# Rhetoric of Body and/in Exile in Haydar's *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* & *Maraya al-Nar*:

# Against Transnational Narratives of Exile

Dima Hanna
Damascus, Syria

BA in English Literature, Damascus University, 2009
Postgraduate Diploma in Literary Studies, Damascus University, 2010

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Cultures

University of Virginia

May, 2016

**To the Root of my existence: Syria.**

**To the Womb of my being: Mom.**

## Table of Contents

## Foreword

It is important to mention here that what has prompted me to focus on the experience of exile is the tragic issue of Syrian refugees, which has turned into a variety of narratives, both personal and collective experiences. While the word 'exile' sounds a fancy term befitting the upper-class and intellectuals who are assigned their own personal solitary space for reflections over 'critical' issues in life, the word 'refugee' tends to connote feelings of pity and empathy over the collective experience of a group leaving their homeland.[1] While the first term triggers political and intellectual contexts and a sense of individuality, the second invokes humanitarian contexts, primarily social, regarding a community or more. However, refuge and exile still share one important characteristic: leaving homeland under fear of greater danger, and thus the experience of the past becomes one and the same.

With all its complex nature, the main issue that concerns me here in this paper is the re-presentation of the experience of leaving one's own country by force (in its various connotations) stripped from its aesthetic components that tend, most of the time, to add, and thus, change or embellish even the experience in its abstract situation. In the issue of Syrian refugees, a great deal of attention is directed towards these components, what I call aesthetic components, that are usually either political (such as the issue of border crossings), social (such as the inability to integrate within societies) or linguistic (their attempts to learn new languages).

Although primary causes in the refugees' suffering, these components create an aesthetic dimension that shifts the attention from the experience of being outside one's country to that of historical continuity, or progress, of human beings in exile. The important thing becomes the present and the future of refugees: a historical progress that often times blurs the past and pushes back the moment of leaving the country into a secondary status.

---

[1] See Edward Said's *Reflections on Exile* p. 181.

In this paper, I am analyzing exile (as this term would be more used to refer to the universal state of leaving one's own country unwillingly) in its 'savage' state of purity. The exile I am concerned with here is that image of birth which follows the separation from the mother but which precedes the difficult but aesthetic adaption of the child to the suffering, but luxury at the same time, of the law of the father.

I am examining in this paper two novels by the Syrian novelist Haydar Haydar. The first is *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, which has been known through its banning by Al-Azhar scholars, and the second is *Maraya al-Nar*, still mostly unknown to a wide range of readers. It is important to note here that Haydar Haydar in both novels has chosen to write about the exile of Iraqi young men in parts of *al-maghrib al-'arabi* (the western part of the Arab world, or North Africa) after a civil war, not very defined historically. The importance here becomes the similarity in the theme of the two novels on the one hand, and the theme itself of writing about the Arab homeland:, *al-Watan al-'arabi*, or *al-Umma al-'arabiyyah*, on the other. The broader theme of writing about the Arab homeland is represented by the encounter that takes place between the male who is uprooted from *al-mashriq al-'arabi* (the eastern part of the Arab world) and the female who is rooted in the western part, *al-maghrib al-'arabi*.

Although this paper focuses on the novelistic aesthetics employed by Haydar Haydar to depict the suffering of the body in exile, I personally and academically aim at unraveling the agency of the human body in the tragedy of exile. I hope that the analysis of these two novels adds not only to a human perspective into the scene of Syrian refugees and their suffering but also to a universal perspective in regards with scholarship in the field of exile, trauma and civil wars.

## Note on Translation

I took up the mission of translating the passages that I included in this paper since the two novels are not translated. I chose to include each passage in both English and Arabic to enable specialists to look at the two versions simultaneously. Furthermore, my choice of including both languages is intended to highlight some differences that might be of great value to the analysis of the two novels in question.

All of the passages taken from Said Al-Wakil's book *Al-Jasad Fī Al-Riwāyah Al-ʻArabīyah Al-Muʻāṣirah*, *The Body in Contemporary Arabic Novel*, are also translated by me.

**Abstract**

This paper aims at an analysis of the re-presentation of the body in the post-war exile by Haydar Haydar, a Syrian novelist who has reflected in two of his novels on the aftermath of internal wars in the Arab world through casting his two exiles in a space that assumes linguistic, social and national similarities to the homeland. These two novels, *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* and *Maraya Al-Nar,* have both been records for the post-war effects on the Arab youth who have fled the war in *al-mashriq al-'arabi* and have been cast in *al-maghrib al-'arabi*. This paper looks at the employment of the body and the encounter of male/female, *mashriqi*/*maghribi* bodies in exile as a vocalization of the agency of memory on exiled bodies. This paper attempts to redefine the agency of the body in exile through portraying it as the only, active tool in the individuals' suffering and in narrating exile. The agency of the body, as this paper attempts to show, is a technique of redefining exile as it purely and universally exists, divorced from linguistic or social aesthetic differences from the homeland. This separation highlights the suffering of post-war exile in that exile here challenges the transnational narrative of aestheticizing the experience of exile on the one hand. On the other hand, this separation aims to highlight the sole agency of the body as it becomes the only medium to document the suffering in exile. Suffering takes form in the imprisonment of the body in a forceful past and its constant desire to be united with it.

.

**Rhetoric of Body and/in Exile in Haydar's *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* & *Maraya al-Nar*: Against Transnational Narratives of Exile**[2]

The Arabic novel has played a great role in turning the physical and psychological violence of internal or civil wars in the Arab world from human bodies to textual bodies of narratives. The two bodies, human and textual, have collaborated together to produce a documentation of both history and of experience. One of the topics that the Arabic novel has depicted in relation with the psychological violence of internal wars has been the spatial forceful movement of the human body outside its land. In spite of the depiction of the trauma and suffering that inflict individuals, exile started to take up a different meaning within a transnational narrative. This transnational narrative takes from the cultural and linguistic integration and interaction that exile entails a launching point for a more hopeful concept of change that follows the act of separation from homeland. Thus, the focus shifted to a more psychological approach of dealing with the experience of exile.

This paper discusses the theme of exile from a different perspective through the analysis of the Syrian novelist Haydar Haydar's two novels: *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* and *Maraya al-Nar*. The two novels approach the theme of exile as a separation from a biological and organic surrounding as opposed to the modern cultural, social and economic aspects of defining exile. This depiction is carried through the images of the womb and the root that become recurrent in the two novels respectively. The journey of temporal and thus historical progress that exile starts to develop as a main theme in the transnational narrative, I argue, doesn't take place here due to the intentional absence of the element of difference between homeland and exile. This paper attempts to show how the exiled body is unable to move

[2] In this paper, I am using the term "transnational narrative of exile" to refer to a mode rather than literature. It is neither transnational literature nor exile literature that I am highlighting here. The transnational narrative of exile is intended to refer to the mode that tends to define, and sometimes confuse, the concept of exile within transnational interests of cultural synthesizing while ignoring the locality of tragic separation and suffering.

beyond its attachment to the womb and the root. I argue that this inability to progress temporally which characterizes exile in its pure image finds from the body the only remaining object and agent at the same time for registering the war and the post-war and exile memory. The comparison between these two novels, as this paper will show, aims to bring back the agency of the body and its politics in registering the post-war memory and trauma in exile, but also to highlight the suffering of the body that often goes unnoticed in transnational narratives.

**Introduction to *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* & *Maraya al-Nar*:**

In both *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* and *Maraya al-Nar*, Haydar narrates the exile of a young man who flees the civil war in *al-mashriq al-'arabi*, the Eastern part of the Arab world (particularly Iraq) and finds a resort in *al-maghrib al-arabi*, the Western part of the Arab world (North Africa). The reason behind exile for both characters is the violence they saw in their home country (Iraq). In *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, Mahdi flees the torture inflicted on him by the regime that suppressed the revolution. In *Maraya al-Nar*, in which the allusion becomes more general as to *al-mashriq al-'arabi* rather than Iraq in particular, Naji flees the genocide of his whole family and is, therefore, full of revenge.

The depiction of the experience of exile for the two main characters is narrated through the alternating interrelation between the past and the present. The past comes through flashbacks, while the present becomes philosophical, theological and political monologues performed by the main characters. The present is also carried through sexual encounters, or reflections on sexual encounters, between the male body from *al-mashriq* and the female body from *al-maghrib*. In both novels, the *mashriqi* main character meets with a *maghribiyya* female. Narration emanates from discussions about philosophy of religion, God, and homeland, but all is processed through sexuality of the body. The trauma of the male

characters is translated into sexual terms that become strongly integrated with the external and internal worlds. The politics of the novel in depicting post-war exile is carried through sexual politics that take place between the male exiles from *al-mashriq* and the females living in *al-maghrib*.

In both novels, exile is highlighted as taking place within the Arab homeland, *al-Watan al-'arabi* or *al-Umma al'arabiyya*. While particularity of naming Iraq as the homeland and Algeria as the country of exile takes place in *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, generality of the spatial theme of naming *al-mashriq al-'arabi* as the homeland and *al-maghrib al-'arabi* as the exile in *Maraya al-Nar* is striking. This generality comes not only to emphasize the same theme in the first novel; it also comes to bring the first novel with connection to the second into more elaborative scopes. The scopes start from the focus on *al-mashriq al-'arabi* as having the dangerous "germs" that might erupt at any moment not only destroying *al-mashriq* but threatening to contaminate *al-maghrib*. Although there is a great emphasis in both novels on the absence of the connections in terms of Arab nationalism between *al-mashriq* and *al-maghrib*, there is a great emphasis on a connection from another kind. Both Mahdi and Naji are described as "a germ" that threatens to contaminate *al-maghrib* when they arrive. Although it is never stated clearly what contamination both will carry to *al-maghrib*, the reader gets that sense that *al-mashriq* has a germ of violence, killing and revenge. The danger of this contamination becomes highly emphasized when sexual relationships between *al-mashriqi* and *al-maghribiyya* become a possibility, and thus this might entail not only the risk of contamination but also of a continuity of this contamination.

***Al-mashriq* & *Al-maghrib*:**

**Spatial Unity**

On one level, through this connection between *al-mashriq* and *al-maghrib*, Haydar seems to bring consciously to light the reconsideration of the concept of Arab nationalism and the problematic issues of the Arab homeland as one geographical and national entity that became prevalent under the spirit of *al-nahda*, or the renaissance. In each of these novels, the protagonist moves, or is exiled, from his country in *al-mashriq al-'arabi* to another Arab country in *al-maghrib al-'arabi*, and thus his spatial movement is highlighted as taking place within 'one' homeland that presumably shares the same language, culture and history. Despite that, both exiles describe themselves and are described by others as "strangers" or *ghuraba*' and they describe their condition as "estrangement" or *ghurba*. Haydar in this context directs a clear critique at this separation between Arab countries that should be united under one national and geographical unity.

Haydar's approach of spatial unity in focusing on Arab countries and excluding other foreign countries is seen by Muhsin Al-Musawi in his book *Islam on the Street* as a diversion from *al-nahda* that had already established the Arab Homeland in constant opposition and resistance to the Western hegemony. (110) While *al-nahda* strived for uniting the Arab homeland against Western powers, Haydar's novels come to mark an internal conflict. According to Al-Musawi, this *nahda*-paradigm is replaced by Haydar with another one: that of the conflict between the individual and the state. Al-Musawi states that Haydar's *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* in particular marks a difference from other novels in that:

> there is a deliberate swerve from those that characterize the *nahda* in terms of priority. Instead of selfhood versus or in relation to the West, there is now an engagement with nationhood, its various representations and channels,

> including the nation-state. The conflict is now between mass culture and the ideological nation-state apparatus. (110)

According to Al-Musawi, the old conflict that *al-nahda* has brought to Arabic literary texts and which takes place between the Arab individual and the Western powers is moved by Haydar to be within one Arab society: between the Arab individual and the Arab society or state. One of the significances, according to Al-Musawi, that this move symbolizes is the departure from the tradition of other Arabic novels that started earlier to follow the path dictated by *al-nahda* movement.

While Al-Musawi's location of Haydar's novels within the context of *al-nahda* explains the reasons of exile outside the home country, or *al-mashriq al-'arabi*, it still doesn't explain the reason why exile takes place in another part of *al-Watan al-'arabi*, namely *al-maghrib al-'arabi.* While it is true and clear that Haydar highlights a critique of the Arab states and of Arab Nationalism as a theory that doesn't find practice, Haydar's connection between *al-mashriq* and *al-maghrib* marks yet another highly important aspect of the portrayal of exile.

This aspect unravels through highlighting the obliteration of the dimensions of difference that establish the concept of exile such as language difference, difference of social and cultural traditions, and differences of history and modernity. In Haydar's two novels, the exile of the two characters strikes neither the exiles themselves nor the readers with any differences that the characters are accustomed to. The experience of exile becomes conveyed through the static situation of the exiles' bodies rather than the progressive journey of difference between the body and the new space. Through this obliteration of difference that is achieved through the connection between *al-mashriq* and *al-maghrib* within one cultural, linguistic, historical and social body, Haydar localizes, or nationalizes, the narrative of exile challenging, therefore, the transnational narrative of exile. Haydar's narrative of exile

becomes invested in emphasizing the tragedy of exile rather than the progressive cultural aspect in the transnational narrative.

**Transnational Narrative of Exile:**

Exile, in political and literary narratives, has been contextualized within a transnational narrative that is based on one basic dimension: crossing borders. The political meaning of the word 'borders' takes other different connotations. After crossing borders that separate geographical spaces, exiles are expected to cross other borders such as linguistic, cultural and economic ones. This takes place when the transnational narrative introduces the element of difference between homeland and exile. The narrative becomes revolving around the necessity of the person's change to assimilate into the new space or country in cultural, linguistic, social and economic terms. This narrative highlights suffering and progress as two composite terms for exile. In these narratives, while it is still painful and agonizing to move across borders, it is positively progressive both historically and personally.

However, the transnational narrative of exile has had some problematic characteristics in regards with the description of the process. One of these problems of the transnational narrative of exile is that it has usually tended to define exile as spatially moving, across borders, from a less developing country to a more developed one in a hierarchical cultural and social paradigm. As war erupts, exile has to take place in a space that is 'better' culturally, and thus the change assumes the same paradigm of change as a movement forward or upward. Furthermore, transnational narratives of exile follow a linear line of temporality that defines both a beginning and an end to the exile narrative. The beginning becomes the moment of entrance into the new space, while the ending becomes related with the occurrence of change. The ending becomes a happy one if change takes place, and it is tragic if change doesn’t happen. In this way, the transnational narrative of exile is linear in its depiction of the

progress of exile; it establishes a beginning that starts with the departure of the homeland and an end with the assimilation or integration within the new country. Also, the transnational narrative assumes that in crossing borders, or transgressing them, exile will bring a new, better narrative, and so exile becomes representative of the concept of a positive change. Within the logic of the transnational narrative of exile, the local suffering and experience of the body's departure from its local space becomes secondary to the more important transnational cultural dimensions.

**Theoretical Background:**

This spirit of crossing borders goes hand in hand with the spirit of modernity that started to dominate the Arab homeland with *al-nahda* and Western modernity and which takes from the concept of transgression a focal point in developing narratives that promise historical progress and continuity. In his book *Sweet Violence*, Terry Eagleton explains modernity in theological terms relating between modernity and the story of the Fall in theological and psychoanalytical terms. He starts this topic by setting the Fall as a movement upwards in human history. He, in other words, refers to the Fall of Adam and Eve as the event that started making human history. Although the Fall caused the Exile of Adam and Eve from Paradise on the one hand, and the endless suffering of man on the other, Eagleton sees it as a necessary event that started the history of man in the first place. As the Fall is about the sin that necessitated the punishment and Fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise and led to the historical human evolution, "transgression," for Eagleton, which is transgressing the limits put by God, becomes necessary for human history.

> Transgression is what makes historical beings of us, which is why the Fall is a felicitous one […] Without the dynamic which comes from trying to repair our condition and failing yet again, history would slide to a halt[…] a history of

> creative transgression is also the open possibility of overreaching and undoing ourselves. In being driven from Eden, we shift upward from the relative security of biological life to the chronic precariousness of the laboring, linguistic creature (244)

What has also accompanied sin in the Fall is Exile, another alternative word that carries the same connotations as the Fall: the Exile of Adam and Eve from Eden into the mortal world. For Eagleton, the sin that caused the Exile was important historically in making human history. Thus, the suffering that has resulted from Exile has a positive sense both theologically and historically. As Eagleton describes it, it is a Fall "up rather than down." (242) Furthermore, he also describes it in Freudian terms: it is the exile from "the relative security of biological life to the precariousness of the laboring, linguistic creature." Eden in this sense was the womb for Adam and Eve and the Exile constitutes birth: the turning point of history for each individual into a "laboring" and "linguistic creature." In this, Eagleton sees human suffering as represented by crossing borders or transgression a necessity for evolution. In other words, the suffering of Exile has meant crossing borders which entails a process of historical progress and continuity.

In "transgression," there is a highly important element that achieves this aesthetic effect of progress or evolution. The Exile of Adam has entailed huge differences between Paradise, the homeland, and earth, the new eternal exile. One large category of these differences is the change into a human life that carried with it death and sexuality: two contradictory terms one of which carries an ended linear path while the other meant a cyclical act of generation. Had it not been for this major difference, human history would not have been created by the Fall. Difference becomes a major component in the Exile of Adam and Eve to be considered as making history. Thus, within this context of exile, suffering and

difference, Eagleton establishes a transnational narrative of the Fall of Adam and Eve in that exile here becomes a positive moment in human history.

**Transgressing Borders:**

In his book *Reflections on Exile*, Edward Said makes the same observation regarding exile, in a discussion that is separate from theology and more limited within a political context, however. In this book, Said attributes a cultural advantage to exile through the element of difference: difference between two states of being. He provides the same description of transcending boundaries:

> For there is considerable merit in the practice of noting the discrepancies between various concepts and ideas and what they actually produce […] Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity. Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (185)

Exile, according to Said, achieves the leap over borders and becomes thus significant not only for the new country that is enriched culturally but also for the exiles themselves who cross both geographical, and thus cultural, and personal (both mental and physical) barriers. To understand and elaborate more on Said's positive cultural and personal perception, a comparative-based analysis is needed. With the difference that exile contains and integrates, the person moves from the past to the present. Although the process is done involuntarily, people in exile find themselves in a condition of comparison between the past and the present. Suffering characterizes this phase; Eagleton would also agree. However, due to "the intrinsically temporal nature of the comparative method," comparison, although tormenting, gives a sense of history, of past and present and an aspiration for the future: a condition necessary for human progress within a historical frame. (Melas, 15) It is "the obstinate

progress of ourselves." (Bernabe, Chamoiseau and Confiant 896) People in exile are under the force of historical progress: first from the past to the present, and second from the present to the future. It is the comparison within this "interplay" the exile imposes that creates an awareness of progress and historicity.

In order to have this difference and strengthen it, there is something that should anchor the person in the past. According to Said, it is the feeling of nationalism that "cannot" be "discussed neutrally" in separation from exile. (177) He defines nationalism as:

> An assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages. Indeed, the interplay between nationalism and exile is like Hegel's dialectic of servant and master, opposites informing and constituting each other. (176)

As Edward Said explains it, nationalism is an emotional resistance to the "ravages" of exile. Said sees both concepts, nationalism and exile, as two complementary, mutually exclusive "opposites." He explains later that "[a]ll nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement." (176) What can be inferred from Said's connection between nationalism and exile is that crossing barriers takes place in this friendly interaction (as Said describes it as "interplay") between nationalism and exile. Nationalism is defined in terms of the shared "community of language, culture and customs." As exile is defined as the opposite, it comes to represent the difference in language, culture and customs.

Within the theoretical approaches of both Eagleton and Said, exile comes to represent a condition of moving forward. The apparatus for this movement is a difference that creates a sense of comparison and history. Even though tormenting, the change that exile entails is promising in cultural, personal and even political terms. What the transnational narrative of exile entails is suffering and progress taken as one and the same. Thus, as the transnational

narrative becomes immersed in the linear, progressive temporality and spatiality, it tends to ignore the body as an agent in the process of exile and crossing borders and its suffering. The body, in other words, becomes the untold story of suffering in these narratives.

**Challenging the Transnational Narrative of Exile:**

The context that Haydar sets for his two novels becomes a challenge to the transnational narrative of exile that is based on difference and on crossing borders. The rhetoric of Arab nationalism that Haydar highlights in both novels is, in the same way that Said talks about, a tool not only to critique the lack of the Arab nationalist spirit but also to assert the similarity between homeland and exile. This becomes significant in terms of the space that Haydar sets as the new space for exile which is *al-maghrib al-'arabi* and which is supposed to be similar to a large degree to *al-mashriq al-'arabi*, the homeland. The relation between homeland and exile is characterized by similarity rather than difference. In setting a spatial exile that is not only geographically but socially, religiously and historically similar to the homeland, Haydar sets his narratives within a local context that challenges the transnational one.

Progress, thus, becomes impossible for the characters in exile as they become trapped in a cycle that brings back the past. In this way, Haydar challenges another dimension of the transnational narrative. He replaces the linear temporal line of the transnational narrative by introducing a cyclical temporality. This theme appears in the depiction of the perpetual suffering after becoming aware of losing the land through focusing on the cyclical temporal line between the two points of departure and loss on the one side, and the events that had taken place before on the other. Flashbacks come to revive the past and the moment of departure while keeping it in relation with the seemingly never-ending trauma. The present for both characters becomes inexistent under the burden of mourning the lost past and a desire to return to it. Exile in both novels becomes an endless wandering that is torn between the

desire to go back and the inability to do so. The temporal linear order of events disappears as flashbacks from the past interfere with the present moment of the character. Both exiles' perspective of the past doesn't follow the logical linear temporality of the transnational narrative. Their last resort becomes the one and only moment of the first land, or the origin, that takes a different form in each novel. Both characters from the two novels are trapped in this destined position of a desire towards the lost past and the inability to proceed in the present.

In Haydar's two novels, this cyclical temporal line of events that keeps taking both characters back to the past and that increases their suffering is also represented by the existence of the female body. In Haydar's novels, the body constitutes not only the main but the only space in which suffering takes place, another dimension that diverts from the transnational narrative of exile. It becomes the body of the male exile surrounded or influenced by the body of the female. Although the use of the body is not new in the Arabic novel, Haydar's use of body in the two novels marks a difference. The image of the female body is usually associated with the land of exile to represent "an escape, illusion, or forgetfulness_ as does exile." (Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel*, 36-37) The symbolism of the female body that connotes continuity through her sexuality turns into an aspect of exile that freezes and fixates both characters from the novels in the past. While exile for Haydar's characters becomes conveyed and interpreted through the idea or image of the encounter between the male and the female bodies, this encounter is seen as threatening in its relation with the past. The female body threatens to conjure up the hidden memory in the body and to bring it in confrontation with two male characters in exile.

One of the most important aspects is that Haydar's challenge to the transnational narrative becomes his focus on the separation from the homeland rather than the entrance into the new land. While the transnational narrative takes from the entrance into exile its starting

point, Haydar's novels highlight the pre-exile events as the beginning of experience. His novels look for the source and the beginning rather than the progress and the end. In Haydar's novels, there is no end as both characters constantly return to the beginnings.

Furthermore, Hydar's novels don't introduce a 'hopeful' context for his characters, as does Eagleton in his interpretation of exile or as does Said interprets the cultural progress of exile. On the contrary, the two themes of losing the land and the female in the new land become accomplices rather than alternatives in the increase of his suffering. The encounters between the male/female bodies and the politics that govern these encounters and the rhetoric of the body in its relation with the outer body, both past and present, divert from the transnational narrative of depicting exile and the passiveness of the body.

***Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr:***

"منغمران. تحت شجرة الجسد الفواح. رأس طفل يتغلغل في

صدر أمه. وذراعا طفلة تطوق أباً عائداً من سفر طويل. " (173)

"In each other's hands, under the body's tree,

a child's head immersed in his mother's breast

and the arms of a baby girl embracing a father returning

from a long journey. "(173)

The events of Haydar's acclaimed novel *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* take place in Algeria which instead of celebrating the liberation from the French colonization is suffering from postcolonial deterioration in terms of human ethics and social relationships. Greed and sexuality in postcolonial Algeria are depicted as two dominant themes that have taken a diverted direction after the high morals and ethics that the revolution had called for.

The novel discusses mainly two separate plots that intersect and turn into one main plot which unfolds in Algeria. The first is about the exile of a group of young men from Iraq and other Arab countries from *al-mashriq al-'arabi* in a village called Bonah. The main character in this plot is Mahdi, an Iraqi revolutionary figure who was forced, along with others, to flee from Iraq after the violent suppression of their communist revolution. He and the others choose Algeria, a country in *al-maghrib al'arabi,* to reside in for reasons unknown to the reader. Although Mahdi is the main character, the reader is introduced to other Arab young men who flee from *al-mashriq al-'arabi* to Noba, and whose stories and fate are not very different from that of Mahdi. Mahyar is one of the secondary characters who, unlike Mahdi, has a clear religious background and who resides in a house owned by Fulla, a woman who had witnessed the revolution and the post-revolution. She is now turned into a woman who is only occupied with satisfying her sexual needs as well as others'. The second plot is that of Assia, an Algerian young woman whose father was killed at the hands of the French

mandate's soldiers. Her mother married another man under whose house Assia, her sister as well as her mother live like prisoners.

The narrative swings, like the characters themselves, between the past and the present which interchangeably influence each other. The present becomes burdened with the memories of the violent past, and the past becomes burdened with the failure of the present. The meeting point between the two plots and which becomes the main plot is the relationship between Mahdi and Assia. Mahdi, whose name means the rightly-guided, meets Assia, whose name refers back to an old Greek Mythological character after whom the continent of Asia is allegedly named. While throughout the novel the reader gets the sense of the ironic assignment of this name to Mahdi, Assia turns out to be, as the name suggest, the surrogate homeland for Mahdi, but a homeland that in resembling his lost homeland invokes fear and anxiety.

The relationship between Mahdi and Assia evolves as Assia asks Mahdi to teach her Arabic. Assia shows a passionate desire to embrace the language of her Arab ancestors which she was deprived from during the French colonization of Algeria; Mahdi accepts to teach her the language. The progress of the linguistic and cultural debates between the two witnesses a development of a personal, emotional and a sexually tense one. Mahdi, the *mashriqi* young man burdened with the violent past of the war in Iraq, and Assia, the *maghribiyyah* young woman burdened with the postcolonial reality and the death of her father on the hands of the French, find in each other a revival of the longing to the past. Although the role of the past for each becomes different in their embrace of the present and the development of their identities, both Mahdi and Assia retreat back to the past in their inability to live in the present.

**Cyclical Time:**

The novel is divided into four chapters, each representing a season of the year: "Fall," "Winter," "Spring" and end with "Summer." Between spring and summer, there are "Marshes", "Love', "Death Anthem" and "The Emergence of Leviathan." Sa'eed Al-Wakil in his book *The Body in the Contemporary Arabic Novel* sees that the division of the novel into four seasons in this novel "parallels the four seasons. These seasons carry all of the contradictions and fluctuations that seasons witness: frost, fire, stillness, starting, death, resurrection, pleasure, pain […]" (154) While it is true that each season carries the contradiction of life, the rupture between "Spring" and "Summer" is a rupture of the normal cycle of seasons. This disruption of the chronological, temporal order of seasons, which presumably reflects the external world of the narrative, parallels the same temporal disruptions of the internal world of the characters who revert back to the past unconsciously.

The novel approaches the cycle of life in many other aspects, as Al-Wakil observes in his book. He interprets the linguistic structure of the use of the letter "و" that every chapter starts with as symbolic for "continuity" which reflects a cyclical moment. (154) This, as Al-Wakil alludes, goes in contradiction with the continuity of the revolution. While the revolution in Iraq constitutes an important part of the narrative, the cyclical division of the novel which ends with summer doesn't reflect the continuity of the revolution that ended abruptly. (155) Thus, the novel performs a stylistic alternation of cyclicality and rupture.

Thematically, this mimesis of "life's cycle" by the novel is further supported by the continuity of the past and its revival in the present and the allusion to the continuity of the present into the future. The plot takes the form of a non-linear movement that keeps bringing the past in the form of "ghosts," or flashbacks, to the present. This non-linear movement of time characterizes the post-war trauma implemented in Mahdi and the other revolutionary men's minds on the one hand, and the hopelessness that surrounded them after the failure on

the other. Mahdi and the other Arab young men are trapped in a pending space between the revolution, the beginning of the revolution, the end of revolution and the moment they left Iraq on the one hand, and the endless present that seems to surround them from all sides on the other. It also features the mentality of Algerians who were disappointed with what followed the expulsion of the French from Algerian lands. Assia and Fulla are described as full of memories from the past and regret about the present.

Biological structures that are related to the body start to occupy a great space in the characters' thinking. Religious and political cycles in the world become related and are seen as blood cycles of the human body. The blood needed for the body to continue its biological life is confused with the blood that has been shed in wars and with the blood of the female's body at birth. The image of the first womb that is so vibrant with blood and sexual appetite is so vivid in Mahdi's description of belonging. Although both have suffered the atrocities of wars, Mahdi's exile becomes Mahdi's separation from the womb, or the suffering of birth. The image of the womb is integrated within the experience of the suffering of Mahdi's exile. The womb becomes Iraq, the paradise he was expelled from, and which becomes the womb of his mother from where he emerged to life. Both processes intermingle together and enlarge when Mahdi meets Assia, the female possessing the womb and who still lives in her homeland that is seen as a womb, even if it was raped before. Thus, the world becomes as seen through the lens of the body and its cycles.

This cyclical collaboration between the stylistics of the novel and the themes themselves is a depiction of the agency of the cyclical temporality of the suffering of exile. The image of the womb becomes a symbol for an endlessly generative power that promises a cyclical continuation of suffering. The abrupt disruption of cyclicality that takes place every now and then plays the role of intensifying the effects of the non-ended tragic cyclical temporality. Whenever there is a disruption, the cycle comes to surprisingly resume its path.

The disruption also plays the role of foreshadowing Mahdi's desire to disrupt this torturing cycle of his suffering. Unlike the linear narrative of assimilation and change, the cyclical narrative that Mahdi is going through and which is characteristic of exile, as Haydar draws it, is not promising, but eternally destructive. The body with its cyclical biological capacities is left in this un-ended relation with the cyclical world around him.

**Post-colonialism & Post-war Exile:**

In this novel, Haydar depicts exile within the borders of national and cultural unity that immediately challenges the transnational narrative of exile. However, Haydar doesn't only focus on the similarities between the spatial contexts. He also highlights the theme of post-war exile in Iraq alongside the theme of post-colonialism in Algeria. Algeria in *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* becomes the center for two important contexts: post-colonialism and post-civil-war exile. This connection between civil wars and exile vis-à-vis post-colonialism has been one of the dominant haunting themes in Arabic novels that depict wars or post-war traumas. In her book *War's Other Voices*, Miriam Cooke discusses the novels that were written about the civil war in Lebanon. In looking at these novels, Cooke highlights how the issue of colonized lands in the Arab world has played a big role in creating a general tendency in the Arab writers to situate the topics of civil wars vis-à-vis the idea of the liberation from colonization. This realization of both colonization and civil wars in the Arab world, according to Cooke, has created a literary tradition that has produced a "despairing literature of existential quest and anger became the dominant mode." (87)

In *Walimah li-a'sha al-bahr,* one of the reasons that Haydar brings together *al-mashriq al-'arabi* vis-à-vis *al-maghrib al-'arabi* is to bring together the two themes of civil wars and post-colonialism as two political and social dilemmas that the Arab world is suffering from. The two themes together produce the "despairing" spirit "of existential quest and anger" that

not only focuses on one dimension of war and the post-war exile, but that rather partly discusses multiple issues. (89) In remembering the war, Mahdi conjures up the issue of the religious beliefs which to him look like mere myths and superstitions. In his repeated monologues, Mahdi brings out philosophical social, religious, political and psychological inherent issues. His exile turns into a reflection on the reasons and the results of events that go beyond the war and exile to issues of existence and of conceptualizing God and religious beliefs. He blames the society that advocated community upheld ideas, which are components of allowing wars to happen.

While it is true that post-colonialism is a haunting theme in Haydar's novel that conjures the issue of the wider context of the problems in the Arab homeland, this connection between the two themes of exile after civil wars and post-colonialism isn't restricted only within this contextualization. It also aims to bring out a sharp comparison-and-contrast paradigm between the two contexts: a way to highlight the suffering and the agony of exiles outside their lands. Although both contexts are depicted as similar spatial contexts that both have suffered in different ways, the suffering of Mahdi as a post-war exile stands out throughout the novel. Through the contextualization of the situations of both Mahdi and Assia, Haydar highlights the particularity of Mahdi's suffering as an exile. As *al-maghrib al-'arabi* was forced to forget Arabic history and language and as pan-Africanism might achieve a split in the Arabic identity of Algeria, highlighting the differences between the two becomes a way to highlight the dilemma of exiles. It also sheds more lights on the idea of exile as internally created rather than created merely by spatial difference. This comparison-and-contrast paradigm between Mahdi and Assia is represented by the relation of each to the past, and the relation of each to their conception of the body and its agency.

**The Past:**

One of the aspects that this comparison between post-colonialism and post-war exile highlights is the relation of each to the past. Assia, who has been forced to forget her language and her culture under colonization, establishes a strong bond with the past. The past comes into Assia's memory voluntarily and willingly and becomes, therefore, a bridge for continuity into the present and the future, while the past for Naji comes unwillingly and becomes a source of torture and imprisonment for him. This becomes significant as Haydar highlights the politics of the role of the past on exiles who cannot proceed or form a journey of progress as long as they are trapped in the past.

Although the narrative brings out the pasts of all of the characters, there are clearly two broad categories for two explicit pasts represented by the past of Mahdi and that of Assia. The humiliating-torturing past of Mahdi is contrasted with the glorious past of Assia. Mahdi's past is polluted with the torture of him and his friends and his sad departure, while Assia's past revives the glory of the resistance of Algeria against the French colonization during which her father was killed. While Mahdi's past is forcefully conjured and indicates suffering, Assia's past is willfully turned into a hopeful outlet through her hopeful desire for "the return of the martyred father."

_كم كان عمرك يومذاك؟

_خمس سنوات.

_وعمر البابا؟

ترفع وجهها نحو وجه مهدي. تصمت قليلا ثم تغمض عينيها. يرف الطيف الماضي ويشجب. الحاضر والماضي يشتبكان في محرق اشعة. ...

عندما تشرق الشمس في صباح خريفي، يدخل من النافذة الزرقاء شعاع يداعب اجفان اسيا الحالمة بعودة الاب الشهيد.

وهي تفتح عينيها تفاجئها لوحة لوجه غريب، تنعكس مع اشعة الشمس. واضحا تراه كانما لاول مرة.

_ كان في مثل عمرك الان. (67)

_ How old were you then?

_Five years.

_And your father?

_She raises her face towards Mahdi's. She keeps silent and then closes her eyes. She sees the past flying in front of her. The present and the past come together in the fire rays.

When the sun rises on a fall morning, a ray enters the blue window and open Assia's eyes, dreaming about the return of the martyred father.

When she opens her eyes, a painting for a strange face reflect through the sunrays surprises her. She sees it clearly as if she was seeing it for the first time.

_He was your age now. (67)

Mahdi in the present represents the reincarnation of her dead father from the past. As Mahdi comes to represent the martyred father for her, Assia's past is brought willingly into the present and they both, the past and the present, intersect in Mahdi's body. This also carries within it a sense of hopeful continuation. The past, although reminiscent of her father's death, is linked with the present and gives her an aspiration for the future.

وتحلم آسيا بالأخضر في الليالي القمرية قادماً من قلب الغابات ممنطقاً ببندقية وقطع الشوكولا وفساتين الساتان والألعاب.

ثم تندب: لا بد أن يعود. سي العربي نائم وسيفيق. صليل صوتها المفجوع يصل شعاب الجبال الأصمّ. ووجهها يكسوه الدمع. (97)

Assia dreams of the return of "Al-akhdar" coming from the heart of forests with a gun, chocolate, satin dresses and toys on lunar nights.

> Then she whines: He must return. Si-Al'arabi is asleep and he will wake up. The echo of her ached voice reaches the mute mountain tracks while her face is covered with tears. (97)

Although she sees in Mahdi the martyred father at the present moment, Assia still clings to the hope that her father "will" still come back: a continuation of the desire and aspiration into the future. Her attachment to the return of the martyred father through the existence and the body of Mahdi brings together the past, present and future. This comes in contrast to Mahdi whose past doesn't give him any sense of hopeful continuation. His present time in exile doesn't play the same bridging role between the past and the future as does the present of Assia who hasn't left her country. Although both pasts contain violence and death, the difference becomes the state of exile that Mahdi has found himself in and which cannot provide him with the same sense of continuity or aspiration that the present of Assia, who hasn't left her country, is giving her. Mahdi is unable to bridge his past with his present; he still lives the trauma of the past, and the present is a tragic result and continuation or reinforcement of the past rather than a separate temporal context of continuation.

**Language between Progressive Past and Ended Present:**

In the continuation of establishing an exile that deviates from the transnational narrative, Haydar twists the element of learning language. The linguistic dimension in *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* plays a major role in the sharp contrast between the post-colonial and exile contexts and which Haydar aimed at highlighting to underscore the suffering in exile. There is a role reversal in learning a second language between Mahdi and Assia. Assia who reads Simon de Bouvior and who had learnt and continues to speak French language, sees in Arabic not only the most sublime connection with her lost heritage but also the most efficient resistance to the French colonization who, in her words:

غرسوا في ذاكرتنا أن المسلمين والعرب كانوا غزاة وفاتحين. استعمروا اسبانيا وصقلية ووصلوا إلى بواتييه. كانوا يؤكدون لنا أن القرآن مأخوذ عن الإنجيل والتوراة واللغة العربية لغة دين وشعر لا لغة علم، وهذا سبب تخلف العرب في العلوم والحضارة الحديثة. (37)

had planted in our memory that Muslims and Arabs were colonizers, that they colonized Spain and Sicily and reached Poitier. They were assuring us that the Qur'an was derived from the Bible and the Old Testament and that Arabic is a language of religion and poetry not suitable for science, and that is why Arabs are still behind in sciences and modern civilization. (37)

She describes the forced abandonment of Arabic language as "exiled language" (37) and which, according to her, belongs to "the cultural colonization that is harsher than both the political and economic colonization." (37) With the forceful one-language learning, which is distanced from the history and the culture, the French mandate has brought history to a halt. Assia's desire to reclaim the origin and the past of her Arab identity becomes an attempt to reclaim the past into the present: a case of progress and of historical continuity brought about by learning Arabic besides French. Assia's desire to bring back the past that resists the allegations of the French colonization becomes another reality that competes with the other present reality that surrounds her.

Through the depiction of Assia's attempts to learn her native language while in her native country, Haydar reverses the role of those in exile and the indigenous inhabitant. The linguistic element that normally contributes to the process of change in the transnational narrative becomes that of the Algerian who hasn't left the center, while Mahdi, in exile, is deprived of that element. Moreover, he takes up the role of teaching Assia his native language, Arabic. With this Haydar makes Mahdi undergo a process of exile that doesn't carry with it any linguistic change. Exile here fixates Mahdi in the past in a static situation that cannot move forward.

It also becomes a manifestation of the split that takes place between exile and the lost land under trauma. While Mahdi is still in possession of Arabic language, he attempts to lose the connection with the Arabic history and the Arab culture, while Assia is willing to re-connect with them. This is significant for Haydar aims to highlight the problematic relation between exiles and language. In the transnational narrative, learning a second language becomes a basic attribute of the change process for exiles. The split that takes place in exile between the person and their native language usually goes unnoticed in the attempts to start teaching new languages. It becomes a forceful one-language environment for exiles, similar to that of colonialism, and it further detaches exiles from their native language.

**The Female Body in Postcolonial Algeria:**

The second aspect of this comparison-and contrast paradigm between Mahdi and Assia is in relation with the conceptualization of the body. Locating both the post-war exile, Mahdi, and the post-colonial Algerian, Assia, in one space, the two develop conceptions of their bodies different from each other. These conceptions develop further in terms of the relation between the conception of the body and that of the self on the one hand, and the relation between the self and the other on the other hand. For both Mahdi and Assia, the civil war and post-colonialism have created a conflict between them as individuals and between the broader context, whether it was a group of individuals, society, or country. The relation between the individual and the group is defined in terms of shared origin, language, history and suffering. The last two become highly important in the individual's sense of belonging to the group in the postcolonial society.In contextualizing both contexts within one, Haydar highlights the suffering of the exiled body in a way different from that of the transnational narrative of exile.

In postcolonial Algeria, the female body, or rather the conceptualization of the female body, becomes a symbol for the corruption of the souls and the deterioration of the aspirations

of post-colonial state and society. As Algeria becomes liberated from the French mandate, Algerian society falls into ethical and social deterioration represented by greed on the one hand, and sexual domination over the female body on the other. The female body becomes the only land for the male to appoint himself a conqueror of. Fulla is an example of how her body has been turned into a land on which men retrieve their sense of lost victory and glory. She becomes sexually used, but satisfied, in allusion to her disturbed sexuality and relationship with her body. Men, on the other hand, are described as capable only of one victory: sexual. Assia in this society becomes an incarnated example of the land owned by Algeria and that should be kept intact for Algerian men. Mahdi faces great hatred when Algerians see him with Assia, and Assia defines this attitude as the fear of Algerians from having 'strangers' taking the bodies of Algerian females. She further explains this as a result of the long history of colonization of the land of Algeria.

Her endeavors to continue in life become attempts to balance between her individual self and broader 'body' or plurality of bodies that she perceives as engulfing her body. She becomes attached to a broader context of bodies: her mother, sister, other people in Bonah and to the larger body of Algeria itself, which is described as "the womb." Thus, Assia conceptualizes herself and her body in relation with the broader body of Algeria and with the laws of other bodies that live and control Algeria. Assia's perspective of herself and which resulted from the perception of her body is reflected through the perspective from which she speaks which is always the perspective of the other. Mahdi recognizes this split in her character when he addresses her:

ماذا أريد منك؟ ما تريدينه أنت. أن تكوني قناعاتك. ألا تنقسمي مثلهنَ فيكون في داخلك امرأتان. واحدة حرة والأخرى عبدة. كيف ترتضين أن تكوني جريئة خائفة، صادقة وكاذبة في آن؟ (54)

> What do I want from you? It is what you want. To be what you believe in. Not to be divided into two like other women: one free and the other a slave. How can you accept to be brave and scared, honest and a liar at the same time?

Mahdi sees Assia as divided into two selves: the internal self, that is who she wants to be, and the external self, that is derived from who the others want her to be. According to Mahdi, Assia needs to be different from the others who are divided into two selves. She needs to have one self: the internal one that agrees with her own beliefs and convictions. This struggle between the internal self and the external self becomes a struggle in post-colonialism context and it is symbolic for the struggle to balance between the individual and the larger community. In his book *Arab Culture and the Novel: Genre, Identity and Agency in Egyptian Fiction*, Muhammad Siddiq talks about what he calls "the search for a collective identity" in some Arabic novels that portray this struggle between the individual and the larger contexts: religion, community and nationalism. According to Siddiq,

> In cultures where the search for a collective identity is still unfolding, including modern Arab culture, individual characters often assume symbolic dimensions that gesture past the individual towards broader horizons of religious, communal, or national identity. Such symbolic transactions are enacted with solemn regularity in a considerable number of Arabic novels. (7)

Siddiq captures the essence of this struggle, and he subtly refers to the reasons for the loss or even the inexistence of "the collective identity" in those cultures, particularly the "modern Arab culture." Modernity, or rather the path to modernity and civilization, in postcolonial countries has raised this level of this struggle between the individual and the larger community, or "the broader horizons." The conflict that *al-nahda* brought was between the Western external society on the one hand, and the Arab internal society on the other. Post-colonialism conforms sensibly to this dialogical relation and the individual becomes aware of

the internal society. As the relation develops in terms of these two poles, the internal self of the individual, like Assia, is described as being torn in this struggle.

However, although this split is described negatively by Mahdi, this modern idea of dependence on others has given Assia a sense of hope to continue in life. Her care about the people around her, like her mother and sister, and even her fear of her people in the same place gave her a sense of the importance of continuity. In addition to the 'present others' in the life of Assia, there is the 'past other' which gives her hope in life. Her attachment to the glorious past of the revolution, her desire to gain back her language and culture and her constant hope of the return of her martyred father has also made her able to get a historical sense for aspiration to continue. This aspiration in having a past, present and future is contrasted with the imprisonment of Mahdi in the past: unable to return to it and unable to let go of it.

**Post-war, Exiled Body:**

Unlike the attachment of Assia's body,and self, with that of Algeria and Bonah society, Mahdi perceives his body as dehumanized and rejected from what was once an enveloping body. In comparing between his state as an exile and Assia's state as living in her country, Mahdi says:

"تحت سماء من المطر، وسماء من اللمعان. وهي المحمية بغلاف من البلازما، والدم، والنسيج المخاطي: بونه.

الرحم.

وهو المرمى في التيه المترامي بعد أن قذف به الجسد مادة غريبة عنه." (109)

"Under sky of rain and sky of sparkles. She, protected with a layer of plasma, blood and mucous tissue: Bonah.

The womb.

He, thrown in the void after he was ejaculated as a strange substance." ( 109)

In Arabic the verb قذف *qadhafa* can be used to mean both "throw" or "ejaculate". The use of the body, or *al-jasad*, which isn't given any specific gender makes it difficult to interpret what Mahdi meant when he described his exile from Iraq. Although it might connote the image of the male body ejaculating, it can also invoke the image of the female body while giving birth. In the first case, it indicates that Mahdi has been "ejaculated out of the body" as if to indicate that at that moment that homeland turned into a body "ejaculating" and Mahdi was a strange material that needed to be outside. It also invokes the act of masculinizing the homeland, which is depicted as a male body, in a way that asserts the harshness of it in expelling Mahdi. In the case of the female body, however, even though femininized in order to give it a more tender mother-like image, the birth takes an inhuman form as he is thrown out of it violently unwanted. Also the use of the word مادة, material, is significant in how he sees himself as dehumanized in the process of exile.

In relation with how he perceives himself and his body after exile, Mahdi clings to the individuality of his body and its separation from all other contexts. He endeavors to give the priority to the individual body/self. He becomes an independent unity that cares and is responsible only for itself. For Mahdi, Assia, who still lives in her country even though she suffered colonization and the death of her father is protected like the baby in the womb of its mother. As Assia still lives in the mother womb, she hasn't lost the connections with her mother womb, with the larger horizon and place she lives in. She is still attached to the womb with the chord. His perspective of Assia's belonging to Algeria is that of the belonging of a fetus to its mother's womb. He believes that Assia hasn't been born yet; hasn't suffered the separation from mother in the process of birth, while he describes his separation from Iraq as a dehumanized separation.

وفي تلك الليلة تحدث عن تحطيم الأوثان التي أقامها الآباء والأجداد، وضرورة الانفصال عن الدين والله، والأخلاق والتقاليد، واالأزمنة الموحلة، والجنة والجحيم الخرافيين، وطاعة أولي الأمر والوالدين، والزواج المبارك بالشرع، وسائر الأكاذيب والطقوس التي رسمتها دهور الكذب.( 192)

> And that night, he talked about destroying the idols that ancestors had established, the necessity of separating the self from religion and God, morals and tradition, the muddy past times, the mythical heaven and hell, obeying rulers, parents and lawful marriage, and all other lies and rituals falsely created by ages. (192)

Mahdi wanted to cut himself off from the surrounding contexts, and so he is left with his own body which starts to betray him towards the end both physically and sexually. The dilemma with Mahdi is that he finds himself forcefully detached from the present, while he is forced to be attached to the past. Mahdi, the communist individualist, calls for the necessity of separating oneself from all that had been formed either in concept or in practice in times gone by. His rejection of the broader body or bodies that make up the broader contexts is based on their temporal invalidity. The past, for him, is deceptive as it has imposed these contexts around man on the present moment. However, Mahdi's belief in separating the body from the broader context is unreliable. On the one hand, this disbelief in the past started to develop after his own exile. On the other, he still clings to the return of the womb: the past and the broader context.

While Assia, 'the unborn,' is aware of the law of the father and behaves accordingly, Mahdi, 'the newly born,' in the most dehumanized way, is in a state of fake denial of the law of the father, and thus to his being as surrounded by a community. Although Mahdi keeps talking about his firm belief in the internal self in opposition to the external self and in the importance of separation from the group, we find him helpless in the confrontation with everybody else in Bonah and surrenders to their law. He gets expelled from his apartment for

having a female student with him alone in the same house and whenever Assia tells him about the possibility of them being killed by the people of Bonah if they see them together, he surrenders forcefully. While Assia's dilemma is surrendering to the power of the group over her internal self, Mahdi's dilemma is his fake denial of this conflict due to another split he is suffering from.

Mahdi himself talks about "fake consciousness" as opposed to "real consciousness". Fake consciousness, he believes, is what society creates in individuals due to the laws and constraints that are internalized in their mentalities. As a result consciousness is mistaken to be real, of one's own making while in reality it is made for them. For Mahdi, the case is that Assia has this fake consciousness shaped as fear from society. Mahdi, on the other hand, suffers from another fake consciousness that was imposed on him. While Mahdi rejects the past and denounces it, he is in constant longing to the womb: both biological, the moment before his birth, and symbolic, his homeland, Iraq. Exile for him marks the moment of birth, which if taken symbolically, had taken place prematurely as a result of his forceful expulsion from the country under the fear of death and torture. Exile produces a feeling of premature birth and separation from the mother that no other space will be sufficient enough to embrace the child again.

However, what took place here is that Mahdi developed a fear of the womb as well. As his perception of exile took a dehumanized manner, Mahdi became both longing to be embraced by the womb again and fearful of it at the same time. The female body in this novel doesn't represent forgetfulness or an alternative for the exile anymore. The female body becomes a symbol for memory and fear.

**Return to the Womb**

Mahdi, the recently separated from his mother womb when exiled, turns his exile into a reflective journey that ponders on philosophical, theological and national issues. The ghosts of the past that attack him, and his remembrance of the past and present events in Iraq and Algeria have compelled him to draw a historical line of thought about the political situation of the Arab world. Reflections are made in the present after separation from the homeland. Furthermore, it is only through meeting Assia has Mahdi started to realize his separation from the womb, to realize his own birth. These reflective thoughts and the journey represent the intellectual progress that Mahdi is going through. He even acknowledges at first the importance of this separation:

فكّر بأن هذا الانفصال ربما كان ضروريا لاستنشاق هواء غير ملوث (16)

He thought that this separation might be necessary to breathe unpolluted air. (16)

In the same way birth is important to start a new historical moment, exile here represented at first a new beginning. Exile here even gave Mahdi a sense of the past that he would never have thought about it had he stayed in Iraq. However, the past that was brought up to Mahdi, unlike the past that Assia brought up, came to a halt. Naji was imprisoned within the walls of the past that didn't find a progressive different path to take. In addition to absence of a new language, in his life in Algeria Mahdi was reminded of his country, of the tragedy of the lost land. The 'sameness' that accompanied his exile has resulted in the endurance of the past that he fled from. The only path left for Mahdi is pre-past, or pre-history, or the return to the womb. Mahdi's narrative, and the narrative of his exile in *al-maghrib al-'arabi* ends with Mahdi's suicide.

على الرمل يتعرى ثم يصعد صخرة. يتنفس بعمق، الهواء الرطب، وباندفاعة طائر يقذف جسده إلى البحر. (378)

> On the sands he undresses, climbs a rock, breathes deeply the fresh, humid air and with a rush similar to a bird he throws his body into the sea. (378)

Mahdi chooses to end his life by throwing himself in the sea. The verb قذف, throw, entails opposite contexts of power and self-assertion on the one hand and dehumanization on the other. The use of the verb قذف here comes in relation with the use of the verb that he uses earlier to describe the dehumanizing way of his separation from Iraq. While the same verb was used to connote a sense of dehumanization in being thrown out of his homeland body, it also came to highlight his passivity in the act. In his use of the same verb here, however, in describing the action of attempting to go back, Mahdi turns this passive action into a willful one to end his life. The use of the same verb in describing the act of separation and that of return, highlights the agency of Mahdi's body in the process. While it was the only tool to suffer separation, it is in the same way the only agent left to fight that. In preparation of his return to the womb, Mahdi gets naked, flies and meets the womb of the seas. As Al-Wakil states, the act of flying is also highly important as it indicates freedom, and thus power. According to Al-Wakil, "[d]espite Mahdi's fear of the sea, it turns out to be his last resort and his spacious space where he throws himself to die hoping to get into the eternal life cycle through the sea womb." (187) In the schism between the mortal body that dysfunctions both sexually and politically on the one hand, and the immortal temporality of his exile, Mahdi chooses to give the body to the immortal cycle of the sea life.

While the post-colonial context has produced the desire of the return of the other's body, post-civil war exile has produced the desire of the return of the body itself. Mahdi's longing to return to the past that is represented by his desire to return to the womb is not spatial, for "[t]he past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. It has become… a kind of temporal central casting…" (Appaduai, 30) Mahdi's desire is a return to a moment before the past that still surrounds him. The womb becomes the symbol of that which

precedes life: pre-history. Thus he longs to the ceased past rather than the progressive, endless present of exile.

One important distinction between Assia and Mahdi's cases in this novel through bringing the postcolonial and the internal wars and exile is the womb. In Assia's case of colonialism, it was the desire of the return *of* the womb, of Algeria, a symbolic action that highlights the historical movement forward rather than going backward. The meeting point between the body and the womb takes place in having the womb, or homeland, back. While for Mahdi, it is the desire of the return *to* the womb, a symbolic desire that highlights the backward movement of human history to pre-history. In spite of the agency and will of the body in the return, the movement becomes backward.

***Maraya al-Nar***

In the second novel, *Maraya Al-nar*, or *Fire Mirrors*, by Haydar there is a striking similarity to *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* in the general theme in many levels. *Maraya al-Nar* is strikingly shorter and more condensed, though. The novel depicts the exile of a male character from *al-mashriq al-'arabi,* which at first is kept in its general perspective and then narrowed down to Iraq in particular. Naji Al-abdullah flees the atrocities of violence of the regime in his country that destroyed his whole family and that raped his girlfriend and threw her dead, raped body in the river. He finds a new space in a North-African Arab village where he meets Dumiana, an African married woman who dreams to envelope the newcomer inside her. Meeting between the *mashriqi* and the *maghribiyya* immediately takes the form of the encounter between the physicality of the two bodies. Like *Walimah li-a'shab al-bahr,* the theme of the *mashriqi's* search for a woman like Dumiana, but meeting her when the body has become a burden rather than a medium, is also a recurrent theme here in *Maraya al-Nar*.

In *Maraya al-Nar,* the female body plays the same role of threat towards the exiled male body. This is carried through the relationship that starts to evolve between our *mashriqi* Iraqi character, Naji, and a North-African, or *maghribiyyah,* woman in the village. The story of Dumiana unravels as the relationship between the two develops both sexually and emotionally. Dumiana is married to the brother of the man who had had a sexual relation with her, had her pregnant and then left outside the country. Her marriage becomes a necessity to cover the scandal of her pregnancy for her and the whole family to escape the shame of having had that relationship.

As the husband becomes crippled after that, Dumiana's conflict of sexual frustration that had her in that marital prison on the one hand, and her thirst for sexual satisfaction and adventure on the other establishes the sexual background of the narrative and the life of the new stranger in the small, sea-by village. The husband conceives the new stranger as "a

coming germ" after Dumiana convinces him of allowing the man to rent a room in their house. A "germ" holds both sexual, psychological, social and even political connotations that starts to unravel throughout the novel. The danger of the arrival of Naji in the village becomes a threat for the husband and a fear for Naji to uproot the tree of this family, an image that becomes recurrent throughout the novel. Images of Naji's uprooted family become interweaved with the fear and guilt of uprooting another family by stealing Dumiana. The novel ends with the unknown destiny of Dumiana, or rather the indifference of the narrator to Dumiana's destiny, and the symbolic death of Naji, the *mashriqi.* This also goes in relation and similarity with the first novel.

In *Maraya al-Nar*, the experience of Naji's exile in *al-maghrib* starts to unravel as this experience carries within it not only a reinforcement of the same linguistic and cultural aspects between homeland and exile, but also strong warnings against crossing limits. These limits take the shape of ethical, national and personal ones that start to strengthen in exile after meeting Dumiana. These borders separate his body from meeting Dumiana's body in a sexual space. Crossing borders entails the invocation of torturing images from memory about the past. This takes place either through reminding Naji of his disabled body that was under the torture before his exile and that is unable to function sexually in exile, or through warning him against betrayal. The theme of betrayal takes from betrayal of the land and the people its introduction into the betrayal of Naji's towards himself and the ethical betrayal of Naji towards Dumiana's husband. This all takes place through the image of the root takes hold of Naji's thinking and exile.

As the title indicates, the mechanism of running the memory of Naji is carried through image of mirrors of fire which later Naji describes as "broken mirrors."

في المرايا المنكسرة ربما تبدو الأمور مختلطة حول منشأ هذا الشر. أهو متأصل في جذور طبيعتها؟ أم لعنة جسد خلاياه مسممة بالشبق كما في عالم النباتات السامة، أم أنه ميراث تناسل من دم الأسلاف؟ أو هو ردة فعل لما جرى لهذا الجسد من إهانات ووطء وتدنيس؟ (113)

> In broken mirrors things might look confused about the source of this evil. Is it inherent in the roots of nature? Or is it the curse of a body whose cells are poisoned with sexual passion like in the world of poisonous plants? Or is it heritage derived from the blood of the ancestors? Os is it a reaction to the insults and violations that had happened to this body? (113)

Exile here is narrated through "broken mirrors" that instead of reflecting the present are tools to dig deeper into the past and look for "the source for this evil." Naji's journey becomes a journey into the past and attaching to it unwillingly rather than a progressive transcending journey. The only apparatus to do so becomes the body that is doomed guilty either by means of its biological structure and its "cells poisoned with sexual passion," "heritage" or the physical and psychological "violation" against it. In seeing through the broken mirrors of exile, the body in *Maraya al-Nar* takes from the "source" and the "root" its background, and it re-establishes the story of exile which is based on the assumption of the existence of the original sin that starts threateningly to invoke the risk of the cyclicality of life in exile.

***Al-Mashriq* & *al-Maghrib:***

The importance of this novel in relation with Haydar's approach to civil wars in *al-mashriq al-'arabi* and in relation with the first novel, *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, lies in the purposeful continuation of the same themes. In *Maraya al-Nar*, however, the themes are crystallized in terms of the relation between Naji and Dumiana. The two bodies, according to the same vision, of *al-mashriq al-'arabi* and al-*maghrib al-'arabi* and which are represented by Naji and Dumiana, are interchangeably threatening to each other:

ناجي العبدلله هذا اللغز الغامض، القادم من بلاد الشرق العربي، المدمرة بالحروب والقتل الاهلي، والحامل في خلايا دمه وزر الجريمة البشعة التي يتوهم انه سيثأر لها من القتلة. وانا دميانة المدنسة والمعهرة بين الاهل والاخوة، الفريسة السهلة لانني انثى في بلاد المسلمين من سيثار لي؟ (97)

> Naji Al-Adullah, this mysterious enigma, who had come from al-mashriq al'Arabi that has been destroyed with civil wars and violence. He holds in his blood cells the ugly crime that he imagines he would revenge for from the killers. And I, Dumiana, the sinful and the turned-prostitute among the family, the easy prey because I am a female in the Muslim world, who would revenge for me? (97)

Although it might seem a weak comparison between the suffering of the two bodies of Naji and Dumiana, the body now is all that matters. While Naji's *al-mashriq* is burdened with the end of the body's life by the civil war and the consequences of that, Dumiana's *al-maghrib* is burdened with the body's violation. This is again in relation with the idea of exile after the violation of his land and body that becomes the sole language that is now left to document violence and exile.

The germs that are attributed to Naji's body are more dangerously effective in this symbolic relation with the body. The intersection of the two bodies would repeat the same endless cycle from which Naji is running away. This will also generate more "poisoned fruits" into the world. Thus, the germs are seen as both self-destructive and contaminating, carrying the germ of hatred into *al-maghrib al-'arabi.* The "source of evil" that Naji mentioned earlier is expanded to include himself, and thus responsibility for him now is to prevent this source from producing more evils. This forms Naji's first conscious attempts to think about the danger of the cyclical time that comes from the source of evil.

**Agency of Female Body:**

"إحياء لذكرى امرأة ضائعة، التقيتها على شواطئ الأطلسي، أزمنة كنت تائهاً، وغريباً فوق دروب الأرض. المرأة التي وقفت إلى جانبي وساندتني وأدفأتني في أزمنة الصقيع، وليالي غربة الروح، والوحشة، وانكسار القلب."

> A revival of the memory of a lost woman I met on the shores of the Atlantic at times when I was lost and a stranger in the world. This is to the memory of the woman who stood by me, supported me, warmed me up in the time of cold and on nights when the soul was estranged and lonely and the heart was broken.

Dumiana's presence in the narrative of exile becomes existential not only to the plot of the novel but also to the experience of Haydar's depiction of exile. Like Assia in *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, the presence of Dumiana doesn't play the theological or the literary traditional role of forgetfulness that is highlighted in other Arabic novels' themes. On the contrary, Dumiana is a constant reminder of the massacre of Naji's family and the injustices inflicted on his country. Dumiana's body represents a threat of a revival of the violation of the bodies of his family and the body of his own country. Images of his massacred family members and their blood are conjured up in parallel with Dumiana's dangerous attempts of sexual approaches towards him. Dumiana's body represents another dimension of fixating Naji in the past.

The manifestation of this fixation is explained in terms of the failure of his body to accomplish its sexual functions due to the memory stored in the body about the war and its physical and psychological effects. Like *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, meeting with the female in exile has tragic consequences on the exiled male body, and is a reminder of the "organic decline" of the body in exile and its inability to function sexually. (50) The exiled body becomes a burden in terms of its biological function.

هل حدث ذلك جراء الصدمات الكهربائية التي تناوبت على أعضائه؟ أم هي انعكاس ارتكاسي لأصوات المذبوحين وهم يستحمون بدمائهم عشية المذبحة؟ أم أنها محض أوهام ثأرية نابعة من مجرات حقد موروث ضد البشاعة والطغيان القديم_ المستجد؟ (50)

Did that happen as a result of the electrical shocks that alternated on his genitals? Or is it a reflection of the voices of those massacred bathing in their bloods on the massacre evening? Or is it just illusions that emerged from places of inherited hatred against ugliness and the old, renewed oppression? (50)

"The organic decline" in the body functions as the exile's memory or trigger of memory of the massacre and the torture of the war. It becomes the close memory of his family's massacre and the distant collective memory. The body becomes the scripture of the events that had taken place not only in portraying its own physical torture but also in narrating the psychological feelings of hatred towards collective injustices. The body in this context takes up the role of re-presenting memory into endless forms in post-war exile. The encounters between the two bodies become the only triggers for the registration of the war and the aftermath of the war. Dumiana's body in this context becomes the evocative trigger of the body's memory about suffering.

**Homeland**

The image of the female body is further expanded in the context of Naji's suffering to include the body of his homeland which is, so far, treated as a female's body. Instead of the image of forceful rape, however, the image that Naji has and suffers from is that of a prostitute who has internalized the mentality of prostituting one's self and who has thus become tolerant to repeated "violation."

رغب أن يوضح لها بأن بلاداً يحكمها ... أوغاد ليست بلاداً منتهكة وتسير باتجاه الهاوية وحسب، إنما هي أرض موطوءة، شعابها، وفجواتها، سهلة النيل، وجاهزة للاستسلام، والتأوه والنزف، والسقوط ورفع الساقين إلى أعلى امام فحولة أي رجل ولو كان من سلالة الخنازير. (75)

He wanted to clarify to her that a country that is controlled by… scoundrels are not only violated countries that go down the abyss. The countries become a land that can be stepped on, easy to be violated and ready to surrender, and to enjoy sex and bleeding and to raise the legs up in front of any man's sexuality even if he were a descendent of pigs. (75)

Violation becomes important both personally, politically and aesthetically. The words in both English and Arabic denote an action of violence and force committed against the ownership and honor of another. This action conjures up the act of crossing limits and reaching out by way of violence and force for another's ownership and honor. The important thing here is that for Naji the problem is not the act of his country being violated sexually; the problem becomes when the land, or the female body, doesn't fight back and surrender to the act of repeated violation, because according to Naji, this will lead to an internalization of receiving the act of violation. He later on declares that he rejects his homeland for accepting to be violated.

_في حمى الجدال المشارف حدود الاحتدام رمت عبارة انفجار: وأنت ترحل وتتخلى عن كل شيء.

_ما هو هذا الكل؟

_الوطن وأنا.

_أي وطن؟

_وطنك هذا الذي تحيا فيه.

_هذا ليس وطني. أنني بريء منه ومن دمه المستباح. (72)

_In the midst of the heated argument approaching conflict, she threw an explosive sentence: and you will depart leaving everything behind.

_What is this "everything"?

_Homeland and me.

_Which homeland?

_You r own homeland, the one you live in .

_This is not my homeland. I declare myself cut off of it and of its violated blood. (72)

Dumiana herself has been sexually violated first by the father of her daughter and second by her husband. It seems as if Naji is establishing a paradigm that relates between Dumiana and his lost land. His fear thus becomes turning Dumiana's body into what the body of his country has turned into.

The responsibility that results from the exile-trauma for Naji becomes not transcending sexual limits and reaching for what is beyond his limits. The very act of sexual encounter between him and Dumina doesn't only impose this sense of crossing bodily limits and achieving union; it also becomes transcending the limits of her husband. Naji's inability to have a sexual relationship with Dumiana is illustrated in the way he had established a sexual paradigm for the status of his country. Body paradigms had already been established in relation with political paradigms. And now, Naji is longing for "the body that returns its old glory, before violation." (77) Longing now becomes longing to the moment before violating the body: the body of Dumiana and the body of his country. Instead of the image of pre-birth that was prevalent in *Walimah-li-A'shab al-Bahr*, in *Maraya al-Nar* Naji's desire becomes to go back to the time of the body's pre-violation.

In her book *War's Other Voices*, Miriam Cooke talks about the differences in perceiving responsibility towards the other between the male and the female. Cooke references Carol Gilligan's *A Different Voice* that explains "male and female children experience of initiation into adolescence" when they are exposed to the transition between the stage of childhood to the stage of adolescence and which marks the concept of separation and

the trauma that takes place after that. (88) According to that study, the male is more susceptible to shocks that generate trauma after the "separation" since the nurturer is identical with their "object of sexual desires" (88). This generates issues of intimacy that affect the male. Males start to conceive themselves as "separate individuals" after symbolic separation. Their perception of responsibility hereafter is shaped by this trauma experience, and so the male has a tendency to be aware of boundaries and afraid of crossing them. In Cooke's words:

> for men responsibility usually entails doing as little so as not to trespass on another's territory; for women, it entails action to do what others are expecting. Although in both cases responsibility requires that others are not hurt, for the one this is achieved by avoiding action, that is, deferring aggressive response, for the other it is achieved by choosing action, that is, initiating response to the needs of others. (88-89)

While this perception of responsibility for Cooke is linked with the differences in responsibility for male and female writers towards their countries after wars, the points highlighted here are highly important in analyzing the trauma that shapes the male exile after the third "separation" that comes after birth and then adolescence. For Naji, the separation from the land has resulted in his inaction with Dumiana on the personal and sexual level. While Dumiana is eager to be united with him, Naji constantly expresses his unwillingness and inability to fulfill this sexual union. Naji's inaction or suspense of action represents his unwillingness to cross boundaries in his exile.

This also comes to highlight the trauma of exiles within a transnational narrative that locates them immediately within a changing prototype of crossing borders. Maintaining the importance and necessity of change for exiles comes as a universal, generalizing fact that ignores this desire or ability of inaction on the part of exiles, particularly men. In highlighting

this aspect of suffering, Haydar once again contests transnational narratives of exile within his two novels.

**Root: Longing for End**

Naji's inaction is further explained in his connection with how he sees Dumiana and how he sees himself after his exile. Unlike *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, *Maraya al-Nar* makes of the image of the womb secondary to that of the root, or *jadhr*. In describing one of the reasons that burdens Naji regarding his relationship with Dumiana is that he sees her as the root of her family.

تلك الأنثى تحيا في كنف أسرة. هي جذرها حتى ولو كان مجذوماً. ناجي العبدلله تحوّل إلى حجر مقذوف مهجور في براري الدنيا بعد أن استؤصل جذره، واجتثّت أسرته من الوجود. (37)

That female lives within a family. She is the root of that family even if it was diseased. Naji Al-abdulla turned into a stone thrown and isolated in the wilds of the world after his root was cut off and his family cut off from existence. (37)

This perception of the firmness of the root and its importance regardless of its strength and purity is contrasted with the idea of the inability to change the first root which becomes similar to the idea of the original sin.

لو اقتحم ذلك الزوج البائس الغرفة وعاين المشهد فضبطهما في حقل الخيانة، هل كان سيدرك أن الشجرة خرعة من جذورها الأساسية؟ جذر الأخ الذي فضّ البكارة بشبق عابر، وجذر المدينة والعائلة المبادتين، وجذر هذا التتويج الثأري والتعويضي. جذور ثلاثة تفرعت في أعماق الأرض من شجر أفعوانية ثمرها مسموم... (53)

If that miserable husband had broken into the room and had seen the scene and caught them in the space of betrayal, would he have realized that the tree is corrupt from its roots? The root of the brother that violated virginity with

> passing sexuality; the root of the city and the family and the root of this vengeful and compensating crowning: three roots that have branched out in the depths of the ground from viperous trees with poisoned fruits. (53)

In talking about the idea of the corruption of the root of the tree, and which we are given the hint that it might be the tree of humanity, a link is established between the corrupted root and the myth of the original sin of Adam and Eve which makes everyone sinful. In spite of Naji's belief in the corruption of the root of humanity, the very existence of this root is highly important for Naji. In her book *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship, and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings*, Hanadi Al-Samman talks about "the tension between fixity and mobility, the restrictive aspect of the tree's rootedness versus the liberating potential of its rhizome's horizontal and vertical movements." (150) Through the use of the image of the rhizome, Al-Samman elaborates on the ability of the person fleeing the war to develop a "rhizomatic narrative" that takes from the root in the homeland its beginning, but progresses, however, in both "horizontal and vertical" directions. This "rhizomatic narrative", according to Al-Samman, reveals a transnational narrative through transcending both temporal and spatial borders and that is able to create a new space for people in exile. Thus, Al-Samman joins Said in welcoming the "'positive" effervescence and constant renewable energy" through the experience of exile which entails that "old roots are reinvigorated with rhizomatic horizontal and vertical affiliations, thereby celebrating the luminal space that enriches both sites." (211)

For Naji, the problem in his exile becomes the very existence of rhizomes for the root that he had left. In other words, the problem becomes the temporal and spatial progress of rhizomes that "have branched out in the depths of the ground" and which have been progressing in the new space. (Haydar, *Maraya al-Nar*, 53) The temporal continuity of rhizomes is problematic for as they have built up on the root, they by necessity contain the

inherent nature of the root. The rhizomes, as a result, have the capacity to extend what lies in the root into other temporal and spatial contexts. While for Al-Samman and Said, the rhizome becomes important to connect between the root and the new space to continue a process of progress, a historical progress, for Naji and for Haydar, the rhizome carries within it the corruptness of the root that war plants in the grounds of the homeland and human imagination. The root, for Naji and Haydar, which represents the beginning of history, becomes more fundamental than progress or continuity. The difference in the two visions of conceiving exile can be attributed to the similarities that Naji saw between the new space and his homeland. The rhizomes, for him, carried a continuation for the root rather than a difference from the root.

The body that remains the only medium for Naji longs for the root in the same way that the body of Mahdi longed for a return to the womb: to the moment of beginning. Naji in his exile appreciates the damaged root more than rhizomes because like the original sin, the damaged root leads to an end after progress. Naji, in other words, is longing to an end to his life through the end of the only medium that has showed him change: his body. In his exile, Naji has been only exposed to the declining changes of his body. Progress, if we can use this word here, took place only towards finding an end.

The sound that comes to Naji at the end to declare his death comes from his father who belongs to a past that cannot be embraced in the present. This declaration of a symbolic death comes in contradiction to the depiction of the death of Mahdi in *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*. While Mahdi's death in *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* was self-willful and close-ended with certainty, Naji's death comes forced and open-ended. *Maraya al-Nar* ends with the uncertainty of the destiny of Naji in reality after the symbolic sentence of death on him. As Naji's death becomes symbolic and belonging to an 'unreal' space, this symbolic open-endedness becomes more tragic in that it invokes the tragedy of the living dead on the one

hand, and turning Naji into a past himself united with his father, thus ending any hope of historical continuity.

**"Novelistic Time"**

"وحدها مسامات وخلايا الجسد كانت تحكي في فضاء

سكينة هابطة من الهواء والشجر ونبض الأرض." (70)

"Only the cells and the pores of the

body were speaking in the space of

silence descending from air, tree and the earth pulse." (70)

Like *Wlimah li-A'shab al-Bahr, Maraya al-Nar* is divided into parts in which cyclicality and disruption of cyclicality alternate. The parts here are entitled as "ages" or *azmina*: the age of the tale, the age of roses, the age of shame, the age of escape, and the age of jealousy. The division is connected with the progress of events between Dumiana and Naji. The issue of time and age becomes problematic in the narrative as the term of "the novelistic time" is introduced into the narrative. This introduction of "the novelistic time" seems to indicate the disruption of the universal unified time in reality and the formation of a new time frame that exists only in novels. The disruption of the relation between the novel, by highlighting the fictitious aspect of the novel, and reality is further disrupted in the first paragraph of the first chapter "the age of the tale" when the narrator disrupts any facts or real events related with his "tale" or *hikaya*.

بداية، لنقل إنها حكاية غريبة، حدثت لرجل غريب في مدينة غريبة ليست موجودة على الخريطة. أو هي حكاية مسلية لرجل يسافر وحيداً في قطار. رجل يستعيد وقائع الزمن على شكل دوائر في سهب فسيح، كما طائر يعبر فضاء.

وكما يحدث دائماً، ثمة مدينة غامضة لا نعرفها تأخذنا الأشواق والتوقعات إليها. يشبه الأمر ولوج طائر مهاجر إلى غابة للمرة الأولى. هكذا حدث الأمر في الأيام التي عبرت. الأيام التي لن تعود، والتي تحولت إلى ما يشبه الطيوف. (9)

> First, let's say it's a strange tale that happened to a stranger in a city that doesn't exist on the map. Or let's say it's an entertaining tale for a man that travels alone on a train, a man who reflects on the facts of the age in the form of circles in a widespread space like a bird crossing space.
>
> And as all tales, there's a mysterious city that we don't know about and that our expectations and fantasies take us to. It's like the entrance of an immigrant bird to the forest for the first time. This is how it happened in those days, the days that will never return, the days that turned into what look like spirits. (9)

The emphasis comes as to highlight the inexistence of such a tale or city and to make the purpose of this tale primarily entertaining, which is an invitation for a detachment from what is taking place in the tale. The title of this chapter comes to establish the new age of a new tale. It is as if Scheherazade's tales have to be replaced with this new tale that although doesn't have any supernatural or strange elements is described as "strange": *ghariba*. Like the tales of Scheherazade, stories are depicted as dangerous. The employment of this danger starts to unravel as the novels continues.

اقتراب من حكايات شهرزاد في الأزمنة الغابرة. إنما هنا ينبغي الحذر من الفخاخ المنصوبة في درب الحكاية. إننا نحاول في هذا العصر الملغوم رواية وقائع مؤنسة، مؤسية بعض الشيء، لنزيح هذا الكابوس اللعين: الضجر. (27)

> It is an approximation to Scheherazade's tales in the old times. Here, however, we should be cautious of the traps set in the progress of the tale. In this troubled age, we try to narrate entertaining facts, a bit troubling to get rid of this damned nightmare: boredom. (27)

The attribute of "strange" or *gharib* becomes an attribute that includes the *mashriqi* as a stranger in the village, the tale as a strange one, and the feeling of estrangement or *ghurba* which accompanies exile. The use of this word becomes problematic as much as explanatory. Although under the sentiment of Arab nationalism, Naji shouldn't be considered as *gharib*, the feeling of *ghurba* or estrangement swipes him away and creates these barriers between him and the other *maghribi* inhabitants. The strangeness is highly related with estrangement: two words in Arabic that come from the same root, and which also is related to sunset *ghurub*, a recurrent temporal theme in Haydar's two novels..

The odd contradiction that Haydar draws in his depiction of Naji's *ghurba* is in parallel with that of this disruption of belief in the reality of his tale. The disruption of belief, the danger of narratives and believing narratives seems at odd with the normality of the tale narrated in *Maraya Al-Nar*. However, as the narrative goes on, the reader becomes pulled into the narrative as it moves him from time to time within its cyclical, free-moving "novelistic time" that captures events from different perspectives and from different times. This first warning from believing narratives is explained later as a technique that rather reinforces the effect of the narrative.

الوقوف بعيداً عن الأشياء الملامسة التي ترغبها وأنت تكافح، وهي مفصولة عنك، كي تتحد معها، لكم تبدو ملفتة كالماء بين الأصابع. الأثر أو اللمعان هو ما يبقى في محيط السراب الخادع. (28)

> Standing away from the things that are very close to you and that you desire while you are striving, separated from you, in order to be united with these things, for how eye-catching water is like between fingers. The trace or the shimmering is what remains in the space of deceptive mirage. (28)

Distancing the reader from the narrative becomes an element for getting the reader into the narrative. Narratives in this sense become more captivating. The narrator who takes up the perspective of Naji states that truth in narratives is not important. In other words, what

becomes important is listening to the story. The element of holding belief in the truth of the narrative is further extended with the non-knowing narrator. This absence of the truth is tightly related with the idea of both unknowable nature of things and events and the uncertainty of man as a result of war and violence. The narrator and the characters in their lack of knowledge seem to be accomplices with the cyclical, never-ending "novelistic time" of the tale to get the reader into it.

من الصعب ترتيب الأحداث بتسلسلها. هي ذي تأتي كدائرة لا تعرف من أية نقطة بدأت. (14)

It's difficult to arrange the events in their order. They come like a circle that doesn't know from which point it started. (14)

This cyclical movement of the events remembered by both Naji and the narrator becomes a burden for both. The "novelistic time" that is an endless cycle of memories narrated in the mind of both Naji and the narrator becomes the only torture for both. What is interesting is that the end of the novel, like *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, is the death of the main male character. This time, however, Naji's death is symbolic, literary rather than physical.

من الخارج، من حدود البحر، جاءته أصداء ونداءات واستغاثات بعيدة. اختلطت بدوي قنابل وانفجارات. بدت الحالة كما لو أنه غارق في حلم سريالي ملون وكابوسي، وهما في غمرة الوداع الأخير. وعبر الظلال لبيت يشتعل بنيران فوسفورية سمع صوتا يشبه صوت ابيه قادما من اغوار بعيدة: انت من مات. (123)

From outside, from the edges of the sea, he heard echoes and calls for help from afar that were mingled with the sounds of the explosions and the bombs. The situation seemed as if he was engulfed in a nightmarish, colorful surreal dream while they were in the grip of thei final goodbye. Through the shadows of house burning he heard a voice that sounded like his father's coming from distant places: you are the one who died. (123)

It is as if the novel has turned into a body that like Naji's body couldn't handle the endlessness of the time that is characteristic of exile, and thus the symbolic death of Naji goes in parallel with the end of the novel. In the same way the body was a deceptive source of broken-mirror-vision of the present, the novel with its deceptive affirmation of illusion and reality becomes a tool for foreshadowing the danger of not holding the truth. This symbolic end of both Naji and the novel becomes more tragic. It means that while "the novelistic time" of the novel ended it and ended Naji's life, in reality this cycle might continue.

Haydar's novel *Maraya al-Nar* establishes a split between the story itself and reality or truth while it holds the reader at the same time within its grip. It engages the reader within the unreliable cyclicality of life and story, and thus the reader becomes like Naji himself: a victim for this cyclical narration. This engagement of the reader in the suffering of exiles comes to reinforce Haydar's techniques in bringing to light the suffering of exiles and which comes in contrast to the stability of the endings in transnational narratives. While the transnational narrative offers a paradigm of happy endings based on the process of change, Haydar's narrative doesn't offer any guarantees of endings. This strengthens the relation between the reader and the narrative, as the reader becomes held captive in the never-ending effects of the narrative.

## Conclusion:

While the 'body' remains an aesthetic cornerstone in the theme of exile, it has usually been depicted as accompanied by other aesthetic mechanisms in narratives that have aimed at transnationalizing the experience of exile. These aesthetic mechanisms in the new space tend to sweep away the vocalization of the suffering of the body that has been a primary and raw material in exile. Exile refers first and foremost to the forceful departure of the body, the physical body, from the space, the physical space whether it is defined locally, nationally or geographically. At the moment of separation between the body and its surrounding space, the body becomes the record of that memory. According to the transnational narrative of exile, during the first stages of residing in a different milieu, the body goes under traumatic healing from the first trauma of memory. In the heat of the first survival, the body becomes in a continuous state of striving to survive, to transgress other boundaries, as Said put it. These boundaries represented by difference in the new space (language, social norms, culture.) become the reason behind the body's power and survival, according to the transnational narrative.

While the nature of these transnational narratives aims at progressive continuity of exiles, the assumption of this progress becomes dangerous when applied generally and universally. These narratives tend most of the time to ignore the experience of the body as an entity that had witnessed the violence of separation. In considering the experience of the body within a larger context of other transnational issues, the body is pushed back as a part that is acted upon rather than acting. The local experience of the body seems to be ignored within a border-crossing narrative that seeks to synthesize rather than gives attention to individual units. This universal experience that becomes de-contextualized seems sometimes to depict exile as an experience that isn't only limited to the after-exile progress. It sometimes falls in the error of depicting it as a necessary universal historical progress, thus making it look like a

necessary stage in modern history. Furthermore, the transnational narrative of exile has created standardized hierarchical paradigms that portray exile as a movement upward or forward. These paradigms have built and maintained a hierarchical difference between homeland and exile.

Haydar's two novels *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr* and *Maraya al-Nar* is a portrayal of the experience of exile as un-mediated by secondary media, and thus the experience comes out in its most basic image. Exile in these two novels becomes a constant longing to the beginning as the end: the body ends itself in a desire to go back to the beginning. This merging of both beginnings and ends of the body goes hand in hand with the cyclical movement of the memory about the war and the situation of the exile in the present. While in *Walimah li-A'shab al-Bahr*, the predominant image is that of the return to the womb and the moment of the birth, *Maraya al-Nar* brings out the image of the root and rhizome in more elaborative connection to the theme of the exile. This assertion of cyclical movement of exile narrative is set against the linear narrative of the transnational one. It also highlights the suffering of exiles and brings readers closer to this suffering.

In Haydar's both novels, the localization of the experience of exile is highly significant in that it challenges the transnational narrative of aestheticizing exile with cultural issues that often times blur the 'reality' of the experience of exile itself. Although transnational narratives are highly important in dealing with the post-exile trauma, the suffering of the body is pushed back into a hidden, forgotten place. Highlighting the idea of the similarity of exile to homeland, Haydar was able to emphasize the rhetoric of the body in suffering to address the basic issue of the exile trauma. The female body is another dimension of emphasizing the suffering of the exiled body. On the one hand, the encounter with the female body has enforced both Naji and Mahdi's conception of borders and limits. The only change that they could have in their new spatial exile was the change that these encounters carried. However,

this change is seen as threatening in that it brings the past back and fixates it further upon them. On the other hand, the resistance and power of the female body played the role of highlighting the suffering and the weakness of the male, exiled body.

In short, Haydar's two novels represent a contestation for the transnational narrative of exile through many stylistic and thematic ideas. The two novels question and problematize the issue of aestheticizing exile by portraying the basic state of the suffering of those in exile. As both novels follow the cyclical temporal line of events, Haydar's two novels open the space for more thoughtful considerations of the embodied suffering of exiles.

Works Cited

Al-Samman, Hanadi. *Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship, and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings*.Syracuse: Syracuse University Press , 2015. Print

Appadurai, A. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." *Theory, Culture & Society*. 7.2 (1990): 295-310. Print.

Bernabé, Jean, B T. K. Mohamed, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant. "In Praise of Creoleness." *Callaloo*. 13.4 (1990): 886-909. Print.

Cooke, Miriam. *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1987. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. Print.

Ḥaydar, Ḥaydar. *Walīmah Li-Aʻshāb Al-Baḥr: (Nashīd Al-Mawt) : Riwāyah*. Bayrut: publisher not identified, 1983. Print.

---. *Marāyā Al-Nār:* Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār Amwāj, 1992. Print.

Melas, Natalie. "Grounds for Comparison." *All the Difference in the World: Postcoloniality and the Ends of Comparison*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007. 1-43. Print.

Meyer, Stefan G. *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001. Print.

Al-Mūsawī, Muḥsin J, *Islam on the Street: Religion in Modern Arabic Literature*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009. Print.

Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.

Siddiq, Muhammad. *Arab Culture and the Novel: Genre, Identity and Agency in Egyptian Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Al-Wakīl, Sa'īd. *Al-Jasad Fī Al-Riwāyah Al-'Arabīyah Al-Mu'āṣirah*. al-Qāhirah: al-Hay'ah al-'Āmmah li-Quṣūr al-Thaqāfah, 2004. Print.