underpinning war.

Beirut, the Other, and the Crisis of Arab/Masculine Honor: May al-Sayigh's The Siege

Tuqan's more constrained insights into the gender asymmetries of Palestinian and Arab nationalism can be read against her background as a woman who transitioned to adulthood well before the 1967 *naksah*. The younger May al-Sayigh deals in a more probing and confrontational manner with the gender of national consciousness in *The Siege*, her poetic memoir about the Israeli siege of Beirut. After producing four poetry collections between 1969 and 1975, al-Sayigh

turned to prose in her 1988 memoir *The Siege*, where narrative becomes an essential means for capturing the devastation of the Lebanese civil war and its impact on the Palestinian civilian and political presence in Lebanon.[13] Al-Sayigh's memoir reflects its author's leading contribution to the Palestinian women's movement in Lebanon, where she headed the PLO-affiliated General Union of Palestinian Women. Her background in women's activism helps al-Sayigh to discern and address the disjuncture between women's issues and the nationalist rhetoric of the PLO in a conscious and deliberate fashion. Approaching the Palestinian experience of the civil war via an inter-subjective optics of empathy, al-Sayigh demonstrates that war is, to a large extent, mobilized by male investments in discrete identity categories abstracted from the relational dependencies that make them possible. Moreover, by illuminating the marginalization of women in Palestinian politics, al-Sayigh underscores the contradiction between the meta-narrative of Palestinian nationalism unified in resistance, and the male-centered structure of the Palestinian political apparatus. Importantly, this bold critical stance toward official nationalism comes with a radical rethinking of the possibilities of language, and a proposal to revolutionize it so that the potential of its signifiers comes unhinged from signifieds that register regressive and constraining aspects of social consensus. These bold critical interventions, however, do not keep al-Sayigh from reverting to identitarian politics once she attempts to analyze the regional and imperial dimensions of the conflict from the perspective of the Arab nation's honor; this results in the reinforcement of masculinist structures of authority, and in the reification of the Self/Other binary that gets undermined elsewhere in the text. In the volatile wartime environment in which al-Sayigh writes, the feedback loop of violence polarizes both gender roles and ethnic identity simultaneously, and in relation to each other, at times yoking the author's discourse to the same centrifugal dispersion of identity categories that fuels the war's violence.

Written as an almost daily chronicle covering a period of two and a half months, from early June until late August of 1982, *The Siege* delivers a scathing condemnation of the sectarian, class-based, regional, and imperial politics behind the civil war and the Israeli siege of Beirut. Engaging the sordid convolutions of realpolitik that mobilize the war from the perspective of the president of the General Union of Palestinian Women, al-Sayigh both criticizes, and reproduces, certain aspects of the masculinist ideologies informing the political factions and geo-political formations involved on either side of the war. On the one hand, she adopts a narrative approach that, in its meticulous recounting of the daily details of the violence, and in its trauma-evoking formal tensions, assigns an arguably feminist priority to the concrete reality of human suffering over the murderous, body-effacing abstractions of realpolitik. On the other hand, she assumes an ambivalent position vis-à-vis the discourses of Palestinian and pan-Arab nationalism, appealing to the mobilizing potential in their ideologies of masculine/national heroism and honor, while also satirizing their blatant failure. Thus, while al-Sayigh goes a long way in her memoir toward unraveling the macro-political coordinates of the Lebanese civil war, and the impossible bind that they impose on the Palestinians, the gender frames of the text's vision remain constricted by the masculine hegemony over politics.

Unfolding against the cataclysmic violence of the civil war and the Israeli siege of Beirut, the autobiographical impetus and framework of al-Sayigh's memoir is challenged throughout by violence's excess over the signifying potential of language. In this light her text partakes of the philosophical and aesthetic undercurrents inspiring the work of the so-called Beirut Decentrists, women writers including Etel Adnan, Hanan al-Shaykh, and Emily Nasrallah who oriented their decentered lives and subject positions against the war's masculinized violence.[14] The limits of the representational function of language reveal themselves in the text's frequent interposition of

intensely lyrical and suggestive poetic segments between chronologically arranged blocks of documentary prose. The poetic segments usually appear at moments when the narrative stops at a particularly traumatic aspect of the author's experience, thus seeming to attempt, through the power of poetic suggestion, to convey what the logical train of narrative prose cannot. One such example is the brief ode to Sitt Marie Rose, the Maronite Syrio-Lebanese activist who was kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by Lebanese Maronite militiamen for her open support of Palestinian refugees and her involvement with the PLO: "Witnesses said that your cries blocked the road/Shattered at the barriers, fled and called at each mountain slope/'O Kisrawan'/And the flock of finches dispersed in fear, while the full moon lowered its head, and the monastery tottered."[15] Now a district of the Mount Lebanon governorate, "Kisrawan" formerly referred to the northern region of the Mount Lebanon mountain range, which developed into the center of the Maronite Christian community by the nineteenth century.[16] Through the appeal to Kisrawan, al-Sayigh has Marie Rose invoke her sectarian community as witnesses to her murder, thus implicating them in the cannibalistic excess of the sectarian hatred that has targeted her for her transgression of sectarian loyalties. Disrupting the steady momentum of the documentary prose, this ode to Marie Rose draws on a power of emotive suggestion more readily available to the rhythms and imagery of poetry. The emotive power of the ode magnifies the horror of Marie Rose's experience by extending its affective reach and empathic repercussions to aspects of the urban and natural environments (the tottering monastery and the finches that take flight in fear).

Even with the more evocative capacities of poetry, however, writing on the whole falls short of the daily expressive demands of the war. As the following passage suggests, however, what lies beyond the reach of language is not merely the horror of war, but also the intensity that war introduces into the experience of life. Deeply embroiled in the depths of the social

imaginary, language needs to undergo its own transformation in order to reflect the transformation of the social realities surrounding it.

> I try to write. I can't. My pen stands naked in front of death, and with life afire there is no room for writing. Innovation lies too far away for me to embrace, even though life overflows with much poetry. A world in its entirety swims toward the unknown, and all the givens collapse, shatter. Thoughts have turned into fruit, fruit from which all the outer skin and old notions have fallen, as if they were lightning that brings with it no rain.[17] An entire reconstruction of existence and realities is underway, searching for meaning in the letters of the language and the streets of the city. Life blooms in the arms of the fighters, freedom waits to be wrested from reality, and humanity can be achieved. Or rather, humanity is the challenge posed by the human struggle, with death, over the fruit of life.[18]

Importantly, the synchrony attested here between linguistic and social change reconciles the endeavor of formal experimentation with the requirement of political commitment, thus bridging the gap between an earlier literature of social realism epitomized by Mahfouz and a more contemporary literature, headed by a broad range of innovative writers extending beyond the scope of this study, that engages with forms of experimentation often identified as modernist.[19] In this light al-Sayigh may be said to incorporate the concerns with formal experimentation seen in the works of Kanafani, Tuqan, and Khalifeh, among other Palestinian writers, into an explicit manifesto proclaiming the responsibility of revolutionary writing toward the aggravated crisis of the Palestinians and their supporters in war-torn Lebanon.

The connection between revolutionary writing and revolutionary politics during war, and the expanded opportunities for women's intervention on both fronts, are aptly illustrated by al-

Sayigh's fervent support of the large group of Arab literati and intellectuals (all the figures she lists are men) who contribute to the wartime newspaper *al-Maʿrakah,* wielding writing as a weapon in the international media war being waged with Israel over the political significance of its invasion of Beirut: "Glory to the fighting word, sustained by the giant spirit of the persevering masses, the lofty wall standing in the face of aggression."[20] By linking writing so explicitly to revolutionary politics, al-Sayigh effectively situates her own writing in a continuum with the men contributing to *The Battle*, thereby claiming for women the male-dominated spaces of writing and political resistance, while challenging the masculinized vortices of "aggression" sustaining the momentum of war. A marked shift has thus occurred between Tuqan's culturally ambivalent expression of female rage at the border and al-Sayigh's strident identification of female resistance with revolutionary politics. However, the very exigencies of wartime violence that make such feminist transgressions possible also impose certain masculinist restrictions on the understanding of identity that dilute al-Sayigh's empathy for the Other, an arguably feminist politics of identification that could work as a counterforce to the divisive discourse of sectarian and ethnic difference and enmity.

In both thematic focus and style, al-Sayigh places an indicatively feminine emphasis on individual subjectivity, empathy, and pathos that challenges the collective identitarian politics of enmity fueling the war. In a retort to a friend who criticizes her for what s/he sees as the hyper-emotionality of her revolutionary rhetoric, al-Sayigh challenges the common wisdom that reason and logic are viable frameworks for understanding the chaos of the war, and goes on to implicate them in the instrumental aggression of war and realpolitik:

> What do reason and logic mean next to one moment of physical pain experienced by those getting diced by bombs? Don't you see that logic becomes a

> scandal, and reason a conspiracy, when Beirut gets reduced, by those barbarians crawling toward us, to mere coordinate points on the grids of their tanks? When relatives, friends, love, music, poetry, memories, all become mere targets?[21]

While al-Sayigh's interlocutor criticizes the emotionalism animating her demand for a revolution from the Arab masses, al-Sayigh's retort posits the rational purging of emotion as a prime factor in the functioning of the war and its political machinations. The same instrumental rationality that positions the Israeli soldiers to regard Palestinian and Lebanese people and infrastructure as "mere targets" also positions the different sects and ethnic groups as objective enemies with regard to each other, while keeping the other Arab regimes from identifying with Lebanese and Palestinian suffering on a visceral level. Crucially, while al-Sayigh's investment in emotion as a counterforce to instrumental rationality reflects both pan-Arab and humanist leanings, it is more proximately informed by a feminized inclination toward empathy and compassion. Commenting on the grief of the mother of Niʿam, a Palestinian woman who was killed while doing her job as a broadcaster for the PLO radio station in Beirut, al-Sayigh offers female emotion as a subjective orientation that disrupts the abstracting, instrumental calculations of war: "Oh, if the world were to hear the yearning, the poetry, the lamentation in our women's bosoms, then it would become a poet. And it would even shirk from throwing flowers at them."[22] Using hyperbole as a rhetorical device, al-Sayigh presents emotion—empathic emotion, in particular—as a feminine asset with the power to undo the infrastructures of violence on a global scale.

Particularly in the challenge it poses to the macro-political constructions of Self and Other operative during the civil war, al-Sayigh's ethics of empathy threatens to undermine the war-riven status quo. Reacting to the news of the capture of two Israeli soldiers as prisoners of war, al-Sayigh represents her experience of empathy for the soldiers as a compulsion that

overrides the taboos of enmity entrenched through the war. “It’s difficult to tie together the individual and the collective. Why is it that inside myself a separation occurs between the enemy’s individual presence, this weak presence, and his collective, aggressive presence?”[23] By recognizing a rift between the individual and collective perceptions of the enemy’s presence, al-Sayigh’s empathy directs attention to the physical and subjective existence of the individual as a reality that outweighs constructions of collective identity, and questions the ideological givens grounding them. In this respect al-Sayigh develops a precedent set by Kanafani in *All That’s Left to You*, where Hamid’s encounter with the stray Israeli soldier in the desert alerts him to their shared condition of human vulnerability, a condition that transcends ethnic and national divisions and hostilities.

Considering the monumental scale of the destruction wreaked by Israeli forces over Beirut, it is small wonder that al-Sayigh’s experience of empathy for the soldiers comes in a conflicted form. It is especially remarkable that, in the midst of the oppressive monotony of death and destruction that surrounds her, al-Sayigh reaches a point of empathic clarity that enables her to pose a broad equation between antagonism toward the Self and antagonism toward the Other: “The Self becomes transparent, and one dives into oneself, discovers its unknowns. As for the Other, he becomes the voice coming from within the Self. The barriers fall, and in the confrontation with the Other, one discovers that one is confronting none other than the Self.”[24] This insight is especially striking for leaving the contours of the Other undefined, giving a semantic openness that allows the identification to apply equally to intra-Lebanese sectarian strife and Lebanese/Palestinian hostilities, as well as the Lebanese and Palestinian confrontation with Israel. Although the identification of the Self with the Other overleaps the numerous macro-political complications that enter into the civil war, particularly in its regional and imperial

coordinates, the force of the identification's critique extends beyond the realm of rhetoric. The economic and geo-political motivations directing the war act in concert with longstanding sectarian chauvinisms and regional ethnic hostilities which, it may be argued, are initiated and sustained by the projection of antagonism toward the Self onto the Other.

While al-Sayigh appears to situate empathy in an organic relation to femaleness, the background she presents to the activities of the women's union in Beirut helps to historicize female empathy as a function of the continuing marginalization and oppression of women. Complaining of the inadequate funding provided for the union, al-Sayigh unveils a contradiction between the nationalist ideology of the Palestinian leadership and its traditional neglect of women's issues: "This has been the custom, over here. When the question comes to us, hands tremble, and doors are shut. For our political position is indeclinable [*ghayr qābil lil-ṣarf*], and the traditional stance toward the woman's role, a stance that continues to be dissimulated, betrays itself on numerous occasions."[25] Drawing an analogy between women's position in the PLO's national agenda and the Arabic linguistic category of partially indeclinable adjectives and nouns (*al-mamnūʿ min al-ṣarf*), al-Sayigh suggests that the "traditional stance toward the woman's role" is related to the conventional boundaries drawn around the semiotic potential of Arabic, making a change in awareness contingent on a transformation of language. The true measure of the obstacles facing women activists, however, lies in their own internalization of the oppressive weight of tradition, as attested in al-Sayigh's unfavorable assessment of the way women activists have handled their responsibilities:

> Many of the female cadres don't have the capacity for collective action, as the historical social oppression of woman, her domestic isolation, her distance from the process of planning and taking decisions—even those that relate to her

> personal affairs—have turned her participation today into a convoluted process, enervated, hesitant in its steps. She feels her way alone, with no encouragement. As a result, some women who lack political and organizational experience request men's approval for their actions, and seek in them a refuge for their grievances. Moreover, women are prone to individualism and authoritarianism upon assuming responsibility, as if to take vengeance on an extended history that has snatched all initiatives away from them, and deprived all of Arab society, through the structure of an authoritarian patriarchy, of any democratic culture that would permit the independence of thought.[26]

Within "the structure of an authoritarian patriarchy," it is women in particular who suffer from "social oppression" and "domestic isolation," along with the lack of "independence of thought" —a situation that renders their politicization "a convoluted process, enervated, hesitant in its steps," as well as democratically challenged. Representing a deep gap between the abstract thrust of Palestinian nationalist ideology as articulated by the PLO, and the concrete experiences of Palestinian women in the refugee camps of Beirut, the gender asymmetries of Palestinian society lead Palestinian men and women to experience the war in different modes. While the Palestinian meta-narrative of heroic resistance demands the reification of the enemy into a monolithic, primal evil, Palestinian women engaged in resistance, like al-Sayigh, can gauge the war situation through a frame of reference informed by their own marginalization in the meta-narrative, a frame that sharpens their perception of the ideological violence inherent in the construction of Self and Other.

However, as demonstrated by al-Sayigh's impassioned indictment of Arab passivity and complicity in the siege of Beirut, the meta-narratives of Palestinian and pan-Arab identity assert

their influence on the authorial vision, leading the author to deploy the precarious language and ideology of heroism and masculine honor in a discourse of shaming and blaming that reinforces regional enmities. Responding to Menachem Begin's ultimatum to the Palestinian resistance in Beirut—leave or accept total destruction—al-Sayigh holds on to resistance as an honorable option that distinguishes Beirut from the surrounding centers of Arab tyranny, treachery, and disgrace: "Your fate, Beirut, is to be the dignity of this nation [*hādhihi al-ummah*]. To remain magnificent with your head held up, alone while dirt sullies every front. The tyrants resemble the invaders, but you shine in your fire and blood, and you stand alone, while the others fall to the ground."[27] On the one hand, the concept of "dignity" and the chain of associations it mobilizes—"magnificent," "head held up," "shine"—serve as powerful motivations for the resistance movement's morale, a morale in constant need of reinforcement since faces severely daunting odds. On the other hand, "this nation" ties the notion of dignity to the anachronistic ideal of the mighty Arab nation revered as a legacy of the Nasserite era. While the pan-Arabism advocated by Nasser espoused a secular Arab identity against the neo-colonial domination of the West, its success as a popular ideology was based in large part on the veneration of the former Islamic empire as an exemplary model of Arab global influence, and on the aura of the strong male Arab leader, which Nasser cultivated to his advantage—a fact well attested by the considerable leeway his popular image gave him to practice dictatorial control. Thus, while challenging Arab passivity and complicity with imperialism, al-Sayigh's invocation of Arab dignity reinforces a deeply entrenched cultural tendency to venerate the authority of the past, and to identify masculine power with the legitimate authority of the state.

The relation of margin to center which the author occupies vis-à-vis official nationalist discourse—identifying with its heroization of Palestinian resistance, while dis-identifying with

its sidelining of women—gets dramatically reversed when her approach to the larger Arab world assumes a Levantine animosity toward the Gulf states. Attributing Lebanon's vulnerability to the combined influence of local, regional, and foreign powers, al-Sayigh holds the atomism and authoritarianism of the Gulf Arab countries responsible for the undeterred momentum of Israeli and US aggression. Crucially, she associates the monarchic self-interest of these countries with a backward tribalism that is apparently distinct from the tribalism that ignited the civil war.

> When the tribes abandoned the decision to fight, they provided the enemy the rare historical opportunity of settling its scores with the Palestinian uprising, and meting out deadly punishment to the Lebanese people, so that they may be an example for the Arabs. The enemy has secured his back with Camp David and America's friends from among the petty kings (*mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*). O, you imbecile Arab desert. We worship what you do not worship, and you worship what we do not worship.[28]

By referring to the political centers of Arab decision-making as "tribes," al-Sayigh excoriates their opportunistic atomism while locating it on a continuum with popular forms of identitarian separatism in the Arab world. As the invocation of the "imbecile Arab desert" suggests, pride of place is given to the citizens of the Gulf states and their Bedouin origins in apportioning the blame for the tribal mentality; in this narrative, the tribal loyalties dominating the Gulf region are uniquely imbecile, while the tribalism tearing Lebanon apart can be absented from the equation.

Al-Sayigh's language approaches demonization when she rewords some verses from the Qurʾan's "Chapter of the Disbelievers"—where God instructs the prophet Muhammad to assert an ontological distance between his monotheistic religion and the religion of the pagan Arabs—in order to have the stigma of unbelief fall on the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula: "We

worship what you do not worship, and you worship what we do not worship."[29] Al-Sayigh's resort to the divisive religious politics evoked by these verses is ironic given her Christian background, and especially ironic given her earlier feminist insight into the ideological nature of Self/Other divisions. Moreover, the epithet *mulūk al-ṭawāʾif* draws a historical link between the dispersal of the Caliphate of Cordoba into petty kingdoms, and the contemporary dividedness of the Arab countries, evoking, as an honorable (and mythological) contrast, the mighty unity of the Islamic Nation or *ummah*. Like Tuqan's adaption of the legend of al-Muʿtasim, al-Sayigh's resort to the mythologized honor of the *ummah* highlights the impulse to draw on masculinist narratives to give cultural legitimacy and weight to female rage: al-Sayigh's anger unites with the anger of the male fighters and politicians active in the war. In al-Sayigh's case, the impulse to masculinize anger combines with a tribal affinity for double standards. By placing special emphasis on the Gulf states and diffusing responsibility from their rulers to their people, al-Sayigh reproduces the tribal mentality she shuns. Moreover, her reference to the petty kings recalls the negative contrast she makes earlier between Beirut's honorable resistance and the dishonorable disengagement of "her" neighbors. In adopting the rhetoric of honor to describe and motivate anti-imperial resistance, al-Sayigh wields a double-edged sword: dissociating herself from the other's dishonor, she also dishonors her role as a conscientious witness to the suffering endured by the Palestinians in Lebanon.

While al-Sayigh draws attention to the serious disjuncture between Palestinian nationalist discourse as represented by the PLO and Palestinian women's issues and concerns, and even resists the masculine instrumental logic directing the war's violence, she remains partially under the influence of masculinist constructions of identity. As the masculinist abstractions of macro-political categories build their momentum in *The Siege,* through the rhetoric of honor and the

privileging of the Self over the Other, al-Sayigh draws on the inter-subjective possibilities of empathy to challenge these abstractions. However, her engagement with empathy clashes with a strong insistence on difference, one whose formative context extends beyond the experience of the siege to include the rivaling masculinities driving the machinery of sectarian divisions and regional hostilities in the Arab world. Crucially, the complicity in patriarchal ideology in the works of Tuqan and al-Sayigh must be understood in relation to the wider repercussions of the Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1967 and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. In these contexts, complicity functions as an enabling condition for female participation in the national resistance movement. By drawing on the rhetoric of honor, Tuqan and al-Sayigh become more honorable than the (implicitly male) collectivities whose quietism they denounce. By denouncing the male authors and beneficiaries of "honor" through their own terms, the writers legitimate their entry into the discursive sphere of politics. More, by being chivalrous enough to assume the revolutionary mantle Arab men have discarded, Tuqan and al-Sayigh trouble the conventional divisions between male and female qualities and spheres: by means of their nationalist zeal they become manlier than men, denaturalizing patriarchal ideology from within its own terms.

Through the volatile entanglements of gender and civil war, *The Siege* bears witness to a particularly traumatic moment in the history of Palestinian existence and national consciousness, where the alienations and disappointments of exile, and the humiliations of occupation, are overshadowed by the threat of complete annihilation. However, as we turn now to Kanafani and Khalifeh, we shall see that the severity of historical crisis by itself is not enough to materialize a revolution in the perception and experience of gender. Written seven years before Tuqan's bold poem "A Hurtful Wish," and fourteen years before al-Sayigh's *The Siege*, Kanafani's *All That's Left to You* makes an elaborately critical effort to place gender at the center of the contradictions

of Palestinian nationalist rhetoric and symbolism, particularly in the shape they take during the *fidaʿi* period. In Khalifeh's *The Inheritance*, written after the dramatic failure of the Oslo "peace process," gender becomes a critical node around which the post-Oslo deterioration of Palestinian national consciousness, and the rise of materialistic individualism, overlap; this critical node invites the revision not only of Palestinian nationalism, but also of binaristic models of cultural difference that consign the question of gender equality and women's liberation to the "West."

2. Fracturing the Nation: Ghassan Kanafani, Sahar Khalifeh, and the Radical Rifts of Gender

A Desert(ed) Nation: Gender and Commitment in Kanafani's All That's Left to You

Widely acclaimed for his pioneering work in fiction as well as his radical secular contribution to the debate on Palestinian nationalism, Ghassan Kanafani's status as a politicized writer is attested both by his life and his death. Serving as spokesman for the PFLP and editor-in-chief of its weekly newspaper *al-Hadaf* while writing fiction and drama, Kanafani was the first to identify the literature of occupied Palestine as "resistance literature"; as Barbara Harlow argues in *Resistance Literature* (1987), this contribution aligned him with writers working at the vanguard of Third World liberation movements.[1] Comparing him to Amilcar Cabral, leader of the Guinea-Bissau liberation movement and prominent theorist of African resistance struggles, Harlow argues that for both Kanafani and Cabral resistance through armed struggle was expected to lead not only to freedom from economic and political imperialism, but also to "a revolutionary transformation of existing social structures. Whether in liberating women from traditional tasks, organizing democratic processes of decision-making and counsel, building schools or training cadres of peasants and workers, the 'armed liberation struggle,' as Cabral says, 'is not only a product of culture, but a *determinant of* culture.'"[2] Furthermore, Kanafani cogently articulated a radical secular, bi-national, democratic framework for Palestinian nationalism in his political and literary writings, as demonstrated in his third novella *Return to Haifa* (*ʿĀʾid ilá Ḥayfā*, 1969) and in his contributions to the PLO academic journal *Shu'ūn Filasṭīnīyah*.[3] Kanafani's sophisticated understanding of Israel's colonial project, and the role of Palestinian and other Arab countries in facilitating it, combined with the progressive stance he took while acting as a spokesman for the

PFLP, made him threatening enough for Israel to assassinate him through the Mossad in July of 1972.[4]

Kanafani is arguably the first Palestinian writer to arrive at a sophisticated critique of the role gender relations and identity have played in the construction of Palestinian nationalism. Approaching nationalism from the position of an exile—Kanafani's family moved to Syria in 1948, and he moved from Syria to Kuwait before settling in Lebanon—Kanafani engages exile as a multi-layered condition with distinctly gendered nuances, relating it to the internal dynamics of Palestinian society as well as the Israeli occupation and the conundrums of nationalism. In *All That's Left to You*, Kanafani contrasts two articulations of Palestinian nationalism through the intricately interlaced narratives of a brother and sister from Jaffa who get exiled to Gaza in 1948. While the brother attempts to escape the emasculation of exile and occupation by crossing the Negev desert and going after a Palestine symbolically transferred to his mother in Amman, his sister chooses to strike her roots in Gaza, while facing the stigma of being a single woman with no male custodian. In deserting what's left to him of Palestine (Gaza), the brother finds himself literally and metaphorically trapped in a desert: engulfing in its hot sands the dream of the welcoming mother/homeland, the desert becomes his reward for deserting Palestine. The sister, on the other hand, makes a new beginning for herself after killing her husband—a male chauvinist collaborator—and claiming authority over her body and life; thus, she and the child she bears become symbols of a new kind of commitment unfettered by the patriarchal scripts for national agency and resistance. Using the nodal motifs of the desert and time, Kanafani overlays these opposed narratives onto each other, allowing them to resonate with each other in a tense critical dialogue. In doing so, Kanafani contrasts a grounded feminine approach to commitment, one adjusted to the mundane sufferings of life in occupied Paelstine, to the abstract masculine

approach, one that informs the detached, lofty rhetoric of the *fidaʾi* movement taking shape in exile.

The beginning of Kanafani's engagement with gender as an important dimension of Palestinian (and Arab) political failure can be seen in his first novella *Men in the Sun*, (*Rijāl fī al-Shams,* 1963). Among the first works of Palestinian literature to highlight the disjuncture between masculine and national identity, the text tells the story of a group of impoverished Palestinian men who try to smuggle themselves into Kuwait in a water-truck tanker and get delayed at an Iraqi border crossing, ultimately suffocating to death in the tanker's hot air. While they suffer the noontime heat accumulating inside the tanker, the group's driver, nicknamed Abu al-Khayzuran, loses time by playing along with the heterosexist discourse of the Iraqi border police, who taunt him about his putative sexual encounters with a prostitute in Basra; as a result, the passengers inside the tanker suffocate from the sun's accumulated heat and die. The symbolic connection here between macho theatrics and Palestinian/Arab responsibility for the Palestinian plight is acutely ironic, due to the fact that Abu al-Khayzuran underwent surgical castration for an injury he incurred in the 1948 war, and is therefore incapable of the virility he feels compelled to assume at the expense of his fellow nationals' survival. However, it is in his second novella *All That's Left to you*, set in the Gaza Strip of 1963 and punctuated by memories of the 1948 disaster and the 1956 Israeli invasion of Gaza, that Kanafani develops a full-bodied critique of the nexus between gender oppression within Palestinian society and the colonial oppression of the Israeli occupation, thereby seriously challenging the masculine foundations of Palestinian nationalism.

In her essay "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return in Two Novels by Ghassan Kanafani" (originally published in 2002/2003), Amy Zalman maps out the dialectical relations

between masculinity and national consciousness in both *Men in the Sun* and *All That's Left to You*, reading them against the historical background of the 1960s, where the idea of a forcible return to the land gains prominence in Palestinian political and literary discourse as a solution to the humiliations of exile and its erosion of identity. While Zalman's analysis boasts a remarkable contextual grounding, as well as a keen insight into the symbolic registers of masculinity and femininity as they are manipulated in the national narratives of loss and return, it also overlooks certain aspects of ironic distance and reversal at work in Kanafani's novellas that are crucial for understanding the radical nature of his gender and national politics. In her reading of *All That's Left to You*, Zalman builds her analysis on certain misguided assumptions that overlook or downplay the feminist and supra-national direction of Kanafani's fictional critique. Among these assumptions are the idea that Kanafani reinforces the woman-land nexus by reifying the concept of fertility; that motherhood represents a domestication of female agency in spite of the socio-historical and individual contexts that condition the meaning of female agency in the plot; and that the narrative of return Kanafani incorporates into the novella ends in triumph by asserting masculine presence against female absence. I argue rather that Kanafani's purpose in *All That's Left to You* is to undercut the triumphalism of the contemporary discourse of return by troubling the masculinity of the national subject, reversing the conventional power dynamics that shape the woman-land nexus, and staging the impossibility of return against the continuing military dominance of Israel, as well as the erosion of the Palestinian sense of belonging over time.[5] Furthermore, Zalman concludes, through an overly literal reading, that the text co-opts female fertility as a sign of virility in the (male) national subject's confrontation with the occupier. I will argue, on the other hand, that Kanafani emphasizes the gender antagonism internal to Palestinian society over the external confrontation with Israel, giving the former struggle precedence in

determining the historical and existential trajectories of Palestinian national consciousness and aspirations.

Employing multiple narrators and stream-of-consciousness to create a contrapuntal narrative that superimposes the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation on gender divisions within the Palestinian family and social fabric, Kanafani departs decisively here from the social realist style associated with the literature of commitment (*adab al-iltizām*) and its didactic, demagogic slant.[6] In particular, Kanafani's experimental treatment of perspective (in addition to Hamid, Maryam, and Zakaria, the Desert and Time participate as characters, the former taking part in narration as well) and of time and space (alternately expansive and condensed, convergent and divergent) allows him to outline the broad existential contours of the Palestinian crisis while simultaneously pinpointing its particular gender coordinates. Synchronizing the thoughts and experiences of Hamid and Maryam, siblings from Jaffa left to fend for themselves as refugees in Gaza after their father dies in the violence of 1948, and their mother gets exiled to Amman, the narrative conjoins gender antagonism to erotic attraction in the siblings' relationship; this conjuncture is duplicated in more dramatic form in Maryam's relationship to her domineering, collaborator husband, Zakaria. As the narrative moves toward the deadly confrontations between Maryam and Zakaria at their home, and Hamid and an Israeli soldier he encounters in the desert, shuttling without expositions between the siblings' resonating streams of consciousness, the gender divide and the colonial divide appear as mutually reinforcing power differentials.

Opening the narrative with Hamid's journey across the Negev desert from Gaza to Amman, where he hopes to reach his long absent mother, Kanafani assigns the desert an overdetermined symbolism, whereby its interminable and alienating vastness codes for the ever present absence of both mother and Palestine, the primary bodies/spaces in relation to which

Hamid experiences personal and national loss. This gendered and sexualized coding of land is especially apparent when, after he feels the desert ground "like a virgin quiver beneath him" and issue an "excited breath" as he sinks his hand into it, Hamid wishes for his mother's presence, and addresses the desert as an unduly advantaged lover:

> **He laid his cheek on the sand again and felt a cold breeze wash over him. The red taillights had disappeared, as though a hand had wiped them out. If only my mother was here, he reflected. He turned and brushed his lips against the warm sand. "It's not in my power to hate you, but how can I love you? In one night you'd swallow up ten [men] like me. I choose your love. I'm forced to choose your love. You're all that's left to me."**[7]

The idealization of the mother as the end of all desire connects, through the symbolic abstraction of the female, with the apostrophic address of the desert as an overwhelming beloved. Here, the demand for love is disguised as a compulsion ("I'm forced to choose your love"), while female power becomes a deadly threat ("In one night you'd swallow up ten [men] like me"). The misogyny latent in such symbolic abstraction is concretely realized in Hamid's relation to his sister Maryam; he decides to leave Gaza after his masculine sense of honor is compromised by Maryam's liaison with, and subsequent marriage to, the known collaborator Zakaria. Maryam's investment in Zakaria, on the other hand, appears as more concrete next to her brother's symbolically freighted investment in the mother-land nexus. Transitioning to Maryam with a repetition of "You're all that's left to me," a thought she has in reference to Zakaria, Kanafani highlights through juxtaposition the power disparity in the siblings' gendered subject positions. Hamid can abstract the female in proportion to his demand, to the point where she is larger than life, while Maryam must accommodate her needs from life to the size of Zakaria.

On the one hand, the metaphorical connection between the desert, as a symbol of deadening absence, and the mother/Palestine, is facilitated by the fact that all four of the related nouns are grammatically feminine: *ṣaḥrā'* ('desert'), *arḍ* ('ground'), *umm* ('mother'), *Filasṭīn* ('Palestine'). Moreover, particularly from the sixties onward, Palestinian literature abounds with instances of male authors describing land in feminizing tropes.[8] On the other hand, Kanafani does not intend to identify Hamid completely with a typical masculine subject position with regard to his attachment to his mother, land, or sister. As the focalized narration and flashbacks of the opening scene reveal, Hamid himself feels stifled and alienated in some measure by the social norms and values that condemn his sister—and, by association, him—for her involvement with Zakaria. As he sets out on his journey, Hamid remembers with shame the ceremony in which he married Maryam to Zakaria, and connects his feeling of shame with a general malaise resulting from his hypocritical social environment.

> **As he plunged into the night, it was as though he was anchored to his home in Gaza by a ball of thread. For sixteen years they'd enveloped him with these constricting strands, and now he was unraveling the ball, letting himself roll into the night. "Repeat after me: I give you my sister Maryam in marriage—I give you my sister Maryam in marriage—for a dowry worth—for a dowry worth—ten guineas...ten guineas...all deferred...all deferred." Eyes had bored into his back as he had sat in front of the *Shaikh*. Everyone there knew very well that it wasn't that he was giving her away, but that she was pregnant, and that the swine who was to be his brother-in-law was sitting next to him, audibly laughing inside.**[9]

The ball of wool functions as a broad metaphor for the socio-economic hardships of refugee life

as well as the stifling rigidity of social norms, and the hypocritical nature of these norms is suggested by the invitees' insincere participation in the marriage ceremony ("Eyes had bored into his back"). While Hamid shares society's condemnation of his sister for being sexually active before marriage, and for being involved with a collaborator—he even fantasizes about killing her in punishment[10]—he also feels ambivalent about his impulse to condemn her.

Crucially, Hamid's ambivalence toward his sister points to a friction between the more personal dimensions of the sibling bond and those mediated by codes of masculine/national honor. Hamid's divergent attitudes toward his mother and sister—excessive idealization with the former, excessive judgment with the latter —reflect a gendered double standard in Palestinian society that finds its way into the Palestinian national movement, where the marginalization of women in the decision-making process, and in the historical narrative of resistance, coexists with the tendency to romanticize Palestine as feminine, and to honor the sacrifices of motherhood for the nationalist cause.[11] Recalling his confrontation with his sister over her sexual liaison with Zakaria, Hamid remembers that "He shook his head. 'You were everything to me, but now you're dishonored, defiled, and I'm deceived...If only your mother was here.'"[12] While the sister's attempt to satisfy her sexual and emotional needs outside of marriage renders her permanently blemished, the mother gets abstracted into the image of dutiful virtue with the help of her absence. By giving Maryam's story ample space to qualify the male-centered social codes and nationalist ideals internalized by Hamid, Kanafani attempts a feminist rewriting of Palestinian nationalism. In the new script, the failure of Palestinian internal solidarity must be understood at the level of gender relations in the family.

Marking in boldface the narratorial shift from Hamid's memory of Zakaria betraying Salim, a Palestinian man active in resisting the Israeli occupation of Gaza, to Maryam's

memories of the sexual and emotional deprivation which she seeks to make up for with Zakaria, Kanafani strikes a bold analogy between the oppression of national aspirations under occupation and the repression of female sexuality by the biased norms of chastity. As the following passage indicates, the Israeli soldier's bullet that kills Salim is analogous in its destructive force to the empty clock strokes that mark Maryam's deadening disavowal of her sexuality.

> **We heard the single shot fired behind the wall and, simultaneously, we all turned our eyes on Zakaria.**
>
> Zakaria! Zakaria! [I was a corpse] on fire beneath my clothes. Even when I took them off and hung them on the wall, the flames continued to feed on those garments. Every morning, as I changed, the clock would sound its melancholy chime from the small bier opposite me. It was then that my wayward breasts would erupt [as if they had been folded away in Hamid's suitcase,] and my hands, unaware, would slide down to my thighs [with the clock still chiming]. There wasn't a single large mirror in the house in which I could look at all my body at once. All I could see was my face. When I moved the mirror, the images of my breasts, my belly, my thighs, would appear as a series of disconnected parts belonging to the disembodied figure of a girl being paid the last rites by the merciless mocking beat of the clock's pendulum against the wall.[13]

Moving from Hamid's memory of Salim's murder (written in boldface) to Maryam's memory of sexual repression through the image of death ("I was a corpse…"), Kanafani connects the sexual stagnation that Maryam undergoes as the price of social conformity to the killing of Palestinian national aspirations as represented by Salim. Moreover, Hamid's brotherly expectations appear as the most proximate manifestation of the social constraints on Maryam's sexuality: Maryam's

breasts are "folded away in Hamid's suitcase." The cumulative weight of Maryam's internalized prohibitions results in an incoherent body image and bifurcated identity (as suggested by the trope of the fragmenting mirror), while the homogenously empty progression of time identifies the horizon of possibilities with death (symbolized by the self-consciously coffin-like clock).

As indicated in the continued unfolding of Maryam's thought process, her experience of sexuality is traumatic not only due to the traditional constraints imposed on women, but also due to the disruption of social cohesion and historical continuity as a result of the Palestinians' dispossession, a formative experience she shares with her brother. This paradox or double bind is condensed in the objection Maryam makes to her absent brother on behalf of her sexuality. Countering Hamid's prejudice against her relationship with Zakaria by mocking his socially sanctioned obliviousness toward her sexual and emotional needs, Maryam goes on to implicate her family's refugee status in her unfortunate plight, thus associating her plight with historical circumstances beyond her or her brother's control. In this context, Maryam links the loss of Fathi, her former suitor in Jaffa, to the current irrelevance of the formerly revered scripts for female sexuality.

> Poor Hamid, what did you really believe? That the plough should remain forbidden to this fertile earth? That I should spend all the days of my life subservient to your manhood, conjuring out of your trousers a man from Jaffa called Fathi, who, silently and proudly, has been preparing a dowry worthy of Abu Hamid's daughter? You poor wretch! Jaffa and Fathi are both lost, forever —there's nothing left.[14]

Drawing, with a tongue-in-cheek irony, on the heterosexist imagery of copulation appearing in the Qurʾan—where women are portrayed as the legitimate "tilth" of their husbands[15]— Maryam

identifies Hamid with the male co-option of female sexuality ("Poor Hamid, what did you really believe? That the plough should remain forbidden to this fertile earth?"). Significantly, the possessive jealousy and sense of entitlement Hamid exhibits toward his sister are reinforced by the fact that their shared orphan and refugee status, combined with the ten year age difference between them, has devolved onto her the role of surrogate mother: the historical catastrophe of the *nakbah* amplifies traditional restrictions on Maryam's sexuality and mobility.

Thus, Hamid expects his sister to limit her interaction with men to him, effectively installing himself as the only legitimate focus of her needs, an incestuous situation that becomes acutely ironic when she must fantasize about men with the help of his trousers. The importance of Fathi in this context also involves an incestuous irony. A former marriage prospect from Jaffa, Fathi represents the socially legitimate, "honorable" direction Maryam's life could have taken had she and her community not been uprooted by the violence of Israel's founding. The loss Fathi represents acquires an incestuous character, considering that his sister, who acts as a surrogate mother by trying to introduce him to her friend Maryam, is also named Fathiyah like Zakaria's first wife. Thus, as per Zalman's astute observation, the normally distinct relational terms of kinship, friendship, and marriage that bind the characters collapse together in an incestuously tangled semiotic web that marks the post-1948 present as a continual effort to recover the relational intimacies prior to 1948: "In the compressed space of the post-1948 world, it makes little difference which comes first: all relationships collapse into structural similarity in which sisters, wives and mothers, and brethren, husbands and fathers play substituting roles, making any erotic pairing a potentially polluted one."[16] Separated from Fathi by the mass exodus of 1948, Maryam identifies his loss and the loss of Jaffa with the loss of a socially sanctioned trajectory for her sexual and emotional needs ("Jaffa and Fathi are both lost, forever—there's

nothing left"). Dutifully observing the identity boundaries of sisterhood and motherhood, Maryam colludes with the social repression of her desires until she's past the prime age bracket of marriage, at which point she feels she has no option but to accept a man with a compromised status such as Zakaria. By calling Hamid a "poor man," Maryam deals a decisive blow to the status he tries to maintain by abandoning her. Citing the historical experience of dispossession as a collective humiliation affecting all Palestinians, men and women alike, Maryam undermines the momentum of masculine honor that drives her brother to condemn and abandon her.

By knotting together, through Maryam's anguished sexuality, the historical dispersion of Palestine and the oppressive gender norms of Palestinian society, Kanafani's vision of political crisis transcends facile demarcation lines between inside and outside, Self and Other, co-national and foreigner. Throwing into crisis the borders that establish the Palestinian collective, Maryam's experience as a woman implicates the divisive momentum of gender in the historical unfolding of the Palestinian crisis itself. This boundary-troubling conjuncture between a personal experience of gender and a collective crisis is acutely illustrated in the scene where Maryam's narration of Zakaria's sexual advance leads her to remember her turbulent escape from Jaffa in 1948, on a boat crowded with menacing men:

> He pulled himself closer to me, and the heat of his breath set me on fire. I knew it was going to happen and I couldn't resist him. My gown slid off beneath his fingers and my nakedness was fluid beneath him. The darkness throbbed with excited hisses. All at once the [the men's odors] spread out as I began relentlessly undulating, up and down, rhythmically, crushed [between their] shoulders, flung, pushed, pulled, crumpled, left quiet and then dragged, squeezed, kneaded and soaked in water in a terrifying mélange of heat and cold...[17]

Here Maryam's desire shifts seamlessly from a register of pleasure and anticipation to a register of trauma (as suggested by the sensory overload of "a terrifying mélange of heat and cold"), and the femininity through which she enjoys Zakaria's virility becomes a vulnerable target for the menacing aggression of men. Since it is Hamid who saves Maryam from the chaotic aggression of the men on the boat, Zalman reads the chronotopic transition in the above scene as a throwback to the erotic circuit between brother and sister, closed off by the traumatic rupture of 1948: a love scene that would normally move to an erotic climax between Maryam and Zakaria instead moves back in time and place to an intense encounter between Maryam and her brother.[18] On the one hand, this reading is insightful in its treatment of the sibling bond as a melancholic attachment to pre-1948 familial intimacy—a reading borne out by several details of the plot, most importantly the injunction by the siblings' father that "there will be no licit expressions of desire until the national cause is decided."[19] However, the darker reality at work in the scene's transition lies in its conflation of Zakaria's sexuality with an aggressive potential inherent in the "odors" representing Palestinian men collectively, Hamid included; indeed, Hamid's zealous protectiveness toward Maryam in the boat scene represents the flip side of the murderous rage he feels for her after she takes independent sexual initiative with Zakaria. Therefore, rather than subordinating her sexual initiative to a closed familial circuit governed by a national/Oedipal law of deferral (Zalman's perspective), I would argue that Maryam's flashback presents a distinctly feminist angle on the dislocations of 1948, showing that gender unsettles the boundaries between the Israeli enemy and the Palestinian co-national in the very moment these boundaries crystallize into the colonial divide.

It is important to note that Hamid's sexuality is also stamped by trauma—in his case the trauma of his father's bloody death, a political castration that translates to feelings of sexual

incapacity through the Oedipal drama of identification.[20] However, Maryam's troubled sexuality is pivotal as a psychic space where the violences of internal hierarchy and external domination intersect and interlock. Both Hamid and Zakaria—the only men Maryam is in regular contact with in the text's story time—stand as potential obstacles and aggressors in relation to her sexual awakening. This is especially significant as the roles of brother and husband which they respectively occupy represent the full range of relational terms—familial and marital—to which legitimate forms of female social and sexual mobility are expected to adhere in the novel. As we have seen above, Kanafani draws an analogy between Israel's killing of Palestinian resistance fighters and the sexual death Maryam undergoes by internalizing the social taboos proximately enforced by Hamid. In the Zakaria/Jaffa scene, Maryam's chronotopically displaced narration implicates her husband's sexuality in a larger momentum of female-directed male aggression, one that becomes metonymically associated with the violence of Israel's founding. By juxtaposing Hamid and Zakaria's significance to Maryam, it becomes clear that women are accorded no equality or protection as individual agents in the Palestinian nation struggling to emerge. Rather, their safety and legitimacy are conditional on their dependence on the agency of men.

Clearly, a good deal of Kanafani's feminist intervention into the Palestinian national meta-narratives can be located in Maryam's own thoughts and actions; most prominent among these is her murder of Zakaria in response to his threat that he will divorce her if she doesn't abort the child she has conceived with him. However, it is by orchestrating a dialogue between Maryam's more concrete reflections on the body and Hamid's more abstract reflections on land that Kanafani delivers his key contribution in the novella: to filter the existential impasse of Palestinian nationalism through the lens of a feminist politics. One manifestation of this

contrapuntal vision has already been seen in the juxtaposition of Salim's narrative of national sacrifice with Maryam's narrative of sexual death. Another more decisive manifestation can be seen in the dialogue Kanafani stages between Maryam's experience of sexual objectification by Zakaria and Hamid's existential objectification by the desert. Marking in boldface the shift from Maryam's memory of Zakaria's sexual advance to Hamid's reflections on the desert's alienness, Kanafani deploys the sexually and nationally charged motif of a "fertile land" to frame the dialogue between the siblings' thoughts. Whereas Zakaria sees the "maze" of Maryam's body as land fertile in its yield of penetrative pleasure, thus reinforcing the woman-land nexus, Hamid's extended foray into the desert exposes him to a land fertile with female alterity, power, and self-sufficiency, thus marking a departure from his initial projections onto the desert/mother/lover.

> Later on, as we delved deep into the maze, you said, "Your body's a fertile land, you little devil, a fertile land, I tell you!"
>
> **A fertile land, sown with illusion and unknown prospects. There isn't a steel blade in the world which wouldn't be shattered if it were to graze your naked yellow breast, that bare rugged breast that stretches to eternity, mine and theirs, floating regally in a sea of darkness. All the steel blades in the world could never hack down one root off your surface, but would shatter, one after the other, in the face of your firm harvest which grows bigger and bigger as a man strides further and further into your depth, step-by-step, until he himself turns into a nameless, deep-rooted stem that thrives erect on your juices.**[21]

In this densely palimpsestic layering, Kanafani manages to conjoin a feminist critique of the male objectification of women, a critique of the abstraction of land in Palestinian nationalist

discourse, and an existentialist view of the diminished status of the human on the cosmic scale. Here Zakaria's self-assured objectification of Maryam's body as a "fertile land" gives way to Hamid's ironic and agnostic designation of the desert as "A fertile land sown with illusion and unknown prospects," a juxtaposition that denaturalizes the organic image of the woman-land nexus by undermining the concept of fertility on which it is grounded.[22] Furthermore, pompous virility [Zakaria represents the most proximate example] recedes into anonymity when made to reckon with its dependence on female recognition, as man "turns into a nameless, deep-rooted stem that thrives erect on [the desert's] juices." Moreover, the ambiguous status of the Negev desert—as an existentially alienating and harsh natural terrain that is nonetheless part of historic Palestine—qualifies the utopianism of narratives of return by alluding to the disruption of the Palestinian sense of belonging over years of displacement. Hamid's ambivalent relation to the desert—who is both surrogate mother and indifferent nature to him—invites the question of the significance of Palestine for successive generations of Palestinian refugees born and raised in exile.

While Kanafani retains the feminine designation of the desert—a limit imposed by the Arabic language as well as a conscious negotiation with nationalist figurations of land—he thoroughly undermines the qualities of nurturance, familiarity, subservience, and loyalty projected onto the woman-land nexus in the discourse of nationalism. In this sense he adopts the trope of woman-land strategically to achieve a dialectical reversal of its authorizing logic, shifting the critical spotlight onto masculinity's domination of the terms of representation. While Hamid imagines the desert as his absent mother and as an unduly advantaged lover, and even imagines it pushing him toward his victorious confrontation with the stray Israeli soldier, the desert's mute indifference only highlights the fact that his thoughts and feelings regarding it are

projective fantasies authorized by his masculine subject position. As for the desert's own frequently empathic reflections on Hamid's plight, these are rendered acutely ironic and playful, not only with regard to the impossibility of the desert assuming a discursive position, but also with regard to the cruel contrast between the desert's discursive posture of empathy and the reality of death which it decrees for Hamid.

Collectively, Kanafani's inscriptions of the desert's symbolism through Hamid's shifting perceptual frame rewrite the woman-land nexus in a way that undermines both the feminizing, abstracting depictions of land in Palestinian nationalist discourse and the male fantasy, underpinning them, of mastery over the female body. The critique of masculinity Kanafani develops here takes a distinctly anti-phallocentric turn when Hamid avers that "All the steel blades in the world could never hack down one root off your surface, but would shatter, one after the other, in the face of your firm harvest"; no man, whether invader or native, can conquer this desert transformed into an abstract embodiment of female alterity, power, and self-sufficiency. Crucially, the alterity of the desert/female isn't governed by the negative ontology of lack; the desert landscape shuns the phallic "steel blades" with its own "firm harvest." Being grounded in a desert motif that is both semiotically layered and organically connected to the plot, Kanafani's reversal of the symbolic objectification in the land-woman nexus acquires critical depth as well as aesthetic sophistication.

At this juncture, it must be noted that the boundary-breaking momentum of Kanafani's fictional critique extends from the focus on gender as a force of internal division and external collusion to a questioning of the ethical disjuncture between nationalist and humanist parameters of identity and identification. As Hamid prepares himself psychologically to kill the Israeli soldier he has taken hostage in the desert—a choice he sees within a Hobbesian scenario of kill

or be killed—he struggles to identify the soldier definitively with the category of the Israeli aggressor, a task that proves difficult in light of the following fact: the human mortality they share is the only dimension of identity communicable across the linguistic barrier dividing them. After disarming the soldier of his rifle and knife and using them to threaten him, Hamid tries to engage him in conversation in order to discover his precise position and lineage within the Israeli colonial machinery. Continuing to address the silent soldier in Arabic while receiving no sign of understanding from him, Hamid co-opts the position of addressee to involve the soldier as a willing collaborator in the prelude to his own murder. The fantasy of power indulged in this discursive manipulation works against the disturbing recognition of identity in the soldier's physical frailty, a condition Hamid shares with him, as they are both at the mercy of the austere desert environment: "**'At any rate,' I went on, 'you can't remain an apparition for ever. We have to find you a name and a purpose. We've got plenty of time for that. By the time they [the soldier's unit] find you with their dogs and their flares, we'll have finished creating you, and then killing you will have some value.'"**[23] In spite of its enormous appeal as a symbolic reversal of the colonial dynamic, Hamid's power over the Israeli soldier is not unqualified by the imperatives of conscience: the "apparition" represents both the soldier's less than human state of anonymity, and the possibility that he may haunt Hamid after his murder (as related by Hamid, Salim takes leave of his betrayer Zakaria with "**the countenance of a man who was already dead and about to announce the birth of a ghost**").[24] Paradoxically, it is only after gaining a measure of intimacy with the soldier—enough to make him completely synonymous with the Zionist enterprise—that his murder "will have some value." Expressing this identification of the isolated human with the collective enemy as an action of imaginative creation ("…we'll have finished creating you"), Hamid's self-referential "dialogue" with the

soldier undermines its own othering momentum: the pre-fabricated demarcation lines between Self/Other and friend/enemy become abstractions that require an effort of imagination to sustain them against the contradictions of reality. The fact that Hamid ends up killing the soldier, an act he feels compelled to do upon perceiving the soldier's convoy's approaching, has the effect of a tragic contrast between a potential reality, and a reality that leaves little room for other realities to materialize.

In Hamid's confrontation with the anonymous Israeli soldier, Kanafani's humanist critique of the ethnocentric limits of Palestinian nationalism delivers its strongest statement. Crucially, however, the momentum building up to this critique is initiated by the author's serious engagement with gender as a centrifugal force of division in Palestinian society. By weaving into Hamid's existential confrontation with the desert a symbolism of female power and positive difference, and by aligning the Israeli oppression of Palestinian national aspirations with the Palestinian oppression of female sexuality as represented by Maryam, Kanafani makes a strong case for gender division and hierarchy as foundational realities grounding the existential impasse in the Palestinian legacy of dispossession, occupation, and exile. Even more, in his juxtaposition of Hamid and Maryam's narratives, Kanafani gives more weight to the score with the internal enemy than the war with the external enemy. While the threat that the unarmed soldier poses to Hamid is more symbolic than actual, a fact that necessitates the imaginative consolidation of his enemy status, Zakaria attempts to force Maryam to kill her unborn child. In addition, Maryam's confrontation with Zakaria is given more narrative time and detail than Hamid's confrontation with the soldier, dominating the synchronized narration of the two episodes until the double-murder climax that concludes the text.

For Zalman, the synchronized double-murder episode represents the core of the text's,

and presumably Kanafani's, effort to establish masculine return through manipulation of the female body. The primary evidence Zalman cites in favor of this argument lies in the supposed disavowal of female sexual/personal initiative that occurs with Maryam's murder of Zakaria—an act that potentially redeems her in the eyes of masculine/national honor; in Maryam's choice to name her unborn son after her brother, thus furnishing her body as a vehicle for his triumphal "return" against the will of his defeated collaborator antagonist; and in the (Western-centric) reading of Maryam's motherhood as an inevitable domestication of female sexuality and agency. While Zalman's reading of the text's gender politics can in part be justified with reference to the multiple mirrorings, resonances, and associations binding together the text's densely layered and suggestively synchronized discourses and events, some key details of the plot and the historical context informing it argue decisively against ignoring the radicality of Kanafani's gender and national politics.

Among others, these details include the fact that Maryam's murder of Zakaria is an act of personal will and vengeance that cannot be reduced to the manipulative machinery of nationalist representation. In killing Zakaria, Maryam repays him for his sustained neglect of her emotional needs, his refusal to clarify for her the terms on which he'll engage with her given his prior marriage and commitment to Fathiyah, and his highhanded presumption that he can compel her to do with her body as he wills. Furthermore, whatever redemption Maryam's murder may grant her in the eyes of her brother and her society, it is bound to be harshly qualified by the common knowledge that her child was conceived out of wedlock; in choosing to kill her husband and keep her child, Maryam is also making more conspicuous the illicit status of her motherhood. While Zalman may be right to suggest that Maryam's choice to name her son Hamid represents her regression to the closed familial circuit of sexuality sanctified by the national castration of 1948,

this regressive step doesn't erase from her record the risky initiative she took with Zakaria, nor does it make her a passive vehicle for Hamid's triumphal return.

Hamid escapes from Gaza as a refugee alienated and frustrated with the hypocrisy, collaboration, and oppressively gendered codes of honor plaguing his adopted home; in other words, he escapes from all the issues he needs to confront and engage if he is to make a viable home out of his place of refuge. The "home" Hamid aims to reach across the desert is an idealized image of his mother, an image whose conflation with the nation is encouraged by the geo-political status quo, where Palestinian refugees are by and large not allowed to return to their cities, towns, or villages of origin. Thus, both the start and end points of Hamid's planned journey are exilic approximations of home, hardly places likely to inspire a triumphal narrative of return. If Hamid does return to Gaza as his son, he is returning back to square one, with all the widespread poverty, moral corruption, gender and class divisions, and potential collaborators, all acting in concert to keep underdeveloped the Palestinian potential for national consciousness and solidarity. In such a scenario, it falls to Maryam to decide what kind of a man young Hamid will be, how aware he will be of the environment surrounding him, and how concerned he will be to change it. In assuming full responsibility for the care of her son, Maryam is also defending her entitlement to a reciprocal love not tainted by the possessive jealousies and coercive measures of either husband or brother. Therefore, contrary to Zalman's reading of the murder scene as a contest between two men mediated by a woman, I argue rather that it is Maryam, out of all three main (human) characters, who is better positioned to make a positive mark on history, and to break free of the existential stagnation expressed in the hoarse strokes of the coffin-clock.[25]

Through the dense semiotic webs enfolding it, Maryam's murder of Zakaria delivers three symbolic blows simultaneously: against the life-negating interruptions and dislocations of

exile, the patriarchal restrictions on female autonomy, and the colonial oppression of Palestine. While stabbing Zakaria to death, Maryam hears her brother's steps across the deadly desert in the death-dealing strokes of the coffin-clock, an imaginary connection that evokes both the empty time of exile and her brother's painful absence as witnesses to, and influences upon, her act of vengeance: Hamid's steps come as they always would "above the noise of the bier hanging over the wall **and hammering with cruel persistence into my [Hamid's] head. Remorseless. Pounding over him, and the bulk of his death heaped there. Pounding. Pounding. Pounding."**[26] Here Hamid's murder of the Israeli soldier and Maryam's murder of Zakaria cross the distance of separation and reach other through the shared, menacing monotony of the coffin-clock, i.e. time flattened into empty, repetitive units by the reality of exile. This is a time that has equally devastating effects on both siblings, "hammering with cruel persistence" in both their heads throughout the narrative. With the murders, the chiming of the clock reaches an intense crescendo—"Pounding. Pounding. Pounding"—releasing the accumulated frustrations of living in empty time, and turning violent resistance into an action coerced by this time. The conclusion of the narrative, with Hamid killing the soldier, projects the radically resistant quality of his act onto his sister's: the killing of the soldier becomes the killing of the collaborator, and a measure of national dignity is recovered through the two acts.

However, the siblings' actions do not perfectly align, and the gap in their symbolic significance is key to understanding the different type of agency that resistance requires of men and women, due to their differently gendered assimilation of Palestinian history and national consciousness. The superimposition of Hamid's steps across the desert onto the coffin-clock's deathly chiming condenses, in one complex image, Hamid's tragically ironic departure from one space/state of exile (Gaza) in search of home in another (Amman); the suppression of Maryam's

sexuality and autonomy over time; and the state of limbo in which Palestinian national aspirations remain. Maryam's act of violence becomes both a literal and symbolic protest against all three of these oppressive historical and personal crises. By killing Zakaria, Maryam not only protects her unborn child—a gesture that asserts continuity and belonging against the hope-crushing disruptions of exile—but also destroys a symbol of the collusion between patriarchal authority and colonial oppression. In this sense, she gains vengeance for both Palestine and her brother, whose death is foreshadowed by the approach of the Israeli soldiers' vehicle.

If seen as a mediator of masculine return, Maryam's agency as a woman engaging with Palestinian history must be eclipsed. If, on the other hand, as I have argued, her agency lies in resisting masculine claims on her body expressed in familial, marital, and national contexts, then it represents a positive challenge to the gender divisions preventing the coherence of Palestinian national consciousness and the politics of solidarity it would make possible. Indeed, taking the narrative trajectories of both of the siblings into account, it is Maryam, not Hamid, who succeeds in conquering a primary obstacle to national cohesion; as explained above, Zakaria represents a more proximate threat to the Palestinian nation than the stray and anonymous Israeli soldier. Moreover, Hamid's victory, in contrast to Maryam's, has no enduring impact on the surrounding field of power relations. While Hamid's violence against the lone soldier leaves no dent in the Israeli colonial machinery, Maryam's violence against Zakaria enacts a dramatic reversal of the gendered distribution of violence prevalent and sanctioned in her society. In this light, Kanafani may be seen to proffer a grounded feminine narrative of adaptation (Maryam) against a utopian and escapist masculine narrative of return (Hamid). In *Men in the Sun*, Kanafani exploits the ironic potential of castration as an allegory of national loss to highlight the dramatic conflict of interests between the masculine and nationalist dimensions of Palestinian identity. In *All That's*

Left to You, he takes a leap further, positing that national consciousness cannot hope to cohere in the absence of a thoroughgoing integration of women into the practical and symbolic rights and privileges of national subjectivity. With no such initiative, female subservience is bound to turn into vengefulness, and the land is bound to alienate the images of constancy, nurturance, and faithful waiting projected onto it in the masculinized discourse of nationalism. Moving to Khalifeh's caustically ironic *The Inheritance*, written under the disillusionments of the Oslo Accords and the joint administration system, we shall see a Palestinian society in which the revolutionary ideals in force from the fifties to the early nineties have been diluted and dispersed by a male culture of power-mongering, materialism, and opportunism, where the interests of individuals take precedence over those of the nation, and the interests of men lie in usurping the rights of women.

Ironies of Patrimony: Sahar Khalifeh's The Inheritance

Widely known for pushing women's problems and concerns to the forefront of her work as a writer and activist, Sahar Khalifeh has earned distinction among Palestinian writers for critiquing Palestinian, Arab, and Zionist meta-narratives from the vantage point of the most marginalized sectors of Palestinian society, wage laborers and poor women. Khalifeh has also brought the dialects and idioms specific to these sectors into a transgressive and creative dialogue with Modern Standard Arabic and the history of elitism related to its formal complexity and aesthetic gravity. Khalifeh's heteroglossic and polyvocal feminism is boldly expressed in her novel *The Inheritance*, where she approaches gender in the context of Palestinian society post-Oslo. Exhibiting a modernist irony self-consciously distant from conventional language, *The*

Inheritance challenges the national meta-narrative of heroic resistance, exposing the combination of masculinism, materialism, and power politics that keeps Palestinians in a state of social fragmentation and ideological disarray.

After earning her doctoral degree in American Studies and Creative Writing in 1988—after thirteen unhappy years in an arranged marriage—Khalifeh returned to her hometown of Nablus, and established the Women's Resource Center as a means of documenting, analyzing, and offering solutions to the concerns and problems specific to Palestinian women living under the occupation. Khalifeh first expressed her feminist awareness in an individualist context in *We Are Not Your Slave Girls Anymore* (*Lam Naʿud Jawārin Lakum*, 1974), a trend she continued in *Memoirs of an Unrealistic Woman* (*Mudhakkirāt Imraʾah Ghayr Wāqiʿīyah*, 1986); in both texts a narrow focus on female identity confronting patriarchal tradition joins a strongly didactic tone and a gender-polarizing critical stance, thus evoking the sex wars of Second Wave Feminism.

However, in the trilogy that comprises *Wild Thorns* (1985; *al-Ṣubbār*, 1976), *The Sunflower* (*ʿAbbād al-Shams,* 1980), and *The Courtyard's Gate* (*Bāb al-Sāḥah*, 1990), Khalifeh integrates with increasing boldness and sophistication the feminist and national dimensions of her critique, thus justifying Suha Sabbagh's conclusion that "…the author's lived experience as a woman exposed to the mechanisms of social control has greatly enhanced her ability to explain the mechanisms of political control and the psychology of oppression in the context of occupation."[27] As Harlow observes of *Wild Thorns*, the novel is "Written against the grain of two dominant narratives—the teleology of Palestinian nationalism on the one hand and the imposed imperatives of developmentalism on the other…"[28] *The Sunflower* develops the feminist consciousness that remains largely latent in *Wild Thorns*, highlighting patriarchal privilege and masculine codes of honor as centrifugal forces that keep the different ideological currents and

social actors across the contemporary Palestinian scene from coordinating a clear course of resistance and change. In *The Courtyard's Gate*, written in the midst of the first Intifada, Khalifeh casts a glaring light on the double oppression of Palestinian women: "the violence of the assault on women's bodies by the combined forces of the Israeli military occupation and the domestic brutalities of their own men within the family and at home; and the depredations committed against women's stories by the rehearsals of the lexicons of love poetry and the rhetorics of nationalism."[29]

Comparing Khalifeh's trilogy to the work of similarly situated writers Raymonda Tawil and Soraya Antonius, Suha Sabbagh argues that "All three authors write from the position of a national struggle in which the questioning of patriarchal norms is mediated through a national agenda. In this respect, Palestinian national aspirations offer a form of 'protection' to feminist objectives."[30] While Sabbagh's argument may apply to an extent to Khalifeh's trilogy—*The Courtyard's Gate* marks an exception as it prioritizes the double oppression of women over the more abstract affiliations of nationalism—Khalifeh's boldest, most self-authorizing critique to date of the marginalization of Palestinian women appears in her sixth novel *The Inheritance*, where the masculinized chains of filiation, affiliation, and inheritance in post-Oslo Palestine, in both their cultural and economic dimensions, are shown to be in collusion with the Occupation. In *The Inheritance*, Khalifeh focalizes her narrative around a half-American, half-Palestinian, culturally dislocated young female protagonist, thus paving the way for a complex feminist understanding of the realities facing Palestinian women post-Oslo, one that integrates the gender politics local to Nablus and the Occupied Territories more generally into a larger neo-colonial framework of power. With *The Inheritance*, Khalifeh takes a radical approach to the gender dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, implicating the will to power on both the Israeli and

Palestinian arenas with oppressive constructions and transmissions of masculinity.

Born to a Palestinian father and an American mother and raised in Brooklyn, New York, Khalifeh's narrator-protagonist Zayna Hamdan acquires, at an early age, a gendered double-consciousness as part of her culturally conflicted Arab-American identity. Having learned that her desire for sexual and intellectual freedom conflicts with the ideal of Arab femininity as preached by her father, Zayna escapes from her father's home in Brooklyn and goes to live with her maternal grandmother in Washington, D.C., eventually losing all touch with her parents and siblings. Although she grows up to become a successful anthropologist, Zayna nevertheless develops a painful emotional void, punctuated by feelings of cultural rootlessness and alienation; this situation is exacerbated by the emotionally reserved nature of her American grandmother. Upon learning from her paternal uncle that her father, who had moved back to Palestine, is dying, leaving her the choice of claiming her legal inheritance, Zayna decides, more out of consideration for her roots than for her inheritance, to visit her ancestral village Wadi al-Rihan lying on the outskirts of Nablus. Gradually, and perhaps to address the gap between identity politics and the more material exigencies of the Palestinian-Israeli crisis, the narrative shifts from a homodiegetic search for identity to a heterodiegetic exploration of the gender and class antagonisms rending the Palestinian social fabric post-Oslo. Through delicately intertwined narrative scenarios that relate intra-familial and class-based power struggles among the bourgeoisie and peasantry of Wadi al-Rihan to the larger conflict between the Israeli occupiers and the Palestinian occupied, Khalifeh's narrative suggests that male investments in material and ideological power form the hidden link between Palestinian social fragmentation and the ongoing success of Israeli domination.

Complementing the blurred distinction between Self and Other that results from this type

of collusion, the narrator's critical insights are often delivered with a suggestively modernist type of irony, one unhinged from a stable frame of reference that could counter its negational force. In this sense, Khalifeh's novel registers a more intense experience of irony than Kanafani's *All That's Left to You*, where the existential ironies of exile are counterbalanced by the promise of a new beginning, represented by Maryam's decision to strike roots in what's left of her homeland. As we shall see, *The Inheritance* answers the hegemonic, male-centered discourse of inheritance with an ironic silence of female dis-identification, a silence whose position between evasion and subversion is difficult to determine. In any case, *The Inheritance* can be said to represent a feminist modernist sensibility inextricable from its local Palestinian and regional Arab contexts.[31] Irony in *The Inheritance* mobilizes a gender-based critique of the Palestinian meta-narrative of unified, heroic resistance to the Occupation, and the international meta-narrative of Oslo as the herald of a new age of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

While class and race also qualify the novel's critique of post-Oslo Palestinian society and its lack of cohesion, gender occupies a privileged position as the main source of dissonance between the interests of the individual and the collective. Growing up as an Arab-American, Zayna Hamdan comes to an early awareness of gender division through her encounter with the anxieties of cultural patrimony. The connection between gender and cultural patrimony receives an acutely ironic treatment in the following scene from Zayna's childhood, where she overhears a conversation between her father, Muhammad Hamdan, and two of his Palestinian immigrant friends. Worried by his discovery of Zayna's occasional sexual voyeurism, and by neighborhood stories of Palestinian girls losing their virginity to American boys, Muhammad Hamdan goes on an anti-U.S. tirade in an apparent attempt to convince his friends to move back to Palestine. When one of the latter expresses doubt over Muhammad's logic, suggesting that all of their

economic livelihoods are tied to the U.S., Muhammad strikes back with a reference to U.S. commercial interests in the Arab countries—a rejoinder which, more for its evocation of the shame of neo-colonial dependency than for its logic, succeeds in silencing the lone dissenter, and inviting the other man's impassioned support of Muhammad. The distress the three men express during their conversation—over the neo-colonial implications of their economic dependence on the U.S.—converges with a highly sexualized anxiety that figures the bodies of their female kin as the boundaries of their own cultural patrimony, now threatened with penetration by the alien U.S. environment.

> One of them exploded, saying, "They eat our food and take us for a ride! This, in a nutshell, is what they're doing there [in the Arab countries]. We Arabs, on the other hand, are as stupid as mules and donkeys, and deserve more than that. That's what they're doing: they're screwing us openly and shamelessly."
>
> "God forbid," commented my father.
>
> The other retorted, "They're screwing us? I'm the one doing the screwing. I don't spare anyone, white or black, and I screw them all."
>
> My father shouted, "That's the intention—you screw their daughters and they screw yours. Isn't that the plan?"
>
> "God forbid!"[32]

Importantly, irony operates on a dual register here—between the macro-political perspective of the first friend and the personal perspective of the second, and between the second's pompous posture of virility and Muhammad's anxiogenic reminder that sexual freedom in the U.S. extends to young girls as well as their fathers. This double-layered irony is subsumed into another ironic context shared between the reader and the narrator-protagonist. This is the context informed by

the latter's position as the incisive and articulate female subject who transcends, through her observational-critical capacity, the sexually objectifying terms underpinning the men's debate.

After relocating to her uncle Abu Jabir's home in the village of Wadi al-Rihan, Zayna discovers that the patriarchal social structure with which she has been acquainted through her father is complicated by the factor of materialism, a conjuncture which, as she learns, accounts for a good deal of Palestinian social fragmentation. During a social gathering of family and friends that her uncle holds in her honor, Zayna meets Abu Salim, cousin to her uncle's wife and a highly successful land broker whose business booms with the false expectations of peace raised by Oslo. The economic opportunism implied in this link between false peace and big business is made explicit in the covetous interest Abu Salim takes in the size and trajectory of Zayna's (now sizable) inheritance. Initially paying no heed to Zayna, Abu Salim starts to notice her after hearing from her uncle about the considerable amount of property her dying father is leaving her: "The realtor turned to me, looking at me intensely as if discovering my human value for the first time. 'May God be praised, by God, your brother produced quite an offspring!'"[33] Although Abu Salim is in many ways the epitome of the marriage of masculinism and materialism, this marriage is by no means limited to him. Most of the novel's male characters, with the ambiguous exception of Zayna's cousin Kamal, exhibit an avid interest in money that eclipses familial and national concerns and loyalties.

The link between masculinism and materialism finds dramatic expression when Fitnah, Zayna's recent step-mother, invites Zayna to her home in the Wadi al-Joz neighborhood of East Jerusalem, and compares the Israeli settlements on the horizon to the Hamdan family's desire to monopolize her (now deceased) husband's estate:

Far on the horizon, where the western clouds appeared, I saw high and low

> buildings, a wall of strange constructions that looked like a hospital or a huge prison that [Fitnah] referred to as ["colonization." Colonization], she explained, is what my uncle, that spiteful, ignoble man, and his children, would like to do with the inheritance. [What's over here, what's over there, they're both an inheritance, but—as she said—my spiteful uncle is even more despicable than the wiles of the Jews. Anyhow, he belongs to them and their creed.][34]

On the one hand, Fitnah's logic is motivated by the same opportunism she openly decries, as the hostility which the Hamdan family shows her follows the opportunistic measure she takes to exclude them from the inheritance. Trying to get pregnant via artificial insemination, and claim a portion of the inheritance for her son, Fitnah acquires the sperm of an anonymous (most probably Jewish) donor through the Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem. Fitnah's opportunism is also reflected in her dubious attempt to link the theft of property and land to Abu Jabir's rumored Jewish lineage; in doing so she reduces the complex reality of Israeli conquest and colonization to sell her verdict on Abu Jabir through a popular, easily digestible stereotype. As the example of Fitnah suggests, Khalifeh doesn't exempt her female characters from materialism and its attendant power struggles. However, her female characters invest in materialism and power more to safeguard their means of survival than for its own stake, and often through the mediation of male relatives. On the other hand, the analogy between Israeli colonization and the male desire for the lion's share of the inheritance accurately reflects the political dimension of inheritance as a means of establishing and perpetuating men's domination over women. While Abu Jabir does not appear to be a particularly power-hungry man, in contrast to his sons Said and Mazen, neither he nor they question the right that Sharia law gives them to the majority of Muhammad Hamdan's inheritance in the absence of a male heir. When Abu Salim marries Zayna's cousin

Nahleh over his wife, and writes his shares in the newly established water purification company in her name, the struggle over inheritance joins Abu Salim's sons and daughters in a rebellion against their father. As we shall see, this conflict dramatizes not only the connection between materialism and masculine power, but also the Hobbesian transformation effected in Palestinian society by the Israeli occupation.

Through the character of Mazen, Zayna's cousin and current member of the Israeli Knesset, Khalifeh's narrator interrogates the gender politics of Palestinian resistance movements, locating masculinist investments in power at the heart of the nationalist effort to defend the land. An ex-revolutionary fighter frustrated with the general state of passivity encouraged by Oslo, Mazen lives in denial of the death of revolutionary ideals, and is more responsive to the theatrical allure of macro-politics than to personal, and particularly sexual, relations. After hearing his tale of sacrifice, love, and loss as a resistance fighter with the PLO in Beirut during the Israeli invasion, a tale whose romantic and heroic gloss hides his cowardly escape from the Lebanese woman who loved him, the narrator orchestrates an ironic juxtaposition between this tale and that of his sister, Nahleh, whose family takes for granted the sacrifice she made for them by working as a schoolteacher in the alienating environment of Kuwait.

> My thoughts were torn between pity and fear. Should I feel sorry for him or fear him? I wasn't sure. I was even more confused when I heard his story from someone else and from another point of view. Coincidentally, I heard the two versions of his life story on the same night.[35]
>
> While he told me the story of Beirut and the revolution, she sang the story of a house and children, the ingratitude of the boys and the worries of the girls. His was a love story, and hers was a story of hunger for a loving touch. His was the

> story of a leader and a rock, and hers was about small concerns of a schoolteacher who began her life a radiant woman [*naḍirah*] and ended a spinster [*ʿānis*]. A spinster? A spinster! A flat word that conjures selfish personal worries and a barren woman, one like the fallow land, unappealing and uninspiring, like a land without rain.[36]

Through ironic juxtaposition and mimicry, the narrator troubles the distinction between the high register realm of revolutionary politics and the low register realm of personal and familial relations, exposing the distinction as the fruit of a masculinist gender system that begins in the family and extends broadly over the entire social fabric. In this regard Khalifeh redresses an imbalance manifest in al-Sayigh's *The Siege*, where the fervent rhetoric of revolutionary resistance steers the author in the direction of reinforcing masculinist constructions of identity. By situating the Palestinian resistance movement within a masculinist economy, the narrator drives a wedge between it and the ideologies of heroism and national sacrifice that enfold it, and that obscure the mix of corruption, opportunism, and power politics motivating its leaders. The fact that Mazen's revolutionary past becomes a cultural cachet he can wield to command respect and admiration—and lord it over his star-struck female admirer Violet—is itself a reminder of the tenuous line between the ideology of heroism and the ideology of authoritarian leadership.

The distinction between resistance and oppression is sharply undone in a sub-plot that delivers the decisive blow to Zayna's hopes of finding a viable social living space for herself in Palestine. After learning of their father's marriage to Nahleh, and hearing —through the inflated gossip of the grapevine—that their father had made her the owner of all his shares and lands, the sons of Abu Salim—and at their head Saadu, the leader of the much dreaded "resistance" group The Black Tigers—decide to take matters into their own hands and compel their father to revoke

Nahleh's supposed ownership by kidnapping her.

> Abu Salem's children, both boys and girls, were up in arms [*qāmat qiyāmat awlād abū sālim wa-banātih*], and as girls, usually have nothing to fight with but their tears, their brethren volunteered to do what was needed and made up for the difference. The news of the company shares that reached them was overblown. They were told **[ ]** had written not only those shares in Nahleh's name, but the lots in the Ghor region [the Jordan River basin], in Anabta, in Sabastiya, and in Nablus as well. And so it happened that in the middle of the day, disguised men invaded the house, covered Nahleh with a burlap sack, as is done with traitors, and took her to a dark place smelling of blood and decay. They made her sit on the confession chair where traitors face the interrogators before they are tortured, then axed down.[37]

While the opening sentence joins the male and female children of Abu Salim in a comic portrait of unmitigated materialism—the Arabic phrase renders their agitation in apocalyptic terms—the following sentence, claiming that "girls, usually have nothing to fight with but their tears," reproduces the stereotypical image of female vulnerability and helplessness in a tongue-in-cheek manner, serving to underscore the monopoly that men exercise over violence in the novel's social world. The last sentence undoes at once two ideological constructs that adhere to the Palestinian side of the confrontation: the essential enmity between Israelis and Palestinians, on the one hand, and, on the other, the sanctity of female honor as the perimeter of national honor. Here, Nahleh's captors assume the Israeli occupier's self-arrogated right to violence, while Nahleh becomes the overpowered Palestinian victim.

While the power of violence exercised here operates in a homosocial context as well as a

heterosocial one—Abu Salim's children threaten his life as well as Nahleh's, and compel him to escape to save his own skin—this power remains inextricable from a masculinist social structure and ideology where it appears not only as a male prerogative, but also as the central component of the masculine self-image and the ultimate measure of masculinity. While confronting Nahleh's brother Kamal, who, along with Said, gets captured while trying to rescue his sister, Saadu rebuffs Kamal's attempts to negotiate the conditions for Nahleh's release by scorning his "feminine" Euro-gentility. However, Saadu also presents the history of the occupation as the background to his immersion in the Hobbesian struggle for individual power, holding out his hands to Kamal and asserting that their long experience with blood has made him impervious to the claims of compassion, reason, or altruism.[38] That said, the individual striving for power that Saadu epitomizes lies in excess of the demoralizing experience of the occupation, appearing more as the cause of defeat than its consequence. This much is insinuated in the narrator's comparison of the Hamdan brothers' attempt to rescue Nahleh to the Palestinian struggle to free Palestine: "He [Kamal] then recalled that Nahleh was still there, captive, while he, his brother Said, and the grocer were on their way to her, carrying with them through this mixture, the hope of her freedom [*al-taḥrīr*]."[39] A word carrying a loud resonance in the history of the Palestinian struggle for independence, *al-taḥrīr* gets deployed here in an acutely ironic context that yokes the external struggle against the Israeli occupation to the internal struggle against masculinist power politics.

Spanning the most intimate and formative circles of family relations and experiences, as well as more recognizably political interactions between classes, peoples, and nations, gender in *The Inheritance* registers the negotiation of power and identity in an over-determined fashion. Irony occupies a central role in this context as a rhetorical, analytical, and philosophical arsenal

that enables the deterritorialization of gender from its institutional moorings, and the opening of the imagination to new possibilities of social engenderment. Quite often, the ironic silences with which Zayna responds to the ideological impositions she endures as a protagonist complement the critical purchase of the ironic commentaries and framings she contributes as a narrator. The novel's final scene furnishes a paradigmatic example. Zayna's uncle Abu Jabir drives her back to the Lod Airport so that she can start on her trip back to Washington, D.C. and resume her academic duties. Before she leaves for her plane, Abu Jabir tries to tempt Zayna to make a return visit by reminding her of her safeguarded property inheritance: "He said, hoping to influence my decision, 'Although the inheritance of the boy is double that of the girl, your part will be saved for you.' I shook my head without commenting, and I walked toward the plane."[40] Here, Zayna's nodding silence protects the secret of the Jewish lineage of her future "brother"—thus preserving his claim on the inheritance and rejecting the racialized politics of enmity that essentialize Arab-Jewish antagonism. In complementary fashion, her silence also rejects the materialistic and masculinist understanding of inheritance informing her uncle's logic, an understanding which she scrutinizes and undermines through the socially expansive and critical portrait of inheritance that she helps to draw in her capacity as the ironic narrator.

And yet, when one reflects on the coincidence between Zayna's silence and her imminent departure, irony attains a more politically ambiguous inflection, appearing, as it has in several literary-historical contexts, as an oblique, compensatory form of resistance compelled by severe asymmetries in power.[41] From this angle, Zayna chooses silence because she can evade the status quo on the strength of her U.S. citizenship and her liberal academic career, and evasion is a much safer (and more appealing) option than relocation to Wadi al-Rihan and a sustained confrontation with the male powers that rule there. In this reading, the conjunction of feminist resistance and

female acquiescence in Zayna's ironic silence finds parallels in Maryam's involvement with the chauvinist collaborator Zakaria as a vehicle for her sexual awakening; in Tuqan's appeal to the honor of the Islamic caliphate and the tribe for protection from foreign encroachment; and in al-Sayigh's use of a masculinized rhetoric of othering while expressing her earnest commitment to the revolutionary principles of war. In all these contexts, female narrators or characters resort to actions or rhetoric that are necessitated, to some degree, by the male-dominated status quo. More broadly, the blurred line between resistance and collusion reflects a radical disjuncture between Palestinian nationalist discourse and Palestinian lived reality, where male-authored notions of solidarity and commonality fail to reckon with the gender hierarchies that fracture the social map of Palestine and frustrate efforts toward a unified plan of national resistance.[42] When we turn in the next chapter to the novels of al-Daif and al-Duwayhi, we shall see that a similar disjuncture exists between the discursive representations of Lebanon's internecine violence and the gender dynamics underpinning this violence. More clearly than any of the texts examined thus far, these novels demonstrate the organic relation between male homosocial culture and violence. Indeed, male homosocial culture is shown to be largely responsible for violence, since it involves men in struggles with other men over power, itself rendered an essential criterion of masculinity.

II. Revisiting Lebanon: Rashid al-Daif, Jabbur al-Duwayhi, and the Making of Tribal/ Sectarian Masculinity

As has been demonstrated by miriam cooke, Evelyne Accad, and Samira Aghacy, among others, Lebanese literature on the civil war goes to remarkable lengths to map out the gender and sexual foundations of the political economy and collective psychology of war.[1] Tawfiq Yusuf ʻAwwad, for example, connects sectarian divisions to the male domestication of female sexuality in his prophetic pre-war novel *Death in Beirut* (1976; *Ṭawāḥīn Bayrūt*, 1972); Etel Adnan draws a dramatic portrait of the conjunction between masculinism, misogyny, and sectarian chauvinism based on the life and tragic death of the teacher and activist Marie Rose Boulos in her semi-historical French language novel *Sitt Marie-Rose* (1982; *Sitt Mari-Rose*, 1977); Ḥanan al-Shaykh entwines the sexual objectification of women with martial violence through the masochistic sexuality of the female protagonist of *The Story of Zahra* (1986; *Ḥikāyat Zahrah*, 1980); and Huda Barakat interrogates the compulsory aggression of wartime masculinity by focalizing her narrator's perspective around a gender-atypical homosexual man in *The Stone of Laughter* (1995; *Ḥajar al-Ḍaḥik*, 1990). Non-Lebanese writers have also tackled the densely interlaced threads between war, gender, and sexuality with different levels of critical consciousness. These include the Syrian writers Halim Barakat, who in *Days of Dust* (1983; *ʻAwdat al-Ṭāʼir ilá al-Baḥr*, 1969) relates the instabilities of heterosexual male identity to the Arab political fragmentation behind the military defeat of 1967; Ghadah al-Samman, whose *Beirut ʼ75* (1995; *Bayrūt ʼ75*, 1975) locates in class and gender oppression the pre-war social anomie of Lebanon; and the Palestinian May al-Sayigh, who contrasts the interests of Palestinian women refugees in Lebanon with those of their political leadership during the civil war in the previously discussed *The Siege* (*Al-Ḥiṣār*,

1982).

Whereas several critics have followed the lead of miriam cooke in distinguishing between men and women's writings on the civil war[2]—the former are presumed to endorse the macro-political categories of identity and ideology explicitly motivating the war, while the latter locate the war's machinations in the domestic spaces and social interactions forming everyday life—in this chapter I will discuss two male-authored novels that call this distinction into question: both texts analyze the war's sectarian hostilities via a broad critique of the masculine foundations of tribal and sectarian identity. *Dear Mr Kawabata* (1999; *'Azīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā,* 1995) by Rashid al-Daif[3] and *The Rain of June* (*Maṭar Ḥazīrān*, 2006) by Jabbur al-Duwayhi[4] both engage the pivotal role played by masculine constructions of language, norms, lineage, and space in fomenting the sectarian strife of the war, and dispersing the influence of national, regional, and global articulations of civic ethics and cultural identity. *Dear Mr Kawabata* has garnered much critical attention, in Europe and the U.S. as well as the Arab world, and been translated into eight languages, including French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Swedish. *The Rain of June*, yet to be translated into English, had been shortlisted for the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) in 2008.[5] The resonance between the two novels can partly be explained by shared elements in the authors' backgrounds. Growing up in the town of Zgharta in Northern Lebanon—a region known for the density of its tribal and sectarian affiliations—and trained academically in literature at the Sorbonne (al-Daif earned two degrees, in Modern Letters and in Linguistics, while al-Duwayhi earned a degree in Comparative Literature), both writers combine an intimate knowledge of the national, regional, and global dynamics shaping life in their hometown and country, with a critical distance enhanced by a solid specialization in literary studies. Both, moreover—and al-Daif is particularly notable for this—approach the history of sectarian and

tribal strife in Lebanon from personal angles, exploring through their personal and familial histories the troubled history of their nation. In many of his novels, al-Daif installs a narrator-protagonist who shares many details of his life, including his name, past, and ideological orientations. Al-Duwayhi, using a pseudonym, covers his own family's involvement in the blood feud that represents his novel's central conflict. Finally, both writers contribute as public intellectuals through their literary professorships at the Lebanese University, where al-Daif teaches Arabic literature and al-Duwayhi teaches French literature. Thus, both writers integrate the professional aspects of their work with their artistic and cultural initiatives.

In al-Daif's novel, a semi-authorial narrator examines the violent impulses of tribal manhood, and relates them to the sectarian enmities driving the civil war. Simultaneously, the narrator attempts to negotiate, through his relation to a narratee designated as the late Japanese Nobel laureate Yasunari Kawabata, a modern secular model of citizenship that transcends the regressive sectarianism of his familial and national background.[6] Al-Duwayhi's novel returns, through multiple overlapping perspectives, to the Christian-Christian massacre that occurred in the northern Lebanese town of Mizyarah in June, 1957, and methodically dissects the aggressive masculinities mobilizing the blood feud that led to the massacre. A crucial insight that unfolds in both these texts—more deliberately and elaborately in al-Duwayhi's—is that sectarian divisions are modeled on tribal hostilities responsible for longstanding blood feuds. More specifically, communal lines of division represented as supra-individual and self-evident in the civil war rhetoric are shown to be contingent on power struggles between individual men, struggles that bind the tribe's identity to the hierarchical structure of male homosocial bonds. Naturally, distinctions of class and rural vs. urban background qualify the meaning of male ascendancy in both novels, as it becomes less dependent on physical embodiment, and more dependent on class

and urbanity, where the setting is Beirut, as opposed to the rural towns in which both the novels set.[7] However, both novels go to some length to show that the antagonistic division of territory according to male-centered tribal hostilities carries over from the Lebanese countryside to the capital. Thus, while the physical signs of masculinity get diffused with the move to the more affluent and cosmopolitan urban center, the geo-political terrain of masculinity remains intact as a terrain dominated by the hierarchical law of exclusion and discrimination.

In response to this reality, both texts shed a critical light on the mutual reinforcement that exists between social hierarchies and male homosocial culture, expanding the concept of gender antagonism to include male-male relations and assigning it a central place in the development of the sectarian hostilities occupying the center stage of the civil war. In the same vein, the novels refuse to depersonalize the enemy, just as the group of women writers cooke designates as the "Beirut Decentrists" do.[8] Political enmity becomes a corollary to a tribally structured male homosociality, a hierarchical matrix of relations framing the internal strife in Lebanon. However, an important distinction exists between the two texts in their treatment of male homosocial bonds. In the case of *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, male homosocial desire shapes the plot and the narrative structure in such a way that it mediates, and circumscribes, the development of the narrator's socio-political consciousness, including his insights into tribal and sectarian masculinity. While the narrator's reflections on the political trajectory of his life render violence a cornerstone of male identity, his ambivalent relationship to his renowned narratee sees him gauge his modern sophistication against the latter, and express his political aspirations in a language that conflates intellectual prowess with male dominance. Thus secularism and sectarianism both acquire the gender of universal masculinity, and the democratic promise of secularism is betrayed by the masculinization of language and agency. As for *The Rain of June*,

where the role of the historical witness is diffused among several, often anonymous narratorial voices—some of them female—male homosociality appears as an often menacing, always constricting limit imposed against the full spectrum of possibilities inherent in relation. By citing the month of June (*Ḥazīrān*) in the novel's title, and relating the massacre to regional Arab politics, al-Duwayhi suggests that the tribal masculinities he scrutinizes play a foundational role not only in the Lebanese Civil War, but also in the Arab defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, and in the failure of pan-Arabism more generally. Thus, while *Dear Mr Kawabata* reproduces male dominance, both at the diegetic level of character relations and the meta-diegetic level of narrative communication, *The Rain of June* makes a concerted effort to historicize and deconstruct the masculine foundations of tribalism and sectarianism in Lebanon. My purpose in juxtaposing these unevenly critical texts is to explore the ways in which their critiques of sectarian masculinity unfold as part of a broader engagement with modernity (*Dear Mr Kawabata*) and Lebanon's national and regional history (*The Rain of June*). In this sense, both novels confront Lebanon's sectarian masculinities within a transnational context that highlights the relevance of their insights to the Arab world at large.

1. *Dear Mr Kawabata*: Sectarianism and Secularism via Male Homosocial Desire

> We can go further than that, to say that in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power: a relationship founded on an inherent and potentially active structural congruence.
>
> Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*[1]

Featuring a narrator who shares the author's name and some aspects of his history —yet vigorously asserts the autonomy of his identity—and a narratorial discourse triangulated through a narratee designated as the deceased writer Yasunari Kawabata, *Dear Mr. Kawabata* is ironic and self-reflexive in the basic elements of its structure. Written as an extended letter to a dead man asked to reply at the end, the novel pretends to portend the futility of its discursive impetus: to establish an enduring impact for the narrator's critical and philosophical reflections on tribalism, sectarianism, language's inherent discrepancy with reality, and the blind, cyclical violence of history. Importantly, the rigorous and ironic self-reflexivity of the narrator is as serious as it is playful. Although he heaps liberal amounts of sarcasm on political rhetoric, the grand narratives of modernity, and conventional language—including his own instances of it—the intent of Rashid the narrator to foster a critical awareness in his audience is sincere and constant throughout the text. Kawabata's position at the apex of the narrative's triangular structure is crucial to this edification process, as he enables Rashid to direct his views to his intended audience through a renowned intellectual, one whose foreign distance presumably gives him the advantage of an objective point of view. However, through the same triangular structure, Kawabata's lofty status offers a means for Rashid to assert the masculine intellectual advantage that distinguishes him from his audience. Castrated by the failure of his grand political ambitions

during the Lebanese Civil War, Rashid attempts to restore his sense of masculine autonomy by seducing, and co-opting, Kawabata's cosmopolitan intellectual status—a status that appears to Rashid as a masculine potentiality by default.

As Ken Seigneurie argues in his article "The Importance of Being Kawabata," the novel's triangular structure enables Rashid to establish a critical distance from the linguistic norms that pressure him toward an *a priori* consensus with his intended audience.[2] Whereas in Seigneurie's account gender is not a structural foundation for the narrator's identification with Kawabata, I will argue that it very much is: Rashid identifies with, and directs his discourse toward, the cosmopolitan intellectual prestige of Kawabata in so far as he aligns it with his masculinized model of agency. While Rashid's reflections on the trajectory of his own life expose violence as the basis of tribal male identity, his relation to his renowned narratee, as well as a charismatic Marxist man who plays a decisive role in his personal development, sees him measure his modern masculinity against both. In this sense, male homosocial desire shapes the plot and the narrative structure in such a way that it mediates, and circumscribes, the development of the narrator's political subjectivity, including his insights into the male roots of tribal/sectarian violence. Oriented toward the masculine gravity he attributes to these two men, Rashid expresses his political aspirations, failures, and doubts in a language that conflates intellectual maturity with masculine authority and self-possession. Thus, Rashid's approach to secularism as well as sectarianism assumes the gender of universal masculinity, and the potential for a civic identity and ethics inherent in secularism gets eclipsed by the masculinization of language and agency.

Apparently in reference to certain details of Kawabata's life—particularly the official recognition he received as a cultural mediator between Japan and the West, and the conflicted subjectivity he developed due to modernity's erosion of Japanese culture—Rashid addresses his

narratee as an ideal auditor, one who appeals to his own conflictedly modern subjectivity, and his ambition to mediate between the traditional sectarianism of Lebanon and the modern secularism of the global nation-state. In spite of taking a historical position that is contrary to Kawabata's romantic-essentialist view of the past, Rashid projects onto him the function of an Archimedean reference point, one that can validate both his understanding of Lebanon's sectarian and tribal history, and his skeptical view of the grand narratives of modernity—in his case, especially, but not exclusively, the Marxist narrative of revolutionary socialism. In desiring to draw the specter of Kawabata into the orbit of his historical judgments and critical reflections, Rashid's discourse is mobilized by what Sedgwick terms the "affective or social force, the glue," of male homosocial desire: in other words, the magnetism of masculine agency that infuses men's relations with other men.[3] Introducing every narrative and commentary with an earnest appeal to Kawabata's ear, Rashid tries to seduce, and gradually assimilate, the intellectual legacy he sees in Kawabata, a legacy which he translates as an honorable masculine effort to reckon with modernity's existential quandaries.

In a signature move, al-Daif spotlights the incomprehensible horror of the Lebanese civil war by placing his narrator in the paradoxical position of living death, where he declares having died and revived several times during the war, and concludes his story with an account of his final death.[4] In addition to this supernatural straddling of life and death, Rashid possesses a comprehensive memory that stretches to cover all of his life history from the moment of his birth. Moreover, through the perspective he gains from death, Rashid manages to comprehend Lebanon's history through a sharp, panoramic vision: "I say: I was opening my eyes after returning to life, as if I was opening them for the first time in history. My gaze fell on things that were clear and bright, as if they were just emerging from the prehistoric gloom." In this respect

Rashid resembles Saleem Sinai from Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), as Saleem's comprehensive memory and telepathic abilities enable him to survey and dissect the historical contingencies and ruptures involved in the partition of India, as well as their influence on his own subjectivity. Like Rushdie, Rashid writes with the theoretical self-awareness associated with postmodernist narrative; in his case, the conscious digressions, repetitions, and self-conscious reflections aim to illuminate the tragic ironies of Lebanon's sectarian and tribal history, as well as their ideological roots in conventional language. Rashid's style also evokes that of al-Daif's earlier novels *Passage to Dusk* (2001; *Fusḥah Mustahdafah bayn al-Nuʿās wa-al-Nawm*, 1986) and *The Technologies of Misery* (*Taqnīyāt al-Buʾs*, 1989), where the active stage of the civil war is replaced by the psychotic dissociations and surreal hallucinations triggered in the narrators' intensely isolated psyches. In *Dear Mr Kawabata*, Rashid asserts that oneiric surrealism is the only language capable of capturing the reality of the civil war: "This dream [of complete paralysis] stayed with me, together with the feeling of ants crawling inside a mouth I could not open. The war was still in the first stages of its fury, which meant that only [delirious speech] could speak of this reality, for it defied all normal expression."[5]

In striving to comprehend—or transcend—the chaos of the civil war, as well as its wider implications for the Arab world, Rashid resorts to the critical distance he has cultivated as an intellectual educated abroad. Importantly, Rashid's investment in Kawabata as the ideal auditor reflects his perception of himself as a unique intellectual who cannot find an equal among his fellow Arabs. In terms of cultural politics, the narrator renders Kawabata a Japanese foil for his own Arab sophistication, which similarly possesses the privileged vantage point of a cultured intellectual. Rashid intends his narrative critique—buttressed by a supernaturally comprehensive memory—as an antidote to a Lebanese-Arab passivity toward the present and reverence for a

mythologized past, where Arab political power is taken as proof of Arab cultural superiority:

> Then again, as you probably know, my fellow-Arabs' lack of belief in me is not because they are convinced of the merits of forgetting, or of its necessity for the sake of progress. They are generally fed on memory, on Memory in fact – the Memory that we Arabs were once masters of the earth. It is for this reason that 'Revival' is the objective around which political discourse (and also literature) generally revolves.[6]

Indeed, Rashid is so disillusioned with Arab cultural discourse that he assigns Kawabata the role of a surrogate Arab intellectual peer, one capable of understanding and appreciating the visionary nature of his style—which, as he suggests, can bring to view future horizons occluded from vision in the postwar period of apathy and inertia in Lebanon.

> I will draw your attention in advance, Mr Kawabata, to the fact that I may appear to switch from one subject to another while I am speaking. But I am confident that you will quickly understand the underlying reason behind each switch. The style will actually be an object of admiration on your part, as well as a reason for happiness on my part, because I will find in you a rare Arab [*al-ʿarabī al-farīd*, lit. "the rare Arab (man)"], who will surrender to me out of love for the days to come and the places to come.[7]

It is here that the convolutions of male homosocial desire introduce themselves as the electric impulse and circuitry of the text's narrative discourse. Seated in the Arabic grammatical slippage between the universal masculine and the particular masculine, "the rare Arab (man)" who can click with Rashid is the one ready to "surrender" to his visionary wisdom, "out of love for the days to come and the places to come." Rashid's depiction of listening as surrender, enabled by

the paradoxical position of the absent narratee, reflects his attempt to assert his cosmopolitan modernity within the orbit of male homosocial desire. At times flirting, and at times contending, with Kawabata as an artist and intellectual of global status, Rashid regards cosmopolitan modernity as a masculine potentiality. It is due to this masculinization of agency, in both its political and cultural dimensions, that Rashid expresses his vision through the language of surrender and conquest.

Family, Tribe, Sect: Concentric Circles of the Masculine Crucible

Growing up in a poor, conservative, illiterate Maronite family in an unnamed mountain town in northern Lebanon (presumably Zgharta, the author's hometown), Rashid is compelled to clash with his parents over the modern, secular direction of his education. Rashid learns early on that he must confront the religious, patriarchal, and sectarian traditions of his parents—especially his domineering father—to satisfy his liberal instincts and his hunger for empirical knowledge. Religion, in particular, along with its sectarian loyalties, poses the greatest challenge to Rashid's intellectual development, it being the core of his family and community's cultural frame of reference, and the only source of security in an environment plagued by blood feuds and poverty. As his education and his exposure to contemporary events move him further along the path of secularism, Rashid also embraces the currents of revolutionary socialism, pan-Arab nationalism, and anti-imperialism that are sweeping the Arab world in the early sixties. To Rashid, secularism appears as an inseparable part of the revolutionary momentum that positions him against all the defining convictions of his father, family, clan, and sect. Thus, to the extent that secularism is desirable, it is also dangerous. Recalling a debate about the existence of God that took place in the Lebanese University, Rashid describes his intensely ambivalent response to the atheists'

advantage in the debate.

> At that time 'against' represented the future, and 'for' was the past. In one camp there was the liberation of Palestine; socialism; the alliance with the Soviet Union, Third World liberation movements, and progressive forces in the capitalist states, and the non-existence of God – while in the opposite camp were ranged objectively Israel; imperialism; the Arab regimes, and God.
>
> During that discussion I felt that God had deserted me, for he had disappeared, and I felt a searing pain in every part of me, in the whole of my being.[8]

Caught between the heavy weight of a religious and tribal background, and the exhilarating pull of political radicalism, Rashid initially adopts secularism with an intensely anxious sense of loss: in expelling God from Rashid's belief system, secularism also undermines the familial and tribal loyalties that inflect Rashid's identity and his cultural frame of reference. However, in adopting secularism and the democratic model of citizenship it supports, Rashid develops a critical knowledge and vocabulary that enable him to deconstruct tribal and sectarian ideology, and to call attention to the necessity of a democratic and politically engaged form of citizenship.

Rashid's earliest encounter with sectarian chauvinism occurs at home, where he faces the abusive authority of his father on a regular basis. Rashid's father, under pressure from poverty, works as a farmer, carpenter, and barber to make ends meet, and his mother is a housewife who maintains a passive-aggressive accord with her husband, while secretly craving the standard of living she could enjoy as a salaried employee's wife. Although violent at times with his wife, the father refrains from abusing his son until he gets wind that his son's increasing literacy has been leading him to affiliate with secular, Marxist, and pro-Palestinian currents of thought. For him, these political platforms threaten the existence of the Lebanese state, which he sees as the hard-

won achievement of a Maronite Christian minority desiring to safeguard itself from the Muslim domination it had endured for the past thirteen centuries. Wanting to punish Rashid for the dangerous results of his increasing literacy, his father decides to brand his fingers. After being forced by his father to read a letter from his aunt, in a perverse attempt to incriminate him (by exposing his high literacy), Rashid refuses to demonstrate his literacy level and deliberately misreads the letter, fearing that his father might take him out of school otherwise—which he ends up doing regardless. As a result, Rashid's father brands his fingers with an iron rod. Rashid's recollection of the incident brings to light the nexus between patriarchal authority and tribal, sectarian, and national affiliations.

> My father would brand my fingers with a red-hot iron, out of love for me – and, of course, out of love for the family, the country, his sect and his religion. If I had known Spinoza's famous aphorism then – the aphorism that says, 'You cannot compel anyone, by force or by law, to gain eternal happiness' – it would certainly have come to me then...[9]

Connecting filial obedience to the "eternal happiness" which Spinoza envisions in the human acceptance of servitude to God, Rashid ironically suggests that his father is like God: he may grant eternal happiness to the obedient among his children. On the one hand, this analogy does approximate the family dynamic: Rashid doesn't dare to prove correct his father's suspicions about his literacy, and his mother doesn't dare to prevent his father from enacting his cruel punishments. However, Rashid continues to read journalism and political literature in defiance of his father, who, after witnessing the dangerous effects of literacy on his son—particularly his scientific rationalism and rejection of religion—abandons his ambition to have his son be a salaried employee, and has him work as a car mechanic instead. After a year of passive

aggressive protest from the mother, however, the father finally allows his son to rejoin school—and eventually assumes a passive aggressive stance himself toward his son's political activities, which gradually evolve from reading extracurricular political literature to serving as a spokesman for the Lebanese Communist Party.

Together with the patriarchal connection to sectarianism, Rashid's education in domestic politics includes the traumas of sexual difference/violence. Returning to his schoolboy days, Rashid recalls the horror he felt at learning from his peers the violent folklore about marital sex. Portraying women as the passive victims of men's predatory sexuality, and as devoid of sexuality themselves, the folkloric narrative resonates strongly with certain elements in the text, particularly since Rashid fails to breach the cultural wall around female sexuality and provide a female counter-discourse. Although Rashid attempts to convince himself that his parents' sexual relationship did not follow the conventional pattern, he fails to reproduce sufficient evidence to the contrary. Thus female sexuality gets almost reified in the position of passive victimhood—a condition with consequences for the text's construction of the gender of agency.

> The man would penetrate the woman, who was crying with fear and embarrassment. She would feel pain, and he would drop into her a fluid, shouting like an animal on heat. So she would become pregnant. Then he would get off her, and she would wrap herself in anything to hand, doubling up in her pain and stifling her groans, while he got up and ate a slice of bread coated with a little sugar.[10]

Recalling his discovery of his parents having (what seemed like) pleasurable sex in the bathroom, Rashid suggests that their sex life lay outside of the folk narrative's pattern. In spite of insisting on his mother's inviolable will, he offers no counter-narrative in place of the

conventional one. As a result, Rashid's suggestion seems not so credible, especially when linked to his childhood memory of the muffled, nighttime voices of women having sex: "Sometimes during the night I would hear a woman's voice coming to me from under a thousand blankets, from behind a thousand doors."[11] Here the stigma against female sexuality necessitates utmost discretion from women during sex, conjugal or otherwise. Moreover, the patriarchal rules that govern the relationship of Rashid's parents include the husband's right to order his wife and subjugate her with physical violence, and the wife's obligation to suppress her sexuality.[12] Other narrative details—such as his father's post-sex consumption of a sugar-coated loaf of bread—also reinforce the folk narrative's credibility.[13] Thus, women are situated, *a priori*, as objects intended to satisfy the sexual desires and domestic needs of men.

As noted by Samira Aghacy, the absence of female agents in the novel carries serious consequences for Rashid's vision of secular modernity, a vision which he contrasts to Lebanon's bloody tribal and sectarian legacies. In "Contemporary Lebanese Fiction: Modernization Without Modernity," Aghacy specifies the ideological conflict in the novel as one between "different forms of modernity" and between "modernity and authenticity," and argues that the conflict has a large impact on the novel's construction of gender identity.[14] Setting this conflict in the familial context, Aghacy argues that the narrator's revolt against tradition is an "oedipal revolt" against his father's tyranny, while his essentializing portrayal of his mother marks the gender limits of his vision of modernity:

> For Rashid [the narrator], woman continues to stand for a more natural and, to use Rita Felski's words, "edenic condition of organic wholeness untouched by the ruptures and contradictions of modern life," for a site of nostalgic longing for authenticity, social harmony, and security. Accordingly, Rashid insists on

> excluding his mother from modernity—which despite some feeble efforts on his part at drawing her attention to certain scientific achievements—remains primarily a masculine endeavor.[15]

Whereas Rashid eschews the patriarchal highhandedness of his father and identifies it with sectarian chauvinism and anti-intellectualism, his perception of his mother relegates her to the status of a partial subject. While she occasionally defies her husband, actively encourages Rashid to pursue his education, and also pursues an extra-marital affair, Rashid does not invest in characterizing his mother, nor does he recognize her as a formative influence on his life. Rather, he recurrently associates her with the archetypal images of nature, and in such a way that her reproductive role in life appears natural and fitting: "My mother was a tree. The tree gives of its fruit at the due time. Didn't I tell you, Mr Kawabata, how she answered anyone who commented on how many children she had? She replied that she couldn't keep her children in her stomach at will, even if she had wanted to."[16] While the mother's reply leaves some room to speculate about whether or not she wanted so many children, her passive stance toward reproduction reflects the patriarchal domestication of female sexuality, naturalized by the narrator through his description of his mother as a tree.

Against the socially limited role of women as wives and mothers stands the socially expansive role of men as the subjects of the public sphere and the regulators, through violence, of the boundaries of their communities. While interrogating the blood feud cycle plaguing his village, Rashid's stories reveal the masculinized nature of the blood feuds' economy of violence. Without exception, both the killers and their victims are male; this suggests that male life is at once the most honored and most threatened asset in the blood feud culture. Commenting on the revenge killing carried out by members of his family against a schoolboy and former classmate

of his, Rashid marvels at the unrestrained glee with which his extended family receives news of the killing, pointing in the process to the importance of the target's young male potential as a political motive for the killing.

> I can tell you, Mr Kawabata, that most people in our part of town were satisfied with the speed of the response to the loss of one of our people. Some people were so satisfied you might say they were happy. Because the enemy had lost someone whose death would lead to more tears in mothers' eyes than our dead man. Our dead man was an illiterate man of nearly sixty, whereas theirs was a young schoolboy of just sixteen years.[17]

In killing a young man with the potential to advance the socio-economic standing of the rival family, the killers score a high point in the blood feud challenge. Moreover, with women being the only ones publicly associated with lamenting their victims, the gender roles supporting the system of violence come into clear view: while women are allowed to express suffering, men are only allowed, and encouraged, to inflict it. Through the suppression and mastery of male affect, killing and aggression become the natural domains of men, while nurturing and emoting become the natural domains of women. Indeed, the relationship between Rashid's father and his handgun demonstrates the extent to which the mastery of violence acts as the foundation of manhood in the blood feud system: "*My father would constantly insist that after his death we should put his handgun under the pillow he rested his head on, because that was the only thing he had faith in, even in his final agony. 'Otherwise, it will be like burying me naked.* "[18] Constantly used to draw defensive boundaries against the imminent violence of other men, the handgun becomes an indispensable extension of the individual man's body, the part of it he trusts the most in a social world where male-male aggression has resulted in an existential dilemma: a man must kill to live

on as a man, or risk the symbolic death of his manhood; and yet killing always invites the risk of literal death.

Rashid's interrogation of the masculine foundations of tribal violence proceeds further to suggest that they determine the spatial divisions and toponymies separating each sect from the other during the civil war. In Rashid's account, sectarian violence is driven by tribal, patrilineal conceptions of identity, and war is an attempt by men to secure their sectarian masculinities by keeping their territories exclusive and inaccessible to other men. Thus, if a man is in the wrong place at the wrong time, he's as good as dead.

> Among us, wars happen in order that the names in one place should be alike.
>
> In our country, your name defines you, and your father, and your grandfather's grandfather, and the place where you live. If your own name doesn't help, then your father's name will help. Or else [a place where you may be buried]. *I hope you don't need any clarification: things are presumably like that in your country too, and in other countries:*
>
> *Jean, Jacques, Jean-Jacques, Jean, Charles, Jean-Charles...*[19]

Here Rashid reveals a chilling aspect of the logic of sectarian hatred: the safety of one's life depends on one's inclusion in the sectarian fold, and this inclusion is contingent on a verifiable paternal lineage; without a "correct" lineage, you are killable by default ("Or else a place where you may be buried"). Given that "wars happen in order that the names in one place should be alike," sectarian violence has a wide impact on locality that extends beyond the inner conflicts of masculine identity. The entire array of social and cultural features distinguishing one place from another manifests within the geographical boundaries set by male-authored sectarian violence. Importantly, however, Rashid suggests that the bellicosity of male-dominated collectivities finds

a common global expression in narcissistic nationalism: the situation in Lebanon is "the same" as in Kawabata's Japan and in the France of the comically generic "Jean, Jacques, Jean-Jacques…" Thus, while Lebanese sectarian chauvinism is distinctly inflected by a tribal organization of male homosociality, neither male homosocial bonds nor the deadly xenophobias they foster are unique to Lebanon and its sectarian history. Male violence dominates international politics as a result of libidinally charged loyalties to masculine aggression, loyalties demanded by the hierarchical structure of male homosocial desire.

This loyalty to masculine aggression becomes a major impetus behind Rashid's political development, particularly during the civil war, where violence becomes the daily language of politics. In challenging his father's authority while identifying his mother with the archetypal functions of fertility and nurture, and in taking as given the male domination of political practice and ideology, Rashid inherits the mantle of universal masculinity. Thus, as he develops his sense of agency in relation to secular ideologies and movements, Rashid incorporates the latter into a masculinized frame of reference that undermines their democratic potential. While the masculine gender of tribal/sectarian violence is visible to Rashid, the masculinization of agency underlying it remains concealed in the subconscious layers of his narrative discourse. As shall be demonstrated in the following section, Rashid's political coming-to-age narrative is a story of agency and status being acquired and negotiated through male homosocial ties of affection and hatred, alliance and rivalry, identification and disavowal. Male homosocial desire mobilizes, and to an extent contains, Rashid's emergence from conservative sectarianism to radical secularism.

Politics as Desire: Manhood and the Erotics of Political Initiation

While recounting the decisive shift in his world view from the geocentric cosmology

based on God's providence, passed on to him by his religious parents, to the scientific model where the Earth is a tiny piece in a cosmic puzzle governed by neutral and absolute physical laws, Rashid identifies the Russian astronaut Yuri Gagarin as both the source of his scientific enlightenment, and the embodiment of its romantic appeal:

> Dear Mr Kawabata, how can I describe to you the relationship between Gagarin and myself at that moment [when the success of Gagarin's space journey was announced]? He was part of me, I was him and he was me. For a long time we would go to school together, come back together, sleep together, eat together, and swim together in the river near our house. I could ask him for light during the darkest part of the night as I walked in the dark streets. I needed no light while his rays lit my being, and his light poured out before me on the road.[20]

Appealing to Rashid's thirst for knowledge, Gagarin's achievement opens up horizons that are closed by the oppressive religiosity of Rashid's parents and fellow villagers. By personalizing the enticing appeal of Gagarin's achievement, and cultivating a fantasy of intimacy with him, where he shares all of Rashid's personal and social activities and spaces, Rashid participates in a symbolic economy where men's achievements in male-dominated fields are conflated with their masculine charisma.[21] The enlightenment represented by Gagarin's success becomes the light possessed by Gagarin himself, and Rashid internalizes this light as his own. Given that Rashid's socialization is dominated by males, social distinction appears, to him, as a sign of masculine charisma. As a result, his attachment to Gagarin may be seen to reflect, in a platonic form, the eroticized magnetism of masculine agency. In this sense, Rashid's fantasized intimacy with Gagarin is an expression of male homosocial desire, and his scientific rationalism, along with the secular politics it introduces, get masculinized through this same desire.

It is from other males—his father, his schoolmates, his geography teacher, Yuri Gagarin, his comrades in the Lebanese Communist Party, and the one comrade who towered above all the rest—that Rashid learns the meaning of issues as wide-ranging as tribalism, the structure of the universe, scientific rationalism, sexual difference, socialism, pan-Arabism, and imperialism. Taking shape in a social setting where males dominate political praxis and representation by default, Rashid's political desire develops in relation to the political desirability of masculinity. By tracing the growth of Rashid's political consciousness against the gravitational forces of identification and desire, *Dear Mr Kawabata* locates masculinity at the center of its narrator's political education, which sees him negotiating his subjectivity in relation to other, more influential men. As we shall see, the erotic magnetism of masculine agency works like a double-edged sword on Rashid: while drawing him toward the sphere of radical politics, it also draws him into the male sphere of opportunistic violence.

As his recollections reveal, the political culture in which Rashid grew up is inspired by a phallocentric fantasy of mastery, one which he now views from an ironic distance. Rashid's memories of the political zeal of his youth reveal a fetishistic relationship to language, where he and his male comrades would strive to master language as a proxy for mastering the world. As part of his wider critique of rhetorical language and ideological posturing, Rashid mocks his earlier presumption of mastering words/the world, suggesting that, on the contrary, it is words that master people: "I do not mean anything, I am being carried away by words. How many people like me have been carried away by words – other people, other generations!"[22] At several points during the narration, Rashid pauses to interrogate his own language in ways that highlight language's tendency to impose conceptual and affective conditions incommensurate with reality: these range from revolutionary discourse and nationalism, to idioms that reduce the complexity

of human motivations to socially acceptable and appealing platitudes.[23] While evoking the post-structural theory of language as the matrix of reality's construction, Rashid's recognition of the power of language touches on the sexual politics of language as well. Mocking the naive objectification of language (and the world) by himself and his male comrades, Rashid implicitly gives it a sexual character: "We would mount those words [*kunnā namtaṭī hādhihi al-kalimāt*] (*imtaṭá* in Arabic means 'he mounted a *maṭīyah*,' and the *maṭīyah* is a grown camel whose back is mounted) and run with them wherever we wanted. Wherever we wanted!" (my translation).[24] Drawing on Arabic idioms related to animal domestication, Rashid evokes a connection between his objectification of language and already established linguistic customs: his mounting of words is encouraged by the similarity of a word (*kalimah*) to a mounted camel (*maṭīyah*), and the latter by definition exists to be mounted, as indicated by the root it shares with the verb for mounting (*imtaṭá*).[25] By setting men's mounting of a *kalimah/maṭīya* against a linguistic custom, Rashid also situates the sexual connotation of mounting (i.e. penetration) within a patriarchal context. However, while he ridicules the masculine arrogance with which he and his comrades would invest their slogans with the power to change, Rashid does not confront the sexual politics that situate men *a priori* as the active subjects of language, and words/animals/women as its passive objects.

Rashid's understanding of the range and repercussions of male violence is enabled by his own participation in the civil war, as a member in the Communist Party's militia, which also fought on the side of the Palestinian factions. Having pursued violence partly for his infatuation with masculine power, Rashid faces its heavy psychic toll head on during his postwar sighting of his former comrade and mentor in the Communist Party, the man whose masculine charisma nurtured Rashid's faith in the revolutionary purpose of violence. Out of all the novel's

characters, it is this man, more than any other, who represents the agonistic nature of male homosocial desire. Rashid's psychically fraught and libidinally charged relationship with this man manifests itself in the novel's very first pages, where he reveals to Kawabata the cognitive dissonance he experiences upon glimpsing the man in the commercial district of al-Hamra in Beirut. Rashid's volatile reaction to the sight of the man registers his fundamental ambivalence toward masculine power, an ambivalence born of the agonistic and hierarchical structure of male homosocial desire.

> For a moment I thought that I was seeing myself walking along the opposite pavement just a few metres away. The moment, however, seemed to become longer, increasing not just my surprise but also my feeling of [derangement]. I was almost losing my balance – losing the sense of cohesion that held the parts of my body together and joined them to that mysterious something that controlled my entire being.[26]

The uncanny doubling Rashid experiences while watching the man registers his own repressed history of transgressive violence, a history that gets replayed before him during his extending moment of cognitive processing. By polluting his moral self-image and undermining his psychic "balance" and "cohesion," this history gives Rashid his feeling of "derangement." Moreover, in identifying the cohesion of identity itself with repression—he is balanced and coherent until he recognizes his psychic entrails as displaced onto the other man—Rashid suggests that identity itself is based on violent exclusion, in his case, of the part he played as a militiaman during the civil war. From this self-critical stance, Rashid confronts the physical violence he had committed along with other fighters in the Communist and Palestinian militias, and the ideological violence he had unwittingly subscribed to, both of which he sees reflected in man across the street.

While Rashid's extra-diegetic relation to Kawabata involves him in a search for a sophisticated masculinity free of the compulsory violence of tribalism, his diegetic relation to his ex-comrade dominates the masculine trajectory he follows from political initiation to political castration. While he presides over Rashid's affiliation with the Communist Party, Rashid's well-built and charismatic comrade represents the conjuncture between the corporeal dimension of masculinity—in Sara Ahmed's terms, a privileged extension of the body in and through space—and the social prerogatives of masculinity in the domains of political practice and symbolic representation.[27] Thus, while the man's influence on Rashid explicitly derives from the radicalism of his political discourse and stances, implicitly it is magnified by his charismatic masculinity. Sharing with Kawabata his irritation at going unseen by the man, Rashid reveals that the same self-assured aloofness behind his ex-friend's detachment from relational ethics also renders him attractive and compelling, making Rashid feel small and insignificant by comparison. In physical terms, Rashid's sense of being outdone by the other man translates into shame over his perceived shorter stature, which, he believes, makes him invisible to the man:

> He only wanted to see people who had deserved his favour. And I did not deserve his favour.
>
> He was three centimetres taller than me, but that did not give him the right to look down on me. A lot of other people are taller than me, and a lot are shorter. What has this got to do with anything? And again, since when has height been a measure of value, and a reason to feel superior?[28]

Soon after divulging this shameful feeling, Rashid announces to Kawabata that he himself had rendered the man taller, thereby suggesting that the effect the man's height has on him is the result of a masculine inferiority complex residing within him.[29] However, it is more significant in

this context that the other man's height gets registered as a sign of masculine superiority in the first place. Both Rashid and his ex-friend are more recently transplanted urbanites hailing from rural backgrounds, where physical stature and prowess are often as important as class to the display of masculine status. The fact that Rashid experiences jealousy over his friend's stature is thus multiply significant. While demonstrating a strong feeling of rivalry, Rashid's reaction also evokes the homoerotic dimension of male homosociality. His ex-friend's body is imposing in its masculine allure; therefore, Rashid's attraction toward it must be expressed as jealous rivalry and alienation from the self. In this sense, the homosocial desire orienting Rashid toward the man regulates its own erotic excesses.

Repeatedly throughout the narrative, Rashid figures his existential illness as an unnamable thing situated at an illimitable distance, a distance that spans time as well as space, and keeps the diagnosis and cure in state of anguished suspension. Crucially, Rashid's first mention of this malaise occurs in connection with his former friend, whose nameless presence in the text figures the non-representable core of Rashid's self-consciousness: "What really annoyed me [about him], Mr Kawabata, was something else, something else a few metres, miles, or generations away from me."[30] This "something else" reappears in the text whenever Rashid is at a loss to name the historical forces imposing the tragic/ironic gap between language and referent, reality and ideal, desire and its object. The centrality of the man to Rashid's existential malaise lies in the pivotal role he had played, as a political leader and surrogate father, in shaping the latter's masculinity, agency, and desire. This role is attested when Rashid identifies his postwar encounter with the man as the trigger for a cinematic self-epiphany, one resembling the scenario conventionally associated with the moment of death: "I did see the film of my life flashing past me, however, swiftly but clearly, with my own eyes. It was a moment that was quickly over, but

it has imprinted itself on my memory. It happened when I met him (the above-mentioned person) in Hamra Street, and for a moment thought I was seeing myself."[31] While Rashid stresses that he does not experience this epiphany at the moments of his death—he dies and revives several times during the narrative—he confirms experiencing it upon his postwar encounter with the other man, whom he perceives as his own image. The other man, then, functions as an overdetermined signifier whose meaning encompasses the full breadth of Rashid's life. Replacing death as the trigger of Rashid's self-epiphany, the man also represents the deadly effect of self-awareness on Rashid. In the context of the civil war, the man becomes a metonym for the transgressive masculinities that had seduced Rashid into participating in the war's chaotic vortex of violence.

Recounting to Kawabata some incidents involving this man's sexism, Rashid attributes to them the same kind of disillusionment he experiences upon discovering the emptiness of the man's political stances. Indeed, in recounting his response to the man's reaction upon receiving word of his mother's death—he promises to father a girl as a surrogate kinswoman and possess her exclusively—Rashid describes a sense of alienation that strongly resembles the bodily dislocation he experiences years later, upon running into the same man at al-Hamra. In this sense, Rashid finds himself unbalanced by the heterosexist dimension of the manhood that had held him in thrall; and yet, as with the surprise sighting at al-Hamra, the disorientation he feels points to a repressed part of himself.

> When he made that astonishing statement after being told of his mother's death, my angry reaction was not caused by disgust, but from a feeling that I'd lost my footing, so to speak. What he'd said didn't belong to our intellectual world at all. This gave me a dreadful sensation of alienation and lack of direction – like a sleeper who opens his eyes during the night, and finds himself nowhere,

directionless, in a void.[32]

On the one hand, the indignation that Rashid expresses rings true as a reflection of political disillusionment, as the possessiveness and entitlement his friend exhibits in relation to female kin belie the platform of gender and class equality from which he preaches his communist ideals. On the other hand, Rashid demonstrates a similar possessiveness toward his own mother, whom he cannot imagine as having desires and goals independently from his father or himself. In this respect, the disorientation he feels upon witnessing his friend's demeanor points to his realization that both the political ideals he has been taught, and the politicized desire he has invested in them, have been corrupted by a masculine will to power. Having developed his identity around these masculinized ideals, Rashid finds himself "nowhere, directionless, in a void" when their putative progressivism is exposed as an ideological mystification.

In the postwar present, Rashid see his ex-friend as a chameleon opportunist, a man whose priority lies in cultivating his own power. For Rashid, the man's smooth postwar adoption of bourgeois life invites suspicions of corruption, especially when the eye-catching opulence of his present attire is contrasted with the casual clothes he would wear during the war: "What had happened, then, for him to go up in the world like this? Where had he acquired this sense of superiority he relied on to walk with his head inclined a little backwards, staring ahead so that passers-by got out of his way, while for his part he didn't need to avoid anyone?"[33] Whereas Rashid had been impressed by the man's zealous proclamations of class equality and international solidarity during the war, he now sees them as theatrical postures that obfuscated his entirely banal investment in the war's contests for power. However, as Rashid observes the arrogance and complacency legible from the man's dress, facial expression, and body language, he is overcome by a horrifying feeling that the man condenses the character traits of all the men

active on the civil war arena—including himself: "I had assembled his component parts from similar features common to many other people I know, features which also link them with myself. I had pulled them together to make him!"[34] While Rashid mocks to Kawabata the rhetoric of heroic resistance that had dominated his service in the Communist Party's militia, he stops to recognize his own role in the party's exploitative celebration of violence: "Mr Kawabata, I am almost laughing at what I am telling you. It's almost as if I were saying it with a touch of superiority. It's as if the 'blame' fell on them, *them*, the others, as if I alone were the victim and they were the executioners."[35]

It may therefore be surmised that Rashid's malaise is elusive to the extent that it links his violent past to the collapse of his revolutionary ambitions, a collapse that opens his eyes to the radical contingency of language and the banal violence of history. Another, more personal factor is equally important in maintaining the obscurity of Rashid's malaise, and foreclosing it from the full possibilities of representation: this is his romantic disappointment with masculine agency, understood as an eroticized power capable of shaping history according to its visionary ideals. Given that his ex-friend was, for him, the epitome of this agency and his ego ideal, Rashid cannot witness the man's corruption without experiencing a profound void in his self-image and self-esteem, particularly since it prompts him to examine his own corruption. Rashid's horrified fascination with his ex-friend goes beyond the recognition of a disturbing resemblance to encompass a distorted romantic ideal, one in which the seductions of masculinity and power are linked through a circular signifying chain. Although the strength, confidence, and mastery projected by the man seem outrageously inappropriate in the recent aftermath of the war, these are precisely the qualities that had made him so attractive to Rashid, at a time when the different warring factions blended seamlessly with their ideological platforms, and revolutionary slogans

dominated: “He was like a mountain, Mr Kawabata, like a mountain. Mountains in our tradition, [Mr] Kawabata, are mighty and majestic. They are used as a metaphor for firmness, solidity and pride.”[36] No longer able to experience his attraction in the form of comradely admiration, Rashid faces its gravity from the doubly hostile position of a friend-turned-enemy. While his experience of bodily dislocation highlights his revulsion toward his ex-friend, and toward the part of himself that resembles him, it also dramatizes the involuntary link between his revulsion and his desire. In reaching for that obscenely, yet attractively, self-assured man, Rashid’s desire recoils in horror upon itself, threatening to unravel both his moral compass and his sense of masculine integrity.

Seducing/Co-opting Kawabata: The Specular Phantom of Masculine Modernity

The conflictual currents of male homosocial desire assume a less hostile form in Rashid’s relation to Kawabata, where the discursive monopoly in place allows him to bolster his sense of masculine autonomy against his silent narratee. Addressing Kawabata as an intellectual peer also alienated from the violence of political rhetoric, Rashid project onto him, qualifies, and then appropriates for himself the prized position of the cosmopolitan intellectual. For Rashid, the cosmopolitan intellectual is a man whose modern education fosters a deep awareness of both the anachronism of tradition and the banalities of modernity. Although Rashid provides little detail about Kawabata’s life, and does not make explicit the reasons for his attachment to Kawabata, it appears that he considers him a highly cultured man who, although attached to the cultural legacy of feudal Japan, finds no place for it in the modern present. As Ken Seigneurie observes, “Both the narrator Rashid and the historical Kawabata suffer modernity to the point that death tempts Rashid and takes Kawabata.”[37] However, through a camouflaged critique of Kawabata’s historical vision, literary themes, and philosophy of language, Rashid places himself one step

ahead of Kawabata in terms of his modern sophistication. While identifying with the historical confusion in Kawabata's subjectivity, Rashid takes the latter's nostalgic essentialism with a large grain of irony. Referring to Kawabata's *The Master of Go* (1951), Rashid expresses his desire to emulate Kawabata's portrait of an alien modernity disrupting the harmony of organic tradition. However, Rashid's expression of this desire contradicts itself to reveal his critical awareness of the adulterated multiplicity of the past.

> I also wanted, like you, to write a story in which I would speak, through an ordinary event, about the clash between the climate of the age (I mean modernity, with its threats and challenges) and [the people of the land], I mean tradition. This was despite my opposition to your way of constructing the story – though I certainly respect it.[38]

In the gap between Rashid's romantically abstract designations of modernity and tradition ("the climate of the age," "the people of the land"), and his self-correcting return to the bare nouns ("I mean modernity," "I mean tradition"), Rashid voices his critique of Kawabata's simplified view of history. Moreover, in his "opposition to [Kawabata's] way of constructing the story," Rashid possibly alludes to the relatively simple conflict developed in *The Master of Go*, where the game of *Go* transforms from a repository of traditional Japanese values and aesthetics, to a functional game where the players compete according to instrumental, standardized rules of participation. For Rashid, romanticizing the past is a dangerous activity, particularly in light of his country's long and bloody legacy of sectarian violence. In qualifying Kawabata's vision of "the clash between the climate of the age...and [the people of the land]," Rashid exhibits his advantage over Kawabata as a modern intellectual beyond the sway of all grand narratives, whether they romanticize tradition or modernity.

Drawing on his critical awareness of the misleading nature of language—which leads him to qualify his own speech several times during the narration—Rashid disavows to his specular arbitrator all ideologies and narratives that sacrifice the idiosyncrasy of individual experience to readily available, socially assimilated forms of expression. In doing so, Rashid distances himself not only from tribal and sectarian language, but also from literary language that glosses over the violent and abject parts of reality in favor of aesthetically appealing abstractions. In addition to popular sayings that carry within them unacknowledged histories of violence, Rashid invites suspicion toward seemingly harmless expressions that emphasize one-dimensional affects, or achieve a glib sort of aesthetic appeal. For example, after stating that his being "had been shaken" [*ihtazza kiyānī*] while seeing his ex-friend on al-Hamra street, Rashid qualifies his statement in a way that casts doubt on the veracity of all emotionally emphatic idioms: "*Mr Kawabata, I don't exactly know what it means for a being to be shaken, but I can tell you that I am unable to resist expressions of this sort that steal through me and permeate my letter to you.*"[39] Here, Rashid proposes that even intimately personal expressions such as "my being had been shaken" are motivated by prevalent social scripts that "steal through" one's discourse in spite of oneself. Thus, he suggests that the meanings of individual utterances are always eclipsed by meanings established through social consensus, thereby becoming socially appealing platitudes. At several points during the narrative, Rashid's critique extends to literary language as well, such as when he links his description of the sea's grandeur to the scent of blood.

> I knew that the sea was huge and frightening, that the oceans extended to infinity, that water comprised two-thirds of the surface of the earth, and the oceans were deeper than the mountains were high. I knew that a tiny amount of metal would sink, while a forest of trees would float.

I smell in this eloquence the scent of blood, Mr Kawabata.[40]

Associating his own nature-inspired "eloquence" with "the scent of blood," Rashid places his literary sensibility squarely in opposition to the pastoral romanticism of Kawabata, who in his Nobel prize speech cited examples from pre-modern Japanese literature to demonstrate how their nature-based lyricism reflects "the deep quiet of the Japanese spirit."[41] Although Rashid never comments on the cultural politics of Kawabata's style, his insistence on demonstrating to the latter the maturity of his anti-romantic modernity points to a competitive impulse lurking behind his demonstrations. At one point praising the *Master of Go* for its treatment of the cultural crisis created by modernity, at others rejecting the type of cultural essentialism that infuses Kawabata's writing and thought, Rashid reveals that the historical crisis engaged by Kawabata extends beyond modernity's disruption of tradition, to become a crisis in the perception of history and culture as coherent entities.

Through the intertwined channels of male homosocial desire, where idealization overlaps rivalry, Kawabata becomes for Rashid both a role model and a pupil in his attempt to conquer the intellectual challenges of modernity. Desiring to have some influence on history and the status quo, yet keenly aware of his political castration, Rashid yields to Kawabata—the mirror of his own desire—the metaphorical positions of king and judge: "So here I am then, Mr. Kawabata, appointing you as that king whom I dreamed of being, and that judge who is obeyed for his sincerity."[42] Rashid's nominal "appointment" of Kawabata as king and judge highlights his failure to attain these positions himself, a failure set against the dark history of the Arab world in the post/neo-colonial period. In an ironic commentary on the tradition of lamentation in Arabic literature, Rashid announces to Kawabata his intention to abandon the trend, only to suggest that the harsh and intractable status quo may not permit him to do so.

So far as I am concerned, I promise you straightaway that I will not let you hear weeping, that I will not complain, that I will not expose my suffering to you, and that I will not grumble about the bad situation fate has brought me to, as if I were a young prince reduced by the world to an outcast. I will not rise up in revolt against injustice and oppression, or complain to you of the sufferings of this people, trampled under the foot of reactionary regimes, the agents of colonialism, imperialism or the new Crusades.

No!

What do I mean by 'no' here, Mr Kawabata?

I promise you, and I will try to keep my promise.

I will try![43]

Here Rashid's suffering is intimately related to "the sufferings of this people, trampled under the foot of reactionary regimes," and to his failure to change the status quo through his participation in the civil war. It is a suffering he cannot ignore, no matter how hard he may try, as indicated by all his assertions, doubts, and qualifications, isolated in separate lines for dramatic effect ("No!", "*What do I mean by 'no' here...?*", "I will try!"). Although he denies being "a young prince reduced by the world to an outcast," that is probably how Rashid feels, given that the world has stepped on his lofty vision of himself as a fighter at the vanguard of the revolution. Practically speaking, Rashid has no hope of being the king and judge who will bring the world to its senses. However, by appointing Kawabata as the king and judge of history, Rashid sets him up as a mute mirror to his own critical views on tradition, politics, history, and the ideological quicksands of language. Thus, Rashid compensates for his failure to be king and judge by routing his regal judgment of history through Kawabata.

By assimilating Kawabata through the function of the narratee, Rashid puts into play a recursive loop linking admiration to rivalry, so that the status which he attributes to Kawabata eventually becomes his own. Crucially, it is not only the desire for power that forms the link between admiration and rivalry, but rather desire itself, operating as an erotic animus to male embodiments of masculine agency. Thus we see Rashid, after telling Kawabata that he had refused the financial support offered him by the Communist Party during the war, admit with a tongue-in-cheek irony that he had sought to impress Kawabata and infatuate him with this story, just as a gallant would seek to impress and infatuate a princess: "*You will doubtless detect in what I say a desire on my part to demonstrate the purity of my inner self and the sincerity of my commitment. Yes! I sometimes surprise myself thinking that you are a perfect woman. A princess, a virgin, desiring but hesitant. And I strive, that her choice may fall on me.*"[44] On one hand, it seems here that an Arabic cultural specificity works to produce a narrower, less anxious gap between the platonic and erotic dimensions of male homosocial desire; this would explain the frankness and ease with which Rashid sexualizes his relation to Kawabata. On the other hand, the fact that Rashid renders his investment in—and his hope for a return investment from—Kawabata in such stereotypical terms suggests that the libidinal intensities of male homosocial desire necessitate their dispersion through gender-polarized heterosexual scripts. Through their normative gravity, these scripts prohibit gender-slippage in the explicit expression of male homoeroticism, so that a man may only express his desire for another man in a manner consistent with masculine self-possession. In imagining Kawabata as "a perfect woman, a princess, virginal, desiring, patient," Rashid reveals his preference to be sexually dominant, and his reluctance to assume the feminized position of sexual passivity in relation to Kawabata or any other man. By articulating this fantasy of phallic mastery over Kawabata, Rashid reinforces the

spirit of rivalry animating male homosocial desire in the text, while evoking its greatest ambition: to counter political castration by mastering the critical vision of the modern cosmopolitan intellectual.

As Aghacy rightly argues, and in spite of his numerous reflections on the ethical limits of modernization and the contingent nature of language, Rashid advocates, through the narrative interface he establishes with the ideal auditor/mirror Kawabata, a top-down model of cultural modernization, with men like Kawabata and himself at the top, and the rest of his fellow citizens at the bottom.

> Indeed, Rashid confronts the authority of tradition and adopts a monologic and totalizing discourse that validates modernity. His intellectual rigidity and cultural arrogance suggest that, because the people in his hometown lack his capacity for reflective reasoning, his brand of modernity should be enforced no matter how disorienting, and regardless of the gap and rupture that it can generate.[45]

From one angle, Aghacy overestimates Rashid's valuation of modernity; in a distinctly dystopian manner, Rashid decries to Kawabata the meaningless cycles of violence that blur the distinction between modern and pre-modern times: "*Mr Kawabata, I hate history as I hate death, and meaninglessness. An emptiness dissolving into space. A tyrant. And a beast. History is a beast. But not like a mountain. With bitterness, rather.*"[46] Here Rashid pronounces his verdict on Lebanon's legacy of sectarian violence as a general verdict on the tiring repetition of violence throughout history. Rather than the majestic silence of a mountain, history's beastly dumbness evokes the bitterness of disappointment and the despair of senseless death. Thus Rashid deals a decisive blow to the teleological narrative of modernity as the end goal of history, a gesture that recalls his bitterness and despair at having none of his secular progressive dreams fulfilled. That

said, Rashid still desires to adjudicate, on a philosophical level, the question of what modernity is and what it should be. In spite of the revulsion he expresses toward his ex-friend's narcissistic masculinity, Rashid himself assumes a self-aggrandizing posture in his representation of his own political development, portraying himself as a revolutionary thinker among hordes of men caught in the web of false consciousness. According to the following passage, among those in his party who understand the mystifying effect of political rhetoric, Rashid numbers only himself.

> [Those were] The same words with which we – you will find out later the reason for my using the plural form – believed we could take the world in our hands.
>
> Then it became clear to me – notice that I have returned to the singular form – that we were good at dealing with them, but not with the world.[47]

The fact that Rashid claims for himself ("notice that I have returned to the singular form") the privilege of a (relative) freedom from ideology is no coincidence; his relation to Kawabata is centrally motivated by his desire to approximate the ideal role he projects onto the latter, that of an arbitrator of tradition, modernity, and history. Monologue takes precedence over dialogue in this approach, as individualism takes precedence over community and relationality. In this sense, Rashid's extended letter to Kawabata is addressed to himself via his narratee.

Rashid's discursive monopoly over Kawabata enables him to co-opt the significance of his death as well as his life. By connecting the motives of Kawabata's rumored suicide to the pains of his own cultural estrangement, Rashid effectively turns him into a foil for his own inflated self-image. For Rashid, the suicide is a brave reckoning with the "heart of the matter," the nameless "something" that pains Rashid from "metres, miles or generations away."

> Now, Mr Kawabata, I hope that you will forget everything else and will pay

> attention only to what I am going to say, because I shall go straight to the heart of the matter – a matter that concerns you as much as it concerns me. The last initiative that you took in your life was simply the most eloquent proof of that. I say, something inside me gives me pain, something metres, miles or generations away![48]

In the context of Rashid's anguished transition from sectarianism to secularism, this unnamable pain seems to refer to the chronic malaise he has acquired as an intellectual obliged to contrast the regressive reality of his country's sectarianism with the progressive ideals of secular democracy. In choosing suicide, Kawabata is seen as championing a masculine ethics of self-mastery, where a man would sooner die than live in a world that cannot be aligned with his lofty principles. Rashid's description of the suicide as "eloquent" endorses this masculine ethics, and when he suggests that the nameless thing paining him from a vague distance and time "concerns [Kawabata] as much as it concerns [him]," he transforms his own suffering into the fate of a tragic hero, one whose noble principles have no place in a stubbornly ignoble world. Rashid thus becomes the enlightened, secular intellectual fated to live and labor in a land of sectarian darkness.

In Rashid's male-centered imaginary, the modern secular citizen is a man who has abandoned the myopic tribalism and superstitious religiosity of his rural upbringing to become a citizen of the world, committed in principle to reason, (formal) equality, and the expansion of the cultural horizons of identity. Moreover, the secular citizen as embodied by Rashid is a man whose savvy politics are linked to a distinguished intellect, a privileged, academic point of view, and a conscious sense of isolation from his social environment. Thus, it may be argued that Rashid's model of secular citizenship, by default, denies full citizenship status to women as well

as less distinguished men. In this light, *Dear Mr Kawabata* represents an ambivalent critique of the gender dynamics of tribal/sectarian conflict. Through the masculine conditions the narrator imposes on the potential of secular citizenship, the text recuperates the patriarchal model of authority it challenges in the form of tribal/sectarian chauvinism. While al-Daif goes to great lengths with his narrator to expose the arbitrary cruelty of this chauvinism, and even goes beyond this to address the contingency of meaning and the historical repetition of violence, the relation between violence and the masculinization of agency remains relatively unexplored in the text, lurking between the lines and in the narrator's attempts to bridge the distance between himself and his symbolically freighted narratee. With al-Duwayhi's *The Rain of June*, the role played by masculine agency in the production of tribal/sectarian violence becomes a theme in its own right, involving gender politics in the widest spheres of socio-political life, ranging from the tribal and sectarian to the national, regional, and global.

2. *The Rain of June*: Manning the Borders with Blood

> Men develop a strong loyalty to violence. Men must come to terms with violence because it is the prime component of male identity...it is taught to boys until they become its advocates—men, not women. Men become advocates of that which they most fear. In advocacy they experience mastery of fear. In mastery of fear they experience freedom. Men transform their fear of male violence into metaphysical commitment to male violence. Violence itself becomes the central definition of any experience that is profound and significant.
>
> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*[1]

If al-Daif approaches the conundrum of Lebanon's sectarian divisions from a platform of secularism and rationalism, aligning himself with a privileged cosmopolitan citizenship, al-Duwayhi redirects attention to the national and regional possibilities of Lebanese identity by capturing them in the state of a shattered ideal, dramatizing their failure as the failure of political agency and social cohesion in both the Lebanese and Arab geo-political terrains. This is most clearly illustrated by the novel's title, which has the name for the month of June (*Ḥazīrān*) in the Aramaic version of the Babylonian calendar current in the Levant. Given that *Ḥazīrān* stands out in Arab collective memory as the month of the ignominious defeat in the Arab-Israeli war of June, 1967, the title symbolically links the tribal divisions scrutinized in the novel—and the gender dynamics behind them—to the internal Arab divisions that led to that defeat. Taking a more sociological approach, al-Duwayhi's text involves no monopoly on the narrative discourse, or any participation by the narrators in the masculinist symbolic economy that they trace. Rather, al-Duwayhi carefully situates the constricting gender roles, predatory relations, and honor codes

requisite to manhood at the heart of a tribal blood feud cycle whose social fault lines transform into the sectarian divisions that dominate the stage of the 1975-1990 civil war.[2] While *Maṭar Ḥazīran* resonates on several levels with *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, it does not reproduce the hierarchies of male homosocial culture that it scrutinizes. Instead of providing a single male narrator with a privileged vantage point outside of history, al-Duwayhi's novel features multiple narrators of both genders and different generations, some external to the narrative and others internal to it, all of them invested in the historical significance and ramifications of the hostilities leading to the 1957 Christian-Christian massacre in Burj al-Hawa (a pseudonym for the town of Mizyarah where the massacre actually happened).

By including the symbolically resonant month of June (*Ḥazīrān*) in the title, al-Duwayhi rewrites in local terms the conventional geo-political scenario associated with the 1967 Arab-Israeli war: the failure of Arab solidarity and sovereignty appears as the outcome of internal schisms resulting from tribal constructions of identity, rather than the presence of a militarily superior enemy. Thus the massacre at Burj al-Hawa comes to represent the failure of Arab socio-political cohesion in general. Crucially, the polyphonic structure of the text allows every narrator to contribute some insight into a phenomenon that is acknowledged as beyond rational explanation and cognitive assimilation. As I will argue, al-Duwayhi's major contribution in this novel is his identification of male violence with the abstract gravity of collective violence, so that the former appears to acquire a metaphysical dimension, as observed by Andrea Dworkin in the passage quoted above. In their initiation into violence, men are compelled by harsh disciplinary rules that regulate body language and self-expression, and mandate aggression as the defining core of their identity. Taking my cue from Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, where heteronormative bodies extend their boundaries in and through space, thus infusing space with a

heteronormative character, I will argue that male bodies molded by the aggression of tribal manhood extend their limits in and through space. By sustaining the cycle of the blood feud, men man the borders of their tribes, guarding them and marking them with the masculine law of imminent aggression.

Strangers, Borders, and the Reification of Difference

Set in the northern Lebanese town of Barqa—seemingly the fictional counterpart of Zgharta—in the four decades between the mid-fifties and the mid-nineties, the narrative establishes early on the influence that male dominance exerts on the definition of the boundaries, symbolic and geographic, of collective identity. In the opening pages of the novel, an anonymous narrator from Barqa introduces, by recollecting his schoolboy days, the socio-political stage on which the Burj al-Hawa massacre unfolds.[3] Attending school in the nearby city (implied to be Tripoli) with other boys from his town, the narrator gets forcibly withdrawn from a classroom session by the school's principal on a summer day in June, 1957, following news of a massacre that occurred in Burj al-Hawa, where the enemy families from Barqa and their supporters clashed during the funeral Mass of the local bishop's brother.[4] While the narrator and his classmates are initially sheltered from the news, he notices that the normally garrulous driver Maurice keeps a long silence before breaking out into tears. This, along with the ominous silence that blankets the town once the children reach it, suggests to the perceptive narrator that a devastating event has befallen the village. Instinctively, the narrator understands that the event involves the entrenched enmity between the town's main families, the Samʿanis of the lower quarter (to whom he belongs), and the Ramis of the upper. When the narrator's aunt picks him up from the bus stop and guides him back to his home—all the while keeping her eyes wide open

for potential snipers hiding in alleyways—she reviles manhood as the natural source of blind and oppressive violence.

> But as soon as we advanced a little into our neighborhood, it seemed that she had relaxed a bit. She started to talk. I don't know why she started saying that the best thing that happened to her in her entire life was that she hadn't married, in spite of the fact that the best young men had "asked for her hand in marriage"… It was a fortunate thing indeed that she refused marriage. She stops and says with an exaggerated aversion that she hates men, and men's oppressive temperament, and men's odor, and boys as well. What's the use of boys?[5]

While the narrator relives his boyhood naivety in his claim that he "didn't know why" his aunt pronounced a sweeping condemnation of men as well as boys, the minute details of his narration suggests otherwise. Paying close attention to his aunt's carefully calculated movements and her anxious protectiveness toward him, and approximating her attitude through free indirect discourse ("It was a fortunate thing indeed that she refused marriage"), the narrator understands that his aunt's "exaggerated" demonstration of misandry reflects her heightened anxiety about the men from the enemy family who may be lurking in the alleyways to ambush her nephew—as well as her frustration with her own kinsmen's role in the blood feud, of which the massacre at Burj al-Hawa is the latest manifestation.

While the blood feud takes place between two different families, these families are intertwined through marriage and a shared locale: although the town is divided into two quarters, members of each family live on the other side, and the divide itself is an invention that coincided with the relatively recent beginning of the blood feud, thus requiring a good deal of imagination to be sustained as a daily reality. However, rather than representing an anomaly to the normal

order of things, the blood feud is maintained precisely *because* of the families' shared history. It is because the two families, relative to teach other, occupy volatile positions on the spectrum of difference, that the imaginary exclusiveness of their identities must be reified through violence. Noticing that no one comes to pick up two of his classmates from the bus stop, the same narrator reasons that the lack of concern shown by the parents over their children's safety is probably due to their family's outsider status in the village. In a thoughtful and lexically playful meditation on the situation of the outsider, the narrator alights on the paradoxical nature of the blood feud in his town: that it is determined by a hierarchy of difference in which strangers, i.e. those with no connection to Barqa, are excluded *a priori* from the equation of violence. In this respect the text resonates with al-Daif's novel, where a blood feud unfolds between families living in the same town, and sending their children to the same school. After asserting that "danger doesn't reach the strangers," the narrator expounds, in dramatic italics, on the precarious status of the strangers, too remote to be included in the local families' infighting, and too different to be taken seriously as neighbors entitled to neighborly rights.

> *'Al-ghirb'* [the strangers]*: with a short 'i' paired with the 'gh,' or a short 'u' in some dialects. The plural form of 'gharīb*' [stranger], *virtually equivalent to the standard plural 'al-ghurabā.'' Here it should be noted that the homograph 'al-gharb'* [the West], *having a short 'a' paired with the 'gh,' is the direction from which those who do not belong to us come, those who fall on us unexpectedly. And so we rant, with occasion or without, saying that no one who pleases the heart comes from among them. Those who make their way into our fold carry with them all that calls attention to themselves and to their strangeness, merely upon speaking.*[6]

By listing the dialectical variants on the word for "strangers," and linking its etymology to the alien "West," the narrator foregrounds the arbitrariness and exaggeration involved in assigning the status of the stranger. The strangers are strange not so much for differences in their features, dialects or customs, but simply because their external origins make them suspect, "merely upon speaking." The intensely localized nature of the townspeople's identity predisposes them to perceive new settlers as threatening intruders. However, the strangers' very strangeness is also what shields them from the bloody legacy of infighting between the town's established families. Thus, it appears that the blood feud responds not only to the law of revenge, but also to the need to extinguish the other from the self. The fact that this other is considered an enemy because of his/her similarity-in-difference underscores the absurd logic of tribal hostilities in Barqa and the rest of Lebanon, where they intersect and reinforce the sectarian divisions that fuel the civil war.

The dominance of lineage-based discrimination as a principle of social organization in Barqa finds its paradigm in *ahl al-bayt* or "the people of the (great) house," the family whose wealth and prestige render it the pivot around which the rest of the clan revolves. Given that *ahl al-bayt* is the title Muslims apply to the descendants of the prophet Muhammad, the family's grand stature seems to acquire a holy aura. By delineating the identity politics shaping relations within the Samʿani clan, the novel demonstrates that these politics are charged with the same craving for power and prestige that animates the blood feud between the two clans. Moreover, class status appears synonymous with high lineage, a fact that underscores the central role class divisions play in mobilizing the violence of tribal manhood. Al-Duwayhi is also careful to draw attention to the cosmopolitan cultural affiliations that attend the social position of *ahl al-bayt*, tracing their colonial history from the last years of Ottoman rule to the last years of the French Mandate.[7] Identifying *ahl al-bayt* as the cornerstone of the Samʿani clan, an external narrator

delineates the hierarchical levels of lineage that determine the structure of the clan. Having gathered wealth during their exile in the mid-nineteenth century, the so-called "core" [*ṣulb*] of the clan live lavishly in a grand, stone-sculpted house [*al-bayt*], and frequently invite the poorer townspeople, sharing their goods with them and offering them counsel and patronage. However, the central family guards its name jealously, discrediting claims made to it by their relatives, and disparaging them with unsavory epithets in order to deprive them of the name's prestige:

> The people of 'the house' don't like others in great numbers, and if some of their cousins happened to bear the same name, they would apply epithets to them and try to make them stick, so that they alone would carry the name, pure and undistorted, as proof of their authenticity and their right to be its sole possessors.[8]

Al-Duwayhi's narrator calls further attention to the prestige conferred by lineage when he notes that, having no prestigious family name, some of the townspeople ally themselves with the clan in the hope of being counted among its periphery [*lafīf*].[9] In such an intensely lineage-conscious environment, where the struggle for power unfolds between and within families and the tribal networks encompassing them, the lineage of identity is politicized by default. As we shall see, the effort at consolidating, through violence, the boundaries of the clans is also the effort of the clansmen to extend their manhood throughout their respective locales, and defend the borders of these locales against the imminent violence of men from the other clan.

Given that the blood feud logic demands that the killing of one man be avenged by the killing of a man from the enemy clan, every clansman becomes a threat to the men of the other clan. The ensuing diffusion of imminent violence leads the clansmen to impose on their territory divisions that serve the tribal logic of exclusion, while violating the actual demography in place. As a result, each quarter must either be imagined as belonging exclusively to the majority clan,

or be purged of the members of the enemy clan. The power of male violence seems to have a metaphysical dimension that empowers it to create, and maintain, symbolic boundaries that flatly contradict lived reality. As is revealed in a chapter that covers the killing of a baker who lives on the "wrong" side of the separation line, the division of space according to lineage becomes more pronounced in the aftermath of the Burj al-Hawa massacre, and gains momentum during the civil strife of 1958, so that the separation line acquires a density it didn't formerly have. In correlation to the expanded field of conflict between the two families—in 1958 the Samʿanis are fighting on the side of the predominantly Christian pro-Western alliance, while the Ramis are fighting on the side of the predominantly Muslim pan-Arab alliance—the line dividing the town's two quarters becomes more tangible, although it still isn't dense enough to acquire a specific designation. Exploring the ambiguity of the separation line in Barqa which leads to the death of Samih al-Rami, the baker who lives in the Samʿani quarter, the unidentified narrator cites it as a historical precursor to the "line of fire" dividing East and West Beirut during the "proper" civil war of 1975-1990. Thus a structural parallel seems to exist between the cleavage of space in Barqa and its counterpart in Beirut; the dissection of space according to imaginary borders extends from the tribal parameters of the Burj al-Hawa massacre to the sectarian parameters of the civil war.

> *It* [the line in Barqa] *wasn't yet called the line of fire. That is a later, eloquent name which the Beirut papers announced in reference to the combat line that had divided the capital after two decades, running down from the hills overlooking the city, passing through the road to Damascus, and stopping at the port. We had no name for our line, or perhaps we hadn't yet arrived at a wording for the idea of this illusory line separating the Samʿani quarter in the south end, and the Rami quarter in the north end of the town…although it had the effect of a bold, straight*

line. All the townspeople knew it, and they knew thoroughly, and in minute detail, where it passes, and where it winds, and where it gets lost in an anonymous, intervening open space.[10]

On the one hand, the ideological necessity of the separation line forces Barqa's residents to take difficult and impractical measures to sustain it, such as building separate cinemas in the village's upper and lower quarters in spite of the commonly shared interest in foreign films.[11] On the other hand, the separation line is illusory in the sense that it doesn't follow a linear direction and that it "gets lost in an anonymous, intervening open space." The persistent vagueness of the separation line underscores the power of male violence in a society ruled by male homosocial bonds; this is a power that can make the discrepant details of geography conform to an imaginary of its own making. Importantly, the narrator's reflection on the politics of naming, emphasized in italics, recalls the reflection of al-Daif's narrator on the connection between war, paternal lineage, and the imposition of uniformity on historically heterogeneous localities. The "*eloquent name*" given by the newspapers to the separation line between East and West Beirut participates, as part of the gender-neutral language of official discourse, in obscuring the symbolic power of male violence.

The structural parallel between the nameless separation line in Barqa and the eloquently named separation line in Beirut may be seen as a symbolic link, established by male violence, between tribal and sectarian divisions. This link is highlighted when Kamilah al-Samʿani, a Burj al-Hawa widow, denounces the local bishop, seeing a cunning political maneuver in his decision to hold the funeral Mass for his brother only one week before the legislative elections.

> He [her husband] went with the young men of his family to that Mass dedicated to the soul of the bishop's brother, may God widen his pit in hell. His brother had died a year or two ago; what devil embellished for him the prospect of holding a

> Mass for his brother, and inviting such a horde merely one week before the elections? From that day on I could no longer endure priests or talk of priests.[12]

Although the political loyalties of the bishop aren't specified in the text, Kamilah's denunciation soundly and roundly implicates the Maronite clergy in the political scheming for the upcoming legislative elections, and the contest between four prominent families over the two parliamentary seats assigned to the district that includes Barqa. Along with the fact that the massacre occurs in Burj al-Hawa's parish church, Kamilah's invective suggests that the politicized aggression of manhood crosses the border between clergymen and laymen. In this sense, Kamilah portends the wholesale co-option of religion by sectarian politics during the civil war, where religion, however superficially construed, becomes a life-or-death marker of insider vs. outsider status.

Blood Labor: The Qabaḍāy as Embodied Violence

While al-Duwayhi traces the connections between tribalism and masculinism in several characters and situations, it is in the character of Farid al-Samʿani, by consensus the protector of the family's interests, that the threads tying manhood to tribal chauvinism and are most tightly woven. Sporting the title of *qabaḍāy* (roughly, 'tough' or 'strongarm') at a time (the 1950s) when the toughs had considerably more influence on local politics than they do now, Farid is an alpha male who augments his lower socio-economic status with theatrical displays of aggression and daring. Changing jobs from a mule drover, to a stone miner, to a tailor of English broadcloth, all in one generation, Farid's job history reflects Lebanon's growing participation in the global economy, and the anxieties attending the subordination of craftsmen's skills to new technologies of mass production. Besides tailors, cobblers, olive farmers, and photographers are all running out of business due to the inexorable advances in technology introduced by globalization.[13] His

clumsiness with handiwork aside, Farid's precarious socio-economic position, along with the sense of frustrated manhood attending it, resonates with other men in the town who haven't yet adjusted to the demands of the globalizing economy—demands particularly difficult to refuse as Lebanon's infrastructure is being built with the help of loans from the World Bank.[14] In his body language, self-expression, and inhabiting of space, Farid al-Samʿani embodies a working class masculinity that crosses class divisions in its symbolic resonance: he is emotionally reticent, stoic, physically strong, sexually virile, socially aggressive, and quick to defend his "honor" and that of his kin with violence—the latter necessitated by the predatory structure of male homosociality. Describing Farid's reaction to his own success at tailoring a pair of men's pants without any help, the narrator observes that "He didn't boast with a single word about his accomplishment. Silence was his idea of manhood, and in those days manhood was at its zenith."[15] As the narrator clearly addresses a contemporary audience for whom the deification of manhood is, at least in some respects, anachronistic, Farid's manhood assumes a comically theatrical aspect, particularly in its fixation on suppressing affect.

Indeed, the suppression of affect appears to be a primary mechanism through which the men of Barqa, and especially the *qabaḍāys*, develop, in Andrea Dworkin's terms, a "strong loyalty to violence." Although some women support revenge and cling to the hostilities that separate one family from the other, it is in male homosocial circles that the rivalries of the blood feud find their impetus. Women do not take part in the killing, and they are often the first to express sorrow for the victims' loss. As a principal element of the value system of manhood, the suppression of affect is necessary—not only for maintaining manhood's facade, but also for desensitizing the killers to their killing and its far-reaching repercussions. This insight appears in a comment made by Kamilah's best friend Muntaha, who notes in the aftermath of the Burj al-

Hawa massacre that "The women mourners [*al-naddābāt*] go from one bed to another. We women get scared when we're alone with the dead, so we start talking and don't know how to stop. The men kill each other and we cry."[16] Besides highlighting the deeply gendered socialization of aggression ("The men kill each other and we cry"), Muntaha's comment points to the gendered rules governing the expression of affect. The fact that Muntaha and the other women are crying with the professional help of the *naddābāt* suggests that men, as opposed to women, are forbidden from expressing overwhelming emotions in public, lest they be perceived as vulnerable. Crucially, the successful suppression of affect plays a pivotal role in the cycles of male violence, given how central it is to the ideal of manhood over which men must compete, and for which they must become desensitized to killing. Muntaha alludes to a connection between the aggressive gendering of men and the exclusionary identity politics of the blood feud. Observing an anonymous woman who attends to Barqa's dead men, she says: *"I saw a woman I had never seen in our quarter before, tall and fair, going from bed to bed, sitting by their [the men's] side, sorting out for them their neckties, raising a lock of hair dangling on a forehead, wiping a spot of blood or dust from a cheek, or examining a face for a while before resuming her round.*"[17] The fact that a female stranger is allowed to tend to the dead men, in an environment charged with the volatile distinction between insiders and outsiders, suggests that women lie outside the sphere of conflict where the boundaries and identity of the tribe are determined. While women may identify with the tribal chauvinism of their kinsmen, the position they occupy in tribal violence's division of labor is ancillary.

Being based on a strict regimentation of physical motion, emotional expression, and social interaction aimed at consolidating male status, manhood in Farid's world is inseparable from predatory behavior and the feedback loops of aggression that sustains it. The extent to

which this behavior underpins the bid for masculine status is clear even from a minor, incidental encounter between Farid and two other toughs renowned in the neighborhood. As soon as he locks eyes with one of them in a coffee shop, the encounter becomes an impending confrontation that threatens to spiral out of control, and drag the nearby customers into the line of fire.

> They tested him, at the Umm Remon restaurant. They were sitting at the neighboring table, drinking arak and eating, Saʿid Ibrahim and Antonyos al-Khuri. His eye crossed Saʿid's. Dangerous, that Saʿid Ibrahim, someone to be reckoned with very, very carefully. Each one stared at the other, without blinking an eyelid. The challenge grew long. Farid would never lower his eyes, that would be inconceivable. The customers withdrew one after the other. No one likes to die by accident.[18]

The fact that the challenge between Farid and Saʿid is sparked merely by looking means that it is there by default: the title of *qabaḍāy* allows only a few contenders. Moreover, the spontaneity of the confrontation reflects the intensely disciplinary nature of the authentic template for masculine body language. In male homosocial spaces like the coffee shop, every bodily gesture potentially carries a symbolic import, signaling the degree of the man's conformity to the rules of masculine ascendancy.

The agonistic nature of the *qabaḍāy* status, a status usually associated with working class men under the patronage of other men higher up on the social ladder, transcends its class-specific parameters to serve as a microcosm for, and active component of, the political tensions between rival families and sects. As the following passage demonstrates, the chivalry of the *qabaḍāy* lies as much in striving for the political ascendancy of the family with which he is allied as it does in winning a battle of wills or physical prowess. In the run-up to the 1957 elections for Barqa's two

parliamentary seats, Farid al-Samʿani is relied on to strongarm voters allied with other families to vote for his own family's representative. Importantly, Farid's unofficial role of political bully is approved and admired by both the men and women among the Samʿanis; the latter read it as a sign of virility, thus pointing to the nexus between manhood, male sexual appeal, and predatory violence in the town's social fabric.

> The elections were approaching. Two seats for the district and four candidates, four families. The competition was sharp. Farid wasn't about to abandon his relatives at their time of need. They call him "Abu ʿAli" from time to time, the title of the toughs [*al-qabaḍāyāt*]. They depend on him. The women, when he passes in front of the houses with their doors open to the street, the women eat him up with their eyes. He won't disappoint the women. Everyone came to know his deeds, they would broadcast them among themselves while he performed them liberally. Doing and not telling. He darts off without a signal, without a request.[19]

The fact that Farid's capacity for political strongarming translates to sexual appeal underscores the co-extensiveness of manhood, in its individual embodiment, and political power in its operation on the collective stage. In other words, Farid's male physical prowess extends his reach into political circles, while access to the latter reinforces his manhood. While the women "eat him up with their eyes," both men and women "broadcast [his deeds] among themselves"; in the guise of chivalry, masculine predation becomes the pride and power of the tribe. It is therefore not fortuitous that Farid retaliates against the chief of the neighboring village of ʿAlmat al-Fawqa by targeting his manhood. After receiving word that the village chief had warned the Samʿani family's supporters not to vote for their representative in the upcoming parliamentary elections, Farid heads up to him and forces him to clip his mustache from the sides as a public

announcement of his compromised manhood.[20] In a system where manhood is integral to status, the struggle over political power appears as a struggle over the physical signs of manhood.

What the masculinization of agency epitomized by Farid means, for gender relations, is clearly articulated by one of al-Duwayhi's external narrators, who, in commenting on the commercial appeal of recently imported U.S. cars, aligns them with weapons and wives as the accouterments of masculine status: "The car had been added, in the early fifties, to the list of a man's un-lendable acquisitions, like his wife and his rifle…although, in the case of the car, there was a mechanical justification for a man's monopoly over driving it, as it was said that 'changing hands' with a car would expose it to malfunctions."[21] The tongue-in-cheek irony of the comment suggests that, unlike the situation with cars, there is no need to justify the monopolization of weapons and wives; the exclusive possession of the latter, and the freedom to dispose of them at will, are socially acknowledged as male prerogatives. Predatory aggression between men co-opts heterosexual relations: both weapons and women serve to mark the physical and symbolic boundaries beyond which a man may not encroach upon another man. When having sex with his lover, Farid keeps his handgun close by. As the description of the sexual encounter demonstrates, the handgun works as a metonymic link between Farid's aggressive sexual penetration, and the armor of aggression wears when entering the imminent male-male violence of the public sphere.

> He gets aroused and roars. He bites her, and his fingers leave red marks on her back. Another woman says that she "wrote a charm" for him, bewitched him. Some friends of his say that she's the only woman in his life. He strikes and repeats the offensive again and again, he lifts her high up and throws her back down again, and throws himself on her until she seriously submits and begs him to stop. He spends the night at her place, in the small neighboring village, with his

> handgun close at hand. He opens his eyes at once and listens carefully whenever he hears even a scratch or a meow. He likes the feel of her, he never gets enough of her, his eyelids never shut.[22]

As suggested by the stories circulating in the rumor mill, Farid's *qabaḍāy* persona invites an exceptional explanation to account for his infatuation with a woman; being the tough that he is, some witchery must have landed him in the hands of the spinster. Although—or perhaps because—Farid "never gets enough of her," his sex assumes the motions of battle, striking and throwing and enforcing submission. With his handgun "close at hand," Farid's sleepless excitement at "the feel of her" can scarcely be distinguished from his vigilance toward potential enemy intrusions from the outside: "even a scratch or a meow" could be a warning sign of trouble from the opposing camp. In overlaying Farid's sexual aggression with his social aggression, the narrator underscores their inseparability as mutually constitutive elements of his role as the *qabaḍāy*, the man who labors through violence to maintain the geographic and symbolic borders of the clan.

Women, Weapons, Words: Extending the Masculine Body

Farid's sexuality amply demonstrates the co-functioning of weapons and women as eroticized extensions of the masculine body. That the novel renders this conjuncture as a fait accompli is well indicated by the narrative episode that covers the sexual life of Farid's brother Shafiq. A compulsive philanderer, Shafiq goes about his adulterous business with the blessing of his wife, who is not merely resigned to her husband's adultery but even proud of it. As an external narrator observes, Shafiq's wife sees her husband's sexual exploits as a safe alternative to his brother's traffic in the Samʿani family's blood feuds and political battles. In other words, Shafiq's compulsive sexuality appears to substitute for a naturalized male penchant for violence.

> *And she would ask* [others] *about the details of his adventures, she would want to know everything, the names and the places and the extent of his lovers' beauty, but she wouldn't confront him with any of this. Her main concern before anything was that he wouldn't follow the path taken by his brother Farid. Farid Badawi al-Samʿani, the "bear's plum," who has a hand in every evil.*[23]

While the logic that guides the thinking of Shafiq's wife isn't spelled out, it is implicitly given by the dominant patterns of male socialization in her environment. Repressing vulnerability and spontaneous emotion in order to build an impenetrable exterior, male socialization renders men emotionally dysfunctional, leading them to express their frustrated emotions through violence or compulsive and superficial sexual liaisons. If Shafiq's wife doesn't give him free reign to vent his frustrations, he might turn into his brother, "the 'bear's plum' who has a hand in every evil" (the bear's plum, apparently sweet but actually sour, is the local nickname for Farid, whose aggression lies behind a placid, impassive demeanor). As suggested by Shafiq's boasting about his sexual virility to his male friends, both heterosexual prowess and violence can be worn as commemorative badges for the successful transition to (emotionally dysfunctional) manhood.

> *And he had some faults, such as his winking on purpose to his friends about women while in their presence, thereby signaling his ability to attract them and make them fall into his net. Moreover, he would make many gestures with his hands and face that would signify his untamable sexual vigor, and he was famous for quickly striking his chest with his hands to signal that he urgently needed to lie with a woman, and that he would do so if his friends weren't present.*[24]

While Farid exhibits his manhood by sporting his handgun wherever he goes and staring down anyone who dares to look him in the eye, Shafiq exhibits it by broadcasting his sexual adventures

to his male friends. With both brethren, however, women's bodies satisfy phallic narcissism and extend the reach of the male body into social space. While the satisfaction of phallic narcissism reaffirms manhood in its internal psychic space, the extension of the male body reaffirms it in a social space masculinized by male homosocial bonds. Thus, women come to play a pivotal role in channeling male homosocial desire.

As suggested by Shafiq's objectifying references to women, sexism finds its cultural cues in the precarious position of female sexuality, at once the currency of male homosocial exchange and the abject other of male sexuality. This much is indicated in the narrative segment covering Muhsin al-Samʿani's contribution to the civil war of 1958.[25] Charged with the day shift at the al-Samʿani quarter's sniper barricade, Muhsin remains impervious to the insults hurled at him from behind the Rami quarter's barricade, refusing to act in a way that might compromise his well-guarded position. However, when one of the Rami snipers casts sexual aspersions that involve Muhsin's wife, suggesting that he is better able to please her sexually than her husband, Muhsin abandons all caution and starts shooting in a standing position, without the protection of the barricade. The uncontrollable anger of Muhsin's reaction indicates that the sexuality of female kin lies at the limits of masculine honor: if the former is transgressed in any manner, physical or symbolic, so is the latter.

> When he heard her name, he perked his ears to listen carefully. The mere act of hurling his wife's name across the opposite barricades was a defamation he couldn't tolerate. The man standing in the barricade of the apartment building facing him told him that he would lie with Katherine because "you, Muhsin, don't do your duty as you should."
>
> Muhsin didn't let him finish. He got off of his chair, drew the rifle out of its

> cover in between the sacks of sand, and started firing in standing position, without protection, in the direction of those who mocked him. He emptied a full cartridge clip, then exchanged it for another and emptied it until his anger abated. It was the first time for Muhsin to transgress the rules of strict self-control, and the first time for us to approach his barricade, stealthily, and gather the empty cartridges while they were still hot. He sprayed them with bullets but he didn't speak. He didn't answer them with words.[26]

In a male homosocial context where women are sexualized by default, and male sexuality linked to conquest, the sexuality of female relatives represents a discursive taboo to the man concerned. The fact that an insult to female kin is the one insult Muhsin cannot tolerate indicates that the agonistic structure of male homosociality conditions men's relations to female kin. Where male sexuality is synonymous with the humiliation of conquest, sexual aspersions toward female kin represent the most serious insult one man can hurl against another.

In addition to women, weapons play a crucial role in the eroticization of male aggression. This insight is illustrated in the passage where an external narrator describes the male obsession with the recently imported handgun. Nicknamed *al-fard*, the Arabic term for "individual," the handgun reinforces the individual male body's presence by guarding it from potential incursions from other male bodies. Moreover, in having its components named in reference to humans, animals, and plants, the handgun becomes a fetish, an object whose erotic magnetism draws a stream of imaginative and animated descriptions. As an instrument that, like the female body, extends the reach of the male body, the handgun becomes the weapon of choice for men involved in blood feuds. More, it becomes a sign of manhood's accession to modernity through modern technologies of violence.

It's the handgun [*al-fard*]. *The individual weapon* [*al-silāḥ al-fardī*], *you might say.*

You lodge it in your waist to the right, if you aren't left-handed, and if matters come to a head and you may have to fire into flesh, you place it in the wide pocket of your jacket, while keeping hold of it. That is, if you haven't yet discovered, through the films of American cinema, that you can keep it close at hand near your heart or even tied to your leg (for when the occasion calls for treachery). You draw it out, and if it's loaded and ready for fire you shoot from up close [*daḥshan*] *or without waiting to fix your target* [*nashlan*], *or else your opponent will beat you to it, and something you wouldn't wish for will happen to you. From birds they borrowed for it names like the "cock"* [here meaning the 'hammer'] *and the "sparrow's eye" (for a precise shot by a good marksman), and from plants they borrowed the "wheat kernel" (the front sight above the opening), and from beasts of burden the "muzzle," and from the body the "grip" and the "nail" (the metallic protrusion that distinguishes old handguns), and the "cartridge clip"* [*al-mushṭ*] *(from the metacarpus* [*mushṭ al-yad*], *most probably), and from human life the "house"* [here meaning the 'holster'], a *leather house to which are added two small houses for the two magazines, and from somewhere they borrowed the "target"* [*al-nīshan*]. [27]

Aligning the handgun user's perspective with the general "you," the narrator invites his audience to inhabit this perspective in order to highlight its excessive eroticization of violence, thereby parodying the male obsession with weaponry. In addition to the wealth of terms used to describe the handgun's different components, the erotic appeal of the handgun is demonstrated in its

association with the modern allure of U.S. cinema and the imperial power projected by the cowboy duels of the Wild West (from which the treacherous handgun maneuvers are presumably learned). While deployed to reinforce traditional embodiments of masculinity and the tribal/ sectarian mappings of territory they defend, the handgun is idealized as an embodiment of the nexus between modern technology and Western power. Moreover, the assimilation of modern weaponry goes hand in hand with a transformation in the body language of masculinity. As can be seen from Farid's altered sense of fashion and grooming, physical expressions of manhood in Lebanon are cautiously toeing the line between traditional scripts and globalized possibilities:

> Farid would still take care of himself, of his appearance. Men's sex appeal was hesitating, searching for its elements after the fashion of the high boots, the riding pants, and the thin moustache, twisted upward on either end, had passed. He hesitated before buying an American hat, and he started wearing it slantwise, only on Sundays. He started paying attention to details. Picking hair out of his ears, showering, choosing colors, the details of elegance. Step by step."[28]

In their clothing habits as well as their assimilation of modern weaponry, men in the *qabaḍāy* class are inching closer to the cosmopolitan, bourgeois status of their metropolitan leaders, who get educated in Beirut and abroad, and become versed in French and English.

In this context, the handgun indicates that the masculinities prevailing in Barqa and elsewhere in Lebanon are being faced with a global, neo-colonial order, where manhood depends less on the mastery of physical violence and more on economic and technological power. Moreover, due to the fact that it facilitates treacherous killing, the handgun undermines the codes of chivalry associated with male violence (particularly in the figure of the *qabaḍāy*). By turning the spotlight on men's appropriation of the handgun, and dissecting their fetishistic relation to it,

the narrator exposes to scrutiny the narcissistic and obsessive dimension of male aggression. As we shall see, men's assimilation of the handgun serves not only to enhance their personal power and prestige. On the one hand, it draws them into a confrontation with the nation-state's increasingly centralized and technologized power, along with its nationalist momentum. On the other hand, it forces them to reckon with the growing economic and cultural influence of globalization. Thus, the handgun [*al-fard*] renders a man an individual [*fard*] in a male homosocial environment that is changing in response to the different vectors of modernity.

Manhood in Decline: The Nation-State, Technology, and Globalization

As revealed in the studio of Barqa resident and photographer Nishan Davidyan, the male body's assimilation of weaponry marks the decline of manhood in the face of modern formations of citizenship that require alternative masculinities. As one of the few survivors of the Burj al-Hawa massacre, and as an Armenian "stranger" in the eyes of the majority of Barqa's residents, Nishan develops a critical, outsider's perspective toward the blood feud in Barqa and the gender dynamics underpinning it. Conscious of his (mostly male) clients' preference to be photographed with modern weapons, Nishan goes the extra mile to secure rifles and ammunition for them, along with the traditional kufiyah and headband. The latter are necessary for adapting the bodily aggression of manhood to the technologized aggression of modern masculinities.

> All of them had appeared before Nishan, in the back room which he had turned into a studio. In the beginning, he bought weapons for them. Weapons are their religion, they worship them. An old defunct rifle and two rows of cartridge tied over the waist, or knotted into a cross over the chest. He would also keep for them the kufiyah and its headband, since they still couldn't find an image of themselves

> that could serve as an alternative to Arab manhood. And he would provide a sword to those who wanted one. Two swords, in fact, and one of them would be curved.
>
> […] The man would stand with his full armament in front of Davidyan's lens, even though he might not have in his home "one sharp knife," as they would say. He would attend to his moustache and examine himself in the mirror first. The scowl was necessary, it would draw itself spontaneously over his features as he stood and challenged the camera lens, as if he were looking into the eyes of his opponent. And his scowl would deepen each time Nishan would ask him to stay still and keep his image from quivering.[29]

Inhabiting Nishan's outsider's perspective in order to relativize "Arab manhood" and expose its historically contingent nature, the external narrator seems to address an implied reader similarly incredulous of the pompous theatrics of manhood. While the "old defunct rifle" highlights the gap between the performance of manhood and its reality, the scowls the men draw in front of the camera evoke the very real stakes involved in the performance. For men, self-identification involves complying with belligerent codes of behavior, codes that align men in the struggle over territory and status. Importantly, however, these codes are being forced to bend to the pressures of the state. For example, many of the men who go Nishan's studio want their photographs taken not simply to verify their transition to a more modern type of manhood, but also to comply with the state's new decree that all citizens must register their identities and obtain civil identification cards. Moreover, the law disrupts the traditional division of public space by requiring of women as well to submit their photographs for the civil i.d. Thus the opportunity for women to increase their access to public space becomes both an obligation and a right. Moreover, the circulation of

women's images in the sphere of state bureaucracy causes a crack in men's monopoly over their kinswomen's bodies. Thus the need to invent a self-image "that could serve as an alternative to Arab manhood" develops in response to both the growing power of the state and the growing access of women to public space.[30]

Importantly, the national consciousness that develops in tandem with the centralization of state power also renders Barqa's version of manhood anachronistic; to the extent that it foments tribal and sectarian strife, this manhood appears to delay the transformation of Lebanon into a sovereign nation-state. By fuelling tribal and sectarian violence, manhood allows the colonial "divide and conquer" legacy—which France and Britain initiated during the Ottoman period, by inciting the different sects against each other—to continue in the era of neo-colonialism. The implied author expresses this insight most effectively in the voice of a young girl from the Samʿani clan whose family is forced to relocate after her father refuses to attend the funeral at Burj al-Hawa, sensing that it will be an occasion for bloodshed. Although the father had bought a handgun independently, the narrator's commentary makes it clear that he did so in capitulation to social pressures that make fluency in armed aggression a requisite of manhood: "My father didn't tell us why he bought a handgun he wasn't planning to use. But most probably the time had come when he could no longer say in front of his family and his uncle's sons that he doesn't purchase weapons."[31] Since the narrator's father's resists pressure from his cousins to accompany them to Burj al-Hawa, he incurs a permanent public blemish on his manhood, while his son Munir gets shunned by his male peers at school, who not only discredit his father, but also question Munir's relation to the Samʿani clan. Recounting Munir's embarrassment and frustration in relation to his father, the narrator embarks on an extensive, historically grounded, and incisively ironic commentary on popular Lebanese manhood and the contemporary malaise

in which it finds itself. In the process, she draws attention not only to the historical contingency of manhood, but also to its role in making Lebanon vulnerable to foreign domination.

> [Munir, to his father] "They say you're not a *rijjāl* [man]."
>
> *With a doubled 'jīm,' of course. And its plural is "rjāl," with an unvoweled 'rā'' and an elongated 'alif,' especially given that the masculine plural—as distinguished from the plural of "qabaḍāy," which is "qabaḍāyāt"—is "rjēl" (with an unvoweled 'rā'' as well). And the wording includes several derivations and diverse verbs, among which is "rajjal"* ["he behaved like a real man"] *or "tamarjal"* ["he pretended to be a real man"]. *And among those who were eager to accompany their leaders to the ill-fated annual commemoration Mass were some who behaved like real men (after all, sudden attacks and stealth reveal people's true mettle). But those who participated in the incident didn't deserve the title of "men"* [*rjēl*] *that was deserved by their grandfathers, who fought on the side of Yusuf Bek Karam against the Turkish army, as they say. Perhaps because the latter stood up to the foreigner and didn't empty the bullets of their handguns into each other's bodies. Or, recalling the saying that boasts that "captivity is for men," one is reminded that the incident sent many to their graves, but almost no one to prison. And the root* [of *"rijjāl"*] *expands to reach the broken plural of "rjālāt," although the latter are a precious few whose number may be limited to those who "created" independence fourteen years ago.*[32]

Citing the elaborate linguistic variations in Lebanese Arabic on the core concept of manhood, and attributing a bathetic obviousness to them that sits at odds with their heavily artificial nature ("*with a doubled 'jīm,' of course*"), the narrator draws attention to a collective fetishization of

manhood that resonates with the fetishization of the handgun discussed above. In bringing to the foreground the performativity implicit in the terms themselves—the presumed authenticity of "rajjal" shades into the calculated performance of "tamarjal"—the narrator establishes a standard of comparison whereby she can gauge present tribal models of masculinity against worthier nationalistic precedents. Thus the Lebanese who guarded their manhood at Burj al-Hawa by massacring their fellow citizens can never compare in chivalry to their grandfathers who fought Ottoman rule, or to the few men who wrested independence from the French in 1943 (the narrator is careful, however, to qualify these men's influence and incentives by placing their "creation" of independence in quotation marks, alluding to the collective international pressures that actually forced an end to the French Mandate, and to the establishment of minority rule by the Maronites as a major incentive for the independence movement). The multiply qualified approach which the narrator takes while making a value judgment regarding manhood reflects an appreciation not only of its contribution to divisive sectarian politics, but also of its historically proven potential to mobilize resistance against foreign domination. By articulating this complex understanding of the politics of manhood in the voice of a female narrator, the implied author attacks a tribal/sectarian model of masculinity that obstructs the democratic potential of the nation-state, while retaining the importance of national pride and solidarity.

Moving on from the rhetoric of manhood to the challenge posed to it by the state, the narrator highlights the decline of manhood and its mythology in the face of the state's growing military power. Moreover, as she observes how the power of manhood is articulated through the duality of gender, the narrator draws attention to the unstable, dialectical nature of this duality, showing that manhood can maintain itself only through an incessant, vigorous dissociation from the signs of womanhood. In this gender-polarized environment, the fact that the toughs are

having to yield to the state the power to adjudicate their blood feuds means that they are being feminized in relation to the more powerful/masculine state. While the narrator doesn't legitimate the state's increasing power over the toughs, she cites it as an occasion to highlight the decline of the entire mythology associated with manhood.

> *As for the decline of the era of manhood, the saying has been sufficient, the one which says that "Men, when push comes to shove, turn out to be women" (therein lies the contagion of the feminine). Some would say that the era of manhood departed with the expansion of the state's influence and its military forces, so that there appeared the phenomenon of "al-farrārī"...the chivalrous qabaḍāy who flees from the face of justice. Others say that the handgun, and even the automatic version, didn't threaten the existence of "the man"* [*al-rijjāl*]*—even though it had opened the door to acts of treachery done behind one's back, and to cowardly ambushes. But then there appeared the automatic hand held rifle, and there could be no manly bravado* [*marjalah*] *in front of the thirty-shot Kalashnikov, the main factor in the end of the era of the qabaḍāy. Now the final word belongs to the weapon, not to the man.*[33]

Citing popular perspectives on manhood and its decline, the narrator purposefully inhabits them in a manner of doublespeak that satirizes their valorization of aggression as a true measure of manhood. Opening her commentary with the popular premise that there is a desirable manhood in decline, the narrator undermines this premise by pointing to the abjection of femininity underlying it ("*therein lies the contagion of the feminine*"), and to the contradiction between the *qabaḍāy*'s chivalrous aura and his flight from the civic "*face of justice*." Although the narrator expresses no value judgment concerning the state's enforcement of justice through advanced

weaponry, her claim that "*there could be no manly bravado in front of the* '*thirty-shot Kalashnikov*'" deflates the bubble of chivalry surrounding manhood, showing that male violence is motivated more by power rather than honor.

In the Lebanon of the 1950s, where sectarian unrest, economic underdevelopment, and rampant corruption encourage migration and the mass importation of commodities, globalization is making considerable inroads into Lebanese cultural life. In light of globalization's influence, which extends the colonial influence of European (particularly French) culture, class mobility requires that the rough edges of manhood be smoothened. Thus, the globalization of Western acts in conjunction with the state's growing military-bureaucratic power to curb the influence of tribal manhood. This conjunction may be observed in the case of Abu Jamil, the longstanding resident of the Sam'ani quarter who belongs to the Rami family, and is forced to relocate to the Rami quarter after receiving death threats in the aftermath of the massacre. On the one hand, Abu Jamil is held to satisfy the requirements of manhood through his occupation—he works for Lebanon's security apparatus—although the narrator is mindful enough to qualify that he holds a desk job there, thus pointing to the persistent gap between reality and attributions of manhood.[34] On the other hand, Abu Jamil is so skilled at domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, and sewing that he enjoys the full confidence of the neighborhood's women, who frequently ask his advice on domestic issues. In addition, he wears a robe at night after the European fashion, and frequently visits his neighbors in it. The narrator who covers the story of Abu Jamil's family was one of the several children who enjoyed playing in their yard and house, and while mapping the forces that led to Abu Jamil's departure, he emphasizes the generous hospitality of Abu Jamil's family toward their neighbors. Thus, when he notes that Abu Jamil, in contrast to other men in the village, hadn't entered the "era of manhood," his observation has the effect of an ironic

doublespeak, similar to that of Hamid al-Samʿani's daughter.[35] Rather than reifying the "era of manhood," the narrator points to its decline under the combined influence of the state's military-bureaucratic power (Abu Jamil's job) and the Western norms introduced by globalization (Abu Jamil's un-manly wardrobe and domesticity).

As can be seen from the example of Elia al-Samʿani, who returns to Lebanon after several years of exile in the U.S., hoping to reconstruct the broken narrative of the Burj al-Hawa massacre, the assimilation of modern Western cultural trends leads to estrangement from local embodiments of manhood. The son of a man from the Samʿani family who falls victim to the blood feud, Elia is sheltered from a young age by his overprotective mother Kamilah, who compensates for her husband's death by doing everything in her power to ensure her son's safety. Restricting his movement to home and school from an early age, and discouraging his mingling with other boys, Kamilah tries to instill in Elia a gentle character, one that clashes with the raucous and theatrically aggressive behavior of his male schoolmates. Elia, however, rejects his mother's influence by taking part in street brawls, and compensating for his meager strength with vile insults, thus managing for the most part to pass as masculine. Following an incident when two boys in the village involve Elia in their plot to kill their old hunting dog, by having the dog chase a launched grenade (he does, and after picking it up in his jaws, promptly starts chasing Elia), Kamilah decides that reckless male behavior has made the town too dangerous for her son, and relocates him to a convent school in the suburbs of Beirut. After spending three months there, Elia returns for the Easter holidays notably changed: reticent and withdrawn, apathetic toward the hazardous exploits of manhood, disinclined to socialize with his former friends from the neighborhood, and skilled at playing the accordion and composing poetry in French. Crucially, Elia's transformation into a gentle, cultured, aloof young man appears as a

departure not only from the local norms of manhood, but also from the cultural parochialism of his hometown. With his movement away from the impulsively aggressive masculinity of his fellow townsmen, Elia

moves closer to a bourgeois masculinity that holds the keys to class mobility and political power.

> Although he had played, in the beginning, to the small, stunned crowd a popular tune known from the radio stations ("Come visit me at least once a year"), they realized as they followed him, awestruck, while he played with passion other Western tunes they didn't know—they realized that there was no sense in trying [to reach him], for Elia had abandoned their world. He had abandoned the riverbanks, and stealing plums and loquats in their seasons, and the games of challenge and endurance. He had abandoned them this time with no intention of returning. He had moved on to another terrain they had no knowledge of, and some of them even felt that Elia had forgotten their names. He hadn't changed out of anxiety for his future, as his mother had hoped he would, or out of a sense of superiority, as may be assumed. Rather, it was as if, suddenly, he had become preoccupied with other, more important matters. […] And they remained uncouth in their fathers' fashion, cursing the saints and the dead whenever they tripped over a stone in their way, or stopping any passer-by who looked at them inquisitively to ask him about his business in a tone charged with menace…But they stopped inviting Elia to their games, or even harassing him.[36]

Having abandoned the juvenile games and challenges still popular among his peers, and delved into the world of French letters and Western music, Elia is identified with an alien and superior kind of masculinity, as evidenced by the boys' reluctance to play with him or harass him. This is

the more cerebral masculinity of the bourgeois elites, whose fluency in the language and culture of their former colonizers takes them beyond the class-bound limits of tribal manhood: "...it was as if, suddenly, he had become preoccupied with other, more important matters." Thus, while Elia's gentler manners and quieter interests might code him as less than masculine, his education in Western culture bolsters his masculinity, in a context where status is masculinized by default. While the external narrator places no value judgment on Elia's Western acculturation, s/he does claim that Elia's peers "remained uncouth in their fathers' fashion," associating their inherited aggression with a tribalism unfamiliar with civic ethics. Thus, the narrator seems to regard Elia's Westernized manners as a potential model for a civilized and civically conscientious masculinity.

Abstracting Agency: Masculinity and the Metaphysics of Violence

Integral to the novel's scrutiny of the masculinity of violence is the careful attention it pays to the language, both popular and official, used in reference to the massacre. While relating his childhood memories of Abu Jamil and his tragic exile, the narrator abruptly shifts to an impersonal discourse—italicized to draw attention to the grave importance of its topic—where he explores in minute detail the politics, and historical ramifications, of the names and naming practices related to the massacre. Speaking in a highly analytic register that evokes the voice of the implied author, the narrator documents the ways in which popular language abstracts the massacre from the details that give it its historical reality. In so doing, the narrator also points to the resulting occlusion of the gender and individuality of the men behind the massacre; in other words, he foregrounds the invisibility of men's "metaphysical commitment to male violence." In accordance with the law of universal masculinity, language represents violence as an abstract momentum triggered by the unpredictable vagaries, and inexorable motion, of history, and male

violence becomes a metaphysical reality. By holding the reins of violence, masculinity also holds the power to determine its geography, temporality, and historical meaning, thus establishing the interpretive framework through which its own violence may be understood. In a long commentary on the popular discourse developed around the massacre, the narrator excavates the naming conventions through which the massacre gets abstracted into an impersonal historical event. In addition to neutralizing the gender of the massacre's perpetrators, this abstraction also diffuses their individual responsibility for it.

> *They call it "al-ḥādithah"* ["the incident"]*, and the term accepts the masculine gender to become 'ḥādith,' but the feminine 'tāʾ' of ḥādithah* [here appearing as the final 'h'] *links the word to an epic calamity*.[37] [...] *In any case, "al-ḥādithah" is a cautious, unanimously accepted allusion to a massacre or battle...a term that conveys the reluctance to attribute responsibility to one side without the other, in contrast to terms like majzarah* ['massacre'] *or kamīn* ['ambush']*. An ambush is also called a 'rabīṭah'* here [from *rabaṭa*, "to tie; fasten; secure"]*, in reference to the ambushers' practice of opening fire suddenly and heavily on the people who, as they've been informed, intend to pass the road they've "secured." The ambush also involves armed men lurking in a supply route controlled by their opponents, and assassinating the first "fat" catch that passes through it. And the incident's fame overwhelmed the town in which it occurred, as is the case with the great battles of military history, so that it became common for people to resort to ellipsis and make do with the place name. So people would say that someone got killed "in Burj al-Hawa," referring to his fall among the victims of that Sunday in June of 1957. Or they would date a birth or marriage by saying that it happened*

"before Burj al-Hawa" or after it, in which case the place-noun would turn into a time-noun.[38]

Conducting a close reading of popular discourse about the "incident," the narrator documents the linguistic trends through which the traumatic impact—and implications—of the massacre get abstracted and obscured. Recognizing that certain terms like *majzarah* and *kamīn* exist and denote violence in a direct manner, allowing for the identification of its perpetrators, the narrator contrasts these terms to the fatalistic *ḥādithah*. Attributing to the feminine '*tā*' of *ḥādithah* the connotation of an "epic calamity," where the sheer magnitude of the referenced event gives it a fateful character, the narrator links the fatalism of the naming to "*the reluctance to attribute responsibility to one side without the other.*"[39] Although the fact that other massacres precede *ḥādithat Burj al-Hawa* suggests that the massacres are ignited by a domino effect for which no particular individual may be held responsible, the reluctance to attribute responsibility renders the domino effect a linguistic mystification, a "unanimously accepted allusion" that exempts the individual perpetrators from accountability. It is *because* individual male violence gets subsumed within the tribal violence it enacts that a more direct approach to naming, such as *majzarah*, is dropped for the more allusive *ḥādithah*. Naming the massacre directly would attach too much responsibility to the tribal representatives involved, a possibility foreclosed due to the domination of public discourse by tribal manhood. Thus individual men, and the tribal manhood that guides their actions, disappear as the agents of collective violence. In this light the naming of the massacre as an incident resembling fate is a logical corollary to the massacre's transformation into an abstract index of space and time; this occurs when "*people would say that someone got killed 'in Burj al-Hawa'"* (omitting mention of the church grounds where the massacre took place, as well as the gruesome details that unfolded there), or when they "*would*

date a birth or marriage by saying that it happened 'before Burj al-Hawa' or after it, in which case the place-noun would turn into a time-noun." While registering its gravity, the metaphysical transformation of the Burj al-Hawa massacre into a turning point in history also erases the tracks of the men who committed it.

An equally pointed critique of the metaphysical mystification of male violence is voiced by an external narrator, by way of a sarcastic commentary on the writings of one Elaine Lahhud. The latter is a sensationalist journalist from Beirut who exploits the massacre as an occasion for entering the lofty realm of theodicy. In posing the question of whether or not divine providence exists in the trajectories of human affairs, Lahhud lifts the massacre out of the human domain of politics and ideology and raises it to the celestial realm, where it turns into a question of whether or not the Gods take an active interest in human affairs. As the narrator's observation implies, Lahhud's turn toward the metaphysical register is not only motivated by her sensationalist style; it is also enabled by the collective abstraction of the massacre in popular discourse. As a result, the active role of tribal manhood in the massacre is obfuscated in favor of a nebulous and contradictory notion of divine providence.

> *And Elaine Lahhud appeals for help—as part of her transcendental approach to the killing incident that preceded the legislative elections by two weeks, which was portending the defeat of the Opposition candidates by the supporters of the President, who, being eager to renew his term, was deploying to this end various forms of pressure—she appeals for help to the American novelist Wilder: "Some say that we, in the eyes of the Gods, are mere flies slain by children on a summer day, while others assert that not even a sparrow's feather falls down without God's consent"... Is it* [the massacre]*, then, an intervention by divine providence,*

> *or rather an oversight on its part? While reading Elaine Lahhud's investigation, it is possible to imagine the church massacre as a painting in the naïve style, in vivid colors and two levels: on the lower level, those striking each other with bullets in the Burj al-Hawa church and its courtyard; above them, a mélange of Greek and Christian gods and angels, sitting on their small blue clouds and smiling, either naively or cunningly, before pelting the combatants with rain to disband them.*"[40]

Adopting a "*transcendental approach to the killing incident*," Lahhud positions herself as an extra-historical commentator on the tribal violence shaping her environment. This self-arrogated privilege is also what emboldens her to render the historical trauma occasioned by the massacre as an epic quandary, where only the position taken by the Gods can provide a sufficient answer to the recursive horrors of human violence. In such an explicitly metaphysical scenario, agency gets abstracted not only from its gender, but also from its concrete humanness. Thus, Lahhud's reportage appears to the narrator like "*a painting in the naive style*," a kitsch picture where Gods and angels painted in vivid colors preside over a scene of human carnage from their lofty clouds. The seemingly discrepant smiles of the gods and angels actually coincide in the narrator's critical perspective: assuming that divine will does take part in human affairs, it is, given the certain repetition of human violence and injustice, passively "naive" at best, and actively "cunning" at worst. Keeping the levers of language in the hands of masculine hegemony, public discourse, in both its popular and official registers, renders male violence an inevitable, metaphysical reality. In this manner, public discourse conceals, and shields, the bloody prerogatives of male agency from scrutiny, allowing tribal manhood to reproduce itself and its murderous imperatives.

Male Homosocial Desire vs. Male Homosocial Menace

In *Dear Mr Kawabata*, the narrator's childhood opens his eyes to patriarchal violence and its connection to tribal feuds, which he subsequently sees as the template for sectarian violence. Violence is represented as a function of male aggression, and the latter appears as the crucible within which tribal and sectarian identities take shape. More, the relationship between violence and the male body assumes an organic form, such that, as in the example of the narrator's father, weapons become natural and indispensable extensions of the male body. Finally, the fusion of male violence with tribal identity and its patrilineal organization becomes the prime motive for war, and for the redefinition of social geography through war. However, given that the formation of the narrator's socio-political consciousness takes place exclusively in male circles, his desire for socio-political influence gets inflected by male-centered constructions of agency. Indeed, his desire for influence becomes inseparable from his attraction to the masculine gender of power. Male homosocial desire, primarily as it animates his relationship with his former comrade and mentor, mobilizes both the narrator's politicization and his ultimate disillusionment with politics. Initially attracted to his comrade's charisma, and motivated by it to commit himself to factional politics and violence, the narrator falls into an existential crisis once he discovers that his former comrade is a corrupt opportunist with no concern for political ideals. Crucially, this crisis takes the form of a loss of faith in masculine agency, and this loss of faith forces the narrator to reckon with his political castration, and with language's sacrifice of individual subjectivity for socially incorporated ideological mystifications.

On the other hand, by assimilating and transcending the symbolism of his spectral/ specular narratee, the narrator tries to compensate for his political castration and disillusionment with language, shifting his will to power from the political to the intellectual realm. Seeing

Kawabata as the paragon of the modern intellectual alienated by modernity, the narrator appeals to his attention through a masculine language of seduction, imagining himself as a chivalrous knight out to court a chaste and patient princess untainted by his own violent history, and compliant enough to hear his narrative to the end. While queering the model of heterosexual virility to which dominant masculinity adheres, this metaphor of the narrative situation affirms the patriarchal basis of male homosocial desire, since it represents communication as a form of conquest. Accordingly, the narrator co-opts Kawabata's history by comparing his suffering to his own anguished position between a violent tribal and sectarian past, and a modern present which, in spite of the clarity of vision it offers through secularism, offers no protection from the violent vicissitudes of history. In addition, the narrator tries to transcend Kawabata's global status by portraying his own understanding of tradition in relation to modernity, and his philosophy of language, as superior to Kawabata's. To this end he deploys a highly self-reflexive language that undermines the coherence not only of tradition, but of conventional language as well, thus demonstrating his effective resistance to all grand narratives, traditional or modern. In this sense, the narrator's attempt to restore his masculine autonomy becomes a bid for a politically savvy and cosmopolitan intellectualism, one that places him above the petty realm of his co-nationals and their tribal/sectarian hostilities. Through his monologic dialogue with Kawabata, the narrator effectively excludes his fellow citizens from the debate around Lebanon's modernity. Moreover, through the masculinization of agency that underlies his homosocial desire for Kawabata, the narrator absents women from the political and intellectual spheres, thus effacing their capacity to become effective participants in the national and international domains.

In *The Rain of June*, the collective drive toward violence is likewise identified with tribal manhood, and the cycles of predatory aggression by men also define the borders and character of

social space. However, in spite of its simpler narrative structure, the novel is much more effective in its analysis of male violence, which it dissects with the sharp precision of an expertly wielded critical scalpel. In the first place, tribal manhood's hegemony is explicitly and elaborately linked to the metaphysical power of language. The distinction between the neighbor and the stranger, as well as the boundaries that separate one clan from the next, are shown to be contingent on a powerful, exclusionary vocabulary that grows out of the cycles of male violence. However tenuous it may be in reality, this distinction acquires the solidity of a physical barrier through its reiteration in language. By spotlighting the fine distinctions in pronunciation, and the strong etymological associations, of the nouns that designate the stranger and her/his difference (*al-ghirb, al-ghurb, al-gharīb, al-gharb*), the text draws attention to the enormous social effort spent in using language to reinforce the abstract boundaries of the community. Through language, social difference is reified to the point where strangers become strangers "merely upon speaking." Moreover, in examining the stubbornly straggly and nameless separation line intended to divide the two intertwined clans of Barqa, the text highlights the resistance of social geography to the linguistic divisions imposed by male violence.

Al-Duwayhi's novel also foregrounds the dependence of violence on the extension of the male body in and through the space, and the dependence of the latter on the objectifying use of women and weapons. Shafiq al-Samʿani inflates his manhood through his incessant liaisons with women, and as a result avoids the stigma attached to men who don't participate in the blood feud. His brother Farid, on the other hand, glories in his status as the *qabaḍāy* of his clan, and he reinforces his fluency in aggression through his fluency in rough sex, while his aggression is socially accepted as a sign of his valuable virility. In addition, the text draws a clear connection between male phallic narcissism and the fetishistic relation between the individual man [*al-fard*]

and his handgun [*al-fard*], which plays a clear role in extending his aggressive potential in public spaces and stamping these spaces with the imminence of violence. By delving into the language men use to gauge their manhood against each other (*rajjal* vs. *tamarjal*, *rijjāl* vs. *qabaḍāy*, *rjēl* vs. *rjālāt*), based on the presence or lack of a genuine commitment to violence, the text exposes the feedback loop that exists between male violence and the language developed around it. While male violence creates an instrumental terminology to render manhood a measurable and concrete reality, this terminology in turn exerts its own force on men, demanding their conformity to its arbitrary measures. Furthermore, in documenting the decline of tribal manhood in the face of the nation-state's growing bureaucracy and its monopoly over advanced technology, and in the face of the cultural influences of globalization as well, the text emphasizes the historical contingency of manhood in the context of modernity. This approach is markedly different from al-Daif's, who engages the challenges of modernity partly to reaffirm his masculinity to himself. Lastly, but most importantly, the text rejects the gender-neutralizing abstraction that dominates popular and official representations of male violence. In *Dear Mr Kawabata*, male homosocial desire leads the way out of sectarian darkness toward the privileged light of cosmopolitan intellectualism; in *The Rain of June*, male homosocial relations in general become synonymous with the menacing law of imminent aggression.

As with *Dear Mr Kawabata*, where gender grounds the search for secular modernity as a counter-vision to Lebanon's sectarian history, the ramifications of the gender-focused critique in *The Rain of June* extend beyond the plot's historical frame of reference (the Mizyarah massacre) to national and regional conflicts that have transpired in its wake, including the factional conflict of 1958, the civil war of 1975-1990, and, perhaps most importantly, the collective Arab defeat in the war of 1967, the colonial conquest of Palestine, and the consequent demise of pan-Arabism

as an anti-tribal, uniting ideology. In this regard, *Dear Mr Kawabata* and *The Rain of June* both share the borders of their critical-historical visions with the Palestinian-authored texts examined in the previous chapter. While the works of Tuqan, al-Sayigh, Kanafani, and Khalifeh all draw attention to the fragmentation of national consciousness and the disruption of national solidarity along the lines of gender, particularly through the discourse of honor and the woman/land nexus, *Dear Mr Kawabata* and *The Rain of June* present male homosocial desire and culture as the hierarchical matrices that produce, and reproduce, the tribal and sectarian violence that collapses the nation. In the next and final chapter, we shall see how Sonallah Ibrahim's *The Committee* situates gender at the base of the massive edifice of the "neopatriarchal" police state.

III. "Neopatriarchal" Egypt in Sonallah Ibrahim's *The Committee*

> It can be fairly said that neopatriarchal society was the outcome of modern Europe's colonization of the patriarchal Arab world, of the marriage of imperialism and patriarchy.[1]
>
> Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*

Embarking on his literary career after serving a five-year term as a political prisoner during the reign of Jamal Abdel Nasser, Sonallah Ibrahim in many ways epitomizes the concerns and conundrums of the politically committed Arab writer, caught as s/he is between a repressive regime and a politically disenfranchised and disengaged public.[2] Ibrahim's literary repertoire covers life under all three of Egypt's post-colonial autocratic governments, from Jamal Abdel Nasser to Husni Mubarak. His engagement with Abdel Nasser's era is represented by his novels *The Smell of It* (1971; *Tilk al-Rāʾiḥah,* 1966), a semi-autobiographical novel that presents the author's prison experience in its broader sociological and existential dimensions; and *The Star of August* (*Najmat Aghuṣṭus*, 1974), a journalistic novel that deconstructs the national mythologies surrounding the construction of the Aswan High Dam.[3] The novel discussed in this chapter, *The Committee* (2001; *al-Lajnah*, 1981), is a Kafkaesque treatment of the rise of consumer culture and comprador capitalism in the Egyptian police state of al-Sadat. Two scathingly perceptive novels coincide with the period of Mubarak's rule: *Zaat* (2001; *Dhāt*, 1992) is a sweeping "docu-fictional" survey of Egyptian corruption, bureaucracy, and neo-colonial dependency from Abdel Nasser to Mubarak, focalized around its eponymous, lower middle class female protagonist "Dhāt" ('self' or 'subject'); and *Honor* (*Sharaf*, 1997) presents the plight of a working class

Egyptian man who gets imprisoned and emasculated by the government in return for defending his "honor" from the sexual advances of a well-off, Western, male tourist. In the prison memoir *Memoirs of the Oasis Prison* (*Yawmiyyāt al-Wāḥāt*, 2009), Ibrahim returns to his five-year long term at the al-Wahat prison in an explicitly autobiographical context. Most recently, he has published *The Ice* (*al-Jalīd*, 2011), which engages the complex cultural and political dimensions of Egyptian-Soviet relations and the regional repercussions of the October War with Israel.

Through this densely historicized and politicized oeuvre, Ibrahim takes on the role of "underground historian," which Samia Mehrez argues is characteristic of most Arab writers.[4] As is evident from his biography, Ibrahim's adoption of the underground historian's responsibilities is motivated by his strong ethical concern for social justice; this concern earned him popular fame and official notoriety when he refused the Egyptian Ministry of Culture's Arabic Novel Prize in 2003. The prize was worth 100,000 Egyptian pounds, and Ibrahim refused it in a pubic statement in which he denounced the complicity of the Egyptian cultural sector with Mubarak's corrupt and repressive regime. As an ethically motivated "underground historian," Ibrahim manages to address, in addition to the daily difficulties facing the average Egyptian citizen, the broader domain of the post-colonial Arab world and the social, economic, and political anxieties and tribulations shaping life within it.

Ibrahim is well-known for the sardonic tone with which he unravels historical meta-narratives, particularly those narratives that obfuscate Egypt's role as a client state of the U.S. and a comprador agent for multi-national corporations. In a manner that is likewise characteristic, Ibrahim devotes much of his narrative focus to the collusion and mutual reinforcement that occurs between sexual and political practice and ideology. As noted by Stephan Guth, Ibrahim discerns a parallel between sexual taboos and political taboos in so far as

both aim to uphold a socio-political system where access to truth and the freedom to express it pose serious dangers to the status quo and the governing elites who guard it. Guth situates Ibrahim's interest in the political resonances of the sexual in the larger context of post-1967 Egyptian literature:

> In post-1967 Egypt, and especially since Sādāt's *infitāḥ* policy (i.e. the policy of 'opening the gates' to the West and re-privatization), the consequences of official policies have become evident in almost all areas of life. Man's reality has come to be conceived of as, among other things, essentially cruel and ugly by Egyptian writers; so anyone who wants to translate this reality into adequate literary forms can no longer do this in 'decent' ways.[5]

Indeed, Ibrahim himself portrays politically critical writing and sexually explicit writing as subject to one and the same prohibition: not to challenge the status quo. In the following passage excerpted from an interview cited by Mehrez, Ibrahim challenges the sexual prudery of the Egyptian literary establishment, linking the cultural taboo against the open expression of sexuality to the political logic of censorship.

> Why is it prescribed for us—when we write—to speak only of the beauty of flowers and the splendor of their fragrance, while excrement fills the streets and polluted sewer water covers the ground and everyone smells it? Or to sketch on paper beings whose genitals have practically disappeared into hiding, so as not to violate a false modesty in readers who know more about sex than the honorable author knows?[6]

In this sharp rejoinder to his critics, Ibrahim consciously and deliberately connects sexual conservatism with the political goals of censorship. Subscribing to the ideology of sexual

conservatism, which is backed by the state, involves a certain degree of complicity with a political system where the interests of foreign investors and local elites are given priority over the basic infrastructural necessities, such as a functional sewage system. Moreover, in the frequency with which he deploys sexual metaphors to convey the sense of political paralysis sweeping the majority of Egyptians, Ibrahim finds common ground with several other "committed" writers in the Arab world.[7] However, Ibrahim differs from most of these writers in that he overcomes the tendency to confine the entire mesh of power relations to the male homosocial sphere, such that the beleaguered citizen is rendered male by default, and the drama of socio-political disenfranchisement is figured around masculine fears: of emasculation, of sexual impotence, and of women. It is in *The Committee* that Ibrahim takes his first step out of this male-centered legacy of representation. In this short novel, the narrator-protagonist moves, in a gradual trajectory of increasing awareness, from universal masculinity as the sphere of political conflict to sexual hierarchy as a primary crucible of political crisis. In so doing the novel shifts the standard of representation not only for Ibrahim (whose later work are indebted to *The Committee* for the sophistication of their sexual politics), but also for all Arab writers (particularly but not exclusively male) who engage national and regional crises from the ostensibly gender-neutral perspective of universal masculinity.

In *The Committee*, the narrator-protagonist is a critical intellectual who, having a penchant for journalistic investigation, runs afoul of a supra-governmental "committee" bent on maintaining the neo-colonial form of liberalism operative in al-Sadat's Egypt. Initially representing his political alienation through the rhetoric of emasculation—thus reinforcing the masculinization of agency—the narrator-protagonist eventually shifts toward a more feminized model of agency, power, and disenfranchisement. Importantly, *The Committee* builds on a hybrid

style of writing Ibrahim had first experimented with in *The Star of August*. This style studiously juxtaposes excerpts from news reports or summaries of the latter, as well as historical, economic, and demographic facts and statistics, to narrative segments oriented around a particular protagonist (usually the narrator). The general effect is to irritate and undermine the dense veils of prohibition excluding popular knowledge from the machinations of the state apparatus, the officials who govern it, and the merchant class that profits from the neo-colonial economy.

Crucially, Ibrahim assigns sexual politics a very prominent role in the novel's representation of Egypt's integration into globalization—and the consequent continuation of its dependency in a neo-colonial form. In *The Committee*, the narrator deploys the rhetoric of emasculation in a self-consciously parodic manner that places more emphasis on systematic exploitation than it does on the honorable integrity of the masculine body. In the novel's early approach to sexual difference, the narrator, and, by association, the implied author, conflate masculine integrity with civic autonomy in a way that consigns femininity to a subaltern domain beyond the marginal status of the average Egyptian citizen. However, as the narrator's confrontation with the Committee evolves, both he and the implied author move toward denaturalizing the masculinization of agency, figuring the power struggle between the dis-enfranchised citizen and the authoritarian government as an opposition between a female-identified subject and a culturally institutionalized patriarchy. In this expanded imaginary, sexual hierarchy and antagonism are taken beyond the domestic manifestations of patriarchy to incorporate what Hisham Sharabi would term the "neopatriarchal" structure of Arab regimes.

While the historical-theoretical framework within which Sharabi situates his understanding of "neopatriarchal" forms of modernization is problematic on several fronts,[8] I find useful the core element of his argument: that the Arab world, among many other former

colonies and dependencies of the West, developed its own non-democratic form of modernization; and that this kind of modernization retains the patriarchal character of the Ottoman Empire, the Islamic Caliphates, and earlier tribal formations, thus consolidating vertical relations between the state and its citizens, and between men and women. As Sharabi explains, the domestic power of the patriarch operates on a continuum with the political power of the state and its military, bureaucratic, and intelligence apparatus.

> A central psychosocial feature of [neopatriarchal] society, whether it is conservative or progressive, is the dominance of the Father (patriarch), the center around which the national as well as the natural family are organized. Thus between ruler and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations: in both settings the paternal will is the absolute will, mediated in both the society and the family by a forced consensus based on ritual and coercion. Significantly, the most advanced and functional aspect of the neopatriarchal state (in both conservative and "progressive" regimes) is its internal security apparatus, the *mukhabarat*. A two-state system prevails in all neopatriarchal regimes, a military-bureaucratic structure alongside a secret police structure, and the latter dominates everyday life, serving as the ultimate regulator of civil and political existence. Thus in social practice ordinary citizens are not only arbitrarily deprived of some of their basic rights but are the virtual prisoners of the state, the objects of its capricious and ever-present violence, much as citizens once were under the classical or Ottoman sultanate.[9]

While Sharabi's argument here seems to neglect the negotiated nature of power in favor of a pure dichotomy between power and its lack (the citizens are simply "objects" of the state's violence),

his positing of the "two-state" system with "a military-bureaucratic structure alongside a secret police structure" points to the need for official power to dissimulate its arbitrary nature in order to survive. Thus, while citizens may be "the virtual prisoners of the state," that is due to their acquiescence to, or complicity with, the arbitrariness of patriarchal power.

The picture gets complicated further by the legacies of Western colonialism and neo-colonialism, as both these historical forces play a pivotal role in perpetuating the non-democratic forms of governance characteristic of neopatriarchy. By demanding that the collective national interests of developing countries be sacrificed for its imperial and neo-colonial agendas, Western hegemony operates as a negative external influence, inhibiting local economic and civic development while supporting the repressive policies that maintain the status quo.

> It is important to note that in their development the various patriarchal societies were hampered not only by internal heteronomous structures, but also by the decisiveness with which Europe emerged as the center of wealth and power in the world. Europe's unique achievement consisted in its ability to transcend its *feudal* patriarchalism and to effect transition to modernity wholly on its own. The other leading cultures (Arab Islam, Hindu India, Buddhist China) were, by virtue of Europe's phenomenal breakthrough, caught in the global European-dominated system that followed upon this success. Thus, internal *heteronomy* and external *dependency* doomed these cultures to various forms of distorted modernized growth.[10]

It is precisely the conjuncture of "internal *heteronomy* and external *dependency*" in post-colonial Egypt that Sonallah Ibrahim critiques in his caustically critical and darkly humorous *The Committee*. In what follows, I will attempt to deconstruct the sexual-political grammar through

which this text tackles the neopatriarchal structure of state and society in post-revolutionary Egypt. In doing so I hope to demonstrate that Ibrahim's work, like that of the Palestinian and Lebanese writers examined in the previous two chapters, signals an important shift in late modern Arabic literature, whereby the problem of sexual difference and hierarchy gets incorporated into the interrogation of the social, economic, and political crises affecting the Arab world.[11]

Preposterous-Precarious Performances: Playing Gender with the Committee

As noted by Samia Mehrez in her authoritative study *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction*, Sonallah Ibrahim, from his very first novel *The Smell of It*, is very much concerned with the socio-political conditions surrounding him. The meticulous way in which his writing reflects this concern affiliates it with the genres of documentary, journalism, and historiography. [12] In *The Committee*, the brief yet dense novel set against the background of 1970s Egypt, Ibrahim addresses the devastating consequences of al-Sadat's *infitāḥ* or "open door" policy. To this end Ibrahim deploys a multi-valenced, self-dissimulating language of protest that engages, in a consciously complicit form of serious play, the language of globalization and neo-colonialism, with the latter represented by the mysterious *lajnah* or "committee." As this confrontation unfolds, it takes a distinctly gendered and sexual turn, whereby the Committee contrives to undermine the narrator's integrity by casting aspersions on his masculinity and sexual virility, conflating all these different capacities in a single image of the proper citizen. Facing a power of judgment doubly reinforced by the Committee's institutional might and the patriarchal masculinism of popular culture, the narrator plays the sub-masculine caricatures arbitrarily imposed on him by the Committee. In doing so, however, he simultaneously flatters and mocks

the gendered and sexualized momentum of the Committee's power. Thus, the narrator's "playing" of gender counts in the dual sense of performance and parody, and the preposterous caricatures of gender that he performs register the precarious position he occupies in relation to the Committee. Desiring to contest the Committee's arbitrary power, yet dreading the consequences of open opposition, the narrator opts to express his dissent through a deceptively flattering brand of mockery.

While the text does not disclose the political framework of the Committee's powers and accountabilities, it states that the language in which the Committee carries its proceedings is a foreign one, thus alluding to an external power operating behind it. Samia Mehrez opines that the discrepancy between the narrator's language and that of the Committee registers Ibrahim's earlier experience with *The Smell of It*, when the novel's language conflicted with the censorship barriers imposed by the Egyptian authorities.

> In light of Ibrahim's past literary experience, language as a means of expression and representation is of paramount importance, especially after what had happened with the manuscript of *Tilka-l-ra'iha*, whose language was in obvious conflict with that of the authorities. It is therefore not surprising that he creates, within the text of *al-Lajna*, two "languages" which are in conflict: that of the committee and that of the narrator.[13]

Complementing Mehrez' important observation, one may suggest that the foreign nature of the Committee's language positions it as a supra-governmental body that mediates between the Egyptian government and the economic interests of Western governments and multi-national corporations. This is further suggested by the fact that the Committee's membership, which includes civilians as well as military officials, seems more grounded in a shared, increasingly

globalized ideology as opposed to a specific state apparatus. Moreover, a prominent member of the Committee—who always sits at the right hand of the local chair—seems to be of Euro-American origin, having blond hair and blue eyes.

In a fashion typical of most of his writings, Ibrahim chooses to voice his language of protest through a narrator-protagonist whose background closely matches his own. The narrator is a politically aware male writer with a Marxist orientation and convictions that antagonize the censorship arm of the governing regime, much as Ibrahim antagonized the Egyptian Information Agency under Abdel Nasser with *Tilk al-Rāʾiḥah*. Although the narrator doesn't name his line of work, one may presume that he is an unemployed intellectual, given the copious time he can devote to studying the many troubling features of Egypt's political economy. Crucially, Ibrahim focalizes his narrator's socio-political anxieties around a sexual imaginary where the prospects of penetration and penetrability encode both the Committee's wide-ranging powers of coercion and the active exploitation inherent in the free market ideology it endorses.

As is demonstrated in the opening pages of the novel, the Committee's access to the realm of desire likens it to the Lacanian vision of the big "Other." In practical terms, this means that the Committee's control of the knowledge/power matrix assumes such a sweeping extent that it can define for its subjects—i.e. the majority of Egyptians—the legitimate parameters of desire, where desire encompasses the political as well as the sexual. In a deliberate move on the part of Ibrahim, the novel's first section commences with the narrator waiting, along with the porter, at the door of the room appointed for his meeting with the Committee. The narrator provides very little concrete information regarding the reason for his appearance before the Committee; he casually mentions that, per the advice of his acquaintances, "there was no alternative" to meeting the Committee, and that his "fate rested on this meeting."[14] It soon

becomes clear, however, that the narrator is a public intellectual whose activity has attracted the Committee's attention, and that with the Committee, the standard scenario associated with political dissent in a police state is dramatically reversed. Instead of deliberately provoking the authorities and taking due measures to escape capture, here the dissident worries obsessively about displeasing the Committee and takes due measures to win its favor, measures that include delivering oneself voluntarily to the Committee and subjecting oneself to its interrogations. In a striking twist on the conventional knowledge/power dynamics between the interrogator and the one interrogated, the latter, rather than the former, bears responsibility for explaining the situation that necessitates the encounter: "I was aware of what I had heard from various sources: the Committee always requires those it interviews to present the reasons and motives bringing them before it. Therefore, I had prepared an answer in advance."[15]

Effectively turning the political encounter between state and dissident into a religious encounter between priest and confessor, the Committee's leverage in terms of knowledge/power approaches godlike status, such that transgression of its (implicitly understood) rules arouses an impulsive feeling of guilt resembling sin. When looking at desire as one of the primary arenas in which power is negotiated, the Committee comes to resemble the Lacanian Other, an impersonal socio-political system of signs that dictates the legitimate scenarios wherein desire may express itself. This is first suggested during the narrator's awkward experience with the door of the meeting room. After failing to get the faulty door to close, the narrator worries, in a paranoid state of mind, that he has failed a test deliberately set for him by the Committee. His thoughts following the failure evoke the psychoanalytic encounter between the guilt-ridden child and the parental object of its dangerously ambivalent desire.

You can imagine my state after failing this test. I stood before them drenched in

> sweat. Oddly enough, I sensed way down deep, a feeling of satisfaction at this failure, as though some part of me feared success. This did not prevent my confusion [*iḍṭirābī*, here nearer to "my disquiet"] or my overwhelming desire to gain the approval of those lined up before me at the long table stretching the width of the hall.[16]

The narrator's ambivalence at failing the "test," joining "satisfaction" to humiliation, conforms to a psychoanalytic model of repression where rebellious tendencies are hidden "way down deep" and betrayed by non-verbal body language (being "drenched in sweat"), and conformist tendencies have an "overwhelming" presence in the mind. This charged ambivalence, which evokes the position of a child challenging the authority of a parent, will be a constant structural pattern in the text, where the narrator's orientation toward the Committee is concerned. The result is that it is often unclear which motivation is stronger in the narrator, the "desire to gain the approval" of the Committee, or the desire to flout its rules and expectations.

After rehearsing, on request, his life story to the Committee, as a means of justifying the critical direction of his intellectual inquiries, the narrator is asked (interestingly, by one of the Committee's few female members) whether or not he can dance. After he responds in the affirmative, the short, ill-tempered member whom he nicknames "Stubby" (*al-qaṣīr*) angrily commands him to demonstrate his dancing skills, and the narrator obeys, overeager to please. It is at this point in the text that the desire policed by the Committee assumes an explicitly sexual form, and gender hierarchy makes its first appearance as a paradigm of political and economic marginality. Drawing on the social connotations of belly dancing as a profession associated with lower class, promiscuous women, Ibrahim has his narrator perform a belly dance as a caricature of the skewed power dynamics between the narrator and the Committee. The belly dance

choreography, which stresses wavy, fluid motion and a seductive exhibition of the body, superimposes the material silhouette of an ideally feminine body onto the narrator's own body, thus unsettling his embodiment of ideal masculinity. In Lacanian terms, ideal femininity as a mode of "being the phallus" unsettles ideal masculinity as a mode of "having the phallus"). As a result, the futility of the narrator's intellectual talents—and, ultimately, of his agency—in the face of the Committee is rendered as a caricature of his masculinity.

> I began to undulate, lifting my ankles [*kaʿbay qadamayya*, lit. the heels of my feet] a little off the ground. Glancing down at them over my shoulder, I raised my arms above my head and twined my fingers, framing my face with my arms. I danced energetically [*fī ḥamās*, lit. with zeal] for a little while, [even] making an effort to snap my fingers, even [sic] after linking my index fingers. I was so absorbed I didn't notice the impression I made on the members.[17]

In a manner typical of Ibrahim's dark humor, which often engages objectification through parody, the narrator parodies the power of the Committee by assimilating its intent to humiliate him: he becomes "so absorbed" in the dance that he doesn't "notice the impression [he] made on the members." By representing the narrator's parody through a caricature of femininity, Ibrahim tacitly reinforces the alignment between the binaries of masculine/feminine and autonomous/ subaltern. However, this caricature must be understood in relation to the Committee's coercive ideology. In deciding to feminize the narrator (and, later, to homosexualize him), the Committee demonstrates that the arbitrary nature of its power is indissociable from the dominance of patriarchal norms.

After he performs the dance to their satisfaction, the Committee interrogates the narrator about his failure to perform sexually with a certain woman, a fact they learn of through their

extensive surveillance networks. As the narrator contemplates a possible answer to the question, it appears that his sexual failure is a chronic condition which, while confirming the Committee's accusation, also points to prevailing socio-political conditions as a causal factor, thereby dissociating the stigma of sexual impotence from his character. As far as the Committee is concerned, however, the narrator's sexual failure raises not only the prospect of impotence, but also the far more damning prospect of homosexuality.

> Stubby, motivated by malice, saved me from answering. Unable to control himself, he shouted, "Maybe he's impotent."
>
> But the Blond didn't share that opinion. He leaned over to the chairman's ear and said, "He's probably…"
>
> I didn't hear the rest of the sentence, but I had no difficulty guessing.[18]

The fact that the narrator "had no difficulty guessing" the aspersions which the Blond casts on his sexuality does not necessarily mean that he conflates male impotence, homo-sexuality, and disreputable character in the way the Blond seems to. As Ibrahim himself suggests in an interview with Muhammad al-Qalyubi, the rhetoric of male virility is part of a hypocritical discourse where real political defeats are obscured by imagined sexual victories.[19] Rather, it is in a parodic, self-objectifying manner that the narrator assimilates both the role of belly dancer dictated to him, and the Blond's suspicions regarding his (homo)sexuality. Asked by "the Blond" to approach him, strip naked, and bend over, the narrator immediately complies, at which point the Blond, using his finger, penetrates the narrator's anus with ease, which leads him to declare "triumphantly" to the chairman, "'Didn't I tell you?'"[20] While the narrator's submission in this instance doesn't logically confirm the Blond's suspicion, it does reinforce the association of male homosexuality with abject femininity. Asked to demonstrate his talent by dancing, the narrator

might as well play a belly dancer; asked to bend over and take it up the ass, he might as well play a homosexual. One cannot deny that the narrator communicates with the Committee via the shared grammar of a phallocentric order, where impotence is connected to homosexuality through the fear of emasculation. However, in playing *for* the patriarchal discourse of the Committee, the narrator also *plays* or deceives it, parodying its objectifying dictates to better illustrate the arbitrary nature of its power.

The narrator's failure in the heterosexuality test sets the Committee into a commotion as it tries to reach a consensus on the significance of the test result. During this brief hiatus and until the end of the interrogation session, the narrator remains "naked before the Committee, not only in the physical sense, but figuratively too."[21] The figurative sense of the narrator's nakedness is, in fact, the primary sense in which it signifies. *Because* the Committee has already documented, in thorough detail, all the narrator's activities and statements, the Blond's command for him to strip naked arouses no surprise or protest by the narrator. His mind has already been bared by the Committee's unlimited surveillance, so he might as well bare his flesh for them. Thus the momentum behind the Committee's objectification of the narrator transforms him from a man to a belly dancer, a homosexual, and finally a naked, vulnerable body deprived of the basic social dignity conferred by clothing.

Coca-Cola, Globalization, and the Politics of Rape

In the question and answer episodes following the anal examination, the Committee tries to confirm, and evaluate, the main features of the narrator's ideological orientation. For this purpose, the chairman asks him to name the most "momentous event among the wars, revolutions, or inventions" of the twentieth century by which it will "be remembered in the

future."[22] In his answer, which reflects the advent of globalization, the narrator chooses the Coca-Cola bottle as the ultimate symbol of globalization, and figures its intrusion into Egyptian life as an act of anal penetration. The choice of anal penetration as a figure for this intrusion is conventional, as it draws on masculine anxieties linked to the masculinization of agency itself.[23] However, the figure serves the important function of linking Coca-Cola's metaphorical penetration of Egypt to the Committee's literal penetration of the narrator's anus. As we have already seen, the narrator's submission to the anal penetration test, in the context of the gender parody he plays with the Committee, signals not so much the loss of masculinity as it does the loss of agency. Likewise, deploying the imagery of penetration and rape for Coca-Cola allows the narrator to emphasize the invasive force of globalization and the Committee's role in propagating it. In effect, the figure of anal penetration draws on the symbolic grammar of patriarchy in order to assault the political reality of neopatriarchy.

Considering a broad array of potential answers ranging from Marilyn Monroe, Arab oil, and the Vietnam War, to products with brand names such as Phillips, Toshiba, Gillette, Kodak, and Marlboro, the narrator finally settles on Coca-Cola. After a prolonged silence from the Committee members, the narrator goes on to justify his answer: "We will not find, your honors, among all that I have mentioned, anything that embodies the civilization of this century or its accomplishments, let alone its future, like this svelte little bottle, which is just the right size to fit up anyone's ass."[24] While the narrator frames this answer to the reader as an attempt at humor, the implication that the Coca-Cola bottle might have a penetrative function immediately connects it to the narrator's recent experience of penetration at the "hand" of the Committee. On the one hand, Ibrahim's narrator, in his playfully serious suggestion regarding the popular Coca-Cola bottle, relies on the conflation of masculinity with agency—thereby drawing on a patriarchal

grammar shared between him and the Committee. On the other hand, the narrator's metaphor appears as a response to a rapidly globalizing system of economic and political disparity that prompts him, as an Egyptian citizen, to symbolically appropriate the violent connotations of rape. En route to justifying his choice of Coca-Cola as the twentieth century's single most important event, the narrator excavates for both his actual audience (the Committee) and his intended audience (the readers) a bloody imperial history involved in the conception, realization, and marketing of the singularly successful drink. This history covers the aftermath of the second World War, where the drink "'slipped into Europe under the wing of the Marshall Plan, which backed the war-weakened European currencies by means of American products and loans,'" as well as the corporation's involvement with the Trilateral Commission, which "'united North America, Western Europe, and Japan for a specific goal—to confront the third world as well as leftist forces in Western Europe.'"[25]

After presenting this history in much detail to the Committee and the readers, the narrator expounds on the prominent role played by Coca-Cola—as both product and symbol of late capitalism—in the socio-political life of Egypt. In doing so he deploys a mode of doublespeak that resonates, through its ironic hyperbole, with the gendered parody of objectification that he performs for the Committee, first as a belly dancer, then as a passive homosexual.

> "If Coca-Cola has been so influential in the greatest and richest country in the world, you can imagine how dominant it is in third world countries, especially in our poor little country.
>
> "Actually, we are justified in believing what is said about this slender bottle and how it played a decisive role in the choice of our mode of life, the inclinations of our tastes, the presidents and kings of our countries, the wars we participated

in, and the treaties we entered into."[26]

As the narrator expands the sphere of Coca-Cola's influence from the cultural life of contemporary Egypt and the Arab world to the key political developments in the region, he undermines the language of the Committee from within. In magnifying the historical significance of the soft drink through hyperbole, the narrator mimics the celebratory rhetoric adopted by the Committee vis-à-vis globalization and the age of "free" markets ("In this day and age, everyone enjoys complete freedom of choice"[27]). What emerges—within the constricting terms of discourse imposed by the Committee as the big Other—is a form of doublespeak that denounces the ideology of the Committee while seeming to adopt it. In this way the "svelte little bottle, which is just the right size to fit up anyone's ass," becomes a menacing figure for "the marriage of imperialism and patriarchy" which Sharabi calls neopatriarchy. Already linked by the narrator to the imagery of rape, the Coca-Cola bottle, as contextualized through his broad historical introduction, becomes a symbol that condenses the doubly exploited and oppressed nature of the life of average citizens in Egypt and most of the Arab world.

The "Greatest Arab Luminary": The Belly Dancer vs. "The Doctor"

While wondering amidst waves of apprehension about his status with the Committee, the narrator receives a perplexingly terse telegram from it which simply states, "'We await a study on the greatest contemporary Arab luminary.'"[28] En route to settling on his final choice for his object of study, the narrator moves along a train of thoughts and associations that demonstrate the connection between neopatriarchy and the sexual norms arising from patriarchal divisions of labor and social space. Dismissing "political leaders and rulers" out of fear that his assessment of their role might prove too controversial for the Committee, the narrator moves on to military

leaders (so ineffectual he "could not bring to mind the name" of a single one); poets (he "didn't like their high-flown language and obfuscation"); writers, the majority of whom he deems to be politically quiescent; judges (he "searched in vain for one judge whose name was linked with an honorable stance"); journalists and union leaders (whom he dismisses on the same basis as the judges); the professional class which includes "scientists, doctors, artists, engineers, teachers, and university professors" (these "were so busy amassing fortunes that they didn't contribute a thing to their professions," or, in the cases when they did, "Their inventions and discoveries were placed at the service of the foreign country and its people"). Next, the narrator considers "several singers who enjoy a wide popularity," but decides that he "find[s] the hackneyed words and sentimental tunes they din out distasteful." Moving on to professional actors, the narrator decides they are "puppets" propelled by commercial tastes and incentives, and so he "couldn't get enthused about studying any of them in detail." Finally, "Only the dancers pictured daily in the newspapers remained"; as for these, the authors finds the prospect of studying them "attractive," since "their remoteness from ideological and political affairs…ensures that [he] would not aggravate the Committee."[29]

Besides illustrating the narrator's sharp ambivalence about whether he should adopt a conciliatory or oppositional stance toward the Committee, his apparently serious consideration of belly dancers as an object of study can be seen as another ambivalent use of women as paradigms of objectification—a theme which Ibrahim will develop in a more explicitly critical direction in *Zaat.* After opening the category of belly dancers for consideration, the narrator hones in on one in particular "who was constantly in the news." While contemplating the pros and cons of approaching her as a case study, the narrator reproduces the slippage, arguably common in a heterosexual male context, between admiration and contempt for the dancer's

exuberant display of sexuality. Importantly, his ambivalence toward the dancer is a symptom of a patriarchal division of labor and social space that links him to the Committee.

Often attracted to the profession due to poverty, poor education, and the male domination of privileged types of labor—and compelled to provide sexual favors to men for commercial success and fame—belly dancers in Egypt cater, for the most part, to male heterosexual audiences. The latter, in absorbing the conventional taboo against the expression of female sexuality in public space, develop an ambivalent attitude towards them (as they often do toward female singers and actors who integrate a self-conscious relation to their sexuality into their work).[30] Thus, in a fairly typical manner, the narrator entertains the possibility of having sex with the dancer as part of his study; in the process he even goes so far as to downplay the artistic status of the belly dancing profession.

> I thought about this for a long time. Spending some time alone with her to gather facts for the study appealed to me. She might even allow me to explore the much-used places of her great "art."
>
> [However, I very soon abandoned this idea, with regret, when I imagined the fierce resistance which I would face from the female members of the Committee, and which would, no doubt, gain some support, even if only ostensible, from the rest of the members.][31]

Predicting "fierce resistance from the Committee's female members," the narrator nevertheless identifies with the male members enough to assert that their support for the female members' objections might be "only ostensible." On the one hand, the narrator's (somewhat feigned) interest in belly dancers serves primarily to mock the Committee's understanding of free speech: only a topic so removed from realpolitik and so closely identified with popular entertainment

might "not aggravate the Committee." On the other hand, the narrator imagines himself, with the tacit endorsement of the Committee's male members, actively exploiting the slippage between belly dancing and prostitution for his own pleasure. This imagined scenario suggests that, to an extent, the narrator makes light of belly dancers—and feminist concerns regarding their objectification (as represented by the anticipated objections from the female Committee members)—because he takes women lightly. However, the narrator's choice of belly dancing as the epitome of depoliticized and disenfranchised labor recalls his own compelled performance of belly dancing for the Committee; as we have seen, this performance delivers a critique of neopatriarchy in the guise of a parody of femininity. Accordingly, the narrator's choice of the Doctor as his object of study reflects his awareness of neopatriarchy as a function of both patriarchy and neo-colonialism.

In transitioning from the socio-politically marginal category of belly dancers to the highly esteemed and feared character known simply as "the Doctor," the narrator effectively dramatizes the gendered aspect of socio-economic disparity in Egypt. Condensing, in one man, the neopatriarchal structure and scope of the Committee's powers, the Doctor appeals to the narrator as an object of study for precisely this reason. Finally yielding to his impulse to challenge the Committee's authority, the narrator opts to do so by compiling a mass of information concerning the Doctor and organizing it into a coherent narrative that highlights the intricate connections between patriarchy, state oppression, and comprador capitalism. In rationalizing to the reader his choice of the Doctor as "the greatest contemporary Arab luminary," the narrator draws on the semantic slippage between luminosity and mendacity in the original Arabic adjective *almaʿ*. In this way the he alerts the reader to the need for a hermeneutics of skepticism when studying

the historical significance of the Doctor.

> The Doctor might not be as well known as the singers or dancers, but he is certainly more powerful and influential than they are, not only within my country but throughout the whole Arab world. Clearly he very much has a hand in shaping the present and the future. How can there be anyone more illustrious [*alma'*, more brilliant/more mendacious] than that?[32]

The narrator first gains perspective on the extent of the Doctor's influence when he visits one of his institutions in order to secure an interview with him. As he learns from the secretary, who gives him "the cold shoulder," the Doctor "rarely comes to his office because he constantly shuttles between the Arab capitals on business." Furthermore, "there is a long list of people waiting for appointments," and the narrator "would have to explain [his] request in full, flawlessly written, so she could forward it to the office manager." The long, hierarchical relay chain that regulates public access to the Doctor is a mirror image of a bureaucratic institution in which he would occupy the position of a high-ranking civil servant. Thus his economic power overlaps with the official power of the state. The Doctor's connection to the government, and the Committee, is further reinforced when the narrator faces a conspicuous dearth of information about him in both private and governmental newspapers, magazines, and archives. Starting out with the office of "the most important and widely circulated daily newspaper," the narrator finds a wealth of information about "famous men and women" from the Doctor's generation, which coincided with Jamal Abdel Nasser's rule. While he is led to a deep, nostalgic empathy for the "boundless ambitions" of these (presumably) pan-Arab nationalist figures, the narrator discovers no information about the Doctor.

Feeling desperate about both the Doctor's invisibility in the prominent politics and

contemporary events sections of news publications, and the mounds of information he would have to sift through to find anything substantial about him (the Doctor having ventured into the world of commerce and politics around 25 years prior to the narrative's present time), the narrator decides to head to the much-lauded archive belonging to "one of the largest daily newspapers," as it contains an extensive amount of back-issues from the majority of Egyptian publications. After getting one of his influential acquaintances to recommend him to the archive's director, since access to the archive is limited to people with high status and political connections, the narrator eventually gains access to its materials—only to discover that the file compiled on the Doctor is filled with pages that are completely blank, except for particular dates listed on the top, and traces of the glue on which the relevant newspaper and magazine clippings had been pasted. Choosing to persevere in spite of this evidently conspiratorial attempt at obfuscation, the narrator decides to record all the dates listed in the file and seek the publications corresponding to these dates in the next room of the archive. Again, the narrator "was surprised at the lack of anything about the Doctor. When [he] got to looking carefully, [he] found small sections had been carefully cut out of the pertinent issues with a razor blade. [He] noticed that some of them were on the pages devoted to crimes, movies, and television." Returning the following day to "confirm his suspicions," the narrator is faced with "a new sign prohibiting nonemployees from using the library." The conspiracy factor magnifies after "The same thing happened lock, stock, and barrel at the other newspapers, from the secret razor to a decree preventing [him] from using their libraries." At this point, the conspiracy appears to have a robustly collective dimension, not only with regard to the post hoc editorial obfuscation, but also with regard to the dominant pattern of distribution within which news about the Doctor is allocated space. Finding that, by and large, news about the Doctor is relegated to the less

prominent, ostensibly apolitical "social and entertainment sections" of news publications, the narrator's investigations suggest that there is a wide-scale conspiracy, covering private as well as public media, through which the Doctor's disproportionate politico-economic influence is concealed behind the façade of celebrity status.[33]

Ironically, it is through the back issues of a weekly women's magazine that the narrator finally manages to glean some information about the Doctor. Complementing the narrator's engagement with femininity as the space of social marginality, the implied author suggests that the secret of the Doctor's power may only be uncovered through explicitly feminine—i.e. extra-political—sources that subordinate political awareness to domestic issues and commercial interests. As such, by delving into the columns concerned with social events, the arts, and crimes, the narrator discovers a range of anecdotal information about the Doctor which enables him to sketch a rough picture of his history, his multiple and conflicting ideological affiliations, and the extent of his current influence. Using as signposts the dates he had recorded from the file with the blank pages, the narrator discovers that the doctor's first successful commercial venture was in the film industry, where he produced a comedy involving the Egyptian army, navy, and police—thus indicating his willingness to turn national symbols into cash. From another article, the narrator deduces that the Doctor was in a liaison with a woman who was later found dead "under mysterious circumstances." Initially accusing the Doctor of being responsible for his sister's death, after which he attempts to shoot him dead, the brother quells his anger after the Doctor "made up with him and gave him a job in a company he managed." Thus, early on in his investigation, the narrator exposes a long thread running through the Doctor's homicidal misogyny, his social status, and a culture that often excuses men's aggression against women. With all these factors aligned in his favor, the Doctor manages to suspend police investigations

into the crime and to buy off the victim's own brother, whose vengeful anger and sense of honor both yield to the ruthless impulse of materialism epitomized by the Doctor.

Disrobing the Doctor: The Chameleon Middleman as "Quilting Point"

Considering the Doctor as a symbolic anchoring point of neopatriarchy in Egypt, I propose comparing him to Jacque Lacan's *point de capiton* or "quilting point."[34] Here I refer to Lacan's understanding of the quilting point as an ideological anchoring point of language that fixes signifiers to their signifieds. The root manifestation of the quilting point for Lacan is the perception of the reality of castration as represented by the lack in the omnipotent parental Other. This perception then constitutes the subject's own sense of lack, and thereby renders him/her a true subject of language, i.e. subject to the necessity of compensating for castration through the signifying chains of language. Expanding the organic connection he develops between the circuitry of desire and the webs of language, Lacan also incorporates the function of the quilting point into the daily, communicative role of language. Thus, any word or phrase that fixes potentially indeterminate signifiers to particular signifieds does the work of a quilting point. It is with regard to both these specific and general understandings that I designate the Doctor as a quilting point for Egyptian neopatriarchy. In the same way that the lack represented by castration must take a back seat in the conscious mind, to allow the adaptation of desire to the limits of language, the Doctor's absence from public discourse serves as a necessary condition for the successful operation of neopatriarchy, a totalized system that depends on its invisibility for policing the consciousness and desire of the state's subjects. Accordingly, the absence of the Doctor from public discourse confines language to a closed circuit of depoliticized signifiers, such that the coherence of public discourse depends on the foreclosure of neopatriarchy from

signification.

Making a 180 degree turn from an anti-colonial, revolutionary nationalist to a cornerstone of the unwholesome alliance between global capitalism and neopatriarchal politics, the Doctor appears as the human face of the big Other: a force that mobilizes the machinery of greed, corruption, growing class gaps, and state authoritarianism, while covering its tracks through a combination of terror and free market ideology. In other words, the Doctor, depersonalized and mythologized via his semi-official appellation, is the individual embodiment of the ubiquitous yet undiscerned agenda of the Committee. Once he gives up on Egyptian media and turns to foreign news sources, the narrator gains access to some concrete accounts of the Doctor's national, regional, and international influence, accounts that clearly define the role he has been playing in the emerging global system. In processing the troubling implications of these narratives, the narrator interprets them through a sexual symbolism in which the divide between agency and subalternity is expressed via the binaries of masculinity/femininity, virility/impotence, and hetero-/homosexuality. Within this politically charged scenario, a fair amount of slippage occurs between the dominant terms of the binaries and their subordinate counterparts, such that neither masculinity nor heterosexuality maintains its privileged status. Instead, the text confronts us with a compounded collective crisis that disrupts the coherence of masculinity and heterosexuality, even while the narrator suggests that both are the limits of subjectivity within which the drama of neopatriarchy unfold.

While the Doctor is only referred to as "a well-known artistic personality" in the article covering the homicide, the narrator manages to identify him through background information in the article that outlines the trajectory of his opportunistic transformations. Bit by bit, a variegated and contradictory profile emerges of a chameleon man who easily adapts his ideological

affiliations and political/commercial activities to suit the dominant politico-economic currents of the moment, at times playing the role of the socialist, nationalist, pan-Arab revolutionary, at others occupying the lucrative position of a pseudo-entrepreneur middleman between Egyptian consumers and Western corporations. Importantly, the Doctor's chameleon profile mirrors an inconsistency between ideology and practice that prevails in all the regimes ruling Egypt from the monarchy of King Faruq, through the socialist republic of Abdel Nasser, to the capitalist republic of al-Sadat. Accordingly, his steady accumulation of wealth and power occurs within a neopatriarchal framework of governance that subordinates the agency of the people to the patriarchal authority of the state, and the welfare of the people to the interests of an elite, comprador minority.[35]

Abandoning national and regional news sources that systematically ignore the more political dimensions of the Doctor's activities, the narrator decides to try his luck at the U.S. Embassy. There he chances upon a collection of "better-known American magazines," in one of which he discovers an article "covering the wedding of [the Doctor's] daughter to an Arab president." To the narrator's luck, the article also cites a broad range of the Doctor's politically influential activities, but in such a way that their cynical and self-serving nature is obscured through rhetoric that prizes the Doctor's capitalist entrepreneurship—the latter being tied to U.S. economic and political interests. As the following excerpt demonstrates, the article yokes the Doctor's success as an entrepreneur to his masculinity through a rhetoric that presents both as complementary aspects of social status. While this rhetoric confirms the dominant associations between masculinity and agency, it also discredits them, as it predicates the Doctor's sexual abilities on "artificial and chemical aids," thus alluding to the artificial character of masculinity itself.

"…One can only admire the vitality and energy of this Arab billionaire. This vitality emerged and left its mark on the last decade. In spite of the price terrorists put on his head after his cooperation with Israeli firms became common knowledge, his energy will undoubtedly last a long time before it withers.

"Because of his age, he now needs artificial and chemical aids above and beyond a face-lift in order to carry out his conjugal obligations when visiting his numerous mansions scattered throughout the Arab world. [However, he needs no help in his financial dealings and in the political activities in which he participates from behind a curtain.][36] Whatever is said about his moral principles, it cannot be denied that the Doctor and his ilk carry the torch of progress, peace, and stability for the region, which has long been disrupted by extremism."[37]

Situated as a qualifying interlude between words that extol the Doctor's ambitious, commercially motivated venture into politics, the slyly mocking comment on his sexual decline may as well have been delivered by the narrator himself. In contrast to his public display of virility through his marriage to multiple women, the Doctor "now needs artificial and chemical aids above and beyond a face-lift in order to carry out his conjugal obligations throughout the Arab world." In keeping with the implied author's partial conflation of masculinity and integrity, other, more socially consequential discrepancies between discourse and action lie in the crack in the Doctor's virile persona. Between "his cooperation with Israeli firms" and "the political activities in which he participates from behind a veil of secrecy," the Doctor acquires a shady political-economic profile that situates him at serious odds with the national and regional interests and sentiments of the Egyptian and Arab masses.

Wary that he may use his research to build a case against the neopatriarchal relations of

production and governance that it seeks to consolidate, the Committee diligently spies on the narrator's research activities and takes note of all the sources he consults. After determining that the information which he compiles on the Doctor would render too visible his role—and, by association, their role—as the Big Other keeping the wheels of the present system in motion, the Committee decides to surprise the narrator at his apartment and dissuade him from pursuing his topic, intending also to keep a closer eye on him. After advising him, in language that merges diplomacy with coercion and intimidation, to switch his research topic to something more "suitable," the narrator defends his choice of topic in a similarly adulterated language, where adulation of the Doctor is blended with cynicism in the form of an objective, journalistic compilation of facts. It is at this point that the Doctor's compromised masculinity is explicitly related to his role as a comprador "middleman."

> "It is enough to say that he was the middleman for the huge multinational corporations in providing for our nation the new equipment and inventions that have become part of contemporary civilization, everything from Samsonite briefcases and transistors to electronics and jumbo jets, and from toothpaste and shaving cream to vaginal deodorant and drugs to increase virility and prowess. And in this context, he created opportunities for the talents of scientists, university professors, and planners, whom Arab regimes take pains to train by the hundreds, but then prevent them from using their abilities, so that neither they nor their nations profit."[38]

Ostensibly, the barrage of contributions that the narrator attributes to the Doctor gives some credence to the idea that "he created opportunities for the talents of scientists, university professors, and planners." In reality, the Doctor's role as "the middleman for the huge

multinational corporations" aligns him with the model of distorted growth represented by the "Arab regimes [that] take pains to train [their citizens] by the hundreds, but then prevent them from using their abilities, so that neither they nor their nations profit." Taking the Doctor as the epitome of the tight nexus between the "neo-patriarchal bourgeoisie" and its government—his financial affairs being inextricable from his clandestine political activities—one can see that success in an "Arab regime" means becoming expert at playing the "middleman." In this bleak scenario where foreign imports fly in and qualified human capital flies out, the middleman, or comprador agent, wins out, in both his private function as "entrepreneur" and his public function as governmental authority. However, even for the middleman, there appears to be an inevitable cost. In accordance with the semantic slippage that prevails in the text—between masculinity, virility, autonomy, and integrity—playing the middleman turns the one involved into a middling sort of man, one whose masculinity, virility, autonomy, and integrity are all seriously compromised.

Maintaining the momentum of his defense against the Committee members' lingering disapproval, the narrator suddenly transitions from the Doctor's economic and political biography to the intimate domain of his sexual life. Adducing the Doctor's high level of sexual activity as a topic of special interest, the narrator implicitly links virility to status as two complementary aspects of masculine agency. However, the narrator draws on conflicting hypotheses to explain the doctor's sexual drive. The contradictory nature of these hypotheses not only undermines the connection between virility/masculinity and social status, but also subjects virility/masculinity to scrutiny as artificial, discursive constructions.

> "Please bear with me, as this point reminds me of another far-reaching phenomenon which the Doctor's biography will introduce to the ambitious

> scholar. I mean his sexual life, which is characterized by an extraordinary energy. Such energy might have several widely varying aspects, ranging from excessive virility—the causes of which can be studied to define them and make them available to all—to a continuous attempt to deny latent homosexual tendencies, or the unflagging search for a mother figure, which search clearly manifests itself in his economic dealings as a continual restlessness and an indiscriminate desire to belong."[39]

In the first instance, the narrator's unflattering theories about the Doctor's sexual stamina serve to undermine the authenticity of his power and status. Reinforcing the logic in the U.S. magazine article's contrast—between the Doctor's wide-ranging influence and his dependence on sexual stimulants—the narrator again poses an equation where socio-political dominance is symbolically synonymous with sexual dominance. The three different scenarios which the narrator advances to explain the Doctor's unwonted sexual stamina—drugs, "a continuous attempt to deny latent homosexual tendencies, or the unflagging search for a mother figure"—all deal a symbolic blow to his dominance in the socio-political realm, since they clash with conventional constructions of masculinity. By insinuating about the Doctor's sexuality in this manner, the narrator seems to marginalize both homosexuality and the affective openness conventionally associated with femininity. However, by pointing out that virility is *not* organically related to men's social status, the narrator actually undercuts the representation of masculinity as a coherent whole, where sexual prowess is an automatic sign of social eminence. Thus the text's binary alignment of masculinity/femininity and agency/subalternity begins to unravel in a notable way.

The Middleman in My Bed: Hegemonic Dependency and Masculine Anxiety

Soon after the Committee invades the narrator's apartment, they decide that his research is too dangerous for them to leave him without constant surveillance. With Stubby assigned to that task and instructed to observe the narrator's activity in every space he occupies, including the most private spaces of the bedroom and bathroom, the Committee's power becomes explicitly gendered and sexualized in the narrator's mind. As the narrator's experience with Stubby demonstrates, the sexual politics of neopatriarchy involve both the restriction of political praxis to the male homosocial sphere, and the servile obedience to the political designs of developed (mostly Western) nations: whereas internal heteronomy propagates the masculinization of culture, external dependency signals its feminization. As a result, the ambivalent gender of neopatriarchy intersects with the convolutions of male homosocial desire, where desire is caught in a fraught interaction with jealousy, rivalry, and fear. Being forced to share his bed with Stubby, an individual embodiment of neopatriarchal hegemony, the narrator initially experiences a distinctly masculinized anxiety, where his perception of Stubby's power as a phallic threat follows the convoluted circuitry of male homosocial desire. Eventually, as he realizes that the man in his bed is little more than a "middleman," feminized in relation to neopatriarchal dependency, the narrator makes light of his own fear—along with the phallocentric logic behind it. From there he opens the door to a deeper understanding of the sexual politics of neopatriarchy; this allows him to place under scrutiny the binary oppositions underlying the masculinization of agency.

After the narrator lets the Committee members into his apartment, they take the liberty to examine all of his books and every item he owns, feeling around for signs of politically subversive tendencies. Moving to his bedroom, Stubby and the Blond lead the unofficial

investigation, eventually homing in on the index cards and notebook he had filled in with information culled from his research on the Doctor. With Stubby "unable to conceal his excitement" at the incriminating find, the Blond makes another discovery while rummaging through the narrator's files: a piece of cardboard pasted over with pictures cut from magazines, arranged in a collage that depicts, via culturally coded and sexualized body language, the Arab position in the New World Order. As suggested by this episode, the Doctor, along with the Committee, can be dissociated from the symbolic position of the big Other when placed in a global context; what remains for them is to assume the lesser function of policing for the Bigger Other, namely, Western-led globalization.

> Pulling a large piece of cardboard from between the files, he suddenly said, "What's this?"
>
> He was indicating some pictures cut from pictorial magazines. I had pasted them skillfully onto a piece of paper so that they appeared to be a single picture. The American president Carter was in the center, facing us, looking over our heads, as suits his lofty position. Right next to him was a very small picture of the Israeli prime minister Begin. I had replaced his long trousers with a child's shorts and the two looked like father and son. In a semicircle in front of them I had pasted a collection of pictures of the more prominent personalities of the Arab world: presidents, kings, leaders, intellectuals, and businessmen, genuflecting as if in prayer, thereby presenting us their rear ends.[40]

In response to the Blond's question, the narrator downplays the political import of the piece, presenting it as an apolitical experiment in collage justified by the fact that "there is a whole school of art whose work is founded on a similar basis." Naturally, this answer doesn't satisfy

the Blond, who "put the scene aside as though intending to return to it later…" Emphasizing U.S. hegemony by placing president Carter in the center "as suits his lofty position," the collage situates Israel, symbolized by Begin in "a child's shorts," as both the beneficiary and subordinate proxy of U.S. imperialism. Elevating both the U.S. and Israel to the status of God through the genuflection of the semicircle of Arab ruling and business elites, the collage endows this gesture with a complex range of gendered meanings, all of which draw on prevailing cultural codes that regulate body language.

While genuflection as a key stage in the Islamic prayer ritual expresses reverence, thus humbling the Arab elites in front of their foreign masters, this same act of reverence becomes an act of aggressive disdain from the visual perspective of the poster's intended audience—the narrator and like-minded Egyptian and Arab intellectuals. In the first place, turning one's back to another signifies, in the Arabic linguistic and cultural contexts, decisively ignoring and dismissing the importance of this other.[41] In the second place, the genuflection, in exposing the Arab elites' backsides to the viewer, evokes the Arab folk wisdom concerning the value of Arab leaders' actions and words: that they amount to little more than flatulence. With these two observations in mind, it appears that the same act that expresses reverence for the foreign hegemons expresses a long legacy of empty promises, oppressive actions, and a general attitude of contempt on the part of Arab leaders toward their people. In crude terms, while the Arab rulers are fucking over the Arab people by selling them to the dictates of Western hegemony, they themselves are getting fucked—i.e. feminized—by their shameful "middleman" function within the larger global system.

In a surrealist plot twist that evokes Kafka's totalizing approach to bureaucracy and centralized power, the Committee assigns to Stubby the mission of living with the narrator and

acting as his surveillance agent, intending in this way to pressure him to abandon his research topic. During this period of intimate probation, the narrator faces the sexual politics of the neopatriarchal order head-on, without the shielding distance of non-participatory observation. It is in this phase of the plot that neopatriarchy manifests itself in the most intimate domain: the desires, fears, and fantasies of the individual psyche. While able, as an investigative intellectual, to discern the middleman role of the Arab regimes and assign a negative sexual valence to it, once the narrator becomes Stubby's constant object of scrutiny, he experiences his socio-political vulnerability in intensely sexualized terms. With Stubby condensing in his person the full, ubiquitous power of the Committee, the narrator responds to him as the invincible phallic father.

Failing to fend off Stubby's insistence on intruding on all of the narrator's spaces and activities, including the most personal space of the bedroom and the most socially reviled body functions of urination and defecation, the narrator develops a chronic apprehension toward his unwelcome guest/warder. Reflecting both the ambivalence of male homosocial desire and the precarious character of masculinity in a neopatriarchal regime, the narrator's apprehension registers not only fear and revulsion, but also excitement and attraction. Stubby's power as an arm of the Committee becomes a focal point for the narrator's sexualized anxieties concerning his autonomy and his ability to derive meaning from his life. Near bedtime, the narrator suggests to Stubby that he change into his pajamas in the bathroom, but the latter promptly refuses as part of his larger determination to stick close to the narrator wherever he goes. Trying to diminish the discomfort of stripping before Stubby, the narrator tells himself "I didn't really care, since it wouldn't embarrass me to be naked in front of a man like him. All the more so since this fellow already had knowledge of the most intimate parts of my body." As it happens, it is precisely because Stubby, as a Committee member, has the power to compel the narrator to render

"knowledge of the most intimate parts of [his] body" that the clothes-changing episode becomes a source of great apprehension for the narrator.

Feeling ashamed at being physically and psychologically exposed to Stubby, the narrator nevertheless feels compelled to assess the virility of the latter's body. In a dialectical tension between dread and desire, the narrator experiences himself in relation to Stubby as a lesser man, fearful, envious, and desirous of the latter's superior masculinity.

> [I had barely taken off my outer clothes and stood before him in my underwear when I started to feel embarrassed whenever he would look at me.][42] I couldn't resist glancing at his naked thighs. The bulge of what was between them scared me. I supposed that either he was the victim of an old hernia, so that his guts were taking liberties with his testicles, or that he was created with unusual generosity.[43]

Starting out on a strong note of discomfort with male-male intimacy, the narrator's mind veers, in spite of itself, toward the sexual center of gravity in his surveillance agent cum bedfellow's body. While frightened by "The bulge of what was between" Stubby's thighs, the narrator also considers it a sign "that he was created with unusual generosity." In this sense, the same proximate virility that unsettles his sense of masculinity/autonomy also elicits from him an envious appreciation, one that draws its cues from a masculinist culture where virility, masculinity, and autonomy are all aligned on the same positive axis of value. Situating the narrator's sexual ambivalence toward Stubby in the larger context of his ideological ambivalence toward the Committee, one can see how the latter dynamic, to a large extent, encompasses the former. In a way that mirrors his rhetorical vacillation between celebrating, and condemning, the Committee's comprador agenda, the narrator's reaction toward Stubby's impressive bulge merges obeisance (desire/envy) with resistance (dread/disgust). Crucially, this merger prompts a

degree of slippage between obeisance and resistance similar to what occurs when the narrator addresses the Committee, such that desire/envy and dread/disgust become very difficult to disentangle. Thus, one can read dread in the narrator's irresistible desire to glance at his antagonist's package (his fear pushing him to size up the man he must contend with), and desire in the fear aroused by this package (where desire is the hidden Freudian substratum of fear).

In the midst of all this angst-ridden confusion, the narrator hearkens back to his collusion with the implied author, who clearly judges the Committee to be nothing more than an oppressive intelligence apparatus designed to maintain the status quo. Thus we see, between dread and desire, a hermeneutics of skepticism that negates the entire dialectical opposition. Before he considers that Stubby may be "created with unusual generosity," the narrator entertains the bitingly satirical possibility that "he was the victim of an old hernia, so that his guts were taking liberties with his testicles." With this caustic caveat the narrator shifts emphasis from his role as character to his role as commentator, and with this shift he makes room for a critical perspective that transcends the binary logic yoking masculinity to autonomy and femininity to subalternity. As his anxious intimacy with his ill-tempered antagonist progresses, eventually leading him to commit a preemptive murder, the narrator-as-commentator makes other interventions that downplay the importance of masculinity as an embodiment of power. In doing so the narrator and implied author move toward an understanding of power as a malleable structure of relations in which gender roles and identity work outside of their conventional binary oppositions, assuming a more flexible, complex, and dynamic texture. As a result, the text's focus shifts from (injured) masculinity as the paradigm of marginality, to femininity as an authentic experience of oppression in its various forms.

Emerging Opposition: Unmanning/Deconstructing Neopatriarchy

After getting into bed with his uninvited guest, the narrator suffers an anxious, protracted insomnia, during which his thoughts race from fearful apprehensions of sexual advances from his bedfellow, to despondent reflections on the politically ineffectual and ethically compromised nature of his life trajectory. During this episode, and en route to his confrontation with Stubby, the narrator adjusts his perception of sexual politics so that the phallus no longer serves as the sine qua non of neopatriarchal power. On the contrary, neopatriarchy appears as a multi-nodal web of relations, where women may assume positions of authority conventionally restricted to men, provided they remain faithful to the basic tenets of neopatriarchal ideology: internal heteronomy and external dependency. The critical distance which the narrator manages to gain from phallocentrism enables him to transcend his own masculinist predispositions, and, eventually, to recast the masculine model of agency prevalent in (neo)patriarchal discourse.

Set in motion by his intimate proximity to Stubby, the train of the narrator's anxious thoughts leads him to search for an affirmative life drive in his sexual history. Failing to find this drive, the narrator sees pleasure as an option foreclosed from his life. As indicated by the close succession of his thoughts, the narrator's sense of sexual vulnerability to Stubby—besides evoking the fraught relation between the homosocial and homoerotic dimensions of his desire—reflects his impotence and apathy in both the sexual and socio-political domains.

> No sooner had I become uncertain about these very matters [concerning my social insignificance]**,** than a familiar wave of doubt swamped me, casting its shadows over my life's aims and goals. Nor were the sexual pleasures that occupied a conspicuous place in my emotional life left untouched. In a desperate attempt to save myself, I called upon the memories and fantasies my mind had stored up,

> which had never yet failed to stir the blood in my veins. Nevertheless, I found myself unresponsive, numb to every promise of pleasure.[44]

In light of the textually prominent connection between sexual impotence and political paralysis, the narrator's anxious and dejected reaction to Stubby's proximity appears as a function of his socio-political marginality and his guilt at acquiescing to the status quo. Due to his proximity to the phallic power metonymically condensed in Stubby, the narrator's experience of himself as a socially and sexually impotent man is heightened. This sexual-political angst is further compounded by the fact that Stubby exercises his power as surveillance officer to a surreal limit: even while he sleeps, his eyes remain wide open and focused on the narrator.

When, from sheer exhaustion, the narrator finally manages to sleep, he is soon afterwards startled awake by the sensation of "something firm bumping [his] thigh." The resulting ambiguity as to whether the sensation was real or imagined pushes the narrator to an acute level of sexual anxiety. As his apprehension over the prospect of Stubby's sexual assault takes on the shape of a dissociative fear/wish dynamic, it evokes a libidinal tension in the awkward space of overlap between homosocial and homosexual desire.

> I stiffened onto my back at once. I looked toward him and in the thin dawn light I saw him staring watchfully at me. But he was far enough away to make me believe I'd been dreaming. [And this should give you some idea of the apprehensions that were roiling within me (*wa-huwa mā yuʿṭīkum ṣūrah ʿan al-hawājis allatī kānat taʿtamilu fī dākhilī*)].[45]

The same fear that "stiffened [the narrator] onto [his] back at once" also encourages him to "believe [he'd] been dreaming," thus suggesting a strong desire on his part to separate himself from the prospect of sexual contact with his bedfellow. And yet, in entertaining the possibility

that he might have dreamt of Stubby's sexual advance, the narrator betrays an obsessive quality to his fear that points to the persistence of a wish underlying it.

As suggested by the analysis above, the dialectical opposition operating here between desire and disgust must be read in the larger context of the phallocentric power struggle between the narrator—a marginalized critical intellectual—and Stubby, an embodied metonym for the Committee. In this light, the fear/wish polarity is more fully comprehended by the politics of male homosocial desire, where attractions, repulsions, alliances, and rivalries between men occur as part of the larger masculinization of status, agency, and power. In this context, male homosocial desire works as a broad structure of relations that encompasses the erotic along with the platonic. It is precisely for this reason that the narrator broaches the erotic dimension of his fear/wish dynamic with a soft allusion, one which, through a tacit agreement not to name the beast of homosexuality, aligns his audience's sexual norms with his own. It is enough for the narrator to sketch the basic outline of his anxious episode with Stubby for his intended (heterosexual) audience to recognize, and identify with, his socio-sexual anxiety over this episode. Thus, the narrator simultaneously evokes and dismisses the more threating dimensions of his relation to Stubby, a relation fraught with the sexual and political convolutions of male homosocial desire.

The dangerous dimension of this relation starts to acquire a much more tangible form after Stubby steps up his game, insisting on intruding on the narrator even within the highly private and sexualized space of the bathroom. Justifying his invasiveness with rhetoric that reproduces the repressive logic of a police state—broaching politics in a critical manner legitimates state oppression—Stubby refuses to leave the narrator to defecate in the peace of privacy. Rather, "He said maliciously, [he who ventures to confront public issues loses his right

to any privacy (*inna man yataṣaddá lil-umūr al-ʿāmmah yafqidu ḥaqqahu fī kull khuṣūṣīyah*)].”[46] At this point, Stubby baits the narrator with a question, pressing him to elaborate an earlier assertion he had made that he “could tear the veil from many mysteries” concerning the Doctor. Sensing the trap laid out for him, the narrator counters with an evasive reply that redirects attention from the Doctor to larger socio-economic problems in which the latter, as a middleman in the neopatriarchal system, plays a symbolically key role: “Take, for example, the spread of the maladies of mental depression, sexual impotence, apathy, religious fanaticism, the extinction of the Egyptian cigarette, or the return of Coca-Cola.” Suggesting that all of these seemingly disparate phenomena are organically connected through the Doctor’s mysterious influence, the narrator stops short of identifying the connections; instead, he leaves it for his auditor to draw the conclusions, which might be too dangerous for the narrator himself to voice.

With the narrator and implied author’s views regarding the global position of Egypt already outlined, the reader has the means to fill in the gaps: “mental depression, sexual impotence, apathy, religious fanaticism” may all be seen as natural outcomes of living under a politically repressive and economically unbalanced regime, while “the extinction of the Egyptian cigarette” and “the return of Coca-Cola” both point to the *infitāḥ* as the comprador capitalist engine that keeps the wheels of the regime in motion. As the narrator himself observes, the return of Coca-Cola, enabled by the peace treaty signed between Egypt and Israel, carries a particularly negative resonance as a sign of Egypt’s submission to the imperial alliance between Israel and the U.S. After inviting the reader to draw these vital conclusions, the narrator offers what is likely the most incisive observation about the Doctor, one that situates his middleman role in Egypt firmly within a neopatriarchal order that extends over the entire Arab region: “I smiled and added, ‘Indeed, the Doctor himself provides us with one of the most provocative and

inexplicable phenomena. By that I mean the presence of many like him in each Arab nation, in spite of disparate social and political systems, characteristics, and laws.'"[47] According to this assessment, the Doctor is simply the Egyptian representative of the regional Arab class that Sharabi calls the "neopatriarchal petty bourgeoisie," a class defined by the non-productive, parasitic, comprador nature of its role in the national and regional economies.[48]

Refusing to leave the narrator alone in any circumstance, Stubby asks/orders the narrator to accompany him while he answers nature's call in the bathroom. Turning his back to Stubby out of politeness and shame, the narrator focuses his attention on the row of books he had arranged along the hall, most of which he had acquired in preparation for his first meeting with the Committee. After he extends his evaluative gaze over the entire range of his library, books "pertinent to the careers of several world figures…who set the standards for human endeavor by their ideas, experiences, and sacrifices," the narrator's contemplation is disrupted by "a sharp metallic sound."[49] At this point he instinctively turns around to find that a "big black revolver" had fallen out of Stubby's underwear as the latter was pulling down his pants. In expressing his fear over the discovery, the narrator deploys an anti-metaphorical rhetoric that mocks the paranoid homosocial~ homoerotic anxiety he had experienced the previous night, during his intimate bedtime proximity to Stubby.

> I understood—and my heart beat violently—the secret of that bulge I had previously noticed between his thighs. This meant that I hadn't been dreaming this morning when I imagined something firm bumping my thigh. I almost smiled when I saw that out of fear I had reversed the well-known Freudian axiom in which a gun is a symbol for the penis.[50]

In acknowledging that "out of fear [he] had reversed the well-known Freudian axiom in which a

gun is a symbol for the penis," the narrator emphasizes the concrete dangers of realpolitik over the Freudian focus on the phallus as the symbolic cornerstone of the struggle for power. In other words, he downplays his sexual anxieties and his insecurity about his masculinity, marking the myopic nature of these complexes in relation to the structures of power actually in place. The sexual politics of the latter, as the narrator begins to discover, cannot be confined to a model where masculinity and the phallus maintain exclusive rights over the practice, and symbolic representation, of power.

Shortly before he decides to commit a preemptive homicide against Stubby, the narrator weighs his desire to challenge the status quo against his fear of the Committee and his eagerness to appease it. En route, he remembers his sexual violation by the Committee as the decisive measure of his relative powerlessness in the confrontation: "I thought back over where my life had been heading before the Committee interviewed me and how I suffered humiliation at its 'hand.' However, I didn't forget that the assigned research had given some meaning to my life after a long spell of hopelessness."[51] Foreshadowing his decision to eliminate the threat posed to him by Stubby's gun, which condenses both the sexual and political power the latter represents to the narrator, the passage seems to ground the narrator's violent resistance in his desire to preserve his masculine honor/social integrity: he can no longer stand to be penetrated/humiliated by the Committee's "hand."[52] The events that succeed the murder, however, see the narrator moving closer to the understanding that sexual power and political power are not always perfectly aligned.

Appearing before the Committee in response to the summons they issue to him following the murder, the narrator is struck by two facts: that some members who had formerly worn civilian clothes are now wearing military uniforms, and vice versa; and that one of the members

presently wearing a military uniform is a woman. This realization provokes an anxious uncertainty in the narrator's mind as to whether the Committee's foundation is primarily civilian or military. An essential aspect of this ambiguity lies in the indeterminate relation between the gentle femininity which the narrator associates with the female member, and the rough masculinity conventionally associated with military power and brutality. Crucially, this gender ambiguity in the phenomenology of power reinforces the narrator's suspicion that the Committee's "military streak" dominates its character and operational logic.

> Formerly, I had believed the Committee was a combination of civilians and officers. But, as I had seen today, the change in dress shook this belief to its foundations. It could mean only one of two things: the Committee consists entirely of officers, some of whom sometimes wear civilian clothes, or it consists of civilians, some of whom sometimes wear military uniforms.
>
> In neither case was there any significance to the change. Actually, abandoning the uniforms could be considered a weakening of the military streak in the Committee. For a fleeting moment this hope was inviting, in view of the reputation soldiers have for cruelty and bloodthirstiness. That the old maid wore a uniform intensified this hope, since she, by virtue of her femininity (frustrated though it might be) was more humane. On the contrary, I soon saw that for this very reason, it was a confirmation rather than a weakening of the military streak.[53]

Briefly hanging his hope for a more gentle reception by the Committee on the appearance of "the old maid" in military uniform, the narrator is oriented toward this expectation by the dominant cultural repertoire of feminine gender roles, values, and characteristics. Joining in one breath the idea that femininity is "more humane" and sexually "frustrated" in the absence of male sexuality,

the narrator reproduces the sexual-political division of labor that gives masculinity and femininity their polarized meanings, prerogatives, and values. However, the narrator soon realizes that women's inclusion in the (ostensibly) military ranks of the Committee—far from being proof of the organization's "feminine" civility—only consolidates its basis in political intimidation and oppression. Behind this intuition lies a gradually expanding understanding of the flexible, multi-nodal framework in which neopatriarchal power embodies its gender.

Buttressed by a governing class that derives its wealth and power from its dependence on the rules of engagement set by the foreign governments and corporations of the Global North, neopatriarchal power is distributed, although unevenly, among both the men and the women comprising this class. More importantly, however, neopatriarchal relations reconfigure the traditional boundaries of femininity to make room, within it, for the practice of aggression in both its more proximate (military) and more remote (civilian) forms. By adopting, in a radically distorted form, the guise of representative government, neopatriarchal Egypt incorporates women into the political process, but only to the extent that they support the collusion between patriarchy and dependency. It is for this reason that the narrator, in the final analysis, construes the gender-blind random distribution of civilian and military uniforms over the members of the Committee as "a confirmation rather than a weakening of the military streak." Irrespective of whether they are male or female, all the members of the Committee and the governing class they are part of, and all the common citizens who have incorporated the Committee's ideology into their daily lives, are participating in the dictatorial control represented by "the military streak."

The Bottle Goes Deeper up the Ass: Corporate Diversification and the Conquest of Coca-Cola

During his final confrontation with the Committee, the narrator faces growing pressure

from all the Committee members to confess that his murder of Stubby was a terrorist plot hatched in concert with other terrorists, with the goal of undermining the Committee's "revolutionary objectives, ethical principles, and religious values," all of which aim to "strengthen basic freedoms and expand the democratic process." In the course of this confrontation, where the narrator gets mired in the duplicitous discourse of the Committee and the weight of arbitrary power lying behind it, the corporate strategy of diversifying goods and services emerges as the ideological vehicle through which the Committee propagates its neopatriarchal agenda. Seizing it as an opportunity to lay bare the commercial soul of the Committee, the narrator expounds on diversification, tracing its incorporation into politics by both U.S. corporations (specifically Coca-Cola) and Arab governments. In the picture that emerges, diversification appears as the main strategy whereby the Coca-Cola bottle, and the invasive momentum of globalization it represents, secure their economic and political "rape" of Egypt. After failing to defend himself against the Committee's accusations, the narrator finds himself taking up a Coca-Cola bottle to quench his anguished thirst. By surrendering to the soft drink's commercial gravity, the narrator internalizes the neocolonial ideology of the Committee, and yields to the status quo that it exists to uphold; the narrator himself takes the "svelte little bottle" up his ass, so to speak. In this way he clinches Coca-Cola's symbolic conquest of Egypt, which is also the conquest of neopatriarchy.

Through a Machiavellian manipulation of language that presents the Committee's purpose as the mirror opposite of what it actually is, the Committee attributes the murder conspiracy to "the animosity of evil and destructive elements" that "have always tried to link us to political coups d'état, sectarian massacres, and limited conflicts happening now in the Arab world, and even to some unexplained suicides, a few sporadic incidents of people missing

without a trace, and other persons who fell from rooftops or were killed in chance traffic accidents."[54] The fact that the Committee itself lists all the pernicious activities with which it is quite plausibly associated is foremost a reflection of Ibrahim's penchant for comically extreme forms of irony, and secondly a testament to the Committee's discursive power: it is so secure in its position that it can announce its crimes with impunity. Sensing that the Committee's verdict will inevitably fall against him, the narrator resolves to take the pseudo-official trial as an opportunity to validate his painstaking research on the Doctor, and thereby attack the Committee's sinister agenda.

The Committee presses its case against the narrator by holding against him, as incriminating evidence, a secretly recorded conversation he had had with Stubby regarding the unnaturally dark color of tap water in Egypt. The Committee insists that the inference which the narrator drew during that conversation—that the regular color of tap water in Stubby's apartment must be due to his use of a special filter—was enabled by his participation in a spying network that targeted Stubby as a Committee member. After repeatedly denying this accusation, the narrator returns to the topic of Coca-Cola in order to justify his critical interest in the blackish tint of Egyptian tap water. En route, the narrator expounds on the corporation's cynical history in order to distill from it the key concept of diversification. First, he introduces diversification as a decisive departure from the corporation's traditional policy, which was to stick to two basic principles: "The first principle was to make every participant in the Coca-Cola enterprise rich and happy. The second was to restrict its energies to creating a single commodity: the well-known bottle." Then, the narrator goes on to explain that "'...the winds of change that blew in the early '60s forced a choice between the principles. In order not to sacrifice the first, Coca-Cola preferred to diversity its products. It began by producing other types of carbonated beverages,

then extended its interests to farming peanuts, coffee, and tea.'"[55]

Having already cited the corporation's attempt to corner the market for water (tap water being its primary competitor at the time), the narrator moves on to Coca-Cola's irrigation projects, which, he claims, hold the key to understanding the filthy state of tap water in Egypt:

> "To go on, for a long time Coca-Cola's desert irrigation projects were limited to a single category: desalinization of sea water. The October War provided a golden opportunity for it to diversify the tools of its trade by using the waters of the Nile to irrigate the Negev, facilitated by huge tunnels dug under the Suez Canal. Naturally, this sort of diversification leads to a scarcity of potable tap water, just as a lowering of the water level, through steadily increasing usage, causes dirt to permeate the water and change its color."[56]

Placing Coca-Cola's diversion of Nile water in the context of the October War—thereby also reminding the reader that Coca-Cola reentered Egypt after the peace treaty signed with Israel—the narrator explicitly links the corporation's greedy diversification policy to U.S.-Israeli imperialism. Thus, he takes the occasion of his self-defense as an opportunity to critique the Committee's neo-colonial ideology and its duplicitously "diversified" relation to power. Taking the concept of diversification beyond its economic purview, the narrator situates it within an explicitly political framework in order to account for its diverse manifestations across the entire Arab world. In this way he incorporates his critique of the Committee within a larger critique of the Arab position in the global order, and the despotism characteristic of this position.

Moving beyond the strictly economic sense of diversification, the narrator applies the term to the shifting political alliances through which the Egyptian governing elites, and their counterparts in similar Arab regimes, strive to secure their privileged positions under the

umbrella of imperial sponsorship. After repeatedly defending his murder of Stubby as an act of self-defense, the narrator launches a critique of the Committee's ideology by seizing the concept of diversification and presenting it as the main strategy through which the despotic regimes in Egypt and the larger Arab world have consolidated their hold over power. Through the diversification of their ideological affiliations and rhetoric, these regimes can dress dictatorship in the outfits of democracy, and justify their collusion with U.S. imperialism as a defense of national interests.

> "At one time all these [Arab] regimes had applied one unchanging means of persuasion to their people: imprisonment and torture. But diversification added other sophisticated methods, from termination to television to parliamentary councils.
>
> "Once, all these regimes had espoused standard, unchanging slogans. But they finally grasped the importance of changing these slogans and diversifying their goals, alliances, and enmities from time to time…[57]

Citing the "sophisticated methods" of diversification as ranging "from termination to television to parliamentary councils," the narrator hints at a police state infrastructure underlying both the clandestine strategy of political assassination ("termination") and the visible institutions of consumer culture and parliamentary representation. By adapting its agenda of physical and psychological control to a (pseudo-)parliamentary system of government and a (pseudo-)free market economy, the Egyptian police state infrastructure digs its roots deeper into the Egyptian social fabric. By shaping diplomacy according to the ideology of *al-infitāḥ*, al-Sadat's Egypt nurtures and consolidates the shift from the integrative momentum of pan-Arab nationalism to the fragmented reality of nationally distinct, and politically isolated, imperial client states—with

the latter shaping their policies in response to the demands and expectations of both the U.S. and Israel.

Refusing to pay heed to the narrator's claim that he acted in self-defense when he killed Stubby, the Committee also ignores the meticulous and elaborate argument which he builds against its raison d'être: the protection of the neopatriarchal structure of the Egyptian state. After the "old maid" invites him, in a display of feminine gentleness, to reconsider his position, the narrator sticks to his guns, at which point she, "Suddenly ferocious…said angrily, 'Have it your own way then.'" This about-face on the part of the uniformed female member demonstrates that, as the narrator suspected, the incorporation of women into the military-bureaucratic machine reinforces the Committee's "military streak" in favor of the collusion between internal heteronomy and external dependency. Finally abandoning the transparent façade of a laissez faire advisor on public morality, the Committee bares its fangs and punishes the narrator with a thoroughly surreal sentence that reflects the full extent of its arbitrary power: self-consumption. In a further twist to the grotesque drama, the Committee doesn't spell out its sentence directly to the narrator; it simply declares that the narrator, "in our opinion… deserve[s] the harshest punishment on the books."[58] The narrator is forced to question the porter in order to learn his fate, leaving the reader to puzzle over the executive logistics of the Committee's decree, and, more broadly, of its power.

Departing from the Committee's headquarters in a broken and submissive state, the narrator wanders

> aimlessly through the streets, [his] gaze wandering among passersby, storefronts, and entrances to houses. Even so, [he] was able to notice how most of the passersby had caught the urge to seek wealth and happiness. Crates of Coca-Cola

were everywhere. Everyone stood behind them, grocers, doorkeepers, carpenters, and even pharmacists.[59]

Representing the road to "wealth and happiness," the ubiquitous "crates of Coca-Cola" entrance both their vendors and their buyers, acquiring a symbolism that goes beyond the soft-drink's sweet taste and thirst-quenching function. By encouraging the delusion of class mobility in a system calculated to maintain severe class divisions, Coca-Cola's embodiment of the American Dream finds mass appeal. Eyeing a store exclusively stocked with crates of Coca-Cola, the narrator finds himself moving toward it as if by force of gravity. Upon reaching the store, the vendor immediately holds out a bottle toward him, and moves to pop the cap open. At this point the narrator, instead of rejecting the offer, asks the vendor if the bottle is cold. After getting a scowl from the vendor, the narrator discovers that the ice-box holding the Coca-Cola bottles is filled with lukewarm water rather than ice. Noting also that the vendor "had doubled the listed price on the pretext of the imaginary ice," the narrator observes the heat-afflicted crowd gathered around the store resigning itself to the same discovery and buying the drink. Reflecting on the disproportionate appeal of "the magic liquid"—the visual and historical connection between the black-colored drink and the blackish tap water must be borne in mind here[60]—the narrator "was caught up in [his] thoughts and didn't notice what was happening until there was a warm opened bottle in [his] hand. [He] automatically raised it to [his] lips."[61]

In a shocking reversal, the narrator succumbs to the fetishistic allure of the same product he had presented to the Committee as the centerpiece of his critique of globalization and the comprador capitalism dominating Egypt. In having the narrator yield to Coca-Cola's mysterious magnetism, which reflects the power of neopatriarchy in Egypt, Ibrahim dramatizes the tenacity of the status quo. As we shall see from the novel's penultimate episode, the neopatriarchal

structure of Egypt's political economy is deeply implicated in patriarchy as a socio-cultural institution. The fact that the last standoff occurs between the narrator and a male sexual predator is no coincidence. By aligning the arbitrary power of the predator with that of the Committee, the episode lays emphasis on sexual hierarchy as the working template for neopatriarchy. Moreover, the standoff becomes the stage on which the narrator revises his male-centered formulation of agency and power.

The Sexual Predator: Sexism, Patriarchy, and the Impunity of Arbitrary Power

As demonstrated during the novel's penultimate episode, where a burly man on a bus sexually harasses a woman with the tacit approval of his fellow passengers, the arbitrary character of the state's power is rooted in a socially entrenched gender hierarchy that authorizes men's abuse and persecution of women, as well as less powerful men. It is during this episode that the narrator makes a decisive departure from his earlier tendency to masculinize agency. Aligning pedestrian manifestations of male sexual harassment and aggression with the Committee's abuse of power, the narrator identifies his own sense of marginality with the female victim of masculine predation. In doing so, he reconfigures the gender of both the subaltern citizen and the big Other. Whereas previously the confrontation between subaltern and Other was largely confined to a male homosocial context, now it is figured as a confrontation between a female-identified victim and a male-identified aggressor. This remapping of the conflict bridges patriarchy as a cultural inheritance with neopatriarchy as a political economy, thus allowing the narrator—and the implied author—to convey from a fresh angle the stubborn persistence of the status quo.

After paying the exorbitant price of the bottle, the narrator ambles over to the bus stop,

waiting with other people for the "Carter" bus. At this point he delves into the social history of the bus, one which serves as a concrete example of the exploitative nature of the U.S. patronage of Egypt. It is against the background of this grim politico-economic history, which the narrator introduces with duly dark irony, that the drama of sexual aggression and gender hierarchy subsequently unfolds.

> The rationale behind using the name of the American president for this type of bus can't be attributed to its particular shape, which resembles a long, sad-faced worm, or to its unusual length, or to the great roar it makes as it runs, or to its higher fares (five times the usual fare), or to its being made in the USA. Rather, it has to do with the insignia on its side, right next to the door, which consists of an American flag emblazoned with two hands clasped in friendship.
>
> In all likelihood, this insignia is the source of the people's delight in the buses' appearance during the last two years or so. They consider the buses the herald of the promised prosperity, which has been so long in coming.[62]

In spite of being so poorly constructed that riding it poses a danger to the passengers, the Carter bus has an insignia on its side that proudly announces Egypt's submission to U.S. imperial patronage. For many politically naïve (or willfully blind) Egyptians, this insignia is evidence of a U.S.-Egyptian "friendship" that promises economic prosperity for the majority of them. For this reason, they go against their better judgment and keep making use of the bus, which literally disintegrates further with every subsequent ride.

Reasoning that "It didn't make sense that the bus would be allowed to operate in this condition on the streets of New York, even in the black ghettos. Nor would it make sense for it to be produced especially for us," the narrator demonstrates the devastating consequences of

Egypt's neopatriarchal brand of modernity. Contrasting the dangerously flimsy make of the Carter bus with the sturdy structure of other, older buses, some of which have been assembled in Egypt, the narrator hints at something like a conspiracy behind the production and legalized operation of the Carter bus.[63] As the narrator's surrender to the Coca-Cola bottle would suggest, this allusion to a conspiracy may be seen as Ibrahim's way of emphasizing the totalized nature of the status quo. After having succumbed to the allure of the lukewarm Coca-Cola bottle, the narrator compounds his ethical degradation by jumping aboard the Carter bus—and yielding to the Committee's unspoken rule that Egypt's comprador version of capitalism must not be questioned. Giving up his contemplation of the socio-economic significance of the Carter bus, the narrator turns his attention to his fellow passengers who, like him, are forced to weather, amidst a stifling crowd, the bus's volatile "dancing motion," with neither straps nor bars to aid them. Sifting through the faces of the passengers, the narrator notices that they each endure the volatile, uncomfortable bus ride in isolation, while some make an effort to distract themselves by observing the stream of ads for foreign products on both sides of the street: "These ads were about international inventions in all fields. They looked at the late-model cars equipped with new features to protect passengers from noise, dirt, heat, cold, and the eyes of others, so that the vehicles resemble small armored cars."[64] Captivating them with a dream of luxury that seems, deceptively, to be within reach, the ads reinforce the self-centered, consumerist state of passivity that seems to unite the passengers.

After scanning a broad range of people, all of whom seem to be thoroughly preoccupied with themselves, the narrator's eyes are suddenly drawn to the sight of two women sitting side by side, both fully covered in black abayas and burkas. Focusing on the impression of isolation projected by these women's outfits, the narrator translates their specifically female form of

quarantine into a potent metaphor for the alienation of the passengers as a whole.

> My eyes stopped on two female passengers sitting next to each other. As though withdrawing completely from our miserable world, their bodies were swathed from head to foot in dark baggy clothes with holes for the eyes. They seemed more like owls, or two [frightening] aliens from outer space.[65]

Alluding to the alienation of the female body instituted by the tradition of veiling, the narrator's description highlights the desexualizing effect of the "dark baggy clothes," as well as the severe restriction of the female body's access to the public sphere and to its own sexuality, as indicated by the burka that leaves only "holes for the eyes." In a parody of the alienation of female sexuality, the women's costumes become signs of a literal alienness, turning the sexuality of the female body to a dark, frightening image of death and absence. The comparison with owls reinforces this image, as owls in Arabic folklore are associated with death, destruction, and bad fortune. In the wider context of the entire group of passengers, the two veiled women condense the general alienation afflicting the passengers into a distinctly gendered mold: social marginality begins to assume a female form, while social oppression appears to have roots in patriarchal institutions that ground both civil society and the state. Thus, the narrator's description of the veiled women can be seen as a turning point in his understanding of neopatriarchy in Egypt. Departing from the conventional model where both the subaltern subject and the despotic Other are male or masculinized, the narrator begins to apprehend the status quo as a more complex dynamic, where a longstanding culture of male dominance enables and authorizes the state's abusive and exploitative relation to its citizens.

Soon after his textually pivotal description of the two veiled women, the narrator turns his attention to the sight of a middle-aged woman getting subjected to relentless sexual

harassment by a gigantic, burly man. The thoughts and actions that follow this incident play a key role in the symbolic gender-reassignment of the subaltern subject. Alerted to the incident by the man stepping on his toes and the woman bumping into him in her attempt to escape the man, the narrator soon observes the man trying to rest his crotch against the woman's backside. While his first reaction is to scowl at the man "in complete disapproval," the narrator recognizes the man's behavior as an unrestrained manifestation of an otherwise quotidian, typical scenario. Indeed, the narrator himself, in a typically ironic manner, admits to having brushed up against women's backsides in crowded buses, but qualifies that his manner of pleasure-seeking is "in accordance with one of the moral principles I had imposed on myself: to avoid hurting others. The first or second brush of my leg against anyone's behind suffices for a connoisseur like myself to tell whether the woman shares my secret pleasure. If not, I lose interest in her." As the narrator goes on to explain, "this behavior, which some may condemn and which arises from our reality and independent character, is nothing other than an Arab substitute for Western dancing in which people pursue such business face-to-face." Making room for both men and women in the pursuit of this furtive game of lust, the narrator points to the long history of sexual repression and sex segregation in Egypt (and the rest of the Arab world) as a cultural background against which the typical incident may be understood. While the narrator does not attempt to excuse the man's behavior, which he recognizes as abusive, he associates the typical nature of the practice with two key features of Egyptian socio-economic and sexual life: the grim poverty of the working and lower middle classes, who use public transportation by necessity and are therefore forced to endure the very worst of Cairo's overcrowding, traffic congestion, and pollution; and the longstanding segregation of the sexes (reinforced by the influx of Wahhabi ideology into Egypt since the late 1970s).

As the narrator suggests, this segregation leaves men and women strangers to each other, and constrains the scope of legitimate interactions to the point where fleeting moments of bodily contact become the simplest way for them to "know" each other and alleviate their sexual frustrations.

> But our national substitute fulfills a more complex role than the mere release of repressed desires. It is a successful way of fighting the boredom arising from overcrowding and frequent long delays in streets jammed with private cars. Likewise, for me, it is an important means of releasing tension and one method of acquiring knowledge.
>
> A woman [*al-marʾah*, lit. "woman"] is a mysterious creature, the object of a thousand speculations, especially if she appears haughty and hostile, until, at the light brush of a leg, she suddenly reveals herself by indicating her consent or objection.[66]

Parodying both the male demand for female sexual gratification and the female resistance to this demand, the narrator's description of "woman" as "a mysterious creature, the object of a thousand speculations, especially if she appears haughty and hostile" alludes to sex segregation as the institutional cause for the alienation between the sexes. The narrator's distance from the ideology of sex segregation enables him to assume a light tone regarding the mysterious aura around "woman," which he deflates with the same ease as "the light brush of a leg." More importantly, however, the narrator suggests that the primary motives behind religious arguments for gender segregation—the proscription of sexual relations outside marriage, and the effacement of female sexuality in particular— are undermined both by the fact that women do desire, and that segregation itself stokes desire to the point where it seeks crude means for its expression.

Confronted with the crude and disturbing spectacle of a brawny man stopping at nothing to stick his crotch to a slighter woman's behind, the narrator's analytic mind attempts to deconstruct the socio-economic and cultural dynamics animating the spectacle. However, when the spectacle decisively clashes with his morality, he abandons the spectator's position—one that he shared with the other passengers—and decides to intervene on the woman's behalf. It is at this point that the man's power over the woman—and the narrator—starts to closely resemble the arbitrary power, or "military streak," of the Committee.

Realizing that the sexual predator doesn't intend to give up his chase, the woman finally confronts him and asks him to "cut it out." Taken aback by the woman's boldness, the man feigns ignorance of the accusation and yells, "Cut what out, lady?"[67] Maintaining her defiance, yet reluctant to name the act of sexual harassment the man had perpetrated, the woman yells back, "You know what I mean!" Refusing to admit his transgression, much less apologize for it, the predator—encouraged by the passivity of the (mostly male) passengers and the "smiles of amusement and enjoyment on most lips"—strikes the woman roughly on her face, and calls her a "whore." Noting that although "The woman sank onto the passenger beside her, pressed her hand to her cheek, and burst out sobbing. None of the passengers moved a muscle," the narrator indicates a disturbing collusion between the passengers' passive acceptance of the incident, and the smug certainty of the predator that he can bully the woman into silence without suffering any consequences. In this manner the narrator highlights an organic connection between the selfishness and amorality of the passengers and their identification with the aggressor instead of the victim. In a context where men's sexual harassment of women is spurred by the sexual frustrations resulting from gender segregation; where blame is assigned to women by default whenever sexual "honor" is at stake (note the woman's reluctance to name the act of sexual

harassment committed against her); where social relations and ethics are warped by economic hardships, minimal class mobility, and the alienation of consumer culture; and where the lawlessness of the street is reinforced by the lawlessness of the state, it is small wonder that the passengers turn a blind or approving eye toward the male sexual predator.[68]

As suggested by the narrator's own account, it is largely in reaction to the institutionalized cultural support of sexual harassment that he decides to rise up in the woman's defense. Suggesting an analogy between the arbitrary power wielded by the man against the woman and the arbitrary power exercised by the Committee over himself, the narrator sets his challenge to the stronger man in the larger context of his frustration with himself: over failing to challenge the Committee and to subvert the status quo which it exists in order to maintain. Dissociating his action from the cultural ideals of masculine honor and male heroism, the narrator portrays it as a symbolic chance to atone for his failed confrontation with the Committee, as well as the neopatriarchal condition of state and civil society in Egypt.

> I don't usually let myself get into situations I'm not physically up to. However, since the morning when I hadn't been able to speak my mind to the Committee, I had been seething and I hadn't even benefited from my meekness. On top of that, I hadn't been able to turn the tables on the Coca-Cola vendor who had robbed me. Likewise, the crowd and the heat grated on my nerves. In short, matters came to a head.
>
> It's not inconceivable that I drew courage from facing one person rather than the whole Committee. Since they had been following the matter from the beginning and knew full well what had happened, I may also have been encouraged by imagining that all the passengers would leap to my aid. Perhaps

> out of religious or moral considerations they would condemn the giant's sexual behavior, or disapprove of his striking a defenseless woman, or simply stand by the truth.[69]

"Seething" at that fact that he "hadn't even benefited from [his] meekness" with the Committee, which pronounced its harshest verdict on him, and that he "hadn't been able to turn the tables on the Coca-Cola vendor who had robbed [him]," the narrator is deeply frustrated with the duplicitous stance he had cultivated in his relation to the Committee. While hoping he would manage to "turn the tables" on the Committee and all that it represents—including Coca-Cola's conquest of Egypt—the narrator realizes that he has only confirmed the political and ideological power of the Committee. Adding insult to injury, "the crowd and the heat grated on [his] nerves," symbolically sealing his socio-economically marginal position. Tentatively admitting that he "drew courage from facing one person rather than the whole Committee," the narrator also implies an analogy between this one, blatantly highhanded man and the Committee; by facing this sexual predator, the narrator hopes to compensate for his defeat by the Committee. Moreover, the passengers' reluctance to "condemn the giant's sexual behavior, or disapprove of his striking a defenseless woman, or simply stand by the truth" mirrors the narrator's own reluctance to openly challenge the Committee—a reluctance he is desperate to overcome. The fact that many of the passengers secretly approve of the predator's behavior becomes, in connection with the narrator's struggle with the Committee, damning evidence of the collusion of civil society with the state's arbitrary and exploitative use of power. It is in this context that the passengers' collusion with the sexual predator assumes a symbolic dimension, representing a collective tendency to side with power rather than "stand by the truth." Furthermore, the narrator's resort to the powerful notion of "truth" doesn't merely reflect the depth of his moral

convictions concerning arbitrary power; it also acts as a bridge between the truth of neopatriarchy and the truth of patriarchy.

After verbally accusing the predator of sexual harassment, the narrator gets rudely rebuffed by him and called a liar. Appealing to the passengers to verify his accusation, the narrator finds no one willing to support his just claim; the passengers simply look away or turn their backs to the developing confrontation. Encouraged by their complicit passivity, the predator lands the narrator "a knockout punch" that sends him into the laps of a few seated passengers. Not content with this severe punch, the predator pursues the narrator and shoves him roughly, causing him to lose his balance and fall to the floor, at which point he holds out his right hand to protect his face. As a result, the full weight of his body bears down on his right forearm, displacing the elbow from its joint. It is only at this point of serious injury that two passengers decide to come between the predator and his new prey. Crucially, however, their intercession is prompted less by a sense of justice than by a desire to save face in front of a bald-faced abuse of power. Rather than scolding the predator for this abuse, the interceding passengers try their best to appease him by praising the masculinist arrogance that impelled his violence against both the woman and the narrator. Turning the table on justice, the passengers extol the predator's virility and slander the woman and narrator as, respectively, a "cat in heat" and a "fag," both of whom are envious of the predator's "virility." Moreover, the passenger who ushers the narrator out of the bus advises him to quit the fight in a language that blames him as its true instigator.[70] In other words, most of the passengers identify with masculinism and gender hierarchy to the point where they are inclined to accuse the victims of male oppression as the authors of their own victimization.

It is crucial to note here that the gender hierarchy framing the showdown ensnares both

men and women in its mesh. The fact that the narrator challenges the alpha male predator's power and fails to meet the challenge means, in the terms of this hierarchy, that his masculinity is lacking to the point where it can be yoked to the stigma of homosexuality. Within the same logical frame, the weight of sexual opprobrium falls on the woman, whose defense of her sexual autonomy get branded as unfeminine sexual boldness. The final blow to the narrator's morale—and to the ideals of sexual equality and social justice which he tries to defend—is dealt him by the passenger who motions him out of the bus, when the latter advises him to "stop seeking trouble and get off." For daring to challenge the most powerful man in the bus, the narrator gets incriminated as a troublemaker; significantly, this incrimination derives support from all of the passengers, who either purposely ignore the woman and the narrator's victimization, or endorse it in tacit or explicit ways. Returning to the analogy with the narrator's confrontation with the Committee, the passengers' quietism vis-à-vis the alpha male sexual predator points to a widespread acceptance of the paternalistic prerogatives of the state, which the latter exploits to the advantage of a small, comprador elite. By drawing this implicit connection between the despotism of the state and the socially entrenched legacies of patriarchy and masculinism, the narrator turns his earlier masculinization of agency and subjectivity on its head. The state's power still resembles the power of the patriarch, but the subaltern subject/potential agent is now identified with the female victims of a history of gender hierarchy and antagonism.

Devouring the Self: The Triumph of Neopatriarchy

After his failure to defend the female victim's dignity, the narrator leaves the bus with a dislocated elbow and a deflated morale, and searches for the nearest public clinic. Following a delay of several hours, the narrator learns that the doctor's shift at the public clinic is over, and

that he is available at his private clinic, to which the narrator makes his way. It is in this penultimate episode that the narrator is forced to reckon with the full scope and tenacity of arbitrary power. Obliged to seek treatment from a private doctor whose work ethics conform to the neopatriarchal system, the narrator soon gets into a dispute with him over the exploitative structure of his practice. In relating the episode, the narrator alludes to a link between the doctor's exploitation as a function of neopatriarchy, and the sexual predator's highhandedness as a function of patriarchy. Failing to win the confrontation, the narrator yields to despair and decides to implement the Committee's verdict on him: to consume himself. Through this spectacular scene of self-destruction, Ibrahim weaves a collective symbolism into the narrator's plight. Taking the logic of objectification to a surreal extreme, the narrator's suicide dramatizes the dire situation of the majority of Egyptians. Under the neopatriarchal system established in Egypt, where the practice of arbitrary power both enforces and traverses class and gender divisions, consuming oneself as an object is a much more viable alternative to becoming a subject.

At the doctor's private clinic, the narrator pays a five-pound examination fee, gets his elbow set back into place, and obtains a prescription for painkillers; none of this helps to reduce the pain significantly. Under pressure from the pain, the narrator heads back to the private clinic the following day, and learns that he must pay an additional pound as a consultation fee. Surprised at the practice of charging for consultations, which doesn't exist in public clinics or hospitals, the narrator views it as deliberate exploitation, an attempt to milk the Egyptian poor by drawing on the significant difference in the quality of medical care between public and private hospitals and clinics. After expressing his opinion directly to the medic responsible for admitting patients, the complaint reaches the doctor, at which point a heated argument ensues. The narrator

accuses the doctor of being complicit in the profit-motivated privatization of health care in Egypt, a transformation that limits better health care and higher living standards to an elite minority at the expense of the downtrodden majority. The doctor retaliates by insisting on the "humanitarian" nature of his work, pointing out that the maintenance of private clinics involves higher expenses, and that "there's no [public] hospital whose services you can trust." Attacking the state's dwindled sponsorship of higher education, including medical degrees, under al-Sadat, the narrator challenges the doctor's atomized understanding of his professional privileges and responsibilities, setting his success within the context of the severe class divisions that characterize Egypt's neopatriarchal economy. [71]

Finding the narrator's lesson in political economy too much to bear, the doctor orders the physically stronger medic to drive him out of the clinic. Weighing his potential confrontation with the medic against his humiliating defeat by the sexual predator in the Carter bus, the narrator decides to give up the fight and retreat to the safety of his home. However, in a gesture calculated to dissimulate his own acknowledgment of his defeat, he threatens to seek legal redress for his exploitation by the doctor.

> The medic who appeared in the door was a strapping young man, and I was afraid the incident on the bus would be repeated. I got up slowly and said, "I'll go. But I know what to do about my pound. We still have law
> and order around here."
>
> Naturally, I didn't believe that, but it was a way of saving face, helping me face the critical looks that met me outside and the insults with which the medic escorted me to the door.[72]

Knowing full well that no means for this redress are likely to be found in the current system, the

narrator, in his meta-narrative capacity, puts on this theatrical performance in order to get a forceful message across to the reader: in the Egyptian police state under al-Sadat, no one is likely to find legal redress for a grievance unless they are backed by the same corrupt elites who have pocketed the legal apparatus, the security apparatus, and the non-representative parliamentary system. Moreover, the doctor's professional immunity from redress recalls the sexual predator's cultural immunity from redress, even in spite of the socio-economic gap between them. In a social world where arbitrary power distorts the course of law in such a way that the powerful routinely escape judgment, while the semblance of law is sustained through the persecution of the weak, the narrator is aligned with the female victim in the same disenfranchised position.

Back in the isolation of his apartment, the narrator surveys his life trajectory up to the present, trying to place in perspective all the little shattered hopes, disappointments, and failures of courage that led him to his failed confrontation with the Committee. Sensing that his end is near, he fumbles around in his past for any and all moments that could give his life a meaning beyond the humiliation of his defeat. Eventually indulging in sexual fantasies with the help of his pornographic books, seeking "to live for the last time those charged moments, during which life floods every cell of the body and a caress anywhere arouses waves of ecstasy that inevitably crest," the narrator presents sexual desire as the primary expression of the life instinct. In the context of his own political ordeals and cultural baggage, it also appears as the most seriously devitalized and repressed expression of life, as evidenced by his numerous incidents of sexual impotence, and his admittance to resorting to fleeting bodily contact with women in buses. Leaving his sexual fantasies to attend to his old diaries and notes, the narrator reads these records of the social and political idealism of his youth and links them to the tragic idealism of the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose poetry he had quoted in his notes.[73] This mournful

train of thought leads him to a retrospective examination of the reasons for his habitual capitulation to institutional authority.

> I was engaged in finding an explanation for this phenomenon, when, after some examination, I realized it was rooted in the distant past, in the first test I had ever taken, at just a few years of age, and each time thereafter when I stood naked before the cold, indifferent eyes of ruthless people who belonged to a world other than mine. The life of each of them revolves in an independent sphere, not dependent in any way on the outcome of any confrontation between us, which is contrary to my own case.[74]

Realizing that his pattern of submissive behavior goes all the way back to his childhood years at school, the narrator also realizes that the Committee's arbitrary power is mirrored and reinforced by the arbitrary power of the institutions and elites that govern Egyptian citizens from the cradle to the grave. In this light, the beneficent potential of educational institutions gets warped under the influence of the "independent sphere" of naked power, and the eyes of teachers come to resemble "the cold, indifferent eyes of ruthless people who belonged to a world other than [the narrator's]."

Although, as previously mentioned, the narrator leaves his line of work unspecified, among the mementos of his past he refers to "Old government applications" that suggest he may have worked as a civil servant at some point in his life. In this case one may safely presume that the "ruthless people" include in their number, along with the corrupt politicians and the merchant elites, some highly placed bureaucrats. Thus, the link between the arbitrary power of the Committee and that of the state is reinforced, as is their shared immunity from the rule of law (their power is "not dependent in any way on the outcome of any confrontation between [them

and the narrator]"). Having reassembled his perspective on his life around the pivotal struggle for socio-political enfranchisement, the narrator realizes that all the time he had spent evading or compromising this struggle has been wasted. Yielding to the conviction that the Committee's power is absolute, the narrator decides to atone for his defeat at the Committee's "hand" by indicting it through a tape-recorded message.

> Suddenly I stood up, put an empty tape in the recorder, and set it on the table. I faced it as if it were the Committee. My voice rang out strong and steady in the empty room. "I committed—from the beginning—unpardonable errors. I shouldn't have stood before you, but against you. Every noble effort on this earth should be aimed at eliminating you…"[75]

With this clear denunciation, the narrator abandons the disingenuous discourse he had deployed in his encounters with the Committee, where he would disguise opposition as appeasement, and opts instead for a discourse of open opposition—not, however, without reminding the reader of the ironic discrepancy between the loud voice with which he addresses the tape recorder, and the meek voice with which he used to address the Committee.

In a denouement that blends a tangible sense of defeatism with an abstract sense of hope, the narrator prepares himself for his end with a carefully chosen sequence of classical and neo-classical musical compositions by Beethoven, Cesar Franck, and Carl Orff. Immersing himself in the music's existential dramas and psychological intensity, the narrator describes the music's appeal in terms of positive or peaceful states of mind that follow states of doubt, turmoil, and pain. Alluding, in this manner, to his impending death as a passage toward peace from a world of suffering, the narrator qualifies this ethereal scenario by adding to the musical mix the work of Dmitri Shostakovich, "who blended all of this with mockery."

My choice finally came to rest on Cesar Franc, in whom the splendor of doubt evolves into the bliss of certainty, Carl Orff, who erupts with vigor and conflict, Beethoven, who sings of victory and joy after pain, and Shostakovich, who blended all of this with mockery.

Darkness had fallen. I put the recordings of these great geniuses within reach of my hand. I took my favorite place behind the desk, at the final wall of the apartment.

I proceeded to listen to the music, whose notes rang throughout the room. I stayed in my place, tranquil, elated, until dawn.

Then I lifted my wounded arm to my mouth and began to consume myself.[76]

Commencing his musical farewell to life with the fall of darkness, the narrator delays executing the suicide death sentence until dawn. This purposive coordination, when juxtaposed to Shostakovich's crowning "mockery," clouds the ethereal hope for a peaceful afterlife with an ironic, objectifying distance from the self. Instead of evoking the afterlife as a just reward for those who endure suffering, the narrator's departure with the dawn drives home the message that, under the darkness of the present circumstances, self-annihilation may be the only way to light.

Relating Ibrahim's form of objectification to Bourdieu's "objectification of the self," Samia Mehrez discusses the self-consumption scene in terms of the psychological repercussions of the ban decreed by the state on Ibrahim's first novel, *The Smell of Its*. Arguing that the text's surrealistic conclusion enables the author to draw a psychological distance from the humiliations he has faced as a critical writer and political dissident, Mehrez also opines that the ending translates these experiences from a personal to a public context, giving the author's tribulations a collective Egyptian resonance.

> This verdict [of self-consumption] becomes a figurative rendition of the one passed in 1966 by the real committee at the Information Agency. In externalizing, recasting, and containing this entire dehumanizing episode within a fictional narrative, *al-Lajna* becomes one more complex and radical step along the line of Bourdieu's objectification of the self. Irony not only generates a distance for the reader, but certainly—and more urgently perhaps—it does the same for the writer. Ultimately, it transforms the personal into the public; the private humiliation becomes a collective one and eating one's self suddenly becomes an act shared by all.[77]

Mehrez' keen insight into the critical logic of Ibrahim's extreme, self-objectifying irony is clearly reinforced by the numerous connections which the author draws in the text between the narrator's own experience of exploitation and marginality and its collective counterpart in the Egyptian street. It is particularly interesting, however, to consider how the novel's sexual politics inflect this ironic objectification/collectivization of suffering. Initially adopting a representational politics that aligns masculine integrity with civic autonomy, and emasculation with political disenfranchisement, the narrator endorses the same patriarchal logic that authorizes the Committee's agenda as the enforcer of Egyptian neopatriarchy. In this sense, his humiliation falls short of striking a collective resonance, being skewed toward an audience that accepts as a given men's dominance in politics and the public sphere. However, as the narrator's understanding of the institutional bases of the Committee's power develops, his viewpoint shifts to accommodate a more nuanced model of power and agency, one where the cultural manifestation of patriarchy is held to be responsible for upholding of the arbitrary power of the state. Realizing that both men and women, depending on whether they endorse or oppose the

status quo, can be agents or victims of patriarchal power, the narrator begins to identify the otherness of women, and their exclusion from the public sphere, with the average citizen's systematic exploitation and abuse by the state. In this model, alienation takes on the color and shape of the veil, and sexual hierarchy and antagonism become essential components of the infrastructure that conjoins internal heteronomy to external dependency.

In the context of his oeuvre, *The Committee* represents a crucial transition point in Ibrahim's understanding of the politics of sexual difference, one that subjects masculinity to a self-negating reflexivity as part of a methodical critique of neocolonialism and state oppression in Egypt. This transition point eventually leads the author to the extensive engagement of female marginal subjectivity in his most famous and critically acclaimed novel to date, *Zaat.* Crucially, the gender critique developed in *The Committee* takes its cues from a regional Arab context that extends beyond the manifestation of neopatriarchy specific to Egypt. This is due not only to the fact that the strictly patriarchal aspect of neopatriarchy can be found in different inflections all over the Arab world, but also to the fact that the historical crises affecting the region are strongly impacted by this aspect. This observation is brought into relief when reading *The Committee* next to the other texts I have examined in this dissertation. While *The Committee* explores the politics of gender in the specific context of the open door policy of al-Sadat, the regional impact of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the 1973 October War also plays a prominent role in the novel's gendered critique of Egypt's political economy. Thus the narrator's caricature of the male Arab rulers and elites bowing in deference to Carter and Begin recalls the anguished disillusionment with Arab/masculine honor that marks both "Moans at the Permits Window" and *The Siege*. Moreover, while neopatriarchy in *The Committee* frames Egypt's disjuncture from the democratic possibilities of modernity, in *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, Lebanon's disjuncture from the

same is set against the hierarchical structure of male homosocial desire. In identifying political disenfranchisement and class hierarchy with the oppression of women, *The Committee* traces the relations of patriarchy to the police state, and to comprador capitalism, within a larger map of the late modern period in the Arab world.

Conclusion

In his essay "Desire for the West, Desire for the Self: National Love and the Colonial Encounter," Stephen Sheehi makes a crucial argument concerning a text considered by many to be the first modern novel in Arabic, Salim al-Bustani's *Love in the Gardens of Damascus* (*al-Huyām fī Jinān al-Shām*, 1870). Taking the novel's male protagonist as a paradigm of the modern Arab intellectual's conflicted subject position between authenticity and the West, Sheehi reads this character's relationship to his beloved Wardah as a polarly gendered manifestation of the crisis facing Arab identity under the weight of Western modernity and colonialism. Running into a European woman by the name of Madame Bellerose while touring Greater Syria—a scenario that positions him as a half-Western tourist in relation to his home country—Suleiman Khalil is quite taken with her learning, intellect, and her stimulating conversation. While Madame Bellerose represents a femininity that appeals to Suleiman due to its association with European modernity, it is only Wardah—a Syrian woman who, like Madame Bellerose, values education and culture, and possesses a recognizably European bourgeois refinement—who captures his heart. Seeing Suleiman's desire for Wardah as transposed from his desire for Madame Bellerose, Sheehi argues that Wardah's appeal for Suleiman lies in the linkage she represents between European civilization and a passive femininity reassuring to the Arab national subject—who, by default, is male: "Yet Wardah is more than a stand-in for Bellerose and the Western 'success' she represents... Rather, as a passive native love-object, Wardah fulfills the desire of the Arab male subject without compromising *his* masculine efficacy and cultural autonomy."[1]

Considering Sheehi's study as a potential starting point for a fluctuating genealogy of gender's "critical" manifestations in modern Arabic literature—critical in the double sense of

acting out, and throwing a critical light on, the gender of crisis—I would like to suggest that my dissertation may complement this genealogy through its investigation of the role of gender in Arabic literature of the late modern period. During this period in the history of the Arab world, specifically from the late sixties onward, patriarchy, tribalism, and colonialism of a post-classical kind endure alongside post-colonial crises in national consciousness, the relation between state and civil society, and political economy. Thus, while we hear Fadwa Tuqan express a bold and distinctly female discourse of anti-colonial resistance in her poetry—a phenomenon that may have been unsettling to al-Bustani—the gendered ambivalence of the subject position she assumes in this discourse remains connected to the patriarchal structure of al-Bustani's anti-colonial nationalism. Following a logic more or less consistent with the logic behind al-Bustani's representation, Tuqan's nationalism holds Arab men responsible for protecting both her honor and that of the nation. By prescribing a partially passive role for women in the realm of national resistance—Palestinian women's duty is to support armed resistance by men, not to take part in it themselves—Tuqan reproduces the public-male/private-female division that structures the plot of al-Bustani's novel, itself a fairly common expression of patriarchal nationalism that recurs in other classics of modern Arabic literature, such as Husayn Haykal's *Zaynab* (1913) and Tawfiq al-Hakim's *The Spirit's Return* (*ʿAwdat al-Rūḥ*, 1933). Taking the trope of the wronged woman/ nation in Tuqan's poetry and other examples of Palestinian literature, we may see it as a function of both the patriarchal roots of (non-exclusively) Arab nationalism and a long legacy of external domination. In this context, Tuqan's contradiction of this trope, through the symbolism of Hind Bint ʿUtbah, may be read as a site of resistance born from the combined influence of modernity and post-classical colonialism, both of which disturb traditionally gendered divisions of public and private spheres. Thus, alongside more personal trajectories, such as those that may be

observed in the oeuvres of Tuqan, Khalifeh, and Ibrahim, for example, several historical factors that mark the late modern period, from globalization and comprador capitalism to the many failings of the post-colonial nation-state, must be taken into account when determining the collective trajectory of gender in post-1950s Arabic literature.

As mentioned in the introduction, I have deliberately worked against the critical model that portrays gender-related problems in Arabic literature as allegorical strategies for dealing with gender-neutral crises occupying the collective stage of the Arab nation or the Arab world. I hope to have demonstrated that gender, in the late modern period of Arabic literature, appears as a primary matrix within which the collective crises of the region develop. While still adhering to the rhetoric of allegory, Joseph Massad recognizes this insight in his book *Desiring Arabs* (2009), where he deals at some length with Arabic fiction and drama, from the late 1960s to the present, as a site where Arab subjectivity is produced in negotiation with the sexual epistemes of colonial and post-colonial modernity.[2] Massad proposes that, although modern Arabic literature had always been concerned with sexual desire and practice, it is only from the late sixties onward that sex frequently appears as an allegory of the post-colonial state of things: "...sexual desires and acts—especially of the non-normative variety, which until the late 1960s, for the most part and with notable exceptions, [merely] added depth and detail to narrative—have been transformed into a quintessential social allegory to represent the state of society in the 1990s and beyond."[3] After designating the late 1960s as the moment at which sexuality begins to assume the role of social, political, and national allegory in Arabic literature, Massad asserts that post-1960s literary representations of sexuality have had an active role in fashioning modern Arab subjectivity: "In reading these texts in a way that addresses representations of same-sex desires, practices, deviance, and normativity as central to what is being allegorized, I am insisting that

they are nothing short of literary attempts to produce and repress, not merely to represent, the modern Arab subject."[4]

While he examines this transformation specifically as it relates to male homosexuality, Massad links it to the path-breaking contributions of women writers such as Layla Baalbaki and Colette Khury in the 1950s. In my own readings, I have applied to gender Massad's insight into the post-1960s shift in the significance of sexuality. Taking the agitated female subject positions of women writers as a trigger for subsequent, and increasingly more nuanced, engenderments of political crisis in the late modern period—as distinct from the post-colonial period designated by Massad—I would like to emphasize that the role of gender consciousness in the literature of this period extends beyond allegory to become a concrete, central factor in the construction, and deconstruction, of crisis. While the texts I have read vary in the degree and nuance of their representations of gender—as identity, sociality, and agency—they all diverge distinctly from the allegorical model that lingers in contemporary (particularly Arab) scholarship on the topic.[5] Rather than be blinded by their respective historical moments in their representations of gender, these texts expand gender's matrix of possibilities to yield a fuller picture of the institutional and ideological structures that maintain the condition of crisis. It is in this expansive view of gender that the historical, and literary-historical, significance of the texts studied in this dissertation—and other texts that follow suit—must be weighed.

References

Introduction

[1] Samira Aghacy, *Masculine Identity in the Fiction of the Arab East since 1967* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

[2] Aghacy, 2.

[3] It wouldn't be suitable to include the recent Arab revolutions and rebellions from Tunisia to Bahrain, since Aghacy's book was published in 2009.

[4] Aghacy, 2.

[5] Quoted in Aghacy, 10.

[6] See, for example, Evelyne Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 1990) and miriam cooke, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

[7] A good example of these trends in criticism may be found in Lisa Majaj et al., eds., *Intersections: Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002). The anthology includes critical essays by Amal Amireh on Nawal El Saadawi, Barbara Harlow on Sahar Khalifeh, and Therese Saliba on Liana Badr.

[8] A dramatic example of the linguistic barrier necessitating a separate approach to the question of gender and crisis in Maghrebian literature may be seen in the fact that several Algerian writers, including Assia Djebar, Rachid Boudjedra, and Boualem Sansal, all chose to write about the Algerian civil war in French and address their reflections on it to French and Francophone audiences.

[9] Hisham Sharabi argues that the historical foundation of this condition is "Neopatriarchy," a term which he defines as the alliance between neo-colonial dependency and local patriarchy as institutionalized in both civil society and the state. This argument will be particularly pertinent for my final chapter, in which I read the patriarchal connection between comprador capitalism and the police state in Sonallah Ibrahim's *The Committee*. See Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[10] Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (Albany: State

University of New York, 1995), 170.

[11] See Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 25.

[12] See Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigee Books, 1981), 51.

[13] Muhsin J. al-Musawi, "Engaging Globalization in Modern Arabic Literature: Appropriation and Resistance," *Modern Language Quarterly* 68.2 (June 2007), 309.

[14] Sharabi, 21.

I. *Embattled Nation: Gender in Palestinian Resistance Literature*

[1] Salmá al-Khaḍrāʾ al-Jayyūsī, "Muqaddimah: al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī fī al-ʿAsr al-Ḥadīth," in Salmá al-Khaḍrāʾ al-Jayyūsī, ed., *Mawsūʿat al-Adab al-Filasṭīnī al-Muʿāṣir* (Bayrūt: al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 1997), 31. My translation.

[2] Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 49.3 (Summer, 1995), 470-71.

[3] Aida Azouqa notes the critical consensus that Suhayl Idris formalized the call to political commitment in Arabic literature with his influential literary periodical *Al-Adab*. However, she also credits the socialist writer and intellectual Salamah Musa and the critic Muhammad Shubashi with laying the discursive foundations of the concept. See Aida Azouqa, "Ghassan Kanafani and William Faulkner: Kanafani's Achievement in *All That's Left to You*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 31:2 (2000): 147-170.

[4] Joseph Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 170.

[5] Qtd. in Zeidan, 213.

I.1. *Fadwa Tuqan and May al-Sayigh: Occupation, Invasion, and the Feminization of National (Dis)honor*

[1] Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*

(New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5.

[2] See, for example, "Kharīf wa-Masāʾ," "Maʿa Sanābil al-Qamḥ," and "Hurūb," in *Alone with the Days* (*Waḥdī maʿa al-Ayyām,* 1952); and "Nidāʾ al-Arḍ," "Shuʿlat al-Ḥurrīyah," and "Anā wa-al-Sirr al-Ḍāʾiʿ" in *I Found Her* (*Wajadtuhā*, 1958).

[3] Fadwá Ṭūqān, "Āhāt Amām Shubbāk al-Taṣārīḥ," in Fadwá Ṭūqān, *Al-Aʿmāl al-Shiʿrīyah al-Kāmilah: Dīwān Fadwá Ṭūqān* (Bayrūt: Dār al-ʿAwdah, 2004), 475. All quotations made from Tuqan's poetry will be drawn from this volume.

[4] Ṭūqān, 476. Al-Muʿtasim is said to have launched his attacks against the Byzantine Empire after hearing that a Muslim woman, captured by the Byzantines in one of their raids on the Jazirah region of Syria, had invoked his name in her call for rescue. From this apocryphal story he acquired a symbolism that conjoins the traditional Arab paterfamilias' jealous custodianship of female kin and the mighty Muslim ruler's zealous custodianship of his subjects.

[5] Ṭūqān, 477.

[6] Leila Ahmad opines that "The extreme ferocity attributed to [Hind], reported in works compiled in the Abbasid age, perhaps owes its bloodiness to Abbasid hatred of the Umayyad dynasty, founded by Hind's son." Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 53.

[7] Ṭūqān, 559. The lines excerpted by Tuqan in that particular order are a redaction of several varieties of the poem; one opinion suggests that the lines had been recited in an oral tradition of war poetry inherited from a daughter of al-Mundhir, king of al-Hirah, another that they had been originally written by a woman of the tribe of Iyād, one of the oldest Arab tribes to settle Iraq. The longer version of the poem that is cited most often reads: "naḥnu banātu ṭāriq/namshī ʿalá al-namāriq/al-durru fī al-makhāniq/wa-al-misku fī al-manāṭiq/in tuqbilū nuʿāniq/wa-nafrishu al-namāriq/aw tudbirū nufāriq/firāqa ghayri wāmiq."

[8] In the tradition that attributes authorship of the poem to Hind, *ṭāriq* is taken to mean "bright star," and based on this interpretation, "Ṭāriq" is considered to be a symbol of Hind's Qurayshi ancestor ʿAbd Manāf. In another tradition that attributes authorship to a woman of the tribe of Iyād, Ṭāriq is the venerated, flesh-and-blood ancestor of the poet Hind Bint Bayāḍah Ibn Rabāḥ Ibn Ṭāriq al-Iyādī.

[9] Ṭūqān, 559.

[10] There are divergent popular narratives concerning the lineage of Qahtan himself; while these narratives don't all agree on this point, most do agree that a lineage that can be traced back to Qahtan is a "true" Arab lineage. In such narratives Arabs are divided into two groups: *al-ʿarab al-ʿāribah* ("the original Arabs") and *al-ʿarab al-mustaʿribah* ("the Arabized Arabs"). The latter group is understood to have acquired Arabic language and customs through their proximity to the former, or via the geographical expansion of Arabic with the Islamic conquests.

[11] Ṭūqān, 559-60.

[12] Ṭūqān, 560.

[13] The poetry collections published to date are *The Crown of Thorns* (*Iklīl al-Shawk*, 1969); *Love Poems for a Hunted Name* (*Qaṣāʾid Ḥubb li-Ism Muṭārad*, 1974); and *Concerning Tears and the Happiness to Come* (*ʿAn al-Dumūʿ wa-al-Faraḥ al-Ātī,* 1975). Al-Ṣāyigh also got her poetry published in the anthology *Poems Engraved on the Obelisk of Ashrafieh* (*Qaṣāʾid Manqūshah ʿalá Misallat al-Ashrafīyah*, 1971). In 2002 she released her first novel, *Waiting for the Moon* (Bi-Intiẓār al-Qamar); the Palestinian family central to the plot includes a few women whose politicized consciousness transposes the drama of exile onto the drama of gender hierarchy.

[14] The term "Beirut Decentrists" was coined by Miriam Cooke in her study of women's writing during the Lebanese civil war. See Miriam Cooke, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

[15] Mayy al-Ṣāyigh, *al-Ḥiṣār* (Bayrūt: Al-Muʾassasah al-ʿArabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 1988), 119. My translation. Sitt Mari-Rose's story became the subject of an eponymous novel in French by Etel Adnan, in which the author deploys an intensely lyrical language to capture the surreal violence of the war and the complex, largely unconscious gender antagonisms fuelling them. See Etel Adnan, *Sitt Marie-Rose: A Novel*, trans. Georgina Kleege (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 1982).

[16] See Ussama Makdisi, "Knowledge and Ignorance" in *The Culture of Sectarianism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), http://escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft2r29n8jr;brand=ucpress/.

[17] The Arabic expression "barq khullab," literally "lightning without a downpour," is figuratively used to refer to any situation where something is promised that does not exist. Thus, it is quite apt as a metaphor for the more performative, ideologically motivated dimensions of inherited

language.

[18] Al-Ṣāyigh, 85.

[19] Stefan Meyer attempts a socio-politically specific, postcolonial literary history of formal experimentation in Arabic literature in *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001). Among the writers he notes for a politicized approach to gender and sexuality in their literary experiments are the Egyptians Idwar Kharrat and Nawal El Saadawi, the Sudanese Tayeb Salih, and the Lebanese Abdo Wazen and Etel Adnan.

[20] Al-Ṣāyigh, 73.

[21] Al-Ṣāyigh, 228.

[22] Al-Ṣāyigh, 260.

[23] Al-Ṣāyigh, 42.

[24] Al-Ṣāyigh, 87.

[25] Al-Ṣāyigh, 86.

[26] Al-Ṣāyigh, 136.

[27] Al-Ṣāyigh, 217.

[28] Al-Ṣāyigh, 232.

[29] Qurʾan 109: 2-3.

I.2. *Fracturing the Nation: Ghassan Kanafani, Sahar Khalifeh, and the Radical Rifts of Gender*

[1] Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 70.

[2] Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 12.

[3] See Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, 115, 169-176, 214.

[4] See Harlow, "Return to Haifa: 'Opening the Borders' in Palestinian Literature," *Social Text* 13/14 (Winter-Spring 1986), 9.

[5] For a particularly insightful study of the role Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, and other Palestinian writers play in reinforcing the Palestinian sense of belonging against the erosions of exile and the opposing claims of Zionist discourse, see Barbara Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

[6] For the connection between Kanafani and Faulkner's experimental methods see Azouqa.

[7] Ghassan Kanafani, *All That's Left to You: A Novella and Short Stories*, trans. May Jayyusi and Jeremy Reed (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2004), 6.

[8] For a detailed study of the feminization of land and its relation to the paternal construction of nationalism, see Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 49 (1995): 468-83.

[9] Kanafani, 2.

[10] Kanafani, 3.

[11] For more on the fraught relations between women's activism and the Palestinian national movement see Julie M. Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) and Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Politics of Women's Resistance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

[12] Kanafani, 2.

[13] Kanafani, 11-12.

[14] Kanafani, 23-24.

[15] Qurʾan 2:223.

[16] Amy Zalman, "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return in Two Novels by Ghassan Kanafani," in *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, Yasir Suleiman and Ibrahim Muhawi, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 70.

[17] Kanafani, 16.

[18] Zalman, 73.

[19] Zalman, 70.

[20] Kanafani, 27-28. On being asked by Maryam if he had had sexual experiences in the past, Hamid first avoids the question, then answers it obliquely by returning to the traumatic memory of his father's violent death and extending its trauma to the Oedipal scene: the arm that dangles from the father's body in death recalls the arm that was seen around the mother's body in life. Identified with the figure of the father and his emasculating end, Hamid's sexuality remains caught in the limbo of national loss/castration.

[21] Kanafani, 13-14.

[22] Remarkably, in spite of the patently chauvinistic characterization of Zakaria, and of Hamid's clearly ironic attribution of fertility to the desert, Zalman understands the passage quoted above as evidence that Kanafani draws on the concept of fertility to reify the woman-land nexus. See Zalman, 66.

[23] Kanafani, 35.

[24] Kanafani, 11.

[25] Zalman proposes a rather selective interpretation of the clock in the final scene. Taking it as an external embodiment of the cyclical time of reproduction, Zalman reads the clock as an expression of the patriarchal law that confines female agency to the (presumably ahistorical) domain of motherhood: "the dull repetitiousness of the clock takes on an ideological force; it sounds a refusal to admit Maryam's presence into history" (67).

[26] Kanafani, 50.

[27] Suha Sabbagh, "Palestinian Women Writers and the *Intifada*," *Social Text* 22 (1989): 71.

[28] Barbara Harlow, "Partitions and Precedents: Sahar Khalifeh and Palestinian Political Geography," in Lisa Majaj et al., eds., *Gender, Nation, and Community in Arab Women's Novels* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 116.

[29]Harlow, "Partitions and Precedents...," 127.

[30] Sabbagh, 65.

[31] In my understanding of modernist irony as one that undoes any frame of reference able to counter its negational momentum I am drawing on the work of Alan Wilde in *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Ironic Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

[32] Sahar Khalifeh , *The Inheritance*, trans. Aida Bamia (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2006), 8. All quotations will be taken from this translation. Where necessary my emendations will be inserted in brackets.

[33] Khalifeh, 36.

[34] Khalifeh, 58. Bamia translates the original *istīṭān* (lit. 'the act of settling (in a colony)') as "a 'settlement,'" thus replacing the action, and its connotative associations with official policy, with an instance of the act. I translate *istīṭān* as 'colonization' to avoid conflating 'settlement' as an action with 'settlement' as a concrete structure resulting from that action, and to designate the

action of settlement as an official policy. Bamia translates the name "Fitnah" as "Futna," almost certainly not how it would be pronounced anywhere in Palestine. I have translated the last sentence of the quoted passage myself because the entire sentence, as well as ten subsequent lines from the same paragraph, are completely missing from Bamia's translation. Interestingly, in these lines Fitnah uses racist language to attribute the covetous and cunning character of Zayna's uncle to his rumored half-Jewish lineage. See Saḥar Khalīfah, *Al-Mīrāth* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ādāb, 1997), 79.

[35] Curiously, the narrator only mentions Nahleh's sisters one other time in the novel, and then only to divulge their names: "Maryam" and "Aidah.

[36] Khalifeh, 47.

[37] Khalifeh, 134.

[38] Khalifeh, 172.

[39] Khalifeh, 152.

[40] Khalifeh, 251.

[41] Linda Hutcheon tackles the political ambiguity of irony from a postmodern angle that emphasizes the pragmatics of authorship, distribution, and reception as the proper context in which irony's critical force or "evaluative edge" may be assessed. See Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

[42] This disjuncture has run into a higher level of crisis with the ongoing factional wars and geo-political segregation between Fatah and Hamas following the latter's victory in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections of 2006.

II. *Revisiting Lebanon: Rashid al-Daif, Jabbur al-Duwayhi, and the Making of Tribal/Sectarian Masculinity*

[1] See, for example, miriam cooke, *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Evelyne Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 1990); and Samira Aghacy, "Hoda Barakat's the Stone of Laughter: Androgyny or Polarization," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 29:3 (1998), 185-201.

[2] See, for example, Carol Fadda-Conrey, "Exilic Memories of War: Lebanese Women Writers Looking Back," *Studies in the Humanities* 30:1-2 (2003), 7+; Evelyne Accad, "Response to Ghandour's Review of Cooke," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23:3 (1991), 478-479; Mona Takieddine Amyuni, "Style as Politics in the Poems and Novels of Rashid al-Daif," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28:2 (1996), 177-192; and Thomas Forster, "Circles of Oppression, Circles of Repression: Etel Adnan's Sitt Marie Rose," *PMLA* 110.1 (1995), 59+.

[3] Rashid al-Daif, *Dear Mr. Kawabata*, trans. Paul Starkey, 2nd ed. (London: Quartet Books, 2007). Unless otherwise noted, all passages quoted are from Starkey's translation, with my emendations inserted between brackets where necessary. When relying on my own translation for an entire passage, I will cite the passage in reference to the original text: Rashīd al-Ḍaʿīf, *ʿAzīzī al-Sayyid Kawābātā*, 2nd ed. (Bayrūt: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2001).

[4] Jabbūr al-Duwayhī, *Maṭar Ḥazīrān* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Nahār, 2006). All passages quoted from the text are of my own translation.

[5] Al-Duwayhi's latest novel *The Vagrant* (*Sharīd al-Manāzil*, 2010), which treats sectarianism's erosion of the cosmopolitan culture of Beirut in the sixties, was shortlisted for the 2012 IPAF.

[6] Since both novels emphasize the continuity between tribal and religious chauvinisms, I will be juxtaposing "sectarian" to "tribal" frequently in the chapter.

[7] Although al-Daif doesn't designate Rashid's hometown, and al-Duwayhi calls the town in which the plot is set "Barqa," textual and biographical details point strongly to Zgharta as the intended reference for both authors.

[8] Cooke writes: "None of the Beirut Decentrists describe a separate battle zone. Everyone was a potential enemy, if not today then certainly tomorrow. In such an atmosphere the enemy could not be depersonalized. None of the Beirut Decentrists…ever defines a particular enemy. Each person, each Becoming-Enemy, recognized and defined him/herself in terms of the Becoming-Other. Combat could not be relegated to a somewhere else. The enemy was everywhere, the battlefield was everywhere. The war was everyone's war." See cooke, ibid, 26-27.

II.1. Dear Mr Kawabata: *Sectarianism and Secularism via Male Homosocial Desire*

[1] Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York:

Columbia University Press, 1985), 25. For the basic definition of male homosocial desire, see pages 1-2.

[2] Ken Seigneurie, "The Importance of Being Kawabata: The Narratee in Today's Literature of Commitment," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 34:1 (Winter 2004): 111-130.

[3] Sedgwick, 2.

[4] Al-Daiʿf also has his narrator protagonist straddle life and death in his earlier novels *Passage to Dusk* (2001; *Fusḥah Mustahdafah bayn al-Nuʿās wa-al-Nawm,* 1986) and *The Technologies of Misery* (*Taqnīyāt al-Buʾs,* 1989).

[5] Al-Daif, 7. Starkey interprets *al-hadhayān* in a more abstract manner ('madness') where a literal approach ('delirious speech') seems more suitable: when coherent speech fails to express a surreal reality, delirious speech takes its place.

[6] Al-Daif, 17.

[7] Al-Daif, 4.

[8] Al-Daif, 121.

[9] Al-Daif, 60.

[10] Al-Daif, 65.

[11] Al-Daif, 23.

[12] After Rashid's aunt suspects, correctly, that his parents are ignoring her door-knocking while having sex, Rashid imagines his mother's private reaction to being (virtually) discovered in the act: "And my mother? What was my mother doing all this time? Had she buried her head under the bedclothes so as not to see or be seen? Or had she been embarrassed to stay in bed, got up and walked round to the lavatory by the back door, to make people think that she was washing or going to the toilet?" Al-Daif, 25.

[13] Al-Daif, 21.

[14] Samira Aghacy, "Contemporary Lebanese Fiction: Modernization Without Modernity," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (2006): 561-80, 561.

[15] Aghacy, 571.

[16] Al-Daif, 64.

[17] Al-Daif, 39.

[18] Al-Daif, 38. I distinguish "manhood" from "masculinity." The former refers to an embodiment

of male-associated qualities that are historically and culturally specific, while the latter refers to a general category of male-related qualities that must be qualified further to gain a historical and cultural specificity. In addition, "manhood" implicitly denotes an ethical system in which a man is judged to be a success or failure as a man, with success being integral to his honor and status.

[19] Al-Daif, 158. Perhaps because he relied on an earlier edition of the novel, Starkey reads the second person passive verb *tudfanu* as the third person passive *yudfanu*; this leads him to interpret the phrase *wa-illā makānun tudfanu fīhi* as referring to the burial location of the father mentioned in the preceding sentence.

[20] Al-Daif, 43.

[21] As reported by Robin McKie in The Observer, one writer claimed that Gagarin had a smile "that lit up the darkness of the Cold War." Thus, the official hero/heroic man's radiant smile leaves its stamp on global politics. http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2011/mar/13/yuri-gagarin-first-space-korolev

[22] Al-Daif, 5.

[23] Al-Daif, 108.

[24] Al-Ḍaʿīf, 14-15.

[25] *Maṭīyah* is a feminine object noun derived from the root *m-ṭ-y* and built on the pattern *faʿīlah* (like the object nouns *safīnah* 'ship,' *madīnah* 'city,' and *qasīmah* 'dividend'). In this case the comparison of *kalimah* with *maṭīyah* is inflected by the feminine grammatical gender shared by both.

[26] Al-Daif, 1.

[27] See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

[28] Al-Daif, 4.

[29] Al-Daif, 4. With the ironic self-contradiction typical of his speech, Rashid denies having "complexes of any kind" (*ʿuqad min ay nawʿ*) right after he admits to his responsibility for magnifying the significance of the man's height. Starkey translates *ʿuqad* as "reservations."

[30] Al-Daif, 4.

[31] Al-Daif, 2.

[32] Al-Daif, 108.

[33] Al- Daif, 109.

[34] Al-Daif, 3.

[35] Al-Daif, 134.

[36] Al-Daif, 120-1.

[37] Seigneurie, 117.

[38] Al-Daif, 8-9.

[39] Al-Daif, 108.

[40] Al-Daif, 150.

[41] See "Yasunari Kawabata–Nobel Lecture," Nobelprize.org, accessed June 25, 2011, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1968/kawabata-lecture.html

[42] Al-Daif, 18.

[43] Al-Daif, 11.

[44] Al-Daif, 104.

[45] Aghacy, 570.

[46] Al-Daif, 116.

[47] Al-Daif, 5.

[48] Al-Daif, 11.

II.2. The Rain of June*: Manning the Borders with Blood*

[1] Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigee Books, 1981), 51.

[2] In an incisive commentary on the novel, the former Lebanese MP for Zgharta, Samir Frangieh, calls attention to the historical continuity the novel draws between the tribal hostilities leading to the Mizyarah massacre and the sectarian hostilities leading to the civil war. See Samir Frangieh, "Riwāyat Maṭar Ḥazīrān li-Jabbūr al-Duwayhī : Risālah fī al-ʿUnf min Zghartā ilá kull Lubnān," *Middle East Transparent*, 28 May 2008, accessed on 24 August 2010, http://www.metransparent.com/spip.php?page=article&id_article=3935&lang=ar.

[3] The town of Zgharta in northern Lebanon is the historical location of the blood feud between the Duwayhi and Frangieh families that led to the massacre at Mizyarah. In the novel, it appears that the Samʿani family corresponds to the Duwayhi family, while the Rami family corresponds

to the Frangieh family.

[4] The fact that the monastic school's principal is a French monk underscores the post-colonial affiliations with France and the West which distinguish the majority of Maronites in Lebanon and play an important part in the tensions leading to the 1958 crisis.

[5] Al-Duwayhi, 18.

[6] Al-Duwayhi, 15.

[7] "And the great house is approached by visitors who don't speak Arabic, as it's only natural for a son of the great house to work as an interpreter for the French Consul in Beirut, where he can expand his circle of acquaintances. Or perhaps the visits are due to the fact that the eldest son had pursued his studies (maybe without completing them) at 'Ainturah, with Father Sarlaute the Lazarist, recommended to him by the French High Commissioner, who subsequently named the son both a deputy in the recently formed National Assembly—in a portion of it determined by the Mandate authorities—and a Minister of Education in a government that didn't survive for more than two months. And his father had been appointed the administrator of a region at a time when Vaso Pasha, governor of Mount Lebanon, had been susceptible to gifts and invitations to banquets embellished with beautiful, coquettish ladies." Al-Duwayhi, 110.

[8] Al-Duwayhi, 110.

[9] Al-Duwayhi, 119-20.

[10] Al-Duwayhi, 237.

[11] Al-Duwayhi, 145. One young man's excitement about U.S. cinema leads him to flout the informal law of separation and cross over to the "wrong" quarter to attend a film screening. Thus globalization adds another layer of irony to the delusional separation line in Barqa.

[12] Al-Duwayhi, 92.

[13] Al-Duwayhi, 43.

[14] Al-Duwayhi, 53.

[15] Al-Duwayhi, 35.

[16] Al-Duwayhi, 133.

[17] Al-Duwayhi, 135.

[18] Al-Duwayhi, 46.

[19] Al-Duwayhi, 36.

[20] Al-Duwayhi, 36.

[21] Al-Duwayhi, 139.

[22] Al-Duwayhi, 49.

[23] Al-Duwayhi, 195.

[24] Al-Duwayhi, 197.

[25] In 1958, the blood feud between the Samʿanis and the Ramis has been subsumed into the multi-factional, regional conflict between predominantly Christian supporters of the pro-Western alliance, represented by President Camille Chamoun and the Central Treaty Organization, and the predominantly Muslim supporters of pan-Arab nationalism, represented by Jamal Abdel Nasser and the recently formed United Arab Republic. The Samʿanis are fighting with other Maronite communities as part of the pro-Western alliance, while the Ramis are fighting with Lebanese Muslims and Communists on the side of pan-Arab nationalism.

[26] Al-Duwayhi, 209.

[27] Al-Duwayhi, 38-9.

[28] Al-Duwayhi, 38.

[29] Al-Duwayhi, 168-9.

[30] Al-Duwayhi, 170.

[31] Al-Duwayhi, 72.

[32] Al-Duwayhi, 78.

[33] Al-Duwayhi, 78-9.

[34] Al-Duwayhi, 184.

[35] Al-Duwayhi, 184.

[36] Al-Duwayhi, 27.

[37] The feminine *tāʾ marbūṭah* or "bound *tāʾ*," appearing as a silent 'h' at the end of *ḥādithah*, is commonly transliterated this way in English, as in Arabic it is silent by default, pronounced as 't' only under certain conditions.

[38] Al-Duwayhi, 185.

[39] The connection of the feminine bound *tāʾ* to adversities beyond human control is prominent, as one may observe in words like *majzarah* ('massacre'), *kārithah* ('catastrophe'), *maḥraqah* ('holocaust'), *ʿāṣifah* ('storm'), and others.

[40] Al-Duwayhi, 100.

III. *"Neopatriarchal" Egypt in Sonallah Ibrahim's* The Committee

[1] Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 21.

[2] Prior to fictional and autobiographical writing Ibrahim had worked as a journalist; his critical journalistic writings provoked the ire of the Nasserite government, subsequently leading to his imprisonment.

[3] For many scholars, *The Smell of It* is considered to represent the first comprehensive departure from the mimetic approach of social realism in Arabic fiction.

[4] Samia Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction* (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1994), 8.

[5] Stephan Guth, "The Function of Sexual Passages in some Egyptian Novels of the 1980s," in *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Roger Allen et al. (London: Saqi Books, 1995), 126.

[6] Quoted in Mehrez, 44.

[7] See, for example, Jamal al-Ghitani's *The Zafarani Files* (2009; *Waqāʾiʿ Ḥārat al-Zaʿfarānī*, 1976), where the men in an entire neighborhood of Cairo's old city, and subsequently in the entire world, develop sexual impotence in tandem with the spread of religious obscurantism and political quiescence; Halim Barakat's *Six Days* (1990; *Sittat Ayyām*, 1961), where the protagonist's prophetic anxieties about the dark future of the Arab world, and his powerlessness to intervene, overlap with his sexual double standards and his failure to grasp the reality of female difference on its own terms; and Rashid al-Ḍaif's *Meryl Streep Can Suit Herself* (*Tiṣṭifil Meryl Streep*, 2001), where the narrator-protagonist expresses his frustrations with his socio-economically marginal position through a paranoid and increasingly invasive compulsion to assure himself of sexual ownership of his wife's body.

[8] Among the most misguided and damaging assumptions built into Sharabi's argument are the following: a) patriarchal forms of authority aren't integral to the political process in the "genuinely" modern West; b) the socio-economic framework of Western modernity is based on

"horizontal relations," a formula that ignores the often severe class divisions that define the capitalist framework of Western modernity; and c) modernity, in all its different constituent strands—economic, political, and intellectual—is a uniquely European phenomenon that was triggered by the popular European revolutions against feudalism and monarchic rule. This formulation ignores the role played by European imperial conquest and gunboat diplomacy in expanding the economic and political power of the European bourgeoisie, as well as the important contributions made by Islamic science and philosophy to the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, the intellectual backgrounds of modern rationalism and empiricism.

[9] Sharabi, 7. Sharabi proposes two historical factors that "have favored sustained and favored the persistence of [patriarchy's] prototypes": "the stubborn resistance of the tribal/clan type to structural change (from pre-Islamic times to the end of the nineteenth century); and the rise at a relatively early stage (seventh century) of a powerful ideological/legal system [political Islam] which served to reinforce the kinship system and to strengthen patriarchal relations within more advanced social and economic forms." Sharabi, 27.

[10] Sharabi, 23. It is worth noting here the defeatism of Sharabi's language ("doomed"), particularly in its failure to anticipate the important advances made in economic productivity and/or democratization in India, China, and some parts of the Arab world since the time of the book's publication.

[11] I will mainly be quoting from the English translation of the novel by Mary St. Germain and Mary Constable. Where I feel alternative translations are necessary in order to preserve essential dimensions of meaning in the original passages, I will place my own translation in brackets, either immediately after the published translation, or in replacement of it if the phrase involved is a lengthy one. The corresponding parts in the Arabic original will be reproduced in the endnotes and cited under the name Ṣunʿ Allāh Ibrāhīm.

[12] Mehrez, 40.

[13] Mehrez, 47.

[14] Sonallah Ibrahim, *The Committee*, trans. Mary St. Germain and Mary Constable (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 5.

[15] Ibrahim, 9.

[16] Ibrahim, 7.

[17] Ibrahim, 13.

[18] Ibrahim, 15.

[19] In the interview Ibrahim declares that "The overwhelming majority of Egyptians and Arabs are sick—full of complexes, lack of sexual fulfillment, and double moral standards. Everybody talks about his conquests and victories, in the sexual as well as the political and military fields. What Arabs have to learn, however, is to confess their defeats, too." Quoted in Guth, 127.

[20] Ibrahim, 16.

[21] Ibrahim, 24.

[22] Ibrahim, 16.

[23] Ibrahim's association of male penetrability with homosexuality, where the latter is seen as a form of political castration, is also visible in his novel *Sharaf* (*Honor*, 1997), where homosexuality is linked to neo-colonial exploitation.

[24] Ibrahim, 18-19.

[25] Ibrahim, 19-23.

[26] Ibrahim, 23.

[27] Ibrahim, 9.

[28] Ibrahim 31. The Arabic phrase used is *almaʿ shakhṣiyyah ʿarabīyah muʿāṣirah* ("the most brilliant/ most mendacious contemporary Arab personage"). The translators' "luminary" misses the crucial slippage between brilliance and mendacity in the Arabic root *l-m-ʿ*, which the narrator introduces to the reader through a detailed historical summary of the different uses of derivatives of this root. The implied connection between brilliance and mendacity lies in the idea of one person attracting the attention of another through his/her distinguished appearance, lying being one way of embellishing one's appearance.

[29] Ibrahim, 34-37.

[30] This ambivalence toward professional women who integrate sexuality into their work is by no means limited to heterosexual men in Egypt, although it primarily responds to the anxieties and double standards they harbor in regard to the open expression of female sexuality. See Berens, Cheri. "Egyptian Belly Dance--Prostitution or Dance? And Why the Confusion?" http://www.cheriberens.com/belly_dance_prostitution_belly_dance_dvds_videos_tapes.html.

[31] "Illā annī lam albath an takhallaytu ʿan hādhihi al-fikrah āsifan, ʿindamā taṣawwartu al-

muqāwamah al-ʿanīfah allatī sa-tuwājihunī min ʿuḍuwāt al-lajnah, wa-allatī sa-taḥẓá dūna shakk bi-baʿḍ al-musānadah, wa-law ẓāhirīyan, min baqīyat al-aʿḍāʾ." Ṣunʿ Allāh Ibrāhīm, *al-Lajnah* (Al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Mustaqbal al-ʿArabī, 2004), 34.

[32] Ibrahim, 40. See note 32 above on the semantic connection between brilliance and mendacity.

[33] Ibrahim, 41-47.

[34] Lacan lays down the theory of the *point de capiton* in full in his 1960 essay "Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious."

[35] Ibrahim, 48-49.

[36] "...fa-innahu lā yaḥtāju ilá shayʾ fī ṣafaqātihi al-mālīyah wa-al-ʿamalīyāt al-siyāsīyah allatī yushāriku fīhā min warāʾ sitār." Ibrāhīm, 51.

[37] Ibrahim, 61-62.

[38] Ibrahim, 71.

[39] Ibrahim, 75.

[40] Ibrahim, 66-67.

[41] In Modern Standard Arabic as well as several Arabic vernaculars, there are different expressions that render the gesture of turning the back as an intentional act of dismissal. Often the phrase used refers to the nape of the neck—*al-qafā*—as a figure for the back, and in some vernaculars, e.g. the Palestinian and Jordanian, the figurative reach of *al-qafā* extends to the backside.

[42] "lākinnī lam akad akhlaʿu malābisī al-khārijīyah wa-aqifu amāmahu bi-al-qamīṣ wa-al-sirwāl al-dākhilīyayn, ḥattá shaʿartu bi-al-ḥaraj ʿindamā taṭallaʿa ilayya." Ibrāhīm, 69.

[43] Ibrahim, 86.

[44] Ibrahim, 89.

[45] Ibrahim, 89.

[46] Ibrahim, 92.

[47] Ibrahim, 94-95.

[48] Sharabi, 5-6.

[49] Ibrahim, 103. Among the "world figures" the narrator names "the prophet Muhammad, Abu Dharr al-Ghafari, Abu Sa'id [sic] al-Jinabi, Ibn Rushd, al-Ma'arri [sic], Karl Marx, Freud, Lenin, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Taha Husayn, Madam Curie, Albert Schweitzer, Fucik, Castro,

Guevarra, Lumumba, Ibn Baraka, Shohdi Attia, and Gamal Abdel Nasser."

[50] Ibrahim, 103-04.

[51] Ibrahim, 105.

[52] The fact that the murder is not actually narrated but revealed ex post facto suggests that it carries with it a traumatic weight that necessitates the narrative lacuna. In the context of the Committee's virtual invincibility, and its power to set the terms of public morality, the lacuna acquires an overdetermined significance: on the one hand it alludes to a guilt-motivated reflex of self-censorship on the part of the narrator; on the other hand it suggests that the active retaliation represented by the murder is itself, under the moral law of the Committee, egregious to the point of being non-representable.

[53] Ibrahim, 111-12.

[54] Ibrahim, 115.

[55] Ibrahim, 125-26.

[56] Ibrahim, 131.

[57] Ibrahim, 127.

[58] Ibrahim, 134

[59] Ibrahim, 136.

[60] See endnote number 63.

[61] Ibrahim, 137.

[62] Ibrahim, 138.

[63] Ibrahim, 141.

[64] Ibrahim, 142.

[65] Ibrahim, 143. The unvoweled Arabic participle in the original text can be read as either the passive *murʿabah* (*"*frightened") or the active *murʿibah* ("frightening"). St. Germain and Constable adopt the first reading, but I believe that the second reading is necessitated by the context, given the unsettling effect the sight of the women has on the narrator; the generally ominous character of owls in Arabic folklore; and the fact that the participle drawn from the same root and commonly used to mean "frightened" is *marʿūb* (Form I), not *murʿab* (Form IV).

[66] Ibrahim, 144-45.

[67] The phrase that appears in the original text—*yā imraʾah*, lit. 'woman'—is more bluntly

sexist than 'lady' when used as an interpellation.

[68] According to a recent survey conducted by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), around sixty-four percent of Egyptian women face sexual harassment on a daily basis, while sixty-two percent of Egyptian men readily admit to their sexual harassment of women (thus demonstrating the extent of the cultural impunity which sexual harassment enjoys).

[69] Ibrahim, 145-46.

[70] Ibrahim, 148.

[71] Ibrahim, 151.

[72] Ibrahim, 152.

[73] Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893—1930), who was imprisoned several times by the Soviet regime for his politically subversive writings and activities, was found dead on April 14, 1930, in what appears to be an assassination framed as a suicide by the Soviet authorities. In a sense, his end resembles that of the narrator, who is compelled by the obscure power of the Committee to enforce on himself the death sentence it had decreed, thereby eliminating all traces of the Committee's involvement.

[74] Ibrahim, 155.

[75] Ibrahim, 156.

[76] Ibrahim, 158.

[77] Mehrez, 127.

Conclusion

[1] Stephen Sheehi, "Desire for the West, Desire for the Self: National Love and the Colonial Encounter in an Early Arabic Novel," *North Carolina State University, Department of English*, http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v3i3/sheehi.htm, 12.

[2] Among others, Massad reads selected works by Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, Gamal El-Ghitani, and Ra'if Khury.

[3] Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 270.

[4] Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 271.

[5] See Aghacy, 14-15 for a critique of the allegorical model of literary criticism. For examples of

this model, see Amy Zalman, "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return in Two Novels by Ghassan Kanafani," in *Literature and Nation in the Middle East*, eds. Lisa Suhair Majaj et al. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 48-78; and Boutros Hallaq, "Love and the Birth of Modern Arabic Literature," in *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. Roger Allen et al. (London, Saqi Books, 1995), 16-23.